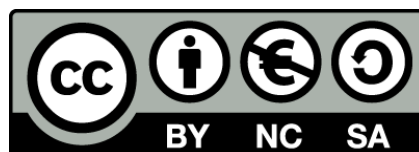UNIVERSITAT DE
BARCELONA

Consumer agency and social change:
Experiences from post-World War South Africa

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Doctoral thesis

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Submitted: October 2017

Acknowledgements

My personal debts, accumulated over the five years it has taken me to complete this thesis, are also very deep. To my friends and colleagues in the Tramod research group: I consider myself extraordinarily fortunate to have known you all. I have constantly learnt from you, and your company has been delightful. I must also thank David for discussions that have sprawled out over days, and I am deeply grateful to Adam and Lucy for their generosity in helping me get here. For their kind words and affection, I must thank Emi and Lola. The conversations, advice, warm company and care you have all offered me have been transformative.

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Introduction

Consumption and social change

The argument pursued here grew out of an exploration into the place of consumer action in conceptually motivated and historically informed social science research. No study is without its prejudices, as I hope to show of the studies I criticise throughout this work. Before doing so, however, I will first lay out my own prejudices. To anticipate somewhat, I will frame historical questions as questions primarily about social *change* and not social *reproduction*, attempting to register the latter while focusing on the former. The opposition between social change and reproduction is not a logical one, as at bottom these are necessarily two dimensions of a single problem. It is rather a practical question of approach, that is, of ontological assumptions, empirical emphasis and their epistemological and methodological mediation. I will relate social change to the creative action of situated agents about whom, despite their irreducible historicity, some very general statements can be cautiously hazarded, not as an alternative to historical research, but as a provisional guide.

One reason for relating social change to creativity is, negatively, to situate the inquiry firmly outside of a deterministic and functionalist social science orientation. Positively, I am using the term "creativity" alongside "agency", but will use these terms to refer to two qualitatively distinct aspects of action that are often collapsed: (i) the capacity to adroitly select, from among a determinate set of means, those that best allow us to attain our ends, and (ii) the expressive capacity to act in a manner that allows us to most fully realise our potentials, which includes also the setting of new ends. I will speak of agency in a minimal sense when referring to only the first of these capacities, where action relies only on human intelligence or resourcefulness as manifested in instrumental action. Creativity, as I employ the term, refers to agency in a stronger sense, as the use of both faculties together, but where the expressive faculty is that which guides action.

To my knowledge, the most important critical social theorists of recent times to systematically isolate the potentially creative and expressive dimension of agency from its instrumental moments, returning to a somewhat forgotten theme from Aristotle, have been Hannah Arendt and Cornelius Castoriadis, and I have used them as beacons for situating my own position.[1] If something like this distinction between instrumental and creative action is fairly easy to ground at a purely conceptual level – for instance, though I do not pursue this line of thinking, by relating it to Weber's famous distinction between action issuing from instrumental rationality and value rationality – then it is nonetheless still far from clear where to locate such activity empirically. What follows grew, in part, out of a suspicion that the instrumentality of what is often thought of as economic action – action relating more or less directly to the market – tends to be greatly exaggerated in critical social science literature. This is true even of what I

consider the best of it. For Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition* (1998) [1958], economic action is, by ontological necessity, either fully in thrall to biological needs that completely wall us off from others or else instrumentally pressed into the service of expressive ends that can in principle only be realised beyond the economy, in the political domain. Upsetting this order, as she believes happens in Western modernity as politics is pressed into the service of economic goals, leads to a total loss of expressive freedom. I am unconvinced of this, but I am also not proposing a reversion to economism, even of the critical, Marxian variety that Arendt criticises. This relies on the same sort of *a priori* ordering of economic and political domains that Arendt proposes, only the opposite, and this appears no more helpful to me as a guide for empirical or historical work.[2]

When considering economic issues, I do this not by appeal to production as the causally prior economic domain but rather to consumption. Here I do come close to taking an ontological position, and at some length, but less to settle any conceptual issues about the priority of production or consumption than to show that the entire question remains wide open. This is still much needed given that most critical social science thinking tends to dismiss out of hand the idea that consumption might precede production when explaining social phenomena – a notion that tends to be viewed as not only inherently uncritical but also ontologically muddled. In approaching this issue I am strongly indebted to Marshall Sahlins' *Culture and Practical Reason* (1976), which argues for the priority of consumption through what I consider at bottom a convincing critique of Marxian productivism. While I believe Sahlins is right to invert the Marxian production–consumption schema, I nonetheless qualify his critique by arguing, for reasons I will expand on in Chapter 1, that it holds only insofar as economic action is intentional. This remains an empirical question, albeit it one that is unlikely to ever be decided by quantification and which will inescapably also require an interpretive appraisal of historical practices.

Sahlins was prevented from limiting his critique of productivism to intentional behaviour because of his basically structuralist view of social change, which allows for expressivity but flattens out the distinction I uphold between agency in general and creativity in particular, and which indeed is entirely ambiguous about what counts as agentic action. That said, if one assumes that the greater part of human behaviour is indeed intentional, as I do, then much of the critique can still be applied. I will therefore try to reformulate many of Sahlins' ideas about consumption in Chapter 1, retaining his basic insight about the primacy of consumption in the order of explanation while placing it on an agentic footing and allowing that any credible argument for people consuming unintentionally can evade his otherwise cogent, and still widely ignored, attempt to show up the lacunae in productivist assumptions about social action.

I will also extend Sahlins's critique by not limiting my discussion of consumption to *commodity* consumption alone. This is essential because focussing too narrowly on commodity consumption when discussing economic matters can easily erase awareness not only of the historical background of market exchange but also the fact that objects usually found on

markets can always in principle be obtained by other means, often in ways that reveal the deeply social and political potential of consumer practices to articulate with or initiate wider forms of institutional change. This seems to me something that Sahlins clearly understood but didn't explore. Much of my discussion of consumption in the chapters that follow therefore takes the form of, firstly, critically exploring the agentic dimension of social change in the domain of commodity consumption and, secondly, of applying these insights about commodity consumption to institutional forms of consumption that lie outside of the market, here building on Karl Polanyi's understanding of the "human economy" as a heuristic tool for framing these institutional reflections in a generalisable fashion.

In light of this I will not attribute any normative primacy to either the political or the economic domains of action when discussing agentic and creative activity. I prefer to assume that both are better thought of as articulations, often practically entangled in complex ways, of ontologically prior social forms of association in which the reliance on shared meanings and the desire for material and immaterial security, and more generally for the inter-personal realisation of expressive freedom grounded in recognition, explain the better part of all political *and* all economic action. From the perspective I will articulate in Chapter 1, political and economic action, like social action more generally, is stretched between determined and agentic moments. Insofar as it is agentic, we can further distinguish between instrumental and expressive forms, seeing in the latter the motivational background of creative action. The difference is in every case a question of time and place and not of principle.

When marking out this position in Chapter 1 I try to show all the while that taking the steps I propose does not lead to the abandonment of critical theorising. Here I understand critical theory very broadly, following Craig Calhoun (1993:63), as "the project of social theory that undertakes simultaneously critique of received categories, critique of theoretical practice, and critical substantive analysis of social life in terms of the possible, not just the actual." The existence of a clearly uncritical contemporary discourse of consumer creativity propagated by the modern marketing industry, which encourages consumers to believe that freedom is best attainable through the purchase of commodities (Arvidsson 2006:93; Bauman 2006:83–84, 89), contrasts sharply with the strongly productivistic assumptions of much established critical theory, where the most compelling critiques of consumption first emerged. Against this wider contextual backdrop it is unsurprising that many critically-minded social theorists still tend to assume that the only exit from a clearly naive understanding of freedom through commodity consumption is by the productivist route, but this impression is deeply misleading when one takes the time to look into it. I also do not think that the specialist literature on consumption that is still emerging offers any clear solution to this neglect. While certainly generating fascinating insights, and with some exceptions that I discuss in Chapter 2, it seems to me surprisingly disinterested in clarifying its own fundamental concepts and background assumptions, tending to heap up theories and cases without rigorously sifting between them by noting their ambiguities and limitations or by registering the mutual incompatibility of their claims. What follows is one contestable attempt to grapple with these enormous problems.

Conceptual concerns: Negotiating the general and the particular

In each of the following chapters I will incrementally develop an argument about what I believe the most useful way of studying consumption is, leading to a very brief restatement in the Conclusion of some central themes arising from my discussion and of where I think this all points for further conceptual debate and historical research. I hope to substantiate an understanding of consumption in which it appears as a form of action that is itself, in certain times and places, and in varying degrees, an undetermined domain of action capable of initiating meaningful socio-political change. What starts out as a conceptual discussion becomes progressively more historical as I try to demonstrate what sort of generalisable historical conclusions can be derived from using the concept of consumption in the manner I propose here. This constitutes the pragmatic dimension of this study, but its intended contribution to social science debate remains conceptual. My aim is to establish greater clarity than is common in the social science literature that touches on consumption about what might be achieved through the critical theoretical study of consumer practices. In this literature an exciting and protean variety of sometimes penetrating observation comes tied up with a frustrating conceptual amorphousness. As some critics of this literature have observed, basic concepts, not least "consumption" itself, are seldom conceptually interrogated or even defined, and where definitions are to be found at all they usually diverge significantly (Fine 2002:155; Graeber 2011:491; Trentmann 2004:376–77).

This formlessness, which also has the direct empirical consequence of promoting a dizzying profusion of methodological approaches to consumption, prevents many interesting conversations form happening, while those that do occur often do so entirely at cross-purposes. For instance, I believe that almost all the most perceptive discussions of consumption relate it in some non-functionalist, expressive manner to culture, but what people mean by "culture" tends, scarcely less than "consumption", to vary enormously. I therefore think some measure of conceptual pedantry cannot be avoided if we wish to combine essential insights about consumption from different academic traditions and indeed from research located even within the same traditions. Without a clearly articulated set of working concepts it is impossible to get very far with the necessary work of conceptual generalisation for purposes of present- or future-oriented dialogue and historical comparison. Abstract conceptual generalisation has its own obvious limits though, and I use the historical discussions in chapters 3–6 to avoid sinking irretrievably into "the quibblings of those who forget that, in the social-historical domain, definitions are valid … as Aristotle would say, only 'for the most part and in most cases'" (Castoriadis 1991:157).

It is nowadays perhaps platitudinous to affirm that generalisations should always be framed in such a manner that they are malleable enough to fit particular historical circumstances, isolating salient features of these cases without misrepresenting or concealing that which resists conceptual assimilation. Conversely, this way of thinking can itself easily slide into

forgetfulness that particular cases cannot be of general interest if one finds in them only perfect singularity, which turns the virtue of historicism into the vice of parochialism. It is somewhere between these two extremes that all the most interesting social science research is done, but within these limits studies can fall more onto one side or the other. This is a conceptually driven study but, as concepts are themselves inescapably historical objects, it is always essential to explore how historical cases may put the applicability of conceptual generalisation to the test. The result is an attempt to conceptually account for consumer action by shuttling between the particular and the universal without ever giving the last word to either. While any given case must always remain only a "particular case of the possible" (Bourdieu 1996 [1979]:xi), it is also true that the "general" or "universal" that I often speak of here is emphatically not a timeless or wholly value-neutral position in which all historical possibilities have been exhausted. More precisely, universal propositions may very well, within the inescapable limits of one's knowledge, *appear* to apply to all cases, and I will make some such assumptions myself, especially in chapters 1 and 7. Nonetheless, if all knowledge is at some level necessarily perspectival, then assuming a universal position does not in the end allow one to claim for one's propositions anything more than a validity that holds "for the most part and in most cases".

Chapter 1 builds up to a number of general conceptual propositions about consumption: that is best understood as the purposive realisation of value; that studying its social dimension is best approached by linking it to institutionalised forms of exchange; and that discussing both the instrumental and expressive dimensions of consumption must first assume it to be an agentic and ethically interpretive domain of action. Before doing so, however, I set out the more general ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions I make in arriving at these propositions. My affirmations here are deliberately of a general nature as my intention is not to settle any of the discussion to follow beforehand so much as to lend it the sort of articulacy that I have said is often hard to identify in the literature. I hope, in short, to identify what major issues the study of consumption can illuminate, as well as how conceptual and empirical work on consumption might link up in a manner that is conducive to generalisation, itself a precondition for lucid debate.

This is followed, in Chapter 2, by a review and discussion of some important literature on consumption. I have selected this work from prominent social science literature in general as well as from the more particular literature on consumer studies. My aim here is not to attempt an overview of all the literature considered to have contributed to the specific field of consumer studies, but rather to identify very broad critical strategies for approaching consumption from within in a far wider social science literature of which this specialist literature is an outgrowth. This is also not an impartial review, if such a thing exists, but rather one that attempts to reason about how my own approach to the study of consumption might be confirmed, contradicted or nuanced. After identifying major trends in the literature, I pose a number of questions about how consumption relates both to the formation, alteration or dismantling of social solidarity and to political mobilisation and legitimation.

In framing my approach in chapters 1 and 2 I understand consumption, as Arendt and Sahlins do, as a form of human action with historically specific manifestations, but which is itself universal. Keeping this more universal background in sight has compelled me to deviate from certain established trends for critically discussing consumption. Two main dimensions of this are worth signalling at the outset, although they will be discussed at greater depth in the first two chapters. Firstly, my discussion of consumption ranges beyond the consumption of material commodities alone. The limitation of consumption in general to commodity consumption in particular is itself a consequence of the common but problematic assumption that the economy is reducible to the market. I have chosen to situate economic issues within the wider context of exchange that interested Polanyi and many others that we now tend to think of as economic anthropologists and to emphasise the social and political embedding of all these exchanges. Consumption, in this wider sense, can be of material and immaterial objects, neither of which need of necessity to be commodified or destined for commodification and where decommodification always remains a possibility.

While the issue of materiality often surfaces in the consumption literature, everyday economic thinking recognises the presence of immateriality in the commonplace division between "goods" and "services". As argued in Chapter 1, it is not that, when consuming services, one usually fails to also consume material things. Rather, it is that there is an explicit or implicit understanding that the materials used in providing the service are not what make the service distinct from others and are at most a peripheral part of the service's *value*. An equally pervasive tendency in the literature is to confine consumption and production to the market alone. Yet just as the meaning of production can be usefully extended to encompass the creation of potential value outside of the market, thereby escaping all sorts of entrenched parochial biases, so too consumption can be extended to designate the realisation of this value in exactly the same practical contexts. Indeed extending one's understanding of production in this fashion, while failing to similarly extend consumption (and exchange), as David Graeber has done, is conceptually imbalanced. Should one feel reserved about this, however, one could equally talk of "realisation" instead of "consumption", reserving the latter term for the realisation of value within market contexts alone (e.g. Graeber 2001:78; Turner 2003:25), but this will not be my approach here and the reasons Graeber offers for doing so are not compelling. Like Graeber and Turner, I will view production as ultimately about the production of personhood – or rather, of socialised persons – with material objects being produced both on and off markets largely as a way of mediating relationships between these persons. This is no negation of the biological dimension of needs and the materiality of these practices, but rather premised on the assumption that the social is usually thoroughly under-determined by biological needs and the materiality of practices, such that the latter lacks explanatory power. We can in this sense talk of both the production and consumption of healing, as I do in Chapter 6, even when what is at stake is not the circulation of "goods" and "services" to which a market value has been attached, or when the desire by some to attach a market value to these things is contested. There I look at healing rituals produced by diviners, pastors and prophets in a manner this is little different from the production of a "service" even in the purely economistic

sense of this term, and consumed by their clients or congregationists, both as commodities and as gifts, depending on the context.

I will argue, however, that we also do well to take a less externalist view of consumption and open up the issue of what renders it both meaningful and desirable from the perspective of consumers themselves. Consumers, after all, seldom understand the significance of their own actions, or what makes these actions more desirable than other possibilities, as a function of their placement in an objective action-sequence facilitating the production of socialised persons, and probing into the subjective meanings and motivations that *do* motivate consumption is an explanatory necessity for any understanding of social action that proceeds on minimally agentic premises. From this perspective, production is not just about enabling the attainment of personhood, but about establishing the practical conditions that allow people to realise themselves in acts that seek to consummate specific values. It is the intentional ordering of action toward such consummation that lends production an antecedent purpose and establishes how certain forms of production are judged to be worth perpetuating or to be undesirable, which is no small part of the reason why production is itself in continual flux. An apparently universal and inescapable part of being a person is to constantly exert oneself to realise expressively defined ends, of the sort that Charles Taylor speaks of when discussing "strong evaluation". Production, as an intentional act, may be more or less *agentic* but is always *instrumental* to such expressive action, as Arendt rightly insisted. Consumption, by contrast, has both instrumental and expressive dimensions. Insofar as consumption sustains the physical body, replenishes the workforce, and so on, it is usefully understood as reproductive, even though in doing so there is a need to completely avoid any functionalist reading of such reproduction. But insofar as it is experienced eudaimonistically, allowing people to realise what they recognise as qualitatively higher values that define the ends of life, something else is going on. While conceptual vocabularies vary, terms like "ludic", "aesthetic", "moral" or "ethical" tend to be invoked to get at this qualitative distinction of expressive from instrumental action, and this universal dimension of consumption tends to be flatly ignored or explained in strikingly reductive terms even in the most sophisticated literature on the subject.

A second basic consequence of analysing consumption from a universal perspective is that attempting to approach the study of consumption by relying on the trope of "consumer society", as is common in the more dedicated literature on the subject, is ultimately unsustainable. Taking my cues from this literature, as well as some provocative academic and journalistic articles by leading academics like Achille Mbembe, the research presented here began life as a project about South Africa as a "consumer society". Very soon, however, I came to view this approach as question-begging. Small details did not make much sense. "Consumer society", like most other basic terms in the existing consumption literature, tends to go undefined. Reading it in context though, the consumer society trope in the literature assumes, among other things, a state of generalised affluence as a driver of mass consumption – often called "consumerism". Debate in terms of consumer society is therefore difficult to transplant into historical settings where affluence is not widespread or very unevenly spread. Something

like this could be applied to middle class white South Africa, which experienced a post-World War financial boom, albeit on a comparatively modest scale. Claims by some historians that the white South African standard of living closely approximated that of many Western societies are based on straightforwardly misleading statistical measures, but all the same, "white South Africans had never had it so good" (Beinart 2001:181).

What about black South Africans? Some recent literature interested in consumption among black South Africans has pointed back toward an earlier post-World War ethnographic literature that tracks in minute detail the lifestyles of both middle-class and working class blacks, while generally focusing on the former. It is becoming increasingly clear that the conspicuous consumption of some of the post-apartheid black elite predates the democratic transition and that the original impression in the popular media and among scholars of an orgy of consumption among the new black elite, though clearly pointing to *something* new, is rather misleading. At any rate, there were always middle class Africans under apartheid, however few, and they were also conspicuous consumers. This is interesting because they were, for the most part, what would be called "lower middle-class" in other societies. If this strains the assumptions of the consumer society literature, so too do other details. In early 20th century advertisements in newspapers with an exclusive African readership consumer luxuries would appear in the same spaces as items consumed only by the very poor; for instance, pitches for French headscarves and shawls for women, smart suits for men, and other fine clothing, all clearly directed at "an aspirational, sartorially self-conscious audience", exist alongside an advertisement for used mattresses addressed to these same readers (Dowling 2013:175). As soon as one drops the wholly misleading assumption that conspicuous consumption need be the preserve of the affluent, such details make perfect sense and can be seen as part of a far more general trend. Thus, as I argue in Chapter 4, while most South Africans were affected by the post-War financial boom, this was generally in the context of very meagre financial resources, and analyses of consumption as a side-effect of diffuse affluence are unhelpful for understanding the complexities of such a situation.

Conceptual and historical articulation

Chapters 3–6 can be considered together. After a brief overview of some salient features of South African historiography in Chapter 3, intended to offer the non-specialist reader some general orientation toward what follows, I use the next three chapters to consider empirical cases in the light of my conceptual interests. I do this by offering a "close-up" picture of three fields of consumption in South Africa from 1948 to the time of writing. The choice of the South African case is a self-imposed delimitation, owing to my own research background and life experience. In this study it ultimately represents nothing more than one of any number of particular cases of the possible, to use Bourdieu's term, although my interest in this case leans also on a larger research project of which I have been a part. Here South Africa, far from being understood as a pure singularity due to the racial discrimination of the apartheid period, has

been considered in broad historical perspective as a modern society, and as one of the family of "settler societies" studied by Louis Hartz and colleagues in *The Founding of New Societies* (1964), where South Africa is compared with the Unites States, Canada, and Australia, as well as Latin America as a whole, in light of commonalities in their colonial histories. These societies have been almost entirely overlooked in the "multiple modernities" literature, and studying their historical trajectories raises potentially awkward issues when following thinkers such as Shmuel Eisenstadt and Johann Arnason in reasoning about modernity and its variations in terms of historically abiding "cultural programmes" or "civilisations" (Wagner 2011:89–95, 2012:24–25, 64–77).

Without reasoning, either, in terms of a distinct "Afromodernity" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012:7), the South African case clearly possesses interesting similarities and differences when compared with other modern societies. This becomes particularly apparent when, following the general lead of the multiple modernities literature, we cease to identify modernity with any specific institutional configuration and to teleologically posit a universal temporal drift towards this condition in the manner of modernisation theories. Modernity is better understood in more general terms as an ethos and/or as a specific mode of interpreting and acting on the world adopted by social collectivities, where genuine novelty, and not the reproduction of abiding social structures, is purposively pursued by social actors (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012:7–12; Wagner 2012:20–26). Modernity, in the broadest terms, can be understood as a social condition in which people generally accept that the challenges, common to all human collectivities, of establishing valid knowledge, satisfying needs, and governing life in common, should proceed in accordance with a commitment to autonomy. We can speak of modernity where these anthropologically constant epistemological, economic and political challenges are generally taken up in a manner that is in principle free from any absolute determination by *external* authority, including the authority that historical precedent may command (Wagner 2008:2–4, 12–16).

This wider conceptual approach to modernity has important empirical consequences. Amongst other things, non-democratic forms of rule are consistent with the condition of modernity, and neither the European episodes of totalitarianism and dictatorship in the 20th century nor analogous experiences in South Africa and Latin America necessarily position them outside of modernity. Similarly, the failure to achieve social equality, even of a purely formal nature, is not at all anomalous within modern societies. Even well into the post-World War period that interests me, meaningful social equality was far from being achieved in most parts of the world. While European societies generally still discriminated against women and workers in the early post-war years, South Africa, in addition, followed the pattern of strong racial discrimination common to the settler societies, even while taking this to greater lengths and officially attempting to reconcile this with a rhetoric of separate but equal development (Wagner 2012:89, 128–32). Precisely this push-and-pull between the European historical background that, often in unacknowledged ways, informs conceptual discussions of

modernity, and a different set of modern experiences promises to expand both the conceptual and historical framework in which modernity is discussed.

In what follows, however, this historically comparative dimension remains largely implicit, and the concern with modernity provides only a background for the selection of my historical cases on consumption. In the study of consumer fields in chapters 4–6 I offer a historical reconstruction of three forms of consumption: clothing, housing and faith healing. By consuming these things through the institutionalised channels of the market, of redistribution or of reciprocity, or some combination of these, I argue that complex social and political bonds have been created, adapted or ruptured in ways that have led not only to social reproduction but also important social change, both at the macro level of system transformation and at the micro level of everyday life. I stray progressively further from conventional understandings of consumption with each chapter, moving from the familiar concern with the market when discussing clothing consumption to a concern with a market/redistributive split in the case of housing consumption. When discussing housing consumption in Chapter 5, I focus on the redistributive dimension in order to show up the shortcomings of reading all social and political responses to consumption as responding only to an anterior market logic of commodification. Chapter 6, in particular, is intended to test how far the approach to consumption I advocate can be pushed. I consider faith healing as a form of consumption split between the market and reciprocity, focussing again on the latter dimension to challenge certain recurrent tropes in the consumption literature. This is not only the fixation on material commodities mentioned above, but also an ultimately reductive over-emphasis on the individual or group competitiveness commonly assumed to motivate consumer practices. Without positing any sharp cleavage between the market commodity and the reciprocated gift in terms of a corresponding division between egoism and altruism, I show how consumption can indeed be motivated by an ethical concern for the well-being of others as well as a fear of vulnerability accompanying other-dependence for both material and immaterial security.

Some earlier argumentative threads left hanging are taken up again in Chapter 7. Informed by the historical material of chapters 4–6, I argue that consumer practices both on and off the market have integrated people socially and politically in an ethical fashion and not, in the first instance, through the systemic effects of economic transactions. These practices didn't simply reproduce the social *status quo ante* but also introduced real novelty into the social world in ways that merit more attention and open up further questions about how best to construct a non-reductive historiographical picture of South Africa in the apartheid and post-apartheid periods. Considering these historical dynamics also illuminates the shortcomings of conceptual approaches to consumption that exaggerate the capacity of the market to structure an entire social order through commodification, that view consumer action as that which reproduces this order, and that overstate the extent to which consumption reinforces social stratification. All of the above may or may not transpire, but the tendency to argue or assume that they must is conceptually reductive and likely to skew any reading of historical events, not only in the South African case, but more generally too.

Chapter 1

1. Approaching consumption

In his introduction to the edited volume *Acknowledging Consumption*, Daniel Miller (1995) wrote what one might choose to regard as a manifesto for a domain of scholarship that had mushroomed from around the mid-1980s, seeking greater recognition for this work in the academic world. The study of consumption, he argued, amounted not just to a sub-discipline of passing interest, but something that no contemporary social scientist could afford to ignore. Research about consumption was nothing less than "a remarkably delayed acknowledgement of social and economic transformations at a global level that had previously suffered from extraordinary academic neglect" (Miller 1995:3). "My argument", Miller states, "is that consumption has become the vanguard of history" – something that he did not view as necessarily a good thing. Such epochal pronouncements should always be viewed with deep suspicion, but what Miller was proposing was not altogether as daring as it may still sound when viewed contextually. While only alluding to this background, part of what he was picking up on was sociological work in Northern societies that, while always contested, had begun to converge on the finding that people less and less oriented their life plans around their productive roles. For instance, not the first, but one of the more influential and persuasive, early efforts by a reputable critical theorist to seriously defend this critical heresy was Claus Offe's essay "Work: The Key Sociological Category?" (1985). Offe's intervention itself appealed to a wide range of empirical work, and suggested that if the abiding primacy of production for the explanation of large-scale social change is to be taken as an empirical and not an ontological proposition, then historical developments – in Western Europe, at least – were apparently serving to disconfirm it.

Miller, in this sense, was simply pursuing this idea where he thought it led, with some scholarly precedents already at hand. A further, unstated, assumption behind Miller's claim was that nothing less than the movement toward historical change itself comes exclusively from Northern societies and radiates outward. Miller did not seek to challenge this background assumption in a robust way, even though he had complex ideas about these matters and was himself interested in how Northern developments were modified in Southern societies. His problematic historical frame of reference suffers from many of the shortcomings accompanying all major studies adopting the "consumer society" trope in the consumption literature, which I discuss further in Chapter 2. What he sought to do was nonetheless interesting. He argued that almost all the generalisations one encounters in the social science literature touching on consumption are very poorly substantiated. Miller calls these academic "myths"; for example, the myth that consumption necessarily leads to global homogenisation, or that it always erodes sociality (Miller 1995:19–20), both of which Miller's own subsequent work would seek to definitively banish. Miller argues that historically sensitive studies can always find exceptions

to these sorts of myths, but that the real challenge extends to going beyond the search for exceptions and observing "the academic requirement to generalise as a means to analysis" (Miller 1995:28). His own attempt at generalisation – primarily, the claim that consumption has come to be of fundamental importance to the organisation of all social endeavour because people have ceased to identify with the groups that produce goods and services – does not get us very far. Miller's claim that we now stand in a "secondary relation" to these goods and services is finally just a conceptual restatement of the association of consumption with alienation and individualisation. It is also too categorically stated, being clearly formulated with only recent Northern social developments in mind, and even there could be challenged in accordance with which forms of consumption we consider and at which times.

Getting around these problems, as well as escaping the oversight of consumer creativity discussed in the Introduction, requires approaching consumption in two complementary ways. Conceptually, we need to formulate a "thinner" account of consumption that is potentially more universally valid if we hope to approach consumption in Southern societies without needless conceptual prejudice. In doing so, of course, we also need to make our wider social science assumptions fully explicit. What follows in this chapter is one attempt at doing this. At the same time, as I will argue in Chapter 2, the empirical value of such a conceptual account resides in whether it can make it easier to register the complex social patterning of how people consume within particular human lifeworlds at an everyday level, as well as how this consumption my take on wider social and political significance in these settings and beyond. These wider consequences of consumption should never be stated in general terms, but always reletavised to specific social formations – which may, of course, potentially span very large tracts of space and time – to avoid lending weight to any insidious teleology. Nonetheless, one's conceptual orientation can and indeed should strive for maximal but always provisional generalisability insofar as one is interested in stimulating far-flung scholarly debate and in promoting research projects whose results can converge better than they have hitherto.

Three basic claims about consumption underlie much of the argumentation throughout this study. Firstly, one can best mediate between the particular and the universal in discussions of consumption by understanding consumption as the realisation of value. Secondly, from a broadly sociological perspective, the most interesting questions about consumption arise from relating it to exchange both on and beyond the market. Thirdly, I hold that consumption can best be explained as an agentic and ethically interpretive domain of action, and that it is only within this framework that its possible instrumentality or expressivity arises. Taken together, the discussion of these three assumptions is a way of articulating what I mean when speaking in this study of consumption as a potential form of expressive action, and when articulating what I will call an expressive approach to consumption. It is this expressive *potentiality* that makes consumption unique as a domain of observable action, and overlooking it can lead to distortions when accounting for social change.

Before directly discussing my understanding of consumption, however, I set out a number of basic assumptions that I make about the study of societies and social action, both in general

terms and in relation to the study of consumption, which help to form the overall "approach" I develop in this chapter and the next. In sketching out these parameters I will pay particular attention to the basic set of ontological premises that guide my research, given that greater clarity about these leads to more articulate comparison and critique between competing conceptual approaches to consumption and indeed to all other social phenomena under discussion. At this ontological level, something brief must be said about what society is and why it should constitute the basic unit of analysis, which I will attempt by describing social life as a practical association for the collaborative satisfaction of needs. I then discuss what I take to be two particularly important qualitative features of all social practice by describing it as both semantically complex and morally motivated. More particularly, I will argue that social action is semantically mediated by imaginary significations that link belief and action and by moral value-orientations that motivate people to choose from among the meaningful options available to them. A further ontological premise is that on utilitarian understandings of the social world such motivations are viewed as material and derivative of atomistically formed desires, whereas they are better described as immaterial and as social in their origins.

I then discuss a number of other elements of the approach to consumption I advocate here, dwelling only very shortly on the issue of epistemology. I believe very little can be determined in the abstract here, as the best social science research is to some extent always inter-disciplinary and any stringent restriction at this level tends to be arbitrary. My only aim here is to establish a very minimal ordering assumption. I claim, following Anthony Giddens (1986), that, whatever disciplinary delimitations one wishes to observe, adopting a basically interpretive social science epistemology with an ethnographic dimension is an indispensible foundation for building up to institutional analysis. I then go on to set out a number of methodological assumptions that form the background to my research on consumption: that functionalist arguments misattribute the needs of situated social groups to entire social systems and misleadingly view expressive action as either irrelevant to social change or as only instrumental to maintaining or preventing it; that both economistic and culturalist modes of explaining social change in the social sciences are best avoided; and that a more useful position from which to analyse the locus of social change is to focus on changes in the institutional makeup of social, economic and political exchange.

1.1 Ontological assumptions: Needs and symbolic mediation

1.1.1 Social life and need satisfaction

This study is concerned, at the most abstract level, with action insofar as it constitutes and reconstitutes social relations. The outcome of this action, as the abstract totality of social relations at a given point in time, can be called "society", though society has no form of existence outside of ceaseless social action mediated by communication. What I will refer to as

the political and the economic domains of action I view as parts or moments of social life, conceptual devices for discussing and practically organising nominally distinct forms of social action. I assume that the social relations established through social action cannot lucidly be explained other than historically. The relation between the social and historical is, strictly speaking, constitutive and their separation is only an occasionally useful form of abstraction (Castoriadis 2005 [1975]:108). When approaching matters historically I will be particularly concerned with identifying moments of significant social *change*. At a purely conceptual level, the question of social change and that of social *reproduction* are not two distinct affairs. However, research questions in the social sciences, and particularly in the study of consumption, tend in practice to be framed in terms of one or the other and this can have very significant effects for the explanatory makeup of the theory and, through this, its empirical focus and claims. In particular, focussing too exclusively on social reproduction can obscure the contingency of social affairs and the potential of action to effect significant departures from the *status quo*. Focussing on reproduction can be more or less sophisticated, but I believe significant oversights come of it, often due to a set of basically functionalist assumptions about the social world or about the instrumentality of action beyond the domain of production.

Without wishing to make many extensive claims about the nature of society, I will understand it in what follows as nothing less than the ontological foundation of human life, both individual and collective, and hence also the most basic conceptual category when selecting the level of analysis in social science discourse. Articulating what a society is and grappling with the relations between individual and society is itself an immensely complex undertaking, but one which can be largely side-stepped by focussing on where the two meet in action, that is, by focussing on social *practices* of varying spatial and temporal extensions (Giddens 1993:4). Even so, social scientists have to make assumptions about what the purpose or meaning of these practices are, and in what terms they will be rendered intelligible and communicated, as these assumptions invariably structure their empirical work and cannot but be tendentious.

Simply put, I believe, loosely following Castoriadis's reading of some key themes in Aristotle, that human societies, whatever else they may be, are always associations for the satisfaction of human needs through exchange, and that exchange necessary relies on shared value orientations that have their origin in common needs (1978:708–17). What I mean both by exchange and by value will be clarified below, but here it is essential to note that neither of these terms makes any necessary reference to the market, as common contemporary usage is likely to do. As I use them they refer, first, to basic constituents of meaningful social interchange that make up what Castoriadis (1978:713) gestures at when speaking of "the essential permanent transaction/transfer constitutive of society". I nonetheless go on to speak of these concepts in a somewhat more specific but still universal sense, with value a feature of moral choice between meaningful alternatives, and only derivatively a property of objects, and with exchange being the transfer of valued objects along market, redistributive or reciprocal channels of association.

By specifying the needs that bring people together into society, as well as the way they are interpreted by those seeking to practically satisfy them, and by articulating all this through concepts that are used to isolate important features of particular situations even while explicitly or implicitly connecting them to analogues in different times and places, we can therefore also make more precise yet still generalisable historical inquiries into and statements about society and the domains of action that constitute it, as I will do in chapters 3–6 below. At the same time, we can avoid reifying society as a totality external to and uniquely constraining of action and instead view social action as tied up in a complex fashion with both enablement and constraint in accordance with the workings of social power. This is the basic intention behind Giddens's famous discussion of the duality of social structure as well as Castoriadis's distinction between instituted and instituting society (Castoriadis 1991:143–47; Giddens 1986:25–28, 169–80; Sewell 2005:322–23).

1.1.2 Society, culture and imaginary significations

I will expand on this understanding of society as it affects my work throughout this study, but here I want to briefly clarify another basic problem: the relationship between "social" and "cultural" forms of action, and between both of these and economic action. What I will refer to as social issues are often discussed in terms of culture. Unfortunately, "culture", no less than "society", is one of the most polysemic terms in the social sciences. Particularly in more casual use, culture is usually (i) discussed synonymously with society or societal sub-groups to designate a particular way of life, or (ii) viewed as a stable body of intellectual, spiritual or artistic achievements, or else some combination of both, as when we speak of, say, South African culture in opposition to the South African economy (Sewell 2005:323; Williams 1985:90–91). Accounts of culture that invoke the first of these meanings I will call "substantive"; those invoking the second meaning I call "localised".

The first, purely substantive, sense of "culture" differs from "society" merely as a lexical choice and raises no a priori problems provided only that one clarifies that it is a substantive form of life one is referring to. Substantive understandings of culture, or associated terms like "tradition", are of course potentially reifying. They are nonetheless hard to escape. Moreover, they are not limited to the modern Western world and have their equivalents in most human societies that anthropologists have explored, where they refer in general to community of some variety based on ethical (for Sahlins, and many others, "moral") and ethnic distinctions (Sahlins 1999). As Sahlins (1999:414–15) explains, "[t]he local demarcation of peoples is the complement of an expanding segmentary scheme, involving the objectifications of ethnic-cultural entities on regional, national and international lands, which usually appear, from the vantage of particular groups, as concentric circles of diminishing moral community". The spatial and social delimitation of society/culture, or the temporal delimitation of tradition, may be made in all kinds of deeply problematic ways, but the very enterprise of drawing such boundaries in some form or other appears both universal and largely unavoidable.

The second, localised, understanding of culture appears to me far more problematic, and any account of culture relying on it (or combining this localised meaning with the first, substantive meaning) makes ontologically dubious assumptions. As Sewell (Sewell 2005:159) explains:

> [t]he problem with such a concept of culture is that it focuses only on a certain range of meanings, produced in a certain range of institutional locations – on self-consciously "cultural" institutions and on expressive, artistic, and literary systems of meanings. This use of the concept is to some extent complicit with the widespread notion that meanings are of minimal importance in the other "noncultural" institutional spheres: that in political or economic spheres, meanings are merely superstructural excrescences.

For some social scientists, such as those working in the tradition of British social anthropology, a distinction is usually upheld between culture, understood as s system of meaning, and society, understood as a network of relations between people. For others, such as writers from the US cultural anthropology tradition, this manner of drawing the society/culture distinction is generally seen as misleading (Graeber 2011:78, n.29). Writing in the latter tradition, I believe Sahlins (1976:117) justifiably objects to "the arbitrary differentiation of 'culture' from 'social system' in the British school, as if social relations were not also composed and organized by meaning", citing as one example what he believes are the otherwise compelling anthropological studies of writers like Mary Douglas. Coming from a more sociological background, Jeffrey Alexander (1989:212–13) makes an identical point, arguing that there is a wider social science tendency to speak of social structure as if it exists, not just analytically, but also historically, apart from cultural order. We should rather "acknowledge that every structural event, and even every specific social value, exists within a very broad matrix of cultural tradition". Alexander (1989:233) argues in particular that most Marxian thought, and even Habermas's very critical approach to the Marxian tradition, tends to ultimately forget that "[modern] political and economic life are never simply instrumental. They are always coded by deep structures of cultural life."[3]

Academic discussions of culture, though astonishingly variable, have increasingly become more cautious about the term "culture" itself, or have escaped it altogether in favour of alternative, lower-level concepts like "*habitus*" or "discourse", not least because of external critique along with self-reproach among anthropologists for the historical complicity between anthropological studies of culture and colonial projects (Sewell 2005:155). Sahlins keeps to the term "culture" in all his writing, and often discusses culture in the substantive sense outlined here. However, he also offers a potted definition of cultures as "meaningful orders of persons and things" (Sahlins 1976:ix) that, when worked out in *Culture and practical reason*, is itself at several removes from this substantive understanding of culture.

Sahlins' more elaborated discussion of what culture is can be situated within a wider approach to culture, largely limited to the social sciences, that Sewell (2005:160–61) refers to as (iii)

"culture as a system of symbols and meanings", and to culture as (iv) a domain of practice or action. I believe Sewell (2005:162–64) is right to argue that, by holding the symbolic and action-centred understandings of culture together, in a purely formal understanding of culture that I will call "semantic",[4] one can rescue the concept of culture from the valid criticisms made by its detractors and use it to make interesting statements about socio-historical change, and this is what Sahlins usually does when working with the concept.

Below I speak of "culture" and "tradition", but only when paraphrasing the statements of Sahlins and others. In particular, and despite its centrality to the position I take on social action throughout this study, I also want to move a little distance even from Sahlins' semantic understanding of culture. In its concern with the historical effects of structures of meaning, this approach to culture is tied up with an understanding of social life that usefully places an emphasis on its semantic dimension but which is unclear about the tensions between human creativity and constraint and which appears to over-emphasise the unconscious aspects of both. When articulating my own position on such matters I will assume that the term "culture", as used by Sahlins, refers back in a general way to the abstraction "society", while wishing to underscore the historical importance of the semantic mediation of social action, thereby shunting between a casual substantive use of the term "culture" and a more elaborated, formal, semantic sense.

When speaking on my own behalf below I will, following Castoriadis, describe the meaningful coding of action that semantic understandings of culture gesture at in terms of "social imaginary significations", which we can think of as "multiform complexes of meaning" (Arnason 1989:334). Here I follow Arnason's (2003:53) suggestion that "the idea of imaginary significations – developed by Castoriadis – is first and foremost a reinterpretation of culture". Using the terms introduced above, I will read Castoriadis's discussion of social imaginary signification as a way of designating the semantic dimension of culture, and when Castoriadis himself speaks of "culture" it tends to be only in the substantive sense. This isn't a capricious multiplication of terms. Speaking of a social world ordered through imaginary significations instead of "culture" draws attention to the practical, active nature of social life by relating the shared meanings that constitute it to creative human faculties. At the same time, it highlights the fact that when talking of society one is speaking of a semantically dense domain of action.

While Sahlins (1976:55–57) holds a semantic view of culture in which both the symbolic and active dimensions (that is, iii and iv above) feature, he nonetheless explicitly prioritises the symbolic dimension.[5] This is a consequence of his structuralist premises, giving rise to a tendency to reify culture and naturalise power, and thereby also allowing him to often slide from his more worked-out semantic understanding of culture into speaking of culture in the substantivist sense without signalling the shift. Castoriadis, similarly stressing the inherently symbolic nature of society, perpetually emphasises the need to keep this in balance with action, which allows him to escape the reification of culture that Sahlins in practice slides into. And while Castoriadis is also interested in the unconscious, and in the shaping power of pre-

existing institutions, he views the former as a perpetual source of imaginary fertility, and the latter as a profoundly constraining of agency but amenable to purposive modification. Castoriadis (1991:143–59, 2003:332–34) develops these ideas into a deep concern with the explicit understandings of the social world and their constitutive relationship with "explicit power", stressing their centrality to autonomous, radical political projects, even if he does so at the expense of broader concern with what Giddens (1986:26, 281) calls "practical consciousness" as it appears in social forms that don't lend themselves to discursive formulation and political mobilisation of the Classical Greek and modern Western variety.

To head off misunderstanding, it should be stressed right away that imaginary signification as a term of art does not necessarily imply that social action or its objects are in any sense purely ideal or fantastical, as the more commonplace use of the term "imaginary" might suggest. While society can of course be understood in different ways by different people, and indeed invariably is, at a level where these understandings intersect[6] social imaginary significations can be seen as the background against which competing understandings are apprehended and judged by common standards, making them also the fundament of all real social action. Social imaginary significations are also constitutively bound up with institutions that enable and constrain social action and that are in their turn often altered by this action (Castoriadis 1978, 1991, 2005).

Below I will take it as axiomatic that by far the greater part of all social action, which encompasses also economic and political action, is semantically constituted through social imaginary significations. Divinities and mythological figures are among the most abiding social imaginary significations, but we are also in the domain of the social imaginary when speaking of the law, the state and the citizen, of the economy, money and capital, and so on. In such cases we are not, properly speaking, referring to naturally-occurring things or the qualities of things that inhere in them as objects. Rather, we refer to a consensual manner in which things – tangible or intangible, formed by natural processes or by human artifice – are to be regarded by a society and incorporated into its practical life within a given historical era (Castoriadis 2005:365). This connection between shared meaning and common action is the essence of social imaginaries. Take the case of the commodity, another social imaginary signification. For Castoriadis (2005:365),

> [t]o say that an object or a class of objects are commodities is not to say anything about these objects as such but about the manner in which a society treats (can treat) this object or class of objects, about the manner of being of these objects for that society. It is to say that this society has instituted the signification commodity – as such and in and through a network of derived significations – that it has instituted individual behaviour and material systems which give being to objects, and these particular objects, as "commodities".

Working with a semantic understanding of culture, or translating this into the corresponding but more agentic language of social imaginary significations, has important consequences for the description of social behaviour in general and of economic behaviour in particular. Using it, we can distinguish between, say, economic and political action in terms of criteria such as the needs they attempt to satisfy. However, it makes no sense to distinguish them in terms of whether or not, or to what degree, they are themselves *influenced* by cultural codes or social imaginaries, for they are *constituted* by such codes or imaginaries. Were we to speak of social, economic or political action as more or less influenced by culture, this would only be possible when speaking of culture in the "localised" sense mentioned above, which we have said is ontologically altogether very suspect.

1.1.3 Value-orientation and motivation

A shared understanding of things does not of itself suffice to account for how any one course of action will be pursued out of a range of possible and meaningful actions. To explain this, it does not suffice to draw attention to the social imaginary significations present in a given social setting; one also has to appeal to agents' motivations. In this section, I will understand motivation for action in terms of value-orientation. As David Graeber (2001:105) puts it, "[v]alue … is something that mobilizes the desires of those who recognize it, and moves them to action". I will argue further below that value-orientation is an ethical faculty, which is the origin of a class of action that can be called "expressive". But value is itself a very nebulous term and requires some initial specification. When accounting for its *origins*, and simplifying a great deal, value can be viewed as: (i) an immaterial quality that actors associate with possible courses of action in practical reason, with sufficient motivational appeal to lead to the prioritisation of one form of action over another;[7] or (ii) a quality that is objectified in material and immaterial things in virtue of which these things come to appear as objects of desire. Desire and choice appear, on the former account, as related to preferred qualitative modes of being, and on the latter as issuing from a possessive impulse toward objects.

I will assume in what follows that (ii) is always a consequence of (i). The social, political and economic implications of this position will be worked out further when discussing utilitarianism below. Here, however, I want to immediately suggest two basic consequences of this way of seeing things: firstly, viewed from the perspective of (i), the production, exchange and consumption of objects pertain not only to the objects themselves but, more fundamentally, to the values assigned to them in the practical flow of social life. This is true not only of immaterial objects, but also of material objects. Secondly, I will further assume that where this is not recognised we can say that value has been reified. I do not wish to discuss the complexities of reification here, except to note that one way of understanding this reification in the terms already introduced above would be to see it as a way of apprehending the world in which both the social imaginary constitution of the objective world and its moral structuring remain hidden.

The constitution of the "social" or "cultural" world through imaginary significations has already been discussed, but here something brief should be said about its ethical ordering. Ethics – a term that I will use synonymously with morality, though it is possible to distinguish them – covers an enormous range of concerns about ways of living well, obligations to others and of others to oneself. In an extended sense, which is how I will understand it below, it can also refer to religious or spiritual orientation, as well as to aesthetic sensibility (Taylor 2001 [1989]:11–22, 373–74). Ethical judgement requires the exercise of what might be called "strong evaluation", that is, the apparently universal and inescapable human faculty for implicitly or explicitly discriminating between basic desires in everyday life in accordance with relatively enduring principles, or "second-order" volitions, that themselves cannot be reduced to these basic desires (Taylor 1985a:23–26, 2001:30–31). Whatever the content of this judgement, which outside of these very general formal limits differs enormously across historical situations, it gives rise to moral activity aimed at need satisfaction in accordance with a conception of the good that may or may not be discursively formulated but which is by definition more or less intentional.

One special category of such moral activity can be called "eudaimonistic" or "expressive".[8] These are difficult terms to define precisely and have their own nuances but, negatively stated, both refer to non-instrumental activity. Positively defined, they refer to that which is done for the fulfilment that accompanies acts of self-realisation oriented by strong value. Admittedly merging what could analytically be held separate, I will speak below simply of "expressive" action. Two clarifications need to be made about this domain of moral action: it is always minimally intentional and therefore refers us back to individual motivations, however socially situated these motivations may be, while also assuming a basic measure of reflexive consciousness and hermeneutic engagement with the world; and the motivations underpinning expressive action are tied up both with the pursuit of freedom and with social power.

Firstly, some basic measure of intention must be assigned to expressive acts, making them also necessarily the acts of individuals. There is a way of thinking holistically about expressivity that views it as a phenomenon best identified at the level of an entire social collectivity and which, at least in Marx's writings, may exist in direct opposition to how actors within these collectivities understand their own actions (Honneth 1995a:9–10; Joas 1996:85–94). This is a fascinating idea, but I take the position that expressivity can only have a collective existence in a purely metaphorical sense. Expressive and moral behaviour more generally always must, strictly speaking, be individual. To situate self-realisation at the level of a collectivity of any sort is to succumb to a metaphysically dubious "emanationism", usually with roots in the early expressivist ideas of Herder, Hegel and Marx (Joas 1996:82–84, 89–94; Joas and Knöbl 2009:47–48). Groups of any sort – societies, classes, or what have you – cannot think and cannot experience motivational states. In taking this position one is nonetheless in no way committed to methodological individualism, for any given individual may, and outside of very marginal cases always should, be understood as a socialised, historically-situated person whose

understanding and choices will always rely in some measure on non-instrumental participation in some larger collectivity (Boltanski 2011:35–36; Taylor 2001:35–40).

This way of viewing expressive action also rules out the possibility of expressive action being wholly unconscious. Where reflexive consciousness of a practical or discursive nature is entirely lacking, expressivity will be lacking too. At the same time, speaking of expressive action does not necessarily imply the application of a cognitive blueprint to life. Rather, and probably for the most part, it points toward a more meandering "interaction between vague intentions and the circumstances of the world" in which we only come to fully understand our own potentialities through their manifestations in our actions (Joas 1996:94, n.37). Here the inescapable limitations on all knowledge and the associated impossibility of entirely banishing the element of hazard from experience call for constant interpretations of, and adjustment to, the opportunities and constraints of the world.

Secondly, when discussing the intentions behind expressive behaviour, these can be understood as motivated by the desire for a type of freedom that, as Taylor (1985b:212–15) has argued, cannot be assimilated to what are now commonly called, following Isaiah Berlin (1969 [1958]), positive or negative freedom. This expressive freedom is nonetheless a powerful motivator of human action, not simply in the modern Western context in which Taylor considers it, where it has received extensive discursive elaboration in Romantic accounts of language and of the social bond, but more universally.[9] Understood as formally as this, though, speaking of expressive "freedom" may itself be misleading, for action motivated by an ideal of expressive freedom may, in the absence of other more substantive commitments, result in sustained oppression or any manner of atrocity. As I will argue later, these reflections are important because most consumer behaviour is motivated by ethical judgements and often performed in an expressive manner. We therefore need to explain economic activity, from the perspective of consumers themselves, as irreducible to its instrumental moments.

1.1.4 The social roots of economic action

Here it would be useful to elaborate on what I mean above when affirming that the *origin* of value is immaterial and relates most directly to the active realisation of preferred states of being. This claim in fact rests on two more basic assumptions: (i) there is no evidence of a universal human desire to competitively maximise valued goods, and (ii) value originates in the desire to secure positive recognition and is only exceptionally based on an immediate desire for tangible objects of any specific kind. These assumptions can be characterised as anti-economistic, or more particularly, as anti-utilitarian.

Economism and utilitarianism. By "economism" I am referring in a general way to the idea that an economy can exist outside of society. One of its recurring tropes, in the social sciences, is what Polanyi (1977:5–6) discussed in terms of the "economistic fallacy", that is, "equating the

human economy in general with its market form". Polanyi believed the economistic fallacy often arises from assuming that a complex division of labour is enough to account for the existence of markets, and more generally from the assumption that market activity is a natural, teleological end of human exchange only imperfectly approximated in non-market societies (Dale 2010:89–90). At the ontological level, one of the central pillars of economism is what we can call a "utilitarian" explanation of social practice (Godbout 1998:14, 19; Sahlins 1976:vii–viii, 166–69). Briefly stated, utilitarianism refers here not to any specific philosophical doctrine or economic body of thought that flies under this name, but rather gestures at the widespread social science assumption that people in all human societies, particularly in their social and economic behaviour, are at bottom motivated by self-interest to competitively pursue ends that they believe will best augment their pleasure or personal well-being alone. What I am calling expressive behaviour shows up, from a utilitarian perspective, as the maximisation of valued objects – usually goods and services acquired through exchange, but in some versions also intangibles like status (or, depending on the preferred terminology: "honour", "esteem"). In the process, however, such expressive action is rendered indistinguishable from instrumental behaviour. This maximisation is considered rational to the extent that it efficiently selects the best means to attain these ends. Building on these assumptions of rational self-interest and possessiveness, value in utilitarian thought is a function of the anticipated satisfaction of possession arising from a person's desire for the object (Graeber 2001:8–9, 46).[10]

This is an enormously influential assumption, both in the social sciences and far beyond, and without attempting anything like a decisive refutation I simply want to state that I believe this view of things is an example of ahistorical universalism. In this connection Mauss (2002:95–98) notes the absence of linguistic terms corresponding precisely to the modern Western understanding of "interest", in the sense of rational self-interest, in other societies. We do find analogues, he believes, but these are never set up in complete opposition to disinterestedness or altruism and rather tend to fuse with it to varying degrees. Mauss may indeed be right to argue that this suggests there is a hidden continental shelf of historical accretions, which he believed derived from the development of the unfettered market, that we stand on when speaking of interest in the utilitarian sense common today. Similarly, Sahlins (1976:109) speculates that the construal of "subterranean strife" as a basic condition of all social life might well "remain the most important legacy bestowed on social science by capitalist ideology".

I am in no position to weigh in on these claims, but below I argue that the self-interest/altruism dichotomy is not useful for understanding social exchange, as it misconstrues the nature of reciprocity. I also argue that interest, while being a meaningful concept, has no explanatory value when accounting for particular courses of social action unless it is understood in a non-universal fashion, as an interpretive self-understanding used to guide action within particular social contexts. In Chapter 2 I will also argue that utilitarianism, while usually referring to individual interest, can be extended to groups without forfeiting its basic assumptions about self-interest and competitive strife being the most essential fact of social life and without relinquishing the associated construal of social action as at bottom instrumental. For this

reason, Bourdieu's critical social thought, which looms very large in the literature on consumption, can rightly be characterised as firmly grounded in utilitarian assumptions.

Value as a property of social action. Despite its inherent reductionism, what utilitarianism does have to recommend it is that it offers something in the way of an explanation of the *motivations* driving social and economic practices. Rejecting as reductive utilitarian assertions about motivation can therefore raise the question of how we wish to account for the motivational grounding of social life, and here Polanyi was pioneering in his attempts to work out a mode of social science explanation that locates the motor of social change, and in particular change in the idealised domain of economic action, in the ethical motivations of historically situated subjects instead of in impersonal mechanisms or principles. This he does while avoiding the sort of ahistorical atomism we now call methodological individualism.

From an expressive position, value may appear to reside in things but its *motivating* capacity is better understood as relating back to the desire for recognition between people, imbuing it with a necessarily social dimension that accounts of the "dialogical", "communicative" or "symbolic" aspects of social life often aim to articulate. Of course, we clearly do sometimes desire things for their innate properties, as is most obviously the case with addictive substances like opiates or certain stimulants like nicotine, or even with more everyday substances such as sucrose. Most satisfactions, however, turn out upon interrogation to be social in nature, and the desire to possess things itself originates in the desire to express the socially-valued attributes associated with their possession among people who share this value-orientation, that is, among the "moral communities" of which Sahlins speaks.

In this regard, it is interesting to note that Polanyi, like Mauss and Sahlins, argues that the idea that people are motivated at bottom by material or economic interests has its own particular history, which he associates with the peculiarities of economic thought in 19th century western Europe as well as with the growth of capitalist markets that formed the background to this thought:

> Though human society is naturally conditioned by economic factors, the motives of human individuals are only exceptionally determined by the needs of material want satisfaction. That nineteenth-century society was organized on the assumption that such a motivation could be made universal was a peculiarity of the age. It was therefore appropriate to allow a comparatively wide scope to the play of economic motives when analyzing that society. But we must guard against prejudging the issue, which is precisely to what extent such an unusual motivation could be made universally effective. (Polanyi 2001 [1944]:160)

Elsewhere, Polanyi (1957:243) argues that economic action, substantively understood, always concerns "material want satisfaction". He clarifies this potentially confusing statement somewhat by arguing that it is the *means*, and not the wants themselves, that are material, as he wishes to avoid attempts to classify and compare economic life across societies by appeal to the motivational properties of actors in these societies in isolation from the substantive social and

political organisation of common life. Polanyi is particularly opposed to the atomistic idea that individual rational allocation of scarce means to fit ends is what, through some unexplained process of co-ordination between individuals, explains the development of modern economies. Outside of the prior existence of collective moral and institutional frameworks of the market, of centralised redistribution and of decentralised reciprocity, these individual dispositions would not of themselves add up to the forms of collective action we in fact observe (Polanyi 1957:248, 1977:20, 36–37). Thus, for Polanyi, when answering the question of *how* an economy works in practice, and how to conceptually delimit economic action from others forms of action, we have to look at material systems, even though precisely what the material is is never clearly set out.

Nonetheless, to understand the genesis of the wants that for Polanyi set the whole economic system in motion, and thereby answer the question of *why* people engage in economic action, we have to look beyond the economy, and indeed beyond materiality. Consider this remarkable statement:

> The outstanding discovery of recent historical and anthropological research is that man's economy, as a rule, is submerged in his social relationships. He does not act so as to safeguard his individual interest in the possession of material goods; he acts so as to safeguard his social standing, his social claims, his social assets. He values material goods only in so far as they serve this end. Neither the process of production nor that of distribution is linked to specific economic interests attached to the possession of goods; but every single step in that process is geared to a number of social interests which eventually ensure that the required step be taken. These interests will be very different in a small hunting or fishing community from those in a vast despotic society, but in either case the economic system will be run on noneconomic motives. (Polanyi 2001 [1944]:48)[11]

What these motives are, Polanyi believes, will differ from place to place, but some generalisable statements are possible. In particular, Polanyi (2001:160) wishes to locate economic motives in relation to a desire to be well-placed in the status or recognitional order, which for him is the most basic sense in which we can speak of a "class" ordering of society:

> Purely economic matters such as affect want-satisfaction are incomparably less relevant to class behaviour than questions of social recognition. Want-satisfaction may be, of course, the result of such recognition, especially as its outward sign or prize. But the interests of a class most directly refer to standing and rank, to status and security, that is, they are primarily not economic but social.

These are insightful arguments, and although Polanyi did not directly apply them to consumption, I will pursue what I believe to be their general implications for consumer practices at various points in the chapters that follow.

1.2 Epistemological and methodological assumptions

Having set out these ontological premises, I also want to lay out the basic epistemological and methodological assumptions that both set the parameters within which I develop my own understanding of consumer action and form part of the background for my critical engagement with existing discussions of this theme. Firstly, I argue that social science research does well to adopt an interpretive social science epistemology and to rely on ethnographic source materials that register these interpretations. This in no way rules out institutional analysis, but effectively subordinates it to a more basic interpretive position. I then highlight what I consider two misleading strategies for explaining social change, the first based on a functional attribution of survival needs to social systems, and the second on a reductive account of the locus of social change that confines it to either the domain of the economy, in the sense of exchange on or production for a market economy, or of culture, in the localised sense of culture discussed above. This leads in to a discussion of how social change might be better accounted for by attending to the institutional makeup of social, economic and political exchange.

1.2.1 Epistemological considerations

We said above that society is constituted by the on-going action of its members, and to this we should add that action, however routinised and unreflexive it may be, is intentional in the sense that it relies on meaningful reasons for action and motivations for acting on these reasons. To the extent that it is reasoned, it rests on complex knowledge. A minimum of reflexivity informed by this knowledge is never wholly absent from action that is repeated over time, for it is precisely this reflexivity that ensures that actions are repeated and hence are routinized (Giddens 1986:281). Considering the intentionality and "knowledgeability" of human action is not an arbitrary or fanciful assumption, then, but a necessary starting point for social thought that takes the phenomenology of action into account. This means attending to the knowledge that actors possess, instead of dismissing this out of hand as an ideological epiphenomenon that is at best of functional importance when explaining social change and at worst a superfluous descriptive indulgence. As Giddens (1986:281) puts it:

> [a]ll human beings are knowledgeable agents. That is to say, all social actors know a great deal about the conditions and consequences of what they do in their day-to-day lives. Such knowledge is not wholly propositional in character, nor is it incidental to their activities. Knowledgeability embedded in practical consciousness exhibits an extraordinary complexity – a complexity that often remains completely unexplored in orthodox sociological approaches.

Considering such knowledge, far from being an indulgence, seems particularly necessary when trying to say something meaningful about the lived experience of real people, as opposed to

statistical abstractions numbered among a population. For instance, consider Isaac Reed's (2011:65–72) reflections on social science interpretation in a volume concerned with Clifford Geertz's methodological legacy. Based on his own historical-sociological study of the largest witch hunt in the history of the USA, which engulfed Massachusetts in 1692, Reed argues that accounting for the event throws up some perplexing questions. These questions concern not only why it happened, in some very abstract sense, but why it happened *in the way it did*. Why were more women killed than men, and why were particular men killed and not others? Why, indeed, was it deemed necessary to execute people at all? To cite the generalised belief in witchcraft at the time is to say nothing useful by way of explanation. Most social scientists, when beginning to search for an explanation, would therefore reach for deeper-level explanations, and what lies most readily to hand in the present academic world are things like the expansion of the market or the growth of the state. But how can one get from there to the details of the witch hunts without leaning on the usual crutches, such as positing a set of subterranean economic interests in some way channelling all observed behaviour?

For Reed (2011:73–74), a satisfactory explanation for the witch hunts, or for any other important social event, necessarily entails an attempt to fathom the semantic complexity of the "cultural" world of those involved in order to understand, through some sort of Geertzian "thick description", how they interpreted their own situations. Thus, for instance, he believes that the Salem witch hunts cannot be explained without first understanding how aggressive conflicts between women in public, accusing one another of improper dressing and sexual misconduct, were perceived as a threat to the patriarchal structure of the Puritan family, as well as to the religious order that viewed this family structure as mirroring the relationship between God and his flock, while situating these beliefs against the backdrop of internal tensions within Puritan religion of the time. We of course don't have to agree or disagree with the details of Reed's preferred interpretation as these are only intended to illustrate a larger point, which is that the explanation of events in historical sociology and the social sciences more generally cannot afford to be disinterested in the interpretive dimension of human life and in the more everyday contexts in which interpretive action is called into play.

It doesn't follow from this that the study of institutions, and especially those very durable institutions that tend to be called economic or political "structures" or "systems", in abstraction from the everyday interpretive activities of social actors is to be simply dismissed as irrelevant. Returning to Reed's (2011:74–75) example, he allows that the detailed manner in which the witch hunts played out were affected by the unequal possession of financial resources and the like, themselves linked to prevailing forms of trade and wealth distribution. The point is that these economic institutions are all to be understood in relation to how the Puritans semantically apprehended their world, with the economic life of Puritan communities being constitutively bound up with prevailing social norms and religious belief and not something that simply steered these beliefs.

Pure institutional analysis is only ever credible if viewed as resulting from a methodological shortcut, where the discursive interpretation and explanation of this activity by social scientists assumes that practical modes of interpretation by engaged actors are so widely known that they can be taken for granted. On this assumption, Giddens (1986:284–85) claims, all convincing sociological research needs to possess an ethnographic dimension, and the only useful question is how explicit this needs to be for purposes of formulating research problems or for interpreting and communicating research results. Ethnographic studies are not inherently superior to institutional analysis, and the latter are often valuable insofar as they draw attention to the inevitable constraints on action that can be thought of as "structure" (Giddens 1986:294–304). Nonetheless, "[t]hose who take institutional analysis to comprise the field of sociology *in toto* mistake a methodological procedure for an ontological reality" (Giddens 1986:285). Likewise, "[n]o study of the structural properties of social systems can be successfully carried on, or its results interpreted, without reference to the knowledgeability of the relevant agents – although many proponents of structural sociology imagine that this is exactly what defines the province of 'sociological method'" (Giddens 1986:329).

Although he is often compared with Bourdieu, who I discuss in detail in chapters 2 and 7, on this major epistemological point Giddens and Bourdieu actually diverge quite substantially.[12] Giddens claims that it is strictly from *within* an interpretive social science position that we need to read institutional or any other structural form of analysis, which is the sort of thing that Bourdieu finds too "subjectivist". To accept Giddens's position does not allow for a middle ground which would see ethnographic studies that draw attention to intentional action on the one hand and institutional or structural analysis on the other as *competing* forms of explanation. They can also not simply be added together as they stand. And clearly we cannot, as Bourdieu seeks to do, derive the intentional from the structural by portraying the classificatory schemes by which people appear to negotiate social life as the working out of a more basic structural nexus of embodied dispositions and mental schemata shared by all members of classes, class factions or kinship groups that evolves unconsciously in the course of their struggle for domination – although admittedly some of Bourdieu's (e.g. 1996:466–68) statements about this are highly ambivalent. For Giddens, institutional or structural analysis should be viewed as only possessing explanatory value when construed as highlighting regularities in the social world that pivot on conscious, intentional action, even if the truth claims on which this knowledge rests are false or lacunary. Clearly, this entails a willingness to read structural analysis very much against the grain.

1.2.2 The problem with functionalism

Turning now from the epistemological to more strictly methodological issues, a major methodological assumption of this study is that the plurality and temporal mutability of social worlds is related to the semantic and moral complexity of social action, as discussed above, and that this forces us to reason about the social world in a fashion that allows for contingency and

human creativity. Here I will claim that social science analysis suffers from at least two basic problems when it neglects these insights, both of which show up in functionalist accounts of the social world. Firstly, when reasoning in general historical terms at what can roughly be thought of as a "macro" level, it tends to assimilate novelty into universal historical tropes in ways that are question-begging and which do not allow for the existence of "events" in William Sewell's sense of unpredictable junctures of radical novelty that precipitate far-reaching social change. Great ruptures can of course occur even in a functionalist universe, but these are already programmed into the system. Such analysis is, in short, teleological and deterministic. Secondly, and as a consequence of this, vast swathes of human experience at the "micro" level of the individual, as well as more articulated group action, are relegated to the domain of historical epiphenomena. The real drama of social life comes to appear, not as a coming together or falling apart of people over the mutual satisfaction of needs, but as some sort of tectonic collision of abstract systems in which people are only incidentally caught up.

Uneventful history. Viewing social life as contingent and actively shaped easily leads to dissatisfaction with deterministic accounts of the social that seek to explain social change as the working out in history of teleologically defined, impersonal principles operating at the level of an entire social system. Against this determinism, I prefer to move instead in the direction of what William Sewell (2005:101–23) understands as an approach to historical sociology that is informed by an "eventful" temporality, where we can speak of path dependence and identify enduring patterns in history but where radically contingent events disturb the predictable flow of history by profoundly altering or abolishing long-enduring institutions.[13] To describe these events as contingent, however, is not in itself satisfactory, because contingency merely creates an opening that further requires the agency of situated actors for anything that can be called either social or historical to emerge. It has, of course, fallen out of fashion to explicitly defend historical teleology. Marxian stage theories of history, for instance, find few adherents in mainstream academic debate nowadays despite the enduring popularity of Marxian thought in many critical circles. This appeal to the contingent and creative may therefore at first appear irrelevant, but I believe it becomes more interesting when used as a way of showing up the shortcomings of functionalist accounts of the social world, which frequently rely on teleological assumptions and which are very much alive in the contemporary social sciences even though seldom explicitly framed as such (Giddens 1976:336, 1986:295).

Functionalism has, historically, been applied both to individuals and societies, though it is in the latter sense in which functionalism is usually discussed and critiqued (Wagner 2001:126). The individual use is, in principle, perfectly defensible, but the social use is not. In the former case, functionalism refers back to the capacity of institutionalised patterns of action to satisfy individual needs. In the latter case, which is what I refer to throughout when speaking simply of "functionalism" unless specifying otherwise, functionalism is a way of explaining both the perpetuation and the internal cohesion of social systems by considering how separately identifiable parts of a social system inter-relate to ensure its survival. Considering how social

needs and value show up within functionalist explanations of social life is one way of seeing what the problems with them are.

Although they don't invariably frame it in these terms, functionalist explanations assume that "social needs" or prerequisites can be assigned to a social system itself, as when, for instance, it is said that the system of industrial capitalism needs vast reservoirs of manual labourers or an industrial reserve army of the poor. The need explicitly or implicitly appealed to in such cases is a teleologically understood systemic survival need, and meeting this need relies on a certain mode of social co-ordination. Here the task of social theory becomes the assessment of whether the measures taken to meet needs effectively ensure the system's perpetuation. Where such explanations go further and attempt to explain how this social need is realised in practice, at the level of situated human agents, social action is understood as the work of actors who have internalised the values and norms required for ensuring that these systemic needs or prerequisites are met (Castoriadis 2005:116–17; Eisenstadt 1990:247; Giddens 1976:336, 343, 1986:286, 294).[14]

When societies are explained using functionalist schemas, needs best attributed only to those members of social groups that benefit from current arrangements are misleadingly assigned to the system itself. This is often at work in historical explanations that appeal to group "interests" as determinants of action while taking these interests as basic properties of a system and failing to inquire into how these interests are imaginatively constituted by situated actors in potentially contingent ways. Values also show up in distorted ways, being understood as that which ensures congruity between the purported requirements of the system and the ends pursued by social actors, even where the pursuit of such ends entails group conflict. Even where a system can be seen to enter into crisis due to conflicts between groups possessing divergent values, this is understood as ultimately the consequence of systemic contradictions that are explanatorily prior to observable conflicts between situated social actors. Thus, Castoriadis (2005:115–16, n.2) argues that Marxian thought, despite its complexities, has to be thought of as itself given over to functionalist reasoning.

Superfluous agency. On functionalist accounts of the social world, situated actors may *believe* themselves to be realising their own agentic ends, but they turn out to be serving the ends of a system they have failed to comprehend, and hence are usually understood to be acting irrationally. Of course, something like this can in principle be identified, provided we dispense with the ontologically dubious notion of systemic needs, as we can never confidently assert the very contrary by assuming that people generally fully know and control the constraints on and consequences of their action. However, to avoid entirely begging the question of what people do or do not know about their own needs and values, we have to demonstrate some interest in the practical consciousness and value-orientations of situated social actors – at least as an explanatory starting point. Castoriadis's (2005:117–46) sustained critique of functionalism in *The Imaginary Institution of Society* can be read as centrally concerned with diagnosing and remedying this banishment of agency from social theory, which he discusses in terms of the

tendency to overlook the "symbolic" dimension of social institutions and of the social imaginary significations that constitute them, and with it any deep sense of how institutional change is the work of human hands and minds.

While Castoriadis's treatment of this topic is extended and extremely complex, his argument can be reduced to two basic claims: (i) much of social life appears simply contingent, in the sense of that which is expressively fulfilling but arbitrary from the perspective of "survival" in any universal sense. Thus Castoriadis agrees with Lévi-Strauss (quoted in Castoriadis 2005:136, n.37) when the latter claims in *Structural Anthropology* that "to say that a society functions is a truism; but to say that everything in a society functions is an absurdity". (ii) We can identify functional relationships between social institutions, and we may also identify increases or decreases in such functional alignments over time but, at a more ontologically basic level, we can never arrive at a condition of prefect functional alignment between all the institutions that constitute the elements of a social system. Moreover, the nature of such alignments as do exit – what such alignments are *functional to* – is always a symbolic mode of imaginatively understanding the real world and of acting in ways congruent with such understandings in the contingent sense of (i). Wherever we look in history, Castoriadis (2005:128) believes,

> we find … at the heart of [the] imaginary and in all of its expressions something that cannot be reduced to the functional, an original investment by society of the world and itself with meaning – meanings which are not "dictated" by real factors since it is instead this meaning that attributes to these real factors a particular importance and a particular place in the universe constituted by a given society.

While speaking in terms of culture and not society, Sahlins (1976:206) in *Culture and practical reason* defends an identical position, which he sums up in the formulation that "functional value is always relative to the given cultural scheme".

Applied to the critique of consumption, the most challenging version of functionalist arguments are the "ideology critiques" I discuss in Chapter 2, which allow that action is informed by potentially complex knowledge and hence could agree with Giddens (1986:345) that "the causal mechanisms in social scientific generalizations depend upon actors' reasons, in the context of a 'mesh' of intended and unintended consequences of action." While they tend to rely more on casual affirmation than convincing argumentation, ideology critiques nonetheless escape from some of the more challenging consequences of this line of thought by viewing this knowledge, which Giddens calls practical consciousness, as part of a *systemically produced* false consciousness, as opposed to contingently or purposively limited knowledge of the historical context of action. We also encounter such reasoning far more generally in most accounts of social life of the type I call "productivist" throughout this study, and which I discuss briefly in the following section.

1.2.3 Avoiding economism and culturalism

In addition to the rejection of functionalist reasoning, a second major methodological assumption informing this study is that social science explanation stands to benefit by steering between two the two reductive extremes of economism and culturalism. What I am calling economism here is a general social science approach that hives off a distinct domain of the economic from other realms of the social world and proceeds to consistently explain social phenomena of a non-economic nature by appeal to causes purportedly originating in the economic field alone. I have already criticised one major set of *ontological* assumptions I associate with economism in the discussion of utilitarianism above, but here I want to consider an enormously influential form of economism as it shows up at a *methodological* level. I will call this "productivism". Productivism is the tendency, within a generally economistic outlook, to posit the domain of production as the main driver of the economy and, by derivation, of the other social domains taken to themselves be contingent on economic developments.[15] Productivism is clearly indebted to the Marxian critical tradition, but one encounters it in almost all contemporary social science disciplines even where no explicit Marxian allegiances are declared. The most basic problem with productivism is that, insofar as action is intentional, consumption must precede production in the order of explanation. By failing to do so we are essentially forced to choose between viewing production as purposeless or explaining why the unintended consequences of production are always of far more significance than those that are intended. I will enlarge on this point when later discussing Marx's reasons for the explanatory prioritisation of production over consumption. Departing from this dogma still remains a sort of heresy in critical social science, but it needn't in any way entail the renunciation of critical thought.

Two other problems with productivism are worth briefly mentioning here. These do not relate directly to the basic premises of productivism as I have defined it above, which is in principle applicable to any society or historical period, but rather to two beliefs with which it often comes bundled to the extent that productivism is applied to capitalist societies. Firstly, productivist thought often places capital accumulation through productive reinvestment at the centre of all modern historical processes, while understanding all known social forms as only leading up to or away from capitalism. This social science folk belief is laden with teleological assumptions that often go unexplored. Without wishing to delve into this enormous topic, I will assume that a more historically informed view of things must begin with the observation that societal surpluses, wherever they are found, can be used in profoundly different ways in accordance with particular demands of "cultural" ways of life and their accompanying power structures, and with different unintended consequences (Arnason 2003:199–200). From this "modes of accumulation"[16] perspective, "accumulation in the Marxian sense of permanent reabsorption into an expanding productive apparatus would then appear as a specific, exceptional and never exclusive form" of this more universal pattern (Arnason 2003:200).[17] This is of course not to deny the very obvious historical importance of capital accumulation to

modern history, but rather to denaturalise it and view it as contingent rather than a teleologically-determined necessity.

Secondly, insofar as the propeller of social change is viewed as a matter of, at bottom, *resistance to* an imposed order of capital accumulation, there is a good deal to suggest that this may be true in certain times and places but reductive when offered up as a universal principle. This is too large a topic to explore here, but in Chapter 5 I touch on it by exploring Manuel Castells' (1983) argument that struggles over "collective consumption" have also been central to modern social and political struggle both within the societies where capitalism has been most advanced and far beyond. Castells linked his analysis of collective consumption of major goods like housing to state redistributive functions, while abandoning the persistent attempt to relate these struggles to changes in production alone, which he came to believe entails the forceful imposition of Marxian conceptual presuppositions onto empirical circumstances that, in many historical cases, patently resist such a reductive reading. I mean to show in my own work, using the South African case as an example in chapters 4–6, how such studies might proceed by considering how both private consumption and collective consumption within and beyond the urban context in which Castells explored it have been fateful for South African society in ways that productivist theories lack the resources to explain.

If economism, in the methodological guise of productivism, tends toward reductionism because of the narrowness of the causal principles it identifies as the propellers of social change, culturalism entails a similar reductive strategy, but rather than being too specific it tends to work with an understanding of culture that is hard to pin down. Though it has a far longer history, culturalism in its more instructive versions can today loosely be associated today with the so-called "cultural turn" or "linguistic turn" in the social sciences, where culture tends to be associated more with linguistic than ethnic or nationalistic characteristics. This is of course not to suggest in any way that this whole body of thought is given over to culturalist reductionism. Indeed, my own understanding of action in what follows falls largely on the side of such thought, while attempting to avoid some of the more problematic methodological pitfalls of culturalist social science: a disinterest in action in what is generally understood as the economic sphere – along with non-economic variables directly affecting this, such as geographical information about demography and landholding patterns, or politicised forms of wealth redistribution (Sewell 2005:51) – and the absence of a coherent account of why so-called cultural action has the explanatory priority assigned to it in generating social outcomes. Linked to the latter problem is, at times, a tendency to either ignore issues of social or political power and constraints upon agency, or to conceptualise these so broadly that their analytical or explanatory purchase is compromised. While I think these criticisms of culturally-informed theory are often made incautiously and easily give rise to all sorts of straw man arguments, such as the confused tendency to label *all* culturally or linguistically informed theories as forms of idealism or postmodernism, in their general form they appear worth heeding.

It is also important to note that productivism and culturalism cannot be overcome simply by fusing them together. If we are not discussing culture in the "localised" sense of the term discussed above, and rather view culture as referring to the semantic coding of all social action, then it becomes exceedingly difficult to give any clear meaning to the assertion that social action is sometimes influenced by productive activity and at other times is only the expression of cultural motivations. While superficially seeming to resolve many disputes in the social sciences, any such attempt must fail. I will show in Chapter 2 how this is an idea that also appears in the literature on consumption, and is, for instance, one of the major shortcomings of Ben Fine's impressive work on consumption. Fine concedes in principle that the study of consumption may be distorted by productivist biases and allows that culturalist understandings of consumer action have something to say, but then seeks to resolve the problem methodologically by establishing a sort of conceptual division of labour based on very dubious ontological premises. He seeks to explain the consumption of certain goods with reference to productivist determinations and that of other goods by reference to culture alone, in the problematic "localised" sense of culture as a domain of meaning limited to certain domains of social action (literature, religion, the arts, or what have you). While giving the impression of culturally aware but realistic social science explanation, any such attempt falls prey to the misleading idea that productive activity can in principal be understood in abstraction from the shared cultural or imaginary meanings that animate it, as well as the misleading idea that only certain parts of the social world are meaningful and not others. We have already seen above that this understanding of culture is unsustainable, and I will argue below, in a discussion of Sahlins's critique of Marx in *Culture and practical reason*, that it holds up no better when applied to the economy, and to economic production in particular.

1.2.4 Social, economic and political levels of exchange

Above we saw that one route out of economistic thought in its methodological manifestation as productivism is to consider how the surplus generated in production is always subject to a cultural order in the sense of collective forms of understanding and acting informed by social imaginary significations. Capitalist accumulation is one purely historically contingent form of this, however obviously momentous when viewed from the present. Instead of positing a systemic logic, arising in the productive sphere, that imposes itself on all action, we need to return to the more basic question of how whole societies, or identifiable groups within given societies, act together through both co-operation and coercion to address shared needs. As suggested above, I believe the best route into this general approach to social action is to look at *exchange* in a non-economistic sense. Considered in terms of its purposes, as Castoriadis (1978:712–13; 716–17) has argued, exchange points us back to the origin of society as an order instituted to satisfy shared needs, with the capacity of social action to satisfy needs being the ultimate source of the commensurable value that all exchange relies upon. At this level, exchange is indistinguishable from social interchange, but the institution of any lasting order,

or its dissolution, will usually also possess a political dimension. Reconnecting economic action to its social roots, in ways that were anticipated in the anthropological and sociological reflections of thinkers such as Marcel Mauss and Karl Polanyi, is useful for (i) discarding as parochial the notion that the economy and the market are identical institutions, or are destined to become identical at certain stages in history, and (ii) questioning the historical autonomy of the economic domain as a whole by drawing out its connections to social action, while (iii) considering how social and economic action may involve struggles over power and take on a political dimension. I will discuss these essential conceptual moves in some more detail below.

Market and economy. When seeking to address major questions about economy and society outside of any parochial spatial and temporal horizon, one important step into genuine historicism for both Mauss and Polanyi was escaping from the idea that market transactions by individuals constitute a pure form of exchange, of which other historical modes are merely anticipations. This in its turn entailed dispensing with the economistic notion, present even in the critical economics of Marx, of a distinct economic sphere as the privileged domain of action when explaining historical change, with social and political action viewed as the determined outcome of economic action and not as an indispensible antecedent condition of its very possibility.[18] When reasoning historically, Mauss and Polanyi were also considerably more cautious than Marx in endorsing the idea that the Western societies in which they lived, which had seen the greatest development of increasingly deregulated markets and of market-oriented production in the form of industrial capitalism, stood at the apex of human historical development. Mauss (2002) tried to identify what he viewed as older forms of social life still existing in the present time of these societies, which he believed always could be, and in fact were being, in some sense revived, implying thereby a basically linear history, but one which was significantly under-determined. Polanyi, though he identified intelligible patterns in history (his famous "double movement", for instance, as discussed in *The Great Transformation*), in places went further than Mauss by flatly rejecting any stagist view of history of the sort that views the modern market as something appearing at the leading end of a necessary linear trajectory (e.g. 1977:42–43). Despite their different understandings of history, when both Mauss and Polanyi looked at exchange it was in order to identify what they viewed as universal human potentials for society-wide collective action that had neither been definitively closed off by the movement of universal history nor been set up by this movement as human destiny. While inverting the prioritisation of the economic over the social and departing from teleologies of the market, also in their Marxian forms, this way of seeing things in no way marks a regression to the sort of uncritical economic thought that Marx was eager to criticise.

Economic action as a species of social action. For Polanyi, major historical change can best be studied by attending to shifts in the balance between three basic forms of exchange: reciprocity, redistribution and market transactions. Polanyi (1957:250; 1977:35, 42–43) calls these spheres of exchange "forms of integration", but he was also adamant that they are only ever found, in practice, within a substantive, historically constituted field of social institutions. Their "formality" is, then, that of an ideal type, a deliberately simplifying conceptual device to enable

non-parochial discussion and comparison of things that in social reality are inevitably more complex. Polanyi tended to think of reciprocity, redistribution and market transactions as forms of *economic* exchange. Like Mauss (2009 [1967]:97), however, Polanyi insisted that the economic is embedded in the social, and having convincingly reconnected the two so that he could escape economism and investigate the "human economy", he never consistently works out how these forms of integration are economic in a sense that would distinguish them from the social sufficiently for this designation as economic to be informative.

Polanyi (2001:160; 1977:20), as we have seen above, appeals to materiality for making this delimitation, defining the economic as the satisfaction of immaterial wants – which he uses to designate simultaneously what are often separated out into "wants" and "needs" – through material means. This is somewhat confused by Polanyi's (e.g., 1957:241, 243) tendency to also speak in passing of "material wants", but he is perfectly clear about this in other places. Speaking of an abstract, universal "man", Polanyi claims that the economic process is the "institutionalized interaction between himself and his natural surroundings", which "supplies him with the means of satisfying his material wants". This proposition is immediately qualified:

> This phrase should not be taken to signify that the wants to be satisfied are exclusively bodily needs, such as food and shelter, however essential these be for his survival, for such a restriction would absurdly restrict the realm of the economy. The means, not the wants, are material. Whether the useful objects are required to avert starvation or are needed for educational, military or religious purposes is irrelevant. So long as the wants depend for their fulfilment on material objects, the reference is economic. (Polanyi 1977:20)

While Polanyi is never entirely clear what the "material" refers to, it appears to designate physical tangibility. This seems a problematic criterion for delimiting the economic given that what he discusses in terms of economic phenomena, such as education, are what in contemporary terms are often called "services". These are intangible, at least for the most part, as what makes the service desirable is by definition not the physical objects that may be used while rendering the service. This abstraction from physical objects is not arbitrary, but exists both because similar objects can be used in rendering other services and hence do not explain why the service is unique, and because the *value* of the service is usually only partially related to the use of these physical objects. A lawyer, for instance, may rent a costly downtown office, have to pay for municipal services and equipment on the premises, hire staff, and so on, but these are only a part of the value of the service, which relates rather to the knowledge that the lawyer offers. This knowledge itself gains more value in direct proportion to immaterial factors such as the prestige of the institution in which it was first obtained, the lawyer's accumulation of experience and a record of work for high-profile clients. What is exchanged in all services is knowledge, or an emotional, spiritual or aesthetic experience, and any attempt at a materialistic reduction of this to the physical objects used in conveying this knowledge or experience amounts to emptying the exchange of its meaning for the actors involved.[19]

If we cannot reliably displace the meaning of the economic onto the use of material *means*, then we have to fall back on Polanyi's understanding of the shared *purpose* of both social and economic life, which he refers to constantly as the maintenance of a "livelihood". Polanyi (2001; 1957; 1977) does not indicate exactly what he means by livelihood, but appears to refer to the regularised forms of social, political and economic activity leading from production though distribution to consumption. While Polanyi never singles consumption out as a specific theme, I will assume in what follows that he saw consumption as the purpose of pursuing a livelihood, even if he viewed production as its most institutionally complex support. Thus he observes that "[p]roduction represents what is perhaps the most spectacular economic feat, namely, the ordered advance of all material means towards the consumption stage of livelihood" (Polanyi 1977:32). Speaking in the most general terms, Polanyi believes it is the need to maintain a particular livelihood that is the basic "fact" of economic life, such that economic action is by definition always a derivative form of social action. Polanyi (1977:29–30) makes this point in order to argue that rational economising in the face of scarce means, far from constituting the universal basis of economic action (as economic formalists assume), only becomes meaningful within a given substantive livelihood, to the extent that, for purely historical reasons, the resources for this livelihood are hard to come by.

We should of course never conclude from such arguments that economising between scarce means is an insignificant part of most people's lives. Scarcity is a very real and distressing problem for a great part of humanity. Rather, this is to say nothing other than that when pursuing a livelihood, even when doing so forces people to economise in the face of scarcity, people are usually doing something qualitatively different from what animals do when they survive, with human actions only being explicable against a background of historically-constituted meanings. Outside of situations of profound ecological devastation and famine, destructive warfare, extreme poverty and the like, where these have rendered it difficult for people to meet their most elementary bodily needs – we might call this absolute scarcity, whether arising through natural misfortune or human destruction and domination – it is relative to the pursuit of a livelihood or style of life that scarcity is invariably identified (Castoriadis 2005:150; Giddens 1996:166; Sahlins 1976:208–9). [20]

An alternative way to delimit the economic from the social, while retaining the guiding idea that economic activity is only ever meaningful in relation to a pre-given, substantive livelihood, is to focus on the domain of *necessity*. This after all seems the real point of singling out materiality, but focussing on necessity allows us to do without the naturalism and materialism that seems to inform the focus on the material. After all, as Polanyi (2001:48) himself realised, what generally makes certain material items necessary for a livelihood and others peripheral to it is not their material properties as such, but rather their ability to confer status or recognition, as a livelihood concerns far more than mere biological survival even if it always has to obey the generally indeterminate constraints of what biological life will allow. Those objects, material and immaterial, that cannot be relinquished without failing to meet the elementary

requirements of a livelihood are then necessities, and in providing for them we can be said to behave in a fashion that is specifically economic.

We can thus think of market transactions, as well as acts of reciprocity and redistribution, as basically social forms of integration, but they can be called economic when we wish to indicate those circumstances in which we engage in these forms of exchange with the intention of securing the necessities of a livelihood. If we think of "materiality" as referring to necessity first and only derivatively, if at all, to the more specific domain of physically scarce resources, then it might after all be useful for isolating that property of things that makes them economic. At the same time, it has to be said that the term used so broadly would appear to positively invite misinterpretation. In particular, nearly all the gains of both an interpretive and of a recognition-centred account of human action have been won by retreating from a strictly materialistic account of social life toward a position from which the meaning of both material *and* immaterial practices becomes visible as issuing from the same set of understandings and motivations.[21] This retreat from materiality is also essential for extending our understanding of social power or domination by allowing for more attention than has been customary to be placed on the harm of what is variously discussed as "misrecognition" or "disrespect" by Taylor and Honneth or "symbolic violence" by Bourdieu, which has tended misleadingly to be portrayed as an epiphenomenon of material deprivation whereas it may often rather be understood as the cause or as a constitutive part of material deprivation.

If the economic is viewed as a meaningful, substantive domain of action – which is precisely the point of discussing it in terms of the pursuit of a livelihood – I see no obvious way of conceptually distinguishing the economic from the social that is not also without an element of arbitrariness. On the other hand, there seems no clear need to dig a trench between them, and the real benefit of reading Polanyi is his compelling reconnection of these domains. Below I will therefore follow Polanyi in speaking of the economic as a sub-domain of the social. When drawing attention to those actions in the pursuit of a livelihood that address what clearly appear to be people's most pressing needs I will speak of the economic, but where this is not altogether clear or necessary, I speak simply of the social or, when highlighting the continuity between the two, the socio-economic.

Social power and political action. Having to a large extent collapsed the economic back into the social, something very brief needs to be said about how socio-economic action is caught up with power struggles and tied up with that other essential sub-domain of the social, the political. Speaking in a very general sense, I will understand power as inherently social, involving a relationship between people in which the more powerful party is able to either coerce the other into obedience or is able to consistently aggregate greater social status than the other.[22] The political domain and the domain of power do not have to overlap, even if they are often closely associated. I will speak of action as political when it concerns the determination of the rules for life in common (Wagner 2008:12). Employing this minimal definition makes it possible to avoid relating politics to any particular set of institutions or actors, such as the

institution of multi-party electoral competition, or state actors, to better allow for generalisation. That said, the creation and alteration of institutions in general is often a political act or has political consequences, and the state is seldom a negligible force in shaping the institutional makeup of social life.

A major challenge for contemporary critical social theory is to build on Axel Honneth's (1995a; 1995b) attempt to account for political and economic conflicts and resistance to power by examining these phenomena from a more basic social perspective so that the motivational dimension of social struggle becomes visible. Honneth's (1995b:95–130) strategy is to draw our attention to the everyday ethical understandings and motivations relating to what he believes, building on Hegel, is a universal human need for inter-personal recognition. This philosophical-anthropological claim has an empirical dimension, as Honneth believes we can explain socio-political contestation and the social movements that emerge as actors through it as originating in disappointed expectations for mutual recognition that, though unquantifiable and difficult to study directly, are in evidence in social conflicts. With very few exceptions, these articulations of disrespect are overlooked in favour of a basically utilitarian understanding of conflict that feels it unnecessary even to inquire into the ethical nature of political and economic conflicts:

> within academic sociology, the internal connection that often holds between the emergence of social movements and the moral experience of disrespect has, to a large extent, been theoretically severed at the start. The motives for rebellion, protest, and resistance have generally been transformed into categories of "interest", and these interests are supposed to emerge from the objective inequalities in the distribution of material opportunities without ever being linked, in any way, to the everyday web of moral feelings. (Honneth 1995b:161)

In citing Honneth here I do not mean to deny that we can meaningfully speak of people's interests, but rather that doing so has no explanatory value when accounting for any particular, empirical course of social action outside of an understanding of how these interests are conceived by those we assign them to. The most interesting issue in this explanatory context in not necessarily whether these conceptions are right or wrong, although I think we can always cautiously weigh in on this when critically highlighting aspects of social reality that appear to escape the knowledge of the participants we observe, in ways that Honneth's (2007:63–64) preference for immanent critique would seem to disallow – at least in principle, if not in practice. This concern with interests as effective only within a context of interpretation, however, also allows us to see how the empirical features of a given situation are a performative consequence of these actors' self-understandings and of the motivational force of the moral feelings of which Honneth speaks.

One consequence of this line of thinking is a rejection of any externalist notion of class, at least in the more orthodox Marxist sense in which class is generally understood. For Honneth (2007:68–69),

social classes do not experience the world in the same way an individual subject does, nor do they have any common, objective interest. It is for good reason that we have abandoned the notion that emancipatory interests or experiences can be attributed to a group of people who have nothing but socio-economic circumstances in common.

Affirming this does not amount to the rejection of class analysis wholesale, but rather means that people can only be expected to behave as members of socio-economic classes where the material circumstances that they objectively share eventuate in shared ethical experiences, and particularly in the negative experience of disrespect, while class belonging more generally needs to be explained as in the first instance the consequence of shared ethical experiences formed through communication. Such reasoning would appear to approach its limits when considering groups that have suffered such material immiseration that they struggle to meet even their most basic physical survival needs, although even here it seems the case that it is not the biological fact of physical adversity alone that results in conflict so much as the added, uniquely human sense that such suffering cannot be justified by those in a position to relieve it.

1.3 Three propositions for an expressive approach to consumption

Having set out the general ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions that guide this inquiry, it remains to explain how they inform the more focussed discussion of consumption to follow. This takes the form of defending three minimal propositions: firstly, understanding consumption as the realisation of value is essential for importing generalised insights about consumption in a wide array of socio-historical settings into the study of consumption in particular societies with distinct institutional makeups, and vice–versa, for moving from the particular to the general. Secondly, consumption is best explained as an agentic and morally interpretive domain of action, and the extent to which it is to be accounted for by scarcity and instrumental calculation is explanatorily derivative of this. Thirdly, from the perspective of social theory, the most interesting questions about consumption, like production, arise to the extent that production and consumption are intentionally united through consumption and practically mediated through exchange.

1.3.1 Consumption and value

To begin with, something brief needs to be said about how consumption relates to production and exchange, as well as what I mean by consumption. As I will elaborate below, from the detached perspective of critical social theory, production and consumption are of most interest when united through exchange, making it the proper methodological point of entry into the study of consumption. Exchange, we have said above, is the exchange of valued objects. It is always social, but can also be characterised as economic when these objects are vital to the

sustenance of a livelihood. Production is simply the creation of these objects of value which when exchanged are channelled onto the market, redistributed through some centralised agency, or transferred through diffuse networks of reciprocity. Consumption is both the intended origin and end of production and exchange: as the origin, it is an idealised action that is reflexively anticipated and willed; as an end, it is a concrete historical act.

Following David Graeber in *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value* (2001), I believe we should view production as a form of activity that is at bottom oriented toward the creation of human relationships of mutual recognition, with the creation of material things usually being purely instrumental to this more basic end (2001:68–81). When stressing the relational ends of production he speaks of "social production" (Graeber 2001:80), implicitly in contrast to "material production" (Graeber 2001:68). Graeber most often describes what indeed would usually be called work or labour, only that this is not parochially bound to modern factories and firms and rather extends to production that occurs in homes, fields and public spaces in an anthropologically-embracing manner while also taking women's unpaid labour into account (2001:77, 80). In this sense Graeber's understanding of production also implicitly embraces activities that are often understood to belong to a distinct domain of "reproduction". From his examples, it is clear that Graeber is thinking specifically of universally essential forms of production such as preparing food, the care of animals and crops, and educational work in the broad sense of purposive socialisation, including ritual socialisation (2001:37–38, 68–70, 80). In insisting on the non-material *aims* of production, and in working with an embraing understanding of production that is informed by an impressive sweep of anthropological reading, Graeber goes very far indeed in rescuing productivist accounts of social life from the parochial shortcoming of explicitly or implicitly relating to material craft production alone and from a utilitarian fixation on materiality that evacuates the social dimension from production.

Although the idea is at first glance compelling, Graeber nonetheless misleads when also viewing production (both social and material) as synonymous with creative activity (Graeber 2001:45–47, 76–77). The general problem with this position is that Graeber understands creativity in a manner that renders it indistinguishable from the broader category of agency. Thus he sometimes speaks of creative action as synonymous with the intentional, intelligent expenditure of effort (Graeber 2001:64–65), whereas this is also a characteristic of agency as exercised in *instrumental* action. On a more rigorous understanding of creativity, we do better to associate creativity with *expressive* action. However, wherever a division of labour of any variety exists, even if only at the more universal level of gendered division of tasks within the family (Sahlins 1972:78–79, 95), the idea that productive activity can ever be expressive is implausible, however undeniably essential such production may be as a practical precondition for the final expressive experience.

Wherever people consistently perform fragmentary tasks for the satisfaction of their own and others' needs, the value of all this collective activity only "returns" to them in concrete acts of consumption to the extent that different value-bearing objects are intentionally brought

together and their value realised within the framework of a single life. The only way to evade this dilemma, which can be found in Marx, is to attempt to portray production as *collectively* expressive, and Graeber (2001:54–55) strongly hints at such an approach at one point. Yet we have already said above that expressive action, being meaningful and motivated, and while always requiring some sort of social co-operation and shared social understandings, must always be understood as an attribute of individuals if we are to escape from metaphysical "emanationism". In short, if we deny the possibility of collective expressivity, then we cannot view production under a division of labour as expressive and we have to situate expressivity in the domain of consumption.

The more specific problem, related to consumption, is that Graeber construes the existence of intentional productive action as that which is the origin of value and hence of the desire to consume and not, as one should properly do, as its outcome. For Graeber, endeavouring to reformulate Marxian ideas in an anthropologically defensible manner, the genesis of value resides in people expending their creative potential *in production*, understood in the non-parochial sense described above. We desire to consume temporally downstream of this act of production because we recognise the intentionality that went into the making of an object such that it is, among those available to us, best suited to the satisfaction of our needs. Speaking of commodity consumption here, but extrapolating from this to non-commodified objects too, Graeber (2001:65) writes that

> If a commodity … fulfills a human need, it is because human beings have intentionally designed it in order to do so; they have taken raw materials and, by adding their strength and intelligence, shaped it to fulfill those needs. The object, then, embodies human intentions. This is why consumers want to buy it.

Here, as with all such views, what consumption enables, which is the reason for undertaking production in the first place, is portrayed as merely incidental to the more salient fact of *craftsmanship*.[23] Marx, as I argue below, at least acknowledged in passing the necessity of understanding production against the background of its guiding purposes, even if, as Sahlins (1976) went to great lengths to demonstrate, Marx failed to draw out the consequences of this important insight.

To back up his position, Graeber explicates and endorses Marx's labour theory of value as it appears in *Capital*. Yet in doing so Graeber appears to overlook the conceptual incompatibility of the labour theory of value with the agentic and anthropologically-informed view of the social world and of production that he is at pains to defend. The basic agent of value in *Capital* is capital itself and it is unclear how to apply the theory to non-capitalist societies. Moreover, the labour theory of value, despite drawing attention to some important issues, is flawed even as applied to capitalist societies. In a general sense the theory very usefully underscores the derivation of market profit (through the generation of surplus value) from labour power and the associated standing temptation for capitalists to exploit labour to ensure financial profit on competitive markets as well as to shift production to low-wage regions. But this is only one

source of profit, alongside a multitude of other conditions that boost productivity and profitability in production and exchange and that lower the consumer costs of sustaining the labour force.[24]

As I will argue below, Hannah Arendt (1958) was correct in insisting on the basically instrumental nature of production (which she divided into work and labour) as the ends it ultimately seeks lie outside of it, even if her characterisation of labour amounts to a naturalistic reduction. Productive exertion is, of course, absolutely essential to the continued sustenance of any social world – as indeed is *re*production – but it exists purely to *facilitate* the realisation of value, as people do not live in order to produce or reproduce their life; where they do either or both, this is to allow them pursue valued ends that lie elsewhere. Whatever innovations and ingenuity production entails, these are placed in the service of objectifying this value and not of realising it.

In what follows, I want to expand on my understanding of consumption. Consumption, as I define it, is the use of objects of value, where this use is intended by the user or users for a purpose other than the creation of further objects of value or the exchange of these valued objects, and which allows for the *realisation* of the value commonly associated with the object. To this provisional definition, whose practical application will be clarified in the course of this study, I wish to immediately add two qualifications, concerning (i) conceptual anachronism or extraneousness and (ii) the intentionality of action. I will also (iii) sort this understanding of consumption out from other common uses of the term, and thus also clarify the sense in which consumption is a form of *economic* action.

Conceptual anachronism or extraneousness. Despite being a widely circulated concept in both academic and lay discourse, there is surprisingly little agreement about what consumption refers to. Beyond the biological assimilation of objects in the form of food or drink, all implicit consensus breaks down. It is overly constricting to approach the concept etymologically and limit the term to its original sense of "using up" or destroying, as Arendt does throughout *The Human Condition*, for while this keeps with the biological understanding of consumption as bodily assimilation, as well as more peculiar uses such as the "consumption" of objects by fire, it cannot encompass the very common understanding of consumption of objects that endure beyond a first purchase or use. We could of course follow Arendt in imposing this limitation on the concept of consumption while proceeding to separate consumption from "use", where the latter term designates what we do with durable physical objects. This, however, still prevents us from considering the consumption of immaterial objects, these days often called "services" in opposition to tangible "goods". The more general problem here is that the meaning of what we do with valued objects cannot be gotten at by behaviouristic descriptions at all. Rather, we need to consider consumption with regard to its purposes.

One could also object that the English terms consumption, production and exchange appearing here, or their cognate terms in the other major languages of Western social science, refer to

institutionalised action within a very specific period in European history and therefore cannot be temporally or spatially transposed without distortion. David Graeber has made this argument about consumption. He stresses his uneasiness with the term, on account of its being derived in its common contemporary usage from 18th century political economy and the social conditions of industrial capitalism in which it emerged, carrying with it associations of the gendered separation between workplace and home emerging then, as well as a number of antecedent social developments in the European world, such as the development of modern notions of property and possessive individualism (Graeber 2011:492, 498–99). One striking oddity of this criticism, however, is that Graeber (2001; 2011) fails to demonstrate the same reservations about using the concept of production in ways that go beyond its emergence from the same historical setting. Yet precisely this extension of the concept of production is what makes his discussion so interesting. As the genesis of a concept and its historical applicability are distinct issues, what is decisive with concepts is how they are employed, which may, and indeed usually does, change over time. Moreover, it is a commonplace for social scientists to appropriate terms to their own purposes in order to facilitate coherent and innovative conceptual framing of the questions that concern them.

When speaking of an "economy" in the mass societies of today, for instance, we all mean something very different from what Aristotle meant when he used the term to discuss private household provisioning, which is nonetheless still carried in its etymology in English and a great many other contemporary languages.[25] Likewise, if scholars wish to use a term like "gift economy" to speak, for example, of Trobriand Kula exchange, or any other institution outside of the modern West for that matter, this entails a total transposition of the concept for purposes of social science inquiry onto a society in which it is perfectly alien (Sahlins 1972:76). Yet all societies possess an economic life of some description, and provided that we are aware of such differences and the limitations this imposes on the analysis, confusion can be avoided and a potentially illuminating comparative enterprise concerning the principles of economic life outside of the usual parochial limits can emerge. Indeed precisely what makes Polanyi's (1957; 1977) later work in economic anthropology so interesting is his attempt to reframe a conception of the economic that can apparently be generalised to any human society by overcoming the "economistic fallacy" that the supply–demand–price mechanism of the market is a pure form of economic activity. One of the major fruits of this line of inquiry, beyond Polanyi's own work, has been a better appreciation of the manner in which gifts and reciprocity remain alive in today's societies and affect their economic life. Of course, none of this would have been possible at all were we to confine ourselves to speaking of the economic in its original etymological and institutional context.

With this in mind, we can see that speaking of consumption outside of its academic use in 18th century Europe is not in any way necessary anachronistic. As with production, we simply have to be clear about what we are referring to. We can think of consumption in a manner that corresponds directly with the forms of production that Graeber describes. Indeed, this is a conceptual necessity if we are to assume that production is a meaningful activity, as

production, if it is not to be absurd, is always by definition geared toward consumption. This consumption is first ideal, and later real. That is, final consumption of the produced object may or may not happen at all, and may happen in unanticipated ways, for practical historical reasons arising subsequent to the act of production. But losing sight of the imaginatively anticipated moment of consumption that precedes production leaves us mute about why producers would want to sink their intelligence, time and resourcefulness into the production of one set of objects and not another, or indeed why they would produce at all. Thus if we speak, as Graeber does, of material and social production, and view the latter as the origin of the former, then we need to do the same with consumption. Similarly, if by production we understand not only factory labour or employment in a firm but also such things as tendering animals and crops and later rendering them edible, care of the young and the sick, and educational or ritual work, then there will be forms of consumption that correspond to these. People can be said to consume such things as food from the fields, the innumerable gifts of care, and the educational or ritual offerings that have gone into converting them from infantile narcissism into more or less socially adapted persons. These forms of consumption all happen at an everyday level in all human societies, regardless of whether they are accessed in the form goods and services that firms have produced and floated onto markets as commodities.

Highlighting these elementary forms of consumption is useful for avoiding the idea that consumption is necessary a frivolous activity, or something limited to market purchases. At the same time, looking no further than these forms of consumption can easily give rise to the opposite notion, which is exceedingly common in the academic literature that goes beyond explaining social forms by appeal to productive variables alone, that consumption must be exhaustively understood as a form of social *reproduction*. From this point of view, separating out a domain of consumption from either production or reproduction can be viewed as an extraneous exercise, but this is misleading. Physical reproduction of the individual body – which will also usually be a *worker's* body – is always and everywhere essential of course. Beyond that, most societies, or at least social elites, tend to promote some measure of social reproduction, including the reproduction of capitalist productive arrangements. To the extent that this is so, consumption can be described as instrumental to reproduction in both the biological and social senses of the term. However, while considering the reproductive functions of consumption is certainly important, assimilating consumption to reproduction obscures the fact that consumption usually goes far beyond this. Within even the elementary and universal forms of consumption described above, there may, depending on the concrete case, be an element of superfluity, with people engaging with objects and experiencing events in an ethically-informed but open-ended and performative way – that is, expressively. I will therefore not treat the instrumentality and expressivity of action as a simple either/or question. Doing so can only be upheld analytically, but in practice action usually has a dual aspect. Moreover, as discussed above, even at the analytical level instrumental action must almost always be viewed as itself intelligible only *within* an ontologically pre-given domain of non-instrumental ends constituted by social imaginary significations.

In speaking of this dual aspect of consumption in practice, I mean that the expressivity or instrumentality of consumer acts depends on how the objects of consumption are used by consumers. Here we might note Alfred Gell's (Gell 1986) observation that consumers possess the "ability to transcend the merely utilitarian aspect of consumption goods, so that they become something more like works of art, charged with personal expression." For this reason, Gell (Gell 1986) argues that it is important to keep alive the distinction between consumption that merely "reiterates the class habitus", and consumption that assumes the form of a "creative process", even while, due to the limitations of his historical case, only himself going on to explore the former aspect of consumption. Gell's point is basically that empirical studies of consumption can reveal either of these possibilities, but that this is easily obscured where these studies are forced into the conceptual Procrustes bed of reproduction.[26]

We should also take seriously Michel de Certeau's (1984) understanding of the "productivity" of consumption, which is his preferred metaphor for describing what I have been calling creativity in the strong, expressive sense of the term. Certeau's point is that consumption has tended to be forgotten by the social sciences because of its relative invisibility and dispersal when compared with production, making it a vastly more difficult object for empirical investigation. For Certeau (1984:xviii), one escape route from the "jungle of functionalist rationality" is to realise that consumption is itself a type of creating or making. It is "a poiēsis – but a hidden one, because it is scattered over areas defined and occupied by systems of 'production'" (Certeau 1984:xii). He therefore seeks to remind us that

> to a rationalized, expansionist and at the same time centralized, clamorous, and spectacular production corresponds another production, called "consumption." The latter is devious, it is dispersed, but it insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly, because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through its ways of using the products imposed by a dominant economic order. (Certeau 1984:xii–xiii)

This is true not only of material production, but also of immaterial representations:

> The presence and circulation of a representation … tells us nothing about what it is for its users. We must first analyze its manipulation by users who are not its makers. Only then can we gauge the difference or similarity between the production of the image and the secondary production hidden in the process of its utilization. (Certeau 1984: xiii)

At the same time, in order to avoid a slide into voluntarism it is essential to consider the larger social context in which this use takes place, with social imaginary significations loosely constraining the meanings that can be associated with individual acts of consumption and which, as I argue in section below, guide the material and immaterial production on which consumption relies from the outset. One way of approaching this sphere of expressive action as both individually expressive and socially bounded is to consider what Mauss (2009:71, 74) termed the "aesthetic" or "ludic" dimension of action in all human societies:

Aesthetic phenomena form one of the largest components in the social activity of human beings, and not merely in their individual activity. An object, an action, a line of poetry is beautiful when it is recognised as beautiful by the majority of people of taste. This is what people call the grammar of art. All aesthetic phenomena are in some degree social phenomena. (Mauss 2009 [1967]:67)

For Mauss (2009:67), aesthetic phenomena are *relatively* non-utilitarian; that is, they possess an element that potentially exceeds whatever instrumental purpose they may serve and to that extent are "always conceived of in the minds of those concerned as a form of play, as something superadded, as a luxury". Mauss is not relying on what I have called a "localised" conception of cultural activity here, in which symbolic activity is assumed to be confined to fields of action such as religion, art, and so on, although he believed the aesthetic element is often more *apparent* in certain fields of activity. Mauss (2009:67–93) has in mind singing and music, visual and plastic art, architecture, drama, bodily adornment, and so on, depending on the concrete society in question. Nonetheless, this inter-mingling of the instrumental and expressive is visible in material objects of all kinds, even at an everyday level. For example, "clothing is more finery than protection", and, beyond its functional use, "a house is an aesthetic creation" (Mauss 2009:67, 77).

The intentionality of action. A second qualification I wish to make about my understanding of consumption concerns the sense in which I will view it as intentional action. Not only consumption, but also production and exchange, are understood here as forms of action. Here I speak of action in the minimal sense of intentional and meaningful behaviour (Weber 1978:4–6), with intentionality referring to what is sometimes also discussed in terms of purposiveness and where intentions always relate back to subjectively meaningful courses of action.[27] Two consequences of viewing action as intentional and meaningful are important to note, one relating to the description of social life and the other to its explanation and critique, though these are only nominally distinct. Firstly, materialistic and naturalistic social science modes of description that prefer to describe action in terms of physical motions and by appeal to motivations shared by animal life more generally struggle to account for the meaningful and intentional dimension of action. This of course does not prevent them, in practice, and at variance with their own commitments, to tacitly assuming meaning and intentionality. This is easier to illustrate when considering less commonly pursued or less physical activities. For instance, for a contemporary social scientist to cogently describe someone as voting within contemporary one-person-one-vote systems, they need to assume something more than that the actor they are describing is performing the physical motions of voting. In addition, they must also assume that the voter is acting in accordance with a minimally coherent theoretical or practical understanding of the socially accepted norms governing such voting systems. Without assuming this knowledge on the part of the person performing the action, the action could just as well be described in a great many other ways, as the physical tasks it involves are not peculiar to the voting process (Taylor 1985b:93; 1995:130–32).

I will also assume throughout that the need to impute intention and meaning to action is not just a feature of more uncommon or more obviously cerebral tasks, and pertains also to more regular or more physical activities. Of course, this is thoroughly debatable when speaking of the routinised practices assimilated into the sort of unconscious or bodily consciousness that Bourdieu's understanding of *habitus* gestures at, which I discuss at length in chapters 2 and 7. Nonetheless, in the last analysis it also holds true for this domain of action. We may, for instance, drive a car largely without thinking about the operations involved but – as Bourdieu himself sometimes acknowledges, and at other times fails to mention – such behaviour was once learnt and is therefore not explicable in mechanical terms. More importantly, and contrary to Bourdieu, this type of unreflexive action generally appears to be framed within a largely intentional pattern of consciously-lived life.

A second complexity associated with drawing out the meaningful and intentional character of action is that most social science description tacitly assumes a broad convergence between the meanings assigned to action by actors and that possessed by both the social scientist and the reader as a condition of its validity. In describing an actor as voting, in addition to assuming the voter's grasp of the norms guiding his or her action, we generally assume at a theoretical level that this knowledge corresponds to that possessed by the social scientist. To speak of this is to highlight the reliance on what Giddens calls "mutual knowledge" that is a necessary vehicle for social science description to proceed. Where little or no such convergence in meanings is assumed, the description has to advance through conceptual translation or transposition, as when, to take Dipesh Chakrabarty's example, historians describing Indian peasant revolts claiming to be inspired by the gods are translated into the "disenchanted language of sociology" in order to get at what these historians believe the real causes to be. Some basic measure of explicitness about such conversions of meaning is necessary if social science description is to be at all aware of its own operations and possible limitations (Chakrabarty 2000:89–90; Giddens 1986:334–42). Such explicitness is particularly essential if we are to claim of a certain form of consciousness that it is a *false* consciousness – something which, as I argue in Chapter 2, is often done quite brazenly and dismissively, and without any such clarification, in the "ideology critiques" of consumption.

Consumption as economic action. Consumption as intentional action aiming to realise value is not just made up of isolated acts, but can be understood as part of the temporally unified pursuit of a "livelihood" (Polanyi 1977:20). To the extent that consumption aims to secure those objects without which one would fall short of meeting the minimal historically-constituted requirements of a livelihood, consumption will also be economic. If this is still a very general definition, it nonetheless already offers a sense of what consumption, in my own preferred usage, is *not*. Most importantly, consumption is not to be conflated with the buying or purchase of commodities alone. This is to assimilate consumption to exchange, and not to any form of exchange, but exclusively to its market form, all of which beg certain questions. Economic action as discussed above does not necessarily require exchange. Nonetheless, most economic action involves some measure of exchange, and at any rate this is what makes it most

interesting from the perspective of critical social theory. The real problem, though, is that exchange, as we also said, happens off the market, through redistribution and reciprocity, and to overlook this is to succumb to Polanyi's "economistic fallacy".

The assimilation of consumption as such to commodity consumption is not just a staple of economic literature, but also recurrently found in the critical literature on consumption, almost invariably as an unstated assumption, but sometimes explicitly, as where Martyn J. Lee (quoted in Fine 2002:104) affirms that "the essence of all consumer goods can be found in the fact that they are, first and foremost, commodities". Taking a comparative or historical perspective on consumption would prevent us from assuming that the objects of consumption are invariably or even mostly commodities. Self-produced objects and freely rendered services clearly are not (Lury 2011:12), while gifts may or may not have been purchased but in either case are acquired by the recipient without purchase. We therefore need to distinguish between consumption as such and commodity consumption.

Of course, this does not in any way mean that studying commodity consumption is uninteresting. Where social relationships are premised on the possession of certain commodities, attending to the consumption of these commodities can reveal a great deal about such societies by compelling us to consider how the preconditions for and effects of consumption are not just local, but as wide as all the social relationships brought into being by markets. It also allows us to consider how people within and across societies are excluded from or hierarchically integrated into social relations in accordance with their purchasing power. Keeping the distinction between consumption as such and commodity consumption alive is nonetheless absolutely essential because it allows us to explore the social significance of consumption wholly delinked from the commodity sphere, or of objects before or after they enter "commodity phases" (Appadurai 1986:13). It also leads us towards questions about the manner in which the commodified or non-commodified nature of consumption practices depends on social and political forces to which the market is always in some measure subject, and it opens up questions about how social stratification due to involuntary exclusion from practices of consumption can derive from sources other than a lack of income.

1.3.2 Consumption as an agentic and morally interpretive domain of action

After Castoriadis's writing, the most far-reaching attempt in critical social theory to discuss agentic action in a manner that fully accommodates its potential creativity, in the strong sense of this term, is Hannah Arendt's work, which in this sense anticipated Castoriadis by a number of years (Joas and Knöbl 2009:410–11). The pivotal early work here is *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]), which is interesting also because it demonstrates an explicit concern with consumption that is largely absent from Castoriadis's work. At a conceptual level, Arendt argues that creativity resides in political action, while economic activity is to varying degrees instrumental to this. Using Arendt's argument as a foil for developing my own position, I

argue that she is correct to portray production as a basically instrumental activity. However, critically engaging with her interesting but deeply misleading account of consumption is one way of arguing that consumption, no less than expressive political activity, is a potential domain of creative action.

Arendt (1998:7, 195) contends that it is in the political domain that people are able to realise their uniquely human potentialities freely and in solidarity with others, which is the more specific sense in which she prefers to use the term "action". Action in a broader sense, which can be called activity, can also be identified in the domains of "labour" and "work", which are necessary to, respectively, the sustenance of biological life and life in common, including political life. Both labour and work are, however, *instrumental* activities (Arendt 1998:140–44). By contrast, political action in the public realm is an end in itself, where people's deeds and speech constitute a domain of "sheer actuality" in which actors' purposes do not lie outside of their acts, and it is this form of action alone that is truly creative (Arendt 1998:206–08).[28] In other words, for Arendt expressivity is limited to the political domain.

Arendt's distinction between labour and work is repeated throughout *The Human Condition*. Of the two, only work is a form of semantically-coded activity, creating physical objects that endure and that are used to mediate communicative relationships, while labour is directed at the satisfaction of eternally unchanging biological needs through perishable objects (Arendt 1998:7, 87–88, 157, 182). While schematically divorcing labour and work, Arendt (1998:94–95, 99–100) pairs labour with consumption and work with use. Considering the first of these pairs, labour/consumption, she argues that through consumption the objects of our labour are destroyed for the sustenance of the impersonal biological life process itself, with labour being just one moment in the collective metabolism of nature by humans of which Marx spoke in *Capital* (Arendt 1998:99–106). "[L]abor and consumption", writes Arendt (1998:99), "are but two stages of the ever-recurring cycle of biological life. This cycle needs to be sustained through consumption, and the activity which provides the means of consumption is laboring."

From a social perspective, labour and consumption isolate people from one another even while reducing them to absolute sameness, and are therefore also "antipolitical" and corrosive of the public realm considered as a space of potential political action (Arendt 1998:214). As anti-social and anti-political activities they are, in Arendt's terminology, "worldless": "The *animal laborans* does not flee the world but is ejected from it in so far as he is imprisoned in the privacy of his own body, caught in the fulfilment of needs in which nobody can share and which nobody can fully communicate" (Arendt 1998:118–19). The background of this assertion is that Arendt, like Castoriadis, works with an understanding of solidarity that draws on Aristotle's conception of true human association as an essentially heterogeneous community of unequal and different people brought together and made equal in certain regards and for specific purposes in order to all benefit from the complementarity of their different capacities (Arendt 1998:214–15). Because she understands labour and consumption naturalistically, as that which all humans

and animals do to reproduce their physical bodies, they erase the very difference out of which community is built.

Arendt's reflections on consumption are assimilated into her discussion of labour and the critique of Marx, but she has more to say on the subject of consumption than did Marx. She believes that labour is instrumental to consumption, but because consumption is always itself in thrall to the fully pre-determined biological process she simply calls "life", it too is an entirely instrumental activity. For Arendt, work/use, the second practical pair of activities she discusses, are also basically instrumental, albeit less so, and in a different way. They are less instrumental because they are usually pressed into the service of uniquely human ends even while not being ends in themselves. They are different because the purpose of work is to create tangible objects of use that endure beyond the process of their making and that are re-usable. From such activity we are able to erect an enduring human world between us and nature (Arendt 1998:137). The instrumentality of work also differs from that of labour because work does not isolate people but rather creates a "physical, worldy in-between" that stabilises and mediates human relationships (Arendt 1998:182).

Action, too, creates a second "in-between", but this is the intangible and web of human relationships made up of public speech and deeds in the political realm that, other than their reliance on human embodiment for their very occurrence, are ideal entities that materialistic philosophies cannot describe unreductively (Arendt 1998:182–83, 183, n.3). Because it leaves no lasting traces that survive its speech and deeds, action nonetheless cannot subsist without the "materialization" that occurs through work, which is why she views worldliness as ultimately a quality of work and not of action. In speaking of work, Arendt has in mind especially the fine arts, the construction of monuments, and crafts such as printing and writing and that which they allow for, but is gesturing more broadly at all forms of skilled work. Without these the entire "human artifice" that action brings into being would crumble, and action would be futile because people would individually lose their sense of self and of what binds them together into a common world (Arendt 1998:95, 167, 204, 208). In short, work and use, for Arendt, provide a necessary infrastructure for expressive action to have an enduring effect on human affairs.

Arendt's mode of reasoning is complex and compelling, but from what has already been said, there are three fundamental problems that stand out, corresponding to each of the three domains of activity that she identifies: labour (and consumption), work (and use) and (political) action. Firstly, Arendt's naturalistic characterisation of labour and consumption as biological processes with exclusively biological ends, which is what for her distinguishes them from work and use, is at best applicable to an exceedingly small portion of human exertion – one far smaller than Arendt herself recognised. By far the greater part of all human activity is unintelligible without reference to particularistic value-orientations.

Arendt was, of course, herself claiming that people behave biologically *only* when engaging in labour or consumption, and applied this to the wealthy and poor alike. I am arguing that this

applies to neither, and that we only exceedingly rarely behave in a purely biological fashion, while trying to head off the opposite misunderstanding that this affirmation can invite, which is that it is insensitive to the problem of poverty. Of course, this is a very delicate subject to engage when pushed to the extreme. On the one hand, it can all too easily slide into a sublimation or intellectualisation of the harsh reality of poverty; on the other, granting too much power to this poverty can amount to dehumanisation, which is not simply offensive for moral reasons, but also inaccurate insofar as peculiarly human modes of experiencing the world are assimilated to those of animals. I think that nonetheless it is true that even in great adversity and poverty, people are very seldom, if ever, reduced to a condition in which their actions can best be understood as the effect of unmediated instinct. Extreme hunger, for instance, may temporarily lead to a suspension of moral evaluation, or to its more lasting reformulation to suit the exigencies of survival. All the same, people are never, as Hesiod put it, mere stomachs.

This was touched on above, where I argued that only in extreme conditions of absolute scarcity can we infer people's consumption practices from the facts of their biological being and the physical constraints of their environments. For the most part, at any rate, the satisfaction of our most basic needs doesn't occur in a domain of action that can be sealed off from our other forms of evaluating and acting. The consumption of food, for instance, is obviously universal, and is the primary form of a consumer "necessity", both in the loosest sense of this term and in the specific economic sense of a commodity that is purchased in the same quantities regardless of fluctuations in prices and incomes (Douglas and Isherwood 1996 [1979], 68–69). Yet what foods people choose to eat is, as Sahlins (1976:169) argues, explained by the meanings people associate with different types of food. Even something as basic as the consumption of food is informed by an ethical orientation to the world as expressed in a "livelihood" before more pragmatic considerations of availability, price and so forth arise as meaningful concerns. We therefore do better to simply drop the attempt to drive a wedge between labour and consumption, on the one hand, and work and use on the other. For the sake of simplicity I will speak simply of production and consumption in general terms. This of course does not rule out making certain distinctions, such as that between skilled or unskilled labour[29] within the domain of production, but it does imply that these are not activities belonging to two distinct ontological orders of acting on and experiencing the world.

If Arendt's attempt to separate production out into work and labour ultimately fails to convince, what of her distinction between production and action? Her discussion pivots on the idea of permanence and worldliness as the unique preserve of production, or rather the production of durable material objects. This is clearly a powerful insight, and can be seen as a forerunner of the idea that would later filter into the study of consumption and of material culture that the symbolic or communicative nature of social life is reliant on tangible objects to stabilise and make visible the otherwise intangible meanings that all social action requires. However – and this is the second problem with Arendt's analysis in *The Human Condition* – the idea that shared meaning that abides over time, or "worldliness" in Arendt's terms, requires

acts of *physical* creation for its very existence is difficult to credit, and may indeed conceal a subtle parochialism. The presence of ritual and routine in all human societies ensures that, even in the absence of or neglect of technologies such as writing and literacy or the specialised knowledge accumulated by technologised crafts, shared understandings and common rules are perpetually reaffirmed.

This is not to say that materiality is not everywhere and always an inescapable dimension of human life, and one often imbued with great significance, but rather to say that creating or maintaining a meaningful common world makes no definite physical demands upon us. The only thing a common world absolutely requires are shared understandings, and these are carried in all the symbolic media of a society, both material and immaterial, depending on the historical case.[30] To see why this is, consider what is implied by Arendt's understanding of worldliness: that the more extensive one's material culture, the more stable the world of human meanings are, and conversely that a culture in which material objects are scarce will struggle to sustain meaningful symbolic life over time. This seems unsustainable as a generalisation, and there is no obvious reason to agree with Arendt (1998:204) when she pronounces, for instance, that "without the human artifice to house them, human affairs would be as floating, as futile and vain, as the wanderings of nomad tribes."

Despite these objections, I believe something absolutely essential is articulated in *The Human Condition*, which is Arendt's neo-Aristotelian attempt to identify and clearly distinguish instrumental and expressive domains of endeavour, and to use this in the service of a historically-informed elucidation of ethical life in the present. However, a third problem is that the way in which Arendt goes about this, which is somewhat misleading insofar as she implicitly views *all* social and economic action as instrumental, and *all* political action as expressive, whereas a more nuanced approach might rather identify instrumental and expressive moments *within* each of these domains. Arendt's juxtaposition of political expressivity with social and economic instrumentality also has the unfortunate side-effect of leading her to normatively affirm the expressive manifestation of the self in speech and deeds in the political domain as an inherently good thing.[31] As Castoriadis (1991:121–22) observes, Arendt seems puzzlingly insensitive to the fact that a number of political programmes leading to sustained domination and atrocity perfectly fit her description of action too.

These appear to me insurmountable problems, and below I try to underscore the importance of expressive life through a very different conceptual splitting of the social world that tries to get round them. As already mentioned above, my basic unit of analysis is the social, which possesses various analytically separable intra-social domains, of which I have distinguished only the economic and the political. Action within the social domain as a whole, or its economic and political articulations, can be split into moments of production and consumption, but when doing so some clarifications are probably in order. "Production" and "consumption" can be applied to the socio-economic domain of needs provision in general without stretching their accustomed uses too far, although of course given the customary application of these

terms to the market alone this will even here sound unconventional when applied to the other forms of integration, that is, to redistribution and reciprocity. When discussing the political sphere, and indeed all other fields of social life we might wish to isolate, it could be less jarring to speak of production as "making" or "acting" and consumption as "using" or "experiencing". I will, however, use "production" and "consumption" to cover all these cases too. This is not only for the sake of terminological simplicity. It is also because I want to underscore what is common to action in all spheres of social life: the generation, exchange and realisation of value in material and immaterial objects that are exchanged in order to satisfy needs.

1.3.3 Production, exchange and consumption

My own understanding of consumption sets out by considering both production and consumption insofar as they are intentionally united through consumption and causally mediated through exchange. This is based on two propositions: firstly, action as meaningful and intentional behaviour is always sequenced with consumption as its end; and secondly, from an external standpoint originating in social theory, consumption and production are most interesting when they are practically mediated by exchange.

Consumption as the intentional end of production. As argued above, the productivist or culturalist burdening of social science methodology can lead to an unfortunate reductionism that ultimately also has consequences for historical analysis. One first step towards overcoming productivism is to argue that, to the extent that social action is genuinely intentional, consumption must always feature as its end. This pushes us close to the culturalist camp because both production and consumption as meaningful and intentional action cannot be understood outside of a basic "cultural" orientation. Put into the terminology I favour, this is to say that production and consumption are forms of action that are constitutively wrapped up with social imaginary significations. What prevents this way of seeing things from being simply "culturalist", however, is that it in no way entails a disinterest in economic action in either the popular sense of market-oriented behaviour or in the more restricted sense in which I use the term, where it signified pursuing the essentials of a livelihood in all domains of the human economy. It is rather a way of asserting that the economic domain is constituted by meaning and value, shaping these meanings and values without determining them. This way of looking at things also needn't lead to a disinterest in the economy as a domain in which power is exercised, and simply suggests that this power does not *originate* there.

The intelligibility of social action, insofar as it is intentional, cannot be reconstructed without referring first to an idealised moment of consumption that is imaginatively constituted, which temporally *subsequent* acts of production endeavour to facilitate in the attempt to realise this idealised moment in practice. Moreover, while production is not necessarily without some bounded agency of its own that will vary in accordance with the historical conditions in which production is executed, it is, as Hannah Arendt (1998:153) rightly insisted, in the first place

always best understood as a basically instrumental activity because the ends of production lie temporally beyond the activity itself. Marx was to some extent aware that one might choose to view production and consumption in this way, and indeed at one point comes within an inch of asserting the priority of consumption over production. That is, Marx very nearly allows what Smith before him and Keynes after him asserted as an obvious truism. Keynes (2013:104) considered it "obvious" that "[c]onsumption … is the sole end and object of all economic activity". He appears to be echoing Smith (quoted in Winch 2006:31), when the latter famously declared it "perfectly self-evident" that "[c]onsumption is the sole end and purpose of all production". Of course, Marx had complex and interesting reasons for criticising this idea. Nonetheless, I will argue, with the important caveat that this only applies to *intentional* action, that consumption is indeed the proper end of production in the sense of being explanatorily prior to it.

In an appendix to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx's most sustained methodological examination of the relationship between production and consumption,[32] he argues that "[c]onsumption furnishes the impulse for production as well as its object, which plays in production the part of its guiding aim" (Marx 1904 [1859]:279). Marx breaks this down into two distinct claims: (i) consumption creates the necessity for acts of production and (ii) consumption *realises* the potentials in production. That consumption creates the necessity for production (point i) is not in fact to allow for the priority of consumption. Indeed it assumes the temporal priority of production, and simply highlights its practical interconnection with consumption insofar as consumption depletes produced objects. The assertion that consumption realises the potential in production (point ii) is, however, absolutely essential, and it is not unfair to say that Marx, like many who have followed him, have failed to draw out the significance of this idea and its irreconcilability with the general run of Marx's own thought.

Marx illustrates the point by arguing that "a garment becomes a real garment only though the act of being worn", "a dwelling which is not inhabited, is really no dwelling", and a "railroad on which no one rides, which is, consequently not used up, not consumed, is but a potential railroad and not a real one" (Marx 1904:278). Although he does not spell it out explicitly, the meaning of these slightly gnomic assertions is not hard to discern. Read in the context of what he would later say about consumption in *Capital*, and using that terminology, Marx is discussing objects that bear a utility in virtue of their capacity to satisfy human needs, their "use-value". This use-value must remain only a potential until these objects are consumed, at which point this value is realised: "[u]se-values become a reality only by use or consumption". The whole issue is confused, though, by Marx's belief that the utility in virtue of which both commodities and all other objects have use-value can be explained by reference to the inherent properties of these objects themselves: "utility is not a thing of air. Being limited by the physical properties of the commodity, it has no existence apart from that commodity" (Marx 1978 [1867]:303). The same is true of non-commodified objects, as "[a] thing can be useful, and the product of human labour, without being a commodity" (Marx 1978:307). This way of

viewing things is problematic if we consider that *production* is for Marx always more than a merely pragmatic affair. It has moral significance because Marx viewed it as that which establishes social relationships, unless commodity fetishism leads to a state of reification in which productive relationships between people become relationships between people and things. However, we can see from these passages that for Marx *consumption* is, indeed, always an individual affair, a relationship between a person and an object aimed at the former using the latter's inherent value, and that no false consciousness or reification is entailed in this.

In these passages from *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, though, Marx (1904:278), for a moment, assumes an understanding of productive action as meaningful and intentional action to *facilitate* consumption, and he says as much by explicitly describing consumption as the "guiding aim" of production and by stating that "without production, no consumption; but, on the other hand, without consumption, no production; since production would then be without a purpose". What Marx is effectively saying here is that, at least *insofar as it is intentional*, productive action must be preceded by an idealised moment in which meaning is conferred on it by the purpose it is intended to serve in consumption – thereby logically placing production in the service of an originally imaginary state of affairs. Here, as well as outside of the specific problematic of the production–consumption relationship, what allowed Marx to generally ignore this insight was his persistent desire to emphasise the *materiality* of production, and hence to ignore its meaningful and intentional constitution.

Marx was, of course, an immensely complex and original thinker and there are fugitive moments in which he steps beyond the periphery of the productivist territory he spent his life trying to demarcate. For instance, he also wrote of production as a material process guided by an *ideal* in *Capital*, in an eloquent and often-quoted passage that both Graeber (2001:58) and Sahlins (1976:153) draw our attention to:

> We presuppose labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labor-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. (Marx, quoted in Sahlins 1976:153)

When explicating this passage, what Sahlins notes, and what Graeber overlooks, is that this is one of a number of places where Marx fails to develop one of his own crucial insights because of its total incompatibility with his more basic theoretical commitments. Indeed, before Sahlins, and also before Shlomo Avineri – who Sahlins credits as the first to have realised how problematic this passage is for Marx's own system – Hannah Arendt had identified this same problem. She quotes this same passage and similarly notes Marx's failure to reconcile the insight it contains with his general view of labour, as almost everywhere else in Marx's writings "the apparently all-important element of 'imagination' plays no role whatsoever in his labor theory", which is conceived naturalistically (Arendt 1958:99, n.36). Indeed, quoting

Marx's own affirmation in *Theories of Surplus Value*, Arendt observes that "despite occasional hesitations, Marx remained convinced that 'Milton produced *Paradise Lost* for the same reason a silk worm produces silk'" (Marx, quoted in Arendt 1958:99, n.36). This naturalism is complemented by a strongly reductive materialism as when, in *Capital*, Marx (1978:320) states that "however varied the useful kinds of labour, or productive activities, may be, it is a physiological fact, that they are functions of the human organism, and that each such function, whatever may be its nature or form, is essentially the expenditure of human brain, nerves, muscles, &c". Here human thought is placed on all fours with muscular and nervous activity, as a mere quantum of physical energy expended by an organism.

Returning to the production–consumption problem addressed in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, despite his foray into an intentional account of production, Marx (1904:279–81) reverts to productivism, arguing that these observations have to be balanced with the fact that (iii) production provides consumption with its historically concrete object and, in so doing, (iv) production defines consumption by giving it a determinate form. Beyond this, (v) the appreciation that consumers feel for products itself elicits new wants, thereby creating novel consumer desires. Considering these last three points, Marx then concludes that, while production and consumption are inextricably linked, production is ultimately what *determines* consumption. Sahlins (1976:155) is entirely right in arguing that nothing in Marx's argument permits him to draw this conclusion. Nor are the elements of this argument all convincing in their own right. That production provides consumption with its historically determinate object (point iii) is straightforwardly true, but nothing follows from this in the manner that Marx suggests. The other points are nonetheless more challenging, and they essentially problematise the idea I am defending, that the idealised anticipation of consumption precedes, in the order of explanation, later acts of production and concrete consumption.

The notion that consumption is constrained by the determinate form of production at any given time in history (point iv) is the offshoot of a more basic assumption that production has an ontologically more elementary status than culture (in both the substantive and semantic senses of culture discussed above) and that, by production directly determining consumption, aggregate cultural forms emerge. Sahlins stands out as a particularly perceptive critic of this idea, which is by no means limited to Marx. His basic point is that production, whatever material forces it consists of, is itself always already semantically constituted by culture, so that commonly-drawn social science distinctions assuming a cleavage between production and culture, such as the distinction between infrastructure and superstructure, need to be retired (Sahlins 1976:22, 39, 56–57). This way of understanding things also has repercussions for how we understand consumer desire. Marx believed desire, unless distorted by commodity fetishism, is a response to the use-value of objects that serve human needs in self-transparent ways. Production on this account serves the purpose of imbuing natural objects with use-value, and consumption responds to this use-value (Sahlins 1976:148–51).[33] Sahlins finds this unsatisfactory because the relationship between needs and objects is always symbolically mediated by culture first and productive technology only second (Sahlins 1976:168–70), for

which reason we can state that "[p]roduction is a functional moment of a cultural structure" (Sahlins 1976:170). Importantly, it also means that the use-value of things cannot be understood as distinct from their symbolic value. Consumption is informed by value in this wider, non-utilitarian sense, in which the practical and the symbolic cannot be prised apart (Sahlins 1976:150). This cultural structure has, of course, to observe basic biological limits to ensure the survival of humans as organisms. Within these parameters, however, there is enormous latitude in relating objects to needs; "nothing", Sahlins (1976:148) claims, "is as variable, naturalistically arbitrary, or analytically fundamental as the 'system of needs'". There is a gap between the survival imperative and the historical detail of life in human societies, for which reason Castoriadis (2005:25) observes that "[b]iological 'need' or the 'instinct' of self-preservation is the abstract and universal presupposition of every human society and of every living species in general, and it can tell us nothing about any one of them in particular."

This gap can only ever be filled through non-functional cultural value-orientations that make human needs into needs for specific things under specific conditions (Sahlins 1976:168–70). Thus need itself is culturally constituted, and production services needs in ways that only culture renders meaningful. That this is so does not necessarily entail false consciousness, and Sahlins reproaches Marx for only conceptualising the semantic mediation of need in terms of commodity fetishism (Sahlins 1976:150). Sahlins illustrates this point by arguing that both domestic animals and livestock would respond to the survival needs of North Americans, but there is an enormous industry for the consumption of cattle and pigs and none whatsoever for the consumption of dogs. The immediate cause of this is not the presence of strong commercial interests in favour of livestock production. Rather, this industry is itself ultimately the outcome of a cultural taboo in Western societies governing the consumption of domestic animals (Sahlins 1976:171–74).

Though Sahlins doesn't pursue the theme, we should observe that following this line of thought does not mean that we are prevented from analysing production or consumption in terms of their entanglement with unequal social and political power relationships. It simply means that such relationships do not *originate* in production, and are instead always bound up with entire semantic world in which power relationships ensure differential dispositions over resources (Giddens 1986:33). We might also nuance Sahlins's criticism by foregrounding the issue of meaning and intention. Sahlins essentially draws out the incompatibility of Marx's claim that production is intentional action geared toward consumption (point ii) with his other claim that production determines consumption in virtue of giving it its concrete form (point iv). Yet this still allows to some extent for an escape route for anyone adhering to productivist orthodoxies: if we are to assign generative capacities to production we can still do so by viewing production as that which gives rise to *unintended consequences*. To the extent that productive activity participates in the world of meaning and intention, though, Sahlins's critique is entirely credible. Production will always be tied back to larger shared understandings that make it a recognisable activity at all and which fit it to given human

needs, and these understandings precede production and are what explain the concrete form that production takes.

A second way of questioning the primacy of this moment of idealised consumption, however, is to argue that it is manufactured (point v). Marx himself does little to render this point credible, simply using the example that an artwork creates its own audience. Clearly, though, even without weighing in on how taste in art or anything else is formed, it no longer suffices to see in it nothing but an unproblematic response to fine craftsmanship unmediated by culture. But if, as writers after Marx have argued, implicitly developing this idea by applying it to the realities of modern commerce, marketers are capable of altering our desires such that they serve the interests of producers, then indeed it is the interests of producers that determine our consumer action. While I defer a discussion of this problem until chapter 2 and 4, here it should simply be stated that if the intentionality of which I have spoken above seems much in evidence in the social world, then this already suggests that the heavy emphasis on manipulation in the critical literature, while highlighting a significant problem, might be exaggerated. Our orientation to "strong value", developed in the course of an entire lifetime, regulates our desires in ways that may prove resistant to manipulative marketing. While the efficacy of market manipulation will usually be impossible to gauge with conclusive evidence either way, this suggests that it is something to be considered from case to case rather than, as it almost invariably is in the literature on consumption, to be taken as a simple axiom.

The importance of exchange. How do we best factor exchange into the production–consumption continuum? Consumption and production practically imply one another but needn't involve exchange, given that they can be performed by isolated individuals, or only relate to the a constricted domain of exchange such as that found in contemporary nuclear families and other small familiar units in which, by and large, "production is for the benefit of the producers" (Sahlins 1972:77). Nonetheless, from the perspective of social theory, all the most interesting questions associated with production and consumption relate to these forms of action insofar as they influence exchange on a large scale and are influenced by it. I have already argued that exchange can be thought of as social interchange in general, but that I will use it in the more specific sense of Polanyi's "forms of integration": market transactions, reciprocity and redistribution. Exploring consumption as it relates to the forms of integration opens up questions about its institutional embedding that tend not to arise from a purely culturalist perspective and which tend to be ignored or downplayed by productivists, who consider exchange only in terms of market exchange and as a passive reflection of productive activity. It allows us to think about the different channels through which people pursue their livelihoods, which we have said is the essence of economic action. At the same time, it makes it possible to link this economic behaviour up with the social and political enablements and constraints on individual consumer behaviour that are part of the context of power in which consumer action transpires.

The market, redistribution and reciprocity are ideal types whose boundaries in practice are seldom perfectly delineated, but which appear to be universal forms of exchange that possess enough commonality to allow for cautious generalisation. Though I follow Polanyi directly here, it should be noted that something similar to his tripartite division is a constant within a much wider range of social science literature, where the terminology employed is usually not that of "market", "redistribution" and "reciprocity", but rather "market", "state" and "community" (Evers and Laville 2004:15–18; Offe 2000:79; Streeck and Schmitter 1985:119). These ideal types simplify the actual complexity of society but enable general discussions about its institutional makeup, and admit of additions and refinements when considering concrete cases.

When exchange is based on the institutional form of price-making mechanisms, regulated by money or credit, we are in the presence of markets (Laville 2010:230–31). To this we should add that market participants may be known to each other and this may have a bearing on their transactions, such as where personal trust is the basis for credit provision, or else their mutual dealings may be subject to more or less impersonal political forms of legal enforcement of contract. We need assume no mutual knowledge, however, and market transactions are often conducted between relatively anonymous parties and (as in discussions of the "informal economy") effectively outside of legal scrutiny. Furthermore, markets, including those based on credit transactions, are not limited to the modern West in any way (Graeber 2014:66; Mauss 2009:103; Polanyi 1977:43), even though the tendency to increase the scope of market allocation relative to redistribution and reciprocity has certainly been a fateful Western development in certain times and places since the 19th century (Polanyi 1977:43).

When exchange passes through the institutionalised channels of redistribution, this is in virtue of the spoils of divided production moving, physically or in title, through an authoritative centre such as the state, chiefdom or city. In virtue of this movement, redistribution is subject to specifically political forms of solidarity and coercion guided by custom, law or less formalised central decision-making (Polanyi 1977:40–41; Evers and Laville 2004:15–18). The modern welfare state, with its massive tax base and welfare functions based on cash transfers or benefits in kind, is one contemporary example of non-market allocation through redistribution on a particularly large scale and it remains of great historical importance, at present generally contracting in many Northern societies even as it expands in the South.

While market exchange and redistribution are more or less familiar, at least in their contemporary forms, reciprocity is an oddly complex concept to articulate. This no doubt owes something to the vagueness of its existing formulations (Graeber 2001:218–19; Narotzky 2007b:407–8), but some version of it is nonetheless indispensible in order to draw attention to the frequently overlooked multitude of exchange channels that in all societies pass neither through the market nor an authoritative political centre and retain an exclusively social character. This is not a purely anthropological or historical indulgence. Just as the market form is not limited to the modern West, so too the gift form is not confined to societies within some

residual "elsewhere" and is indeed an important part of modern Western life, however diminished it may be by the advance of commodification.

Reciprocity differs from market transactions insofar as it always seeks to affirm or create relationships of social recognition, and from redistribution in that it is not buttressed by a central authority (Laville 2010:230–31) and is generally more personal and attentive to imbalances in people's needs (Godbout 1998:59–61). In fact all forms of exchange, and not just reciprocity, are at root social and primarily explicable in terms of the pursuit of recognition instead of power or material goods in themselves. With reciprocity, however, this concern relates to recognition as it exists in the immediate relationship between the two exchanging parties, while in market exchange and redistribution the exchanging partners may relate more or less impersonally and instrumentally, potentially seeking to extract nothing but personal benefit or to discharge a duty through the act of exchange itself. It is in this sense that I understand the claim that there is in reciprocity, from the perspective of the exchanging partners, an inherent concern with the quality of the social bond (Godbout 1998:61) and indeed a greater concern with this bond than the goods exchanged (Evers and Laville 2004:18).

Phrasing things in this manner, however, can easily give rise to the misunderstanding that reciprocity is necessarily altruistic, and to the possible further misunderstanding that in focussing on it one must forfeit a critical perspective on social life. Reciprocity can be thought of as giving or gift giving, and is frequently discussed as such, often in ways that do seem insufficiently critical. However, I believe it can only be cogently understood as a form of exchange insofar as it exists outside of – or if one prefers, between – absolutely disinterested giving and purely amoral taking. Entirely disinterested giving seems a fiction, one assuming either some sort of relentlessly dutiful Kantian moral agent or romanticised noble savage, although it does not follow from this that self-interest and altruism negate one another. Appropriation, on the other hand, lacks any element of mutuality and is therefore assimilable to the concept of reciprocity only by what almost seems an abuse of language.

Concerning the issue of pure disinterestedness, nothing forces us to choose between this and pure self-regard when accounting for the motivational basis of exchange. As Mauss (2002:95–98, 2009:102–03) observed, egotism and sectional interests can motivate reciprocal exchange, as in the "agonistic" potlatch ceremonies that interested him, but some measure of self-interest itself can also comport with altruism. This seems to me insightful, and there is no compelling reason for believing that the anticipated or actual benefits to one's own sense of self-worth or material prosperity that can attach to acts of giving need of necessity obviate a genuine and concern for the well-being of others. Bourdieu (1977; 2000:191–202), extrapolating from his Algerian fieldwork among the Kabyle to critique Mauss's understanding of gift giving, tended to assume a dichotomous understanding of self- and other-regard, and to view action motivated by the latter as at best inconsequential and at worst a naive fiction. Mauss's interpretation was written when the ethnographic method was in its infancy, but it is based on

a far more diverse set of historical materials and is free of the universal attribution of self-interest that Bourdieu apparently believed his single case vindicated. On balance, Mauss's approach to the gift is historically far better informed and conceptually more nuanced in its approach to reciprocity. Within these limitations, Bourdieu's basic point, if we read it as referring only to a *potential* inherent in reciprocity that is actualised in agonistic reciprocity systems of the type Bourdieu observed among the Kabyle, is of course excellently made. We can certainly also allow that reciprocity always has the potential to entrench the power of one party at the expense of another. We just cannot assert with the same confidence as Bourdieu that this is a universally valid truism and that any appearance to the contrary is deceptive.

At the same time, if such relationships are based on domination in the form of purely one-sided extraction, we appear to have moved beyond the domain of reciprocity. When Sahlins (1972:195–96) speaks of such action in terms of "negative reciprocity", he therefore stretches the concept of reciprocity too far for it to retain its analytic purchase. If we are to speak of negative reciprocity at all, then it must be seen, in ways that Sahlins failed to make clear, as an inversion of the previously-existing gift form, and not its opposite, insofar as it occurs *within* social groups previously integrated through the gift, where social relations have enormously deteriorated. This is not the simple obliviousness to the other's personhood or humanity of the sort we find in cases of amoral appropriation, but rather the complex behaviour that can be called resentment (or "*ressentiment*", when used as a term of art invoking Nietzsche's discussion of this theme). I will briefly take up this theme further in Chapter 6, where I view resentment as a potentially very powerful and very common accompaniment to relationships of recognition. At an empirical level, I will argue that resentment can have very destructive social effects. There I explore beliefs about witchcraft, which remain baffling from the perspective of a secular social science, but can be read as one practical way of understanding and coping with resentment in the vernacular in a great many human societies.

Having discussed market exchange, redistribution and reciprocity, it should be added that, arguably, one omission from this and other similar tripartite schemas are what are sometimes called "associations" (Streeck and Schmitter 1985:119–24). Also called "membership associations", "voluntary associations" or "clubs", these can be traced as far back as medieval guilds and have radically proliferated in post-World War Northern societies in a great many forms: churches, sects and religious congregations; labour unions; business, employers and professional organisations; consumer organisations; human rights and ecological groups, and the like (Streeck and Schmitter 1985:119–24; Zimmer 2009:41–42). These first appeared in social and political thought in the late 18th and early 19th century through figures such as Hegel and Saint Simon, and later became a key element of Durkheim's understanding of modern "organic solidarity" (Streeck and Schmitter 1985:124). They could be considered a fourth category, though I place these on the side of reciprocity or community, as Offe (2009:79) and Laville (2010:229–32) do. Indeed I will do the same for all institutions often referred to in terms of "civil society" in the contemporary sense of the term that excludes the firms and financial

profit-oriented market actors included in the original Hegelian understanding of civil society. This will be seen in Chapter 5, where I discuss the "new social movements", as conceptualised by Manuel Castells, and in Chapter 6, where I consider the socio-political importance of certain religious organisations.

Chapter 2

2. Approaching the consumption literature

In this chapter I explore how major questions concerning consumption have been posed and answered in a selection of existing social science literature that, directly or indirectly, makes an important contribution to a critical account of consumer action. In doing so I build up to a detailed statement of the research questions I pose in the remaining chapters of this book. At the most abstract level, these concern how consumer action fortifies or erodes social solidarity and social and political power in given social settings. What follows is an explicitly partial reading of the literature. I seek throughout to identify points of agreement and disagreement between the expressive account of consumption outlined in the previous chapter and other precedents in the social science literature that have been closer to the centre of recent attempts to grapple with the problem of consumption in the social sciences, or that have been more peripheral but deserve more attention than they have so far received. In so doing I hope to suggest, in this chapter and again in Chapter 7, both what an expressivist account of consumption might have to offer for critical social theory in general and historical sociology in particular, while also specifying what is novel about my own preferred approach.

I begin by isolating three basic orientations in the conceptually-oriented literature on consumption: the ludic consumption approach, the "production of consumption" (Featherstone 2007:14) approach, and the socially productive approach. Considering each of these in turn, I identify common explanatory strategies used to account for consumption and social change, while suggesting how the expressive understanding of consumption I propose both draws upon and diverges from this literature. I then briefly consider some major contributions to the historical literature on consumption, which has only loose connections with the conceptual literature and which has developed in a somewhat isolated way, through studies that have in common an attempt to historically locate the emergence of "consumer society". I argue that this literature possesses much of the historical detail that the conceptual literature lacks, but that this is itself often attained at the cost of conceptual rigour. Moreover, aside from clear Eurocentric and teleological biases, this historical literature shares with the conceptual literature a tendency to focus exclusively on commodity forms of consumption. Having said this, the burden is on me to suggest a viable alternative approach, which I do in a final section concerned with bridging conceptual and historical approaches to consumption and which lays out how I aim to develop my own expressivist approach to consumption in the chapters that follow.

2.1 The ludic approach

2.1.1 Overview

In ludic approaches to consumption basic needs are understood to be satisfied through what can in a broad sense be called play. Of the three common approaches to consumption to be discussed here, ludic approaches allow the greatest room for agency by viewing consumption as expressive and liberating. In their understanding of the consuming subject, they locate consumer motivation in inflamed desire. When considering the social context of consumer action, ludic approaches situate it in the cultural domain. Here culture is generally understood in the "localised" sense discussed in Chapter 1, that is, as a distinct intra-social domain within which the construction of meaning, in spiritual, intellectual or aesthetic forms, is usually confined. In the two most prominent ludic accounts of consumption, consumption as a historically-significant social phenomenon is framed in terms of mass consumption of commodities. To this extent it shares with the production of consumption perspective, which I discuss below, the same set of background assumptions concerning markets and capitalism as a precondition for the emergence of modern consumption, but the route into this is Weberian and not Marxian, and consumption is understood as a mode of behaviour driven more fundamentally by a uniquely modern Western culture of individualism than by market mechanisms (Bell 1978 [1976]; Campbell 1989). Even when not emphasising individualism, or in addition to doing so, most ludic approaches to consumption situate it within a historical narrative that views it as a hedonistic *reaction* to the austerities of the Protestant Ethic and of working life in modern capitalist societies instead of a passive expression of these (Bataille 1988 [1949]; Bell 1978; Turner 1982; this view is also expressed in Campbell 1989).

Ludic approaches to consumption sometimes also take on a more universal dimension by relating it to ritual or to a purportedly universal desire for freedom from prudential or instrumental calculation. Although not always explicitly linked to consumption by these authors, ritual participation can take the form of socially levelling expressions of carnivalesque exuberance (Scott 1990), immersion in ritual "anti-structure", and partially ritualised expressions of cultural creativity (Turner 1982; Turner 1991 [1969]).[34] One way into this has been through discussions of festivals and festive events, often through a development of Mikhail Bakhtin's account of the carnivalesque in *Rabelais and His World*. Here such things as theme parks, shopping malls, sports stadia and holiday resorts feature are considered as pure expressions of consumption (Featherstone 2007:22–23). Behaviour in such contemporary settings is often viewed as consistent with older carnivalesque gatherings in the forms of carnivals and popular festivals, Saturnalia, charivaris, harvest celebrations, rites of passage, and so on, where we also find anonymity, an abandonment to immodesty and imprudence, and more generally the suspension or reversal of ordinarily binding social norms (Featherstone 2007:22–23; Scott 1990:172–76; Turner 1982:28). Consumption appears not only as hedonistic

self-indulgence but also as a symbolically charged celebration of excess or disorder, though this may be a "tamed hedonism" and an "ordered disorder" (Sassatelli 2007:104). In the ritual approaches to consumption provided by Turner and Scott, in particular, carnivals and festivals are understood as existing on a continuum with more universal seasonal rites of passage in which social and political authority is inverted (Scott 1990:175–76; Turner 1991:166–77). From this ritual perspective, which Turner discussed in terms of liminal states, play is also not related to unalloyed pleasure, and simultaneously obeys a deeper social purpose (Turner 1982:viii). In portraying carnivalesque events as social release mechanisms these approaches implicitly view its motivational appeal as residing in a desire to escape routine frustration or domination.

Consumption can be understood in even more universal terms that include ritual but go beyond it to encompass all non-productive and self-sufficient action, or "expenditure" in the broadest sense of this term (Bataille 1986 [1933], 1988 [1949], 1989 [1948]). For Bataille, consumption is not an activity limited to the market but rather the expenditure of all productive surpluses in a manner that he believes defines the common life of all human societies. More importantly, for him, what is ultimately at stake in consumption is therefore not simply a rebellion against the Protestant Ethic, although this is one important manifestation of it. In our ludic pursuits, and most pronouncedly in those of an erotic or religious nature, what we reveal is a more universal human aspiration toward a release from prudential or instrumental reasoning aimed at the creation and conservation of material objects. This aspiration to freedom, which Bataille calls "sovereignty", is also accompanied by a desire for "intimacy", that is, for a sense of being connected with the immanent stream of natural life in a peculiarly human way.

Though in many ways the most sophisticated discussion of consumption in the ludic approach, Campbell (1989:227) has little to say about the socio-political effects of consumption, other than to briefly assert that the prudential spirit of utilitarian calculation embodied in the Protestant Ethic and the consumer hedonism of what he calls the Romantic Ethic are *psychologically* in tension but practically aligned. As manifested in aggregate social action, Campbell argues, it is this very psychological tension that is what gives the West its historical dynamism and keeps the existing system running as it does, with hedonic desire fuelling capitalist production and innovation. Despite the underlying similarity of their premises about consumption, this is actually an oblique critique of Daniel Bell, for whom hedonism is a dire threat to the social order. For Bell, since the early 20th century hedonistic "modernism" has been the main driver of social change. Yet, he argues, it runs directly counter to the continued functioning of economic life based on productivity and thrift which had hitherto been the main propeller of history. In trying to accommodate this new hedonism through luxury marketing and the extension of credit arrangements, business has hastened its own demise, as productivity and organisation continue to rely on an ethos of frugality and commitment to work (Bell 1978:xxv, 21–22, 71–76). When Bell was writing Marxian understandings of consumption were already popular, according to which modern societies have entered into crisis because of productive over-accumulation, for which accelerated consumption was necessary for saving capitalism from its

own inherent crisis tendency. Without highlighting the divergence, Bell was in effect arguing for something very different. Heightened consumption, subject to manipulation by marketers but growing out of a wider modernist cultural ethos that escaped such manipulation and possessed no teleological logic of its own, was as an *unintended consequence* generating economic inflation and, more destructively, undoing the ethos of self-denial and diligence underpinning all economic productivity (Bell 1978:23–24, 69–70, 238–43).[35]

Anthropologically informed approaches to ritual potentially open up a larger historical perspective on consumption, allowing us to view it either as a sort of social release mechanism that dissipates tensions that could otherwise lead to conflict, or as a genuine threat to the established order. The latter interpretation implicitly identifies moments of existing or utopian freedom within the domain of consumption, portraying it as a mode of action that is in certain times and places socially or politically subversive in its consequences. The portrayal of ritual consumption as ultimately conservative is defended by Turner. Turner conceived of his *The Ritual Process* (1991), which has become a seminal anthropological work on ritual, as an attempt to move beyond the narrow focus on "structure" as the organising principle of social life in human societies. The single-minded concern with structure, he believed, led to an "obdurate evasion of the rich complexities of cultural creation" (Turner 1991:viii). Extrapolating from his fieldwork on ritual practices among the Ndembu of Zambia, along with similar anthropological work, Turner (1991:94–165) argues that all human societies cohere through a movement between structured social life, with its division of roles and its hierarchies of status, and the suspension or reversal of this condition in "liminal" states where people associate according to the value of "*communitas*".

Although not explicitly associated with consumption, Turner's (1991:131–33) discussion of *communitas* is very similar to what Bataille says of sovereignty, insofar as both entail states of being in which people transcend the mundane in search of a profound revitalisation of affective experience. As Olaveson (2001:99–105) points out, *communitas* is also very similar to Durkheim's "collective effervescence", although Durkheim also allows that collective effervescence can eventuate in violence. In this sense Turner's understanding of *communitas* bears more resemblance to Arendt's domain of "action" than to Durkheim's collective effervescence or Bataille's sovereignty. Unlike the often mythopoetic realm of *communitas*, action for Arendt is a basically rational sphere of interaction even while being geared toward ensuring mutual recognition, but like *communitas* it is considered in abstraction from its darker potentialities. Turner (1991:139) also differs from Bataille insofar as he argues that *communitas* is, ultimately, usually a "means to the end of becoming more fully involved in the rich manifold of structural role-playing".[36] What is really at play in ritual, or at least collective rituals of status reversal, is an affirmation of the rationality and goodness of everyday structure by temporarily exposing people to the senselessness and turmoil that stepping outside of the usual order invites, even while it also offers for a carefully-bracketed time a heightened sense of intense communal belonging (Turner 1991:176–77). As discussed below, however, Turner

(1982:32–52) would later nuance this position and speak of the creativity of *communitas* in ways that resemble Bataille's understanding of the creativity of sovereignty.

Compared with the sociological reflections of Bell and Campbell, Turner and Bataille's anthropological work aims at a more universal form of socio-political analysis. However, Bataille's work, while containing some essential insights that I mention below, comes bundled up with a number of highly contentious claims, like his implausible assertion that the great wars of the 20th century were the outcome of capitalist over-accumulation that had to find a destructive outlet. In their critical capacities, Bataille's and Turner's understandings of sovereignty and *communitas* are also quite distinct. As a number of critics have noted, Bataille perpetually vacillates between a utopian assertion of the need to find new forms of egalitarian, communal consumption and a neo-Nietzschean affirmation of aesthetic experience by solitary individuals or isolated groups that has no place whatsoever for conventional forms of communal belonging or political mobilisation (Nancy 1991:36–38; Todorov 2001:35–38; Winfree 2009:32–34). In its neo-Nietzschean mode, Bataille's critical perspective differs a great deal from Turner's discussion of the virtues of *communitas*, in which the expressive experiences of individuals are always placed within a larger social context through which they take on meaning and achieve significant social effects.

2.1.2 Assessment

The ludic approach to consumption is, of the three general approaches I isolate in this chapter, the most compatible with my own assumptions about consumption. Here I will briefly draw attention to why this is, while nonetheless also arguing that ludic approaches possess certain shortcomings that, in various ways and to varying degrees, render them excessively "culturalist", in the pejorative sense of that term discussed in Chapter 1. There I associated culturalism with the tendency to overlook the power dynamics entailed in acts of consumption, along with all forms of constraint, to rigidly separate consumption off from economic activity, and to lack a clear explanation for why conceptual approaches to consumption explanatorily prioritise the cultural domain when accounting for consumer behaviour.

Ontological assumptions: Agency and voluntarism. Considering the first of these problems, the ludic approach to consumption is the only one in which consumer agency, and especially consumer creativity, is taken at all seriously. Nonetheless, ludic approaches tend to take this too far and so suffer from an excessive voluntarism.[37] All the thinkers considered here as contributing to a ludic approach to consumption are seldom detained by reflection on the ways in which consumer behaviour might play out in less than autonomous conditions. In this regard, and despite presenting an otherwise very sophisticated and historically detailed account of consumption in modern Western societies, Campbell is the biggest offender. Modern subjects, Campbell argues, are habituated to experiencing their emotional responses to the world as internal states that are amenable to their own deliberate instrumental

manipulation in the interests of sustaining maximally protracted anticipatory excitation and longing. But taking hedonistic pleasure in the imaginative fertilisation of desire is, for Campbell, also self-defeating to the extent that the eventual encounter with reality is almost invariably disappointing. Thus consummation of desire is always partial and the object of desire perpetually migrating in order to keep open the horizon of imaginative possibility that is necessary for perpetuating desire. Campbell defends the claim that people are fully aware of the part that illusion plays in their desires; as he puts it, modern consumers are "self-illusioned" hedonists, with the disappointment that invariably follows upon acquisition generally leading to dissatisfaction with a world so little able to satisfy their desires rather than to a relinquishment of desire itself (1989:90). This is an interesting proposition, but as a general explanation for consumer motivation it is at best very partial. Campbell's position can be read as a reaction to the popular belief that consumption is invariably manipulated by others, and there are good reasons for agreeing with him that consumer manipulation has been greatly exaggerated in the critical literature, as discussed below. We should nonetheless take some distance from Campbell's highly individualised psychological position too because, as socially productive approaches to consumption emphasise, consumer choices are usually demonstrably relational even in individualised modern societies, and are aimed at situating a consumer in one or another evaluative social hierarchy whose existence is not fully of their making.

Methodological assumptions: Contingency and disarticulation. At a methodological level, another important reason why ludic approaches to consumption are most compatible with the expressivist account of consumption sketched out in Chapter 1 is that they tend in varying degrees to view consumption as a contingently-arising phenomenon that ushers in significant social change. As I argue below, this is quite different from how consumption is viewed in the production of consumption and socially productive approaches, where it is understood to be invariably subservient to a teleological logic of capital accumulation or a side-effect of class domination. Campbell's Romantic Ethic thesis is again a great exemplar of this. Like the Protestant Ethic in Weber's famous account, Campbell believes the Romantic Ethic is propitious to capital accumulation without having functionally evolved for this purpose. Turner's work is slightly more difficult to situate in this regard. Scott (1990:178–82) focuses on the specific case of carnivals, and carnivalesque social episodes more generally, which for Turner are one form of ritualised "liminal" social state, and argues that these can function to reinforce the status quo in just the manner that Turner argues. However, Scott notes that, were carnival to ensure social harmony, we would expect to look into history and find elites more benevolently disposed towards it. Instead, what we appear to, in a range of historical settings, is a full spectrum from indulgent permissiveness to straightforward hostility. From the position of elites, carnivals are often permitted, if at all, in the spirit of a prudent but uncertain wager, and the unintended consequences of the social levelling characteristic of carnivalesque situations can be, and indeed often have been, a genuine challenge to power.

Scott's critique of Turner is convincing up to a point, but the disagreement is nonetheless not as strong as Scott makes out. This is because elsewhere Turner (1982:32–52) argues that the

functional nature of liminal situations tends to be true of what he calls "pre-industrial" or "tribal" societies, but that in industrial society there is far more room for "liminoid" experiences that are genuinely subversive. These liminoid forms of anti-structure can

> generate and store a plurality of alternative models for living, from utopias to programs, which are capable of influencing the behaviour of those in mainstream social and political roles (whether authoritative or dependent, in control or rebelling against it) in the direction of radical change, just as much as they can serve as instruments of political control. (Turner 1982:33)

Turner is thinking here of potentially subversive theatre, film and other artistic practices, which can be likened to forms of ritual, although he also inserts such things as academic research into this category, which might strain the analogy. We would also do well to question Turner's neat and teleological cleavage between social formations based on their level of industrialisation, but taken together, what he says about liminal and liminoid social conditions allows us to think of carnivalesque and all other ritual situations as openings for either the reaffirmation or repudiation of the existing social and political order, depending on the historical circumstances in which they occur.

The very important allowance for agency in the consumer domain found in ludic approaches to consumption is, however, accomplished at the cost of implicitly disarticulating consumption form production and exchange, and failing to explain why consumption is assigned the explanatory power to serve as a major independent variable when accounting for social stasis or change. The ludic approaches to consumption discussed here look toward a relatively well-demarcated domain of culture to explain consumption. In doing so they adopt, often only implicitly, what I have called a "localised" understanding of culture, which stands apart from the economic. Aside from the ultimate unsustainability of any attempt at limiting culture to a specific range of spiritual, aesthetic or intellectual activities, noted in Chapter 1 as a common feature of British social anthropology and Marxian sociology, this biases their empirical approaches by encouraging a strict separation between the economic, usually limited to the spheres of market-oriented production and exchange, and the cultural, which is associated with consumption alone in a vaguely-defined realm somewhere outside of the market. This separation is usually accompanied by a consequent tendency to ignore production and exchange when discussing consumption or else, with the exception of Campbell, to set up an exaggerated tension between production and exchange on the one hand, and the cultural on the other, that overlooks their inter-connections.

As we saw in Chapter 1, viewing all practices within a society as functionally inter-connected is untenable, but this does not rule out there being certain localised functional relationships between them. A better way of putting this, however, is not to speak of functionalism at all, which usually comes wrapped in a metaphysically dubious, reifying language of system "needs". One does better to speak, on the one hand, of unintentional, causal connections between practices or, on the other hand, of intentional, agentic connections of either an instrumental or expressive nature. Adopting a semantic understanding of culture or, to put it

another way, attending to the social imaginary constitution of the social world, points one back toward the deep symbolic makeup of all domains of social practice and the institutions into which they congeal. We can view production and exchange as temporally separable from consumption but nonetheless connected to it insofar as they are *intentionally* geared toward facilitating consumption, which connects these spheres instrumentally with (idealised) consumption as the prior moment. Production and exchange my then produce both *intended* and *unintended* consequences that causally shape the historically concrete manner in which consumption is ultimately realised, but only in the latter case can we assign any causal priority to them in the order of explanation.

Here the intentional should, at least as a starting assumption, be expected to subsume the unintentional. We have, as Giddens argues, strong phenomenological grounds for *assuming* the greater efficacy of intentionality in explaining the social world, and I have argued that it is in this specific sense that we can redeem Sahlins's claim, heretical as it still sounds within the critical social science literature, that production is necessarily instrumental to consumption. Nonetheless, consumption as the act of realising value, itself has instrumental and expressive dimensions. The good life, eudaimonistically conceived, is partially constituted by expressive acts of consumption, to which our other acts of consumption are themselves also instrumentally subservient. To the extent that we focus only on its instrumental forms, the common trope in the critical literature on consumption that associates it with physical reproduction has a clear element of truth. We need, however, to avoid the reduction of all consumption to reproduction, which inevitably misrepresents the intentional ends to which various forms of consumption are pressed.

We saw in Chapter 1 that such a distinction was hinted at by Gell, and also by Mauss in his discussion of the aesthetic dimension of human practices, without them following up on this intuition. Within the literature explicitly devoted to consumption, the first thinker to clearly make this necessary distinction was Bataille and, to my knowledge, the idea has not been further pursued. Bataille is a complex thinker, yet the reflections on consumption and "general economy" that he considered the culmination of his life's work tend to blur cogent sociological analysis with both naturalism and mysticism in ways that are enormously difficult to credit. Nonetheless, I think there are some good reasons why his ideas, however adventurous, have merited the attention of important critical thinkers, such as Habermas and Taylor,[38] even if we look at Bataille more as a literary provocateur than a systematic thinker. At any rate, for the purposes of this study, Bataille undoubtedly points to something of enormous importance when arguing that it is in the domain of consumption that much of what is decisive for human life in all societies plays out. Bataille is not speaking of all forms of consumption though, and he makes a clear distinction between instrumentally useful consumption and consumption that is not governed by instrumental concerns. Bataille nods at the Marxian tradition's attempt to subsume all consumption under reproduction by arguing that in the first category belong "the use of the minimum necessary for the conservation of life and the continuation of individuals' productive activity in a given society; it is therefore a question simply of the fundamental

condition of productive activity" (Bataille 1986:118). Such reproductively-oriented consumption is, however, quite distinct from a second category that encompasses "so-called unproductive expenditures", which differ substantially between societies but generally include such things as "luxury, mourning, war, cults, the construction of sumptuary monuments, games, spectacles, arts, [and] perverse sexual activity (i.e., deflected from genital finality)" (Bataille 1986:118).

It was the non-instrumental consumption that most interested Bataille (1986:118, 1993 [1954]:198) because, unlike both production and reproductive consumption, in which we "employ the present time for the sake of the future", it is here that people's action has no end beyond itself. At a collective level, Bataille believes that it is these "sovereign" expenditures that most define the collective life of a given society as this is the end toward which all effort is ultimately geared. Here we would do well to compare Bataille and Arendt's work, for despite the large differences there are some deep similarities. For one thing, both thinkers were at bottom convinced that Marx, while quite deservedly being a giant of modern thought, was profoundly misleading in associating production with freedom, even in utopian terms. For Arendt, however, consumption, like production, is invariably instrumental. She did, nonetheless, consider it fundamental to any critical-theoretical understanding of freedom to delineate a domain of expressive practice in which freedom is realised – a basically Aristotelian idea that she believed modern social science thought had lost sight of – and to this extent her reflections are in very much the same spirit of Bataille's. Arendt calls this the domain of action and views it as a public realm of political expression, while Bataille calls it the domain of sovereignty and associates it explicitly with expressive consumption. Nonetheless, in the broad sense in which I define consumption in this study, both thinkers can be seen as contributing to an understanding of consumption, and both can be read as isolating an expressive domain of action within the domain of consumption that stands apart from its instrumental modes.

It is easy to assume from this that production and exchange are historically insignificant, and I believe something like this idea is in implicit in most culturalist thought, and certainly in the culturalist accounts of consumption discussed here as part of the ludic approach to the subject. This is clearly problematic. As we often discover with hindsight, there are things that go on behind people's backs in the social world, meaning that intentional action is subject to prior constraints in ways that may escape the knowledge of actors, and which can lead to effects which might similarly be unforeseen. We can speak of this as the causal context of action, but always with the ontological proviso that we are not speaking of naturalistic forces here, and avoiding the methodological seductions of mono-causal explanations. If we follow Giddens's assumption about the priority of intentional action, any such causal ordering of these moments of social life cannot be *assumed* to hold and would need to be demonstrated, if only in the form of a plausibility argument. As we will see below, the production of consumption and socially productive approaches to consumption can be read as offering a causal account of consumer practices but generally fail to provide an argument of any sort about why the causal ordering of production, consumption and exchange is able to bypass conscious apprehension and

undermine our intentional designs. This greatly weakens their analytical and critical claims. They nonetheless nudge the discussion of consumption in the direction of a consideration of all that constrains it, and thereby help us to think in less culturalist ways about the possible relationships between all these spheres.

My own preferred approach is to move back from consumption to exchange, arguing that production is itself always oriented not only toward consumption but toward a certain mode of exchange to which consumption is usually attached and which makes up the institutional sphere in which consumption exists as a socially-integrating activity. Any given form of consumption can usually be shifted between different forms of exchange. It remains the same type of consumption and all social and economic activity will be directed toward it, but the social relationships entailed in this exertion might vary enormously. The major socio-political conflicts in any society relate to the tensions between instituting different forms of market, redistributive and reciprocal forms of integration in different proportions. The production of consumption and socially productive approaches to consumption that I go on to consider below tend to have little to say about exchange, however, either assimilating production and exchange or assuming that all production is for market exchange. Nonetheless, within these limits, they put major analytical and critical issues for the study of consumption on the table, not the least of these being the problem of commodification and more generally of consumer false consciousness that might accompany it. Socially productive views of consumption also raise the issue of stratification through consumption, and this too cannot be ignored by critical social theory. Below I will therefore consider each of these approaches in turn.

2.2 The production of consumption approach

2.2.1 Overview

What we might call the "production of consumption" approach can be abstracted from an early but still influential body of literature that usually equates the economy with the market and endeavours to critically conceptualise the social and political effects on modern societies of capitalist commodity production for the market. These theories share a critical tendency to view mass consumption, often called "consumerism", as a major domain of social and political *domination* and owe to their common Marxian origins a tendency to think of modern consumption as an activity that ensures that the capitalist system reproduces itself or is reproduced by elites. An assumption common to such accounts is that consumer behaviour is to be understood as the result of ever-increasing commodification that originates in the sphere of production and perpetually infiltrates further into the sphere of consumption or "culture" (in the localised sense), with consumers supporting a status quo that in the long term benefits

only a narrow set of elites. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002 [1947]), Herbert Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* (2002 [1964]), and Jean Baudrillard's *The Consumer Society* (1998 [1970]) are particularly forceful statements of this position and remain pivotal texts for discussions of modern consumption. More recently, similar ideas have surfaced in important critical works, such as David Harvey's (1992 [1989]) *The Condition of Postmodernity*. An even more important critical work, though limited to the dedicated literature on consumption, has been Ben Fine's *The World of Consumption* (2002). In both the older and newer works a broadly Marxian account of commodity fetishism is reproduced along with a critical concern for the social effects of new marketing techniques and mass communication more generally, which together are often portrayed as the mediums through which consumers' practical reason is shaped.

The early Frankfurt School writers in fact believed that mass entertainment either heavily manipulated human needs or else created them wholesale, which we might think of as weaker and stronger theses about consumer needs on the market. Horkheimer and Adorno hover somewhere between the two, noting that despite the overwhelming power of market manipulation there were at least some instances in which unmanipulated needs could still guide human action. Thus, even if it was true that "the cycle of manipulation and retroactive need is unifying the system ever more tightly", it was nonetheless also true that "[d]emand has not yet been replaced by simple obedience" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002:95, 108). This did not of course mean for them that such a seamless unity could not be achieved: "The more strongly the culture industry entrenches itself, the more it can do as it chooses with the needs of consumers – producing, controlling, disciplining them; even withdrawing amusement altogether: here, no limits are set to cultural progress" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002:115). Marcuse (2002:7), however, does not hesitate to endorse the stronger thesis, where we can speak of "false needs": "most of the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate, belong to this category of false needs." This spread of false needs was not a potential but a reality: "people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment. The very mechanism which ties the individual to his society has changed, and social control is anchored in the new needs which it has produced" (Marcuse 2002:11).

Baudrillard's is the first work in this tradition to focus squarely on consumption, and while all these works explain consumption functionally, none do so more radically than *The Consumer Society*. Invoking Marcuse, Baudrillard (1998:192) declares that the advent of a consumer society marks the end of transcendence, an age of "radical alienation". The spread of commodification has been so fateful that it has colonised all spheres of human life: "[c]ommodity logic has become generalized and today governs not only labour processes and material products, but the whole of culture, sexuality, and human relations, including even fantasies and individual drives" (Baudrillard 1998:192). What makes Baudrillard (1998:54, 61–62) so radical is that for him the human drive to consume is neither a utilitarian desire for

objects – Marx's consumption of use-value – nor people's desire to improve or maintain their social status, as it was for Veblen and later for Bourdieu. Baudrillard (1998:49–51, 61–66) acknowledges status competition as a propeller of the system of production and consumption, and speaks at points of consumer desires, but his structural–functionalist reading of consumption attributes no explanatory value to the satisfaction of individual needs. Beneath the striving for status there is a more basic need for system survival sustained by an impersonal symbolic system of differences in which commodities act only as signs that predispose people to consume in an infinite quest for distinction through difference: "The system only sustains itself by producing wealth and poverty, by producing as many dissatisfactions as satisfactions, as much nuisance as 'progress'. Its only logic is to survive and its strategy in this regard is to keep human society out of kilter, in perpetual deficit" (Baudrillard 1998:56, 61–62). What truly matters, then, when explaining consumption is only system survival, with an external, coercive system of signs having its own way with people.

Baudrillard (1998:45–48, 65–66, 158) views the overall orientation of the system of consumption to be toward waste, an in modern societies, or at least urban centres, the system is propelled from the side of production, which possesses a coherency that consumption lacks. Advertising has evolved to accelerate consumption cycles by dragging objects into the fashion system, where all lasting things are made perishable. Indeed advertising practices have become of special importance for maintaining this system. Along with the "convulsive craving for objects" advertising creates at the individual level, the result is to "ensure the reproduction of the order of production" (Baudrillard 1998:48, 65). By perpetually fostering more needs than can be supplied by goods, the wheels of production never stop spinning, while always heading off in new directions (Baudrillard 1998:64–65). This emphasis on the wholesale fabrication of needs is less explicit in Harvey's argument and denied in Fine's (Fine 2002:108), both of which I discuss in greater detail below, but here we can note that they too stress the manner in which accelerated and extended consumption cycles exist downstream of commodity production in order to functionally ensure sustained profitability for capitalists and to offset the crises of over-production that always threaten capitalist social orders. In doing so they retain the idea of the unconscious and manipulated nature of consumer behaviour, with Harvey speaking of fetishism and Fine speaking of "aesthetic illusions" when explaining why consumers feel compelled to buy into this system (Fine 2002:78, 88–97, 2005 [1995]:139–41; Harvey 1992:77–79, 180–97).

None of the works discussed here have much to say about the socio-political causes or consequences of consumption, preferring to view consumer behaviour as a side-effect of dynamics internal to the economy even while allowing in a very abstract way that all this works in favour of domination. When speaking of the economy they of course mean production for exchange on markets within capitalist societies, and the intra-economic variables that interest them tend to be marketing or, for Harvey, as discussed below, "flexible accumulation". The early production of consumption literature by Horkheimer and Adorno and by Marcuse was, however, at least peripherally concerned with what they believed to be

the socio-political paralysis induced by commodity consumption, although even here the specifically political dimension is not really explored in any depth. Indeed so extreme were their analyses of the socio-political impact of consumption that the very possibility of effective political resistance was, at least implicitly, constantly being called into question. Consumption had, for them, politically pacified modern populations by undermining social solidarity and diverting collective energies from the pursuit of radical change. In this connection they argued that new forms of consumption have socially atomised society into a horde of individuals who are simultaneously all passive subjects to what Horkheimer and Adorno (2002:9, 94) called "the total power of capital".

Dialectic of Enlightenment portrays consumers in the "culture industry" as fully lost within a world of entertainment due to the "necessity, inherent in the system, of never releasing its grip on the consumer, of not for a moment allowing him or her to suspect that resistance is possible" (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002:113). Likewise, in *One-Dimensional Man*, the enhanced satisfaction of needs that technological development has enabled for even the poor is viewed as a source of political pacification through "enslaving contentment" (Marcuse 2002:239–40, 246, 248). Marcuse (2002:26) believed he was witnessing, in the advanced capitalist societies, the emergence of "an ever-more-comfortable life for an ever-growing number of people who, in a strict sense, cannot imagine a qualitatively different universe of discourse and action, for the capacity to contain and manipulate subversive imagination and effort is an integral part of the given society." Indeed, the very experiential core of oppression as understood in early Marxist terms seemed to Marcuse to have been obliterated as "the extent to which this civilization transforms the object world into an extension of man's mind and body makes the very notion of alienation questionable" (Marcuse 2002:11).

Marcuse tended to view this pacification in utilitarian terms, as the result of mere satisfaction with increased possession of material objects although, like Horkheimer and Adorno, and also Baudrillard, he simultaneously maintained that such satisfactions were attained within a wider context of emotional misery and perpetual dissatisfaction. However, although very much in passing, Marcuse (2002:10) also attributed a socially comparative dimension to the problem, arguing that shared consumption habits foster mutual identification between oppressor and oppressed, and hence a defusion of the potential for class conflict. This is an important idea, although even at the time it was written it could hardly have been new. For instance, Werner Sombart had already made the same point, in both its utilitarian and its socialised form, in his *Why is There no Socialism in the United States?* In the prelude to his famous assertion that in the US, with its relative affluence, "[a]ll Socialist utopias came to nothing on roast beef and apple pie", Sombart (1976 [1906]:105, 106) observes of the "American worker" that, in addition to eating better and having larger dwellings than was common in Europe,

> [h]e dresses like a gentleman and she like a lady, and so he does not even outwardly become aware of the gap that separates him from the ruling class. It is no wonder if, in such a situation, any dissatisfaction with the "existing social order" finds difficulty in establishing itself in the

mind of the worker, particularly if his endurable – indeed, comfortable – standard of living seems permanently assured.

For Sombart (1976:110), this lack of social distance between the US worker and those higher placed on the status order than her/him was not just a product of material affluence, but also better general standards of education and more egalitarian social mores. Marcuse's original contribution therefore seems more to have been a generalisation of this idea to all capitalist societies. This is consistent with Marcuse's (2002: xlvi, 49–51, 246) historically deterministic assumption that consumption was destined to develop in nearly identical forms in all industrial or all capitalist societies.

2.2.2 Assessment

Without wishing at all to dismiss what are often original and immensely provocative theses, the production of consumption literature suffers from a number of major drawbacks. These relate, at an ontological level, to what appears to be a casual exaggeration of the malleability and passivity of human reason. Although seldom explicitly distinguished, they also demonstrate a methodological commitment to an explanatory account of social action in general, and consumer action in particular, as the passive expression of deliberate manipulation by marketers or as subordinated to the systemic need of capital accumulation, and in either case as a functional necessity for the perpetuation of an existing order of production. These theories are still of some relevance insofar as they sensitise us to real problems, but as tools for guiding the empirical examination of any specific society they are blunt instruments incapable of registering aspects of consumer behaviour that are not obviously obedient to manipulation or reducible to explanations in terms of systemic shifts.

Ontological assumptions: low estimation of rationality. At an ontological level, all such production of consumption approaches implicitly or explicitly share a commitment to the plausible assumption that human reason is a thoroughly historical capacity. The specifically critical dimension of such approaches might be called "ideology critique" (Heath 2001:3). It builds on this assumption by claiming to identify a condition of systematic ideological misapprehension that in some sense overwhelms our capacity for reason and generates false consciousness, at least among certain social groups. However, it is possible to accept the historicity of reason without also accepting the idea that this reason is as pliable as these characterisations of consumer action suggest, if only because the total determination of social consciousness and erasure of meaningful conflict appears to be a technology never yet mastered on any large scale. Colin Campbell (1989:46–49), quite insightfully I believe, detects an incomplete break in this literature with two assumptions that hold up poorly under scrutiny: the idea that any symbolic use of goods that deviates from their apparent material utility, and any choice of goods that derives from emotion or imagination instead of calculation, reveal the irrationality of consumption. More importantly, as Joseph Heath (2001:4) points out, the blanket ascription

of irrationality to enormous swathes of social actors by ideology critics can be taken to suggest a shortcoming in the critic's conceptual approach more than an existing social malaise – at least the absence of strong support by ideology critics for their position.

Heath's objection to the assumptions of the production of consumption approach is, however, not a knock-down argument. Such an objection itself rests on a premise of assumed social rationality of the sort that, in the preceding chapter, we have said Giddens makes when arguing that social science explanation should be conducted against the background of *assumed* intentionality. Should this premise be dismissed, there seems to me ultimately no clear way to resolve such matters. Appeals to the phenomenological implausibility of the idea of systemic delusion, which point out that all socialised individuals tend to assume rationality on the part of their interlocutors within everyday communicative encounters, don't have the force of a logical proof and can in the end always be evaded. Nonetheless, there does at the very least seem to be a need in the production of consumption literature for a great deal more rigour in locating the position of the social critic. With false consciousness taken to be a pervasive feature of society, one is never entirely sure how it comes about that the social critic has succeeded in penetrating the total ideological screen posited in the theory.

This is a criticism which, for instance, Alisdair MacIntyre (1970:69–72) has made of Marcuse, but which necessarily arises for any ideology critic. The only way to escape this is to offer some plausible argument about how the critic attains this position, such as through the classical Marxist understanding of solidarity with oppressed groups who, as a direct consequence of their oppression, are able to grasp the reality of the social world in ways that those not subject to such oppression must fail to do. Yet, at least with the early post-World War critiques of consumption mentioned above, the domain of consumer action is viewed as so fully captured by a system logic of domination or by elite manipulation that the very possibility of resistance emerging in this sphere appears to be foreclosed (Schor 2007:22).

Indeed, when one looks closer at what is going on in the production of consumption literature, I believe two separate problems tend to be conflated, and their separation and elucidation is potentially a matter of both academic and political interest. The first is one of systematic false consciousness generated by the very structure of social reality itself, and the second is the separable issue of whether people possess access to the information required to successfully make choices that conduce toward the realisation of their presumed or stated interests. In the first case, there is an assumption that rationality is necessarily distorted by social conditions and will remain so in the absence of radical change – the very shape of society renders it incomprehensible. In the second case, there need be no such assumption, and but for the manipulation of social consciousness by elites, and/or the poor education of dominated groups, along with similarly identifiable constraints on the production of knowledge, people can potentially attain a plausible grasp of their objective conditions.

If the problem is merely one of available information, then we can simply assume that the critic has accessed enough information to present a plausible case. To the extent that systemic false consciousness is assumed, however, as exemplified most clearly in Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* and Baudrillard's *The Consumer Society*, it needs to be accompanied by some plausible account of how the critic has accessed a perspective beyond it and why this position is in principle superior to any other perspective, as this affects the entire communicative context in which the critic's social analysis is to be received. This is so because those not occupying this position are, in effect, necessarily being enjoined to judge the critic's account of thing, not in accordance with some potentially shared standard of validity, but rather to accept it on *faith*. It would be naively scientist, almost boorish, to insist on anything like hard evidence for these critical claims, but it does seem fair to require some explanation for why it is that in our everyday lives nobody experiences themselves as quite so fully determined, even automated, in their everyday consumer choices, thereby building a bridge between these externalist arguments and the actual experience of real consumers. Yet one finds no clear arguments of this sort in these works.

Methodological assumptions: "manipulationism" and functionalism. Those defending a production of consumption approach to consumption have no scruples in characterising the "knowledgeability" embedded in practical consciousness, of which Giddens (1986:281) speaks, as entirely shot through with error and of no explanatory interest other than as a functional support, in the form of passively introjected values, for existing systems of socio-political domination. The functionalism inherent in these theories is evident in their constant descriptive framing of the problem of consumption in terms of system *reproduction*. This is not a cautious approach to consumption in which the question of what, if anything, is intentionally or unintentionally reproduced is subject to genuine investigation. Instead, it is a strident assertion that consumption is necessarily conducive to the reproduction of the capitalist system. In so doing they all go beyond the mass society thesis of the sort that Colin Campbell (1989:46) calls "manipulationism", which reduces consumer behaviour to the outcome of manipulation by marketers, and also embrace functionalist premises that can be seen in their treatment of human needs and values.

This systemic reproduction is usually portrayed as a need, not simply of market and political elites, but of the structure of the market itself.[39] In either case it comes at the cost of domination of modern societies by these elites, and can go unchecked because a system-wide tendency to fetishise commodities ensures that the use-value of things is conflated with their exchange-value (e.g. Horkheimer and Adorno 2002:128). Baudrillard is somewhat unique in that he proposed to forsake the opposition between use and exchange-value, and introduced the concept of "sign-value" into the debate, in order to plausibly contend that value first originates in the domain of symbolically-mediated social interchange. But this was regrettably not with the intention of negating the idea of systemic delusion but rather of updating it in step with the semiotic interests of structuralist or post-structuralist theory.

This sort of functionalism is hugely problematic, but there is enough that is methodologically informative about consumption of production perspectives to allow for a reworking. As we saw in Chapter 1, it is misleading to argue that everything in society functions, but we can nonetheless identify localised "functionalist" relationships between social institutions to the extent that some institutions clearly are instrumentally subordinated to larger purposes. In the particular case of consumption, consumer activity may very well to some extent ensure the reproduction of capitalist relationships of production in *certain* times and places, and as regards certain forms of consumption. This needn't be attributed to the ideological automatism assumed by production of consumption thinkers, although this is also not to say that consumers are necessarily impervious to manipulation. The more interesting point, to my mind, is that we can still make some use of production-of-consumption-style arguments if we think of them as pointing to the potentially unintended consequences of productive trends. These consequences might constrain consumer action in ways that are not always fully foreseeable when undertaking production in the intentional manner that, as I argued in Chapter 1, always characterises production as a form of action that is by definition subservient to a pre-existing anticipation of an idealised consumer end. In so doing we can establish a connection between production and consumption that rescues us from a "culturalist" forgetting of production without having to buy into any of its questionable ontological claims or its misleading methodological positing of production as the temporally prior determinant of consumer action.

2.2.3 Ben Fine's systems of provision approach to consumption

While having gone somewhat unnoticed even within the more dedicated literature on consumption, in many ways the most informative contribution to the production of consumption approach is Ben Fine's *The World of Consumption* (2002). Although it does not always deliver, what Fine's book promises is a potential way around the functionalism afflicting production of consumption approaches, while retaining a concern with what I believe is potentially most insightful about them: (i) at an explanatory level, the attempt to keep the structure of production in view when discussing consumption, and at a critical level, (ii) an approach to issues of value starting out from a concern with power and unintended consequences of action that show up the shortcomings of voluntarist understandings of social action. In addition, Fine corrects his own omission in an earlier version of the book by modifying his position to allow for (iii) a distance-taking from the idea of the market as an a priori privileged domain of need provision, which is a major blind-spot of the production of consumption literature. He proposes to do this by stressing the necessity of considering "the shifting relationship between commercial and non-commercial forms of provision" (Fine 2002:114)

Fine develops a "system of provision" approach to consumer action as an explicit attempt to impart some much-needed programmatic coherence to the splintered enterprise of consumer

studies. In so doing Fine, an economist by training, hopes to overcome the "alien and absurd postures of mainstream economics, and the formidable intimidation posed by its technical virtuosity and pompous and invalid claims to science and rigour" while also escaping the "lingering legacy of an economicless postmodernism" (Fine 2002: xi). Fine's basic argument starts out from the fundamental premise of all production of consumption perspectives by arguing that the study of consumption needs to take as its unit of analysis the complex links between consumption and production. To this he adds the essential insight that such connections may differ profoundly for various categories of consumer goods: housing, clothing, food, cars, or whatever the case may be. The empirically variable manner in which consumption and production are linked for each category of good in different times and places potentially calls for a different theoretical model of explanation in each case. We need to proceed by isolating, not the consumer goods themselves, as advocated by Arjun Appadurai, but rather the entire "system of provision" running from production to consumption through which such goods are produced and accessed. Taking the system of provision as the basic unit of analysis for the study of consumption allows us to see how such systems have *constrained* consumer action in different times and places (Fine 2002:118–22, 2013:222).

From this basic insight, Fine develops a number of interesting conceptual and historical claims that are salutary in their intentions but turn out to be problematic when worked out by him. Conceptually, Fine believes that his approach allows for a reconciliation of the "material" and "cultural" elements of consumption by allowing us to better grasp "the articulation of the material and the cultural" in consumer practices (Fine 2002:5–6, 101–24). This concern for the cultural causes him to reject mainstream economics, with its deliberate methodological evasion of questions concerning the formation of consumer desires or "preferences", as wholly inappropriate to the task and to seek out insights into economics in general and consumption in particular in other social science disciplines. At the same time, Fine seeks to limit conceptual generalisation and nudge the study of consumption in the direction of greater historicism. His central insight – that the study of consumption must focus on the historically specific systems of provision underpinning each category of consumer good – leads to an affirmation of the need to move from homogenising and static conceptual generalisations to an appreciation of historical variability and change when studying consumer action (Fine 2002:82–97). While these may seem auspicious starting points for the study of consumption, I will proceed below to flag some of the more apparent problems attaching both to Fine's ontological assumptions and to his methodological appeal for greater historicism. These questionable ontological assumptions show up in Fine's implicit utilitarianism and his weak conceptualisation of the imaginary or cultural dimension of consumption. At a methodological level, Fine's historicism is undercut both by a weak understanding of non-commodity forms of consumption and by an arbitrary delimitation of systems of provision, which make it difficult to derive general conclusions from any particular case.

Ontological assumptions: utilitarianism and downplaying the imaginary. One of the major premises of Fine's book is based on an understanding of culture that, as I argued in Chapter 1, is conceptually implausible: it assumes what Sahlins (1976:117) refers to as "the arbitrary

differentiation of 'culture' from 'social system'", places materiality on the side of the social, and then sets out to establish how they interact.[40] If Fine is willing in principle to reconcile the material and the cultural, in practice he nonetheless finds the explanatory value assigned to cultural factors to be unacceptable and falls back time and again on Marxian-style political-economic arguments that stress the structural encompassment of consumer choice by temporally prior economic arrangements of "capital commodity production" of material goods. This is because capitalist commodity production, on Fine's (2002:78, 88–97, 2005:139–41) account, affects not only the exchange-value of goods but also their *apparent* use-value by motivating those engaged in production to alter the physical properties of goods or to generate "aesthetic illusions"[41] about these physical properties, as this manipulation is an essential part of ensuring profits.

While there is much obvious truth in this, and while it goes a step beyond Marx insofar as use-value is viewed as no less manipulable than exchange-value, as a basic explanatory account of why people consume it is inadequate because of its simple utilitarianism. Utilitarian arguments, which view the motivation to consume as originating in the match between a person's desires and the physical attributes of objects, may help us understand the consumption of physically addictive substances, such as sweetening agents or nicotine, as well as other objects that seem to rely for their popularity on their compatibility with the human sensorium, such as multimedia, although even here it may not be a self-sufficient explanation. At any rate this utilitarian outlook has nothing useful to say about the consumer appeal of other objects whose desirability is constitutively tied up with some social mode of understanding and morally motivated evaluation. I have argued in Chapter 1 that, far from being exceptional, such socially and morally informed consumption is the norm and not the exception.

Fine's implicit utilitarianism is an outcome of a more basic problem, which is his tendency to downplay the imaginary dimension of social life and to misconstrue approaches to the social world that lend it greater weight than he does by claiming they are entirely dismissive of the material dimension of human life. In this regard it is symptomatic that Fine (2002:67–70, 110–12) entirely misses what is most interesting about the discussions of "sign-value" by focussing on Baudrillard, whose understanding of this concept is indeed problematic, instead of the far more interesting treatment of this same idea by Sahlins in *Culture and practical reason*, where Sahlins discusses what I have been calling the imaginary dimension of social life in terms of a semantic understanding of culture. Rather against the grain of his own reasoning, Fine resorts to tarring with the brush of "postmodernism" not only Baudrillard – to whom the appellation may be suited, though Fine does little to define it in any precise way – but *any* theoretical orientation not making a firm commitment to the explanatory primacy of materiality when accounting for consumer practices.

Unlike Fine, Sahlins argues that use-value is only a workable category when understood against the pre-existing cultural schemas that inform production and make it a meaningful activity in the first place. These schemas, which are constitutive of sign-value, have very little

to do with any logic of brute materiality or the manipulative creation, during production, of illusions. Saying this does not entail denying that the manipulated creation of illusions about value exists, but suggests that, where it *succeeds*, this is most often in virtue of successfully pegging the value of the product to a larger set of cultural meanings and not to material properties that act directly on people while bypassing this sphere of meaning. In short, illusions about use-value, no less than use-value itself, both assume a more basic orientation toward sign-value. Failing to perceive this is the result of implicitly naturalising and universalising consumption practices that are better viewed as always culturally or imaginatively constituted.

As we said in the previous chapter, outside of some universal biological functions such as hunger in social contexts where extreme scarcity has banished meaningful choice, nothing interesting follows at the level of observable consumer practice from the brute physical properties of things. Rather, people actively shape the physical properties of things to suit their antecedent purposes, and then choose among things in accordance with complex estimations of value. Outside of extreme scarcity, then, Sahlins (1976:169) is surely right to assert that use-value, whether illusory or not, is as little related to the purely material attributes of things as is exchange-value:

> the social meaning of an object that makes it useful to a certain category of persons is no more apparent from its physical properties than is the value it may be assigned in exchange. Use-value is not less symbolic or less arbitrary than commodity-value…. The reason Americans deem dogs inedible and cattle "food" is no more perceptible to the senses than is the price of meat.

It has to be said that Fine's insistent productivism is tempered by his occasional allowance that physical, "material" properties do not *exhaustively* constrain use. Given his association of production with materiality, along with his limitation of cultural factors to the immaterial, this concession is at any rate entirely essential to sustaining the basic argument of the book along with what he says elsewhere about systems of provision: that some consumption goods will be more affected by factors arising in production while others will be more affected by what he calls cultural variables, by which he means the status struggles described by Veblen, along with gendered, classed and racialised patterns of consumption. Fine nonetheless assumes that the effect of production will always be so significantly felt that generalisation about consumption at the level of culture will always be impossible (Fine 2002:81–85; Fine, Heasman, and Wright 1996:62). The more general problem, however, is that in those places where Fine departs from stressing the productive determination of consumer action he ends up half-way between material and cultural, as well as structural and agentic, understandings of economic action. This is achieved, not through any compelling reconciliation, but rather through appearing to allow for entirely disparate explanatory strategies to be piled onto one another.

Fine's (2002:211–26) analysis of food provision as an attempt to put his approach to work empirically is a good example of where this leads in practice. He assumes that most systems of

provision have corresponding "cultural" systems associated with them. To varying degrees in different times and places, these cultural systems may influence the nature of food provision in ways that are not reducible to the more material determinants on its production and exchange, such as the structure of the agricultural sector in a given society. In fact what Fine means by cultural systems, in this context, turns out to be channels of information and knowledge creation, such as scientific and regulatory information about recommendable foodstuffs that track its productive origins and critically assess its nutritional properties (Fine 2002:111). This is an oddly reductive approach to culture, and specifically to the cultural determinants of food choice, as Fine, for the space of a sentence, actually acknowledges. But this does not deter him. Indeed it would appear that Fine has to make this reductive assumption because he wants to argue that cultural systems are grafted onto what he clearly views as *pre-existing* systems of material provision (Fine 2002:106). Taking a larger view of culture, and applying it to the case of food choice in the manner Sahlins does, would clearly destabilise this approach. This is because the "cultural" questions Sahlins asks of production go straight to the heart of the fundamentally historical and socially variable nature of all human endeavour, always insisting on asking why, in any given time and place, *this* form of production prevails and not another; in the case of food, he asks: why produce *this* form of food, when others can, and elsewhere do, meet people's nutritional needs?

Despite this reduction of culture to specific knowledge systems formed around systems of provision, what might more credibly be thought of as cultural silently reappears through the back door in Fine's further discussion of five variables affecting systems of provision. We are told that all systems of provision are (i) "construed", (ii) "chaotic", (ii) "constructed", (iv) "contradictory" and (v) "contested" (Fine 2002:111). Not the smallest shortcoming of this schema, when put into practice in Fine's (2002:211–26) discussion of food consumption, is that the entire interpretive dimension of activity is reduced to one variable, the (i) "construed" nature of consumption, which is itself but one of many things *affecting* the knowledge we have about food and our associated experience with it (Fine 2002:220). Food consumption is "construed" because "[f]ood beliefs are extraordinarily diverse and complex given the cultural content of food and, especially, how food is experienced. It is not simply a matter of taste and reflection but how we buy, prepare, eat, dispose of and socialise around food" (Fine 2002:220).

For Fine, food consumption is also "cultural" in the sense that it is: (ii) "chaotic", because our knowledge and experience of food is wrapped up with other domains of social activity (dating tourism, family bonding, and so on); (iii) "constructed", because it is packaged and labelled in ways frequently meant to bypass consumers' critical faculties; (iv) "contradictory", because subject to contradictory individual beliefs and given to causing unintended social consequences; and (v) "contested", because regulatory and commercially interested bodies might disagree about its nutritional value (Fine 2002:220–21). One problem here is that it is not clear where to insert Fine's earlier gesture to theories of competitive consumption, or of its socially stratified nature. These were highlighted by Fine's earlier nod to Veblen or to theories of gendered or racialised consumption but are then seemingly forgotten. Perhaps these are

other sources for the contradictory (iv) or contested (v) nature of consumption when dealing with objects of consumption *other than* food, although obvious empirical discrepancies in food consumption between social classes, racial groups, and so on are bound to make this a rather disappointing point of departure. A more basic problem is that, somehow, these dimensions of food consumption all arise for Fine *downstream* of its actual material production. If we assume that Fine is not simply positing this because it fits with his pre-existing hunch that food systems *must* always first be explained by material production, then the reason must be that the "constructed" nature of consumption (iii) is most important to Fine, at least if we take this to be a reframing of his earlier extended discussion of the centrality of "aesthetic illusions" to consumption. For this to satisfactorily account for the properly historical nature of consumption, however, we would have to be persuaded of other things too. We would need to already accept that not only the choice of certain brands or specific producers of the same foodstuff, but the very choice of that foodstuff from among other viable human possibilities, is best explained as a trick of producers and marketers. If this were so, then explanation could indeed bypass any consideration of the historically complex movement of a human collectivity as mediated by semantically dense forms of understanding of the sort that Sahlins insists on, or of the social power dynamics that Bourdieu believes explain food and other forms of consumption, as discussed below. Fine, however, does nothing of either sort with this idea, which is simply mentioned but seems to have no explanatory power in his own approach. As a variable for explaining consumer practices it is floated alongside all the others in this alliterative list, which are presented as in principle on all fours with it.

In keeping with my own assumptions about the imaginary makeup of social life, we do best to discard Fine's utilitarianism and with it the peculiar relegation of the cultural to an informational system pegged to an antecedently-existing system of provision. In Fine's own terms, this would entail viewing the "construed" nature of consumption as what is most basic about it, and that which makes it most distinctively human. All other cultural aspects of consumption that he mentions have to be understood as framed by this more basic, interpretive orientation to the world. Likewise, the material dimensions of production need to be viewed as instrumentally subordinated moments in the provision of needs that are fist interpretively construed. This way of seeing things nonetheless can learn from Fine's analytical insistence on focusing on systems of provision instead of the isolated commodities that Appadurai (1986) takes as his preferred unit of analysis. In this manner we avoid a slide into an economically disinterested culturalism.

Methodological assumptions: overlooking non-commodity forms and arbitrarily delineating systems of provision. If these ontological problems require us to modify Fine's system of provision approach, so too should the specific manner in which Fine tries to introduce greater historicism into the study of consumption. The attempt itself seems to me both original and sorely needed, but the concrete manner in which Fine suggests we do so is not in itself sufficiently worked out because, pursing its own logic further than Fine does, it is difficult to see how generalisable conclusions can be derived from it. Given that systems of provision vary enormously from one society to another, and change over time too, what makes them *comparable*, and hence renders

their study potentially of interest to non-specialists? Like Bourdieu's delimitation of "fields", to which Fine (2002:119) at one point likens his system of provision approach, and which I consider in more detail below, the number of systems of provision we count and their inter-relationships have the potential to infinitely and arbitrarily multiply. When applying his systems of provision approach to food consumption Fine often speaks, for example, of a "food system", but also of a "food information system". He further specifies that the food system is really not a singular system and is rather composed of such things as "the sugar system" and "the dairy system", and so on, which we must assume are themselves accompanied by their own knowledge systems (Fine 2002:111, 221–24).

Fine (2002) says very little about how such systems are to be delimited or how they inter-relate, other than telling us that they are "chaotic" (ii, above) and hence complexly related. Even the earlier extended treatment of this topic by Fine and colleagues fails to clear matters up, as there they in fact concede that systems of provision may be bound by similar cultural factors operating on many such systems simultaneously, raising the obvious question of why the system of provision should be the most basic unit of analysis (Fine et al. 1996:62–72). Fine's lack of clarity here is in part defensible insofar as he views the answers to these questions as a matter of historical contingency, but if this were entirely so then we would also have to surrender any attempt to portray such studies as anything other than specialist historical research into consumption at a very particular time and place. Yet Fine is very explicit that his systems of provision approach is intended, despite its historicism, to be universalisable. This compels him to establish some criteria of comparison for linking up individual case studies of consumption that adopt the system of provision as their basic unit of analysis, and there is some attempt at this, but it is either unsystematic or reductive.

In its unsystematic form, it appears as the claim by Fine and colleagues (1996:64) that modern consumption can be understood if we simply concatenate enough studies of discrete systems of provision. This is unconvincing and positivistic because in linking the literature up it will always be necessary to make some simplifying assumptions for identifying internal agreements and disagreements and evaluative calls have to be made in relating these studies to one another if they are to add up to anything meaningful. Fine appears elsewhere to realise the problem though, which is that he has not accounted for what actually makes systems of provision *systems* at all. He thus seeks to establish a basic criterion of comparison for systems of provision across stretches of time and space in his recurring arguments that it is against the background of capitalist commodity form that consumption and all important social phenomena need to be understood (e.g. Fine 2002:50–54, 116–17, 227). For even having allowed in principle that production and consumption need to be considered together, which to his mind entails establishing "a commitment to bring culture and the economy together", nonetheless in practice everything comes back to the challenge of going "beyond … circuits of culture and to develop and employ a deeper political economy of capitalism" (Fine 2002:227).

The problem here is not simply that this limits Fine's analysis to capitalist societies, but that it also forces him to do so reductively. Fine overlooks what thinkers like Mauss and Polanyi came to realise, which is that even within capitalist societies the extent of commodity penetration varies greatly between societies and within societies over time. Polanyi argued that the key to understanding the social and political life of any society was by relating it to the constant, complex tension *between* the commodity sphere, centralised redistribution and variously socially patterned forms of reciprocity. Overlooking this critical tension leads into an empirical neglect of non-commodity forms of provision along with the loss of a perspective from which the commodity form can be critiqued by systematically attending to all the ways in which commodification is effectively diminished or actively resisted in the present, what precedents can be found for this in history, or how this might be effected in the future.

Fine clings very tenaciously to the teleological notion that comparing systems of provision is finally a matter only of attending to the effects on consumer practices of the implicitly inevitable penetration of the commodity form into previously uncommodified spheres of life, and this shows up most clearly in his desire to dismiss the qualitative difference between commodity exchange and reciprocity or gift-giving (Fine 2002:37–56). As with Bourdieu's more sophisticated version of this argument, discussed below, it has some limited use, allowing us to question the most naive and exoticising accounts of gift exchange. Nonetheless, Fine's analysis leads to a complete dismissal of the real, socially significant, qualitative distinctions that exchange may possess in certain times and places, which consumption calls systematically into play. When Fine is not simply dismissing the difference between market exchange and reciprocity as illusory in all times and places, which he never convincingly substantiates, he resorts to arguing that the effect of the commodity form of social organisation, once it has penetrated any given society, renders negligible the effect of such differences as may exist. This is certainly questionable in itself, as it marks an implicitly heteronomous evacuation of all critical possibilities for resisting the market, both actual and potential. So too is the non-sequitur he derives from it, which is that gift-giving and all other non-commodity forms have to be understood as both conceptually and practically *derivative* of the commodity form, thereby completely overlooking how they may be in genuine tension with it and meaningfully different from it.

It should be noted, in fairness, that Fine is not completely unaware of this problem and he has revised his earlier work on consumption in response to criticism about his earlier total oversight of non-commodity forms of provision. While this has had no effect on Fine's understanding of reciprocity, other than occasioning his reductive discussion of the theme that we have discussed above, it also leads him into an exploration of "public consumption" and state intervention in provisioning in the form of modern welfare state provisions (Fine 2002:176–210). His interesting discussion of welfare partially alleviates this problem if we read this as a historically-narrowed discussion of redistribution. More generally, Fine (2002:177) does in principle reject the idea that "public consumption is merely an alternative form of private consumption", which he considers not only analytically false but also too easily

conducive to neo-liberal or Third Way justifications for attempts to whittle away public service provision in favour of private providers. He even claims at one point that "[t]he nature of non-capitalist production, commodity or otherwise, cannot simply be read off from its dependence upon capitalism and, only rarely, can the latter be set aside as irrelevant and, if so, this needs itself to be explained" (Fine 2002:52). Nonetheless in practice Fine flatly ignores his own qualification on this important point and he nowhere explores how provision might follow a logic that is irreducible to that of *commodity* provision. Indeed throughout the book, and despite some clear statements like those mentioned here, Fine endeavours to substantiate the dubious claim that "capitalist commodity production is an appropriate starting point for examining modern consumption, even where such consumption does not itself necessarily depend directly upon (capitalist) commodity production" (Fine 2002:26), along with the assertion that in contemporary societies commodities "set the conditions for the presence and nature of those goods that are not within their immediate orbit and ambit" (Fine 2002:34).

Altogether more useful, for purposes of generalisation, is the sort of Polanyian understanding of economic systems discussed in the previous chapter. This allows us to view economies as invariably split between a number of basic "forms of integration": market, redistribution and reciprocity, sometimes also referred to as market, state and community. Systems of provision should certainly not be ignored as an important level of analysis, but should rather be grafted onto this more basic tripartite division of social and economic systems. In doing so, care should be taken to avoid any teleological presumption of inevitable historical development toward the market form, which naturalises what are rather momentous but historically contingent developments. Understanding the effects of commodification is vitally necessary, but for both descriptive and critical reasons the marketplace for commodities has always to be viewed as only one contingent form of integration. Doing so allows us to speak of commodification with some simultaneous sense of what commodification *pushes against* as it spreads, as well as what the alternatives are once it has.

2.3 The socially productive approach

2.3.1 Overview

Socially productive approaches to consumption draw attention to the symbolic or communicative dimension of consumer acts, viewing them as, most fundamentally, attempts to relate to other consumers. They are concerned in particular with how consumption allows people to integrate into social groups whose distinct class or status position is marked by their consumer habits and premised on shared understandings of what these habits signify in terms of the distribution both of material abundance and social status. Thorstein Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class* (2007 [1899]) remains the pivotal early articulation of this perspective, and

more recently Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1996 [1979]) has developed it into an analysis of the socially productive nature of modern consumption. Other interesting contributions to it can be found in Georg Simmel's (1971 [1904]) famous essay, "Fashion", along with Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood's *The World of Goods* (1996 [1979]).

Socially productive understandings of consumption assume a highly socialised social subject whose needs are inherently relational. Whether explicit or not, all such views appear indebted to Veblen. Veblen argued that social honour (usually discussed, inter-changeably, as "esteem" and sometimes as "respect"), which underpinned a system of what he called "class" distinctions that is no different from what is more commonly discussed today in Weberian terms as "status", is premised on the possession of leisure time and on visible consumer behaviour.[42] This behaviour, which Veblen famously discussed in terms of "conspicuous consumption", assumed especial importance in large modern cities in which relative anonymity leads to greater reliance on display for the attribution of status (Veblen 2007:61). Consumer behaviour enters into the existing disposition of social relationships in a dynamic fashion insofar as this behaviour helps to establish perpetually shifting group alliances based on demonstrable status, with the wealthy constantly migrating toward new honorific forms of consumption to the extent that those beneath them on the status ladder begin to successfully mirror their consumer practices.

Wealth is not, for Veblen, an end in itself but rather a means of signifying status. Likewise, the possession of things that indicate wealth is motivated not by the inherent satisfaction that these things might offer, but also, and indeed more fundamentally, by their symbolic value as honorific tokens. As Campbell (1989:49) notes, adopting this position was a "very necessary corrective to the naive materialism of the utilitarian tradition". Indeed, Veblen was essentially attempting to redirect economic inquiry toward the social foundations that it had methodologically bracketed out:

> Classical economic theory has not needed, for its own purposes, to specify why wealth is desired. This question is a sociological concern, and the answer is defined by the value system of the society. For economics, ultimate ends are simply given data. Veblen, however, made them his primary interest, thus shifting the emphasis from economic to sociological or institutional phenomena. (Davis 1943:282)

A very similar understanding of consumption emerges from Simmel's writing on fashion. Fashion here refers to the acquisitive striving for novel possessions that signal high social status, although more generally it refers to any conspicuous feature of social life that becomes subject to a system of rapid social change and the sort of creative destruction that this entails (Simmel 1971:306, 309, 314). In modernity, which Simmel (1971:301) dates from around the early 1800s, the fashion system has steadily advanced. It has, in so doing, "overstepped the bounds of its original domain, which comprised only personal externals, and has acquired an

increasing influence over taste, over theoretical convictions, and even over the moral foundations of life" (Simmel 1971:303–04). Thus in the modern world "[s]ocial forms, apparel, aesthetic judgment, the whole style of human expression, are constantly transformed by fashion" (Simmel 1971:299). Fashion serves to create both unity within a group as well as to separate members of such unified groups from all others through "[s]egregation by means of differences in clothing, manners, taste, etc." (Simmel 1971:301). As for Veblen, so too for Simmel, fashion is driven by the upper classes, with subordinates following through imitation. As soon as they catch up, fashion among the upper classes migrates to new forms in order to maintain social distinction (Simmel 1971:299). Nonetheless, unlike Veblen, Simmel acknowledges that the lifting of sumptuary codes and greater individualism have led to a certain decentralisation of fashion codes, though the diffusion of fashion is still constrained by what distinct financial means permit (Simmel 1971:299–301). Simmel also differs from Veblen in allowing for what are sometimes now called "trickle-up" forms of fashion that are pioneered at the low-prestige levels of the social order (Simmel 1971:311).

Within the dedicated literature on consumption undoubtedly the most influential single work has been Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction*. *Distinction* has indeed become a seminal social science work far beyond the restricted domain of consumption studies too insofar as it is commonly regarded as a pivotal step in the rupture with structuralism in the social sciences. The book is presented as a study of taste, understood as "manifested preferences", and the embodiment of taste in consumer "life-styles" through "cultural consumption" (Bourdieu 1996:54–56, 175–76). While perplexingly never mentioning Veblen or Simmel, Bourdieu (1996:56) is, exactly like them, interested in the social context of taste, and particularly in the manner in which "every sort of taste … unites and separates. Being the product of the conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence, it unites all those who are the product of similar conditions while distinguishing them from all others". The book elaborates in minute detail and with a great deal of methodological sophistication the anthropological and sociological insights already largely formed in Bourdieu's previous *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (2013 [1977]).[43] As discussed in greater detail below, both books are ultimately inquiries into the strategies of social and political domination aimed at maintaining inequality of status and wealth. The central intuition in both works is that the cultural sphere, which Bourdieu implicitly understood through what I have been calling a localised understanding of the cultural domain that he associated in particular with ritual and aesthetic practices, can serve as a screen that masks forms of action governed by a desire for domination by making such action appear *disinterested*.

Bourdieu believed that kinship groups, as well as classes (which included what he called "class fractions"), possessed their own systems of largely unconscious dispositions that he discussed in terms of "*habitus*". In *Distinction*, he speaks of how such dispositions are objectified in "life-styles", and he attempts to demonstrate how lifestyles entrench class stratification (Bourdieu 1996:172–78). This stratification can be approximately gauged in the form of roughly systematic, unequal possession of material wealth or of status, which are the social markers of

value that Bourdieu (1996:114; 2000:242) usually discusses in terms of economic, social and cultural "capital". Cultural practices have a special place in the explanatory framework developed in *Distinction*, where they are equated with aesthetic value-creation in general, and come for Bourdieu to be that through which the social domination that accompanies the accumulation of all forms of capital is collectively misrecognised. In Bourdieu's (1996:250–52; 2000:242) terms, aesthetic practices, like ritual practices, unconsciously transmute all forms of capital into "symbolic capital". Bourdieu (1996:250) thus says at one point that we have to risk being thought of as barbarous and pose the question of what culture is *for*, and answers that it is "a simple social artefact, a particular form of fetishism" and a disguised territory of struggle. This struggle plays out in a ceaseless race for distinction between members of the middle and upper classes, as well as within the various class fractions of these groups, and Bourdieu aims to explain the basic logic underpinning what Proust (quoted in Bourdieu 1996:66) called "the infinitely varied art of marking distances". At the inter-class level, the struggle for distinction resembles a perpetual race in which the gap between classes required for maintaining distinction is marked by acquiring objects and consuming them in ways unavailable to lower-placed classes, which usually sets up cycles of competitive consumption and fashionable innovation that have no definitive end (Bourdieu 1996:160–61, 251–52).

Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood's seminal study *The World of Goods* has also become a seminal work on consumption, although its impact has been limited to the dedicated consumption literature. Douglas and Isherwood develop the anti-utilitarianism implicit in Veblen's and Simmel's discussions of consumption by discussing it as a *communicative* form of action. They therefore reject materialist explanations of consumption as failing to conceive of people as social beings (Douglas and Isherwood 1996:79–80). Thus they argue that

> [g]oods that minister to physical needs – food or drink – are no less carriers of meaning than ballet or poetry. Let us put an end to the widespread and misleading distinction between goods that sustain life and health and others that service the mind and heart—spiritual goods. That false distinction leaves a mass of unnecessary luxuries to be accounted for by a mixture of consumer gullibility and sinister advertising. (Douglas and Isherwood 1996:49)

Outside of this interest in the communicative dimension of consumption, shared by all socially productive approaches, they strike off in their own direction. Consumption, for them, is tied to production, but both are tied up to a larger human need to relate to one another through exchange in the broadest sense of this term. More explicitly than Veblen did, they take the methodological position that the problem of consumption has to be placed precisely at the level at which formal economics apparently has very little to say, being limited, as it deliberately is, to questions about how variables like changing prices and incomes might be expected to affect demand and generally avoiding more basic questions about the formation of "preferences" (Douglas and Isherwood 1996:3–19; 26–35, 68–73).[44] At the same time, they go beyond Veblen's frame of reference by highlighting the fact that consumption is part of the everyday life of poor

and rich alike, thereby shifting the emphasis away from *luxury* consumption (Douglas and Isherwood 1996: xxi, 68). They also argue that *competitive* consumption is historically peculiar, and consumption can just as easily serve to unify social groups in a genuinely solidaristic fashion, although as the argument runs its course this current of thought quickly evaporates (Douglas and Isherwood 1996: xxi, 21–25). For Douglas and Isherwood (1996:62) it is only a small step from rightly acknowledging that "consumption is a field in which exclusion can be applied, usurpation attempted, or withdrawal enforced by private individuals against one another" to concluding categorically that "[u]ltimately, consumption is about power". The real question, for them, is not about the presence of power but rather its modalities of exercise or the means by which it is resisted.

When working out their own theory of consumption in greater detail, Douglas and Isherwood (1996:51–52) therefore drop their early mention of how consumption may be motivated by a desire to share and focus squarely on apparently more hard-edged and critically pertinent questions of power. This too turns out to be about forging social connections, but here sharing is regarded as purely instrumental. They argue that power is gained through social alignments, and time-saving technologies free people up to form these connections, as do technologies that increase people's communicative reach, making consumer items that facilitate this spatial and temporal social availability of the self central to the exercise of social power (Douglas and Isherwood 1996:63–92). Goods that extend one's availability differ between societies and also across time, but contemporary Western examples would include expenditure on household labour-saving devices or services, cars and travel, and telephonic communication, which sustains their technological thesis, although they also mention such things as expenditure on gifts and on specialist services relating to finance, education and the like as important investments (Douglas and Isherwood 1996:87–89, 112–14, 120–21). Their overall argument is that social power is enhanced through such forms of consumption, which free people up from repetitive tasks and extend their social connections by allowing them access to specialised information, in turn also creating opportunities for financial gain. This is a virtuous cycle from which the poor are excluded, and in this manner consumption choices help to shore up class divisions. Although Bourdieu's work scarcely informs their study at all, Douglas and Isherwood's discussion of the social context of consumption clearly bears many similarities to Bourdieu's understanding of how social, cultural and economic capital reinforce one another through a sort of mutual complementarity and exchangeability, while also tending to share Bourdieu's emphasis on the instrumentality of consumer choice.

2.3.2 Assessment

Socially productive accounts of consumption develop ideas pioneered by Veblen, extending these in order to place consumption at the heart of their accounts of social change. At an ontological level, they focus on the potential for domination through the creation of social distance in acts of consumption. They usefully explore the manner in which consumption calls

power dynamics into play, even while losing sight of the ways in which consumer acts may not be best explained through such one-sided understandings of social power. This ontological framing of consumer action is also tied up with a useful attempt to understand its importance in a range of human societies, but here too it appears that particular features of modern Western societies are projected back onto human history in other societies in question-begging ways. I will consider these problems, especially as they reappear in the work of Douglas and Isherwood, before going on to consider in detail Bourdieu's more sophisticated attempt to extend the insights found in socially productive approaches to consumption.

Ontological assumptions: Instrumental and material consumption. For the purposes of the argument developed here, the most promising feature of this tradition is Veblen's (2007:22, 25) argument that the pursuit and maintenance of status provides the basic motivation for material accumulation and the consumption practices that socially signal the wealth thus accumulated. Those who fall short of the minimum level of respectable consumption among their peers, Veblen (2007:25) believed, forfeit their claim to status, and as a result

> they suffer also in their own esteem, since the usual basis of self-respect is the respect accorded by one's neighbours…. So soon as the possession of property becomes the basis of popular esteem, therefore, it becomes also a requisite to that complacency which we call self-respect. In any community where goods are held in severalty it is necessary… that an individual should possess as large a portion of goods as others with whom he is accustomed to class himself; and it is extremely gratifying to possess something more than others.

Later socially productive approaches to consumption focus on this desire to surpass others in order to understand and expose social domination. They focus on the connection between taste and consumption on the one hand and social distinction on the other, which Simmel also drew attention to. Bourdieu's apparent debt to Veblen, though not directly acknowledged in the works of his I have considered, is impossible to miss, not least in the question that framed his research project as well as the answers he would provide, despite the considerable originality and sophistication of these answers. Consider this passing statement by Veblen, which in retrospect can be seen as a forerunner to Bourdieu's investigation into the social grounds of taste:

> The superior gratification derived from the use and contemplation of costly and supposedly beautiful products is, commonly, in great measure a gratification of our sense of costliness masquerading under the name of beauty. Our higher appreciation of the superior article is an appreciation of its superior honorific character, much more frequently than it is an unsophisticated appreciation of its beauty. The requirement of conspicuous wastefulness is not commonly present, consciously, in our canons of taste, but it is none the less present as a constraining norm selectively shaping and sustaining our sense of what is beautiful, and guiding our discrimination with respect to what may legitimately be approved as beautiful and what may not. (Veblen 2007:86)

As we saw above, Simmel (1971:303–04) also draws passing attention to taste, which he believed had come in modernity to be subsumed into the fashion system. He believed the social logic of consumption resided in the simultaneous pursuit of membership in one class and distinction from another through manipulation of the fashion system, in a manner that also clearly anticipated Bourdieu:

> Fashion … is a product of class distinction and operates like a number of other forms, honor especially, the double function of which consists in revolving within a given circle and at the same time emphasizing it as separate from others. Just as the frame of a picture characterizes the work of art inwardly as a coherent, homogeneous, independent entity and at the same time outwardly severs all direct relations with the surrounding space … so honor owes its character, and above all its moral rights, to the fact that the individual in his personal honor at the same time represents and maintains that of his social circle and his class. (Simmel 1971:297)

Douglas and Isherwood's general framing of the problem of consumption innovates by arguing explicitly that (i) consumption is a form of communicative action that makes cultural categories visible and that, more specifically, (ii) the enhancement of social power through consumption is best advanced by technological means. When discussing cultural marking, Douglas and Isherwood view modern consumption as a form of meaningful *ritual* comparable with ritual all other human societies, and provide an interesting description of its basic communicative purpose. Here their approach is somewhat more abstract than Turner's understanding of ritual as the temporary suspension of social rules, and can be better thought of as an anthropological analogue of Arendt's philosophical discussion of the necessity of production and consumption (in the specific form of what Arendt calls "work" and "use") for the creation of "worldliness":

> The main problem of social life is to pin down meanings so that they stay still for a little time. Without some conventional ways of selecting and fixing agreed meanings, the minimum consensual basis of society is missing. As for tribal society, so too for us: rituals serve to contain the drift of meanings. Rituals are conventions that set up visible public definitions…. To manage without rituals is to manage without clear meanings and possibly without memories. Some are purely verbal rituals, vocalized, unrecorded, but they fade on the air and hardly help to limit the interpretative scope. More effective rituals use material things, and the more costly the ritual trappings, the stronger we can assume the intention to fix the meanings to be. Goods, in this perspective, are ritual adjuncts; consumption is a ritual process whose primary function is to make sense of the inchoate flux of events. (Douglas and Isherwood 1996:43)

Framing the significance of consumption in this manner of course has the same drawbacks that it does in Arendt, which is to exaggerate the necessity of material culture for attaining cultural coherence, while there seems no obvious reason outside of unreflective prejudice to assume that a lack of material advancement limits any group to a less worldly – that is, meaningful and distinctly human – existence, as Arendt appears to assume. It nonetheless is a vital step toward

accounting for consumption as a meaningful, communicative practice with some very general commonalities discernable in all human societies.

Douglas and Isherwood argue that material goods, in addition to their physical usefulness as nourishment, shelter and the like, are treated as a "nonverbal medium for the human creative faculty". As they use it, the term "creative" is not employed in any defined sense and apparently signifies no more than agency, and particularly the capacity to freely forge instrumentally beneficial social relationships (Douglas and Isherwood 1996:40, 108). This is symptomatic of a broader limitation of their outlook, which is that, as with Bourdieu, the concern with power and instrumentality, though certainly necessary in some form for maintaining a critical perspective on consumption, fully eclipses all interest in the possible expressivity of consumption. Unlike Bourdieu, however, Douglas and Isherwood choose to yoke their account of the connection between consumption and social change to a technological argument. The result is an analysis of the social functions of consumption that is certainly interesting but appears far too parochial for a theory of consumer action that aims at achieving a high degree of generalisability. They hypothesise that the social groups highest placed on the social hierarchy will invariably not only have the most leisure time but will also possess the most extensive social connections, and that both of these are the source of their social power. If indeed this is true of Great Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, which is the main source of their data, it nonetheless seems implausible that this can be universalised in the manner that they believe it can (Douglas and Isherwood 1996:63, 121–30). While they mention belonging to elite clubs and well-connected social groups in passing, their main item of cross-cultural evidence for this is an argument about spatially and temporally extended consumption patterns creating more beneficial marriage opportunities. Though marriage clearly does act as a major determinant of wealth and social status in most human societies, it is at best unobvious how this provides sufficient evidence to establish their general point about power. With marriage as with their other examples, social power in broad historical perspective is, after all, premised on all kinds of variables other than being socially well-connected. Not the least of these being such things as the possibility of politically mobilising large numbers of people, yet Douglas and Isherwood have almost nothing to say about this absolutely fundamental form of power.[45]

Douglas and Isherwood appear to be driven toward a technological explanation for consumption because, for them, working within the tradition of British social anthropology, cultural explanations of social change are question-begging and more hard-edged explanations are required. This is generally implicit but is made explicit in their discussion of Weber, where they flatly reject his or any other attempt to explain the emergence of social relationships by appeal to independent cultural variables, as is the case in Weber's famous argument for the Protestant Ethic forming the "spirit" of capitalism (Douglas and Isherwood 1996:16). Bourdieu, as we will see in greater detail below, takes this a good deal further than Douglas and Isherwood, who still view social action as agentic in the minimal sense of intentional action. Bourdieu's discussion of *habitus* highlights the more unreflective side of human action, which may be of some limited use for explaining certain isolated practices. However, it suggests such

a pronounced degree of automation across the entire spectrum of human social activity that individual intentionality and even conscious thought is reduced to an entirely auxiliary role when accounting for social change, and this suffers from the same shortcomings as the accounts of systematic ideological delusion found in production of consumption approaches.

Methodological assumptions: Unclear historical variables. Despite the very necessary sociological reframing of supposedly economic questions that Veblen helped to pioneer, which amounts to an early rejection of economism, there are a great number of problems with his overall position that have not escaped his critics. Veblen's historical arguments are impressionistic at best and fanciful at worst, and he effectively reads the competitive nature of social life in the US back onto all of human history (Davis 1944:283–84). Veblen also assumes a centre of taste in modern societies, whereas taste might also be dispersed (Campbell 1989:54–55; Sassatelli 2007:70). These problems, to varying degrees, show up again in the other writers taking this approach to consumption. Douglas and Isherwood's attempt to generalise from their study of Britain to other societies seems strained at best, and as I argue below, Bourdieu was consistently vague about the terms in which we might generalise from his research on Kabylia (where he studied the social life of the Kabyle, a Berber group in contemporary Algeria) and France to other societies. It is perhaps for this reason that many researchers have failed to duplicate Bourdieu's empirical findings in other societies, or have done so with at best very mixed results (Peterson and Kern 1996:900–906; Stillerman 2015:95–101). The issue of taste dispersal in modern societies is also problematic for Bourdieu. While many expressions of taste may indeed map onto a class hierarchy, there is an important sense in which tastes in modern societies are also simply too fragmented to be exhaustively explained by any single hierarchical scheme in which taste trickles down through innovation at the top and imitation below.[46] It is for this reason that terms like "sub-culture" have appeared in cultural studies. To some extent Bourdieu's division of classes into distinct "fractions" solves this problem (Stillerman 2015:92–95), but Bourdieu is still generally uninterested in the manner in which variables like ethnic or religious belonging are fundamental to the formation of consumer taste, even while seeming to allow in principle for such variables to form part of the background for the formation of class – and therefore, for him, also of taste (see, for example, Bourdieu 1996:102).

2.3.3 Pierre Bourdieu's praxis-theoretical approach to consumption

In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, which combines essays from the 1950s and 1960s, Bourdieu had already signalled the break with structuralism that *Distinction* would further advance by noting how people consistently flouted long-established social rules, sometimes totally abandoning these rules but more often manipulating them. *Outline of a Theory of Practice* aims to uncover the logic of this seemingly unpredictable behaviour, which leads Bourdieu into an attempt to excavate the workings of domination in what he calls "pre-capitalist" societies, particularly in their economic life. A major focus of *Outline of a Theory of Practice* is the argument that what tend in the anthropological literature to be called "gift economies" are concealed – in his

terminology, "misrecognised" – apparatuses of domination, and the failure of social scientists to penetrate appearances and grasp this reveals only the naive "enchantment felt by the observer of enchanted social relations" (Bourdieu 2013:194). Bourdieu (2013:5–8, 171–96) claims that gift economies based on reciprocity require for their sustenance a society-wide self-misunderstanding, in which self-interested calculation, competition and exploitation is allowed to be passed off as ritual observation or generosity only by the lapse of time in exchange between gift and counter-gift. Beyond simply creating what he derides as a wasteful "collectively concerted make-believe", the social institution of the gift economy conceals the "symbolic violence" of its constitutive practices (Bourdieu 2013:173, 190–191). As Bourdieu (2013:192; emphasis in original) explains:

> The gift, generosity, conspicuous distribution — the extreme case of which is the potlatch — are operations of social alchemy which may be observed whenever the direct application of overt physical or economic violence is negatively sanctioned, and which tend to bring about the transmutation of economic capital into symbolic capital. Wastage of money, energy, time, and ingenuity is the very essence of the social alchemy through which an interested relationship is transmuted into a disinterested, gratuitous relationship, overt domination into misrecognized, "socially recognized" domination, in other words, *legitimate authority*".

Bourdieu's background assumption in writing this is that here, as in all other domains, rules are manipulated in accordance with the objective interests that actors possess. Thus the "juridical or customary rule is never more than a *secondary principle* of the determination of practices, intervening when the primary principle, interest, fails" (Bourdieu 2013:76; emphasis in original). At a methodological level, however, Bourdieu (2013:72–87) is not advocating rational choice theory or methodological individualism because, ontologically, individual interests are indexed to those of a group and because there are objective, historically-constituted structures that impose constraints on how individuals and groups interact. Methodologically, Bourdieu also does not want to be thought of as a determinist in either the structuralist or functionalist senses, as knowing the commonly-sanctioned rules of any given society is a poor predictor of what actually happens at an everyday level, which he calls the "world of practicality" (Bourdieu 2013:76). In the attempt to vault over these hurdles, which together he considers forms of misleading "objectivism", Bourdieu (2013:72–87; 2000:172–175) also seeks to avoid the voluntarism that he associates with "subjectivist" methodologies, especially insofar as these are informed by phenomenological or ethnomethodological epistemological orientations. The problem with subjectivism, for Bourdieu, is that it overlooks constraints on action that are often invisible to social actors when making choices.

In order to pull off this balancing act between objectivism and subjectivism, Bourdieu introduces "*habitus*" as a basic term of art, which he adapts from a great variety of similar concepts but nonetheless develops in a very original way.[47] Indeed Bourdieu had started to speak of *habitus* in an unsystematic fashion even before *Outline of a theory of Practice*, and it

would remain at the centre of all of his work by forming the explanatory axis around which his theory of action revolves (Joas and Knöbl 2011:10–11; Maton 2010:56). Bourdieu's (especially 2013:72–87; 1996:169–178) discussion of *habitus* in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* and *Distinction* amounts to a complex argument that the objective world of historically-determined structures and the subjective world of choice are mediated through a largely unconscious cognitive and motivational framework that people acquire through their socialization, especially in the earlier phases of life. The *habitus* can be thought of as fundamentally pre-reflexive knowledge, though Bourdieu generally prefers to speak of "dispositions", which are simultaneously cognitive and corporeal, instead of knowledge. *Habitus* is an individual attribute, but it is formed and constantly renewed collectively, which is why Bourdieu spoke of *habitus* as the possession of groups – usually kinship groups, classes or class fractions.

Each group-specific *habitus* present in a given society is objectified in a corresponding "life-style" (Bourdieu 1996:172). A lifestyle, for Bourdieu, cannot lucidly be apprehended in terms of the expressive values its adherents profess through judgements of taste. While always presented as free choice, expressions of taste are invariably a mode of unconsciously affirming class position, which is itself an objectively-determined condition and never a choice (Bourdieu 1996:174–78). By understanding professions of taste in this disenchanted manner it becomes apparent that a lifestyle is a basically misrecognised, because mythologised or aestheticised, set of practices through which social difference and distinction are reproduced. The channels through which the actions and judgements peculiar to distinct lifestyles run are carved out in advance by the basic structure of group or class *interests* in any given society (Bourdieu 2013:85–86). These interests are in negotiating certain social "fields" so as to secure maximal advantage (Bourdieu 1996:112).

Fields became the main intra-societal level of analysis for Bourdieu when discussing what he considered to be differentiated societies in *Distinction* and other works subsequent to *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Calhoun 1993:77). A field is a historically structured, inherently relational domain of social practice. As Bourdieu (in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:97; emphasis in original) explains,

> I could twist Hegel's formula and say that *the real is the relational*: what exist in the social world are relations – not interactions between agents or intersubjective ties between individuals, but objective relations which exist "independently of individual consciousness or will", as Marx said.

Examples of fields include: sport, music, food, fashion, theatre, decoration, politics, language, science, religion, law, the state, the church, political parties, unions; even housing construction and consultancy (Bourdieu 1996:153, 208, 233, 235; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:94, 97, 102).

This advantage to be gained in all fields is conceived as the possession of "capital". When speaking of capital, Bourdieu is in effect discussing what can be called value (Grenfell 2010:22; Lambek 2013:145), although he himself does not generally frame it in these terms. Bourdieu

(e.g. 1996:114; 2000:242) most often discusses capital or value in terms of economic, social and cultural forms, although his preferred terminology and his overall counting of different forms of capital is, like his designation of fields, quite strikingly erratic (Joas and Knöbl 1996:17–18).[48] While rejecting any naturalistic understanding of social fields, Bourdieu constantly compares these fields to natural force fields and capital to energy (e.g. in Bourdieu 1996:113, 2000:169; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:101, 106–07). Capital positions one within a field insofar as its possession is what allows one to dominate or to resist domination, with the different forms of capital assuming greater importance in some fields than in others (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:98). A person's economic capital is measured by their possession of financial wealth or any goods convertible into money in a given society (Bourdieu 1997 [1986]:47). Membership in a relatively durable social group that allows members to claim for themselves the status and the benefits associated with that group allows people to amass social capital (Bourdieu 1997:51). Social capital is "a capital of social connections, honourability and respectability" (Bourdieu 1996:122). Cultural capital refers to the possession of material objects on which a high cultural value is placed, or to high social status gained through the possession of habitual dispositions allowing people to consume goods in a manner that confers social distinction on them (Bourdieu 1997:47–50).

When the advantages that the possession of capital – whatever its consensual, objective forms happen to be – confers on its bearers are mistakenly understood as legitimate rewards for innate competence or superiority, we can also say that these forms of capital function as symbolic capital and allow for symbolic domination or symbolic violence.[49] Bourdieu's reasoning here is in fact only an inch off of the ideology critiques of consumption considered above. Although he speaks of ideology in *Distinction* as "an illusion consistent with interest" (Bourdieu 1996:74), elsewhere Bourdieu (2000:181; 2013:188) tried to avoid speaking of symbolic action in terms of ideology because he believed that the most important practices in the social world are not consciously learned or co-ordinated. Whether we think of it as ideology or not, symbolic capital is a domain of fundamental illusions about the social world that does very much the same explanatory work as the concept of ideology. Sahlins observes of Marx that he failed to register much of the anthropological complexity of human life because he was disinclined to think of humans as symbolically connected outside of a net of illusion (commodity fetishism). So too with Bourdieu, who sees the symbolic domain as an area of practice in which reality is always misleadingly refracted and as such "misrecognised"; a reality that, by implication, is only truly knowable without symbols.

While presented as an anti-Kantian critique of aesthetic judgement, *Distinction* is more fundamentally an attempt to explain why and how members of distinct social classes – situated, in *Distinction*, primarily by occupational group, which plays much the same role as kinship group in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* – make similar consumption choices, without appealing simply to disparities in income (Honneth 1995a:193; Bourdieu 1996:176–77). When answering the "how" question, the most fundamental mechanism Bourdieu points to is not so much the conversion of economic into cultural capital and vice-versa, as the conversion of

cultural capital into symbolic capital through the cultural work of aesthetic legitimation. He does, however, touch in passing on the direct conversion of economic into symbolic capital in places in ways that resonate with his dismissal of gift economies in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* as misunderstood symbolic forms that conceal economic interest and perpetuate domination. For instance, Bourdieu (1996:55) argues that "[e]conomic power is first and foremost a power to keep economic necessity at arm's length. This is why it universally asserts itself by the destruction of riches, conspicuous consumption, squandering, and every form of gratuitous luxury". Addressing the deeper reasons for this state of affairs, *Distinction* amounts to a long argument that the formation of lifestyles, and the consumer practices that constitute these lifestyles, are guided by an unconscious impulse to perpetuate class domination.

Ontological assumptions: unconscious agency and motivational reductionism. We have seen that, for Bourdieu, the basic explanatory principle for what happens in the social world is *habitus*, an individually embodied but group-specific set of dispositions that tend to remain unconscious and that needn't ever become conscious for social life to proceed as it does. We should add here that Bourdieu views *habitus* as "a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions" in the form of complex classificatory "generative schemes" that all social actors internalise (Bourdieu 1996:170, 175). It is precisely their unconsciousness that makes classificatory schemes so effective. As Bourdieu (1996:466) explains, "[t]he schemes of the *habitus*, the primary forms of classification, owe their specific efficacy to the fact that they function below the level of consciousness and language, beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will."

For the purposes of the present discussion, the most obvious benefit of speaking of *habitus* is clearly to curb any naive voluntarism that "culturalist" or interpretative social science epistemologies might knowingly or unknowingly endorse. By thinking in terms of *habitus* we can, perhaps, better grasp the constraints on action that owe something to unreflective assumptions that are inculcated into people in the course of socialisation in all human societies. Taylor (1995:169–80), for instance, has argued that *habitus* is a useful concept for getting around an overly intellectualised account of human knowledge and action, although the better part of what Bourdieu has to say about *habitus* is exceedingly hard to reconcile with Taylor's own views of agency, in which the intentionality of a consciously reflecting individual or deliberating group are always minimal conditions for the exercise of agency. But even assuming that there is a meaningful sense in which habitual dispositions complement agency, we can nonetheless question how far this idea can be pushed as a grounding explanatory principle for a critical account of social change while also considering what might get lost when doing so.

Bourdieu, we have said, believes that focusing on the workings of the *habitus* allows him to steer between what he views as the dead ends of objectivism and subjectivism. It is not unfair to argue, however, that Bourdieu really does not abandon objectivism and simply pushes it in an original direction. Bourdieu reductively associates subjectivism with a shallow, empirically

vacuous voluntarism, and the most he concedes to it is the idea that people invariably form complex taxonomic social schemas (his "generative schemes") that affect their action. Bourdieu is therefore no crude behaviourist, but this concession amounts to very little because such schemas are constantly reduced by him to elaborations of habitual dispositions moulded all the way down by an objective class structure.[50] Alongside Bourdieu's efforts to avoid excessive subjectivism comes a certain scorn for extended ontological reflection on subjectivity, but in practice this does not lead so much to his successful evasion of sociologically irrelevant ontological assumptions as to the covert importation of an ontologically reductive view of the human subject into the heart of his sociological project.

In setting out his understanding of social practices, Bourdieu appears to view acting subjects as entities who, when acting, opt for one or another side of a paired meaningful dichotomy of choices in accordance with the workings of social power. Contrary to orthodox structuralism, this is not the power, contained within an entire culture or linguistic system and backed up by tradition and existing authority, through which individual evaluation is consistently channelled in a pre-determined direction. Rather, it is the power released in the struggle between kinship groups or classes and class fractions, understood as groups whose members have widely overlapping interests. These common interests dispose their individual members to manipulate signifying systems and the "principles of differentiation" they contain – such as high/low, rich/poor, beautiful/ugly, vulgar/distinguished, and so on, depending on the field of action in question – to their advantage. Doing so allows them to gain capital, and the status accompanying this capital, for themselves, while depriving others of it. In *Distinction* Bourdieu argues that group members do this, for the most part, not by consciously aligning their actions with one another but rather by endorsing classification systems that associate the favoured terms in such dichotomies with objects and modes of consuming these objects that are beyond the reach of other classes. Because members of these groups share the same *habitus*, the sum of individual choices adds up to strongly patterned, group-specific behaviour even in the absence of conscious individual choice or collective deliberation (Bourdieu 1996:77, 172–73).

We can, however, very legitimately question (i) whether all the complex activity that constitutes social life can be usefully explained as generally reposing on such dispositions alone, which Bourdieu believes to be conscious only in exceptional cases. We also need to question (ii) whether the invariable effect of historically significant social action, unconscious or not, is to augment or resist domination, or whether the presence of qualitatively distinct modes of social interaction consistently complicates or discredits such generalisations. Bourdieu is never an uninteresting thinker, but his views on both of these issues are strikingly reductive. This does not mean at all that they are to be dismissed, but rather that we should use them with far more caution than Bourdieu and many of his followers generally do.

Addressing the question of the unconscious background of social behaviour, especially in the context of lifestyle consumption as discussed in *Distinction*, we might start by considering Bourdieu's understanding of production and consumption. Doing so raises a potential

challenge to the position defended in Chapter 1, where I argued that if we assume action to normally be intentional then consumption precedes production in the order of explanation. In Bourdieu's understanding of *habitus* we are offered an explanatory principle that implies that in the general run of social life both production and consumption are guided by unconscious ends. Intentional action is necessary, for Bourdieu, only in exceptional cases, that is, where domination is not automatically secured by members of all classes simply obeying the urgings of their habitual dispositions. Although he offers what would normally be called a "trickle-down" model of mimetic consumer practices, Bourdieu (1996:249, n.28) himself rejects this term because he believes it implies intentional strategising:

> The fallacy in the "trickle-down" model is that it reduces to an intentional pursuit of difference what is in fact an objective, automatic effect of the differentiation of the consumers' conditions and dispositions and the differentiation of the field of production, which may or may not be intentionally reinforced.

On the side of consumption, Bourdieu is very clear that the choice of a particular lifestyle at all is a *choice* in name and appearance only. The schemas through which coherent lifestyle choices are made are really generated by *habitus*, and *habitus* is itself generated and constantly regenerated through the objective struggles between distinct social groups for domination through the exclusionary accumulation of capital (Bourdieu 1996:175–76). On the productive side, things are much the same. When speaking of production, which he usually associates with the market, or of labour, which he often understands in a wider social sense, Bourdieu (1996:230, 466) designates the making of both material and symbolic goods and understands this too as activity that is consonant with the workings of *habitus* and the pursuit of domination.

Bourdieu's (1996:230) point is that, because the logic of both production and consumption is indexed, through the promptings of *habitus*, to that of a more basic class struggle, there is in fact no need to understand the relationship between production and consumption as either a case of production imposing its logic on consumption or of production being driven by "a conscious endeavour to serve the consumers' needs". In other words, Bourdieu (1996:230–32) tries to steer between both the productivist manipulationism that I have associated above with production of consumption perspectives and the alternative position that I have defended through a development of Sahlins's position on the primacy of consumption over production in all intentional action. This, at any rate, is Bourdieu's explicit position, even though he himself sometimes offers arguments for both of the positions he is trying to surpass. He sometimes speaks, in a manner reminiscent of Marx and Marcuse, of producers manufacturing needs (e.g. Bourdieu 1996:310), while at other times acknowledging that producers engage in research in order to match their products to the existing needs of consumers (e.g. Bourdieu 1996:223–24), neither of which fit easily with one another or with the more basic assertion that production and consumption are normally unconscious activities driven by habitual dispositions.

As *habitus* is not visible and has to be inferred, there is no way to empirically prove or disprove Bourdieu's arguments, but we might critically consider what they practically entail. We should note at the outset that, in speaking of both production and consumption, Bourdieu usually has market products in mind. Assuming that Bourdieu's understanding of these things is consistent with his more general account of social action, we must infer that both market manipulation and market research are only occasionally necessary tools to align production and consumption. In the normal run of social life in all societies producers would be able to float viable products onto the market based on nothing more than an intuitive sense for what will sell that never need be reflected on, while consumers generally consume only on the basis of what they inarticulately feel will satisfy them. I have already said enough in Chapter 1 about the intentionality of consumer action, and social action more generally, to make it clear that I find this implausible as a general explanation on the consumption side, but here it is worth mentioning that this appeal to inarticulate intuition seems to misrepresent production too. Firstly, at least applied to post-World War Northern societies like that which Bourdieu studied in *Distinction*, his preferred account of production seems to render as perfectly superfluous market research, despite Bourdieu himself mentioning this in passing as an interesting feature of how firms behave on markets. If people really did usually behave in the social world with nothing more than an intuitive "feel for the game" in all but the most exceptional circumstances (Bourdieu 2000:151), this ever-expanding activity of market research would be wholly wasted expenditure of time and resources, not unlike what Bourdieu views as the colossal charade of gift-giving and ritual in "pre-capitalist" societies.

More importantly, Bourdieu's position tells us nothing about why, in any capitalist or market society, some products succeed and others fail. This oversight is not peculiar to Bourdieu at all, and it is indeed only by wholly ignoring the existence of market failures that much of the consumption literature can so confidently advance the claims it does. At a deeper level, what gets completely forgotten is that in the market domain, no less than in any other social sphere, the presence of contingency plays havoc with any deterministic or functionalist account of action.[51] Recent studies on product failure, for example, differ widely in their methodologies, but generally conclude that new products fail between 20 and 50 per cent of the time, with some variation between specific industries (for a critical overview of the product failure literature, see Castellion and Markham 2013). Moreover, this is itself usually after a long process of fully conscious planning and experimentation called "product development". Precise figures here should not be taken too seriously but, for instance, one study reports that "of an initial 100 new product ideas generated, only 15 ideas survive the screening phase, six ideas survive the product development phase, three ideas survive the testing phase, and only two ideas survive the commercialization phase" (Kortge and Okonkwo 1989:301). What is going on at every step here is a fully conscious, instrumental adaptation of production to the needs of consumers. Of course, market research and product development of this nature are historically peculiar, but it seems at least very plausible to assume that something analogous, if not as elaborated, exists in other forms of market society, wherever producers are not

sufficiently familiar with the intended consumers of their products to know in advance how to adapt their activities to consumer needs.

Not only is Bourdieu's attempt to portray production and consumption as ordinarily habitual, unconscious activities unconvincing, but so too is his explanation of these practices as invariably motivated by struggles for or against *domination*. Critical social theory can permit itself to hold back from assuming that social life is fully explicable in terms of domination without in the process swinging to the other extreme of an anodyne "culturalism" in which such dynamics are rendered completely invisible. It is important to note in this regard that Bourdieu's overall picture of the social world spanning the various fields he identifies – including but also far exceeding fields of market production and consumption – is one of *conflict*, with members of different groups pursuing their interests to gain advantage over one another. Advantage comes through amassing the various forms of capital in what are always portrayed as encounters with zero-sum outcomes, and to have a position in the social world is always to have a position in a hierarchy determined by the extent of one's various capitals. This struggle over capital, which we have said is Bourdieu's way of discussing the pursuit of value, is not viewed by Bourdieu as one possible historical configuration of social life. For him, this is the very stuff of social life, and any suggestion that things could be otherwise is perpetually mocked as perfect naivety.

The central claim in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* is that the pursuit of honour and the ritual life of society, as embodied, for instance, in marriage ceremonies, is a form of self-interested calculation that is socially misrecognised as disinterested self-expression. *Distinction* is a similar attempt at unmasking, only the discussion of morality and ritual is replaced by one of aesthetics, in both the high-cultural sense and at the everyday level of expressions of taste in consumer action. The basic argument is that any adoption of an "aesthetic" position – a position of purported disinterestedness, where activities are presented as ends in themselves and unconstrained by necessity – on the things of the world is fraudulent (Bourdieu 1996:54–56). The aesthetic domain is conceived so widely here that aesthetic judgements are mobilised in all manner of social practices: not only art, but also "cosmetics, clothing or home decoration" and other forms of commodity consumption, along with "eating habits, use of credit, fertility, political opinion, religion etc." (Bourdieu 1996:57, 113).

What all these disparate things appear to have in common is only the negative fact that they fall outside of what Bourdieu believes are the independent variables of class: basically, "volume and structure of capital", although he also allowed that such things as "sex, age, marital status, place of residence etc." could enter into the definition of a class insofar as these variables help, within specific societies, to form the basic axes of stratification in the various fields of social life (Bourdieu 1996:112). In this manner Bourdieu separates social and cultural life and consistently views the latter as throwing up a screen over the power dynamics that make up the substance of the former. Indeed in *Distinction* Bourdieu is really not just trying to critique what is conventionally understood as aesthetic judgement at all, and is effectively

proposing an entire reading of cultural action, especially in the form of consumption (Honneth 1995a:185–87, 193). When speaking of the aesthetic he tacitly adopts what I have called in Chapter 1 a "localised" understanding of culture, associates aesthetic/cultural action with symbolic action in general, and both with symbolic domination, and then sets out to uncover the workings of domination wherever he believes symbolic action overlaps with social action. The aesthetic domain, in the sense of the consumption of art or "high culture", is, as Bourdieu himself often emphasises, just an extreme example of this more pervasive cultural tendency.

Other than the inherent implausibility of a localised understanding of culture, as discussed in Chapter 1, the underlying problem here is that Bourdieu tends to either ignore or seriously downplay the ethical dimension of human life, including even ethical *habituation*. Similarly, the Bourdieusian subject is, for an *embodied* subject, oddly unemotional (Sayer 2010:89–95). In this sense, Bourdieu's understanding of the consuming subject could be situated somewhere on the opposite end of a continuum to that assumed in ludic accounts of consumption, and especially to that of Bataille's. The one is a bloodless calculator, even if this calculation is simply an unconscious feel for how to most effectively secure domination, while the other is all passion and dissolution. As implied in the chapters to follow, and discussed further in Chapter 7, a more realistic view of the consuming subject would occupy a space between these two extremes, which are only potentialities and not fixed states, and which can be embodied in the same person or group at different times and in different practical contexts in a manner that is purely contingent and historical. Moreover, unless this subject were in some sense debilitated, we would assume him or her to possess some measure of fellow-feeling or sympathy with others. As Sayer (2011: 118–24) has argued, navigating everyday social life requires sympathy, and those lacking in it typically struggle to live among others and to gain or grant recognition. Such feelings of sympathy are not external to how societies are ordered and reordered, but a fundamental part of such ordering.

Methodological assumptions: Cultural practice as a functional support of social domination. In breaking with structuralism, Bourdieu usefully moves the discussion of social action in an agentic direction. People are no longer seen as beings whose practices are bound to the broad field of the meaningful, sometimes discussed in terms of a semantic understanding of culture, and are rather seen as motivated by more partial forces that reach back into history and that affect them at the level of everyday life or of their cultural life in the narrower, localised sense of culture. This allows Bourdieu to dive below the macro-level discussion of society or culture while also not landing on the individual. Instead Bourdieu excavates the institutions residing somewhere between these levels of analysis, leading, in *Distinction*, to a complex understanding of class, and also of class fractions, as embodied in corresponding *habitus*.

Distinction, though possessing a strongly empiricist dimension, can be read as essentially an empirical exploration of cultural action from *within* these conceptual parameters, which were already firmly in place before the research was undertaken and which everywhere condition how Bourdieu interprets and presents his data. Bourdieu's data convincingly demonstrate a

correlation between class and taste. As Rogers Brubaker (1985:764–69) argues, by connecting up the lengthy and recursive but fragmentary approaches to the theme in *Distinction*, class is measured through the proxy of occupational group, taken to account for one's position in production (a Marxian element) and one's market position (a Weberian element) and also the contacts that Bourdieu understands as part of one's social capital. Bourdieu nonetheless also allows that other variables, like educational level, sex, age, ethnicity and geographical origins, are themselves determining of the relative ease or difficulty of entering certain occupational groups, and that they are part of the definition of class (Brubaker 1985:764–69; Bourdieu 1996:102, 106).[52] The result is a fairly conventional three-tier class division between a working class, a middle class and a dominant class, determined above all else by overall possession of capital (primarily economic and cultural capital), but with an original sub-division of classes into internal "class fractions" depending on the composition of this capital.

Bourdieu's empirical findings should be of great use in arguing, with evidence, against methodological individualist explanations of social life, or at least of its consumer dimension and the realisation of consumer choices in observable lifestyles. He demonstrates on one level that lifestyles statistically converge around the possession of economic capital, but also tries to understand finer-grained statistical irregularities within this convergence. As lifestyles diverge even where financial resources converge, the possession of economic capital alone cannot account for different consumer tastes, and here Bourdieu argues that the possession of cultural capital explains these irregularities. Of course, hardly a trifling problem it that is not at all clear how far this applies to times and places other than France in the 1960s, as Bourdieu himself acknowledges in the introduction to the English translation. Moreover, even assuming that we could unproblematically derive data from other societies closely matching that of his empirical case, Bourdieu's blanket attribution of the correlation between class and taste to an unconscious form of class-based *domination* is in fact not contained in any of the empirical data he presents. Readers are simply instructed at every turn to make this connection, but on the misleading grounds that the only alternative would be to see all cultural action as some wildly idealised communion with things bearing no social, and quite possibly no terrestrial, grounding at all.

This is not to say that the connections Bourdieu draws are wholly spurious either. Taste clearly does follow some sort of relational logic, and is used to create social distinction, much of the time, as all the writers contributing to a socially productive understanding of consumption argue in one way or another. The problem is that it needn't be, and that class-specific forms of taste might simply relate to a wholly different experience of the world premised on no desire to outdo others but rather on different sociological attributes of class members: radically different educational backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds and the knowledge of different languages often accompanying this, lesser or wider travel, and so on. By repeatedly asserting that all group-specific consumer choice is basically a matter of merely assenting to the promptings of internalised *habitus* in the impersonal interests of sustaining class-based power Bourdieu simply subsumes all consumer choice under a single functional logic that would seem to have

no place for expressive acts in the sense that I have discussed them in Chapter 1. As Honneth (1995a:194–95, 199–200) has argued, Bourdieu's unwillingness to make these sorts of distinctions contaminates the critical import of his findings by injecting into them a strong element of functionalist reductionism. In Chapter 7, having considered a range of consumer practices from a more expressive position in chapters 4–6, I will take up further was the consequences of this functionalism appear to be for Bourdieu's project.

2.4. From the general to the particular in approaches to consumption

What is most durable and what is not in the social world in general, and in the domain of consumption in particular, is a question that cannot be definitively solved but which explicitly or implicitly frames all inquiry into the subject and which can be approached in more or less convincing ways. In this chapter I have tried to extract from the literature on consumption, and from broader social science literature that proposes a novel or conceptually stimulating approach to consumption, some of the most influential or challenging attempts at forming a generalisable account of consumption. In flagging problematic elements in these existing approaches, I have shown where they potentially disrupt my own preferred expressive approach to consumption as laid out in Chapter 1, especially on questions of an ontological and methodological nature. I have argued that, while the ludic approach to consumption best fits with my own assumptions, it also has a number of shortcomings, and that these become more visible when considering the production of consumption and socially productive approaches to consumption.

Here I would like to briefly complicate this discussion by further arguing, as I have already suggested above, that this comparison between the approaches cannot proceed on conceptual grounds alone. It is therefore not sufficient to explore whether a given account of consumption is necessarily insensitive to such things as the agentic, and more specifically to the expressive, dimension of social action. Neither is it enough to interrogate whether a given account is wedded to functionalist methodological assumptions about the social world. What makes a conceptual approach better or worse is not only its fit with these or any other ontological assumptions about consumption, and about social, political and economic life more generally, in universal terms. Nor is it just about whether its wider methodology falls foul of important trends in the social sciences, like the increasing concern with questions of meaning and agency that have characterised the "cultural turn". It must also be about whether such an account, whatever its ontological and methodological assumptions, can reveal hitherto ignored or misrepresented features of a given historical situation that might be of general interest. In particular, I have argued in Chapter 1 that a substantial merit of any given conceptual approach is whether it is able to suggest ways of better organising an explanatory account of social change in any given society, and whether it can do this in a way that can lead to constructive debate across the walls of separate social science disciplines and of parochially

drawn empirical specialist areas, while also developing a conceptual vocabulary that enables scholars of consumption to avoid talking at cross-purposes. I will only attempt this fuller comparison of approaches to consumption, and a more definitive and nuanced statement of my own approach, in Chapter 7, after first applying my own expressive approach to consumption to the empirical case that interests me. Here, however, I would like to selectively and briefly return to the three approaches to consumption highlighted above, with a view to attempting to extract some guidance from them for opening up historical questions in such a manner that they can relate back to the theoretical concerns about social change that I discussed in Chapter 1, by corroborating, complicating or negating them.

2.4.1 Ludic approaches: Bell and Campbell on the cultural background of consumer behaviour

In *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1978:7, 84), Bell attempted to explain the origins of what he believed was a culturally-driven crisis of modern society culminating in his own time, a "cultural crisis of all Western bourgeois society" heralding nothing less than "the end of the bourgeois idea". For Bell (1978:65), "[t]he cultural transformation of modern society is due, singularly, to the rise of mass consumption". The guiding assumption here is that modern economic life, premised on the accumulation of capital, has been underpinned by Puritan restraint and the Protestant Ethic since the 16th century. Both in the economic and in the cultural domains – which Bell considered separately – this was accompanied by a protean individualism that over time took different forms (Bell 1978:16–17). Beginning in the mid-19th century, a new "modernist" spirit based on the value of authentic self-realisation and increasingly given over to hedonistic self-exploration emerged within the cultural domain (Bell 1978:17–19, 46). Bell (1978:50) viewed this modernist spirit as given over to aesthetic experimentation that was both amoral and anomic: "if the aesthetic experience alone is to justify life, then morality is suspended and desire has no limit. Anything is possible in this quest of the self to explore its relation to sensibility." This new cultural orientation, cut loose from the complex "dialectic of release and restraint" characteristic of religious life in all societies, and fully given over to the former, came to dominate leisure time and consumption since the 1920s (Bell 1978:44–45, 65–66, 156–57). It is, however, not altogether clear how we might generalise from Bell's work. He claims, entirely in passing, to be speaking of "American and other Western societies", which he views as consumer societies (Bell 1978:15). In practice nearly all Bell's examples and dates are drawn from the USA, particularly in the post-World War period, without him ever establishing how we might extrapolate from this case to others.

Colin Campbell (1989:227) distances his analysis of consumer *motivation* from Bell's, but in most other regards the two converge, and this is particularly evident when interrogating their basic historical focus and assumptions. Both discuss consumption in the sense of "consumerism" – that is, mass consumption on the market, compulsively performed in accordance with inflamed desires. Both thinkers also believe such behaviour to be a modern

phenomenon, and by modern they clearly mean only Western, and more specifically, North American and Western European. Campbell (1989:39) explicitly says that his analysis may be limited to "modern industrial societies", but within these limits he works with a wider spatial and temporal compass than Bell and provides a stimulating historical engagement with Weber's ideas that lend a great deal of weight to his basic argument that the Protestant Ethic existed in tension with a more hedonistic Romantic Ethic from around the early 18th century.[53] Campbell views this ethic as a complex ideal of personal autonomy and believes it gave rise to a distinctly modern form of consumption.

Reading Bell and Campbell together, both Protestantism and Romanticism can be seen as large-scale social trends that had a momentous impact on shaping consumption in the West. This is unlike Turner, from whom a more universal understanding of consumption can be extracted as the grounding for his specific case study of the Ndembu, and also unlike Bataille's discussion of potlatch and festivals in an equally universal way. Like Bataille, but with more academic rigour, both Bell and Campbell follow Weber in looking back to early-modern religion as inhibiting the emergence of mass consumption and then proceed to identify ruptures with, or developments of, this basic situation. One potential point of entry into the historically-oriented study of consumption in any society can therefore be a similar exploration of Protestantism and/or Romanticism as major social forces, although of course the prima facie plausibility of this conceptual approach leans directly on the actual historical identification of these movements as themselves a significant driver of social change in these societies. Where there is no such antecedent penetration by these movements, similar consumption patterns across cases will suggest that these movements are not independent variables able to explain observed consumption patterns.

2.4.2 Production of consumption approaches: David Harvey on postmodern consumption

We have said that accounts of consumption like those I have associated with the ludic approach are excessively culturalist. This concession should not be confused with similar accusations often made on the foundation of Marxist orthodoxy and emerging in reasonably unconvincing charges of "idealism" or "postmodernism", which themselves rely on a somewhat cavalier dismissal of the semantic or imaginary background of social life as mere epiphenomena. At the same time, it is not at all the case that Marxian thought has nothing interesting to say. We have seen this in the case of Ben Fine's attempt to develop a generalisable approach to consumption, although above I pointed out that one weakness with Fine's systems of provision approach is a tendency to focus on commodity production alone, somewhat neglecting redistribution and reductively dismissing reciprocity. Fine, like all other Marxists, obviously points to something essential when flagging the issue of commodification as of major concern for the study of consumption, but is vague about the historical specificity of capitalist commodity production itself given his attempt to construct a widely generalisable

approach to consumption. Things are different with David Harvey's (1992 [1989]) *The Condition of Postmodernity*, which cannot compete with the conceptual sophistication of Fine's approach to consumption but which is far richer in historical detail. Though not focussed exclusively on consumption, what makes it so interesting is precisely Harvey's attempt to situate the historical significance of consumption within a much wider nexus of historical transformation.

Harvey (1992:vii) believes he can explain major macro-level social transformations in Western societies, which he describes as the transition from an austere workerist modernity to a hedonistic consumerist postmodernity, by identifying nothing less than a "necessary relation between the rise of postmodernist cultural forms, the emergence of more flexible modes of capital accumulation, and a new round of 'time–space compression' in the organization of capitalism" that emerged "around 1972". As the argument develops throughout the book, it becomes clear that of these three elements it is capital accumulation alone that it the real *cause* of change, with the globalisation of capital production and post-modernist culture portrayed as the dependent outcome of this. A sceptical reader might be forgiven for suspecting that, given Harvey's evident disinterest in interrogating his own pre-existing Marxist commitments anywhere in the work, he seems to arrive at this orthodox Marxist conclusion more by way of fleshing out his antecedent assumptions than by demonstrably challenging them at any point in the book. This may err on the side of ungenerosity though, and whether or not this is the case, it is true all the same that in the course of developing the empirical dimension of his argument Harvey draws attention to apparently important historical transformations whose significance for consumption deserves to be interrogated.

Harvey's specification of 1972 is somewhere between a serious assertion and a humorous literary device, as he is of course aware that such precision is impossible when speaking of large-scale social trends (Harvey 1992:39). As a literary device, finds it amusing to locate moments like the dynamiting of the Pruitt-Igoe housing development in St Louis, based on Le Corbusier's modernist architectural principles, at precisely 3.32 p.m. on 15 July 1972, as symbolic of the changes afoot in Western society around that time. As a serious assertion, though, he selects this date because he believes it points to the shift from a Fordist regime of capital accumulation to what he calls "flexible accumulation" at around this time, and this is the real variable that Harvey believes explains the emergence of postmodernist cultural forms, including the modes of consumption that accompany them (Harvey 1992:145–72). Harvey suggests in places that these changes might owe something to elite decision-making and political realignment, as well as cultural change, but he constantly argues that these are surface-level phenomena possessing no deep explanatory power. What is really at work is the unfolding systemic crisis of Fordist capitalism, long in the making and finally exploding in 1973. This, Harvey believes, led to the reforming of capital accumulation strategies in order to deal with the recurring structural problem of over-accumulation,[54] thereby ensuring system survival in the face of a threat to the global economic order of the sort that occurred in the 1930s (Harvey 1992:180–197).

Harvey (1992:181) understands this crisis in a deterministic manner, informed by his orthodox Marxist historical assumptions:

> the tendency towards overaccumulation can never be eliminated under capitalism. It is a neverending and eternal problem for any capitalist mode of production. The only question, therefore, is how the overaccumulation tendency can be expressed, contained, absorbed, or managed in ways that do not threaten the capitalist social order.

For Harvey, it is this crisis that has functionally necessitated the greater space-time compression of capitalist production to allow for the absorption of over-accumulated produce. The spatial extension of markets and the speeding-up of product cycles in its turn explains the transition from modernity to postmodernity at the cultural level. Considering the mode of capital accumulation thus allows us to understand that the apparent cultural complexity of social change is only a floating mirage. We need to see through this by focussing on the more basic mechanisms that turn the wheels of history, as Marxist political economists have always known:

> Behind all the ferment of modernity and postmodernity, we can discern some simple generative principles that shape an immense diversity of outcomes. Yet the latter strikingly fail … to create unpredictable novelty, even though the seemingly infinite capacity to engender products feeds all the illusions of freedom and of open paths for personal fulfilment. Wherever capitalism goes, its illusory apparatus, its fetishisms, and its system of mirrors come not far behind. (Harvey 1992:344)

In the larger historical narrative that Harvey sketches, consumer practices are one functionally determined part of a much larger productive shift to rescue capitalism from crises of over-production, where "accelerating turnover time in production entails parallel accelerations in exchange and consumption" (Harvey 1992:285) – in this causal order. As Harvey (1992:156) explains:

> Flexible accumulation has been accompanied on the consumption side … by a much greater attention to quick-changing fashions and the mobilization of all the artifices of need inducement and cultural transformation that this implies. The relatively stable aesthetic of Fordist modernism has given way to all the ferment, instability, and fleeting qualities of a postmodernist aesthetic that celebrates difference, ephemerality, spectacle, fashion, and the commodification of cultural forms.

From the discussion of the shortcomings of functionalism in Chapter 1 it should be apparent that I believe Harvey's reasoning about consumption seriously compromises the validity of his and any other production of consumption approach, but it is certainly not my intention to dismiss it wholesale. It is useful in this regard to follow Giddens's (1986:285, 296–97) suggestion that we should transform statements of functionalist causality into questions about how social changes are "made to happen" by situated, living actors possessing reasons for

action that ensure continuity or rupture in social life, albeit within conditions of unequal power and imperfect knowledge. From this perspective *The Postmodern Condition* is full of stimulating *assertions* that, when stripped of their functionalist baggage and when historically contextualised in a significantly more cautious fashion than Harvey proposes, can operate as interesting research *questions* when looking at any given society over a given period. I will take this issue up further in Chapter 5, where I briefly attempt to gauge the gains and losses of accounting for social change in a concrete historical setting by relying on assumptions borrowed from the production of consumption literature in general and from Harvey's work in particular. Here, however, I will simply note that, whatever the validity of Harvey's position, it is only a tool for inquiry that is relatively limited in time and space. Harvey is clearly thinking only about Western societies since the 1970s, and transplanting his ideas to different societies would require some consideration of how those societies might differ from those that Harvey considers, especially in the manner in which capital accumulation is achieved.

2.4.3 Production of consumption approaches: Bourdieu on fields of consumption

I have maintained above that arguably the most challenging, and certainly the most influential, approach to consumption has been Bourdieu's. Despite its rather relentless reduction of conscious experience and motivational complexity to purportedly unconscious desires for domination between class members, Bourdieu offers a powerful critique of culturalist assumptions about consumption by drawing attention to the manner in which consumption may be bound up with social stratification. Here I want to address another aspect of Bourdieu's approach to consumption by asking how it holds up when generalised to other societies. In this regard, another shortcoming of Bourdieu's praxis-theoretical approach to consumption is that his understanding of the nature of social "fields" and their inter-relations is too arbitrarily constructed to enable coherent socio-historical generalisation from his findings.

Craig Calhoun has argued that, despite a certain disciplinary eclecticism, Bourdieu is probably best read as an historical sociologist, while nonetheless being consistently vague about the terms on which one might generalise from his historical studies. Bourdieu claims both to avoid merely formalistic theorising *and* to uncover trans-historically invariant features of social life but never clearly sets out how the two are to be balanced (Calhoun 1993:64–66, 70–71). One of the ways in which this problem shows up is in Bourdieu's discussion of fields, which function for him as the basic unit of social analysis. Calhoun is sympathetic to Bourdieu's project as a whole but notes that there is "a certain ambiguity about just what is to be generalized and what not in Bourdieu's empirical studies of fields" (Calhoun 1993:82). In his eagerness to avoid the "scholastic" error of imposing conceptual categories onto social phenomena and thereby reifying them, Bourdieu ends up going too far in the other direction by directing his analyses toward a profusion of fields whose delimitation and inter-relation appear to verge on arbitrariness. This is hardly a small problem, and seems to me a difficulty that is also underestimated in social science literature that seeks to apply Bourdieu's ideas outside of the specific historical settings in which they were grounded.

To see why this is, we might observe that Bourdieu (1992:97, 104, 117) understands fields to be basically mutually irreducible domains of competitive striving for augmented power. The fields that Bourdieu discusses are quite strikingly assorted. Recall that the fairly random selection of all the many fields Bourdieu speaks of, presented above, included sport, music, food, fashion, theatre, decoration, politics, language, science, religion, law, the state, the church, political parties, unions, housing construction and consultancy. Bourdieu sometimes specifies how some of the various fields arising in his analyses are inter-related, usually privileging fields like economy, culture, and politics, but usually he is vague about even this (Eyal 2013:163; Thomson 2008:79–80). What Bourdieu does tell us unambiguously is that people inhabit many fields simultaneously, and advantage in one field can often translate into advantage in another. Also, taken together, all fields collectively constitute what Bourdieu usually called the "field of power", that is, the entire social space of a given society (Thomson 2008:70–73). At the same time, he allows that certain fields can subsume others, such as when developments in the housing field largely depend on what happens in the state and financial fields (Thomson 2008:73). In fact, really making sense of Bourdieu's often-baffling discussion of fields would appear to require situating them at four interacting but distinct levels, which Bourdieu himself does not clearly set apart: (i) the over-arching relational field of power, corresponding with the delimitation of "society"; (ii) higher-order fields, and particularly the political, cultural and the economic; (iii) sub-fields, such as housing; and also, sometimes, (iv) organisations within fields, such as firms on housing markets (Thomson 2008:79; Eyal 2013:163).

Bourdieu (1992:97, 109–10) himself insists that the exact nature of fields and their inter-relation is an empirical and not a conceptual concern and dismisses as merely scholastic any conceptual unease about this. This is, however, a little unfair, for a lack of clarity about one's basic unit of analysis is eminently likely to throw up all sorts of obstacles to non-specialist debate about social life in different times and places. If more or less lucid comparison between social action occurring in different times and places is to be possible, then there has to be some sort of tidying up of what fields one chooses to analyse by making use of a set of ideal-typical assumptions about how fields relate to one another and, more importantly, on what terms statements about any given field can be generalised. We need, for the purposes of the argument being developed here, to also see how this might apply directly to a discussion of consumption.

Starting with the second problem, concerning how field analysis might be applied to consumption, while also keeping in mind the problem of the relationship between production and consumption, we should note that Bourdieu, in *Distinction*, is largely concerned with the production and consumption of *commodities*. He argues that the various fields in which taste is expressed and lifestyles constructed can, in certain times and places, overlap with markets in ways that may at times alter these fields significantly (Bourdieu 1996:223–24, 230–44). Markets are always subject to the larger logic of the field of power – that is, in class-divided societies, to the logic of class struggle over capital in its various value forms – but beyond this Bourdieu believes general rules are hard to formulate because they rely on the complex push-and-pull

between consumers and producers. The solution, for him, is to move toward greater sociological empiricism, which he contrasts with economistic abstraction:

> it is only by increasing the number of empirical analyses of the relations between relatively autonomous fields of production of a particular class of products and the market of consumers which they assemble, and which sometimes function as fields (without ceasing to be determined by their position in the field of the social classes), that one can really escape from the abstraction of economic theories, which only recognize a consumer reduced to his purchasing power (itself reduced to his income) and a product characterized, equally abstractly, by a technical function presumed to be equal for all. (Bourdieu 1996:224)

Bourdieu's (1996:223–25; 230–44) understanding of commodity production and consumption can be usefully compared with Fine's discussion of the "systems of provision" approach to consumption. At a general level, both Bourdieu and Fine are interested in escaping from the evacuation of all social or historical complexity that characterises conventional economic approaches to consumption. Both Bourdieu and Fine argue that such approaches put aside all questions pertaining to consumer preference formation as a matter of methodological principle without appearing to realise how profoundly this reduces their explanatory power when accounting for consumption. Bourdieu differs from Fine, however, in the depth to which he penetrates when excavating the consumer side of such exchanges. Fine, like all ideology critics in the production of consumption approach, ends up explaining demand-side consumption as a consequence of production-side manipulation. Bourdieu (1996:223–25, 310–11, 483) believes the relationship is far looser, even if in the end he, like Fine, holds to a basically Marxist position and assigns ultimate priority to the production side, focussing less on production-side manipulation though and more on class conflict as an explanation for consumer practices. Bourdieu would not accept the inversion of the priority between production and consumption that Sahlins proposes, which I have defended with the caveat that this should be limited to intentional action. What ultimately determines the layout of social life for Bourdieu (1996:466) is "the division of labour … or the division of the work of domination". While in *Distinction* Bourdieu largely focuses on commodity consumption, in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* he takes a larger perspective, making it clear that the objects in which capital is invested, and which secure high social status, are not necessarily commodities, and not necessarily material objects (Bourdieu 2013:178). Such discussions are usually not framed by Bourdieu in terms of consumption but rather in terms of his broader concern with the accumulation and expenditure of capital, but aside from this terminological difference the same basic anti-economistic and productivist principles apply.

Turning now to the first-mentioned problem above, concerning the definition and delimitation of fields in general, Bourdieu seems to think that field analysis can be extended to all societies because it concerns the workings of social power and exposes the transmutation of capital in its various forms into symbolic capital. Even if this were true, however, this then only tells us what fields have in common and not what separates them. Moreover, I have argued that we

have good reason to dismiss the association of the overall social field with a field of power (the first and most encompassing of Bourdieu's four levels of field analysis), for reasons that have already been explained when discussing Bourdieu's motivational reductionism. Power, particularly in Bourdieu's preferred sense of generally unconscious domination between members of distinct classes, class fractions or kinship groups, should rather be understood as merely one potentiality on a wider motivational spectrum of possible social connection, albeit an extremely important one that cannot be wholly forgotten without an accompanying narrowing of the critical perspective, which we have said is a shortcoming of culturalist social science. I will also not follow Bourdieu's occasional discussion of organisations as fields (the fourth level of Bourdieu's field analysis), which simply does not fit in with the language of production and consumption that Bourdieu at times applies to fields and which most interests me.

This leaves one with the task of designating the most important fields within a given society, as well as the major sub-fields (the second and third levels of Bourdieu's field analysis) – not as a way of ontologically carving up the social world using scholastic categories, but rather as a way of clarifying the basic terms on which one proposes to analyse the social world and what practices one is pointing to. Here one simply has to lean on generalised ideal-typical constructs when making assumptions about the order of priority between fields and their inter-connections, without which any attempt at generalisation cannot defend itself from accusations of methodological arbitrariness. For the purposes of this study, we need in particular some idea-typical understanding of how localised acts of consumption link up with wider processes of social change. At the level of instituted social relations, which I have associated in Chapter 1 with three apparently universal "forms of integration" (exchange through the market, redistribution and reciprocity), the path through which one obtains the objects one is to consume is of potentially great socio-political significance. By reading fields of consumption against this larger socio-economic framework, deliberately developed to allow empirical studies of social and economic life to learn from other such studies and by so doing to make and refine generalisable claims, we can make basic inferences about how fields relate to one another, as well as what the basic tensions between them might be, with some reasonable hope of such inferences being comparable with similar experiences in other societies. In other words, by considering how fields operate, not only on the market, but also through redistribution and reciprocity, and by attending to the historically significant shifts in the balance between these apparently universal forms of integration, generalisation from one case to another might proceed in a less arbitrary fashion. This by no means rules out the need for focussed historical studies of the sort that Bourdieu champions, but rather gives one some sort of structured and potentially comparable framework in which to render studies from different times and places commensurable in their findings and with one's own work, thereby building in a background against which it is possible to coherently evaluate where they really agree or disagree on issues of major historical import and critical relevance.

2.4.4 Historical research on consumption: Consumer societies

The scattered insights on the historical roots of contemporary consumption found in the three approaches that I have discussed above, which are almost all sociological or anthropological in nature, are, to some extent, complemented by an array of more historical studies on consumption. Due to conceptual eclecticism or vagueness, these cannot always be clearly aligned with any of the three perspectives outlined above, although some patent affiliations exist. Insofar as these historical studies do cohere conceptually, it is rather around the question of the emergence of "consumer society". The term "consumer society", along with such equivalents as the "affluent society" and "mass consumption society", was popularised by public intellectuals such as John Kenneth Galbraith, David Riesman and George Katona in the 1950s and 60s, where it was initially used to diagnose certain features of modern societies that many believed were most evident in the USA at the time. The term later gained wider currency in discussions of Western European societies such as France, Britain and Germany in the 70s, and since then it has been even further extended to multiple individual cases (Trentmann 2004:5, 2011:27–28). The most popular recent articulator of the consumer society concept has been Zygmunt Bauman, who in key works like *Liquid Modernity* (2006:80–84) associates consumer society with modernity. By this he implicitly means only Northern modernity in the post-war period, and particularly from around the last quarter of the 20th century. He discusses consumption in the sense of mass consumption or "consumerism", and associates it above all with an imperative toward aesthetic self-making accompanying individualism, competitiveness induced by marketing and the sociological shift away from work to commodified leisure as a key site for the formation of identity (Bauman 2006:76–87, 139–44).[55]

Given the enormously different uses to which the concept of consumer society is put in the historical literature on consumption, it is remarkable that so little effort has been spent on lending it some agreed meaning. As Ben Fine (2002:155) observes, "precise and meaningful definitions of consumer society are extremely hard to come by; they are as rare as the use of the term is common". Similarly, Roberta Sassatellli (2007:2) notes that, "underneath the apparent simplicity of the expression 'consumer society' lies profound ambiguity. From its very first appearance, this term has been used more to convey condemnation than to describe". This omission holds true even of Neil McKendrick and colleagues' seminal *The Birth of a Consumer Society* (McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb 1982). In general, however, one can infer that the concept refers, at least minimally, to the condition a society reaches when one or more of the following conditions are met: (i) a generalised social state of acquisitiveness for material goods makes itself widely felt, especially where sufficiently widespread material abundance leads to people spending more on luxuries and less on necessities, (ii) commodity consumption is mediated through modern marketing techniques, or (iii) innovation and obsolescence in fashion, in the broadest sense of this term, begins to accelerate with unprecedented rapidity.

While the consumer society literature is far from coherent, it tends to focus on changes in demand rather than supply, or to place more emphasis on their mutually constitutive nature.

In effect, the consumer society literature provides a highly suggestive mass of historical material to back up the claim, which from a strictly productivist perspective on modern capitalism remains fairly heretical, that capitalism, in both its mercantile and industrial forms, has always possessed a "cultural" or imaginary dimension that has been necessary for its growth and continued survival. Thus the central claim of *The Birth of a Consumer Society* is that the Industrial Revolution, occurring first in late 18th century England, was accompanied by a consumer revolution and the emergence of a consumer society, without which it could not have transpired. The empirical reference point for these claims is a study of changing fashion cycles, explicitly attempting to vindicate Simmel's far earlier claim for the social significance of modern fashion systems while also invoking Veblen's understanding of social emulation as a driver of demand. Similar attempts at pinning down the origins of consumer society have questioned McKendrick's preferred spatial and temporal location of consumer society. For instance, Chandra Mukerji (1983) locates it roughly around the 16th century in a number of commercially networked cities in Western Europe as a whole; Grant McCracken (1988) believes it appears rather in late 16th century Elizabethan England; and for Simon Schama (1988) it appears in the Netherlands during the Golden Age of the mid-16th to mid-17th centuries.

Taken together, this literature that has followed their lead has the merit of showing up the limits of productivism, while also to varying degrees revealing the human side of a story often told in terms of abstract productive systems by exposing to view the tastes of consumers and their social and economic mediations in concrete historical settings. Most significantly, Mukerji and Schama effectively corroborate Campbell's claim that Protestantism, from its earliest days, never led to the sort of self-imposed austerity that, under Weber's influence, social scientists have come to widely assume prevailed during the early modern period. This entire period has therefore begun to be excavated as a locus for consumer society, albeit in differing senses of this same term. Beyond this, as some useful attempts to extract common historiographic themes from the burgeoning consumer society literature have argued, we might read this research as providing a complementary picture of the emergence of capitalist demand through multiple trajectories and variable object histories. In many ways it effectively substantiates Fernand Braudel's interest in emphasising the importance of demand as that which appears to set the complex wheels of inter-connected supply-and-demand in motion (Agnew 1994:22–26; Sassatelli 2001:20), with most scholars agreeing that "widespread cultures of consumption very nearly always preceded mass markets for consumer goods rather than the other way about" (Glennie 1995:184). Nonetheless, these debates are clearly far from conclusive and the empirical priority of demand over supply is not universally accepted, while basic disagreements also persist over issues such as whether demand within given societies is more explanatorily fundamental than networked demand structures across societies, and what independent role productive changes played in shaping the structures of exchange that grew up in order to minister to rising demand (Agnew 1994:23–24).

It would require an impressive knowledge of European social and economic history, to which I make no pretence, to meaningfully adjudicate the claims and counter-claims arising in this

literature. From a more external perspective, however, this literature is also not without a number of enframing assumptions that have not yet been systematically problematised: (i) there is a strong tendency to limit the discussion of consumption to its market forms, itself always accompanied by (ii) a parochial disinterest in consumption in non-Western societies along with, to varying degrees, (iii) the teleological assumption that markets diffuse outward from the modern or early-modern West over time for reasons immanent in history. Even where parochialism is overcome, as it is in Daniel Miller's (2012:49) understanding of Trinidad as a consumer society – where consumer society is thinly defined as one in which the core values of a society are expressed through commodities – the other assumptions tend to remain in place. For instance, an early attempt at the formidable task of assembling a global history of consumption, Peter N. Stearns's *Consumerism in World History* (2006 [2001]), is a first very brief attempt to systematically escape parochialism, but remains fixated on the market and is robustly teleological. Nonetheless, dissatisfaction with these shortcomings seems to be growing. Two very stimulating recent interventions, James P. Woodard's (2012) "Consumer Culture, Market Empire, and the Global South" and Joel Stillerman's *The Sociology of Consumption* (2015) are impressively global in their outlook, but also remain focussed on the market. On the issue of diffusion they remain agnostic, but essentially undermine it by revealing the empirical oversights that such an assumption leads to, without hazarding a solution.

The most impressive attempt to date at providing a global history of consumption is Frank Trentmann's remarkably wide-ranging *Empire of Things* (2016). Even here, however, there are certain problems. Trentmann devotes a chapter to redressing the exclusive concern with commodities, but this important emphasis on non-market forms of consumption does not conceptualise consumption outside of the market in its own right or consider the possible tensions between market and other forms of consumption. Rather, Trentmann (2016:556–97) considers only how market consumption might be stimulated by supplements to income provided by firms and states. This chapter also has very little influence on the rest of the book, which remains firmly focussed on market consumption throughout. More importantly, however, Trentmann (2016:32–33) explicitly drops all teleological assumptions, and goes to great length to reveal how colonisation and domestic fashion cycles mediated by increased trade have shaped the diffusion of commodity consumption over the last six centuries in a reasonably non-linear fashion, despite the existence of certain geographical centres of power in different historical periods.

Indeed, like Stearns's, Stillerman's and Woodard's first attempts at shifting the study of consumption outside of its narrow geographical confines, what results is a walk through a great deal of often-fascinating, thematically arranged empirical material, but without any focussed thesis emerging from the attempt. They manage to explode certain generalisations, such as Woodard's (2012:380–385) demonstration that much of the marketing practice and retail infrastructure for shopping associated with Northern societies in the consumer society literature was developed early on in societies of the global South, often far eclipsing various

Northern societies in the extent of their penetration. Similarly, Trentmann (2016:56–64) provides an interesting discussion of increasingly rapid fashion cycles in China since the 16th century as an example of the sort of thing that goes completely unobserved in the mainstream work on fashion as a feature of consumer society.

The development of the historical literature on consumer societies, which is still far from conclusive, clearly owes something to the very nature of its conceptual assumptions. What appears to be happening here is that the openness of the concept of consumer society to different readings on account of its relative formalness has had the unintended virtue of allowing for the empirical dating of consumer society to be pushed backward from its original confinement to the 20th century USA. It has thereby given rise to a diffuse research project that has consistently challenged productivist dogmas with a wealth of empirical material, while also avoiding excessive culturalism by remaining focussed on economic affairs, even if it has not clarified its relationship with more conventionally productivist economic histories. At the same time, the very wide understanding of consumer society that these historical accounts work with is coming back to haunt its original adherents as their parochialism is shown up in the newly-emerging accounts of consumer practices outside of Northern societies. These global understandings of consumption themselves offer up a wealth of interesting detail but, as with the historically narrower research whose limitations they attempt to transcend, it is not always clear what emerges from the enterprise other than complementing the temporal expansion of the consumer society debate with a similar geographical expansion.

Beyond this, a more basic problem with all the studies considered here, from the expressivist perspective traced out in Chapter 1, is that while there is a good measure of quantitative detail, in the broadest sense of easily-observed empirical phenomena, there is very little qualitative discussion of consumers themselves. Much of the discussion ranges across huge movements in global trade, fluctuations in incomes or altered legal structures and retail practices, acknowledging in an abstract way that emerging class stratification, accompanied by changing moral understandings and agentic practices more generally, lay behind these trends, but without exploring how in concrete terms these things might tie up. In short, there is a nod toward considering agency alongside structure as an explanatory principle, but next to nothing actually gets said about agency itself.

2.4.5 Expressivist consumption: Research problem and approach

I have tried to demonstrate above that the most complex attempts at providing a conceptually coherent and maximally generalisable account of consumption tend to offer useful insights, even if we need to read them cautiously and take some distance from some of their bolder claims. I have also tried to suggest, however, that the relative sophistication of these conceptual approaches to consumption comes at the cost of a general absence of historical perspective, even though interesting historical theses can be found in isolated accounts of consumption, such as those of Bell, Campbell, and Harvey. When turning to the more historically-focussed

literature, I have claimed that one finds a wealth of detail that is absent from the more conceptual approaches to the subject but, conversely, there is a great loss of conceptual rigour. Instead of focussed arguments one often finds loosely-themed observations that are usually individually interesting but cumulatively too dispersed to eventuate in clear statements of anything other than variations on the consumer society theme. One might add that this has led to a sort of subject-specific enclavism in this historical work, making it at times hard to systematically relate even to the conceptual studies of consumption at which it usually does little more than gesture in formulaic overtures. Potentially it has an enormous amount to contribute both to this conceptual literature and to wider social science discussions, not only the origins of mercantile and industrial capitalism, but also of world history more generally.

Without claiming to solve all these problems in any definitive way, I aim to follow an approach for further research in the spirit of the more conceptual discussion of consumption laid out in Chapter 1 and informed by the discussion of the three conceptual approaches to consumption above. Such an approach, to avoid sterile abstraction, must nonetheless find a way of pointing to focussed historical research capable of generating novel insights into social change, while also aiming to yield generalisable propositions and thereby stimulate further debate. As set out in Chapter 1 and elaborated above, I make a number of important social-theoretical assumptions that frame my approach. Most importantly, I take a very broad view of consumption as a moment of all intentional action. Consumption is the intentional realisation of value, and this value is invariably objectified, though not always materially. Consumption and production necessarily imply one another, as Marx and many others have observed, but I have argued that to the extent that they are intentional then production must be instrumental to consumption, and especially expressive forms of consumption. I have also argued that of special interest, from a social science perspective, is the manner in which production and consumption may be mediated through exchange. Viewing exchange in the tripartite Polanyian sense of this term allows us to move from generalisations to the analysis of specific cases while not losing sight of how these cases might be analysed in terms that allow for generalisation.

At the intra-social level, consumption can be examined by isolating specific fields, as discussed above. Contrary to Bourdieu's preferred approach, however, we should not assume that the stakes in any given field relate to domination, even if this is always a potential we must attend to in order to retain a critical perspective. Bourdieu's own perceptive studies of domination through consumer behaviour can nonetheless be taken as exemplary, if conceptually flawed and empirically reductive, attempts at critically revealing the darker side of consumption, and following Bourdieu allows one to move some distance from a naively culturalist understanding of consumer action. Fine's proposal to focus on systems of provision for various consumer categories can be quite easily reconciled with Bourdieu's discussion of fields as the basic unit of analysis for consumption, even if Fine works with an even narrower conception of production and consumption than Bourdieu, focussing on the production and consumption of *material commodities* alone. Despite its limits, Fine's work too reminds scholars of consumption to avoid the sort of culturalism in which processes of material production have no place.

In order to empirically concretise this approach, while also better allowing for the analysis of non-domestic influences on consumption, I propose three basic moves. Firstly, instead of moving directly onto the level of the general historical studies of consumption discussed above, and then trying, somehow, to tease out their conceptual significance, one can proceed more cautiously and at a lower level of abstraction. The major precedent here is what has come to be called the "commodity biography" approach, the most influential being Arjun Appadurai's (1986) and Igor Kopytoff's (1986) seminal discussions of this theme, along with focussed historical studies of specific commodities in Sydney Mintz's (1986) *Sweetness and Power* and Timothy Burke's (2005 [1996]) *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women*. Essentially these studies look at how material commodities are embedded in highly complex social worlds within given historical frameworks. They therefore go a large way toward balancing the conceptual and the historical, even if, even more than with Bourdieu's fields or Fine's systems of provision, a certain arbitrariness surrounds their criteria of selection and the manner in which specific findings from these cases might be generalised. Studies have to be delimited somehow, of course, and some level of arbitrariness can never be escaped when doing so, but I have suggested that this can be tamed by selecting empirical material in accordance with where observed consumer practices are situated in the ideal-typical domains of market, redistributive or reciprocal exchange, at times neatly situated within one of these domains of the human economy and at others complexly sprawling across them.

A second step for concretising this approach, and for mediating the general and the particular, is to proceed by way of dialogue with existing narratives, both discursive and practical, of historical change at the level of a given society, where important themes like class, race, nation and gender can be worked into the analysis, depending on the specificities of the case at hand as well as the theoretical ambitions of the study. Thirdly, one can then also introduce themes at a level where societies, or members of certain societies, are brought into loosely-structured contact, such as imperialism, colonialism or globalisation, with the usefulness of such concepts again in part depending on one's own background assumptions but needing also to rely on a plausible reading of the historical specificities of the case at hand. One immediate problem, especially when researching non-Northern societies, is the relative paucity of literature that explicitly addresses all these themes from an angle than can be informative for the study of consumption. Ultimately, this problem can only be addressed over time by a collectivity of researchers pursuing similar projects on consumption and debating their assumptions, methods and conclusions. Nonetheless, Woodard has offered an interesting illustration of how one might proceed at these second and third levels by showing how consumer themes can be picked out of historical works not specifically intended to make statements about consumption and social change. For instance, he demonstrates how a book like Louis Pérez Jr's *On Becoming Cuban* (1999) contains a wealth of information about the manner in which a highly acquisitive popular culture, influenced by the growth of the USA but developing in locally idiosyncratic directions, emerged in Cuba from the late-19th to mid-20th century. When Cubans found they could not keep up with the runaway expansion of US affluence, this ultimately led many toward radicalisation as the gap between their expectations and their realistic consumption

possibilities grew impossibly wide (Woodard 2012:393–94). Woodard implies a twist on the consumer society theme, not denying the obvious precedent of the USA as a source of many consumer ideals and practices (even while demonstrating that this has been enormously overstated in the literature), but by attending to the contingencies through which this played out, both socially and politically, with initial contact with globalised consumer norms and ideals ultimately leading to a more insular nationalism and economic protectionism.

Reading such existing historical narratives at this second and third level will invariably entail reading against the grain, which can be taxing given that not all histories are so conveniently explicit about consumer themes. Speaking in terms that are emphatically heuristic and not ontological, I have proposed that we identify social change at the level of an entire society by considering tensions between the basic forms of integration, and at the level of particular social fields that are encompassed within or stretched across the various forms of market, redistributive and reciprocal exchange we identify within any given time period. Those narratives that are a constitutive part of observed practices, in the sense of a cultural (semantic) or imaginary background to both material and immaterial practices, are of especial importance. These narratives might be framed in terms of class, race, nation and gender, or modernity and globalisation, and so on, and the work of the social scientist is to interpret and communicate these in generalisable terms. At the same time, such an attempt, which will always be partial and flawed, must try not to get lost in these higher-level generalisation. This can be done by relating analysis at this level back to the first level of specific fields of production and consumption. An analysis framed in terms of globalisation, for instance, might prove very useful for explaining the consumption of tradable consumer durables in highly industrialised 20th century societies. At the same time, it might be of very limited use in discussing forms of consumption there and elsewhere that do not pass through globalised markets, or do so only very indirectly, such as redistributively-provided education or health care, or reciprocally-provided caring services to the young and elderly within nuclear families or more extended kinship groups.

In the chapters to follow, as discussed in the Introduction, I rely on the broad conceptual guidelines sketched out above to examine a slice of South African history from 1948 to the present, focussing on consumption practices during this period. To further narrow this down, I focus, in chapters 4–6, on the consumption of clothing, housing and ritual healing during this time as cases that allow us to explore both the complex manner in which concrete consumption practices play out and how the shifting balance of consumer practices across the various forms of integration can be related back to larger social and political changes in particular historical settings, of which South Africa is only one contingent example. The central argument pursued in the chapters to follow is that historically-situated consumer practices may be channelled into the service of different forms of integration in order to independently affect the social bonds between people, with potentially profound socio-political consequences. One should always hold back from substantively specifying these consequences in general terms, which always leads into teleological reasoning. Nonetheless, one can approach the problem formally in ways that direct further, substantive research. Consumption has this effect by (i) extending existing

group solidarity, or else disintegrating existing solidaristic groups. Where consumer practices have a disintegrating effect this leads either to (ii) fragmentation, in the sense of bounded associational forms of the sort usually referred to as "sub-cultures", or to (iii) individualisation. Likewise, consumer action may affect the political life of a society by (a) altering the explicit norms of political legitimation, (b) consolidating or altering the effective social grounds of political mobilisation, or (c) promoting a general withdrawal from political activity.

While Chapter 1 and this literature review chapter have been framed by concerns of a social-theoretical nature, the historical research on South Africa that follows in chapters 3–6 moves onto the terrain of historical sociology. In doing so I make extensive use of ethnographic studies by sociologists, anthropologists and historians that have conventionally been neglected in the telling of South African history, though I read these against the background of more conventional sources, mostly of a political-economic nature, from these disciplines and from political studies. In Chapter 3 I briefly situate this ethnographic literature within a wider historiographical field, drawing upon it as a sort of neglected archive that is astonishingly rich in insights about everyday forms of consumption of the sort that I go on to analyse in chapters 4–6. At this social-historical level, but building on the assumptions set out in this and the preceding chapter, I essentially attempt to demonstrate how socio-economic practices of consumption are constitutively wrapped up with large-scale socio-political outcomes. I draw attention to neglected "cultural" dimensions of South African history, which are scattered throughout a great many interesting studies within different disciplines but which tend to never be related to one another in any sort of systematic fashion and instead are read as at best interesting footnotes to a more basic political-economic narrative of historical change in which production is the essential motor of history. In doing so I also hope to illustrate how existing causal accounts of the main axes of historical change, usually of a strongly productivistic nature, overlook historical detail of great importance that tends to be misrepresented or ignored as a consequence of productivist forms of explanatory reductionism.

My aim in chapters 3–6 is not in any way to arrive at a complete rejection of the existing literature on South Africa, but neither am I just trying to show how it can be supplemented by filling in some forgotten details. I rather suggest that, by working with a reductive set of concepts, South African historiography has often been structured around misleading causal sequences that are of enormous consequence for the empirical studies that have gained most prominence. This historiography relies on explanatory hierarchies prioritising production over consumption and all other social activity. The validity of these explanatory strategies is often uncritically assumed rather than being demonstrated, allowing what are in their own right fascinating and necessary studies to explain too much with far too little. This is then followed, in Chapter 7, with a return to the more basic argument of this study about the potential contribution of an expressive account of consumption to critical social theory, but one informed by the detour through the historical material. It is at this level, as I have already suggested in Chapter 1, that we can and must attempt to generalise if our aim is to stimulate minimally converging research and debate, even while inviting such generalisations to be later nuanced or even robustly challenged.

Chapter 3

3. Conceptual trends in critical South African historiography

In this chapter I provide a brief overview of certain major trends in South African historiography. It is not my intention to enter into the details of these debates, but rather to offer a very general background for the historical discussion of specific forms of consumption in chapters 4–6, as well as the more conceptual discussion in Chapter 7. I begin with an overview of debates about race and class in the apartheid period, which divided criticism into liberal and neo-Marxist camps. I then show how these themes have shown up in post-apartheid debates, and especially those concerned with the black middle class. A somewhat submerged, and indeed mostly forgotten, strand in these discussions has been a fascinating tradition of ethnographic work on race and class during the apartheid period, and I mention some basic trends in this literature. This is indeed the literature that I have relied on most heavily in the historical reconstructions of major trends in the consumption of clothing, housing and faith healing that I offer in chapters 4–6. Here I do not get into the details of this ethnographic literature, and simply suggest that it offers a different way at coming at issues of race and class in South African history in general, as well as being rich in insights directly pertinent to the emerging literature on consumption. I briefly discuss this emerging literature, before suggesting that it can be critically extended through a lower-level discussion of various fields of consumption, with commodity and non-commodity forms of consumption considered alongside one another and general patterns being identified in accordance with where these practices are situated within or across the basic forms of integration.

3.1 Liberals and neo-Marxists

As Christopher Saunders (1988:14–16) has shown, one of the first attempts at framing a critical historiography for South Africa was made by William Miller MacMillan. MacMillan was a liberal historian who, in the 1920s, sought to criticise the segregation that was being put into place then. He argued that the most momentous event in South African history was the emergence of a single market during the 19th century. The single market was, in MacMillan's opinion, already an accomplished fact, and its further development favoured social integration, while segregation was unjust and regressive. MacMillan's ideas were expanded on by successive historians, who tended to view racism in South Africa as a throwback to the 18th century frontier encounters between the early Dutch settlers that were in time to regard themselves as the Afrikaners. C. W. de Kiewiet, a student of MacMillan's, soon added to this the idea – derived arguments from the 19th century by abolitionist critics of slavery and

adapted by other liberal thinkers to the South African circumstances of the times – that cheap labour, aside from being unjust or a throwback to a frontier past, was manifestly inefficient (Saunders 1988:15–17). With South Africa having left the gold standard in 1933 and being on the road to major economic recovery and growth, there was hope among liberals that this growth would of itself ultimately work to roll back segregation which, as discussed further in Chapter 4, had gone from a dispersed set of informal measures to official state policy with the passing of J. B. M. Hertzog's Native Bills of 1936–37 (Saunders 1988:17).

These optimistic tenets of liberal faith survived even the transition to apartheid in 1948. Indeed they were only to be seriously challenged from the early 1970s, when a new generation of neo-Marxist thinkers emerged, who were trying to make sense of the confluence of economic growth during the 1960s with on-going, and indeed mounting, racial domination. This gave rise to an enormously complex "race-class debate" that essentially attempted to critically diagnose the roots of apartheid, to explain what kept it running, and to thereby suggest what might be required to end it (Posel 1983:50).[56] For the neo-Marxists, the liberals were wrong in thinking that racial separation and domination would undermine capital accumulation; on the contrary, apartheid and capital were perfectly aligned, with racial domination providing an ideological screen for capital exploitation that ensured high rates of return through surplus value extraction. Some neo-Marxists viewed apartheid as an unstable system, but not in the first instance because of the racial tensions underpinning it. The crisis was rather one of capitalism itself which, as Marx and his followers had argued, was universally prone to self-destruct due to its own internal contradictions.

Posel (1983:50–59) demonstrates how the very terms of this debate unnecessarily restricted the possible critical space those participating in it sought to occupy by setting up an axiomatic either/or opposition between race and class as the basic units of analysis for understanding South African society. Both sides were in fact making valid historical connections but conceptually overstating their cases. Posel's main target is the neo-Marxists, who she argues were reductionists insofar as they insisted on reducing all racial dynamics to class, in the sense of productive relations, and were functionalist insofar as they believed racial domination must support capital accumulation based on exploitation in production. What is interesting about Posel's intervention is that she shows that neo-Marxists were reasoning in terms of a basic base-superstructure model, even when not explicitly using these terms or when throwing in disclaimers to the contrary, as race is never allowed to function as anything but a dependent variable of class in any of the actual analyses they offered (Posel 1983:53–54). Pivotal practical issues also showed up in distorted ways in this debate. The most sophisticated of these neo-Marxists, such as Harold Wolpe, were aware of where the major fault lines of conflict that had opened up in the apartheid system: the loss of economic self-sufficiency within the African homelands,[57] constantly-rising African urbanisation, and African mass-mobilisation. Nonetheless, they insisted on portraying these as outgrowths of dysfunctions in the very structure of capitalism, whereas they are better understood as consequences of self-defeating

apartheid policy manoeuvres to dominate Africans and other blacks that, while supporting capital accumulation in some ways, were undercutting it in others (Posel 1983:54–58).

It should be added that liberals were also reasoning functionally insofar as, working with a different set of premises, they believed that the expansion of the market must eventually throw apartheid into crisis. They were perfectly correct in thinking that racial domination collided with class exploitation, but were themselves reductionistic insofar as they overlooked the ways in which the two could also mutually reinforce one another. Posel (1983:60–62) and Saunders (1997:36) also point out that liberals tended to be methodological individualists, and struggled to reason in terms of structural enablements and constraints, which was one of the advantages of the neo-Marxist position. On the whole liberals were correct in viewing race as explanatorily irreducible to class but insufficiently critical of capitalism itself and wrong to view the market as the god in the machine that would of its own dispel the apartheid system, although, as Lipton (2007:54) has argued, the idea that liberals were all naive champions of the market, as neo-Marxist polemics have constantly claimed, is a clear misrepresentation of the actual state of the debate.

In fact, much of the neo-Marxist argument, when relieved of its functionalism and read more pragmatically, can be applied to primary industry on the mines and farms, especially during the period from the formation of industrial centres in the 19th century that followed the discovery of diamonds in 1867 and gold in 1886 until the 1930s or 1940s, where most labour power needed for the accumulation of capital was low-skilled and could be performed by labour migrants or farm tenants. The costs of physically sustaining these workers, which is one meaning of the Marxian appeal to reproduction – the other being the reproduction of the essential pivots of the social order, usually understood as the historically-prevailing system of labour exploitation – could be supplemented by rural homesteads. This in turn made a low-wage, low-skill economy sustainable and physical separation between the races viable, at least as long as Africans were prepared to stand for it or lacked viable political channels for making their malcontent heard and ensuring change. But applied to the period after the end of the Second World War, such arguments are somewhat at odds with historical reality. This is so even when reasoning purely economistically, and ignoring such important environmental and demographic factors as the drought and cattle disease that undermined the homeland economies and spurred urbanisation and demands for higher wages, along with all the other social drivers of black resistance in the cities.

Mining and agriculture were increasingly mechanised by the 1960s, leading to a greatly increased need in these previously low-skill sectors for more skilled workers (Lipton 2007:54). More importantly, with the massive growth of secondary industry in the form of manufacturing and the rise of a large African population living in the cities by the end of the Second World War, which continued to increase following the war despite all attempts to halt it, market production in South Africa underwent a very significant change. Charles Feinstein (2005:128–30, 247–50) argues that South African manufacturing required large numbers of

skilled or semi-skilled workers, and racial domination mostly worked to frustrate this. The "cheap labour" thesis defended by the neo-Marxists overlooked all these developments, assuming that it is on cheap, exploited labour alone that capitalism runs, and failing to appreciate that productivity gains by skilled labour can offset expenditure on higher wages. For Feinstein (2005:248–49), this is misleading, and quite apart from the cruelty and injustice of it, an unhealthy, unmotivated, low-paid labour force imposes hidden costs of its own:

> economic growth in a developed industrial economy does not depend on crude exploitation of wage labour with low pay and long hours. It is achieved by means of technical progress, better human capital, and advances in productivity. What was true for mining in 1870 was not true for manufacturing a century later. The constant emphasis by radicals on super- and ultra-exploitation of migrant labourers highlighted the very real suffering imposed on black workers, but ignored its adverse consequences for the economy.

Also, as manufacturing remained locked into a cycle of low productivity, it was dependent on a decently-paid domestic market for its products in the context of post-war import substitution industrialisation, but low wages thoroughly depressed this market. In short, export-oriented growth premised on low-skill labour was indeed basically compatible with apartheid in the manner stressed by neo-Marxists, but domestic growth and the move toward mechanisation and diversification away from primary industry were not (Lipton 2007:54–55).

3.2 General histories, the underclass and the new middle class

Saul Dubow (2014:ix) has argued that contemporary social science approaches to South African history "from above" have now largely given way to history "from below". This has in many ways been beneficial, but what we now find is a tendency for scholars to approach the past in a blinkered manner, leading to a "fragmentation of the historical experience and loss of analytical connections". There have, however, been some attempts to counter this through general histories of South Africa. In addition to Dubow's (2014) own book, works by Beinart (2001 [1994]) and Thompson (2001) stand out as particularly ambitious attempts to put the fragments back together again. These works do not attempt to break new ground, either conceptually or empirically, but are impressive syntheses of an enormous amount of existing scholarship. The major themes of race and class, though everywhere present in these books, have nonetheless appeared in some pioneering works attempting to make sense of South African life on a large scale, although class has become the more central of the two concepts with the transition to a democratic and – in principle, if not in practice – racially equal South Africa.

On the one hand, it is still common to note how race and class continue to overlap, but on the other hand there is a widespread tendency to underscore the increase in *intra*-racial inequality. Observations about the latter are also generally accompanied by discussion of a "new" black

middle class, although just how new it is is very debatable. Without entering into such debates, I will assume that this class, emerging in the colonial period, was still forming during the apartheid period but established enough in popular consciousness for it to have an important life of its own in practice too, which was a recurring finding in the "neo-Weberian" and anthropological literature mentioned below. That said, the democratic transition of 1994 has created the potential for unprecedented mobility, allowing this middle class to rapidly expand in number, with its members moving further into civil service employment and business, and catching the attention of the media through the conspicuous consumption of public figures, both in popular culture and among the new political elite. Most approaches to the black middle class have been quantitative, based especially on income and expenditure data (e.g. Muller 2006; Schlemmer 2005; Visagie 2015).[58] Historical and more ethnographic approaches to the black middle class have also begun to emerge, which have argued for the historical rootedness of the black middle class (Mabandla 2015), its indeterminacy due to on-going social, economic and political insecurity and its regional variations (Chevalier 2015; Khunou 2015), and the manner in which members of the contemporary black middle class deal with debt (James 2015) and justify their social mobility (Krige 2015).

Class, beyond the more particular issue of the black middle class, has received very detailed and sophisticated treatment in two major works. Jeremy Seekings and Nicoli Nattrass (2005) have created a topography of class in post-apartheid South Africa by judiciously collating variables from various data sets establishing the employment status and income of most South Africans. The book also innovates by identifying a large "underclass" (borrowing the term, with some reservations, from Erik Olin Wright) in South Africa that is permanently unemployed or else systematically disadvantaged in the labour market. However, a shortcoming of the book, as Seekings (2008:8, 2009b:866) has conceded elsewhere, is that subjective understandings of class are ignored. On the premises from which I have been working, this is no small flaw. It fails in the end to tell us anything about how demographic facts are conceived by people and translate into patterned forms of action. From this perspective, a more promising book has been *Class in Soweto* (Alexander *et al*. 2013), the outcome of an ambitious research project that systematically grapples with both objective and subjective dimensions of class in contemporary South Africa from an African perspective. I will discuss what I believe are the book's flaws below, which amount to imposing a reductive, neo-Marxist conception of class onto empirical material that itself suggests that a more complex understanding of class would be more appropriate. *Class in Soweto* nonetheless remains the most impressive existing attempt to engage with the complexities of class in South Africa insofar as it endeavours to systematically reconcile a structural, political-economic approach to class with quasi-ethnographic research into the lived reality of class at an everyday level.

3.3 The forgotten Weberians and the *Xhosa in Town* trilogy

Seekings (2009b) has recently uncovered what he calls a "Weberian" tradition of writing about class and social stratification in South Africa that has been routinely ignored and that is by now all but forgotten in contemporary efforts to reconstruct the historiography of the apartheid period.[59] This literature began appearing from the late 1940s, but from the early 1970s disappeared from mainstream debate, which had begun to surrender to neo-Marxist approaches to stratification. It was increasingly only through figures like Pierre van den Berghe and I. D. MacCrone, who tended to get pilloried as "liberals" in neo-Marxist polemics, that these writers were paid any heed at all (Posel 1983:51, n.4). The term "Weberian" is something of a makeshift, as Seekings acknowledges. Weber is not always directly invoked in this literature, although there is a generally Weberian influence in the analytical focus on status or caste as the foundational feature of stratification in South Africa, but it seldom went deeper than this. I will call it the "neo-Weberian" tradition for ease of reference, and by way of contrast with the neo-Marxist tradition discussed above, without wanting to suggest anything like a perfect convergence among these various writers or any direct debt to Weber himself. There was some overlap between liberals and neo-Weberians, but they were mostly a distinct set, and were asking different questions, with the latter frequently interested in uncovering subjective and objective forms of stratification within black communities and between black and white groups.

These neo-Weberians should also be discussed alongside the anthropologists that produced the *Xhosa in Town* trilogy, who researched the satellite townships of East London in the contemporary Eastern Cape province, and whose work has been revisited, critiqued and updated in an excellent recent study by Leslie Bank (2011).[60] Philip and Iona Mayers' book *Townsmen or Tribesmen* (1974 [1961]) was the most engaging of the trilogy and received the widest audience. It was, for this reason, also subject to particularly vicious and sustained critique. Many academics erroneously viewed the Mayers' interest in the manner in which rural migrants resisted assimilation into industrial capitalism and the lure of consumer luxuries, even while periodically living and working in the cities, as a tacit endorsement of apartheid and a negation of the African capacity to adapt to modernity (Bank 2011:9–10). While sharing to some extent the neo-Weberian concern with stratification, the anthropologists among them were also keenly interested in understanding African life from multiple perspectives, especially by considering the extent to which urban living had affected it. They were not directly trying to explain apartheid, while all being overtly or tacitly critical of it, and they had little to say about the development of capitalism, even while showing a very detailed interest in the working lives and consumer habits of those they studied. While much of this literature uses the term "class", it is to stratification in a far wider sense that they clearly refer, interrogating people's social standing in a hierarchical status order with both objective and subjective dimensions. These works were also very alive to the independent role of race as a determinant of status. Because of the extreme difficulty in achieving social mobility between the racial groups under apartheid, the term "caste" is sometimes used in the Weberian sense of

a rigidly bound status group when speaking of the racial order. It is also not an entirely coherent literature, and one can only make very rough generalisations about it. What really holds it together conceptually is its avoidance of a purely economistic account of social stratification, with markers of class in the Marxian or Weberian sense always balanced with or subordinated to other social attributes in whatever way struck the observers' eyes, such that age, residential locality, gender, ethnicity, and so on, were also observed to stratify. Race, however, stands out above all as the primary form of stratification in all these studies, which is hardly surprising given that the entire socio-political order was constantly being transformed from above along racial lines.

3.4 Consumption as an emerging theme

In recent years academic studies of consumption have begun to emerge. These overlap somewhat with the studies of the black middle class mentioned above, but have also moved in different directions. The trigger for this has been the extravagance of South Africa's conspicuously consuming new business and political elites, which has caught they eyes of both marketers and the media, even though the recent historical and ethnographic research on the black middle class mentioned above has found that middle class Africans and blacks often also spend or invest money more prudently than is generally assumed (e.g. James 2015, 48). In one of the first explicit treatments of this subject, Posel (2010:159) argued that the ostentatiousness of South Africa's new elite, marked by their conspicuous display of luxury commodities and lifestyles, is essentially continuous with that of the emerging black middle class, where an aspirational ethic prevails: "among many of those less well endowed, the aspiration to wealth, along with the acquisition and display of desirable things — from clothes and cell phones through to cars and houses — is boldly declared, and invested with the iconography of a joyous emancipation."

There also appears to be a political dimension to this. Arguing in a fashion that is avowedly "highly speculative", Achille Mbembe (2008:37) has proposed that the shopping and entertainment complexes in which middle class South Africans appear to increasingly spend their leisure time engaged in commodity consumption divert or negate potentially progressive collective energy that could otherwise be channelled toward fostering critical public debate, isolating individuals instead within an enclosed realm of consumer fantasy that has little regard for historical grievances and future aspirations. Elsewhere he has suggested that, along with the welfare system, consumption is one of the essential "technologies of social discipline, if not pacification, that the government is using after the years of mobilization to demobilize people — it doesn't want people to be protesting too much" (Mbembe in Weaver Shipley 2010:662). Posel (2013:60), by contrast, believes that consumer dynamics have fed into political mobilisation, arguing that the widespread imaginary of "freedom as freedom to consume" in democratic South Africa has been tied up with a form of politicised identity formation through

which whiteness is equated with wealth and prestige, and opposition with exclusion and blackness. Here political mobilisation carries an explicitly emulative or aspirational ethos, with excluded black youths encouraged to unite on the grounds of their blackness in order to match or surpass whites in wealth.[61]

Posel advocates taking a large historical view of the subject, recommending that further research look into antecedents under apartheid, or even further back, by tracing its colonial roots and segregationist offshoots. The true significance of studying consumption in the South African context, she suggests, can be grasped by considering how it has helped to shape racialised social stratification and political domination. In addition to the many restrictions that prevented black South Africans from directly participating as equals in the labour market, as well as the transition from mission schooling to the Bantu Education system under apartheid, prohibitions on the sale of luxury items in township retail outlets helped to institutionally concretise the racial order by purposively inhibiting the cultivation of manners and lifestyles that would afford blacks greater social mobility (Posel 2010:168–70). These measures were part of a far broader "historically constitutive relationship between the workings of race and the regulation of consumption …. [T]he making of the racial order was, in part, a way of regulating people's aspirations, interests and powers as consumers" (Posel 2010:160).

Other than Posel's seminal article, there are some precedents for a historically-informed approach to the social and political context of consumption in South Africa, relating less to the apartheid period as a whole than to the transition from it to formal democracy in 1994. Patrick Bond assimilates discussion of consumption into a far larger critical economistic narrative of historical change from apartheid in 1948 to racially-inclusive democracy (Bond 2000, 2015; Bond and Saul 2014). On this account, which is basically a mixture of neo-Marxist and Regulationist claims, the democratic transition was ultimately driven by a crisis of capital over-accumulation that began in the 1970s and culminated in the 1980s, leading to full recession between 1989 and 1993. Skill shortages, anti-apartheid and workplace protest, inflation and economic sanctions by the international community all aggravated this crisis, but the main problem was the over-production of manufactured luxury goods for a local market unable to absorb them. With black labour legally confined to the bottom of a wage pyramid steeply slanted along racial lines, South Africa's "racial Fordism" approximated the Fordist model of Northern societies but was unable to integrate society to the same extent. In order to escape this over-accumulation crisis, and the falling corporate profits attending it, firms in the 1980s responded by moving abroad or geographically expanding their local operations, while also adapting through strategies of "financialisation", facilitated in large part by an expansion of the consumer credit system from the 1990s. Apartheid, having become an impediment to capital accumulation that by the 1980s, began to seem irremediable, especially due to international sanctions and the dampening of internal demand through low remuneration for the black labour force, was jettisoned in such a manner that the basic mechanisms of capital accumulation remained untouched (Bond 2000:18–48, 212–13, 2015:220; Saul and Bond 2014:109–12, 151–53).

This, then, was the particular manner in which Bond believes South African society faced up to the accumulation crisis that, in its general outlines, is bound to surface in all capitalist societies given that the over-accumulation of capital is everywhere "an eternal underlying tendency of capitalism" (Bond 2000:22). As with Harvey and his predecessors in the production of consumption tradition discussed in Chapter 2, consumption is also understood functionally here, as that which either sustains capital accumulation or, if aggregate demand falls, leads to total systemic shock in the form of an over-accumulation crisis. In either case the real cause of historical change is always to be located in the system of capital accumulation, all else being explanatorily derivative of this, and the only questions asked of consumption are whether it functionally stimulates or undermines accumulation. What Bond never tells us is what anybody made of all this. It is probably not unfair to suggest that, as with the structuralist neo-Marxist theory he applies, Bond assumes that human action responds to interests, that in capitalist societies one's interests are reducible to one's disposition to promote or frustrate capital accumulation in accordance with whether or not one suffers from labour exploitation or the depredations of primitive accumulation, and that this objective relationship to interests is what determines both thought and action, the rest being extraneous detail when accounting for large-scale social change. Bond clearly draws attention to some hugely important economic developments in South Africa that help to explain the democratic transition, but whether all these, along with the political trends he also mentions in passing, can be functionally related to capital accumulation in general is asserted without due caution. So too is the notion that consumption, also approached functionally, is explicable in abstraction from the meanings and motivations that real people bring to it. As sophisticated Marxists like E. P. Thompson famously insisted, it is not brute interest that shapes action, but how people conceive of their interests. Such conceptions may, of course, originate in a form of false consciousness in which objective interest is veiled, but if this is so then it deserves a mention, along with at least a few lines hazarding an explanation of how it is that multitudes of people completely fail to make these basic connections to their purportedly objective interests.

Some clues about how action on the large scale might have responded to what those performing it thought and felt, joining a concern with consumer action with large-scale social and political analysis, can be found in articles by Jonathan Hyslop and Albert Grundlingh. Hyslop (2000) has argued that accounting for apartheid's demise must entail probing why a majority of South African whites, as the only enfranchised population group, came to acquiesce in its dismantling. He contends that we need to supplement the more established political explanations for this change with an understanding of how thoroughly individualised and apolitical identities emerged among sections of the white population under the impress of exposure to commodified "lifestyles" from Northern countries. This initiated a process in which, eventually, "subjectivities that were to a large extent organised around a modernist and racist project of state building were replaced by a more self-regarding, individualist and consumerist identity" for whom the apartheid project ultimately came to be seen as an impediment to their more self-regarding life projects (Hyslop 2000:37).

This is not as abstract a proposition as it may sound if we observe that it points to concrete practices and can be given an approximate date. Hyslop believes politically-significant change in the subjectivity of certain sections of white South Africa began in the 1970s when, due to political rifts in the ruling Afrikaner alliance, deliberate attempts by the apartheid state to regulate subjectivity, through measures such as artistic and intellectual censorship, halting the introduction of television while promoting state-sponsored radio, and compulsory white military conscription, slowly gave way. He views the change from apartheid to racially inclusive democracy as, in part, an unintended consequence of these political decisions. Here it is immaterial whether we agree with the details of Hyslop's analysis, and what is important is rather to consider the mode of explanation as something that works outside of functionalist assumptions, moving away from mono-causal accounts of social change and attempting to grapple with historical contingency, while also registering the socio-politically significant effects of subjectivity within a context of power disparities and imperfect knowledge.

Hyslop's explanation can be supplemented by Albert Grundlingh's (2008) discussion of social responses to increased wealth amongst South Africa's white Afrikaner population, from whom the apartheid political elite was largely drawn. While the details of his account are contestable, it is the implied explanatory value of consumer action for initiating historical change that interests me here. Grundlingh (2008:143–46, 151) argues that the economic boom of the 1960s was accompanied by rapid upward social mobility among the white, Afrikaans-speaking ethnic group self-identifying as Afrikaners, facilitated not only by the greater presence of Afrikaner women in the labour force, expansion of the local advertising industry and the wider availability of credit since 1964, but also by a valorisation within popular Afrikaner culture of spending and conspicuous consumption rather than of saving and austerity. Grundlingh (2008:146–49) believes more privileged Afrikaners now felt secure that they had escaped the financial conditions of the 1930s and war years. The popular push for Afrikaner social unity for political ends in the run-up to the 1948 elections, which saw a pro-Afrikaner and pro-apartheid government installed through a narrow electoral lead, now lost its urgency. This social split within the Afrikaner population led to deep political divisions, with the wealthy elite ultimately relinquishing political power in the face of socio-political developments such as increased political resistance to apartheid, international sanctions, and the fall of the Soviet Union despite strong resistance from the poorer and more conservative political support base for apartheid (Grundlingh 2008:158–59).

Considering this emerging literature on consumption as a whole, I believe that very little can be decided about how it fits together in the abstract. An important basic step for engaging with the institutional dimension of consumption is to balance large-scale social analysis with more detailed research, holding back from incautious generalisations until more can be said about the everyday thoughts and motivations of actual consumers. To do this, we need to make the historical move of provisionally conceiving of consumption at a lower level of analysis than that of an entire society, with generalisations at this level best reserved for a cautious second step. This is the key insight in Ben Fine's "systems of provision" approach to consumption,

only we need to resist Fine's ultimate insistence that all systems of provision ultimately have to be explained in direct relation to the effects of capitalist commodity production. We do better to reason, somewhat like Bourdieu, in terms of various fields of practice that may be fully encompassed by the market but which may also be only partially so, or indeed wholly independent of it. But fields, like systems of provision, can also be infinitely multiplied, and we do not have to give up on generalisation. This is the importance of Polanyi, as he reasons about the market as something that appears in all human societies, albeit to very varying degrees, to exist in a space of tension with other forms of exchange. Hence the heuristic value of discussing redistribution and reciprocity as elements of any given economy.

Polanyi's basic insight is that critical social-science theorising has an enormous amount to learn from anthropology in this regard, as a reminder of what human potentials exist even in times of extreme market liberalisation. If Craig Calhoun is right to argue that the task of critical theory is always to criticise society in terms of both the actual and the possible, then Polanyi effectively offers a far stronger critique of capitalism than that of some of its most relentless critics, and he does so without sliding into abstract utopianism but rather by thinking historically. Focussing on the particular problem of consumption, which Polanyi said very little about, I will try to show in the next four chapters that, among other things, the catch-all appeal to the structuring effect of the market in all human domains of endeavour is a simplifying tool that is valuable for excavating the class dimension of social practices, but if we hope to explain the wider grounds of social solidarity and stratification, and the practical sources of social and political change, then we should not be content with only going this far. Moreover, as I will argue, consumption on the market has a wide range of possible effects, not only shoring up existing forms of solidarity but also potentially reconfiguring them.

Chapter 4

4. Clothing consumption and stratification

Clothing appears to function universally as far more than a merely pragmatic form of consumption and is, even in the context of everyday life, usually heavily weighted with symbolic significance. The most promising route into the understanding of clothing consumption is by situating consumer practices within the context of social struggles aimed at creating social solidarity and entrenching or challenging existing forms of stratification. In Chapter 7 I will consider the merits of more orthodox Marxian understandings of stratification as applied to South African history. Here I will simply note that, insofar as stratification relies on one's ability to consume commodities, as it partially does for Weber and even moreso for Bourdieu, one's relationship to the means of production or one's raw purchasing power is not fully determinative of one's overall placing in the stratification system. This is not just because distinction often has other social dimensions, such as one's educational background, possession of hereditary titles, performance of socially-esteemed work, ethnic or religious affiliation, and so forth, depending on the concrete historical setting in which it is being studied. What I want to highlight here is that even to the extent that it relates directly to the possession of status-conferring commodities, distinction is more easily secured through some commodities than others. Because of this, differential investments of scant financial resources into status-conferring forms of commodity consumption can in some measure allow for correspondingly differential placement within a stratification order even in the context of identical resources.

In South Africa during the time-frame I consider, the relative accessibility of fine clothing, like other more accessible fashion items such as home furnishings, and unlike that of other distinctly more expensive status-conferring commodities, such as cars or access to private secondary and tertiary education, has allowed for a measure of social *mobility*. Within the constraints of unequal and often very meagre financial means, a shifting of financial priorities can create an impression of in-group superiority or of equality with members of a higher-placed out-group to which one aspires. Whether motivated by the pursuit of expressive ends or by instrumental calculation, such impressions sometimes have real consequences. One might really attain equal recognition or achieve higher status, just as one might obtain a desired job or marry into a wealthy family, which potentially alter the existing stratification order instead of simply reproducing it. Ordinary people are aware of such possibilities, have no difficulty articulating them when questioned, and adapt their behaviour accordingly.

Precisely because social orders are symbolically constituted, and because clothing is usually symbolically-loaded, clothing consumption is never entirely "innocent", in the sense that it positions the wearer within social space. For this reason, clothing consumption tends to be

heavily regulated by laws or communally-enforced norms in many societies, such as the sumptuary laws and codes prevailing in many pre-modern Western societies and their colonial offshoots. These were often extremely detailed, in order to prevent any breach of these codes. In the Cape Colony, which was the original European settlement of South Africa under Dutch rule, sumptuary laws were imposed in the mid-17th century in order to ensure that only high-level administrators could display finery on their coaches and wear clothes with gold and silver thread and buttons, while only high-level merchants could wear velvet clothes and lower-level merchants wear gold or silver shoe buckles. Likewise, only women with high-ranking husbands were permitted to wear jewels amounting to more than 1,000 Rix-dollars in value, to appear in pubic with three or more slaves attending them, to allow their female slaves to wear gold and silver jewellery (though the insertion of diamonds and pearls into their slaves' hair was strictly forbidden), and to allow their male slaves to wear clothes with braid trimmings or aiguillettes (Ross 1999:10–12). Later, in 1765, regulations were imposed in order to ensure that displays of affluence by emancipated slave women did not go unchecked:

> emancipated slave women were forbidden to wear "coloured silk clothes, hooped skirts, fine lace or any other adornments on their caps or on their waved hair, nor ear-studs, whether of precious or false stones". They were thus exclusively to wear chintz or striped linen. The only exception was that those of good character were permitted black silk dresses for marriages, when they were witnesses at a baptism or when for some other reason they went to church. (Ross 1995:11)

In the stretch of South African history that I examine here such laws had long since been abolished, and wearing smart clothing helped Africans to get jobs, ensured better treatment by whites, and enabled them to avoid the attention of the police that ragged or dirty clothes would draw, but would also be worn in an effort to pursue status (Clowes 2002:74–75; Reader 1961:71). Though cheaper than other status-conferring goods, the shifting of priorities needed to obtain clothing has usually involved great sacrifice, as African consumers frequently struggled to meet even the bare necessities constitutive of a socially-acceptable livelihood. That African consumers have usually demonstrated a willingness to make such sacrifices would appear to underscore the social significance of clothing. I view this significance not as a form of class[62] reproduction through consumption practices steered by false consciousness or a form of unconscious practice conforming to the urgings of *habitus*, but rather as an attempt by Africans to purposively situate themselves in a social milieu of their choosing. In so doing Africans were often constrained in what choices they could make and, as a consequence of their choices, reinforced a hierarchical ordering of social relationships, in ways that may not have always been fully transparent to everyday practical consciousness, but they possessed a complex awareness of social stratification and in a very important sense appear to have known very well what they were doing.

When developing my argument below, I offer a brief historical background sketch in the form of a discussion of how, despite most South Africans living at a globally low financial standard, post-World War South Africa experienced its own very modest consumer boom. This is followed by a discussion of advertising as a driver of clothing consumption, before considering the wider political-economic framework in which this consumption has been institutionally embedded. I go on to argue that such institutional dynamics should not be taken as explanatorily basic. Rather, one has to explain commodity consumption in both apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa within the context of altered but persistent colonial-era racial domination. When placed within this context, consumption can be understood as a form of expressive action aimed at the pursuit of recognition based on the social status associated with "civilization" and "respectability." In this way I build on the minimal epistemological assumption made in Chapter 1, where I argued that "structural", "institutional" or "causal" explanations of social action need to be read from *within* a more basically agentic, intentional and interpretive explanatory framework. In order to bring this latter dimension of social life into focus, this chapter explores the neglected ethnographic literature on South Africa for implicit or explicit attempts to situate consumer behaviour within a broader framework of action as meaningful and motivated. I then move the discussion forward in time, arguing that in the post-apartheid period there has been a slight deracialisation of consumer practices, allowing for greater social mobility by the African middle classes, whose consumption choices are now informed by an increasingly global set of status associations gesturing at greater freedom and wealth instead of ideals of civility and respectability. The background to this appears to be a continued stratification in African society that is increasingly revealed in practices of commodity consumption. These ideals have also been taken up by poorer social groups, but in an apparently highly commodified form that, unlike the consumer practices of early apartheid-era youth gangs, is only superficially at odds with conventional middle class consumption.

4.1 Changing styles of life in post-World War South Africa

The post-World War period – which I divide up into the apartheid period that began in 1948, shortly after the Second World War ended, and the post-apartheid period that emerged from 1994 following a four-year negotiated democratic transition – was a time of profound social change. This was particularly true for South Africa's African population, many of whom moved into the cities in their millions and all of whom became subject to increasingly-elaborated forms of racial domination. The wars had completely shaken up the demographic makeup of the country, with massive urbanisation built on an economic transformation in which the burgeoning manufacturing sector came to eclipse mining. At the same time, apartheid had been instituted in 1948, and the perpetual oscillations in apartheid policy that followed can be understood, in part, as a heavy-handed way of manipulating the political and economic changes afoot in such a manner that they would benefit a project of white

domination. This project aimed at ensuring social mobility especially for Afrikaners but was increasingly propped up by English South Africans that also perceived themselves to benefit from apartheid.

The more conventional political and economic responses to this situation – especially economic organisation and political struggle focussed on altering the political regulation of industrial production – have been exhaustively researched. Here I will simply note that these changes and the responses to them were not simply economic and political, and rather reached down into the social life of all South Africans. No social group was more profoundly affected by the social changes afoot than the African population, among whom a widespread "confusion of mores" prevailed, of the sort liable to confront any social group undergoing rapid social change (Nyquist 1983:155). Thomas Nyquist (1983:156), reflecting on his own research on Xhosa-speaking groups in what would become South Africa's Eastern Cape province, as well as the preceding ethnographic work of the Mayers (Mayer and Mayer 1974 [1961]), Reader (1961), Pauw (1968 [1963]), and others, who had all devoted themselves to registering the seismic shifts in African kinship structures and moral beliefs in the immediate post-World War period, argued that the social foundations of African society had been firmly shaken. By way of illustration he argued that:

> the place in society of the initiation rite for boys, the importance of virginity among girls, the role of men and women in marriage, the degree to which one should help relatives, the form and role of religion in life, the proper way of running organisations, the degree of belief in witchcraft – these and other strands constituting the cloth of one's culture are examples of those many areas in urban African life in which there is uncertainty about correct behaviour. (Nyquist 1983:156)

Africans, themselves a far from homogenous group, reacted in contradictory ways to new modes of urban living, sometimes rejecting them and sometimes enthusiastically embracing them. Insofar as they were taken up, urban black life in South Africa was increasingly suffused with consumption practices that demonstrated the mimetic adoption of European and North American fashions in dress, as well as in music and lifestyle more generally. These changing fashions brought most South Africans into more intimate contact with a global market. Such promises were embodied in the imagination of black South Africans in the "popular modernism" informing popular black artistic forms like Jazz in the USA, which had a counter-cultural edge and which stood in marked contrast both to what many at the time experienced as the traditional constraints of rural life in South Africa and the arid and oppressive Calvinist visions of modernity that the apartheid state celebrated (Bank 2011:41–44; Hannerz 1994:187–89).[63] There were also regional and local roots for this optimism, which was nourished on an awareness of the liberation of African colonies that led to the formation of societies like Ghana and Tanzania (themselves contributing to what Leslie Bank calls "pan-Africanist post-war urban modernity"), and the sea change in domestic resistance politics symbolised by the formation of the African National Congress Youth League in 1949 (Bank 2011:41–44, 49). These

changes launched a wave of popular, celebratory optimism at the prospect of realising what most urban black South Africans at the time viewed as the promises of a new era that would be marked by the imminent collapse of apartheid and the flourishing of local black society.

What is striking about this, however, is that in South Africa these post-World War developments happened in the context of very limited economic means, at least for the racially oppressed black population, and especially for Africans, who stood at the bottom of a racially-scaled hierarchy in which members of "coloured" and Indian groups received certain exemptions and greater privileges from the state. Despite their very limited resources, most Africans were able to meet their physiological needs, although some of the African homelands and urban areas experienced absolutely dire material want (Feinstein 2005:70–71; Lodge 1989 [1983]:11–12). While falling far short of the material affluence experienced in many Northern societies of the time, the post-World War period was accompanied by a novel "material culture" for black South Africans too. Not only fashionable dress but also such things as radios, gramophones, telephones, "European" furniture and alcohol, cigarettes and cars became potent status symbols, themselves linked to a popular conception of a new, modern era of greater liberty and expressive potential (Bank 2011:44; Kuper 1965:112–16). Popular magazines like *Drum*, *Zonk!*, *Bona* and *Pace*, as well as radio shows and film, opened the gates to new fashions, which were then moved onto the streets and into the shebeens and dance halls, while also featuring prominently in periodic rituals like weddings, beauty contests and sporting events (Bank 2011:49, 171; Kuper 1965:114; Laden 2001:516).

4.2 Enablement and constraint in market context

4.2.1Advertising as a stimulus to consumption

The previous chapters have argued against economistic, and particularly productivistic, approaches to consumption, and here it remains only to mention how this assumption shapes my understanding of clothing and other forms of commodity consumption in South Africa. Firstly, I believe that endeavouring to explain the consumption of clothing or any other commodified good by observing simply that it was advertised in a certain fashion deserves to be met with greater scepticism than is usually the case. I do not mean to suggest, however, that research informed by such assumptions is of no value. There has been, for example, very interesting research done on how advertising for clothing and other commodities in popular newspapers and magazines has reproduced class, racial and gender tropes of an often highly inegalitarian nature, which might indeed have had a large effect on South African society (Clowes 2002; Lewis 2012; Louw 2009; Maake 2006; Masina 2010).

At its most compelling, the literature on advertising, often written from a cultural studies or media studies perspective, reveals how advertisements played on these social divisions when pushing products, even while reflecting or seeking to resolve some of the tensions accompanying these divisions. For instance, Nicolette Louw (2009:43–48) argues that advertisements in *The Townships Housewife* and *Grace*, which were read by African women, endeavoured to help these women to endure racial domination and to negotiate the transition from the country to the city, often associated in these magazines with an embrace of "modern" or "civilised" ways, by encouraging them to dress and groom themselves in accordance with prevailing white and middle class African standards of beauty. Women were at once offered a range of goods to purchase, beauty columns that instructed them on their acceptable use, and admonitions to retain a sense of civilised propriety and maintain their Christian values without getting lost in the allure of what one columnist called "the shine of the temporary things offered by civilisation" (Louw 2009:47). Sarah Nuttall (2004:44–46, 2008:165–71) has, similarly, argued that in the post-apartheid period, advertising within youth magazines has been instrumental in allowing for the emergence of racially-blurred identities based on shared tastes and consumer practices.

What is far less clear, however, is what independent role advertising, as opposed to the multitude of other social and political forces invoked by these adverts, played in stimulating consumer demand by ensuring that people who would have not otherwise bought goods in fact did so. Some clearly suggest that advertising is efficacious in stimulating consumer demand but are unclear about the extent to which this is so and focus instead on its social and political consequences (Nuttall 2008:165, 167).[64] Other studies assign a strong independent role to advertising in this regard (Masina 2010:10–11; Lewis 2012:83–84) but are not up-front about how completely speculative this is and do not consider what alternative explanations might exist, as when Desiree Lewis confidently claims that advertising in South Africa is "the culture industry's tool for generating an insatiable need among consumers". Highlighting this problem is not an objection to a lack of hard evidence, but rather a way of suggesting that there needs to be a deeper excavation of the historical context in which such advertisements appeared. Lindsay Clowes (2002:75), for instance, seems more aware of the historical context in which advertising functions, arguing that advertisements and advice columns for men's clothing in *Drum* during the 1950s were to a large extent preaching to the converted, as "urban men were already 'dressed for the west', and the magazine's role seems to have been one of acknowledging, reinforcing and ratifying an already existing phenomenon rather than inventing new traditions."

While not wishing to simply dismiss the possible contribution that advertising may have made to the demand for particular products, for which I also have no direct counter-evidence, it should be noted that these claims fit so well with a widespread critical stance that those making them appear to feel absolved from appealing to evidential support themselves. Below, relying on the ethnographic material that informs my own conclusions, I will argue that

people's tendency to explain their consumption choices in terms of their social situatedness, as well as a multitude of observations to this effect by sociologists and anthropologists not directly intending to make a point about consumer behaviour even while converging on their reading of the phenomenon, all strongly suggest an explanatorily derivative, and at best modest, role for advertising. Given this, I am in sympathy with Michael Schudson (1984), who argues cogently and with a wealth of empirical evidence that the efficacy of advertising tends to be thoroughly misconstrued in the critical literature touching on the subject, which fails to draw essential distinctions. Advertising can of course inform people about the very existence of new products, and in this way help to link demand to supply. But when evaluating the *persuasive* dimension of advertising, of which production of consumption perspectives are fully convinced, Schudson makes an excellent case that what advertising can most plausibly claim to do is to shape people's choice of *brand*, not of *product*. Otherwise put, advertising expands the "market share" of competing firms, but consistently fails to make any significant dent on aggregate consumption for any category of consumer goods. Thus many products have demonstrably become enormously successful in the total absence of advertising, just as huge advertising expenditures have failed to arrest shrinking aggregate demand for other products (Schudson 1984:9, 24–26). Although it cuts strongly against much accepted wisdom in critical social science, I think Schudson (1984:9) quite rightly maintains that "[a]dvertising is not a war on consumers' minds but a competitive war against commercial rivals for a share of a market whose size is either constant or, if changing, is changing for reasons far beyond the power of advertising to affect."

For research on advertising to be truly informative about product choice, as opposed to brand choice, it would have to come at matters very differently, by considering how consumers might have responded to these advertisements in agentic ways, if only by simply disregarding them as insincere (which Schudson shows is a common response), and by exploring what really motivates producers to advertise. Considering the latter, Liz McFall (2004:69) has recently argued for the continued relevance of Schudson's sceptical approach to advertising, and points to ethnographic studies of advertisers that bear out Schudson's contention that it is primarily the desire to ward off encroaching competition on an existing market share that impels producers to advertise, as opposed to any strong confidence in their ability to conjure up demand where there was none before. What all this points to is the need to proceed on the assumption that we do better to search for the explanation of consumer behaviour *on* the market by beginning *outside* of the market itself. Doing so entails situating one's account of market behaviour within a far wider social and political context in which its broader historical embedding can swim into view. Before doing so, however, something has to be said about class-based constraints on consumption, which in the commodity sphere clearly are of huge importance.

4.2.2 Commodity consumption and class reproduction

A second point to note when considering the shortcomings of economistic approaches to consumption is that commodity consumption need not reproduce an existing system of social stratification, and may rather confuse and alter it. I will develop this idea further in Chapter 7, but here it should be introduced in order to demonstrate why focussing on clothing consumption is able to reveal something about commodity consumption that is generally overlooked in the general literature on consumption. Clothing, in the period considered here, has been attained almost exclusively as a commodity by all South Africans, with differences in purchasing power directly convertible into differential placing within a recognitional order shaped by one's ability to access this status-conferring commodity and others like it. For this reason, class variables in the conventional Marxian and Weberian senses of this term, such as higher income levels or the *de jure* or *de facto* preferential access to waged labour that often guaranteed higher income, have always conferred on white South Africans an enormous advantage over black South Africans in the pursuit of status-conferring goods. Considering income levels alone, inequality in South Africa has always been striking, with the per capita income of the white minority standing at approximately 10 times that of Africans at the beginning of the post-World War period in 1946 (Thompson 2001:155–56). The difference between the two stood at roughly 12 times in 1993, just before the completion of the democratic transition the following year (Seekings and Nattrass 2015:3–4). Significant income disparities *within* the African population also began to appear from the mid-1970s onward, which in the post-1994 period have grown even larger (Feinstein 2005:231–33; Marais 2011:210–11).

The existence of these discrepancies in financial position did not, however, mean that those in different income categories were entirely unable to compete with one another for status or to aspire toward equal recognition, although it obviously did make it extremely difficult to effectively do so. Ethnographic research on South Africa has often registered the enormous sacrifices made by Africans in order to ensure a standard of conspicuous consumption that often compels them to pinch on other less conspicuous forms of spending. In the particular case of clothing, for instance, Laura Longmore (cited in Clowes 2002:76) observed of African men in the Johannesburg region, as part of a study of sexual mores in urban African life in the late 1950s, that "a man will tell you that he would rather buy clothes, often of superior quality, than save his money, or even spend it to feed himself adequately", and she believed Africans were generally "much more clothes-conscious than the average European".[65] As discussed further below (building on Bray et al. 2010:132), similar spending patterns have been noted of African and other black households in the post-apartheid period.

My purpose here is certainly not to suggest that Africans are careless spendthrifts. Rather, I am concerned with inquiring into what motivates such spending and what its social and political antecedents and effects have been. As a visible bodily covering worn in public at all times, clothing is one of the most fundamental indicators of one's lifestyle, and its being obtained exclusively on markets of course made it significantly more accessible to some social groups

than others. It would be easy to conclude from this that clothing simply reproduced class-based distinction, but this is considerably complicated by the fact that the significance of clothing choice could be manipulated and clothing was never a *reliable* social differentiator. Schudson (1984:158) points out that in some cases "[f]rom the point of view of society, consumer lifestyles may confuse social ranking; from the point of view of the aspiring individual, however, this very confusion may serve personal ends." Similarly, Robert Ross (1990:91), reflecting on the simultaneous semantic density and manipulability of clothing codes, suggests that dress is a practical domain in which we see the truth of Umberto Eco's claim that a sign might best be defined as that through which lies can be told.

With this in mind, I believe it is interesting to note that clothing has often been observed in scholarly discussion of stratification in South Africa to function as just such a potentially misleading sign. Unlike Schudson's emphasis on individual behaviour, though, clothing consumption has often been discussed within a larger framework of concern with social stratification between people understood as members of social classes in a roughly Weberian or Bourdieuvian sense, though not drawing directly on these authors. Leo Kuper (1965:112) viewed clothing as an "uncertain index of class" in South Africa and emphasised the great economic sacrifices some poor Africans were prepared to make in order to augment their status through investing in clothing. Thomas Nyquist (1983:139), also within the larger framework of a discussion of stratification in African communities, makes an identical observation, arguing that clothing allows for social imitation in a way that is not possible through less accessible goods. Like Kuper and Nyquist, who wrote in the apartheid period, Kim Wale (Wale 2013:168), notes the importance that contemporary Africans place on self-presentation through dress when discussing social distinction. For the residents of Soweto that informed her study, "class position is not just about what you have, but about how your community perceives the way you present yourself through dress." She is led to this conclusion by poor informants who, in addition to stressing the importance of clothing for one's standing in society, make statements like the following: "[y]ou must try to put your things together. Right now things are much better because you can buy clothes on the streets and fix yourself nicely [so] that you look like other people", and "I sometimes go to top class [when] I wear expensive clothes and carry expensive stuff" (Wale 2013:169). What follows is an attempt to think historically about the wider determinants of clothing consumption, which entails moving beyond the economistic confines of advertising as a motor of consumption, or of productive status and income as strong predictors of consumer behaviour. While the efficacy of the former seems to me exaggerated, and while the latter has certainly been very important, I believe the consumption of commodities like clothing has been under-determined by both of these, and focussing on them alone can distract attention from the larger social and political forces that have shaped commodity consumption in South Africa in the period that interests me, and indeed well before.

4.3 The politics of clothing consumption

4.3.1 The political-economic background of clothing consumption

I argued in the first two chapters that production of consumption approaches to consumption have something important to say because they help to show up aspects of consumer behaviour that excessively "culturalist" approaches tend to overlook. It is worth briefly returning to this claim here, broaching questions of a roughly political-economic nature, before going on to emphasise, in section 4.4, the social dynamics informing consumer choice in a manner that might otherwise seem excessively voluntarist and unconcerned with production. In particular, I want to briefly consider another sense in which the institutional and often unintentional dimension of commodity consumption that purely culturalist approaches to consumption tend to ignore might be informative for an historical reconstruction of the sort I am attempting here. The particularly political element of this will be of special interest to me, in part as a way of guarding against a tendency to exaggerate the specifically economic nature of institutional change, in the commonplace use of this term, as referring only to market dynamics.

One way into considering the political effect of clothing consumption is to see how it has indirectly and often inadvertently been tied up with larger institutions supporting economic exploitation and racial domination. Purchasing valued goods on the market may contribute to the reproduction of certain productive arrangements at the expense of others, and to the perpetuation of the social and political arrangements that come with obtaining objects through the market form of integration instead of through reciprocity or redistribution. At the same time, the more complex the division of labour in any given society, and its regulation, the less likely people are to possess an everyday awareness of the wider economic and political frameworks in which their consumer actions take effect, and it is here that associating consumption with reproduction is likely to be most informative. Fredric Jameson (1991:411), for instance, argues that in contemporary conditions, where social life is spatially extended to a historically-unprecedented extent, people's phenomenological experience is

> limited to a tiny corner of the social world, a fixed-camera view of a certain section of London or the countryside or whatever. But the truth of that experience no longer coincides with the place in which it takes place. The truth of that limited daily experience of London lies, rather, in India or Jamaica or Hong Kong; it is bound up with the whole colonial system of the British Empire that determines the very quality of the individual's subjective life. Yet those structural coordinates are no longer accessible to immediate lived experience and are often not even conceptualizable for most people.

In mass societies, and especially with the proliferation of transnational economic connections of the sort sometimes referred to as global commodity chains from around the 1980s, it is easy to see how this disconnect between intentional action and its opaque causal context might be

problematic. It clearly weakens everyday critique of market practices, even without entering into discussions about possible consumer false consciousness or a global "culture-ideology of consumerism" promulgated by marketers (Sklair 1994:177). We can speak here of a "dark side" of consumption, with the complexity and spatio-temporal extension of many contemporary market arrangements often profoundly impairing the consumer's grasp of the productive (and distributive) background of products encountered at the point of consumption, where we are also likely to encounter relationships of socio-political domination (Narotzky 2007a:21, 28–32).

Purchasing South African clothes locally or abroad has helped to reproduce the social and political arrangements governing the provision of clothing by locally-based, though often Taiwanese-owned, clothing producers, at once ensuring the continuation or creation of jobs in what is a labour-intensive economic sphere but also perpetuating the economic exploitation that has often accompanied this. Moreover, the development of the clothing industry has been deeply marked by the imperatives of racial domination, and the two need to be considered together to avoid explanatory reductionism. To see why this is, we should consider that the South African garment industry emerged in the early 20th century, moved from small craft production into mass factory production from the late 1920s, and nearly doubled in size in the course of the Second World War, thereby becoming a major component of the larger boom that saw manufacturing surpass gold mining in number of employees and contribution of the sector to the gross national product (Berger 1987:125, 139; Lodge 1989:11; Thompson 2001:177–78).

The shortage of cotton and wool yarn during the Second World War made the clothing industry a particular focus of state concern, and in keeping with the wider import-substitution strategy developed by the Smuts government from the early 1940s it was decided to establish local weaving and spinning factories instead of importing yarn. In time, this led to the clothing industry becoming the centrepiece of South Africa's import-substitution industrialisation strategy. Garment factories, together with other manufacturing enterprises, were initially placed close to black urban locations and African reserves and, in the latter case, came to be known as "border industries". The economic purpose of this was to source cheap (relative to white, and to urban black) labour and also to resell the products to these same workers. Beyond this, the social and political purpose, which appears to have predominated, was initially an attempt to stem black urbanisation. This lasted until the 1980s, when the goal was instead to develop "industrial development points" within the reserves and on the peri-urban fringes with a view to their eventual reincorporation into a decentralised and deracialised state. This shift occurred as the aspirations of high apartheid gave way to tacit defeatism among the political elite, who feared regime change would lead to despotic centralisation coupled with bureaucratic breakdown and initiated a reform processes focussed on the more modest goal of "deconcentration" of urban areas (Hart 2002:134; Rogerson 2000:693; Seekings and Nattrass 2012:2–3).

From around 1989 the structure of the clothing industry, while shaped by the wider history of domestic racial domination, began to transform as a consequence of international competition

with the increasing penetration of imports, both legal and illegal, from China, India, Pakistan and elsewhere (Rogerson 2000:693–94). This amounted to a transition away from an overwhelmingly domestic post-World War market to the slow integration into a far larger international clothing market, which was given a major boost at the time of the 1994 democratic transition. That year, South Africa also became a signatory of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), reducing tariff protection at an even greater rate than required by the GATT agreement (Seekings and Nattrass 2015:88). This was in one sense a typically "neo-liberal" move, exposing local producers to international competition and rendering their employees vulnerable to job loss. It was also, at least according to Seekings and Nattrass, motivated by a desire among reformist post-apartheid policy makers to discipline capital which, under apartheid, had enjoyed protections that had allowed it to become inefficient. Domestic producers in tradable sectors of the economy were to varying extents harmed by the greater import penetration that followed, even while consumers benefitted from lower prices, with the clothing industry being one of the most profoundly affected by these changes (Seekings and Nattrass 2015:88).

The most important change to come of this was that tariffs on imported clothing fell from 90 per cent in 1996 to 40 per cent in 2002, although rising minimum wages through labour bargaining and an appreciation of the South African Rand from 2003[66] also helped to foment major change in the industry. With increased spending power and access to low-wage labour and retail competition beyond its domestic borders, many South African retailers shifted to sourcing clothing internationally, and especially from China. This was aided by China's previous entry into the World Trade Organisation in 2001, along with the scrapping of the multi-fibre arrangement in 2004, which had imposed quotas on imports from large Asian countries to "developing" countries. By 2010, the local clothing market was totally dominated by imports, with 74 per cent of total clothing imports coming from China (Seekings and Nattrass 2012:7–8). In the ensuing crisis a great many formal jobs were shed, and many metropolitan producers responded by shifting production to low-wage areas outside of metropolitan areas in South Africa, as well as to Lesotho and Swaziland (Rogerson 2000:693–94; Seekings and Nattrass 2012:9–11).[67]

4.3.2 Consumer agency and institutional constraint

Considering this institutional background of clothing consumption in South Africa potentially opens up questions about what, as we saw in Chapter 2, Bourdieu (1996:466) called "the division of labour … or the division of the work of domination", but is itself dogged by the problem that it is not at all obvious how much responsibility should be assigned to consumers for the overall reproduction of a system of provision. In complex markets with decentralised lines of production and distribution, along with varying degrees of state regulation of business through complex legal codes, tax arrangements, centralised currency controls, and so on, which no amount of conventionally neo-liberal reform has ever abolished, all systems of provision are

shaped by the choices of some mixture of state regulators and business, often along with organised labour. Nonetheless, all markets are geared toward securing final consumption and would collapse if consumer demand were to be withdrawn. Consequently, consumers always potentially possess an effective veto on productive arrangements provided only that they possess an alternative means of provision, along with some awareness of this capacity and the will and means for acting collectively.

The assumed passivity of consumers that one finds everywhere in the critical, economistic literature on the subject no doubt owes a lot to the undeniable fact that, on large markets, consumers are often dispersed and disorganised, and consequently unable to effect meaningful change. On the one hand, underscoring this can serve as an important counter-balance to any exaggerated assertion of consumer agency or creativity in more culturalist approaches to the subject. On the other hand, unwitting support for domination is usually portrayed as an inevitable accompaniment of market expansion, which easily slides into a sort of market teleology that can obfuscate the possibilities that exist, and thereby, in the name of realistic criticism, actually close down critical reasoning about historically-existing and possible alternatives to market-mediated domination.

Consumer boycotts of commodities, like sanctions, have always possessed the potential to disrupt existing arrangements of provision from the consumption end, and to use this disruption for purposes that are not only economic but also social and political. They are not a major feature of our times, but their potential power has not always escaped the awareness of consumers. Two basic problems tend nonetheless to frustrate the realisation of this potential. The first is that there still exist at an everyday level few mechanisms for informing consumers of the context of their actions and equally few vehicles for them to exercise some power over major economic choices. Consumer oversight bodies in contemporary South Africa (in contrast to many in Northern societies) are generally unconcerned with the wider ramifications of consumer practices if domestic consumers themselves are not directly harmed (Hughes, McEwan, and Bek 2015:152–53). Likewise, political parties tend not to defend the interests of consumers because these are often diffused across the boundaries of political support, as opposed to the interests of producers, which are concentrated into factions that can be far more easily be politically mobilised into unions or lobbies.

A second problem is that, while consumer choice helps to create or withdraw demand, consumers are often oblivious of, or indifferent to, how this demand is met, or else simply prefer not to inform themselves and feel exonerated from responsibility precisely due to the many-layered nature of contemporary systems of provision. On the market, consumer decisions, though antecedently shaped by complex social processes that may well have nothing whatsoever to do with the market are, to state the obvious, often driven by a desire to receive the products that satisfy the desires so-formed at the lowest possible personal expense. Even where consumers become aware of the consequences of their choices, then, they are often immediately confronted with the reality that satisfaction through alternative systems of

provision on the market may lead to a price increase, and hence to some degree of self-sacrifice. This sacrifice is not only, or most fundamentally, of desired objects, but rather of the social status that possession of these objects secures. Moreover, in both this utilitarian and more social sense, the poor have the most to lose by making such sacrifices.

Despite these complexities, the boycott was a tool of political struggle was used throughout the apartheid period by South Africa's poor and those they managed to mobilise in their support. Boycotts of consumer products or outlets, though relatively common, were usually sporadic affairs, as opposed to boycotts of goods provided by the state, which I consider in Chapter 5, and which could go on for years. Nonetheless, there are examples of prolonged campaigns that supported the boycotting of commodities, of which the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) in Britain is a particularly illustrative case. Already by 1949 the boycott was emerging as the focus of Africanist resistance by the newly-formed ANC Youth League, who had observed its efficacy in places like Alexandra during the successful bus boycotts of 1940 and 1945, with resistance through boycotts often combining with strikes and civil disobedience (Lodge 1989:12, 22). From 1960, following the Sharpeville massacre, until the end of apartheid the AAM did an enormous amount to spread awareness of both economic exploitation and racial domination and to press for remedial political action. The initiative built on the achievements of a boycott movement started in South Africa in 1959 by the South African Indian Congress and the African National Congress (ANC). The Congress movements, in their turn, had been inspired by previous boycotts led by civic organisations and trade unions in South Africa during the 1950s, and had been roused to further action at the first All-African People's Conference, held in Accra in 1958 (Dubow 2014:137–38; Gurney 2000:123–40; Lissoni 2008:63; Skinner 2009:131).[68]

In 1958 the ANC formed an "Economic Boycott Committee", with then leader Albert Luthuli declaring that "[t]he economic boycott has unlimited potentialities. When our local purchasing power is combined with that of sympathetic organizations overseas we wield a devastating weapon" (Gurney 2000: 126). The AAM's boycotts, planned in collaboration with the ANC and other South African dissidents, were initially focussed on South African food, alcohol and cigarettes, but later expanded to include a very wide range of goods, including also stationery, furniture, coal and gold jewellery. In the 1980s, at a time when Britain and the USA were South Africa's two largest trade partners, the AAM turned their activism to the South African clothing and textile exports that were beginning to enter Britain in large quantities (AAM n.d.[a]; Skinner 2009:138). Pamphlets from the AAM titled "Stop Profits from Apartheid – Boycott Clothes from South Africa" and "Don't Buy Apartheid Fashion" note a tenfold increase in clothing and textile trade between South Africa and Britain from 1974 to 1983 and list specific South African labels to boycott as well as British outlets stocking them (AAM n.d.[b], AAM n.d.[c]). The AAM was aware of the argument that boycotts could lead to joblessness among South African workers but claimed, on the basis of research (though of what quality it is difficult to discern), that not only South African political activists but also factory workers in

the clothing industry supported them and were prepared to endure financial hardship if it would lead to social and political change and long-term improvement in workers' conditions.

In contrast to the apartheid period, consumer activism on the market seems to have all but disappeared following the democratic transition, and where it does exist, it is rather ineffective and apolitical. "Ethical consumption", as a means of enhancing consumer information, has generally been studied in the global North, but it also exists in the South, though often through North–South initiatives. One form of this that has emerged in the post-apartheid period has been "ethical labelling". Its impact in South Africa since its emergence in the 2000s is difficult to ascertain but many middle-class South Africans appear to recognise and support it (Hughes, McEwan and Bek 2015:149–152). The most prominent ethical labelling initiatives include Proudly South African, Fairtrade Label South Africa (the South African branch of Fairtrade International), and the Southern African Sustainable Seafood Initiative (launched by the World Wildlife Fund). Proudly South African, launched in 2001, is a local initiative backed by the state and organised labour. In an effort to combat surging import penetration and the accompanying job losses, it aims at encouraging the consumption of goods whose production costs are made up of at least 50% South African labour. It specifies that imported materials need to be substantially transformed locally, in order to boost local employment against the backdrop of local employers sourcing work and materials globally, especially in the clothing sector where Chinese imports now heavily dominate (Hughes, McEwan and Bek 2015:149–52). Clearly, however, any initiative failing to appeal beyond the middle classes in a society like South Africa is of very limited use. There is also, arguably, little to be gained by supporting local production of clothing and other commodities through ethical labelling while the state's macro-economic policies that have carved open the local market to foreign competition go largely unchallenged.

From what has been said in section 4.2 and immediately above, it should be clear that explaining the origins of commodity consumption in stimulated demand through advertising or the brute possession of income does not go far enough in explaining how it arises and why it takes the forms it does. I have also suggested that, when considering the consequences of commodity consumption, there is a political-economic dimension to it which, when situated within a diffuse and complex system of provision and regulation, is likely to go unobserved by consumers. Insofar as consumers are unaware of this larger system they unwittingly participate in its reproduction, although this is not an *a priori* necessity but rather a historically-explicable and hence contingent state of affairs, as it is clearly possible to understand how systems of provision function and to consciously leverage this to attain particular ends. Thus far, however, little has been done to excavate the manner in which consumer demand for commodities relates to the particular social circumstances in which consumers find themselves. In doing so, we are forced to consider consumer demand as itself an historical object amenable to closer scrutiny, and to turn from the political-economic literature, in which such questions are not raised, toward the ethnographic literature that registers in impressive detail the manner in which consumers understood the significance of their actions at an everyday level.

4.4 The social significance of clothing

4.4.1 Civilisation, respectability and consumption

Even prior to the apartheid period in South Africa, social stratification through racial discrimination was not simply enforced through pure violence, and rather had complex social roots. Military spoliation has certainly underpinned much of South African history, especially in the expansion of the original Cape Colony and the settlement of Natal and the so-called "Boer republics" of the Transvaal and Orange Free State in the 19th century, which would later all be assimilated into the Union of South Africa in 1910. Nonetheless, alongside an increasingly legalised system of domination, the dominant white groups always felt the need to produce some justification for their actions. These justifications usually appealed, directly or indirectly, to the 19th century European colonial imaginary of "civilisation" that persisted well into the 20th century. While white expansion and domination always had strongly exclusionary tendencies, marked by the fear of racial merging, the overriding tendency that came to win out among most whites was one of fiercely hierarchical assimilation of black subjects into white "civilisation".

Echoing at an official level what was a common racial prejudice of the times, job reservation and racial ceilings in wages were, during the Hertzog government's control of the Union from 1924 to 1933, further entrenched through a "civilised labour policy" designed to alleviate what was discussed at the time as the "poor white problem" (Seekings and Nattrass 2005:78). As explained by a government cabinet circular of 1924, white workers were to be given preference over black workers wherever possible and were to be paid more than blacks because they were "persons whose standard of living conforms to the standard generally recognised as tolerable from the usual European standpoint", whereas blacks were "persons whose aim is restricted to the bare requirements of the necessities of life as understood by barbarous and undeveloped peoples" (Patterson 2007 [1953]:68, n.21; Thompson 2001:168–69).

Among the effects of Hertzog's Native Bills, eventually passed in 1936–37 after long deliberation, which made already-existing racial segregation official government policy, was the entrenching of this colour bar for industrial work. These measures were reinforced in the early apartheid years by the 1951 Building Worker's Act, forbidding Africans from working outside of their designated areas in the rural reserves and urban "townships",[69] and the 1956 Industrial Conciliation Act, which extended job reservation to all forms of work (Dubow 2003:167–68; Mager and Mulaudzi 2011:376). Despite all these restrictions, a small black middle class and a large black working class had begun to establish themselves in the cities by the end of the World Wars (Kuper 1965:78), and their numbers would continue to grow steadily. The

first direct study of this black middle class was conducted by Leo Kuper in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Kuper's implicit model of "class" is roughly what could be called a Weberian or Bourdieuvian stratification system. The empirical focus on traders, professionals, and civil servants in Kuper's (1965: xi) work was only an easily-determined objective starting point for a more expansive and sophisticated ethnographic portrait of a stratum of urban Africans united by "a distinctive style of life, with special patterns of association and claims to prestige made manifest in conspicuous consumption and imbued with some measure of class consciousness". Kuper (1965: ix, 234) rightly suspected even then that it was in this class that, "by reason of their education and prestige", he would find "the potential leaders in South African society, given a radical change in the structure of racial domination".

Kuper's study, like a number of other important ethnographic works before and after that have dwelt on this African middle class and its relationships to other classes at some length (Brandel-Syrier 1971; Mayer and Mayer 1974; Nyquist 1983; Pauw 1968; Reader 1961; Wilson and Mafeje 1963), explodes with unsystematically-formulated but subtle observations about the subjective stresses that this class were under in the apartheid period. Perhaps most importantly, these ethnographers converge on the claim that for the African middle class whites, and often English-speaking whites in particular, were the reference group that informed their chosen style of life (e.g. Kuper 1965:116–17; Pauw 1968:27; Wilson and Mafeje 1963:16, 142; Brandel-Syrier 1971:80; Nyquist 1983:3, 155–56). Unlike both rural labour migrants to the cities, as well as members of what were very widespread urban youth "gangs", who I will consider further below, the picture that emerges is one of the African middle class being frustrated in their ambitions and perpetually disrespected by most whites yet strongly desiring to live as they did. Far more than working class blacks, members of this African middle class felt entitled to a stake in the running of the wider society and to property ownership in urban areas as a means to living their desired style of life and attaining the respect that accompanied it. Racial ascription nonetheless prevented this and placed an absolute boundary on class mobility, effectively locking in racial subordination in the manner of a caste system, and the gradual realisation of how impermeable this boundary was led to incrementally-increasing political radicalisation (Kuper 1965:89–94, 407).

As the Mayers (Mayer and Mayer 1974:32) put it, also viewing race as a form of caste, for these middle class Africans "[c]aste barriers may divide, but the common aspiration towards 'civilization' unites". Similarly, for Wilson and Mafeje (1963:142), "there is a lively consciousness of differentiation within the African group and a struggle to achieve recognition as 'civilized' as opposed to 'barbarian', partly because so many whites do not accept Africans as civilized." The resultant situation was rich in contradictions. On the one hand, members of the African middle class usually took on many of the prejudices that whites held against blacks. Kuper (1965:84) believed that the black elite often suffered from a sense of shame in relation to their own history, which they too regarded as barbaric or primitive. Similarly, speaking of this African middle class, and especially of the elite members of it, which he

designated by the vernacular Xhosa word for them, *abaphakamileyo*, Thomas Nyquist (1983:136–37) argued that

> [w]hat has developed, in fact, among the abaphakamileyo as a result of European domination is an unfortunate depreciation of their own African culture. They have become convinced that the European culture is generally superior, though they resent the circumstances in which it has been transmitted to them.

Such feelings of inferiority were not completely pervasive, and there were some cases of educated Africans showing pride in such things as the African ethic of humanism (*ubuntu*) and in historical figures like Shaka, who some portrayed as a sort of African Napoleon (Kuper 1965:84). The background to this is the assertion of African pride by African teachers, intellectuals and artists in the 1920s and 1930s, some of whom had links to the African National Congress[70] (Cobley 1990:82–88). For the most part, however, middle class Africans appeared to avoid taking on these demeaning racial tropes less by directly combatting them than by simply passing them on, and would themselves normally look down on other Africans for their lack of civilisation or respectability. Thus Wilson and Mafeje (1963:140–41) observe that "[f]or three hundred years the white immigrants have disparaged the indigenous peoples of South Africa as being 'heathen' and 'uncivilized', and these are the terms used by Africans today to express class differences among themselves." Kuper (1965:93–94) was intrigued by the complexity of this:

> [s]uperficially, there is something strange in the reproduction by a subordinate racial group of a system of inequality which prevails within the dominant group itself. No doubt, the withholding of values renders them all the more desirable. Insofar as the movement in a subordinate group is toward equality with the dominant group and not domination over it, the goal would be the same style of life. Equality in style of life would seem also to imply adopting the inequalities (or prejudices or discriminations) of the dominant group. Of course, there is often selective adoption, with expurgation of racial values depreciating the subordinate group, or modification by the introduction of other values, such a qualities of personality (intellect, humanity) with which members of the subordinate group feel themselves highly endowed.

4.4.2 Middle class clothing consumption in the apartheid period

With this historical context in mind, we can better see how the purchase of clothing and other fashions was an act with profound social antecedents and consequences that economistic approaches to consumption fail to register. Clothing and bodily ornamentation more generally – including in some cases such things as male cosmetics – had always been used to symbolically mark differences of sex in rural African societies, along with other distinctions like seniority and marital status, but the introduction of European clothing, especially through the 19th century Christian missions from around mid-century onwards, came to radically transform the manner in which these differences would be expressed. Clothing came to be used

primarily as a way of assuming a position on either side of a profound status cleavage in African society that opened up around differences of religion, education, morals and manners (Clowes 2002:75; Comaroff 1996:20–32; Mayer and Mayer 1974:21–24; Ross 2008:94–97). Jean Comaroff and Robert Ross describe, in effect, the genesis of a new stratum of Africans at the mission stations in what would become contemporary South Africa, stressing that this was constitutively tied up not only with a shift in political economy due to the emergence of a new spirit of enterprise and the later mineral revolution, but also with the social implantation of a fashion system.

With various local nuances, this 19th-century division would remain alive in the popular consciousness of most South Africans until around the 1980s, when it began to blur. In the early apartheid period, we can form a detailed picture of how this played out in daily life by considering the ethnographic work done on the mainly Xhosa-speaking ethnic groups in the contemporary Eastern Cape province (Mayer and Mayer 1974; Reader 1961, Pauw 1968; Nyquist 1983, Ntsebeza 1993; Bank 2011). There this wider division was demotically understood in terms of a division between "Red" and "School" people. The former designated those who maintained what they viewed as a traditional Xhosa way of life, while the latter referred to those born in the city or country but belonging to the African middle class. One respondent, a young School man, when asked by the Mayers what separates him from Red men, lists the religious, educational, moral and dispositional differences between Red and School Xhosas at length. Significantly, however, his response is prefaced by a candid discussion of how he dresses: "The difference between a Red man and myself is that I wear clothes like White people's, as expensive as I can afford, while he is satisfied with old clothes and lets his wife go about in a Red dress" (Mayer and Mayer 1974:21).

Some people seem to have defied such easy categorisation, at least in other parts of South Africa.[71] Nonetheless, what is clear from both this and the ethnographic literature on the apartheid period more generally is that there has always been a widespread everyday awareness of style as a significant determinant of social standing, and a corresponding willingness to invest in socially-recognised markers of style at great personal expense. One of Kuper's (1965:112) informants stated that

> [a] car is a very important badge of prominence. Once you have a car, people look up to you…. And if you can't buy a car, then you go in for flashy, showy clothes. And I think to a very large extent that is responsible for the African's preoccupation upon [*sic*] clothes. I think we Africans are very dressy.

Kuper (1965:270) notes that "[t]he consumption of luxuries by Africans was regarded as newsworthy, indicative of the change from the traditional image of Africans as consumers of basic necessities and cast-off clothes." He also believed women were particularly fashion-conscious (Kuper 1965:112–13), and cites a female, African beauty columnist who, comparing African females to males, claimed that "[w]e are quicker to take up fashions and civilization" (Kuper 1965:113).

When discussing their consumption choices, people did not always demonstrate a critical attitude towards the larger colonial and apartheid situation in which they were made, but they were observant of such contextual connections and articulate about the complex manner in which this affected their consumption. In this sense, the picture that emerges of African consumption choices in South Africa bears a great deal more similarity to what Ferguson says of the Zambian Copperbelt than to Bourdieu's portrayal of French social life. Ferguson (1999:101) found that among the poor mineworkers he encountered "self-consciousness about matters of personal style and its social relevance was surprisingly common", and that people were able to articulate the significance of style in a complex manner. Allowing that this might be due to the pace and extent of social change on the Copperbelt, and may not hold in other societies in which stylistic differences were taken somewhat for granted, he observes that "[s]tyle in such a structurally 'loose' setting is very badly apprehended as a simple product of a passive socialization (or even, as Bourdieu would have it, 'inculcation'); it is clearly at least in part an activity, a motivated process of self-making" (Ferguson 1999:101).

4.4.3 Apartheid youth fashions

While African elites very clearly took on European styles wholesale across most professional divisions, the artists, writers and intellectuals among them were innovating, or perhaps rather moving between mimicry and innovation (Hannerz 1994). A somewhat more demotic, and more socially-radical (if generally politically-apathetic), source for this new social experimentation was the youth groups in the larger cities. These groups, mostly of young men, perpetually competed among themselves for wealth and status through fashionable consumption. Bank calls this competitive consumption a "struggle for power and recognition in the city", which, following Arjun Appadurai, he understands as "tournaments of value" (2011:54, 58). Speaking in terms of "hybridity" or "creolisation" may by now have become an almost platitudinous trope. Nonetheless, whatever one prefers to call it, there is quality ethnographic research amply demonstrating that South Africans in the period I focus on were exposed to global fashions and perpetually domesticating them in surprising, complex ways that a broad-brush political-economic perspective cannot meaningfully illuminate. Members of apartheid-era youth gangs, at any rate, are difficult to pin down by any conventional class schema. For the most part they actively cherished a "non-work ethic" and came into their money and goods far less through gainful employment in the labour force than through robbery and constant hustling (Glaser 2000:65–67).

These groups came to be known as "*tsotsis*", a word appearing in township vocabularies from at least 1943 and in print media from 1945, and seemingly derived from a style of narrow-bottomed or "stovepipe" trousers popular among township youths in the 1940s (Glaser 2000:50–51). At least in Soweto and other townships of the gold-bearing reefs to the north of South Africa (known as the "Witwatersrand" or "Rand"), where the most important study of the phenomenon has been conducted by Clive Glaser, this appears to have been an enormous

youth sub-culture. The origins of *tstosi* association on the Rand can be traced back to the mid-1930s, and by the end of the Second World War it appears to have involved, to a greater or lesser extent, most male youths. Elsewhere in South Africa, the *tsotsi* way of life has been found by Bank to have been more limited in extension, although this discrepancy appears to be more a matter of definition, as in the Eastern Cape (where Bank's research is situated) a distinction was upheld between *tsotsis*, associated with crime, and other youth subcultures similarly united around fashion but living within the law. The latter were often called *oobrighty* youth ("bright boys") in the East London townships of the Eastern Cape, for whom, according to one of Lungisile Ntsebeza's (1993:62) informants, clothing "fashion tended to replace the influence of the knife and stabbing" by the late 1950s. Indeed, for Ntsebeza (1993:84), "[w]hat distinguished the 'bright boys' from other youth categories is that they were fashion conscious, almost worshipping clothing". They were themselves divided into two main groups called the *Iikatis* and the *Ivies*, these being adaptations of similarly-named youth styles from the Rand (Glaser 2000:107–08; Bank 2011:115–16, 120–21). The *Iikatis* had a liking for gaudy clothing styles and designer labels, although within these limits their attire was not of necessity expensive, while the *Ivies* went in for a more muted but conspicuously expensive look (Glaser 2000:107–08; Bank 2011:120).

One of Glaser's informants, a prominent member of the large "Americans" gang in Soweto, described belonging to a *tsotsi* gang as "a style, a way of life" (Glaser 2000:53). The essential item of *tsotsi* belonging was the trousers, but smart hats, jackets, shoes, shirts and ties were also highly sought-after. Youths would scrape together what little money they had to ensure that they at the very least had the requisite clothing to be eligible for membership, though dress was also a way for many to actively spar for distinction (Glaser 2000:69). *Tsotsis* were heavily influenced by US popular culture, but they often chose to side with the villains, and they formulated their fashions as a deliberate rejection of middle class respectability, preferring instead to endorse a moral and aesthetic code that was hedonistic, improvident and frequently violent. These gangs "simultaneously held middle-class values in contempt and aspired to middle-class levels of comfort and consumption. They were eager to display their wealth, power and success and mock what they considered to be the undignified and submissive options of 'respectability' and regular employment" (Glaser 2000:133). This scorn for respectability was also reflected in gang names like the "Gestapo", "Berlins", and "Germans", the "Mau Mau", the "Apaches" and the "Satan Boys". Likewise, "*Tsotsitaal*", usually described as a distinctive language (though it is perhaps more accurately described as a creole, mixing Zulu, Xhosa and Afrikaans forms, with many regional variations) emerged as part of this subculture, and some knowledge of it was indispensible to group belonging (Glaser 2000:70–71). While criminality increasingly became associated with the *tsotsi* subculture from the 1960s onwards, adherence to fashions, especially in dress, was always the identifying hallmark of both *tsotsi* and *oobrighty* youth cultures (Glaser 2000:53–59, 68–70; Bank 2011:49–51). Though keenly aware of global fashions, especially from the USA, young men chose to join these groups not due to some simple enticement into a fashion system but rather by force of a more basic desire to achieve recognition within a narrowly-defined in-group, limited to the

township. The real significance of this way of life was that it provided "an alternative, insulated system in which young ghettoized males had a real chance of acquiring prestige and fame" (Glaser 2000:70–71).

4.4.4 *Resistance to status-oriented consumption in the early apartheid years*

As an antidote to any linear, economistic teleology of the market, it would be good to observe that consuming clothing and other commodities needn't of necessity follow a logic of "distinction", at least where this refers to a separation of groups within a commonly-understood status hierarchy. Here one should consider rural migrants to the cities – in the Eastern Cape, mostly made up of the Red Xhosa mentioned above – who for the most part directly rejected urban fashions until around the 1980s. These migrants quite consciously and deliberately separated themselves out from both the African middle classes and the *tsotsis*, believing both to have succumbed to the corruption of Western ways of life. As with Ferguson's (1991:104–07) discussion of "localism", we are not dealing with a residual mode of being to which people on the lower planes of a status hierarchy were rigidly confined and which an inherent evolutionary logic was set to undermine. Rather, localism was a style of life that was actively chosen with an awareness of the alternatives, despite the undeniable constraints on such choice and knowledge.

Migrants were usually superficially polite but, at least among themselves, as disdainful of the African middle classes as the latter were of them, viewing the middle classes as inauthentic or even traitorous. One of the Mayers' (1974:32) informants, for example, describes the African middle classes as being "sometimes Xhosa and sometimes White men". In this, he believed, they were like bats, "neither birds nor animals". They also wanted no part in white social life, demonstrating either a simple contempt or an active rejection of it (Mayer and Mayer 1974:32–33). Migrants did not "in any significant sense 'look up to' White people. They merely look across at them as over a gulf" (Mayer and Mayer 1974:32). Migrants (and *tsotsis* too) constantly derided the middle classes for their mimicry of white styles of life, not only through dehumanising metaphors like that just cited, but by referring to them as the "excuse me" people, which was a common term of abuse. This gestured in the first place at what many viewed as their affected manners, but more fundamentally it was an accusation of inauthenticity.[72]

For these labour migrants, the city was seen as a place of temporary refuge where one went for a while to work and to live as sparingly as possible in order to remit funds to the rural homestead. These migrants believed that it was in the country alone that one was still able to live in an expressive manner consistent with vernacular understandings of "tradition", in the sense of the subjectively-perceived "moral community" of which Sahlins speaks.[73] Accordingly, in the cities they usually spent money only on bare essentials, and furthermore tried to transact

both financially and socially only with other migrants as far as was practicable (Mayer and Mayer 1974:136–40). I also do not want to suggest that migrants only took an instrumental view of clothing all round. They did have their own codes of good dress. The bulk of migrant consumption was, however, directed toward building up a more customary life in the country, where clothing styles were often modest and where consumption in general wasn't as caught up in the cyclonic fashion systems prevailing in the cities. Rural clothing styles in the country don't appear to have been based on a logic of competition and were rather intended to signal good standing within rural communities at a level most could attain, although this was to some extent being shaken up by migrant youth returning from the cities. For the most part, clothing was consumed for purposes such as indicating that a man had passed through the initiation rites of manhood, which was essential for attracting a wife. In this connection Reader (1961:71) notes that in the contemporary Eastern Cape migrating to the city after the circumcision ritual that marked the transition into adulthood was commonly referred to as "changing clothes". For women, too, clothing was a major marker of life stage. For example, Zulu women would also often wear traditional items of clothing like leather dresses in order to signal that they were married and bound by the duties of the new homestead, just as new Xhosa wives don German-print dresses, headscarves and neck scarves after customary marriages (Bank 2011:131, 134).

I do not want to suggest that rural migrants were categorically invulnerable to the lure of city ways, or that established city dwellers were incapable of moderation. These were simply widely-observed trends. Moreover, it appears that these lines were gradually blurred, especially with the massive upheavals in the townships during the mid-1980s. These changes affected not only migrants, but also the other urban-based youth cultures. *Tsotsis* have never disappeared, but the phenomenon went into decline between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s. On the one hand, a new *amapansula*[74] style was emerging in the townships, apparently first in Soweto and later spreading to other parts of South Africa by the late 1980s (Bank 2011:124–25). In the Eastern Cape, it became the new expression of *oobrighty* youth style, at once more focused on expensive conspicuous consumption of clothing and the embrace of new fashionable music and more overtly masculine and tough, and some rural youths participated in it (Bank 2011:124–25). Most importantly, at this time a new generation of activist youth usually called the "Comrades", galvanised especially by the 1976 Soweto uprising and later by the urban revolts in the cities and countryside against the state that gathered pace in the mid-80s, began to successfully hit back against *tsotsi* dominance of township life (Bank 2011:113; Glaser 2000:60–61; Ntsebeza 1993:101; Seekings 1996:104). Comrade style was sometimes deliberately austere in its dress, with members at times wearing makeshift uniforms to ensure a measure or equality and regimentation among both rural and city-based youth. In practice, there were often clashes between adherents of these styles, but while they appear to have emerged in isolation on the Rand, the two styles sometimes merged in complex ways in the Eastern Cape (Bank 2011:123–29).

4.4.5 Stratification and consumption in the post-apartheid period

The most interesting contribution of consumption and its relation to social stratification in post-apartheid South Africa, discussed further in Chapter 7, has been made by the sociological research group that recently produced the volume *Class in Soweto* (Alexander et al. 2013). There it is argued that in contemporary Soweto[75] all but 10 per cent of informants generally think of their social world in terms of reasonably well-defined social strata and are happy to situate themselves within such a system, which the authors refer to as a "class" system. What these researchers found was that "class was defined largely in terms of consumption, but also generally by comparison" (Phadi and Ceruti 2013:144). Here the qualification about comparison refers, not just to the truism that stratification is relational, but also to the fact that the research inquired into subjective understandings of stratification, with informants throughout Soweto defining "class" position by contrasting their own personal circumstances with those of others known to them. Informants all spontaneously related class to things such as "where you live, the state of your house, whether you have a car or appliances, the quality of your furniture, clothes and food", as well as things like "where you socialised and the make of car, brand of beer or label of clothing you displayed", though they sometimes also noted that high self-esteem (demonstrated in attitudes of confidence, ambition and optimism) and certain modes of greeting and bodily comportment signified class standing (Phadi and Ceruti 2013:143–44, 150, 153).

For middle class African consumers, shared consumer tastes have undergirded experiments with new forms of social solidarity that, among other things, have begun to erode the caste-like racial divisions of the apartheid period. The precise nature of these changes is as yet unclear but it may be less a case of race disappearing as a fundamental determinant of social solidarity than of popular understandings of race migrating from biological determination toward popular style, as when clothing styles or music tastes widely associated with race groups are taken up by people of different skin colours (Dolby 2001:15–17).[76] For Nadine Dolby (2001:63), in her ethnographic study of South African school children at a mixed-race school in 1996, "[i]ncreasingly, race is constituted and driven by a discourse of taste, which locates identity within the commodity culture nurtured through global popular culture". Dolby draws on Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* to argue that consumer choices occur within pre-given social restraints, but resists Bourdieu's determinism, arguing that taste itself is at times far less stable than Bourdieu suggests. She contends that tastes among the South African youth she studied are unstable, and that in such circumstances "taste ceases to be reproductive; instead taste points to and illuminates the breaks and changes in the racial construction of selves" (Dolby 2001:67).

The youth Dolby observed "use taste in conflicting ways: to reproduce their positions within racialised structures, and simultaneously to challenge those positions, cracking open spaces for the emergence of new identities, locations, forms". In this manner Dolby (2001:66) seeks to avoid both a one-sided reproduction thesis and the over-emphasis on subcultural resistance

that she finds in Dick Hebdige's work on subculture, as the youth she observed did not resist mass culture in the manner of the teddy boys and punks studied by Hebdige. Dolby (2001:66–67) implies that the issue of subcultural resistance through consumption is something we must leave open to empirical study. She shows, from her own study of clothing tastes, that clothing consumption followed contradictory logics but that on the whole it tended not only to reconfigure but to undermine the racial divisions of the past, even while reproducing the basic structure of commodity consumption as a marking activity for augmenting social status.

Clothing and music are, for Dolby (2001:67), the two central commodities used to create group belonging, and she emphasises the "non-utilitarian" manner in which they are used. When discussing clothing, Dolby reasons in a manner that is very similar to Ferguson and argues that choices in clothes were a way of performatively creating social solidarity instead of a reproduction of more basic structural relationships. In this sense "collective racial selves are actively constructed by students through selection, arrangement and presentation of clothing" (Dolby 2001:67). Partially building on Dolby's ideas, and also singling out clothing and music as particularly relevant commodities for the construction of social identities, Nuttall (2004:436) calls these forms of solidarity "new stylizations of the self". She believes this shift to new forms of association that cut across previously rigid social barriers, and especially those of race, constitutes "one of the most decisive shifts of the post-apartheid era" (Nuttall 2004:449). Nuttall (2004:443–49) also shows how advertisements and reader content in popular youth magazines have experimented with racial boundary markers in order to promote social solidarity around trendy objects.

These new forms of solidarity do not push against the dynamics of commodification and rather merge indissolubly with them. When consuming clothing, coloured and African youth, far more than whites, generally demonstrate an acute awareness of brand names, linking these directly to status. For coloureds, the expensiveness of branded clothing and status are only loosely connected, but for Africans price was an essential status-conferring factor in addition to brand prestige (Dolby 2001:70–71). Lucert Nkuna (2006:267–69) also found that the conspicuous display of branded clothing items is particularly essential for young, middle-class Africans for signalling their group affiliation, although he does also argue that excessive brand display can seem amateurish in some circles and there is also some interest in African-influenced designs and local ways of mixing items. For both Nuttall and Nkuna, as for Dolby, there appears to be a clear attempt being pioneered by South African youth to move beyond race, as conventionally understood, along with ethnicity and place as markers of identity and to assay new forms of association based on common consumer tastes that sometimes ironically reference the apartheid past but always gesture towards a globalised future.

One limitation of Dolby, Nuttall and Nkuna's discussions is that they are limited to middle class youth in formerly white urban areas, yet research on formerly *de jure*, and still *de facto*, black areas like Soweto in Johannesburg (Alexander et al. 2013; Krige 2011) and Langa and the Fish Hoek Valley[77] in Cape Town (Bray et al. 2010; Swartz 2009) suggests that these dynamics

are far more diffuse and cut across class and age boundaries. Clothing was one of the key markers of perceived class found by the *Class in Soweto* group among African informants form a range of class and age groups, who displayed a strong awareness of style. They cite one deeply impoverished informant who viewed clothing only as a way of covering her nakedness (Wale 2013:170), but all others used clothing as a way of flaunting their real wealth, of appearing respectably middle-class in public, and of deliberately appearing above their own perceived class station (Phadi and Ceruti 2013:143–44; Wale 2013:168–69).

Swartz (2009:41) found the African township youth she encountered in Langa to be obsessed with brands as status symbols, and believed that branded clothing was *more* essential to the impoverished young people she met than to wealthier suburban-schooled youth because the former possessed no access to other sources of status-conferring goods. Those that could not access good clothes felt ashamed of themselves, and in some cases would shoplift in order to keep up with others that flaunted their wealth through their expensive clothing (Swartz 2009:94–95, 115). Indeed the youth in Langa used the isiXhosa word *spidans* to refer to "[s]omeone who, by the type of clothes s/he wears, likes to 'advertise' themselves" [*sic*] (Swartz 2009:189). In Ocean View and Masiphumelele (respectively, majority-coloured and African former townships on the Cape Town periphery) both poor children and their parents were found to be spending a very large portion of their small incomes on branded clothing (Bray et al. 2010:132). They were often aware that heavy spending on clothing relative to other commodities prevented them from spending on education and making similar investments in the future, but

> having the right clothes is also a means of resisting the burden of being working class and poor. Wearing designer clothing is a way of asserting inclusion among both local and global peers. One can, quite literally, label oneself as an equal in a society that, in most other respects, is increasingly divided and divisive. (Bray et al. 2010:132)

Conspicuous consumption of clothing and other status-conferring items is also tied up with the assertion of masculinity. Especially in poorer African communities, there is a great deal of pressure on young men to provide for women as an assertion of power and success, and young women have been found to sometimes engage in transactional sex in order to access these commodities (Bray et al. 2010:270–72). The middle-class, adult, African informants Krige (2011:282–83) met in Soweto, many of whom used to belong to groups like the *amaIvyies* or *amaCats*, also prided themselves on their dress sense, often repeating the maxim that "clothing makes the man".

A striking form of conspicuous consumption, sometimes coupled with destruction, has emerged in the contemporary *i'khothane*[78] phenomenon in many of South Africa's townships. In *i'khothane* encounters rival groups of youth "crews" gather together to conspicuously flaunt their wealth by ritually displaying and sometimes destroying valued goods. These mock "battles" are invariably centred on the display and/or destruction of expensive, branded clothing, but may also include money and expensive food and liquor, and are accompanied by

stylised dancing and the verbal taunting of opposition crew members (Vincent and Howell 2014:61, 64; Richards 2015:94–95). One of Richards' (2015:95) informants described these battles as debates based on clothes. Those who display or destroy the most valued items are praised by the audiences and gain prestige over other crews. These battles usually entail no physical violence, however, and are more like agonistic exchanges in which a minimum of respect is maintained between crew members and where crews are finally judged to have won or lost by the spectators present (Vincent and Howell 2014:65; Richards 2015:1). *I'khothane* appears to be an outgrowth of previous *amapansula* and *amabujwa* styles (Richards 2015:76, 87). If journalistic sources are to be trusted, the phenomenon emerged in the 2000s (Spinks 2014) and the destructive dimension of these rituals is presently declining in the face of widespread moral backlash, police crackdowns on the destruction of currency (which is illegal in South Africa) and theft by gangs (Inggs and Kemp 2016). James Richards (2015:94–95, 109) found that luxury items like expensive alcohol were being deliberately wasted in these rituals, though clothing was no longer being burned, as it had been in the past.

The media tends to cover the phenomenon in a morally censorious manner and hold back from deeper analysis (e.g. Bambalele 2012; Mabandu 2012), but it is beginning now to attract balanced academic attention too (Howell and Vincent 2014; Mkhwanazi 2012; Mnisi 2015; Richards 2015).[79] For all the uncertainty that still surrounds *i'khothane* ritual, it is interesting because it vividly illustrates the lengths to which the poor in many societies will go to conspicuously consume, in apparent defiance of strictly economistic logic that assumes that apparently more basic needs like food and health services, or prudent spending on education, should completely crowd out other forms of expenditure for those in low income brackets with minimal disposable income (Moav and Neeman 2012:933, 936–37). As primary examples of this, Moav and Neeman (2012:933–94) observe the tendency for poor households in some regions of India to spend up to 10 per cent of their annual incomes on festivals, and for African households in South Africa to spend on average a year's salary when provisioning for funerals. They also note, however, the tendency in both Northern and Southern societies for those with more established status-conferring credentials to spend comparatively less on conspicuous consumption than on less conspicuous forms. To understand this one has to follow the lead of Veblen, who we said in Chapter 2 was one of the first prominent advocates of abandoning economistic abstractions when accounting for consumer demand, instead seeking to open up the question of consumer behaviour to the sort of sociological analysis that production of consumption perspectives would later develop. The failings of the economistic belief that income levels, as well as price and personal taste, sufficiently account for consumer choice are particularly obvious when regarding poor consumers, whose consumption choices are demonstrably driven above all by social comparison and who will often sacrifice physical well-being and pay punishingly high prices for goods in order to gain social acceptance or elevated status (Atik and Yurdakul Sahin 2011:5330–35; Chipp, Kleyn, and Manzi 2011:117–31).

Even where *i'khothane* rituals are destructive, they clearly do not signify a rejection of status-seeking through the conspicuous consumption of luxury items and rather seek to aggrandise it.

The apartheid-era *tsotsi* phenomenon entailed some measure of social subversion even while deeply implicated in commodity consumption, but the *i'khothane* phenomenon might be thought of as what Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:83) calls "an inverted celebration of the principles that undergird social hierarchies". The purpose of these rituals is, of course, to suggest that those consuming these status-conferring goods are so well-endowed that the goods are easily obtained. This is why crew members consider it tantamount to social death to appear at battles in the same outfits they have worn before or in second-hand clothing (Richards 2015:92), and why some have gone to the extreme of destroying the goods they flaunt. In so doing, they suggest that crew members stand above those who merely horde such items, even though crew members are invariably poor. It is tempting to draw analogies to the agonistic "potlatch" ceremonies that interested Mauss (2002) and other anthropologists,[80] given that the purpose of these rituals is to establish distinction for crew members through conspicuous display and destruction, although clearly there are differences. Most importantly, for Mauss (2002:6–7) the potlatch was one competitive form of a larger, long-term commitment to articulated social unity between otherwise potentially rival social groups. The potlatch was, in this sense, embedded within what he called a "system of total services" in which members of different groups deliberately structured their livelihoods in such a manner as to create mutual inter-dependence and thereby a strong incentive for co-operation, albeit in forms that were often hierarchical and agonistic (Mauss 2002:7, 2009:103). While *i'khothane* rituals are bound by complex norms, they are not grounded on anything as elaborated and irrevocable as a jointly-articulated livelihood.

Why, from their own perspective, do African youth engage in these rituals? Crew members adduce a range of motivations for engaging in battles. These include simple enjoyment, gaining a claim to female sexual affection or to territory and, above all, gaining respect (Vincent and Howell 2014:64–65, 69–70, 72; Mnisi 2015:349–50; Richards 2016:76, 79).[81] Penelope Mkhwanazi (2011:2) refers to *i'khothane* ritual as "a form of costly social signalling to indicate social status or standing", and in the most penetrating discussion of the *i'khothane* phenomenon to date, Vincent and Howell (2014:72; emphasis in original) argue that

> [t]he concept that seems most central to the *i'khothane* is that of respect…. Lacking tertiary education, social services, and living in communities in which violent crime is a daily occurrence, respect becomes the symbol through which a new identity can be constructed. With no recourse to the conventional structures through which respect is earned, they have found new arenas, new paths, and new traditions upon which to build their identities. While clothing and battles are the *vehicle*, it is ultimately respect that it desired. Respect becomes power and wealth in the face of powerlessness and poverty.

At the same time, as Richards (2015:84) contends, crew members are endeavouring to "reopen transitional spaces that have been closed to them by the dominant class", even while "closing down that space, in a different context or form, to others they deem below them".

4.5 The many meanings of clothing consumption

Looking back over the argument pursued in this chapter, we can see that during the early apartheid years, clothing consumption can be argued to have unintentionally reinforced a project of political and economic domination, albeit very indirectly. Even here, however, there was no pre-determined inevitability and awareness of these dynamics led to politically-oriented resistance in the form of international consumer boycotts on South African products, backed domestically and regionally by the likes of Albert Luthuli and Julius Nyerere. With the demise of apartheid and the accelerated exposure of local producers to global competition that came with it, domestic clothing consumption has largely shifted to the purchase of foreign clothing, indirectly bolstering a new mode of economic regulation in which local producers have largely lost state protection and clothing industry workers have forfeited their jobs. Efforts to make South African consumers aware of these larger dynamics have thus far been very modest.

While caught up in these larger political-economic processes, however, clothing consumption in South Africa has always obeyed a basically social logic, in part tied up with global fashions but deeply structured too by the particular domestic context of racial domination as well as the establishment of social hierarchy within racial groups. The attainment of civility and respectable status was, in the apartheid period, symbolically communicated by adopting a style of life associated with white, and especially English-speaking, social groups, which members of the African elite pursued as best they could through largely mimetic consumer practices. Commodity consumption, from this perspective, has tended to hierarchically fragment African social groups and was one of the major tools through which a new social stratum of Africans actively pursued distinction. Middle-class consumption was not that which simply reproduced this class's existing social distinction, by exacerbating antecedent 19th century social fractures within African society between what were widely understood to be educated, Christian groups on the one hand and "traditional" or "rural" groups on the other. While purchasing expensive, status-conferring commodities like cars may have had precisely this effect, the consumption of more widely-available yet status-conferring commodities like clothing is rather part of how this distinction has been pursued in ways that allowed for the formation of new social alliances and genuine social mobility within African society even while failing to ensure social mobility across racial boundaries. In parallel to this, however, distinction has been sought by deliberately *inverting* the values of civilization and respectability, as commonly seen in apartheid and post-apartheid urban youth gangs or crews. Focusing on these sub-cultures reveals how such groups have, in the 20th century, and particularly since the large-scale urbanisation of the war years, come to cohere around expressive forms of consumption, where shared clothing styles have been central to group formation.

Chapter 5

5. Housing and social integration

In this chapter I look at housing consumption in South Africa from 1948 to the present, focussing in particular on urban, largely African housing, where social and political struggles over consumption can be identified throughout the two periods of post-World War South African history that I consider here. My aim, from a social-theoretical perspective, is to understand the social and political significance of housing consumption, allowing at an explanatory level for the potentially agentic dimension of social change by following Giddens's injunction to always keep people's reasons for action in sight, without considering these as necessarily derivative of more basic systemic causes. As with the previous chapter, I attempt this by falling back onto the ethnographic literature that has informed this study, where people's reasons for action are explored. Instead of assuming a system logic pervades the entire social structure and accounts for particular consumer choices, as is common in the political-economic literature, this entails allowing for the possibility that the reverse is true, and that aggregate phenomena themselves arise from potentially more dispersed but contingently-converging social practices that are themselves only explicable in terms of the meaning-making and motivational capacities of situated agents.

From a historical-sociological perspective, this chapter also contributes to an exploration of the major institutional dimensions of social change, which I have argued are best understood by establishing how acts of consumption are facilitated by relationships of exchange, in the Polanyian sense of "forms of integration". While the previous chapter focussed on a field in which consumption has come to be entirely mediated by the market, this chapter shifts the focus onto a field of consumption that is split between market and redistributive forms of integration. In making this shift one begins to escape from the restricting limitation of relating production, exchange and consumption to the market alone, and can begin to also consider the enormous importance of the central and local state which, in the period I consider, have been the major loci of redistributive activity. This will be another step in pursuing the implications of Polanyi's conviction that the most basic, generalisable features of any society can be investigated by attending to the historically-variable balance between market, redistributive and reciprocal forms of integration, although I defer the discussion of reciprocity until Chapter 6.

This shift of perspective away from an exclusive focus on the market is possible because housing consumption in the time and place in which I consider it has taken place both on private markets and through centralised redistribution. Following Manuel Castells in *The City and the Grassroots* (1983), which is unfortunately ignored in the mainstream consumption

literature, I will understand consumption of redistributed goods as "collective consumption", and will contrast this to private consumption. Castells's understanding of collective consumption is not without its limitations, which I touch on in Chapter 7. Nonetheless, *The City and the Grassroots* remains a classic because it pointed the way toward genuine historicism in the study of urban social change, without relinquishing the desire for conceptual generalisation from specific cases. Rejecting the idea that cities were the expression of one dominant social group or cultural system, Castells argued that city forms evolve through conflict between groups with heterogeneous self-understandings and value-orientations. At the same time, he had come to consider Marxian urban sociology – much of his own previous work included – as at best a partial remedy to this culturalism. He argued that, when one looks at the historical details, the urban conflicts leading to social change appear never to reveal a purely class logic, with the class dimension of social struggles being a matter of pure contingency (Castells 1983: xviii, 4, 67–68).[82]

At an explanatory level, production-side class variables interact with others in ways that cannot be determined *a priori*. The failure to grant this, Castells (1983:296–303) believed, lent itself not only to formulaic conceptual dogmatism, but also to empirical distortions and omissions, with analysts of urban life fixing exclusively on whatever empirical factors might allow them to portray class struggles as the cause of social change. Everything not easily inserted into this framework would be ignored or relegated to a secondary, epiphenomenal position. To escape this, Castells (1983: xviii–xix) proposed rather thinking of urban social change as that which, at a grassroots level, comes about when social movements make claims for altered patterns of collective consumption, press for the acceptance of territorially-situated and group-specific cultural identities, or challenge relationships of political power at a localised level through engagement with the state – strategies that usually overlapped in some measure. Allowing in principle for any or all of these claims, along with those arising through class struggles over production, to be explanatorily basic objectives of movements seeking social change allows us to arrive at a properly historical understanding of the extent to which class struggle really explains observed events.

5.1 The social and political origins of the apartheid spatial division

5.1.1 Segregation and apartheid

In section 4.1 of the previous chapter I discussed some salient features of post-World War South Africa, especially as these formed the background to the emergence of experimental new styles of life in African society. Here I will say something more about this historical context, but with a focus on Africans as subjects that, despite their very marked social diversity, were

assigned a common juridical status within a constantly-evolving system of white racial domination ultimately rooted in the colonial situation. This status would come to assume more content than that which the settler population assigned to it and take on an expressive life of its own, far beyond white control, but still influenced by a long history of colonial domination. As the name "apartheid" (apartness, or separateness) suggests,[83] state-led efforts to keep the races physically separated was a defining feature of the post-World War period from its implementation in 1948 to its formal dismantling between 1990 and 1994. For all the novelties it introduced, apartheid has to be understood in this colonial context. D. F. Malan, writing in 1954, was not only invoking his colonial ancestry, but also speaking in an essentially colonial register when defending apartheid by claiming that

> [t]he deep-rooted colour consciousness of the White South Africans ... arises from the fundamental difference between the two groups, White and Black. The difference in colour is merely the physical manifestation of the contrast between two irreconcilable ways of life, between barbarism and civilization, between heathenism and Christianity, and finally between overwhelming numerical odds on the one hand and insignificant numbers on the other. Such it was in the early beginnings and such it largely remains. The racial differences are as pronounced to-day as they were 300 years ago. (quoted in Van den Berghe 1965:124)

This way of seeing things was no simple ideological smokescreen for a more basic project of agricultural and industrial exploitation, although the two often developed in a sort of "elective affinity". It was, rather, a deeply-held conviction with complex religious and intellectual articulations among white settlers, and particularly among Afrikaners. In articulating these ideas, Malan and those like him were leaning on complex social imaginary significations about civilisation and barbarism with deep roots in European history and in the colonial encounters in which this history became entangled. Without assigning these significations a capacity to independently effect social action, it is exceedingly difficult to explain why capital accumulation in South Africa assumed a racial form. Capitalism, after all, has no inherent racial logic, and reducing race to class is a problematic intellectual operation, as suggested in Chapter 3's discussion of intra-racial stratification and taken up again briefly in Chapter 7.

In addition to colonial-era ideas about proper morals and manners, which in Chapter 4 we said were partially communicated through dress, European colonial settlers brought with them ideals of domesticity. These domestic ideals had emerged in the course of the European transition from feudal life to industrial capitalism, in which social life was increasingly organised around a division between spaces of production and consumption, male and female familial roles, waged and unwaged work, and public and private forms of association (Healy-Clancy and Hickel 2014:8–9). As with attempts to clothe Africans in European dress, the 19th century missions were deeply implicated in promoting ideals of domesticity. "The African who believes that Jesus is preparing for him a glorious mansion in heaven", wrote the missionary John Mackenzie in 1858, "will endeavour to build for himself a decent house on earth" (quoted in Iliffe 2005:253). There was, however, an apparently complex balance between the policies advocated by the missionaries, colonial administrators and settler farmers and traders. Most

involved believed in the need to "civilise" Africans,[84] especially by discouraging polygyny, an institution thought to promote both immorality and male idleness. The settlers were, however, initially opposed to both the missionaries and the colonial officials in advocating higher taxes on African homesteads and stricter systems of land allocation in order to disrupt African economic self-sufficiency and create a floating pool of labour for white agriculture and industry (Healy-Clancy and Hickel 2014:10–11).

In its strictly spatial dimension, apartheid grew out of a patchwork of measures to physically separate black and white groups that emerged unevenly in South African cities from around the mid-19th century onward, which in the days of the Union of South Africa (formed in 1910) came to be known as "segregation" (Mabin and Smit 1997:199; Maylam 1995:22–29). Segregation was partially formalised in the 1913 Natives Land Act, and again in the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act, the former restricting black land ownership to roughly 8 per cent of the land area of South Africa, and the latter expanding this ownership to 13 per cent. It was no doubt this that Frantz Fanon (2008 [1952]:64) was thinking of when he described South Africa as a "boiler into which thirteen million blacks are clubbed and penned in by two and a half million whites". There was, however, no way of rigorously enforcing these laws, which ultimately did very little to prevent Africans flooding into the cities, usually illegally. Part of the reason for this was that segregationist legislation stipulated that anyone discovered to be living illegally in the cities and forcibly removed had to be provided with new housing. There was not invariably an eagerness by municipalities and rate payers to cover these costs, leading local enforcers to turn a blind eye to infringements (Beinart 2001:126).

In the course of the Second World War it came to be accepted by the ruling elite on both the more liberal and conservative ends of the political spectrum that segregation was too inconsistent to deal with the social and political demands that Africans in the cities were making in ever-more-strident terms (Dubow 2014:11–13). There had been a spate of minor reforms during the Second World War on the back of fears that Africans might revolt at their poor living conditions, which was heightened, among the political and military command, by the fear of a possible Japanese military invasion (Thompson 2001:180–82). The colour bar in employment was eased, Africans were offered improved job training facilities, black factory wages were raised at a higher comparative rate than white wages, Africans became eligible for modest old age and disability pensions, and in 1942 influx control was relaxed to allow for urban sub-tenancy in a concession to the needs of industry (Lodge 1989:15; Thompson 2001:181). The upshot of this was that by 1946 the shortage of urban housing was pronounced, with major crowding in the townships and 58 per cent of urban Africans squatting on unserviced land (Posel 1991:20). Aside from a growing political restiveness and a more generalised fear of civilisational overrunning among many whites, the fear of disease loomed large in white city residents' and administrators' minds. While this fear was no doubt fed by irrational, racially-discriminatory anxieties, it also had some grounding in the reality of poverty and state neglect. For instance, many townships in Port Elizabeth and East London, in the contemporary Eastern Cape, were found in 1949 to have soaring tuberculosis rates (Lodge 1989:50).

Major early items of state policy, intended to rationalise and shore up segregation in accordance with the new apartheid doctrine included the 1950 Population Registration Act and the Group Areas Act of 1952.[85] The former forced all South Africans to be classified as white, African, coloured or Indian – racial constructs which, while never being simply internalised or going wholly uncontested,

> were powerfully rooted in the materiality of everyday life. The ubiquity of the state's racial designations, and the extent to which they meshed with lived hierarchies of class and status, meant that apartheid's racial grid was strongly imprinted in the subjective experience of race. (Posel 2001:109)

The Group Areas Act heightened the state's power to coercively displace Africans into state-subsidised townships in the "white" cities or in the designated reserves, while limiting coloureds and Asians to legally-delimited "group areas" in or around the "white" cities. While creating an everyday framework for the orderly control of African urbanisation, this also took more physically-coercive forms, and between 1960 and 1983 an estimated 3,548,900 people were forcibly displaced under the auspices of the Group Areas Act (Thompson 2001:194). These removals certainly caused an enormous amount of suffering, with people sometimes being removed to areas with little other than tents or tin huts and pit latrines, far from their places of work and sometimes dwelling among relative strangers (Dubow 2014:114). Despite this, as mentioned below, there were in fact also many cases of people living in shacks or squalid conditions co-operating with the removals where this entailed an effective upgrade in housing conditions (Bank 2011:73–74; Bozzoli 2004:52–53; Brandel-Syrier 1971:21; Goodhew 2004:152–53; Lodge 1989:109).

5.1.2 Housing policy and influx control in the apartheid period

Housing was a problem that would centrally occupy top apartheid policy makers from the 1950s onward, particularly in the person of Hendrik Verwoed, first as head of the Native Affairs Department and later as Prime Minister (Dubow 2014:110).[86] Housing redistribution often entailed providing Africans with small, free-standing "matchbox" homes housing nuclear families.[87] This led to the construction of around 400,000 houses between 1950 and 1970. State-funded housing production was justified by urban planners in terms invoking European ideals of domesticity and with the hope of eradicating violence and disease while creating respectable African nuclear families whose members would be docile and respectful of authority. The National Planning and Housing Commission also sought to justify its housing production in more economistic terms, appealing to the low cost of the NE 51 model house that was approved. Building detached houses was, however, dramatically more wasteful of land and construction materials than row houses or duplexes, and the prevailing logic here was clearly moral and political and not one of cost efficiency (Dubow 2014:110–11; Hickel 2014:142–47). This is one reason why the poor in South Africa are still generally not housed in tenements or

consolidated structures like those commonly found in many West African, Indian and Latin American cities (Crankshaw et al., 2000:841), although in some localities what were originally single-sex hostels for rural migrants were built for those who were meant to spend only short spells in the cities.

In addition to the racialised residential separation between the four juridically-delimited racial groups discussed above, as well as the job reservation system, discussed in Chapter 4, that mapped on to this, and indeed providing a link between them, the urban "influx control" system was also central to apartheid. Influx control had its roots in the earlier colonial and Union-era desire on the part of white farmers and industrialists to reconcile the need for commercial integration and social separation (Healy-Clancy and Hickel 2014:11). A 1952 amendment to the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923,[88] which had originally formalised the system, ensured that Africans over the age of 15 coming and going from the cities, unless granted "section 10" settlement rights, had to prove that they were economically active there, forcing them to register with a local labour bureau within 72 hours on pain of arrest and forceful expulsion (Hindson 1985:403; Posel 1991:21–23; Thompson 2001:169–70). Africans were legally compelled to produce passes detailing their legal status at the request of police officers or labour bureau officials, and road blocks, night raids and checks on public transportation were periodically used by police officers to enforce these measures (Hindson 1985:403). This system lasted until 1986, when influx control was eradicated as part of a wider reform policy that, by 1990, had led to the slow but complete scrapping of formal apartheid as part of a phased democratic transition.

Section 10 rights replaced the previously-operative, informal system in which some Africans were permitted to remain in the urban areas if they possessed a "letter of exemption". These letters were sometimes given to African men that were educated, wealthy, or who occupied leadership positions within African communities (Posel 1997:124). The new rights were granted to long-standing urban residents, along with their spouses and dependent children, provided they had no serious criminal record and could be officially regarded as "detribalised" in virtue of a long history of legal residence and employment (either 10 years with a single employer, or 15 years with multiple employers). This, however, did not mean that a person was free from the threat of forced rezoning (Posel 1997:101–03). Apartheid was an improvised, even haphazard, system of rule, but this was no legal loophole. Rather it was part of a conscious attempt by apartheid officials to not only divide the races but also to fragment and control African society by allowing for the formation of urban "insiders", as distinct from "outsider" rural migrants.

Posel (1988:125; 1997:256–57, 267–69) shows that these measures cannot be understood in narrowly economistic terms, as they often have been, as the state's attempt to satisfy the demand by capitalists on labour markets for both semi-skilled and skilled labour on the one hand and for unskilled labour on the other, with urban insiders channelled toward the former and outsiders the latter. This overlooks the specific provisions in the enabling legislation that

sought to formally establish an "urban labour preference policy" in which settled urban Africans should have preference over rural Africans for all categories of work, with a view to minimising the African presence in the cities as far as possible. In so doing the state was directly opposing many firms that preferred migrant labour, as migrant labourers were widely regarded as less choosy about jobs. Migrant labourers were also preferred because they usually accepted lower pay than urbanised Africans, but the effect of the state's labour preference policy was to drive up wages for unskilled work as employers were forced to lure more skilled workers into unskilled positions to fill posts that migrants were no longer occupying.

5.2 Housing in social context

5.2.1 Housing and social stratification in the apartheid period

In the apartheid period, the most common modes of dwelling in the townships were, firstly, renting a house from the local municipality, who often owned the house and the land, though African land ownership existed in some areas and municipal housing sometimes passed into African hands. A second form of housing entailed constructing one's own house on a small plot of land rented from a municipality. Another common housing arrangement entailed renting, as a sub-tenant, from either municipal tenants or owners of self-made houses, by occupying an existing room or building a backyard dwelling (Pauw 1968:34; Brandel-Syrier 1971:21).[89] These living arrangements were found throughout South Africa, but everywhere varying locally to a marked degree and with different dwelling patterns often co-existing within in the same localities.

I want first to consider the strictly social dimension of housing consumption. This entails looking beyond how houses functioned as utilitarian objects sought out for their physical properties alone. Beyond providing bodily comfort and security, dwelling in a house served to set up relationships between people. The social relationships people entered into as housing consumers also cannot be understood simply as systems of property ownership or hire for instrumental advantage, although they were also that. Beyond this, they show up as practices in which people's conceptions of meaning and value were at play, shaping their ethical apprehension of themselves and others and lending them an expressive dimension in addition to their instrumental functions. In considering these instrumental and expressive dimensions of housing consumption, we are also able to account for the agentic dimension of consumption. This should not be exaggerated, but neither can it be ignored, and the challenge is rather to situate this agency within the wider historical context sketched out above, where social, political and economic relationships of power enveloped individuals and groups in ways that both enabled and constrained them.

A first set of social relationships that private housing consumption established was between African tenants and landlords. These relationships were often hierarchical and antagonistic, as property owners could be despotic and capricious in their treatment of their tenants (Reader 1961:127–33; Bozzoli 2004:24). Property owners sometimes surpassed their tenants in income, but often by a negligible amount and sometimes not at all, making any explanatory attempt at reducing this inequality to a more basic inequality in financial means difficult to sustain all the way. Investing what money they did have in property, or in some cases inheriting it (as was the case with many African women surviving their husbands) gave house owners social distinction and power (Brandel-Syrier 1971:22; Lodge 1989:96; Goodhew 2004:74–76). Nonetheless, there is no strong suggestion in the literature that status was the major reason for acquiring and renting property, and the landlord–tenant relationship is best viewed as a basically instrumental one on both sides, with landlords primarily pursuing financial gain and tenants seeking a foothold in the city that would allow them to labour and to eventually build up a homestead of their own in the city or the country.

The symbolic significance of housing consumption is more apparent at the territorial level of the township, or of neighbourhoods within the larger townships, where commodified housing consumption was tied up with social stratification. Houses were understood as a primary marker of social distinction, through either the physical form of the house or its residential location. Housing consumption thereby established a second, more diffuse, relationship between people, symbolically indexed to the dwellings in which they lived. Uniformity of housing was sometimes enforced to such an extent that this sort of distinction through conspicuous consumption was difficult or largely impossible,[90] as in the days of "matchbox" housing provision by the state during the 1950s and 1960s. Nonetheless, just as mass-produced commodities, in South Africa and elsewhere, have always been appropriated in in ways that have enabled people to use them as markers of distinction, so too in the case of standardised state housing provision social differentiation was nonetheless signalled through the furnishings, electrical appliances and other decorations within the house or illegal modifications of the house itself (Beall, Crankshaw, and Parnell 2003:199; Van den Berghe 1965:70; Nyquist 1983:47–52, 65–67). Moreover, where Africans could own their own land and homes – as they could in certain parts of legally "white" South Africa that apartheid officials often referred to as "black spots" – or where houses of differing quality could be rented from municipalities, upper-stratum urban Africans usually endeavoured to live in relatively spacious houses that were recognisably European in the materials they were constructed from or in their furnishings and decoration. These houses contrasted sharply to the densely-packed, scantily-furnished and modestly-decorated houses in which other Africans lived, and were sought out for this reason (Kuper 1965:112–13; Brandel-Syrier 1971:86; Nyquist 1983:47–52).

Because of the expressive value attributed to houses, Africans committed to urban dwelling would invest heavily in them, despite their generally very meagre financial resources. As Mia Brandel-Syrier (1971:86–87) observed, discussing the motivation for housing consumption, that it was driven by the desire to escape dehumanisation: "[i]n itself, to live in a house and not in a

hut, was of the greatest social and cultural significance. It not only showed that one had 'arrived' socially and culturally, but it demonstrated for everyone to see that one had arrived among human beings." But while the possession of decent housing was tantamount to entry into the community of common human regard, it could also, within these limits, be intensely competitive. This no doubt differed from place to place, and could be limited to competition with those outside of one's class while allowing for a solidarity that corresponded with commonly-understood class boundaries. For instance, Thomas Nyquist (1983:67, 75–94) found that the African middle classes in the freehold townships in Grahamstown formed some friendships with one another based on the neighbourliness that came of acquiring houses in the same neighbourhoods, while often discouraging their children from associating with children from families they did not consider "respectable". These middle class adults would participate in community events beyond the neighbourhood too, at the level of the township, but usually kept within their own respectable circles. Where they did associate with lower-strata Africans, this was in a hierarchical fashion, with upper-stratum Africans assuming leadership positions in civic associations.

Even this sort of restricted intra-racial and intra-class solidarity was not a given, however, and commodified consumption had the potential to thoroughly individualise. For example, Brandel-Syrier (1971:56–57, 86) describes a newly-formed African township[91] in which the competitive struggle for municipal housing, commercially available to Africans in differing qualities and grouped into distinct areas within the township, had become fiercely competitive. In this system of unrelenting jockeying for status through housing consumption, acquiring housing of a higher quality was, in the absence of other educational and occupational markers of prestige, widely regarded as entirely indispensible to securing elevated social status. This led people to heavily invest their meagre savings in housing, and especially in the construction of house facades. As a consequence, there had been a precipitous decline in sociability, with people having expended money on the upkeep of their houses they might have otherwise spent on hospitality. The disinclination to socialise was also reinforced by a fearfulness many had of inviting others into their houses, as the interiors were often unfinished or so threadbare that they would feel exposed for having projected a misleading perception about their wealth.

Brandel-Syrier's middle class African informants spoke very frankly of their frequent lack of mutual companionship, jealously and ill-will toward one another (Brandel-Syrier 1971:54–55). A dependence by African city-dwellers on whites, she argues, underpinned this social competitiveness over housing. She describes this as "a common need which ranged from the necessity for actual material assistance to the psychological urge for recognition", which fed into the "self-hatred, the guilt-feeling and the intra-aggression of the ghetto" (Brandel-Syrier 1971:53). As discussed in Chapter 4, this sort of invidious comparison with whites was encountered in most important ethnographic studies during the apartheid period, although it was limited to the black middle classes and was often not expressed by African rural migrants or urban *tsotsi* youth, with migrants often rejecting the ideals of respectability and *tsotsi* youth inverting them. Middle class Africans clearly stood in an extremely complex relationship to the

white middle classes, shaped by the racialised power dynamics released in the colonial encounter with a dominant settler population and its subsequent permutations, which appears to have informed their consumption patterns to a considerable degree. Provided, then, that we do not view it in any simplistic, ahistorical terms,[92] what Brandel-Syrier observed is reminiscent of Frantz Fanon's (2008:73–81) and Loïc Wacquant's (Wacquant 2008:29–30, 169–78) observations on the manner in which colonial subjects and residents of metropolitan ghettoes often come to internalise deprecating views of themselves.[93]

It is clearly implausible to portray Africans as invariably proud and wholeheartedly committed to resistance, this being, anyhow, only inches off of a noble savage portrayal of Africans. At the same time, we should also bear in mind that consumer preferences can also be explicable as a form of resistance of the sort that Certeau speaks. In this regard, the acquisition, rental, modification and decoration of houses in African townships during the apartheid period, despite insecurity of tenure, has also been plausibly read as part of a claim to belonging to the city or to the South African nation from which African and other black subjects were forcefully excluded on derogatory racial grounds (Bank 2011:226; Bozzoli 2004:49; Krige 2012:29–34; Lee 2009:84). One of the problems with Brandel-Syrier's account of housing consumption, as Krige (2012:40) points out, is that she gave little thought to these wider historical circumstances. Reading this historical context back in, however, the two explanations are not necessarily at variance, and both help to reveal the density of expressive meaning and value that housing consumption embodies. As Leo Kuper (1968:116–17, 398, 404) argued, a large part of what made middle class Africans so politically restive was precisely that they admired much of what they encountered in white society, and considered their debarring from it unjust.

5.2.2 Post-apartheid housing and social stratification

Informal housing was always a feature of the apartheid period, but from the 1970s the apartheid state began channelling its housing budget into developments within the reserves, leading to an increase in informal dwelling around the major industrial cities. This took the form of growing backyard shack construction and free-standing squatter settlements, although the latter only emerged in significant amounts from the mid-1980s, as the state was largely effective in preventing land invasions until then, even while often turning a blind eye to backyard construction. From the 1980s, private housing developments began to emerge in black townships too, leading to increasing residentially-based stratification even *within* townships (Beall et al. 2003:200; Crankshaw, Gilbert, and Morris 2000:843; Hindson 1996:79; Mabin 1989:7–8).

The ability to access private housing at the top end of the market is, of course, linked to the different possession of incomes, itself largely premised on differential working conditions. Income discrepancies within African residential areas are increasingly very marked. For instance, a large survey conducted in Soweto in 1999 found the township to have an internal

Gini coefficient of 51.3 – not far off the already stratospheric 58.4 coefficient within wider South African society of the time (Krige 2012:25, n.13). Further down the income ladder, however, matters are more complex, because social stratification by housing type depends not only on the market but also on access to redistributed housing, where factors such as age and eligibility for social housing are not necessarily less significant than income levels in patterning home ownership (Ceruti 2013:85, 88–89).

For reasons I discuss briefly below, South Africa remains locked within a housing crisis, and by 2015 an estimated 14.1 per cent of South African households were living in "informal dwellings" (Statistics South Africa 2016:4). These are made up mostly of free-standing shacks in squatter settlements along with backyard shacks. Backyard dwellings have come to constitute around a third of informal dwellings, but they have become by a very large margin the fastest-growing informal settlement type (Lemanski 2009:473). While backyard housing is sometimes used to freely accommodate new family members in growing households, and can therefore be said to pass through reciprocal forms of exchange before being consumed, this is less common, and most backyard dwelling is based on rental arrangements in informal markets in much the same way as it was during the apartheid period (Turok and Borel-Saladin 2016:394).[94] In the post-apartheid period, social status continues to be strongly dependent on one's dwelling type. As with the apartheid period, many poor South Africans view their inability to access formal housing, not only as a practical setback that exposes them to such things as high crime levels or poor sanitation, but also as a cause for deep shame. For instance, it is common to find instances of shack dwellers comparing themselves to animals as a consequence of being unable to escape from houses that are visible markers of poverty, by referring to themselves as dogs or their dwellings as kennels or chicken coops (Bank 2011:216; Ceruti 2013:68; Meintjes 2000:50; Ross 1990:634; Samara 2011:160; Zikode 2016).

Housing in the post-apartheid period also appears tied up with individualisation in some cases. Shack dwellers and those living in poor housing conditions sometimes willingly isolate themselves from others, or are simply rejected by those with whom they would have liked to associate (Swartz 2009:35; Ross 2005:639), although shacks can also be the location of a vibrant sociality, with shack dwellers meticulously caring for and displaying their prized possessions to visitors (Guillaume and Houssay-Holzschuch 2002:88–89). While living in informal housing is often perceived as shameful, or even a negation of one's humanity, the ability to live in a brick house is read as a signal of success and wealth, and associated with the whole range of values connoting respectability (Meintjes 2000:51; Ross 2005:638–42). For those with access to brick houses, the modification of council housing is extremely widespread, while those with the means benefit both instrumentally and expressively from the construction of their own houses (Ceruti 2013:71–72). As one of Ceruti's informants explained: "[b]uilding a big house is both a practical thing [to accommodate a growing family], but it's also a status thing, and it's also a form of escape from '*siyafana*' (we are the same) – because remember the matchbox houses are all the same, so you try to distinguish yourself." Bank (2011:226–29) also found that former shack dwellers that were granted council housing modified the houses, usually starting

with the exteriors, by adding in better windows and doors and plastering and painting the exteriors, in order to project an air of respectability. Despite being poor and in need of whatever income sources they could find, they had also decided to ban the erection of backyard shacks, condemning those who would "put profit before dignity" (Bank 2011:227). House-proud residents often insisted on more formal manners between neighbours in order to shore up the hard-won respectability that their new houses had secured for them, and social interaction between neighbours had decreased, and was indeed often absent unless the children of the families were friends (Bank 2011:228–29).

5.3 Struggles for housing

Above I have described housing insofar as it has been a commodity on formal or informal markets, and we have seen that it had the power to create complex social relationships, with stratification forming between people and their immediate communities in accordance with their ability to access formal housing. Consumption through these commodity forms often led to social fragmentation or individualisation, but considering consumption of redistributed goods reveals how "collective consumption" can also be broadly integrative, and that such integration can in certain circumstances possess a solidaristic dimension. In this regard, it is essential to note that despite the social stratification within African communities, Africans often found themselves on the same side of state policies that placed blacks on a racialised ladder of benefits and burdens, with Africans receiving the most scanty benefits. Apartheid policy makers attempted to demographically manipulate Africans through housing benefits, but were not always effective in doing so.

5.3.1 The politics of housing in the apartheid period

During the apartheid period, conflicts over housing were a potent source of resistance to the state, finally coming to a boil in rent boycotts across South Africa. These boycotts themselves fed into larger urban revolts during the mid-1980s that cumulatively played a major part in precipitating the dismantling of apartheid. When answering the question of why these revolts happened when they did, mainstream political-economic approaches point to systemic economic crises affecting the country as a whole. In the work of Patrick Bond (Bond 2000, 2015; Bond and Saul 2014), a student of Harvey who has been the most recent and most sophisticated exponent of a broader neo-Marxist tradition in South Africa, we are offered an erudite understanding of how the national economy, booming after the wars, experienced a downturn during the 1970s that deepened in the 1980s into a crisis of capital accumulation. As discussed further in Chapter 7, such accounts are certainly informative but both conceptually and empirically reductive, viewing major political events as functionally determined by what are

portrayed as explanatorily more basic shifts in the economic system. For the specific purpose of understanding housing consumption, they can be used for revealing part of the background of urban conflict in South Africa but, reasoning teleologically, they are of very limited use for grasping how the thought and action of real people might have combined in contingent ways to set in train events that were not structurally pre-scripted.

Elsewhere, in his defence, Bond (2002:102–04) pays more attention to everyday life and lists some of the major causes for urban revolt in the 1980s and 1990s, all of which led to intense dissatisfaction among the African population: high transport costs for Africans located in areas remote from their workplaces; low-quality or absent social services like schools, crèches, libraries and recreational facilities; poor sanitation; high crime rates due to lax policing in the townships; and the discovery that black areas like Soweto were effectively being used to cross-subsidise urban development and stimulate business in white areas. These are essential points for understanding what made apartheid unacceptable to most Africans, and surface time and again in studies of local-level life. Bond (2002:102), however, either has little to say about these or else gratuitously portrays these in neo-Marxist terms as "structural contradictions". They can be more accurately described as a mixture of deliberate policy choices by apartheid planners and, in the case of revolt over transport costs, unforeseen consequences of these policies, which led to unanticipated, often successful, boycott movements. These choices were made by real people with historically-situated concerns that were in no obvious way determined by a more subterranean, universally invariant process of capital accumulation.

As mentioned above, apartheid policy makers were acting in accordance with an imaginary grasp of their situation in which the vulnerability of white civilisation to overrunning by barbaric blacks required that black subjects, and Africans in particular, be strictly controlled. One concrete aspect of this, discussed further in Chapter 7, was their fear – not without some grounding in fact, whatever it may have also owed to racial paranoia – that blacks would bring disease into the cities. These fears of pollution are not peculiar to capitalist societies and can have major consequences for how these societies are structured. Even when not immediately apparent, as in the case of cross-subsidisation, all these policies came in time to be consciously apprehended and critiqued by those adversely affected by them. In the case of cross-subsidisation, it should also be noted that awareness of it led to outrage and fuelled protest (Bond 2000:103; Beinart 2001:254–56), but this awareness appears only to have emerged on a wide scale following the publication of a report by the Soweto People's Delegation in 1989 showing that this was happening despite the existence of Regional Service Councils that were meant to ensure that funds flowed in the opposite direction (Humphries 1991:81; Mabin and Smit 1997:211; Swilling, Cobbett, and Hunter 1991:176–77). It therefore cannot explain the *emergence* of the revolts, however important it is for understanding their subsequent escalation.

While portraying all relevant change as related to capital accumulation is wildly reductive, I also do not mean to suggest that capital accumulation was in any way unimportant for South African history, but rather that advocates of this sort of class analysis tend to explain too much

with too little. A broadly political-economic perspective is also important for considering one of the most proximate causes of the mid-90s revolts: one major political grievance that surfaced repeatedly in the conflicts of the 1980s was against black-run local government structures, called "black local authorities" (BLAs), which effectively became independent players in local politics in 1983 following the passing of the Black Local Authorities Act of the previous year (Beinart 2001:254–56).[95] Owing to the mounting financial crisis of the times, the withdrawal of state subsidies on essential consumer items, inflation and the introduction of a new sales tax in 1983 made meeting all livelihood requirements exceedingly difficult, and this difficulty was greatly compounded by the BLAs often raising rents in order to remain solvent. These conditions certainly played a major part in the rent boycotts, as well as shop boycotts and physical attacks against local government administrators of the time, which appeared in isolated localities in 1983, and on a large scale 1984 with the Vaal Uprising, later spreading to many South African townships by mid-1986. Across South Africa, an estimated 50 townships were participating in boycotts by 1986, although increased political oppression subsequently led to the abandonment of boycotts in most of the smaller townships, where a lack of mass mobilisation made it more difficult for activists to escape being individually identified and persecuted. In the larger townships, the boycotts persisted up until 1990, when they died down or else disappeared entirely as the democratic transition was being negotiated. One of the biggest boycotts was the Soweto rent boycott, starting in 1986, in which roughly 80 per cent of residents refused to pay rents for four years (Beinart 2001:254–56; Van Donk and Pieterse 2006:108–10; Marais 2011:46–47; Shubane 1991:64–72; Swilling et al. 1991:174–77, 188).

While these political-economic trends are an essential part of what led to the demise of apartheid, they are nonetheless in themselves insufficient as explanations for the emergence of conflict. The basic problem, as Belinda Bozzoli (2004:51–52) has argued, shows up negatively: while acknowledging that the political-economic conditions of the 1980s were a significant catalyst of change, they tell us nothing about why South Africans living in areas subject to similar political oppression and economic deprivation often did *not* revolt. Even where the responses of people on the ground to the "structural" conditions in which they are caught up are taken to be a significant catalyst of systemic change, Saul Dubow (2014:297) argues that in South Africa

> many politically engaged narratives of "the struggle" have been disinclined to ask probing questions about what motivates people, whether as individuals or as groups. Endless liberation movement narratives have spoken of victories and defeats along the certain—if long and bumpy—road to freedom. Such teleological accounts pay considerably less attention to defeats or periods of hiatus than to victories and active phases of resistance. This is in the nature of patriotic or propagandist history.

Housing consumption in South Africa, at any rate, has always been tied up in a complex fashion with both political passivity and insurgency. To account for this, there is a need to go beyond a focus on generally binding structural conditions and to consider how these originated in explicitly formulated and debated state policies, sometimes creating the

submission, complacency or loyalty they sought to produce and sometimes failing to do so in the face of equally explicit political critique.

Teleological histories of the sort Dubow describes have never disappeared, but in the 1980s, in some circles, academic debate shifted away from a preoccupation with impersonal forms of structural domination and began to consider the explanatory importance of explicit political consciousness, which led to greater concern with both working class consciousness and black nationalism as explanations for social changes of the time. This was clearly a leap forward, and where the more compelling strands of debate remains, even if it has failed to make a deep impression on those continuing to satisfy themselves with more structural explanations alone. Even so, when focusing on the details of the revolts, when these happened, we see a picture of very localised grievances and interpretations of existing conditions that appear to challenge existing narratives of class and nationalist resistance as the main propellers of social and political change, even in their more sophisticated versions.

Below I consider two ethnographic studies of urban struggles during the apartheid period, both of which stand out for their empirical detail and methodological pluralism. The first of these struggles, near the beginning of the apartheid period, ultimately failed to lead to lasting transformation of society, while the other, during the convulsions of the 1980s discussed above, was at the epicentre of the political revolts that did indeed feed into major political change. They both suggest that, firstly, urban protests over collective consumption have to be understood by exploring the self-understandings and motivations of those engaging in them alongside more conventionally structural factors. Secondly, they demonstrate that in their origins these revolts were profoundly localised and, while often sharing a general antipathy to racial domination and at times guided by ideals for a future South Africa, were not invariably waged by groups already occupying a unified class position or possessing a shared African or black identity and a common vision of a future democratic South Africa. These wider solidarities, where they existed, often emerged later, not bypassing local struggles, but rather by knitting them together in ways that made sense of them as part of a larger struggle and which motivated people to make sacrifices for this struggle.

Goodhew's (2004) study of the cluster of townships called the Western Areas (Newclare, Western Native Township and Sophiatown) is an excellent example of this historically nuanced scholarship. The Western Areas held the largest concentration of urban Africans in the immediate post-war period, and Goodhew's study leads from the early 20th century until the political uprisings that occurred in the 1950s. While not framed in the language of consumption, he demonstrates that the recurring boycotts and larger civic revolts of the early post-war era, including recurring and pervasive rent boycotts, were often triggered by grievances that united people as consumers and followed no unitary class or black nationalist logic. This is certainly not to say that class and nation were of no importance, but simply that localised opposition to the state created common ground for people from very disparate social groups to form together into the type of urban social movements that had, in a variety of

different contexts, caught the attention of scholars like Castells. These social movements linked up with party politics in various complex ways to oppose increases in rents and transportation, poor policing, low quality municipal services, and a lack of consultation by local government officials with local black leaders on policy issues. Finally, these social movements also formed as a response to the forced removals that led in piecemeal fashion to the complete destruction of the Western Areas between the mid-1950s and early 1960s, with most residents removed to Meadowlands, a newly created township in what was in the process of becoming Soweto (Goodhew 2004:134–35, 146–47, 152).

This opposition was usually framed in terms of an ethic of respectability through which the expressive meaning and value of people's actions was articulated. As Goodhew (2004: xviii) explains,

> [w]hat writers mean by respectability varies, but the concept does contain a fixed core. There is a stress on economic independence, on orderliness, on cleanliness and fidelity in sexual relations. This is often, though not always, linked to religion. Belief in education as a beneficial force is strongly present. Respectability could also be defined negatively: as implying hostility to alcohol (or at least excessive consumption of alcohol), gambling, sexual unions outside of monogamy, and a lack of religious devotion. Thus respectability was contrasted with what was considered "rough".

Despite its colonial origins, Goodhew argues that respectability was not in itself an ideology that masked basic class interests. It could in some times and places be divisive, but in the Western Areas it was a way of expressing common meanings and shared value orientations whose appeal spanned class divides and it was actively made, modified and applied by many Africans in the course of lending meaning to and imposing direction on their lives. Africans responded to the material and social suffering that came of domination in different ways, but it was through ideals of respectability that Africans in the Western Areas from both the middle class and a part of the working class came to creatively frame their most basic ethical commitments and responses to life, including their motives for political struggle (Goodhew 2004: 14, 37, 168–70).

Goodhew's (2004: xx–xxi, 78–79, 169) main contention, in relation both to struggles over removals – mostly in Sophiatown – and to other forms of activism, such as the transport and rent boycotts, is that it was not only widespread poverty that led to political struggle. Widespread poverty also often eventuated in socially divisive crime and in political indifference or submission, and remained relatively stable both before the emergence of protest and at its height, from 1949 to the mid-1950s. What *was* decisive for revolt was eventually the growing conviction, articulated by activists from the Communist Party of South Africa,[96] the African National Congress and a host of smaller but not invariably less influential civic movements of the time, that Africans were being forced through various forms of state neglect and everyday racism to forego the chance to live a respectable life, which is why Goodhew's study is titled *Respectability and Resistance*.

Goodhew does not, however, offer a simple morality tale of noble resistance. In Sophiatown, a freehold township in which opposition to the state was most fierce, Goodhew makes it clear that one social division that respectability did not succeed in lastingly bridging was that between landlords and backyard tenants. We saw above that these financial relationships were often overlain with social tensions, and this was certainly true of the Western Areas, where local and central government officials consciously sought to leverage these divisions. As events unfolded the tenants were offered upgraded housing and urban services by state officials in exchange for going along with the state's forced removal programme that sought to place Africans in Meadowlands (Goodhew 2004:151–52). Hendrik Verwoed, in his capacity as minister of Native Affairs, had a direct hand in this. Using the pseudo-democratic, paternalistic language through which apartheid officials usually justified racial domination, he championed the tenants' "rights" to improved housing conditions as if they were the will of the people: "[d]o not the rights of the masses count more than the rights of a few home owners?" (Goodhew 2004:151). There was at first fierce popular revolt against the removals, but in the end these government attempts to co-opt tenants won out insofar as many tenants were willing to co-operate with the removals or were simply indifferent to them, leaving only the landowners to pursue the fight against removal (Goodhew 2004:152–53).

In the Western Areas, the state's attempts to leverage social division within the African population were largely successful in defusing the potential for revolt, but similar attempts at manipulation, in the 1980s, were less successful. Belinda Bozzoli's (2004) work on the township of Alexandra is among the best examples of the conceptually nuanced and historically attentive South African scholarship mentioned above. She describes a fierce battle against local authorities and armed forces that began in 1986 and had its roots in political and economic transformations during the 1970s. Changes to the education system were a major focus of struggle at the time, but the central grievance was that rents doubled between 1970 and 1977 as a result of sweeping administrative transformations in the ownership of housing and land between 1963 and 1979. These effectively laid the foundation for the later transformation of African township residents into what Bozzoli (2004:55) calls a "mass of tenants" of state-owned land or property. Bozzoli does not mean that stratification and all forms of intra-African particularity ceased to exist, and she notes in particular that housing type continued to stratify in some areas. Rather, she contends that such differences as did exist among the various strata came to be overshadowed by their increasingly common relationship to the land and to the state as dispossessed, excluded and dominated subjects. These transformations in housing occurred against the wider backdrop of the removal or downsizing of pre-existing forms of urban-level cross subsidisation and the dismantling of political patronage systems among elites that mediated the allocation of these benefits. They were effected through the introduction of Bantu Affairs Administration Boards in the early 1970s as a means of bringing local government under the fuller control of the central state (Bozzoli 2004:51–57).

This shift toward bureaucratised political and financial management of local life marked a transition from what Bozzoli calls "welfare paternalism" to "racial modernism". The new

bureaucracies led to great financial hardship as a consequence of dysfunctional new systems of cost recovery and were widely considered illegitimate, with existing grievances soon mounting into open rebellion as a consequence of this loss of popular legitimacy (Bozzoli 2004:50–65). Increased struggles in the 1980s, in the form of school, bus, shop and rent boycotts between 1983 and 1985, coupled with popular outrage at the shooting of a young activist from Alexandra in 1986, led to what is still called the "Six Day War" by residents, though after the initial fierce urban battles fought in the first six days the conflict endured for many months and flared up over subsequent years (Bozzoli 2004:36–38, 66–87). There was a cross-cutting network of demands at play in these struggles, but even the "millinerian" or utopian demands of the youth could be traced back to dissatisfaction with everyday indignities and often sought reform not at the level of the South African polity as a whole but rather within the limits of the township. Importantly, however, tenants were now placed in a totally different position to the central state. While their grievances and their designs for urban renewal were profoundly localised, they now had to also direct them at central government instead of the landlords and local city councils that had in previous times effectively formed a buffer between residents and the central state (Bozzoli 2004:57, 62). Similar struggles were fought in many distinct localities across South Africa during this time, where civic associations formed to fight the BLAs, largely by means of organised boycotts on BLA rents and election processes along with boycotts on the businesses of whites in general and of black local councillors (Shubane 1991:72–75).

Bozzoli argues that Alexandra is interesting to study precisely because, however unique in its particulars, it was not a singular case. Many uprisings largely emerged locally and haphazardly and were only later woven into a coherent narrative of unified struggle against an exploitative capitalist class or an oppressive state. In the case of Alexandra, this assimilation of originally fragmentary sources of struggle amongst a very diverse set of movements proceeded mainly by nationalists claiming responsibility for events they often did not precipitate (Bozzoli 2004:88–92). The workplace and trade unions were sites for the recruitment of Alexandrans into the struggle, but no more so than the housing backyards, schools, churches, sport clubs, youth clubs, choirs and shebeens (Bozzoli 2004:97–99, 116–123). Bozzoli (2004:111–13) claims that black consciousness and conventional leftist recruitment platforms were commonly encountered but limited in their popular appeal. Class-based "workerism" in particular was limited in its motivational appeal, especially among the youth. Moses Mayekiso was a prominent township leader of the time who formed the Alexander Action Committee, a civic movement that was highly effective in mobilising Alexandrans. Mayekiso came from a trade union background but was a pragmatist. "In organising for the union," he explained, "I found workers had many problems that did not originate in the workplace, which could only be solved in the community" (Mayekiso, quoted in Bozzoli 2004:185). This, for him, did not entail the abandonment of workerism but rather its assimilation to a larger programme of civic reform based on modified trade unionist organisational forms but addressed directly to immediately local issues (Bozzoli 2004:186–92). Mayekiso's basic insight was, as Bozzoli puts it, that "it was the yard rather than the shop floor which was the locus of a particularly harsh kind of suffering that could be alleviated by local organisation" (Bozzoli 2004:189).

Because of the assimilative and simplifying nature of the nationalist narrative, and its fit with religious and other social forms of what Eric Hobsbawm called "proto-nationalism", it was appealing both to insiders and outsiders in the form of the local and international media that offered extensive coverage of the crisis, and so came to have real effects (Bozzoli 2004:209–13, 226–32) The nationalist narrative was further consolidated during a series of political trials in the late 1980s and, later still, during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings of 1996–1998 (Bozzoli 2004:257–62).[97] Bozzoli also makes a compelling case for the idea that conflict was never inevitable, and owed a great deal both to pure contingency and to the ferment of decentralised political debate by adults building civic organisations based on the virtues of respectability and of utopian experimentation with new forms of political understanding and action. These included experimental forms of democratic debate and mobilisation at the level of the housing yard, along with more violent and despotic practices that emerged among the youth in many South African townships of the time, such as people's courts and the lynching, trying and execution of supposed political collaborators as informers or witches, sometimes eventuating in victims being burnt alive in public (Bozzoli 2004:124–87).

5.3.2 Post-apartheid housing and political struggle

One of many ironies in post-apartheid South Africa has been the flourishing of gated communities alongside the legal abolition of apartheid-era racial zoning. The new zones of plenty, often themed in faux-European style, are largely self-sufficient "virtual theme parks, ever more detached from the reality of the asymmetrical socio-economic conditions lying beyond their confines" (Hook and Vrdoljak 2002:202). While not at all peculiar to South Africa, they are particularly interesting in this context insofar as they effectively perpetuate the residential segregation of the apartheid era by other means, albeit on somewhat more of a class than a racial basis given that black residents are permitted to live in them (Hook and Vrdoljak 2002:205–06). Gated compounds have formed though the slow drift by affluent whites and some of the less numerous black middle class elite out of "greying" (mixed race) areas that began to appear in the late 1980s alongside the political reforms of the time, even prior to the legal abolition of the Group Areas Act in 1992 (Hindson 1985:82, 93; Simone 1998:183). Marketed variously as "estates" (including golf estates and security estates), "villages", "courts", "parks", and "clusters" or "townhouses" (Morange et al. 2012:893–94), gated compounds have gained enormously in popularity since, such that they are now a major feature of the post-apartheid landscape (Chipkin 2013:229). Dwelling in these complexes can be understood as a mode of living in the post-apartheid period that amounts to a reconstitution of community outside of pre-existing networks of solidarity. Especially for the few black residents in these new communities, the relative independence from the demands of family allows residents to better pursue a middle-class lifestyle, which for them frequently represents attained "respectability" (Chipkin 2013:243–44).

Scholarship on urban tensions in post-apartheid South Africa that tries to make sense of this tends to reason in systemic terms. In his two seminal studies, *Taming the Disorderly City* (2008) and *City of Extremes* (2011), Martin Murray argues that the social distance that apartheid sought to impose on South African society has been perpetuated and indeed deepened, de facto, through the commodification of urban space by groups whose interests cluster around real estate development. This elite is "a loose alliance of city builders—notably real estate developers, large-scale property owners, urban planners, architects and design specialists, city boosters, security specialists, and municipal officials" (Murray 2011: xvi). Murray's (2011: xv, xix) guiding research question, most precisely formulated in *City of Extremes*, is "to investigate how, after the end of apartheid and the transition to parliamentary democracy, city-building efforts directed at creating a 'spectacular city of consumption' have triggered new kinds of exclusion and marginalization of the black urban poor", and the answer, elaborated at length and with an impressive wealth of empirical material, is that the "changing shape of the built environment marks both the appearance and mystification of capital accumulation in landed property." This is because the interests of real-estate have won out in their efforts to create "fortified renaissance sites of private luxury, where affluent urban residents work and play", while neglecting "impoverished spaces of confinement, where the haphazardly employed, the poor, the socially excluded and the homeless are forced to survive" (Murray 2011: xv).

Murray reiterates throughout these studies that what ultimately sustains the spatialised concretisation of social inequality in South Africa's post-apartheid cities, beyond the on-going legacy of inadequate housing provision and aggravating factors like recessions on white farms and immigration from neighbouring countries, is something far more fundamental: the private housing market and the "system of property exploitation" it perpetuates (Murray 2008:107, 147). This complex of interests has invaded local government offices and helped to ensure collusion between public authorities and private planners and developers through complex public–private partnership arrangements that represent a turn away from a redistributive ethic of local governance toward a consumerist ethic consolidated on the model of "new public management" (Murray 2011:245–69). In researching all this Murray has also uncovered what appear to be truly complex social phenomena exemplifying new modes of living together in South Africa that have yet to receive sustained scholarly attention. These include inner-city "slumlord" economies run by an "embryonic land mafia",[98] highly securitised and almost carceral inner-city compounds owned by private residential development capitalists, and peri-urban "shack farming" by immiserated white farmers. Further along the spectrum of privilege, and better researched, there are neighbourhood associations of middle class or wealthy suburbanites in barricaded residential areas or the gated compounds discussed above (Murray 2004:23, 2008:115–19, 173–74, 2011:269–74, 285–88, 307–8).

Murray catalogues in minute detail all the ways in which business and political elites have collaborated in excluding the poor through urban commodification. In so doing, he has very usefully excavated the class dimension of these new conflicts. Importantly, however, Murray scarcely mentions resistance to these initiatives. This is perhaps justified insofar as resistance of

the same intensity as that seen in the apartheid period has not yet materialised – there is widespread opposition, but it lacks the system-altering and often utopian nature of apartheid-era mobilisations and it is highly dispersed. But here, too, there is something to be explained. To follow Murray's demonstrations of how elites pursue commodification and influence political decision-making for these ends is indeed fascinating and very necessary, but it is less obvious that we need subscribe to his implicit belief that social and political domination and resistance can be explained by this alone. For a genuinely critical appraisal of the present, as well as the potentials for future ruptures it contains, there is a need to range outside of Murray's economistic frame of reference and fill out the picture by looking at how market commodification is at times genuinely in tension with state decommodification. This entails thinking more about how people at the grassroots level have responded in an effort to shift the balance between market commodification and state decommodification, and why they have chosen to do so. These South Africans possess far less significant financial clout, but they can potentially sway outcomes at the polls, even if by simply refusing to vote, as has been the case, with the ruling party registering heavy losses in local elections. Repression by state and private security services has not prevented mobilisation, and to the extent that the poor are politically organised, they have to be appeased by the new political elite.

In this regard, something Murray doesn't explore, but which is significant, is that the "welfare paternalism" that Belinda Bozzoli argued served to pacify resistance to meagre state provision in the early apartheid period, but which was eventually stripped back under apartheid in a manner that was both materially damaging and politically unacceptable, is back in place, albeit in modified form. This has led to widespread dependency by the poor on the ruling ANC party – often in the form of specific, local-level ANC councillors functioning as "gatekeepers" for their supporting factions. The ANC has set itself up not only as the party of liberation from white rule but also from poverty. One main aspect of this was the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) adopted by the ANC shortly before the 1994 election as part of its campaign platform, which has subsequently included the wide roll-out of small, low-cost public houses that are still popularly called "RDP houses" even though the RDP was soon superseded by state-run developmental initiatives claiming to extend the RDP but clearly departing from its originally pro-poor agenda (Beresford 2015:243; Cirolia, Smit, and Duminy 2015:163).

Importantly, however, not all South Africans are eligible for housing, and the allocation of welfare is more fiercely contested than ever before. Amongst the very poor, despite providing nearly 3 million low-cost homes,[99] the post-apartheid state has failed to meet the enormous demand for housing in South Africa. By 2013, with informal settlements a common feature of urban life, there were an estimated 2.1 million households in need of homes – roughly 600 000 more than in 1995, due to population growth outpacing the rate of delivery (Brand and Cohen 2013). This figure is certain to grow as current housing policies have switched their focus onto upgrading shacks and providing basic services in existing free-standing informal settlements, while ignoring backyard dwellings and failing to provide new housing (Brand and Cohen

2013; Cirolia et al. 2015:164; Turok and Borel-Saladin 2016:287–88). The housing problem also extends to less poor but financially struggling South Africans, the so-called "working poor". While 60% of South Africans have a monthly income lower than R3,500 a month and are therefore eligible for state housing, 25% of families earn more than this but are still too poor to qualify for a mortgage.

In the post-apartheid period, the urban revolt that developed in the 1980s has re-emerged since around 2004. This local-level political agitation, often referred to as "service delivery" protest, certainly does possess a class dimension. At the same time, it is not reducible to this alone, as the protests do not map onto areas of poverty in any symmetrical way. Research for the Multilevel Government Initiative (Powell, O'Donovan, and De Visser 2015:13) finds that data on local-level protests across South Africa between 2007 and 2014 demonstrate that "there is a very poor correlation between the size of the poor population and the prevalence of protests in general". Of course, such statements should be read with caution, and much of this turns on what one understands by poor.[100] On a broader understanding, it is entirely self-evident that service delivery protests, where they do erupt, only ever do so in poorer parts of South African cities. This is hardly surprising, as it is there that people lack the option of satisfying their unmet needs on the market. The point is rather that within these general parameters there is no strong correlation, with other factors intervening, such as perceptions of the responsiveness of local government to local needs and of local-level corruption, along with power struggles related to local politics and the access to jobs and patronage networks that participating in it provides. As in the post-war period, there is also far more protest in urban areas than in rural areas, despite there being more wealth in the urban areas (Beresford 2015:226–46; Powell, O'Donovan, and Visser 2015:13).

The grievances arising in these protests differ from place to place, but indignation at inadequate housing is always among the major reported causes. Demands here are not made simply in instrumental terms, but rather by appeal either to universal discourses of basic humanity or to a particularistic nationalist discourse of citizenship, sometimes in an inclusive fashion and at others in a manner that excludes ethnic minorities and foreigners. Nonetheless, they have as their object the rectification of intensely local grievances. Their practical demands are for improved housing and delivery of services to local communities or to factions within these communities (Beresford 2015:243–44), as well as for more inclusive decision-making processes by local state officials (Pithouse 2013:99–101).

Most of the organised resistance to housing and these associated issues during the apartheid era was to varying extents eventually co-ordinated by the UDF from its formation in 1983, and by the South African National Civic Organization (SANCO) from 1992, after the UDF formally dissolved the previous year. However, many SANCO activists then merged into the ANC around the time of the ANC's unbanning and the democratic transition of 1994, greatly weakening its subsequent capacity to independently influence South African politics (Huchzermeyer 2003:598–99; Lodge 2003:206–8; Saul and Bond 2014:173). Nonetheless, from

the early 2000s local-level political organisation around civic issues has re-emerged, now often discussed in terms of "new social movements" (Pithouse 2013:97–98; Bond and Saul 2014:173–75). Insofar as housing is a central focus of mobilisation, this has been in movements such as the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign and the Landless People's Movement (both largely defunct by 2013) and the shack-dwellers movement called *Abahlali baseMjondolo* (meaning "those living in shacks"), all of whom have mainly operated locally or regionally despite sometimes forming higher-level connections.

Abahlali baseMjondolo, the most sustained of these local movements, has, in particular, been viewed as potentially exemplifying an emergent form of grassroots politics in South Africa (Brown 2015; Huchzermeyer 2014; Pithouse 2013). The movement, operative since 2005, which claims a membership of more than 12 000 people in over 60 shack settlements, is made up of shack-dwelling families and closely networked social organisations like crèches, churches and choirs (Pithouse 2013:102; Zikode 2013). It is deeply suspicious of electoral politics, and its members have largely refused to vote in order to pressurise politicians into better serving their needs, or else have voted strategically where officials have promised to improve housing (Etzo 2010:575). For the most part, their collective action has been channelled into resisting housing evictions and demolitions, while also demonstrating for improvements in housing and other services like water and electricity provision, sewage disposal, fire-fighting, and appealing for land reform. They have successfully opposed state slum removal legislation in the courts and organised illegal electricity connections and land grabs of unoccupied land (Zikode 2016).

Importantly, *Abahlali baseMjondolo* members have explicitly rejected having their movement reduced to pragmatic issues of service delivery alone. Like all of the protest movements discussed above, they adduce complex ethical motives for their practical struggles, even though these concern physical objects like housing and municipal services. As S'bu Zikode (quoted in Gibson 2016:7), himself a shack dweller and one of the movement's founders and leading intellectuals, has explained, "[i]t is not only about physical infrastructure…. the struggle is the human being, the conditions that we live in which translates into demands for housing and land". Seeking to redress the dehumanisation that, as we saw above, many shack dwellers feel has become their lot, Zikode (quoted in Gibson 2016:7) argues that the movement is fundamentally concerned with moral issues: "[i]s it good for shack dwellers to live in mud like pigs, as they are living? Why do I live in a cardboard house if there are people who are able to live in a decent house? So it is a moral question." "We live as we do," writes Zikode (2016), "because we are not counted as human. Therefore at the heart of our struggle there is a duty to defend our humanity." Indeed, Zikode (2005) has always claimed that "[f]or us the most important struggle is to be recognised as human beings."

5.4 Private and collective dimensions of housing consumption

In considering historical experiences of both private and collective housing consumption I have been interested in establishing what sorts of social solidarity and political mobilisation consumer action creates or undoes. Private housing is a commodity, but unlike clothing, its greater expensiveness often renders it far beyond the reach of most people. No amount of self-sacrifice and budgetary reallocation, of the sort commonly practised by clothing consumers, will place it within reach of the poor. To this extent, private housing consumption at the higher end of the market follows a class logic, where one's income, usually determined by one's placing in the system of market-oriented production, strongly determines one's capacity to participate at all in the consumption of such commodities. This is basically the case for housing consumption in the post-apartheid period, although housing at the lower end of the market is still influenced in some measure by state redistribution. In the apartheid period, however, the housing market was subject to constant legal intervention related to the exigencies of racial domination, leading to a clearer overlap of class and race as dimensions of consumption patterns, even while some measure of private housing consumption always ensured that race and class were never perfectly aligned.

Collective housing consumption, however, reveals something more about the political dimension of consumption. Politically, the consumption of redistributed goods like housing has led both to dependence on and resistance to the state. In the latter case, the desire to reform or extend the redistributive conditions for collective consumption can serve as a channel for political action aimed at securing social change. Collective action around housing provision in South Africa has extended far beyond isolated campaigns like the commodity boycott initiatives discussed in Chapter 4, with rent boycotts being central to the domestic struggles that helped render racial segregation and apartheid unworkable in South Africa's most populous cities. Inadequate housing redistribution is also the main grievance voiced in the pervasive municipal-level protests in post-apartheid South Africa and in some new social movements among the poor, although not yet on anything like the same organisational scale as that witnessed in the apartheid period.

These political trends have themselves altered the prevailing forms of social solidarity in South Africa in both the apartheid and post-apartheid periods. To understand this, it is important to recall that housing provision by the state was not only about controlling the African workforce, but also part of an attempt by apartheid policy makers to render Africans politically docile and divided by altering the social conditions in which they lived. The deliberate manipulation of social cleavages through housing provision by state officials succeeded, in the early apartheid period, in fragmenting opposition to racial zoning through forced removals. This ultimately backfired though, as did the hope that housing and other forms of state redistribution could be manipulated to produce submissive African subjects. Towards the end of the apartheid period the racial ghettoes to which the state had confined the African population became the seat of relentless opposition to minority white rule, at times mitigating the socially-stratifying effect of

the private housing market as landlords and tenants found themselves on the same side of diminished and inefficient redistributive schemes that were increasingly considered not only materially insufficient but also unjustly managed. In the post-apartheid period, however, this common purpose appears to have greatly diminished and resides only in a number of pro-poor social movements driven by those whose material conditions have not improved despite regime change. These impoverished South Africans continue to feel themselves reduced, in the eyes of middle class blacks and whites alike, to an animal existence, and some have chosen to challenge the state on these grounds.

Chapter 6

6. Faith healing as reciprocity

If we understand religion very broadly as the belief in spiritual beings and in supernatural agency (Whitehouse 2004:1–2), then South Africa has always been an overwhelmingly religious society. From a social science perspective that considers it essential to account for action as meaningful and motivated, one cannot afford to ignore the religious terms in which social life is usually imaginatively signified in such a society. Of course, looking on, we might consider such significations as mystifications, as imaginary in the everyday sense of this term, and indeed contemporary social science research that aims to address any but the most narrow of audiences is compelled to do so. Nonetheless, self-understandings, by informing action, have performative consequences that matter, even if this significance is reinterpreted into thoroughly secular terms.

In this chapter I focus on religious practices framed by their practitioners in a conceptual idiom of healing and illness. I will refer to this, in short, as faith healing, and in keeping with the focus on Africans that has informed the previous chapters I will look at faith healing practices largely confined to the African population. These faith healing practices are focused, on the one hand, on divination, typically premised on communication with and appeasement of ancestral spirits. On the other hand, the African independent churches (AICs)[101] have also become a major locus of faith healing, frequently through the figure of a prophet instead of a diviner. This split is not absolute though, and there are cases where AIC members do consult diviners (Venter 2004:17), where AIC prophets recommend ancestor veneration (Anderson 1999:298), and where diviners engage in Christian prophecy or believe in the Christian God (Niehaus 2001:39; Wilhelm-Solomon 2013:41). As an example of the latter, Niehaus (2001:39) mentions a diviner who described the Christian God as "the greatest of all ancestors". Below I will say more about these overlaps, which arise against the background of a historical continuity between these two forms of faith healing.

To speak of faith healing is not to deny that some form of materiality is involved in these practices. The materials most commonly used by diviners include plants, sea water, animal parts, blood and other bodily emissions (Xaba 1999:156). Either in isolation or combined, these objects are sold in largely informal business practices. Christian prophets from AICs also perform healing rituals using objects such as cords and ropes, wooden staffs, and fragments of wood. They also use various forms of sea or pure water, called "blessed water", and water-based infusions such as ash or salt in order to induce vomiting, as well as tea and various plants (Anderson 1999:305–07; Xaba 1999:157). As discussed below, church members make monetary contributions to the running of the church or for special causes, but the prophets or

ministers performing these rituals generally do not receive any of this money. Another important difference is that the objects consumed for purposes of faith healing, unlike both indigenous herbalism and biomedicine, are generally not viewed by those engaged in these practices as inherently healing. They are rather understood as bearers of properties whose efficacy depends on an antecedent process of spiritual invigoration.

While Durkheimian approaches to religion posit a well-demarcated division between the sacred and profane, the two are very often practically indistinguishable in the lives of most late-20th century Africans (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993:xviii), and this overlapping is very much the case at the level of everyday life for the poor in contemporary South Africa (Wilhelm-Solomon et al. 2016:10–11). I will similarly view religious discourses and practices, not as a means of marking out a sacred space outside of the everyday and the profane, but as testimony to the creative manner in which both the everyday and the transcendental are invested with expressive significance. As a form of religious practice, faith healing is enormously popular in South Africa, although we have little reliable information that would allow us to quantify the pervasiveness of divination. A figure commonly encountered in the literature puts the number of South Africans that regularly consult diviners at 80 per cent (e.g. Van Bogaert 2007:39). This figure, is, however, completely unreliable (Wilkinson 2013).[102] One recent estimate puts it at around 72 per cent (Mander et al. 2007:190), but this too is based on a number of small-scale studies and is no reliable guide either.

We can, however, say a little more about the popularity of church-based faith healing in South Africa today. If the main reason for belonging to the AICs is to benefit from faith healing, which indeed is a consensus position within the literature (e.g. Anderson 1999:298; Schoffeleers 1991:90; West 1975:91–92), and why Matthew Schoffeleers refers to them as the "healing churches", then AIC membership figures are quite arresting as a rough index of the magnitude of faith healing practices. Nearly one in three South Africans, almost all of them Africans, belonged to one of the AICs by 2001. So-called Zionist Christianity, which is by far the most common form of AIC, has become one of the largest religious movements in South Africa and southern Africa more generally. In 2001, 11.1 per cent of all South Africans belonged to the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) alone, the largest of the Zionist congregations. The 31.8 per cent total AIC membership of 2001 was up from 26.8 per cent in 1996 (Statistics South Africa 2004:24–28).[103] AIC affiliation has indeed been on an upward trajectory since the churches appeared. Shortly before the apartheid period, in 1940, membership was estimated at 9.6 per cent, and as has risen steadily since (Venter 2004:28).[104]

The enormous popularity of faith healing in South Africa has to be understood as itself dependent on local understandings of both healing and illness, which is an idiom for speaking about an enormous range of physical and social afflictions. Here I will focus on the AICs alone, and especially on the Zionist form of AIC. This is because, while divination is an increasingly private, commodified faith healing practice, faith healing in the AICs is the foundation for a form of social belonging that largely happens outside of the commodity sphere. Particularly in

Zionist churches, the congregation functions as a sort of communitarian association joined by strongly binding ethical ties and practices of gift giving. One major challenge is to attempt to cast these practices into a conceptual language that renders them comprehensible within the secular assumptions of most contemporary, critical social science debate. To do so we have to appreciate that healing is an extremely widespread demotic idiom in which the establishment of reciprocity is discussed, but one peculiarity of this in the South African context is that it is often indissociably linked up with understandings about the physical state of the individual body. By joining AICs, I will argue, people seek to establish or repair social bonds premised on practices of reciprocity, especially where these bonds are threatened.

Beyond interpreting these practices in a sociological idiom, the particular task at hand is to show how, from a historical-sociological perspective, the consumption of faith healing creates definite social and political patterns. Here I am guided by the Polanyian conviction that all societies are, in some measure, integrated through a plurality of basic forms. While the market may exert a particularly powerful effect on social integration in certain times and places, this can never be assumed *a priori*, even within a capitalist society. The actual extent to which commodification explains observed forms of social integration and disintegration, as well as the actual or potential for socio-political resistance to this that any critically-minded theory is compelled to seek out, can only be gotten at by resisting the temptation to assume prior to all investigation that the force-field of commodification must extend to the very perimeter of the social world. In the previous chapter I looked at how market integration can be in tension with redistribution, and here I will look at a similar tension, but between the market and reciprocity. I follow this line of reasoning below by considering the historical origins of the healing churches, before examining the class dynamics of membership and the political quiescence that they have often demonstrated. This is then followed by a probing into the social dimension of AIC belonging, which allows us to view them as something like the "sub-cultural" groups and new social movements discussed in chapters 4 and 5.

6.1 The appearance of healing churches in South Africa

6.1.1 Organisational emergence

From the late 19th and early 20th century onward ritual healing practices began to fuse with the Christianity that had begun to be widely diffused in the early 19th century. The Protestant missions that were largely responsible for bringing Christianity to South Africa were to fuel an explosion of syncretic religious activity in ways that were then entirely unforeseen. Within the organisational structure of the churches themselves, the precipitating events for these secessions were usually the inability of black members of congregations to advance in the

mission hierarchies, with complaints also focussing both on extremely low salary levels and on the disrespectful manner in which African pastors were treated by their white colleagues (Sundkler 1991:85). Mangena M. Mokone's "Declaration of Independence" in fourteen points, which accompanied the establishment of his Ethiopian Mission in the final years of the 19th century, laid particular emphasis on the humiliation suffered by the black clergy, complaining that "[n]o African pastor is honoured by the white brethren. The more the African humiliates himself, the more he makes himself a matter of derision" (quoted in Sundkler 1991:85). There was also a larger-scale economic background to this though. Africans preferred to seek work in more lucrative fields like farming, business or skilled trades rather than in the missions in the early 19th century, when most missions were being established. As the century wore on, however, heavy taxation along with land reservation and other racialised brakes on black advancement in these other fields led to renewed interest in mission work by around the 1880s (Chidester 1992:112–13).

The cumulative result was a rupture from the European churches and the formulation of new church denominations and beliefs. These were often called "Ethiopian" churches, as Ethiopia was a biblical metonym for Africa generally, as a reference to independent black churches emerging around the turn of the 12th century in North Africa, and due to an African nationalist homage to the modern Ethiopian nation and the prior independence of the Abyssinians from colonial conquest. Ethiopia also became a symbol of pan-African unity invoked by black preachers in the USA, and especially those of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, with which some early Ethiopian church leaders were in contact (Chidester 1992:112, 117–18; Kiernan 2004:47–48)

Alongside the breakaway Ethiopian churches, the first of which was founded in 1882, there was the emergence of independent "Zionist" churches since 1908 (Venter, 2004:19; Kiernan, 2004:48).[105] The Zionist movement in South Africa bears no immediate connection to Israel/Palestine and the Jewish nationalism that is often called Zionism in this context. The term "Zionist" is used both to connect the church genealogy to the establishment of John Alexander Dowie's church in Zion City, Illinois in the USA, through the efforts of the strayed Dutch Reformed missionary Pieter L. Le Roux and his followers. More generally, Zionism refers to churches that emphasise the guidance of the spirit through prophecy and focus their practices on healing (Sundkler 1976:68). While the original adherents of the Ethiopian churches were largely urban, middle class Africans, Zionist churches were from their inception attended by the rural underclasses. From the 1940s onward, Zionism became an urban phenomenon too, growing very rapidly in both the country and the city due to massive war-time labour migration and urbanisation, although in recent years the biggest growth in the Zionist churches has decisively shifted to the cities (Kiernan 2004:48–49, 53).

In their early years the Zionist churches quickly adapted their teachings to reflect elements of African cosmology not encountered in any of the parent churches (Kiernan 2004:49). Prophecy is particularly central to the organisational practices of Zionist churches. Sundkler (2004

[1948]:23, 278–90) argued that the Zionist prophets implicitly or explicitly laid claim to divinity and were viewed by their devotees as black Christs or messsiahs. Later, apparently remorseful for giving offence, Sundkler (1976:309) claimed that these terms of divinity may have been too incautiously applied, but at any rate his and others' research is full of evidence that these prophets sometimes claim for themselves an exceptional and elevated social status and are widely believed by their followers to possess supernatural powers.[106] In the literature they are sometimes referred to as charismatic leaders.

Zionism has in time proven the more popular of the two basic AIC types, and in the course of the 20th century there has been an overwhelming shift away from Ethiopianism and toward Zionism, such that today an estimated 80 per cent of AICs are of the Zionist type (Denis 2012:217; Schoffeleers 1991:93). This depends somewhat on one's typological commitments though. As Sundkler (2004:54–55) stressed, the dichotomy of Zionist and Ethiopian congregations was an ideal type and not a social fact, with a great deal of overlap between denominations in practice. Both church types possess a theology and practice based predominantly on faith healing, although this is particularly pronounced in the Zionist churches.[107] Both groups draw in African believers almost exclusively and tend to be explicitly Africanist, but this Africanism has taken slightly different forms. It was more directly stressed by the Ethiopian congregations, for whom this entailed an explicit African nationalism as a rejection of dependence on whites, with Zionists rather tending to simply avoid whites on grounds of a belief in their ritual impurity (Sundkler 2004:54–55).

6.1.2 The social significance of healing

The emergence of the AICs cannot be explained by organisational disputes among leaders within the churches alone, or by the appeal of the Zionist movement in the USA to the local church leaders who introduced Dowie's principles to South Africa and adapted them to the local context. It rather needs to be understood against the far larger colonial background where, as Jean Comaroff (1985:2) explains in *Body of Power*, her seminal study of Zionism in South Africa, "Christian symbols provided the lingua franca through which the hierarchical articulation of colonizer and colonized was accomplished". Aspects of this colonial background, as well as its segregationist and apartheid-era articulations, have been discussed in the previous two chapters, but a few brief observations should be added here in order to make some sense of why these churches possess a mass appeal and developed in the way that they have.

The original mission churches always played some part in healing, and mission hospitals in South Africa, as in many other African societies, helped to expedite conversion. Mission converts expected the missionaries to show an interest in health and fertility commensurate with the importance that these values usually possessed in pre-colonial times (West 1975:91). What is most interesting about the spread of Christianity in South Africa is that, within the

AICs, Christian symbols were overlain with vernacular understandings of health and disease (Comaroff 1985:8–9; Crais 2002:121–23, 131). This complex syncretic process that emerged in the late 19th century has continued into the present, with Christian beliefs being perpetually adapted to local modes of imagining and coping with the world.

We can say in a general sense that there has been a clear desire to domesticate Christianity so that the "distant God of orthodox Christianity" that the missionaries introduced, focussed on salvation in a transcendent realm, would become more familiar and present (Niehaus 2001:31). In so doing the Christian god would cease to be what one prophet in a later period called "a God who has neither arms nor legs, who cannot see, who has neither love nor pity" (Sundkler 2004:278). This was, however, no abstract exercise in ideation. In practice this has meant that, while the missionaries and their successors in the mainline churches slowly became more distanced from medical practice in accordance with the growing specialisation of biomedicine and its organisational concretisation in clinics and hospitals, the AICs have largely served to reverse this process, developing their own complex understandings of how the body is to be healed (West 1975:91). Beyond this, the AICs have always been churches of the poor and oppressed, and have clearly functioned as a means of imaginatively adapting to the often exceedingly trying material and ethical strains accompanying subaltern life. Faith healing, as I argue further below, attempts to remedy both bodily sickness and psychological affliction through the same ritual means.

6.2 Faith healing in a capitalist society

The emergence of AICs can be related to the altered material reality of a jolting assimilation into industrial capitalism, as some writers have done, focusing on the Zionist AICs in particular. This perspective focuses on the sustained material poverty of most Africans, which, as we saw in chapters 4 and 5, was fed by production-side factors such as unemployment, low wages, and occupational precarity due to the colour bar in employment. Belonging to the healing churches can be understood as the outcome of poverty in two related ways: firstly, church affiliation reproduces class distinctions due to informal sanctions that exclude the poor from certain denominations, and secondly, faith healing assists industrial labourers in adjusting to their subordinate place in a globalising capitalist system. When pried apart from the functionalist theses these observations are usually taken to support, both provide important insights into the economic significance of the healing churches.

6.2.1 Faith healing among the underclasses

Keke Motseke and Sibongile Mazibuko, members of the *Class in Soweto* research project – which, in Chapter 3, we said was the most challenging attempt to grapple with the

complexities of class in post-apartheid South Africa – have argued that AIC membership reflects class divisions (Motseke and Mazibuko 2013:219–31). Attending to these connections is illuminating but, of the various pieces of evidence they present, none strictly speaking reflects class in the occupation- or income-based terms in which class is generally discussed, and which their own research project explicitly defends. When viewing class as an objective social position, the closest the *Class in Soweto* researchers come to establishing a class patterning to denominational belonging is by demonstrating that AIC membership corresponds with lower living standards than membership in other denominations (Motseke and Mazibuko 2013:216–18). However, even assuming that we adopt an income-based understanding of class, and that living standards mirror income unproblematically – that is, even choosing to ignore differences in people's propensity to save or spend their incomes and to live on credit, which can create level living standards across households with very different incomes – there are other basic problems with this. Not least among these is that AIC membership is also higher among the youth. As Motseke and Mazibuko admit, this makes it impossible to tell from the data they use whether the AICs are poor churches because their attraction to the youth, who tend to be poor, boosts these figures, or because, being poor, these youth are drawn more to AICs than to other churches. Only the latter scenario proves the class thesis, while it is entirely possible that both factors are at play (Motseke and Mazibuko 2013:225). Indeed, it has been found that a significant number of AICs deliberately attempt to boost their youth membership through music, sports, drama and youth services, suggesting that the former explanatory strategy has something important to say and that something other than a purely economistic causality is at play (Öhlmann, Frost, and Gräb 2016:7). The closest Motseke and Mazibuko come to demonstrating some causal mechanism at work that might back up their class thesis is by arguing that some people lack the ability to pay tithes or make contributions of a generally acceptable monetary standard at church collections in other denominations (Motseke and Mazibuko 2013:230–31). Even though they don't directly demonstrate it, there seems little reason to doubt their suggestion that this shapes people's denominational choices. What they say chimes with Becca Hartman-Pickerill's (2016:208) encounter with Zionists who were uncomfortable with mainline church services, not only due to the lack of lively drumming, dancing and singing, but also because they felt demeaned by their inability to contribute large sums of money at church collections.

Motseke and Mazibuko (2013:225) at one point simply appeal to common sense in favour of their position, insofar as the historic record shows that the AICs (and the poorer Pentecostals) have never been churches for the "respectable" middle classes. This in a sense is already backed up by their own research on the subjective dimension of class. They show that some of the sociological patterns widely observed to differ greatly between AIC members on the one hand, and mainline church members on the other (with these patterns falling across the Pentecostal churches), such as the use of English, confident physical comportment or the conspicuous display of cars by members of the mainline churches, are commonly understood by Sowetans to indicate higher class standing. But this argument, and others like it throughout the book, benefits from an ambiguity in the meaning of "class". As Krige (2012:35, n.20)

explains of contemporary Soweto, "'[c]lassing people' is an actual phrase used to denote the labelling of people as belonging to specific status groups. In fact, when Sowetans use the term 'class' they are referring to the Weberian notion of status group."

In the apartheid period, too, working class Africans tended toward membership of the AICs while the middle classes gravitated to the mainline churches. Middle class attendance of Zionist churches was very uncommon except in isolated cases where people pursued healing, but there was some overlap in the Ethiopian churches (Kuper 1965:99, 136–7; Pauw 1968:40; Nyquist 1983:67–72). The researchers who made these observations, however, even when speaking of "class", were not referring to class in the strict sense, but rather to status, which Nyquist discusses in terms of the tendency within the mainline churches to uphold "prestige and position" (Nyquist 1983:70). For these to count as *class* distinctions in the conventional Marxian or Weberian sense of this term, it would be necessary to demonstrate that they were causally reducible to one's position in the productive structure of society or to one's financial resources, and this is not clearly done in any of the literature.

This does not mean that there is no correlation between class, in the more conventional sociological sense that Motseke and Mazibuko and the *Class in Soweto* project employ, and denominational belonging. If isolated ethnographic research is anything to go by, Zionists studied during the apartheid period were almost invariably impoverished (e.g. Kiernan 1977:33). In the post-apartheid period, in 1997, Garner found that 34 per cent of the Zionists he encountered were living in extreme poverty while only 5 per cent were relatively affluent. He also found that 59 per cent of Zionists were either unemployed or in low-skilled work, with only 12 per cent engaged in medium- or high-skill work (Garner 2004:206). These findings lend some support to Motseke and Mazibuko's position that it is indeed class and not status that patterns denominational belonging. Nonetheless, the problem remains that it is one thing to view such correlations as important, and other thing entirely to argue that a causal relationship exists between class and denomination and to attempt a reduction of all explanatory variables to it. After all, there are cases during both the apartheid and post-apartheid periods where the poor have been found to belong to mainline churches in substantial numbers, even if the reverse, of middle class Africans belonging permanently to African churches, is considerably more rare (Comaroff 1985:189; Garner 2000:319). In Garner's research mentioned immediately above, 41 per cent of mainline church members were unemployed or in low-skill work, and 18 per cent lived in extreme poverty.

For the class thesis to really be convincing, we would need some way of accounting for cases like these, where income and professional status do not appear to strongly predict denomination. More importantly, we would also have to address the obvious problem that many people respond to poverty in entirely non-religious ways or by belonging to other religious denominations, which makes it necessary to understand what *else* explains Zionist belonging. Instead of explanatorily reducing all observed dynamics to class, a more nuanced position is possible, in which class interacts with other social factors of the sort that Weber

indicated by status. Weber believed that, in the historical realm, class and status often interact in complex ways and are likely to correspond over time, but insisted on resisting the sort of Marxist reductionism that would collapse status into class, and this insight still remains perfectly valid still as a basic conceptual orientation for resisting economistic reductionism.

We do better to think in terms of elective affinities rather than opting for the more elegant but reductive alternative of mono-causal explanations. Even James Kiernan, who explicitly holds the economistic position that Zionism was before else a response to poverty, nonetheless argues that this was only *one possible* response to poverty. Another response, and one which he commonly encountered, was a life of crime in a *tsotsi* gang, and beyond this were a range of organisations, mostly run out of mainline churches, that assisted people with surviving poverty (Kiernan 1977:34). Kiernan does not imply that any of these options were easy, but simply observes that many of the people he met made real choices among them. In this manner, he steers clear of structural determinism even while paying due attention to the disempowerment and restricted choice that confronts the impoverished in capitalist societies.

6.2.2 Faith healing and adjustment to a globalising capitalist system

The genesis of the AICs in South Africa can also be explained by their capacity to assist the African labour force, created through primitive accumulation of their land by colonialists, in coping with industrial labour by easing their entrance into city life. At a further remove, this can be argued to have facilitated South Africa's transition from a peripheral to semi-peripheral country in the global economy (Kruss 1985:71–79, 94–95; Venter 2004:182). There seems some obvious truth in this too, as faith healing appears to reduce the anomie and loneliness that sometimes accompany city living. It is, however, not at all obvious that AIC affiliation can be portrayed as a response to urban life alone. It was originally only the Ethiopian movement that came out of the cities, itself often maintaining or establishing strong links in the country too (Kruss 1985:98–100). Zionism emerged first among breakaway Dutch Reformed Church missionaries and rural farm workers in the rural Wakkerstroom area[108] and later grew up dynamically on both sides of the urban–rural divide under African leaders, with the first churches and holy sites being overwhelmingly rural (Kiernan 1977:243–44; Sundkler 1976:16–67).

If insisting on an economistic interpretation of AIC belonging fails to account for its origins, it might nonetheless explain its persistence and growth. In this connection Zionist congregations can be viewed as functionally necessary vehicles for the creation of dutiful, efficient workers able to accumulate capital. Zionist churches encourage industriousness, sobriety, thrift and abstention from many forms of material consumption as a consequence of taboos on alcohol, tobacco and gambling, while also frowning on the purchase of consumer luxuries (Kiernan 1977:34–35).[109] As Kiernan (1997:250) puts it,

> [t]he secular consumer society dazzles with promises of all kinds of possessions and attendant pleasures; it lures with bright playthings, brash music and loose women, and with freedom untrammelled by stuffy or rigid moral rules. Zionists mount guard against it by rejecting profligacy and waste, both of earning power and sexual potency. Set squarely against prodigality and promiscuity is the Zionist insistence on saving, concentration of resources and sexual restraint.

This looks superficially like a sort of religiously-driven material enhancement propitious to capital accumulation that could be taken to functionally explain why Zionism has thrived in South Africa. However, the concentrated time demands placed on members appear to be in tension with holding up a steady job, and material resources constantly flow away from the few who manage to build any up and toward group members in need, such that no lasting accumulation results (Kiernan 1977:39, 1988:457; Venter 2004:95–98).

Belonging to Zionist groups is therefore likely to frustrate material enrichment, even while it does enable members of Zionist groups to meet the most basic material requirements of their livelihoods. With the exception of the ZCC, as well as the Nazareth Baptist Church and the African Congregational Church, whose leaders have openly benefitted financially from their positions, cash collections appear not to lead to lasting accumulation. The ministers leading grassroots congregations are usually scrutinised in their handling of money and, in some cases, actually appear to generally lose money by sometimes having to make up for shortfalls in collections from their own pockets. There is generally too little money for them to receive salaries, and they have to work to maintain themselves. Where churches are linked up, higher-level leaders (usually called bishops or presidents) are in a position to surreptitiously extract money but, at least going by the absence of major scandals, seldom appear to do so. At any rate, owing to the general poverty of the congregation members, the overall sums are generally so pithy as to make embezzlement at this level a rather unrewarding enterprise (Kiernan 1988:463; Denis 2012:723–25). One of course can never rule out the possibility of some form of theft here, but Kiernan and Denis, who have researched AIC financial practices in some detail, both find no evidence of major mismanagement.

The real material gains of belonging to Zionist churches go to those in desperate need, who benefit from money gathered during church collections, from private "loans" among congregation members that are very often understood as gifts unlikely to be returned, or from donations of food, child care, and free accommodation (Kiernan 1988:455–56; Garner 2004:94–95). Faced with the impossibility of meeting some of the greatest expenses in life, such as births, weddings and funerals, members of Zionist congregations could always rely on support from their co-congregationists (Kiernan 1977:35). It is also common for churches to serve as conduits for people joined by trust to link up into informal money-pooling schemes (called *stokvels*) and shared funeral clubs outside of the churches (Bompani 2010:317–20; Denis 2012:728; Venter 2004:93–95). If these practices are in some general sense a response to local and global processes of capital accumulation, insofar as most Zionists can be said to be exploited workers or members of an underclass characterised by an inability to find regular work at all, it is

nonetheless true that none of the complex ways in which they have responded to their circumstances appear to be fully determined by this structural predicament. While heavily disempowered and functioning in a context of limited choice, members of Zionist AICs have found ways both to physically survive and to live expressively rich lives, neither of which would be possible in a world in which the only bonds existing between people were those of the market.

6.2.3 The limits of economism

Explaining faith healing in economistic terms both illuminates and obscures. It draws attention to a wider context of action, some of which actors may be unaware of in their everyday practices, such as the extension of economic relationships gestured at in discussions of globalisation. On the other hand, resting content with economistic explanations alone effectively commits one to an understanding of action where the social and political mediation between individuals and large-scale economic forms of association is assumed not to possess a logic of its own. In this regard, a basic problem is that similar experiences of integration into industrial capitalism in Northern societies have led to very different responses, both religious and otherwise. This suggests that integration into a global capitalist system doesn't suffice for explaining the immense popularity of the new independent churches and the faith healing rituals they offer. More has to be done in order to register the particularity of these forms of ritual consumption for us to be in a position to explain why *healing* is so central to the practices of the AICs, and more generally why solidarity through communities of faith has proven preferable to other forms of belonging, or indeed desirable at all. In so doing we don't have to relinquish the aspiration for a more universal explanatory strategy, but I will argue that this too needs to be more nuanced than simply yoking all observed phenomena to the development of industrial wage labour and an increasingly global market.

Those espousing this sort of economism, often without explicitly endorsing functionalism, nonetheless tend to lean on functionalist epistemological assumptions, adducing a structural logic for observed behaviour that absolves them from exploring people's reasons for action. Adopting such explanatory strategies can be tempting because focusing on material structures appears more scientifically rigorous than "culturalist" forms of explanation. It is no doubt also particularly tempting when explaining action motivated by spiritual beliefs that, at least to secular-minded social scientists, are exceedingly difficult to accept at face value. There are, however, ways around these problems. One can avoid the reification of action that makes social structures appear as self-propelled systems by considering experiences at the level of everyday life and engaging with the meanings and motivations that people offer for their practices. Here we cannot simply assume that people act in accordance with false consciousness or the ingrained predispositions of a class *habitus* in their practical activity, both of which are ways of positing a basically unintentional action-orientation where reasons for action are viewed as a distraction from what is really going on. At the same time, looking at

action informed by belief systems that appear thoroughly implausible also reveals the impossibility of accepting a purely phenomenological route out of this deterministic and objectivistic dead end.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the manner in which the action of one individual joins up with that of others often cannot be read off the surface of everyday experience, and if people do not possess beliefs that can plausibly account for this then one is forced to read a meaning into their action that escapes them. Attending to the meaning that actors give to their experience while conceptually translating these into social science categories that fit with secular premises about the social world always carries the risk of doing some violence to that which is being translated. However, as I argued in Chapter 1, this goes on all the time in mainstream social science, even if not always explicitly. As Chakrabarty contends, it is especially difficult to avoid when studying subaltern subjects in Southern societies with conceptual tools formed elsewhere. For instance, even when it goes unstated, the very assumption that something further remains to be explained when somebody offers a supernatural explanation of events always betrays a mistrust of their worldview, regardless of whether we state this outright or leave it unsaid. Of course, none of this can be an excuse for a dismissively arrogant attitude to other beliefs and their holders. Done properly, it is simply a prerequisite of communicative clarity where the meaning attributed to action by actors diverges from the interpretation of an outside observer and that observer's assumed audience.

In the specific case of faith healing explored here, this means that something has to be said about what people understand by illness and how faith healing seeks to address it. Without attempting this, one cannot give a satisfactory answer to the question of why people choose to seek healing, and why they seek out the membership of the AICs over other alternatives open to the poor, often in the form, in the South African case I consider here, of ancestor veneration or belonging to the Pentecostal churches. Healing is necessarily related to illness, and understanding the one illuminates the other too. Over and above its instrumental capacity to provide material security to the impoverished, we can agree with Schoffeleers (1991:91) when he writes that "healing … functions as a metaphor for a church's capacity to cure people of what Fanon has identified as 'the colonial syndrome' by restoring their self-confidence and reaffirming their human dignity". This in itself may not take us far, but it can be broken down.

In the previous chapters I have already mentioned how African subjects were dispossessed of their land and increasingly confined on juridical grounds to what amounts to a caste existence. At the everyday level, they were also subject to racial humiliation at the workplace, as well as in encounters with bureaucrats and law enforcers. The suffering that came of this might be called "social suffering", where normative expectations of recognition that people bring to their encounters with others are disappointed (Honneth 1995a:59). However, the AICs have a very uneven record in addressing this specifically racial dimension of misrecognition. Indeed, at least in the apartheid period, they often acquiesced to it. I will take up the issue of how the AICs responded to racial domination in the following section, where I address what can

loosely be called the political dimension of faith healing. Having done so, I will then approach the problem from a more narrowly social perspective and explore how AIC belonging is valued as a means of protecting against or redressing illness in a very broad sense that links misfortune both to the individual physical body and to the person as conceived within a nexus of social relationships.

6.3 Faith healing in political context

Here I will address the issue of how the subordinate position that Africans were forced to assume in the colonial and apartheid political order was tied up with faith healing practices. What interests me is how social misrecognition, along with its political and economic expressions, has largely failed to give rise to any strong opposition movement. In so doing, I want to look at the conventional argument about consumption leading to depoliticisation, but in a context far removed from the usual economistic frame of reference for these discussions. Instead of focusing on the question of whether market purchases nurture individual self-indulgence, I am interested here in considering the extent to which consumption of faith healing helped to create an apolitical or politically quiescent approach to the misfortunes of the time among tightly bounded social groups.

6.3.1 The politics of faith healing in the apartheid period

Jean Comaroff (1985) has argued that healing practices of the Zionist churches can be understood as an indirect response to colonial domination and its subsequent evolutions on both political and economic levels, serving as the source of an elliptical form of political critique embedded in ritual symbolism. In this it resembled other religious movements in the Caribbean and Latin America, and as such was "part of a second global culture; a culture, lying in the shadow of the first, whose distinct but similar symbolic orders are the imaginative constructions of the resistant periphery of the world system" (Comaroff 1985:254). The understanding of resistance at work in Comaroff's book is, however, very embracing (Schoffeleers 1991:95), and the practices she describes under this heading could in other hands be construed as a mystical retreat or the sort of mystical consolation that Marxists have often argued inclines religion to political conservatism. There are also countless places in the book where Comaroff betrays an ambivalence about the political efficacy of the Zionist movement, even while explicitly denying that it constitutes "a mere apolitical escapism" (Comaroff 1985:262–63). Whether the sort of ritual resistance Comaroff speaks of aided, skirted or actively undermined more explicit resistance to racial domination is never really broached head-on, but she does strongly suggest it tended in effect to mystify the neo-colonial order in ways that proved politically impotent or even debilitating.

Matthew Schoffeleers has expressly taken issue with Comaroff on the matter of political resistance in the AICs. He reads the lack of declared political opposition among AIC leadership during the apartheid period as a move from political resistance to straightforward depoliticisation and acquiescence. Schoffeleers shows how most authoritative scholarship on the AICs in southern Africa, which had initially assumed a strong connection between them and other political manifestations of African nationalism, also came in the 1970s to the realisation that this connection was tenuous and that the two had developed in relative isolation (Schoffeleers 1991:92–94). What little political resistance they did offer came from the Ethiopian churches, with Zionist groups appearing to better fit Robert Buijtenhuijs's description of them as "anti-revolutionary countercultures" (Schoffeleers 1991:94). That the AIC leaders did not commit to the anti-apartheid protest movements of the 1980s, while many mainstream churches did, has also suggested to subsequent observers that they exercised a depoliticising force on their congregants (Schoffeleers 1991:97–98).

Here Schoffeleers adduces some compelling evidence, at least concerning South Africa's single biggest church, the ZCC. Perhaps the most telling sign of acquiescence was the ZCC's rapprochement with the apartheid establishment at two of its annual retreats to the holy site of Moria, where millions of congregants go on pilgrimage each year. Minister for Bantu Administration and Development, M. C. de Wet Nel, went to Moria in 1965 on the invitation of Bishop Edward Lekganyane, head of the ZCC, and was praised by Bishop Lekganyane for "lead[ing] the Bantu to orderly freedom." "Our church", explained Lekganyane, "has no room for people who subvert the security of the state and break the laws of the land. Besides the punishment for breaches of the law imposed on such like by the courts, our church also takes appropriate action" (quoted in Bompani 2008:667). When president P. W. Botha went to Moria in 1985, it was to tell the approximately three million congregants that the message of the Bible is: "Do what is good and you will recieve [sic] the approval of the ruler. He is God's servant for your good" – a message that was subsequently endorsed by then ZCC leader Bishop Barnabas Lekganyane (quoted in Ranger 1986:20). Allan Anderson, however believes Schoffeleers makes too strong a case, arguing that these statements were mere courtesies or at worst signs of an "ambiguous" relationship between the ZCC leadership and the state. This is probably less true of Edward Lekganyane's behaviour, which one could be forgiven for reading as acquiescence or even collaborationism, as Schoffeleers does. But Anderson (1999:293) shows that Barnabas Lekganyane was much more reserved in his reception of apartheid rule, and a year after Botha's visit to Moria Lekganyane made an unambiguous public denouncement of apartheid.

Another limitation of Schoffeleers' argument is that it focuses on a few incidents of the top leadership in the ZCC. Beyond the specific case of the ZCC, the leadership and many members of some AICs have, in isolated studies, resolutely maintained that they did support opposition politics, both under apartheid and after its political dismantling, but not at the level of particular movements or parties. AIC leaders claim they viewed their task as creating black social solidarity that could be politically effective while leaving political partisanship up to the individual discretion of the members of their congregations (Ranger 1986:21; Bompani

2008:668–70). These arguments should not be dismissed out of hand, though one might well want to view them with a more critical eye, given that they can also be read as an attempt at exculpation.

There is indeed a consensus in the literature that, whatever the precise extent of this ultimately was, rank and file Zionists generally avoided political engagement, at least in its more conventional forms, for most of the apartheid period. In an attempt to explain this, Schoffeleers argues that they individually internalised their suffering and thereby overlooked the deeper social, political and economic causes for it. Drawing on a sociological literature on illness that includes Parsons and Foucault, Schoffeleers (1991:98–101) argues that healing is, in most social circumstances, likely to lead to individualisation. This is a consequence of the attribution of deviance to the sufferer, while also fostering dependence by the sufferer on those believed normal, thereby effectively politically containing the potential for protest such marginalisation might contain. Schoffeleers applies this to the Zionist churches by considering the relationship between those considered sick and the prophets who diagnose illness, showing that such prophetic diagnoses reveal wrongdoing and therefore carry with them a potential threat of expulsion from the group. His argument appeals to a number of studies by James Kiernan to justify applying the Parsonian model to the Zionist churches, but what Kiernan actually says there does not back these claims up. Expulsions seldom ever happen (Kiernan 1976:362), and that the odd unfortunate individual gets nudged beyond the group perimeter clearly acts as an incentive for adhering to group norms all the more devoutly. Moreover, while the prophet does engage with congregants as individuals, preachers unify the group and facilitate the collective alleviation of individual sin (Kiernan 1976:358). What usually does happen is a loss of status *within* the group – something that itself already assumes the existence of a bounded group, and which Kiernan stresses is always provisional:

> [p]rophet and preacher share in a common enterprise, that of constantly restructuring the band. They are partners in this reconstruction and the division of labour between them is constantly observed. A Zionist band is more than a collection of individuals; it is an organisation of social statuses. Although the human composition of the band may remain fairly stable from one meeting to the next, as a constellation of statuses it is undergoing continuous changes. (Kiernan 1976:358–59)

We might indeed say that what Kiernan establishes is the perfect negation of the Parsonian model of deviance, at least insofar as it is meant to lead to individualisation. Schoffeleers believes the very presence of in-group sanctions weaken group solidarity, but they do the very opposite.

6.3.2 Post-apartheid healing and political struggle

Schoffeleers' point about the mystification of affliction, applied to the whole Zionist group instead of the individual, does indeed appear plausible, but here too there are grounds for

caution when extrapolating from apartheid-era studies to the post-apartheid period. When arguing that most Zionists were apolitical, Schoffeleers is repeating a commonplace finding among ethnographers that studied Zionist groups (Kiernan 1974:89; Mohr 1993:36; Sundkler 2004:295). Anderson (1999:295) nonetheless found that in 1991, a year after the ANC was disbanded and the negotiated transition to racially inclusive democracy had been set in motion, 42 per cent of the Zionists he met supported the ANC. Many other Zionists were involved in various civic movements too. This he believed to be a new development, directly related to the altered legal and political climate of the times, but suggestive of changes to come.

After the democratic transition in the early 1990s, AICs started to actively debate important social issues and have become more politically defiant. Barbara Bompani (2008:671–77) argues convincingly on the basis of her research in Soweto that AICs are increasingly functioning like new social movements in generating a great deal of social and political critique. This tends to be overlooked because, with the exception of large churches like the ZCC and the Nazareth Baptist Church, the life of the AICs is largely confined to the local level (Bompani 2008:671; 2010:309).[110] As Bompani (2008:671) explains,

> [i]n the post-apartheid context … public outspokenness at the national level is not necessarily indicative of the political effectiveness of AIC leaders, whose pronouncements register much more prominently, and achieve greater recognition, among the plurality of voices within civil society at the local level. Independent Christianity in South Africa is heterogeneous, its communities segmented. Its leaders do not strive to articulate a common political stance, nor do they act in concert at the national level or collectively endorse any particular political party. In this respect, Independent Christianity in South Africa is analogous to a fluid social movement.

Based on research between 2001 and 2005, Bompani found church leaders would at times criticise central government, and worked actively to leverage local government leaders. This resistance is focussed on "service delivery",[111] along with some of the most pressing contemporary social issues: HIV–Aids, crime, education, housing, unemployment, poverty and inequalities in wealth distribution. Bompani doesn't broach the question of whether the fragmentation of the AICs is likely to limit their political efficacy, and of what the practical consequences of their generally conservative worldview might be were they to be become more politically empowered. Nonetheless, she makes it clear that both leaders and grassroots members of AICs now consider themselves to possess a stake in the new system, and that they are increasingly willing to make their voices heard. While specific party names are generally not mentioned in order to avoid generating tensions between congregationists, lively political debates are emerging based on disappointed expectations that political liberation would carry with it liberation from poverty (2008:671–77; 2010:312–14).

6.4 The social significance of faith healing

6.4.1 Illness in the popular imagination

The discussion of the political and economic dimensions of faith healing above is far from having exhausted its significance as a consumer practice tied up with both social change and reproduction. This becomes apparent as soon as we enquire into the more strictly social dimension of faith healing within the AICs, while trying to reconcile phenomenological and objectivist approaches to these practices. Faith healing rituals seek to remedy misfortunes arising from what might be separated out into (i) natural processes and fortuitous accidents, (ii) ethical transgressions, and (iii) the malicious resentment of members of one's own community. None of this is peculiar to African faith healing of course, but what is striking is the extent to which chains of natural causality are dismissed or downplayed in relation to the other two explanatory resources. This in turn has to be understood in the context of the ontological and ethical assumptions that members of the AICs tend to bring to their experiences. Right and wrong are gauged in relation to ethical standards upheld as much as, or more, by ancestors than by God, while resentful others are understood as witches, with the figure of Satan being largely ignored. These are connected beliefs, and what Niehaus (2001:43) describes in relation to his ethnographic findings in South Africa's Limpopo province[112] holds more generally of the AICs throughout South Africa too: "with conversion to Zionist-type churches, marked by a 'this worldly' emphasis on health and a dualistic cosmology, the malevolence of witches was defined in opposition to the benevolence of the Holy Spirit and cognatic ancestors." Far from being exotic and rare, belief in ancestors and in witchcraft remains almost ubiquitous among poor Africans, both within the AICs and beyond. The ancestors uphold the normative standards favoured by powerful members of given communities, while ethical deviance is personified in the figure of the witch. I will briefly consider below how healing practices seek, by purportedly spiritual means, to address both ethical deviance and perceived resentment, while attempting by a secular route to draw out the social significance of these actions, viewing them as, in part, responses to increasing uncertainty and individualisation.

Returning to the question of why impersonal causality tends to be played down as an explanation of misfortune, it should be noted that in South Africa, as in many other parts of the world, misfortune is usually given a "sociogenic" explanation. In South Africa, this takes the form of responsibility for a large part of afflictions that in Northern societies are usually attributed to impersonal mechanisms being assigned instead either to ancestors displeased at a violation of communal norms or to the ill-will of other people (Comaroff 1978:250–51). In this context, physical illness is often seen as but one species of sociogenic misfortune and healing practices are often the first resort for repairing the ruptures in social relationships that are perceived to be the ultimate causes of misfortune. Those in poorer African communities sometimes also reason that misfortune is simply fortuitous, but any existing dispute with

others immediately arouses the suspicion that it was intentionally "sent" by others known to them. Of course, not all Africans in South Africa and elsewhere reason in this manner, making any essentialist explanation completely untenable, but it invariably surfaces in ethnographic studies in both the apartheid and post-apartheid periods.

These assumptions may owe a great deal to low education levels or unfamiliarity with scientific explanations, but this finally also does not explain it. For instance, already in the 1930s it was observed that increasing missionary education and contact with biomedical doctors had led to a wide diffusion of some basic medical knowledge about recurring ailments like typhus and malaria, but this did not necessarily disincline people to seek a social explanation for affliction. People knew epidemic typhus to be spread by lice, but this failed to answer deeper questions of why one person would be bitten and not another, or why one person and not another would recover. Similarly, knowledge that malaria was passed on by mosquitos did nothing to eliminate the question of why the mosquitos afflicted some and not others when the operation of a "malicious will" was suspected to be the underlying cause of illness (Hunter 1964 [1936]:274–75). In such cases the source of misfortune may be attributed to others within the community of the living, but it can also come from the community of the dead. This takes the form of punishment by loving but offended ancestors or, in cases of total and repeated lapses from generally-accepted ethical standards, to the subsequent total withdrawal of concern by the ancestors, leaving the forsaken deviant exposed to both natural and "sent" misfortune (Mayer and Mayer 1974:158–60).

The fundamental demand that the ancestors are believed to make on the living is ethical – "right conduct towards people", and provided the living uphold this the ancestors' influence is always benevolent (Mayer and Mayer 1974:156). Here the "people" in question are not only members of a given kinship group but also the larger community from which the esteem of all the group's members derives. Provided one works to ensure harmony in the community and refrains from wrongdoing, the ancestors actively intervene to protect one against harm in everyday life. Wrongdoing here encompasses all forms of antisocial behaviour: sexual looseness, deceiving others, theft, unprovoked assault, and so on. Among other things, ancestors are believed to defend obedient family members physically. As one of the Mayers' (1974:155) informants explained, "[m]y ancestors are my only guards. Anyone who wants to harm me just feels afraid to do so, without knowing why. My ancestors have conferred with theirs, and their ancestors have warned them, through their consciences." Ancestors are often also associated with sexual fertility. This takes specific forms in different localities. For instance, Axel-Ivar Berglund (1976:253–55, 260) found that, for men, ancestors were believed to ensure that semen has fecundating power. For women, they provide for the foetal blood and infant milk of the mother. More generally, the ancestors were considered a source of "heat", understood as a form of corporeal desire that is necessary for potency in the sexual domain and efficacy in life more generally, but which also needs to be carefully managed if it is not to erupt

into destructive anger. The ancestors exhort people to control their heat, especially by upholding rules of proper sexual conduct such as exogamy and marital fidelity.

In the practice of the AICs, Christian notions of sin and salvation have merged with the ethical codes upheld through ancestor veneration, although the nature of this assimilation varies. There are some cases of AIC members ignoring or even actively rejecting ancestor veneration (Anderson 1999:302–03). Ethiopian churches, in particular, tend to frown on ancestor veneration, although it sometimes persists in subtle ways,[113] while Zionists are usually very accepting of it, sometimes openly sacrificing to the ancestors and at other times encouraging their members at church services to communicate with the ancestors, such as by lighting candles and silently speaking to them (West 1975:37, 179–84). The punitive powers that the ancestors are said to exercise on those who have strayed but not yet been abandoned are generally downplayed and their benevolence stressed (Niehaus 2001:36). Ancestors tend to operate as the active intermediaries between an ultimately more powerful yet somewhat remote God or Christ and the individual in need, being in this sense comparable with figures like the Catholic saints (West 1975:180–81; Comaroff 1985:231). Ethical deviance is cleansed by speaking to and propitiating the ancestors, or with confessions and laying on of hands, or often some combination of these. In the Zionist churches, people often discuss their problems with the prophets, who are treated as "healers *par excellence*", in both public and personal confessions (Anderson 1999:298–99). Sin is also prospectively avoided through prophylactic rituals of purification, rights such as the wearing of cords, ropes or cloth as proof against misfortune and witchcraft, and the everyday observance of taboos.

As popular healers, Zionist prophets are very much like diviners, and the prophet role is a historical offshoot of the diviner. Both learn of their calling through a period of protracted illness that is read as a summons from the ancestors. They then enter into a period of apprenticeship in which they perform rituals of purification, learn to communicate with and propitiate the ancestors, and to heal others (West 1975:184). Some AIC leaders are explicitly opposed to divination and forbid their congregation members from consulting diviners, though with mixed results (Niehaus 2001:39–40). Anderson (1999:302–03) encountered Zionists who considered prophets and diviners interchangeable and who associated the prophetic gift with both God and the ancestors. Some prophets claim to receive their knowledge from the Holy Spirit, while diviners attribute it to the ancestors, but there are also prophets who claim both sources of inspiration, and who sometimes recommend ancestor veneration as a remedy for the afflicted. Some prophets claim to communicate with "angels", but in these cases the angels appear indistinguishable from the ancestors or else are understood as messengers of the ancestors (Sundkler 2004:250; Anderson 1999:302–03). A less widely-noted difference, but one that appears significant, is that Zionist prophets generally do not charge for their services. Prophecy outside of the Zionist group and for profit is associated by lay Zionists with the commodification of spiritual goods and with a lack "institutionally inspired altruism". Such "pirate" prophecy is known but is considered completely unacceptable when engaged in by

prophets belonging to Zionist groups, and when on occasion prophets do operate outside of the church they are usually accompanied by family and other dependents and do not seek financial gain (Kiernan 1976:362–64).

Much as the emphasis on God has been displaced by a concern for ancestors, so too has the figure of Satan greatly receded. In contrast to accounts of Christian responses to the European and North American witch persecutions, as well as those in West Africa, Satan is seldom ever associated with witches (Kiernan 1997:252; Niehaus 2001:38–41). Niehaus found that when he brought the topic of Satan's influence up with church leaders they would answer that Satan was a symbol of evil. The figure of Satan, explains Niehaus, was widely viewed by AIC leaders as a "moral rather than natural evil: he did not directly cause sickness" (Niehaus 2001:38). This supports much of what Kiernan (1997:248, n.3) says about Satan as an internal principle and not an external being in Zionist theology, and one which only preachers generally appear to pay much attention to. On the whole, Kiernan (1997:249), speaking from his ethnographic experience in the Durban region, found that "the imagery of Satan is poorly articulated in Zulu Zionism. He does not loom large as a consuming preoccupation in the moral consciousness of the ordinary Zionist but is more a creature of the preacher's imagination." At the same time, AIC leaders and their congregations all firmly believe witches to be real embodiments of evil and the primary source of misfortune. This is especially strong in the Zionist churches, which are widely perceived to be locked in constant spiritual war with witches (Ashforth 2005:190; Mohr 1993:33–34; Niehaus 2001:40).

In the popular imagination, witches are ethically depraved, existing within a community but abiding by none of its norms. Their depravity usually has a sexual dimension. Ethnographic literature in Africa has consistently turned up a popular association between witchcraft and practices that are considered sexually deviant in their local contexts. Evans-Pritchard's discovery that Azande witches were believed to give birth to kittens sired by wild cats was one early exemplar of this, but others abound, such as associations between witches and homosexuality in Cameroon and beliefs that Zambian witches destroy reproductive processes (Niehaus 2002:272). Similarly, in South Africa witches are viewed to be the issue of bestial and incestuous sexual unions, and to themselves engage in these acts with one another or with their familiars (Berglund 1976:268, 275). Witches aim "to destroy fertility in men, beasts (particularly in cattle), and fields", along with the wealth and social prosperity of others, ultimately seeking to induce "sickness as an avenue towards death". Indeed witches sometimes reach into physical death itself by exhuming corpses and turning them into familiars, thereby preventing people from becoming ancestors and annihilating them spiritually too (Berglund 1976:268–69, 277).[114] Witches may operate in unison but they are quarrelsome. Berglund's (1976:276–77) informants spoke of witches travelling together by clinging to one another's genitals in flight or by sharing their familiars when inducting new witches into the dark arts, although this sharing was done reluctantly. When pressed about why this might be, the answer was "[i]t is just like that with them. They do not lend to each other" (Berglund 1976:277).

6.4.2 A sociological approach to ancestor belief

Assuming, as I will, that we cannot take these beliefs in ancestors and witches at face value, the question arises of how best to explain them in generalisable terms without fully abstracting from the specificity of the South African case. As a first step toward translating the significance of faith healing practices into sociological terms, it should be noted that the AICs emerged soon after the mineral discoveries that provoked South Africa's rapid industrialisation in the late 19th century along with the conquests and wars that led to Union in 1910. Though African communities prior to this were not stable and timeless by any means, this was a time of frenetic social change and these changes very clearly generated enormous tremors in the social, political and economic institutions of these communities. Intimately tied up with the material dimension of these changes, but irreducible to them, were also alterations in exiting ways of understanding and ethically responding to the world. This process of change was further accelerated with the massive urbanisation of the Second World War. Rural life was disrupted to an unprecedented extent, especially through migrant labour, which led to a widely perceived increase in such things as extra-marital affairs or permanent absorption into city life. These were all a source of deep anxiety and suffering for many South Africans during the apartheid period. We touched on this in Chapter 4, noting how Thomas Nyquist (1983:156) observed that many of the remaining landmarks by which Africans were accustomed to orient themselves in their social world had been levelled and how "uncertainty about correct behaviour" prevailed.

Though physically dead, the ancestors are an imaginary embodiment of essentially conservative, patriarchal value that seeks to contain the ethical consequences of this change. What the ancestors uphold is always indistinguishable from the basic ethical standards generally considered binding within a given community. For the Mayers' (1974:156) informants among poor labour migrants, "[t]he things which people do not favour are the things that the ancestors have said to be bad", but this appeared to run in the other direction too: "[t]he wrong behaviour condemned by the ancestors is the very behaviour that is not acceptable to people in general." Believing in the ancestors serves to ethically guide people's behaviour through internalised moral standards and through the shame of ethical censure by subjecting people within a single community to the same evaluative standards and exposing them to the reproaches of others when they lapse. This censure can come from other family and community members, or from diviners and prophets believed to communicate with the ancestors. Ancestor belief and veneration serves to anchor these inter-personal standards in a social domain imagined to be timeless (Berglund 1976:254), even while they must be read from a secular perspective as situated responses to social, political and economic upheavals (Chidester 1992:12–13) and to the actual or feared fragmentation of consensual inter-personal ethical forms of evaluation and association. How people understand the values on which their solidarity is grounded, and which of these values they choose to uphold, is therefore

historically rooted but highly variable. It will depend enormously on the power dynamics at play within any given community and it will never be total or uncontested, even if it is imagined as such.

Through ancestor belief many Africans, and especially the rural and urban underclasses, have attempted to recreate the heavily disrupted routinisation of everyday social life, not out of an abstract desire to perpetuate any given social system, but rather as a way of seeking to preserve the interpersonal solidarity that routinised life enabled. This solidarity, which Giddens (1986:61–64) discusses in terms of "trust", appears to be a universal need, and failure to secure it in some form or other leads to "ontological insecurity". This search for security is, however, potentially in tension with other basic motivating values that also appear universal, such as freedom. It would be very misleading to conceive this as an *a priori* tension, as freedom, even understood only as freedom from social constraint (often called negative freedom), also has a necessarily social dimension. How this tension is experienced is rather a contingent, historical matter that differs from place to place and time to time in accordance with how security, freedom, and other fundamental ethical values are understood and reconciled within situated, practical lifeworlds. The nature and size of the solidaristic communities people desire to form is always unstable in virtue of the uneven allocation of benefits and burdens that appears to afflict all social arrangements in some measure, so no functionalist conclusions about the necessity for preserving society can explain the desire to perpetuate any *pre-given* community. To explain this, we rather have to consider the values that people seek to realise through communal belonging along with their understanding of the ideal community.

Translated into these sociological terms, ancestors are for many South Africans the supreme imaginary representations of the shared values that enable routinised solidarity to develop. In the case that interests me, ancestor veneration has been creatively adapted by the AICs in order to construct and maintain faith-based Christian communities unified around practices of reciprocal material and immaterial exchange. These churches appear to have gained such wide followings by adapting imaginary significations that the African underclasses are largely familiar with to new Christian semantic worlds in ways that make sense of and valorise their shared practices. These understandings are exceedingly complex, conventionally relating to the upkeep of a patriarchal homestead, the production of food and children, and of harmonious marital and communal relationships, but adapted to the contingencies of specific circumstances by church leaders. It is in such concrete terms that freedom and solidarity, which are themselves formal abstractions, have to be understood.

At a motivational level, human agency is clearly being delegated to the ancestors, and so one has to ask what motivates *them* in order to better understand the motivations of their believers. Positively, the ancestors are constantly credited with wanting to see their familial line multiply and prosper. Negatively, they are believed to be concerned fundamentally with ensuring that individuals refrain from acting in ways that are considered shameful by the standards of the wider community, as this tarnishes the family name (Mayer and Mayer 1974:155–56). At the

same time, they will defend family members who have been unjustly shamed by others by visiting misfortune on these others (Berglund 1976:262–63).[115] What is motivationally at stake in venerating the ancestors would therefore appear to be not only conformity with a conventional understanding of the good life, but also the pursuit of what could variously be called honour, status or recognition.

6.4.3 The sociological significance of witchcraft belief

Ancestor belief and its Christian adaptations have, then, provided a framework of social imaginary significations in which social solidarity and reciprocal exchange are thought through and upheld. Discourses about witches and the practices they help to constitute are, by contrast, a way of coming to terms with individualism and the collapse of reciprocity and solidarity through resentment. At a motivational level, the loss of social solidarity and practices of reciprocity that constitute it can never be a matter of indifference for the underclasses who depended on these both for their material wellbeing and for the associative bonds that, in both egalitarian and hierarchical form, allowed them to ethically cope with affliction. These are two analytically distinct but practically connected dimensions of the same problem and, viewed from this perspective, Monica Wilson (quoted in West 1975:87) was not simply being naive when arguing, when it was still commonplace to speak of a universal "man", that "[t]he basic insecurity of men comes, not from poverty, but from the feeling that no one cares about them." At the level of social imaginary signification, though without assuming any rigid structural connection, ancestor belief and witch belief are two sides of a single phenomenon. As Mary Douglas (1970:xxv) puts it, in the context of an argument for the communicative – and not functional – importance of witchcraft in many human societies, "[t]he witch-image is as effective as the idea of community is strong."

Wilson's and Douglas's observations are pointers toward the manner in which we might generalise from the specific South African case. I believe witchcraft fears and accusations are, in the first instance, not best read as a response to social change on the large registers through which this is often tracked, such as talk of globalisation and macro-sociological institutional and technological change (often associated, albeit problematically, with modernity). There is increasing scepticism about attempts to forge links between local-level witchcraft phenomena and large-scale social change, especially in pioneering interventions by John and Jean Comaroff (1993, 1999a), where factors such as neo-liberal capitalism and footloose financial flows are assigned a prominent place when explaining witchcraft and other "occult" practices in South Africa and many other societies too (1999a:294). As Peter Geschiere (2013:7–8) has recently argued, referring back to both the Comaroffs' work on "occult economies" and his own earlier influential writing on witchcraft, these remain profoundly interesting links to pursue but at the very least some more localised filling-in is required. By suggesting a strong a connection between global processes of "late" or "millennial" capitalism and individual or localised group behaviour, the Comaroffs (1999a) throw out innumerable fascinating suggestions but do very

little to establish whether or how they might indeed link up in ways that allow us to close the gap between "general context" and "particular explanation" (Moore 1999:306). This is, indeed, a point which the Comaroffs (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999b:307–8) themselves partially concede, as they are not unaware of the problem.[116]

Without surrendering the aspiration to generalisation, along with the desire to take large-scale processes into account, one needs to take discussion of witchcraft down to a level at which a better compromise can be struck between generalisation and particularity. Of course, as soon as one steps beyond macro-sociological generalisations, it also becomes apparent that the local frameworks of meaning in which witchcraft belief arises vary quite considerably. Nonetheless, one promising point of departure here is the observation that witchcraft fears, however far-flung their ultimate origins, always respond to the fragility of everyday social relationships and the complexities of local, personalised power dynamics (Geschiere 2013:13–17; Myhre 2009:120).[117] These localised dynamics may in principle be fully explicable in terms of larger global or modern process, but they also might not; or, given the messiness of actual history, it seems most plausible to suggest that they are usually loosely connected in ways that merit cautious consideration. This holds out the promise of explaining why similar large-scale developments lead to dissimilar outcomes. At the same time, shifting to a more localised perspective makes it easier to avoid the risk of evacuating the entire agentic dimension of meaning and motivation, which tends to happen, even if entirely inadvertently, wherever sociological discussion remains at the macro level.

In some societies, witchcraft discourses serve as a way of coping with perceived threats from those outside of one's community. Mary Douglas (1970: xxvi) mentions a number of studies making these claims, but she fails to distinguish adequately between in-group members possessing foreign allegiances and the attribution of witchcraft to true strangers. Less ambiguously, however, Julien Bonhomme (2012) has argued that in many parts contemporary west and central Africa witches are believed to come from outside of the local community and witchcraft discourses seem to feed off of fears of face-to-face encounters with malevolent strangers. Bonhomme (2012:225) is, however, of the opinion that this is a very *new* phenomenon, and one which overlays the more established pattern in these regions and elsewhere of witchcraft emerging among intimates. Witchcraft accusations in South Africa, both rural and urban, certainly follow this wider pattern. I will therefore take it as the best provisional starting point for approaching witchcraft in South Africa in generalisable terms. Witchcraft accusations constantly emerge where people depend on local networks of reciprocity for material sustenance and ethical self-realisation at an everyday level. The more this is the case, the more they feel they have to guard against the unwholesome, harmful potentials that reciprocity contains. This allows us to better appreciate why witchcraft accusations in South Africa almost invariably arise between wives within polygamous unions, rival lovers, neighbours and extended family members (Berglund 1976:271–73; Niehaus 2002:277–78, 2005:200–201).

In the terms I favour, popular witchcraft discourses are generally best understood as a way of understanding and guarding against the potential for violence that arises when the solidarity forged through reciprocity is undone. Witchcraft accusations arise from vulnerability and uncertainty, and frequently arise where socially corrosive feelings of resentment – by which I mean envy, jealousy, or hatred, or indeed any compound of these emotions – are believed to have penetrated into everyday social relationships of solidarity (Berglund 1976:270–73; Comaroff 1978:251).[118] Just as Myhre (2009:133) has described witchcraft as "the dark side of relationality",[119] so too, in the South African case, Seekings (2009a:25) has described it as "the dark side of *ubuntu*" and Adam Ashforth (2005:86) calls it "negative *ubuntu*". While such statements can easily be misinterpreted, what Seekings and Ashforth gesture at is that living by the humanistic creed that a person is a person through other people, which is what *ubuntu* represents, does not abolish the problem that intimacy always places one at the potentially disturbing interface between solidarity and mutual vulnerability.[120]

6.4.4 Faith healing, bounded solidarity and stratification within the AICs

Having considered the representational and motivational dimensions of faith healing practices within the framework of ontological assumptions and ethical orientations framing their production and consumption, something remains to be said about their consequences for institutional social life. The social significance of faith healing through both divination and the AIC healing rituals can be understood, most basically, as a way of simultaneously pursuing the physical and psychological wellbeing of the individual by assuming that health is indivisibly both physiological and social. With the physical body believed to grow ill through ruptures in the social body, healing becomes a sort of conservative communitarian discourse that seeks through all means possible to shore up ethically thick bonds of solidarity between people and which abhors anything perceived to jeopardise these bonds. While mainstream historiography has largely ignored them, these ritual healing practices have constituted one of the most fundamental grounds of social solidarity in both the apartheid and post-apartheid periods. This has, however, been a very diffuse, fragmented solidarity, limited to a multitude of small church congregations.

I also would not like to suggest that the solidarity achieved in the healing churches has been entirely egalitarian. One way into this problem is by exploring how AIC belonging might have augmented social status. Consider again the issue of church collections, mentioned above, which materially underpins these faith healing communities, but this time not from a social rather than economic perspective. Jim Kiernan (1977; 1988) and Jean Comaroff (1985) usually stress the economic background of AIC membership, in both cases through studies of Zionist churches, but both writers also step beyond a purely economistic frame of reference to explore the social grounding of church belonging. Kiernan argued that donations to church collections may serve both to increase individual status within congregations and group status at meetings

between congregations. Contributions offer those who give a sense of efficacy which, as poor workers, they usually lack, and the amounts given are, in comparative terms, very low. Moreover, status affirmation is not the sole motive, as people also donate as evidence of the strength of their group commitment. Also, while collections are publicly made, sometimes with a flourish, money in the form of periodic organised "offerings" and of tithes is usually gathered anonymously and little interest is demonstrated in who pays what (Kiernan 1988:458–62). It is worth quoting Kiernan (1977:39) at length on this:

> The Puritan ethic practised by the Zionist does not … result in the accumulation of capital…. [T]he Zionist operates in an economy of needs rather than in an economy of acquisition and leisure. This is mainly because small surpluses carefully gleaned are channelled into the collections which form a part of regular gatherings and which are designed to be expended on some immediate need. The better off a man is, the more he is expected to contribute on these occasions and there is the incentive of the status and prestige, and usually of the office, which is accorded to the conspicuous giver, to spur him on…. [S]avings are not accumulated, but to the extent that the industrious and respectable Zionist tends to better himself in his employment, he thus establishes an economic base from which he can make a bid for the support and social approval of his fellows by making regular and steady contributions to the needs of his community. By his thrift, therefore, the ordinary Zionist manages to squeeze miniscule quantities of money into the Zionist organization, lubrication enough to keep the wheels turning, to help alleviate the distress of somebody in need and incidentally to advance his own social standing in his community. By his industry, he can hope to get more profitable employment so that he can pursue the same objectives with relatively greater ease and can consolidate his status as a leading exponent of the Zionist way of life. In either case, the result is that what might be saved by the individual is reinvested in the organization.

Kiernan (1988:464) ultimately concludes that people "don't want to make money out of Zionism; rather, they make and remake Zionism out of money".

Comaroff also encountered Zionist monetary donations, called *koleka* ("collection") in SeTswana, that took place in an ostentatious fashion, but believed that it served to materially unite the group while also giving individual members a sense of efficacy they lacked as workers:

> [t]he accentuated idiosyncrasy of self-presentation in the *koleka* rite, each person dancing in a distinctive style, contrasts with the uniformalizing practice of the rest of the ritual process; it would seem to suggest a personalized control over the flow of money, a feature absent from the experience of the everyday market economy. But this individually reclaimed value does not remain with the self; for the fullest realization of the return to the self of its essence is the ability to give, especially to give a gift that binds donors together in a substantial unity. In contributing to a collectivity in whose integral circulation the donor seeks self-fulfilment, he or she reverses the loss of self associated with wage labor. The rite of *koleka* really is about "collection"; it involves the dramatization of the social bonds, the interweaving of individuals, that constitutes the community. (Comaroff 1985:235–36)

Unlike Kiernan, Comaroff argues that no status motive was present at all in Zionist donations (Comaroff 1985:235–36). But even assuming that a status-enhancing motive is generally present, and that we therefore do better to generalise from Kiernan's and not Comaroff's case, Kiernan offers no reason for believing that this motive is exclusive of others or paramount among them, and indeed does not himself believe it is.

Kiernan's and Comaroff's work is useful because they demonstrate that, while Zionism responds to poverty, it is not fully determined by it, and they explore Zionism as a creative response to poverty and to low-wage industrial labour. Insofar as they do so, they also step beyond a purely economistic and functionalist approach to their subject and broach questions about the social dimension of church belonging. While taking economic structures into account, they probe into the reasons for action that sustain them, or fail to do so. At this motivational level, Kiernan in particular is not suggesting some sort of Kantian altruism, but neither is he suggesting the sort of conscious or unconscious manipulation that Bourdieu believes the gift conceals. What he does point to is a mixture of self-interested and disinterested reasons for giving. This ethically complex ground, as we argued in Chapter 1 in relation to Mauss, is precisely the main territory on which the gift has always existed.

Social stratification, even while not particularly pronounced at the micro-level of the church congregation, nonetheless shows up when placing the churches within their wider social contexts, and when considering the unintended consequences of participation in faith healing communities. Firstly, the Zionist AICs perpetuate belief in witchcraft, and when one looks at the sociological patterning of witchcraft accusations, it is clear that they fall disproportionately onto women and the elderly, the poor in both money and social connections, and more generally onto those considered weak or deviant, such as epileptics or the mentally retarded (Bank 2011:105; Berglund 1976:268; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999:288; Niehaus 2005:201). Because witches are generally considered weak in everyday social life (though powerful in secret), the widespread belief in witchcraft in effect offers a tool of social domination to the already-powerful. Any expression of discontent at inequality can easily be construed as the sort of resentment characteristic of witches. Instead of making people confront the negative social consequences of their own actions, through guilt or shame, belief in witchcraft can make all resentment appear illegitimate, motivated only by the very basest human impulses in *others* (Niehaus 2005:207). It does not appear that witchcraft accusations are usually consciously formulated to put weak others down or to absolve people of responsibility for the negative consequences of their actions, but they nonetheless do reproduce or indeed deepen social inequalities in African communities. Insofar as witchcraft accusations do not consciously seek these ends, and insofar as they reproduce existing forms of social distinction, they function somewhat in the manner that Bourdieu believes ritual serves to obscure and reproduce underlying forms of social power. It is hard to see how this could be described as a form of *class* domination, though, even in Bourdieu's extremely encompassing understanding of class, and neither is it at all clear how one might argue that this domination is what *explains* the perpetuation of these practices.

Secondly, because of the austerity of Zionist life, ringed round with everyday taboos, belonging to Zionist AICs has prevented the formation of solidarity among the African underclasses. The best study of how this happens in practice is Kiernan's (1974) essay "Where Zionists Draw the Line". His argument is that Zionism effectively entailed, not a withdrawal from South African society as a whole, from which Zionists were anyhow largely excluded, but from association with other Africans, although this was more pronounced among Zionist men than women. In the workplace and in the township, Zionists hive themselves off from others in materially similar circumstances, both as producers and as consumers in the market economy. Kiernan (1974:84–87) found Zionists had a preference for isolated work, choosing wherever possible to be self-employed or taking up jobs like drivers and night watchmen, and when they were forced by circumstance to work with others in associatively dense work situations they nonetheless simply tended, wherever possible, to politely recoil from familiar contact with others. Moreover, where Zionists did nonetheless form solidaristic bonds with associates at work, as sometimes did happen, these almost never extended beyond the workplace. While non-Zionist male workmates tended to spend their leisure time together too, forming drinking sets that met on the weekends, Zionist taboos on alcohol consumption, as well as the smoking, gambling and promiscuity that sometimes accompanied this, meant in effect that Zionist men never spent time with other men from outside of the church group.

6.4.5 Faith healing and social solidarity in the post-apartheid period

Above we saw that membership of the healing churches appears in some measure to reflect changing class divisions and to have responded to the altered political reality of the 1990s. We should briefly consider how faith healing practices continue to interact with wider processes of social change in the post-apartheid period, if only to further guard against the misleading idea that these practices are static or signify a reversion to some "traditional" past. Although we only have census data until 2001 to go on, it appears that the AICs have continued to grow in popularity in the post-apartheid period. There is also a popular belief that witchcraft is on the rise. Whether actual witchcraft accusations are increasing is difficult to gauge, but the belief that it is has had real consequences, and indeed there was shortly after the democratic transition even a local government-appointed commission into witchcraft and ritual murder in South Africa's current Limpopo province (Ashforth 2005:88–89; Comaroff and Comaroff 1999:286).[121] As the discussion above has suggested, we can assume that these are connected phenomena, at least to the extent that AICs respond through faith healing practices primarily to social insecurities that are collectively explained through the catch-all idiom of illness and witchcraft, while witchcraft fears are in their turn a response to the insecurity generated by social change where this change threatens established forms of solidarity (Niehaus 2001:40–41; Ashforth 2005:88–89, 184–85).

Faith healing practices within the AICs and by diviners, as well as by the prophets that straddle these categories, is a response to a range of material and immaterial maladies of which

witchcraft is only an extreme representation, in which affliction has been personalised by attributing it to a malevolent will. And regardless of whether faith healing practices are growing or receding, they clearly remain almost ubiquitous, serving as a resource for those living in precarious conditions to establish a sense of security and well-being and to make sense of affliction in all its forms (Wilhelm-Solomon et al. 2016:313–14). Beyond localised dynamics giving rise to it, the affliction that faith healing responds to may originate in the global or national political upheavals that the Comaroffs suspect account for occult belief and practice in the post-apartheid period. We nonetheless still know very little of substance about how to draw these connections, given that the individual experience of global dynamics is still strongly mediated, not least by national and local state structures that even in the age of neoliberal capital flows regulate the market and provide non-market forms of assistance. Misfortune may also well be attributable to more macro-level domestic causes like incredibly high HIV infection rates, an inability to explain persistent misfortune after the demise of apartheid, and growing socio-economic inequality at the level of the national political economy (Ashforth 2005:88–89). To the extent that these larger processes cause localised distress in ways that systematically escape the awareness of local actors, there is a significant danger that the spiritual terms in which affliction and healing are understood will lead people to blame one another or ancestral displeasure for their misfortunes instead of addressing the deeper causes. We should, however, be cautious in assuming that a religious understanding of affliction need rule out a more pragmatic approach to solving major social problems, as the two are compatible. For instance, some AICs have been observed to be educating themselves about HIV by inviting health professionals to talk to their congregations (Öhlmann et al. 2016:7).

Most importantly, for the themes pursued here, AICs have begun to foster bonds of localised social solidarity through practices of reciprocity that are far more extensive than in the apartheid period. As in the apartheid period they continue to pool money for the benefit of the most needy church members as need arises. In addition, tough, they have been found to develop programmes and informal activities aimed at helping criminal youth and homeless children, at funding bursaries for congregants' secondary or tertiary education, and at teaching basic productive skills to church members. The ZCC, for instance, runs a bursary programme supporting 300 students on an annual budget of R3 million. AICs have also been found to run crèches and schools, which are often open not only to congregants but to broader local communities, and to donate food, clothing and money to informal settlement residents (Öhlmann et al. 2016:7–8).

Many of these churches are registered non-profit organisations with the national Department of Social Development. They fund programmes that, despite being smaller in scale than those of many established NGOs and mainline churches, often reach beyond the immediate congregation, even while using funds derived from the congregation alone, and it appears that money is usually spent in accountable ways (Öhlmann et al. 2016:8). In this the healing churches appear to be functioning very differently to newer arrivals on the South African religious scene, such as what are sometimes called "prosperity gospel" Pentecostal and

Charismatic churches. To take an admittedly extreme example, consider the originally Brazilian-based Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG), which has continued to expand since its founding in 1993. The UCKG actively negates the formation of deep social ties between its members and derides charity, encouraging its members rather to make individual monetary "contracts" with God and on this basis to *demand* divine assistance (Heuser 2016:5–6). Here the logic of the market clearly prevails. In the healing churches, by contrast, it is reciprocity that draws people together and money, far from individualising, serves to establish and sustain complex social unions.

6.5 The complexities of faith healing

I have argued above that economistic explanations for the emergence and meteoric rise of the healing churches are far more limited than their exponents acknowledge. The notion that faith healing, at least in the enormously popular AICs, has been functional to South Africa's assimilation into the global economy fails to account for why similar processes of assimilation elsewhere have not relied in any way on such practices and ignore the local dynamics informing these practices. Attempts to explain AIC membership in class terms, due to thoroughly localised mores surrounding financial contributions, are more informative but also reductive. Considering the political significance of the AICs, we saw that attempts to portray them as vehicles for political resistance under apartheid, either through direct critique or elliptical ritual process, are difficult to square with the evidence of the basically apolitical or even collaborationist orientation of their leaders and members. Nonetheless, this began to change from around the early 1990s, apparently in parallel with the negotiated democratic transition of the time. The real historical significance of the healing churches has been of a more narrowly social nature. They have functioned as localised extended families for the generation or reparation of solidaristic bonds through reciprocal action. By engaging with some of the basic theological and cosmological assumptions informing how AIC members imaginatively grasp their social worlds, one can see how, in secular terms, church belonging functions as a sort of conservative communitarian discourse for assessing the quality of associative bonds and for practically shoring these up against perceived threats. Indeed the best term to describe this form of association would be as a kinship group, in the sense in which Sahlins (2011) understands this polysemic term. Kinship, for Sahlins, refers to any tightly bound human association in which strong intersubjective ties forge deep material and ethical links between people. It bears no essential relationship to consanguinity and is rather formed through "a manifold of intersubjective participations, founded on mutualities of being" (Sahlins 2011:10).

Faith healing acts as a means for even the poorest of South Africans to surround themselves with others in a manner that provides them with material and ontological security. The associative bonds so formed create a measure of internal stratification within congregations. From this perspective, AIC belonging can be read as a means of augmenting individual status.

But here, too, the desire for personal status co-exists with the desire to uplift an entire group, and it is in the creation of largely small-scale social groups bounded by reciprocity with both material and recognitional dimensions that the ultimate sociological significance of faith healing practices in the AICs resides. Internal status within groups tends to be in flux, such that over time a basic egalitarianism can be achieved. Rather than the pursuit of status, in the strict sense of a positional good, the prevailing purpose of group belonging appears to rather be the creation of a tightly bounded group in which, along with the promise of material support among members, there is the possibility of mutual care and recognition. As Martin West (1975:87) has observed, it is not only security that draws people into the healing churches, but also the desire to attain, through the approval of peers, "a certain status or standing in each other's eyes." As such, faith healing as practiced in the AICs can be understood as a form of reciprocity underpinning one of the most widespread forms of solidarity in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. This solidarity has institutionalised certain forms of social stratification, but this is most apparent, not at the level of the church congregation itself, but rather in the manner in which AIC members relate to vulnerable others beyond the group as an unintended consequence of participating in their churches' fight against witchcraft.

Chapter 7

7. Between economism and culturalism

This study has been concerned throughout with social change through consumption. In the approach I developed in Chapter 1 I advocated joining elements of critical social theory with historical sociology in order to arrive at a rounded, dynamic understanding of consumption. Such an understanding, I have argued, must lend itself to the formulation of generalisable social science propositions that are nonetheless always vulnerable to being undercut by observed historical patterns that resist such generalisations. The first two chapters were given over to formulating a detailed approach in which these generalisations could best be articulated. Chapter 2 extended the discussion in Chapter 1 by attempting to isolate important insights into consumption from critical social science literature, while the following four chapters sought to apply this approach to a slice of post-World War South African history in order to see what might show up when doing so.

The guiding intuition throughout has been that, by rejecting the tendency to incautiously formulate *a priori* statements about consumption, examining historical cases will suggest which, of a range of existing generalisations, will hold up and which have to be sacrificed. At the same time, such an exercise is at its most interesting if it can also lead to the formulation of new and better social science generalisations and thereby feed back into an on-going conversation, ideally ranging over the wires that artificially segregate social science practitioners within diverse disciplines. But formulating workable generalisations is not an end in itself. One way of assessing the value of these generalisations is by considering the sort of historical work that can be done with them, if not by the person formulating these generalisations, then at least by others who might benefit from their existence. As I see it, there are different ways in which such benefits arise. At an analytical level, these can simply provide a framework for thinking in more lucid or expansive terms about a given historical problem, helping to pose important questions that would otherwise be left begging, and drawing attention to events that may often be overlooked. Beyond this, such generalisations can be useful if they also suggest a new explanatory framework for interpreting the relative significance of all that that which shows up as analytically interesting. In this manner one might hope to make oneself useful to a scholarly community by arriving at some provisional division of labour between critical generalisation and historically nuanced observation.

Here it would be useful to return to an argumentative thread left hanging in Chapter 2, where I argued that the conceptual and historical dimensions of consumer research can best be joined up at three levels. On the agentic premises I have been working with, we need to first start with consumer practices that are locally magnified to an extent sufficient to allow the self-

understandings and desires of actual consumers to come into view. In order to avoid arbitrariness here, this can be more systematically approached by mapping observed consumer practices onto the basic forms of integration they help to establish or disrupt. From there, a second step is to interpret the social and political significance of observed consumer practices in light of already-existing sociological tropes, such as class, race, ethnicity or nation, insofar as these have been used to explain apparently significant processes of social and political change at the level of a given society. At a third level, one can then attempt a more generalised interpretation of events in terms of how people might link up through larger sociological processes of the sort usually discussed in terms of imperialism, colonialism or globalisation.

Chapters 4–6 together constitute the first of these three steps, and here I attempt the remaining two, focusing, however, only on narratives of class and race at the second step in accordance with their salience in social science research in colonial and post-colonial contexts such as South Africa, and on globalisation at the third step, in accordance with the prominence of such analyses within the literature on consumption. I will explore what major analytical and evaluative conclusions might be drawn from the historical discussion of the concrete fields of consumption discussed in chapters 4–6 for the further study of South African historiography. I do this less in the hope of putting to rest any burning questions in the framing and telling of South African history, which would require a much more exhaustive treatment than that offered here, than as evidence that the conceptual propositions raised in the first two chapters can point to neglected and interesting dimensions of social change in South Africa and, by implication, elsewhere too. Finally, I reflect on how the themes from chapters 4–6 can themselves modify the conceptual discussion in chapters 1 and 2. My discussion below can be read as an invitation to generalise from the South African case by drawing attention to the potentially profound ethical and institutional significance, for large swathes of people, of social integration and solidarity created through consumer action both on and beyond the market, in ways that are not determined by production. It also points to the potential significance of consumer action as a propeller of social change at both the level of everyday life and of large-scale socio-political upheaval, and of the manner in which an *a priori* critical emphasis on domination through consumer practices as a source of social order is likely to distort the actual ethical significance of these practices.

7.1 Institutional and practical dimensions of consumption in South Africa

7.1.1 Studying consumption today

We saw in Chapter 3, when situating the recent writing on consumption in South Africa within a more general historiographical framework, that both Mbembe (2008) and Posel (2010; 2013) were explicitly speculating about the significance of consumer practices in an attempt to

provoke further research and debate about a dimension of South African history that has been little explored. Their brief contributions to this theme are not in any way intended to solve this major question, but rather to raise critical awareness of its neglect and its possible significance. This has had the desired effect, and an engaging fringe literature has started to emerge. Most significant here is an edition of the journal *Critical Arts*, where Mehita Iqani and Bridget Kenny (2015) have gathered a number of important studies on the theme. As with any emergent literature, of course, highly divergent research questions, conceptual vocabularies and empirical interests mean that it nonetheless still remains splintered into micro-studies joined only by a very broad thematic interest in consumption – indeed, with few exceptions (e.g. Kistner 2015), in *commodity* consumption. Despite their obvious relevance to emerging features of South African social and political life, none of these studies, along with those discussed in Chapter 3, have yet fed into a cohesive debate around major issues of class and race that have informed the broader critical research on South Africa. There is, in short, no clear sense of what these studies add up to, both in the South African context and beyond. Despite some intriguing suggestions, they neither systematically challenge nor confirm the on-going significance of race and class as historically significant axes of social stratification and political action in South Africa or elsewhere, despite this being an explicit theme in Posel's (2010) seminal paper. These studies also tend to move very quickly over basic conceptual issues about the nature of consumption, its relationship to production and exchange, and generally how it is to be approached, or else simply fail to address these basic issues at all.

Within much of the wider literature on consumption the same basic problems recur. As noted in Chapter 1, this appears to strongly work against the emergence of clear debate and consolidated research projects capable of generating findings that either clearly agree or disagree with one another or with important social science research in other fields. Below I will revisit the conceptual and historical material covered in the preceding chapters in order to suggest how the debate might advance on both fronts in a somewhat more systematic fashion. My intention is also not to arrive at any incontestable resolution to these enormous problems. I rather hope to offer an example of how best to tap into existing conversations about consumption and to stimulate on-going debates in which there is at least some minimal agreement about what basic issues are at stake, how elementary concepts are to be employed, and how historically-informed research can feed into a focussed discussion of these issues or calls for a further refinement of the basic research problems themselves.

7.1.2 Conceptual assumptions revisited

I have argued that consumption is tied up with both social reproduction and social change, but that the latter aspect tends to be dismissed or ignored in the literature due to deterministic assumptions about human agency and a strong critical tradition of viewing consumption as a passive, functionally determined domain of action. We need to return to an understanding of consumption as meaningful and motivated action. It is unintelligible in abstraction from the

imaginary significations that frame it and it is best explained by appeal to the desire for recognition that explains why consumers choose one set of meaningful options over others. Saying this does not completely rule out structural explanations of consumption, but suggests that these nonetheless must relate to the limits of people's knowledge concerning the preconditions of their action and its possible consequences. Moreover, assuming that Giddens is right to argue that action in all human societies is normally intentional, then the burden of proof falls onto those who seek to account for consumption structurally to show how this comes about. People might turn out to be the playthings of larger systems, but we should not simply assume this as an axiom.

I have also approached the institutional dimension of consumption as, at bottom, a social question with political and economic articulations. When approaching consumption from a political angle, what interests me is whether consumption alters the explicit norms of political legitimation or the effective social grounds of political mobilisation, or whether it promotes a withdrawal from political activity. Political action is itself a form of social action, and from a more strictly social perspective I have tried in the previous chapters to establish the extent to which consumer practices extend the reach of existing social bonds or break these bonds up. Analysing the institutional dimension of consumer practices can be approached in terms of exchange, but instead of assuming that exchange always happens on markets, and that the economy and the market are co-extensive, we can view exchange as possessing a plurality of forms. The most historically momentous forms of exchange can be approached through a tripartite ideal-typical scheme of market, state and community, although I have preferred to frame this in the more expansive terms of market exchange, redistribution and reciprocity favoured by Polanyi. Polanyi conceives of each of these ideal types as a "form of integration", which together form the "human economy". However, Polanyi fuses these forms of integration into the social world so thoroughly that his occasional attempts to define the economic domain as the material dimension of social practices cuts against his own more basic insights, which contradict this limited approach to the economic. I have defined the economic as pertaining to the domain of necessity, with necessity understood not naturalistically but by the minimal socially-accepted standards for the upkeep of a livelihood. Consumption, as I have discussed it, is therefore not necessarily a market practice, nor an economic one, though it might be either or both in specific circumstances.

I will go on to discuss these issues by approaching the forms of integration as underpinned by solidarity or by a system. Solidarity is a very capacious term, but I employ it to discuss the imperative people feel to create and recreate social and political bonds.[122] By doing so I mean to draw attention to the ethical dimension of consumption and the manner in which ethically-laden self-understandings and motivations are constitutively tied up with the creation, alteration or destruction of social and political order. This in turn makes it possible to account for how the practical and institutional dimensions of consumer action link up agentically. However, social integration may, in principle, be achieved without solidarity. In such cases it happens causally, in the sense of unintended consequences of action adding up to something

behind the backs of the actors involved. Conceptually speaking, social integration of both types, whatever its ultimate extension, can be opposed to individualism, although an individualised society need not necessarily imply a swarm of absolutely isolated individuals, but rather a society occupied by people whose sphere of intimate association generally extends no further than a nuclear family or a very small peer group and whose contacts beyond this narrow sphere are usually impersonal, instrumental and possibly bureaucratically mediated.

7.1.3 Historical cases revisited

The historical reconstruction of consumer practices in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa in chapters 4–6 looked at clothing consumption as a form of consumption tied almost exclusively to market exchange. I also looked at housing consumption as straddling market and redistributive forms, and at the consumption of faith healing services as falling across market and reciprocal forms of exchange, while focusing, respectively, on the redistributive and reciprocal dimension of these practices in order to assess how they might be bound up with qualitatively distinct forms of social integration. The purpose there was to analyse these consumer practices in enough detail for their potentially symbolic and ethical significance to register. This was the first of the three steps I have argued we should take when discussing consumer practices, and here I pursue the other two by revisiting them with a view to identifying more generalisable patterns.

Market consumption. In my discussion of clothing consumption in Chapter 4 I found no clear evidence that the consumption of fashionable, status-conferring clothing was driven by advertisers, and a great deal of evidence for other social factors being at play. Without dismissing the possibility that advertisers played *some* role in creating fashion cycles, I assumed that what Schudson (1984) observed of the USA holds to varying degrees of other societies too. Advertising may effectively alert people to the existence of new product types, but doesn't appear to account for their motivational appeal. Consumption of one brand instead of another may indeed be profoundly affected by advertising, but the basic desire for any product category occurs within a structure of demand that is likely to be affected to a negligible extent by advertising when compared to other social determinants of consumption. Advertisers, in short, do not have the ability to conjure up entire patterns of consumer behaviour *ex nihilo*. Certainly there is no evidence of consumers possessing "false needs" of the sort that Marcuse believed advertisers can create at will, and which Baudrillard functionally attributed to the very logic of system survival where the "convulsive craving for objects" advertisers conjure is itself necessary at a systemic level in order to "ensure the reproduction of the order of production" (Baudrillard 1998:48, 65). The idea that advertising possesses this power, I have suggested when discussing "production of consumption" approaches to consumer action, has become something of a critical canard but rests on the dubious assumption of a consumer subject that can be effortlessly interpellated, while also simply ignoring the reality of product failure, which on its own terms it is unable to account for. Production of consumption

approaches usefully draw attention to the institutional framework in which consumer choices are made but misleadingly take these to be explanatorily basic when accounting for consumer practices.

I also spoke of a political dimension to clothing consumption, looking at the example of consumer boycotts and "ethical consumption" through "ethical labelling" to challenge the idea that consumption on the market need be depoliticising. Boycotts seldom attained the high level of organisation that the AAM achieved, but the boycott was a very widespread tool of resistance through the market, even while ethical labelling initiatives and consumer awareness groups appearing in the post-apartheid period have been a largely ineffective tool for hitching consumer purchasing power to an effective programme of political change. Nonetheless, it is essential to see that such initiatives exist in order to dispatch the common idea that consumption on the market is a necessarily depoliticising affair.

More than occasioning localised bouts of resistance, the real significance of clothing consumption has been social. Clothing consumption has been used in a creative manner that has ensured social mobility for some. Not all commodities can function in this way. Some are simply too expensive for most people to attain no matter how much they sacrifice to do so, as we said was the case with private housing. Expensive cars are another obvious example, as is tertiary education for many. Nonetheless, at least in South Africa, clothing is one of those status-conferring goods that can indeed allow people to gain status that would otherwise have been withheld from them had they in fact behaved as abstract consumers following something like a Maslovian hierarchy of needs. This search for status would appear to best explain the enormous lengths to which poor Africans have been willing to go in order to purchase fine clothes by pinching in other areas of expenditure.

Clothing consumption among middle class Africans, as well as those aspiring to middle class status, usually went far beyond the need for warmth, that is, for survival, or to cover one's nakedness out of shame, though for the truly destitute this was of course not so. Clothing consumption, even among the African poor, has generally been exercised within some basic margin of choice in which a semantic logic was clearly at play. It responded to a vital human need nonetheless, which is a minimum of affirmative inter-personal recognition. Beyond this, it also allowed people to pursue distinction. Bourdieu is clearly not wrong in suspecting that Proust's (quoted in Bourdieu 1996:66) "infinitely varied art of marking distances" has a wide anthropological reach, but of course it has very different meanings in different settings. The ethnographic sources all converge on the notion that, when pursuing distinction, the purchase of luxury commodities among middle class Africans was mimetic of white consumption patterns. To this extent, it was informed by conceptions of "civilisation" or "respectability". But this was not invariably so, and the *tsotsis*, for instance, deliberately inverted these ideals.

When considering what this look at clothing consumption might tell us about the institutional dimension of market consumption in general terms, we can observe that the result has been

neither one of individualisation through consumption, as posited by Giddens (1991:197) and Bauman (2006:83–84), nor the reproduction of existing race or class forms of social and political integration. Rather, it has led to the formation of various small groups falling somewhere between these two levels. Starting earlier, but accelerating with the massive wave of African urbanisation during the Second World War, various ethnic groups that had been linguistically fractured and locally distinct increasingly gathered together in the cities, where they were confined to common areas. Here the purely synthetic notion of a cohesive African identity, and more generally of a black identity, was beginning to assume a more organic existence, not only in the thought and practice of neo-colonial officials, but also among those designated black, even when resisting the state. In this sense, a form of racialised sociation was at work. These people were mostly allowed into the cities in their capacity as labourers, and workerist ideals could lead to a unity as producers, especially through trade unionism. At the same time, however, the middle class pursuit of respectability through purchasing luxury commodities ensured that sociation happened on grounds that were narrower than those of race or of class in the Marxian sense of productive position, corresponding more to class in the Weberian sense of income. In this light, the neo-Marxist contention that race was reducible to class was clearly at variance with social reality as perceived and lived by most Africans.

To make matters more complicated, I have argued that people would often make purchases beyond their apparent means in order to achieve recognition and ensure class *mobility*. In the African case I have considered, the middle classes deliberately consumed in such a fashion as to appear respectable and thereby stand apart from other Africans. *Tsotsi* youth also set themselves apart from older and more respectable Africans through competitive consumption of luxury goods, rejecting the pursuit of respectability and identifying rather with international fashions, especially from the USA, and often valorising criminality. Tsotsi and respectable middle sub-cultures defined themselves in opposition to one another, even if they were in some general sense both caught up in a larger neo-colonial drama. What was at stake, however, was never simply the possession of clothing on utilitarian grounds, but rather the pursuit of recognition against the backdrop of white social domination, and those involved were generally aware of this. The African middle classes were united in the search for recognition through what was clearly at bottom mimetic consumption, while the youth, often adapting international fashions to local tastes, developed a mode of belonging premised on more "creolised" or "hybrid" tastes. The result of this was that whatever unity as producers or consumers was being generated in other domains of action was being fragmented through commodity consumption. Cumulatively, the effect of this was nonetheless not individualisation but rather the formation of small, agonistic communities united precisely by shared practices of commodity consumption. In the post-apartheid period, African consumption patterns are largely continuous with these earlier forms, although various youth sub-cultures are somewhat less racially divided and better able to facilitate a sort of solidarity that, to some extent, is based on blurred racial codes. This appears to extend *intra*-racial class distinctions even while opening up a space for solidarity that, as Dolby argued, sometimes undermines racial boundaries instead of reproducing them.

On what conceptual terms might we best explain these institutional developments? I have argued that consumption patterns follow, insofar as they are intentional, from the desire consumers possess to establish social relationships with others, and are judged worthy of perpetuating or dissolving in accordance with the quality of the social bonds thus formed. From this perspective, the manner in which people clothe themselves is a form of meaningful communication with semantic and ethical dimensions and is intelligible in relation to both shared understandings and to the motivated pursuit of recognition. Tzvetan Todorov (2001:78), speaking of the essential connection between material practices like clothing and recognition, notes that failure to dress appropriately can amount to a failure to achieve recognition, and this can be one of many disadvantages of poverty. Dressing well, on the other hand, is often seen as a prerequisite for entry into the upper social strata. To use Todorov's (2001:79–80) terminology, clothing consumption can be used to further a "recognition of distinction" as well as a "recognition of conformity", even if these are often two sides of the same phenomenon, as Bourdieu recognised.

The agonistic nature of this consumption fits, in some measure, with a Bourdieuvian understanding of class as an order forged around struggles for distinction. Here, however, one encounters another problem with relying too heavily on Bourdieu, which is his insistence on the generally unconscious nature of consumer choice. A more useful framework for understanding clothing consumption in South Africa is to view it as a central practice to the adoption of what James Ferguson (1999:85–102) has referred to as a "cultural style". Here "culture" is used in a semantic sense and indicates a mode of signification that actors use to situate themselves in relationship to socially established categories – not only class, but also such things as gender or sexual orientation. In the South African case I have considered, this was seen, for instance, in the middle class pursuit of "civilisation" or "respectability" as values informing a class hierarchy, with "class" in this sense referring in fact to a complex stratification order where both class (narrowly defined) and status determinants were present. During the apartheid period, both the neo-Weberian class researchers and the *Xhosa in Town* anthropologists demonstrated very amply that ordinary Africans had a keen everyday awareness of social stratification and consumed in accordance with this, and this is also very apparent in the contemporary *Class in Soweto* research project. Lay people have no difficulty making these connections themselves and know perfectly well that their actions are not socially innocent but rather serve to situate them with in an evaluative social hierarchy. For this reason, they were also able to manipulate clothing codes in order to actively pursue status, and indeed made enormous material sacrifices to do so.

Ferguson (1999:99) stresses the generally "motivated, intentional and performative" nature of adopting a cultural style, while also noting that it needn't always be fully conscious, essentially inverting Bourdieu's preferred balancing between conscious and unconscious elements of consumer behaviour. For Ferguson, this does not lead into naive voluntarism, as the adoption of any given style, or rather the mixing of stylistic elements, is always also in some measure subject to constraints of a political and economic nature of which people may be more or less

aware. Even in agonistic fields in which people pursue distinction, then, we can assume that they are potentially aware of what they are doing, sometimes resembling the heavily determined subjects Bourdieu describes and at other times functioning with a keen awareness of the symbolic and practical significance of their actions.

Redistributive consumption. During the apartheid period, the housing crisis in South Africa was fed from many sources. The state was heavily involved, both in forcing Africans into the environmentally and economically fragile homelands and in legally containing African settlement patterns in the large cities. In an attempt to control urban settlement the state provided housing on a large but insufficient scale and regulated all housing purchases in accordance with elaborate racial zoning rules, for which reason no purely economic explanation for social and political trends associated with housing consumption can suffice to explain the phenomenon. The housing market now has freer play, but millions of Africans still remain dependent on the state for housing due to unemployment, economic precarity or the low pay that South Africa's "working poor" receive, itself the legacy of apartheid.

From a strictly social perspective, private housing consumption helped reproduce certain features of race and class stratification in the apartheid period. This has shifted slightly away from race and toward class insofar as the democratic transition has allowed a growing but still small black middle class to escape the townships to which it had been legally and financially bound or to relocate to the widening zones of affluence within the townships, while a larger white middle class remains boarded up in old or new domains of privilege. Considering the extent to which the racialised patterning of urban space in South Africa has, despite these small changes, been basically unaffected by the democratic transition and the increased redistribution accompanying it, we could therefore argue the housing consumption has followed a logic of reproduction. Here we would not be speaking economistically of the reproduction of labour or of a class system, but of the basic elements of a given socio-political order as a whole, as physical separation of the races was a basic pivot for the caste-like racial separation between South Africans.

There is, however a very basic sense in which the South African polity has been meaningfully transformed, and may still further transform, and struggles over urban housing consumption were a major part of this. Dissatisfaction with redistributed housing in the apartheid period spilled over from everyday frustrations at a local level into political conflicts that fed into a process of large-scale, system-altering change. From the 1970s, in the context of a faltering economy and rising costs of daily living, a politically-motivated contraction in the state redistribution of housing that many African and other black South Africans considered unjust was met with localised revolts in many townships. These were assimilated into broader civic, faith-based, workerist, African nationalist and black consciousness mobilisations that together played an important role in triggering the democratic transition.

Factoring in the local dimension allows us to appreciate the civic roots of much apartheid-era resistance and to avoid constructing the sort of patriotic historical narratives that Saul Dubow warns against. Bozzoli's fine-grained historical and ethnographic study of the Alexandra uprising shows how misleading it can be to buy into a retrospectively constructed myth, or half-truth, of origin for democratic South Africa under the leadership of a liberation party. The agency demonstrated in political struggles over the collective consumption of housing has often been grounded in spatially peculiar forms of solidarity and cannot invariably be assimilated to received historiographical tropes of classes or racial and national groups as the sole objects of domination or agents of resistance. Bozzoli shows that the ANC, in particular, was very instrumental in welding together resistance from across the country, but its various nationalist and workerist modes of recruitment often drew on other, pre-existing foundations of solidarity that have largely disappeared from view.

Similar stirrings have emerged since the 2000s as expectations for a better material life for most Africans have been sorely disappointed. These dissatisfactions have united South Africa's poor around programmes to improve collective consumption, in which housing is a major grievance. These struggles are shaped by class dynamics but irreducible to these, as they have always been responses to central and local state policies too. Redistribution of housing continues to fall short of demand for those who cannot purchase houses, and low-quality service delivery, factional gate-keeping within local party structures and corruption are rife. Alongside this, there is a tendency for local governments to channel large parts of their budgets into competitive city upgrading at the expense of pro-poor upliftment. The relatively wealthy white population, often benefitting from pro-business government investment, only directly feels the negative effects of this in the form of crime that reaches their often fortified neighbourhoods and compounds, but has done nothing of to mobilise around redressing the deeper economic and political causes of crime and instead invests heavily in security to rather ameliorate its effects.

For this analysis of the field of housing consumption to be of wider interest it is necessary to abstract out its general features. At an institutional level, the temptation to seek a basically economistic explanation for social and political change associated with South Africa's housing crisis has always been strong. During the apartheid era, liberal-leaning critics of housing policies, especially those associated with the South African Institute of Race Relations and the Urban Foundation, placed the blame on the apartheid state. They argued that the crisis arose from the state's meddling with supposedly natural forces of urbanisation and of market principles of supply and demand for housing, normatively envisaging a far more discreet role for the state (Hendler 1991:199–200). By the mid-80s, most pro-apartheid policy makers in the ruling National Party and the senior civil service had come round to this position too, as indeed had some within the African National Congress (ANC) and United Democratic Front (UDF) (Hendler 1991:201). Neo-Marxists were equally critical of the state, but were also not taken in by the liberals' uncritical confidence in the market and argued instead that the housing

crisis was a consequence of the apartheid state working in concert with capital to increase profitability through exploitation. As Paul Hendler (1991:202) explains,

> [t]he conscious restriction of Africans to a relatively minute portion of the land led to overcrowding and depleted the carrying capacity of the land reserves for African occupation, which increasingly became little more than labour reservoirs for industries located in the "white" areas. Thus the liberal paradigm's theoretical assumptions occlude a politicized perception of housing, the supply of which perforce is interwoven with relationships of subordination/domination.

For neo-Marxists, often building on the work of Manuel Castells' *The Urban Question* and *City, Class and Power*, which brought into focus the expanding role of the post-war state in everyday life through policies favouring such things as housing and transportation subsidies,

> [t]he geography of the townships was a direct outcome of the conflicts waged over the distribution of the costs of reproducing labour power (i.e. reproduction being the replenishment of the physical capacity to work, and the control of the political/ideological processes which legitimate capitalist relations). This argument also ironically gave an analytical centrality to the state, and reflected the work of Castells. Policy positions emanating from the neo-Marxist assumptions focused on popular, multi-class urban social movements and their resistance against the state, mainly around the issue of housing. (Hendler 1991:204)

Castells had argued in these works, against Marxist structuralism, that *within* a basically Marxist class division of society there were multiple intra-class divisions that need to be taken into account when explaining urban struggles. However, from *The City and the Grassroots* (1983) onward Castells abandoned this premise too. He now argued that even the assumption that class division remained the most fundamental determinant of urban struggles was an *a priori* projection onto historical circumstances, some of which indeed were, to varying degrees but never totally, amenable to such a reading, and others of which were not (Castells 1983:296–303). This more historical approach clearly has much more to offer. That said, we do not need to dismiss neo-Marxist approaches, but rather to regard them cautiously and retire their functional assumptions about all social and political change passively reproducing more elementary economic developments.

In *The City and the Grassroots* Castells' contribution to the debate on the political potential of social change through new forms of political action was not to introduce the issue of consumption but rather to stress its importance and to view it in non-functional, agentic terms. One major weakness in his analysis of consumption, however, is that he tended to view consumption as unifying, a "collective consumption" formed through state policy and challenges to this policy by grassroots mobilisers. He paid less attention to how such unity might fail to arise or fragment as people opted for private consumption over collective consumption – a criticism that is valid outside of the urban context too (Bauman 1992 [1988]:131–37). Precisely this tension between reliance on public goods or privately acquired goods has the potential to become central to social stratification in contemporary societies

where there is some sort of state welfare provision. Nonetheless, Castells' basic insight about the potential of consumption to create social solidarity and political action remains entirely valid. It is worth retrieving in light of on-going discussions of these same issues that are aware of the spatial dimension of consumption but continue to insist on the primacy of production. Assigning this type of explanatory priority to production draws attention to important political-economic features of our time but poses its basic problems in a functionalist manner, reducing complex questions concerning the explanation and effects of consumer action to more basic questions about commodification (Harvey 1992; Zukin 1995).

Castells' understanding of consumption also remains relevant given the presence of very influential treatments of the topic that accept the non-functional social and political significance of consumption for modern societies but only pay attention to the individualising and depoliticising potential of consumer behaviour, usually as a consequence of failing to also consider the significance of consumer action outside of the market. The result is that, like Martin Murray's remarkable analyses of housing in contemporary South Africa, one gets a clear picture of the manner in which business and local state elites have shaped housing consumption, but the specifically social and political dimension of this disappears almost completely under the weight of a mono-focal critique of commodification. It is not surprising that Murray, at least in his two major books on the subject, has very little to say about opposition to housing policies by social movements, as well as the importance of factoring collective agency into one's account of the development of city forms, both of which came to centrally occupy Castells in *The City and the Grassroots*, which is widely regarded as a turning point in the urban literature. To make this move would mean to also focus on issues of failed redistribution as a consequence, not of the unceasing insinuation of the market into every crevice of human affairs, but of diffuse corruption, a lack of democratic access to local decision-making, the complexities of local patronage, and other social and political crises of redistribution.

Reasoning in these more generalised, institutional terms highlights the tensions between market and redistributive forms of exchange, but does not in itself serve to explain *why* such tensions arise, at least if we set out from an agentic set of assumptions. A starting point here is to note that, for its beneficiaries, the extension of redistribution may pacify a population, provided this meets their expectations, as Mbembe has suggested is the case in contemporary South Africa. But by the same token, failure to meet expectations can undermine this passivity, while often increasing solidarity in cases where socially stratified groups join together in political contestation. This has happened once already. What is decisive here is not simply an alteration in material conditions but people's ethical apprehension of their situations, in virtue of which their material conditions are considered just or unjust.

Looking at the South African case, nobody, to my knowledge, has suggested that those that have engaged in conflicts over housing and other services, on either the side of the state and propertied and business elites or on that of grassroots actors, are submitting to the promptings

of a class *habitus*, and it is difficult to see what such a view of things might illuminate, at least in the context of these consumer practices. This is particularly striking when one considers a movement like *Abahlali baseMjondolo*. While it might not be a representative case of social movements in South Africa more generally, it reveals what is possible here. Members, though often desperately poor, engage in debate and sometimes even join study groups in order to educate themselves and organise in ways that will allow them to better leverage the state. They want elite decision-makers to meet their specific material needs and to recognise them as fully human, which indeed they consider two dimensions of the same struggle. It is only by attending to these details, which tell us something about people's agency, that we can attempt a more general explanation of why people in similar material conditions sometimes choose to resist and at other times do not. Doing so makes it possible to avoid the reductionism that arises when viewing history from the tower, in this case by highlighting real and very influential processes of capital accumulation such as those that Murray has studied while ignoring or misrepresenting historically influential responses to these by those worst affected by both commodification and redistributive neglect at an everyday level.

Reciprocal consumption. There is an economic dimension to the healing churches that deserves attention. The original secessions from the mission churches were prompted, in part, by poor remuneration for black clergy. There is also a plausible case to be made that church belonging is in some measure shaped by one's wealth insofar as poorer Africans often feel out of place in wealthier congregations. Zionism has, moreover, always been overwhelmingly the denominational preference of the poor, who make large sacrifices for one another to ensure that the worst excesses of poverty can be endured. The class logic here is nonetheless in no way precise or determinative. Many poor South Africans sought non-religious solutions to poverty, and poor people have indeed been found to belong to wealthier denominations too.

Politically, a great deal of ambiguity hovers over the healing churches. During the apartheid period the Zionist congregations generally stood apart from politics, although the enormous ZCC traversed the whole distance from collaborationism to explicit opposition to apartheid in the mid-1980s. Recently, however, the AICs have begun to step into the political domain and the public sphere more generally, but at a very localised level that is still modest in scale and works with meagre resources. The real significance of faith healing is more narrowly social. Faith healing attempts to repair frayed social bonds, which are commonly understood as the cause of physical illness and misfortune, and in the Zionist churches to establish ethically thick ties of solidarity between congregation members. Prophets and ministers in the AICs strongly uphold widely-accepted ethical norms of the sort often associated with the ancestors, either encouraging direct communication with the ancestors or else supporting the same basically communitarian values attributed to them, while rejecting all that cuts against this, popularly represented in the figures of witches.

At an institutional level, faith healing is split between market and reciprocal forms, roughly but not perfectly corresponding to commodified consultations with diviners and uncommodified

healing rituals with Christian prophets, ministers and wider church congregations. I suggested in Chapter 6 that the larger historical circumstances these churches respond to are the increased uncertainty and individualisation of African experience. Against the "uncertainty about correct behaviour" that Nyquist (1983:156) saw all about him, they uphold what the ancestors are imagined to have always considered inviolable – "right conduct towards people" (Mayer and Mayer 1974:156). But where does this uncertainty and individualism come from? One way into this is by considering how those widely believed to be most untrustworthy and solitary are demotically understood to behave, which points toward the significance of the almost ubiquitous belief in witches among the African poor for the entire historical period I consider. The Comaroffs have suggested that we not limit ourselves to any given local social configuration or polity when investigating witches and other occult beliefs. Their basic intuition is that rapid social change is perceived through the idiom of witchcraft or the "occult" more generally and that the spread of the market is the main agent of this change, even while allowing in principle that social and political happenstance can also foment such change (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001:14).

The Comaroffs often suggest that the occult in Africa, and especially witchcraft in South Africa, is a sort of fetishism in the age of "late", "neoliberal" or "millennial" capitalism where, among other things, the internationalisation of labour, and with it the dispersal of class relationships, fundamentally obscures people's experiential grasp of social reality (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001:9–16, 19–20). They suggest that a sort of systemic invasion of local life by global or regional market forces has begun in earnest, largely bypassing the state (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999a:284–85; 2001:9–14, 19–20), although what they have to say on this is very similar to what is often discussed in terms of "glocalistion", as they allow that specific localities will experience these global forces in distinct ways. They also argue that the central state is very likely to play *some* role and can never be simply bypassed, such that there is no simple logic of globalisation at work in the contemporary world, but they don't tell us how to understand the new place of the state or how we are to balance the two claims (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001:28–40). Here they are not contradicting themselves but rather allowing for historical variation and avoiding the temptation of mono-causal explanatory schemas. Nonetheless, the value of their work resides in having asked these questions and not in having resolved them, as we still know nothing about how to reconcile all these possible variables in practice.

When thinking about the institutional origins of African beliefs and practices associated with misfortune and ill-health, I find it inherently plausible that these larger connections are to some extent at play. However, two notes of caution are necessary. Firstly, discussions of globalisation, in whatever specific terms they are phrased, raise very interesting issues of human connection that merit critical engagement in our times. However, they assume an already-existing empirical condition of structural extension across the globe along with the individualisation of those connected by such structures. In this manner they overlook the important mediations that continue to exist between the level of the global and the individual

(Karagiannis and Wagner 2007:4–5), and often misleadingly present as global phenomena what are really regional or networked exchanges that largely exclude great swathes of humanity across the globe (Ferguson 2006:14).

Secondly, and most importantly for the specific problem of explaining faith healing practices, there is still not enough empirical evidence for assuming a global perspective of the faith healing practices that provide a response to misfortune and illness, even though these connections occasionally get posited. I argued in Chapter 6 that what the bulk of evidence does point to is that, in South Africa, and indeed far beyond, witchcraft accusations respond overwhelmingly to resentment arising in intimate settings like amorous, family or neighbourly rivalries. Other examples could be added to this that appear not to strain this basic thesis. For instance, in the mid-1980s, with the anti-apartheid struggle at a fever-pitch of intensity in many South African localities, people believed to be state informers were sometimes lynched or burnt alive by crowds. Even in such cases, however, strong ties of locality and kinship linked the accusers and accused, and local rivalries informed the violence (Delius 1996:199). Saying this, of course, does not disprove that there are larger forces at work, as the existing literature is made up of localised ethnographies that were not probing for the intrusion of larger spatio-temporal process into the quotidian worlds they studied. Nonetheless, these limitations of the literature render any strong thesis about the role of global connections thoroughly speculative. Until such a time as research on faith healing emerges that is able to show that the misfortunes it responds to originate at a more global level, we do better to assume that a local, irreducibly social logic is at work, as this is where the evidence overwhelmingly points.

The ultimate fear that faith healing addresses, in the South African context and apparently more universally, is the ill-will of those within one's community. From considering the ethnographic literature on faith healing in South Africa it is clear that this itself is a consequence of the strong reliance that Africans, and particularly the African poor, have on their intimate networks for securing their material and immaterial well-being. With a strong supportive network poverty can be weathered, but without it one is far more exposed. Yet mutual reliance brings with it mutual vulnerability. Similarly, in a society in which one is perpetually demeaned, tight bonds of care and a deep concern for the fate of one's peers can also provide one with a minimum of affirmative inter-personal recognition and a sense of security, without which social suffering and uncertainty can become unbearable. Applied specifically to the institutional significance of faith healing communities, and especially the Zionist churches to which around a third of contemporary South Africans belong, there is still a lot to be said for Martin West's approach to the healing churches as a form of what Brian R. Wilson discussed in terms of "sects". For Wilson (quoted in West 1975:87),

> [a] sect serves as a small and "deviant" reference group in which the individual may seek status and prestige in terms of whose standards he may measure his own talents and accomplishments in more favourable terms than are generally available in the wider society…. Its ideological orientation and its group cohesion provide a context of emotional security.

These groups exist somewhere between the large-scale forms of integration like race and class, and are best regarded as one form of kinship group in the sense favoured by Sahlins (2011). The life of such groups is not in any strong pre-existing identity but rather in profoundly localised practices of reciprocity. Though far poorer and more socially marginalised, these religious communities resemble other groups existing on a similarly intermediary scale, such as the social movements discussed in Chapter 5 and the *tsotsi* and *i'khothane* sub-cultures discussed in Chapter 4. The latter, we saw, were also solidaristic associations formed to gain mutual recognition or to compete for status in agonistic rites involving the stylised display of commodities, in the context of both poverty and racial domination. Within these groups, poor and dominated Africans have sought, not only to survive, but to do so in a manner fully consistent with expressive values that make human life meaningful.

As for the particular cases of clothing and housing consumption discussed above, so too for faith healing, we do well to attempt to extract maximally generalisable principles when attempting not only to describe the institutional changes they led to but also to explain these changes in critical social-theoretical terms. As a starting point, foregrounding the religious dimension of social life is useful for bringing into focus its creativity, and especially the expressive ends people seek to realise through consumption, such as the mutual recognition and ontological security (or "trust") that faith healing establishes, which we saw was a way of describing in secular, sociological terms what is understood more demotically by health. Strictly speaking, it is not that people are necessarily more expressive in broadly religious domains of practice, and we have seen that both clothing and housing consumption were geared toward encompassing, not only material, instrumental ends, but also expressive values like respectability and self-realising freedom. It is rather that, when encased in a non-secular cosmology, these meanings and their ritual enactments become particularly visible to the outsider. Seen in this light, other conceptual possibilities swim into view, and on this score, too, the Comaroffs have had something essential to say.

Developing ideas they find in predecessors like Edmund Leach, the Comaroffs argue that we need to seriously challenge the idea that ritual reproduces "custom" or "tradition". There are periodic rituals that stand apart from everyday life, but ritual also seeps into the everyday. The challenge, as they see it, is to make conceptions of ritual "embrace more mundane meaningful practice, practice often meant to transform, not reproduce, the environment in which it occurs" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993: xvi). Doing so involves allowing for the possibility that

> ritual may be creative, constitutive practice—and, hence, an instrument of history in all human societies at all times. Rather than being reduced to a species of ceremonial action that insulates enchanted, self-reproducing systems from the "real" world, then, ritual may be seen for what it often is: a vital element in the processes that make and remake social facts and collective identities. Everywhere. (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993:xvi)

The Comaroffs warn against arguing that rituals exist only to shore up fractured social relationships, as this has been a mainstay of functional theories of ritual pervading much of the anthropological literature (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993:xv). This is an important conceptual step. Clothing consumption rituals by township youth in contemporary South Africa, for instance, are clearly about the active pursuit of social status among the marginalised, and real social changes follow from this. But ritual can indeed also serve to repair the social fabric, which is what I have argued faith healing rituals do. We simply cannot say that ritual *necessarily* seeks to, or invariably has the consequence of, fully reproducing any antecedent social configuration. This indeed would be a surrender to functionalism. Mary Douglas (1970:xxv) has argued, however, that functionalist readings of ritual as attempting to reproduce social order can be redeemed if reread from a communicative perspective. She is clearly right about this, and indeed the sorts of religious associations that in Northern societies tend to labelled as "communitarian" by political philosophers are a possibly better-known and widespread example of this. From this perspective, faith healing rituals sometimes do indeed seek to foster social solidarity in profoundly conservative ways, but they nonetheless do so creatively and by appeal to the meaning-making and desiring capacities of humans, and not by reproducing a system.

What might all this mean when applied to consumption? Starting out from the premise I have defended that consumption is value-realising activity both on *and* off the market, and focusing on a largely non-commodified form of consumption like faith healing, there is very limited use in attempting to apply the production of consumption perspective, of which Ben Fine has been the most sophisticated exponent, which seeks to conceptually pin back all observed social practices to a more basic logic of the market. Understanding faith healing's true significance to reside in the social domain and beyond the market, we should rather ask whether the socially productive view of consumption discussed in Chapter 2 and associated above all with Bourdieu can offer an explanatory framework for it.

To some extent, I believe it can. The value of Bourdieu's conception of *habitus* is that it posits a logic of action that usually escapes the actors performing it, even while sustained by complex schemata and somatic dispositions that these actors individually possess, and even when acting within ritual or supposedly aesthetic fields of practice in which expressive ends are ostensibly being pursued. Invoking *habitus* is different from speaking of the commodity fetishism invoked by production of consumption theorists – even if the concept does almost identical explanatory work – as it seeks to excavate a logic of practice operating in social action both on and off the market, where different but exchangeable forms of capital are at stake. If we agree that the meaning of people's actions escapes their conscious apprehension, even while possessing a discernable social logic in virtue of which it is not simply absurd or irrational but amenable to social science exegesis, then thinking in terms of *habitus* has something important to offer, if only as a provisional way of naming and explaining this strange human faculty we are thereby forced to posit, a sort of "social unconscious" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:49).

On the other hand, Bourdieu's understanding of *habitus* is simply too deterministic to really explain the complexity of social life, and so the concept would either have to be greatly adapted or some substitute found. From a Bourdieuvian perspective we cannot do justice to the agentic dimension of ritual discussed by the Comaroffs, where ritual is something manifestly novel and unforeseeable, and in this sense a creative act observably *inside* of history even if, in the self-understandings of its practitioners, it is believed to really effect a return to custom or tradition. What is attained is rather a temporary but real fluctuation in the social relationships between participants in the ritual, at times leaning toward greater hierarchical stratification than at others, but serving to shore up, always provisionally, the solidarity that the agents involved rightly know they require in order to pursue recognition and with it both psychological and material security. From a Bourdieuvian perspective this possibility is merely naive, as Bourdieu forces us to posit a deep-level social reproduction – in the form of relentless and pervasive class domination – existing *beneath* the surface of observed social change. For Bourdieu, social actors engaging in ritual or aesthetic activity forever seek out novelty to set themselves apart but nonetheless achieve only everlasting sameness. What the Comaroffs rather suggest is that, while pursuing an imaginary custom and tradition, ritual actors always respond to the contingencies of their times and as such are compelled to constantly innovate.

Beyond failing to register social contingency and therefore being ahistorical in its understanding of the institutional dimension of social life, a Bourdieuvian approach to faith healing must entail, at an explanatory level, attributing a strangely flattened "moral psychology" to the actors involved, which would do a great injustice to its apparent complexity. Koen Stroeken (2012:175) argues that the African diviners he encountered in Tanzania, like the shamans Lévi-Strauss spoke of, are engaged in something analogous to psychoanalysis. This insight applies also to both diviners and faith healers in South Africa. In beliefs of witchcraft and faith healing, there is an apparent psychological understanding of what *matters* to people, and what *should* matter, and attending to these values explains why people consume these services. What is interesting about faith healing and witchcraft discourses is that they posit solidarity based on ethical regard for others as essential to health at both an individual and group level, while resentment is seen as the psychological mechanism through which illness arises. In so doing they participate in a more universal understanding of the meaning of the gift, but at the same time touch on a potentially universal fear attaching to the mutual vulnerability that practices of reciprocity create. This all takes us a long way from understanding social order as merely reproduced through the internalisation of taxonomic schemata and a dispositional apparatus conducive to domination of the sort that interests Bourdieu, which in Bourdieu's hands makes no affective, motivational assumptions whatsoever. Witchcraft discourses show up in negative what faith healing reveals positively: the ways in which people *care* about their social worlds, creating and responding to local inflections of the values that saturate all human life, and how such caring contains the germs both of social order and disorder. Of course, the social order that comes of this may lead to domination, and outside of all utopias indeed always does, but there are degrees of domination

and no reason for assuming that it pervades all human affairs and that it does so consistently over time.

With these considerations about the general significance of the particular forms of consumption I looked at in the historical chapters in mind, we are now better placed to return to the task of suggesting how this might inform a discussion of South African historiography, and especially the problems of race and class that continue to throw up conceptual problems. This, I have said, is less an attempt at intervening in these debates in the South African context in which they have played out than a way of exploring how studying specific consumer practices can, more generally, inform a telling of history that has tended to skirt all inquiry into consumption as a driver of socially significant change, or that has considered consumption only reductively, due to a more general economistic bias. Having done so, I will then return, in section 7.3, to the generalising conceptual work with which the argument throughout has been more directly concerned.

7.2 Consumption, race and class in South Africa

7.2.1 Systemic or socio-political change?

South African historiography over the apartheid and post-apartheid periods has amply registered the importance of capital accumulation as a historical process shaping events. From this perspective, when falling into line with or resisting socio-political developments associated with racialised struggle people have really been fighting a sort of proxy war over capital accumulation, and a failure to appreciate this amounts to overlooking what was really at stake. To wholly overlook market dynamics in any capitalist society would, of course, be outrageously blinkered, but at the same time it is important to appreciate that the workings of capital provided more of a general background to events not directly related to the market, or to market-oriented production more specifically, than a robust explanation for any particular one. We have seen, for instance, that the anti-apartheid struggles over poor housing and other forms of service provision in the 1980s were influenced by the economic downturn of the times. This economic slump clearly had an enormous effect on social relationships, but the fact that resistance erupted only in selected localities shows that other factors were at play. Moreover, when considering clothing consumption, we saw that the existence of an international market was leveraged to resist exploitation and racial domination by South African firms and the central state, as seen in the case of the boycotts on South African products in which domestic and international organisations collaborated. What this points to is the limitation of reading an impersonal logic of the market into South African history, where the market is understood as a spreading system, foundational to the existence of other social and political systems and unassailable by them.

The various social and political effects of the consumer practices I discussed in the three historical chapters above often played out at a localised level by dynamically constituting

forms of collective agency existing between the level of the global system and of individual life, even while both globalising and individualising dynamics were at work. On the one hand, some of these collective practices fit in well with a conventional, economistic narrative of capital accumulation even while adapting it to local circumstances by allowing us to identify the people involved as complex beings and not systemic dupes, thereby giving a local twist to more global developments associated with the spread of markets and the associated commodification of human relationships. In the case of housing, middle class, still overwhelmingly white, enclavism in new compounds is one example. This phenomenon has been traced by Murray and others to the rampant commodification of public space in the interest of the wealthy, with private-public partnerships and an ethos of new public management appearing to reflect trends observed in other societies of both the global North and South. Similarly, without seeking to explicitly make a point about consumption, Ivor Chipkin (2013) shows how the production of this type of housing resembles developments in Northern societies like the USA, but Chipkin also suggests that a more localised logic is at work. Such housing is consumed locally because of its fit with the ambitions of an aspiring middle class to escape financially draining familial attachments and to pursue respectability. Gurndlingh's discussion of increasing affluence and consumption by Afrikaners and Hyslop's discussion of white consumption patterns more generally in the apartheid period can also be integrated into this picture of socio-political change responding to the spread of the market without for that reason bypassing people's awareness and agency.

On the other hand, when reading the ethnographic literature I have discussed above one continuously encounters more anomalous forms of consumer agency that responded to what are far more localised dynamics at the level of everyday life. Widespread youth sub-cultures based on shared consumer tastes, enormously diffuse faith healing communities, and social movements by those oppressed or marginalised by local authorities deserve some place in the telling of South African history. Considering the latter groups, it was apparent that housing struggles originated locally through forms of urban collective consumption even while responding in some measure to more blanket political-economic trends in the 1980s and later being woven together into a larger struggle narrative. In the contemporary period similar localised struggles are once more being fought over housing and other services in specific localities and might again scale up. But social change at the level of everyday life, including the consumer practices associated with clothing and faith healing, is no less important when it radically alters the social reality of millions of people. While the economic and political-economic examples of commodity consumption in luxury enclaves mentioned above can be to some extent assimilated into a fairly conventional class narrative, these more localised forms of collective consumer agency resist such a reading, not least because they have all been strongly compartmentalised on racial grounds. In light of all this, I do not believe we need to give up on thinking in terms of race and class. Rather, we need to be more pragmatic in thinking about how these concepts can be used to make historical experience more legible.

7.2.2 The Class in Soweto *project reconsidered*

As an example of how this can be done, I want to briefly return to the *Class in Soweto* project, which I described above as the most challenging endeavour to engage with the complexities of class in contemporary South Africa. What is interesting here is both the attempt to systematically consider subjective understandings of class alongside objective markers, as well as the finding that consumption was central to class identification. At the same time, the researchers believe that the link between the two can be gotten at by cleaving to a neo-Marxist understanding of class. I do not find this convincing, but it is interesting to consider why not, and here I will proceed by way of criticising certain themes in the study. I will also choose to read the book somewhat against the grain, approaching it as a statement about the confluence of class *and* race, putting aside the question of whether this is ultimately a constitutive relationships or merely a result of overlapping trends with distinct racial and class logics. The book, by virtue of its own research limitations, which confine the study to the black, African-majority area of Soweto – found in the 2011 census to be 98.5 per cent African – simply cannot make any claim to speak of class in extra-racial terms without begging the question of whether race and class are mutually constitutive, or indeed of whether race is of prior importance to class.

What the *Class in Soweto* project's researchers found was that conspicuously absent from the self-understandings of class among members of the self-identified middle class in Soweto was any consistent relationship to occupational, educational and other conventional "objective" markers of class (Phadi and Ceruti 2013:154). This is a significant observation because those identifying as middle class constitute two-thirds of Sowetans (Alexander 2013b:236). It was also unexpected, cutting against much received wisdom on class and status and also against the apartheid-era studies of class discussed above, even in the "Neo-Weberian" tradition. In the latter, no symmetrical link between occupation, education and subjective class or status position was observed, but there were nonetheless very important correlations. Rather than relinquishing hope of connecting subjective understandings of stratification to purely objectivist understandings of the sort meticulously outlined by Seekings and Nattrass (2005), where statistics on people's general relationship to paid work as well as occupational category and income are the sole criteria for assigning people to class positions, the *Class in Soweto* group sought to find some connection between subjective class position and more conventional indicators of class. This led them to observe the widespread use of the concept of "affordability" when informants discussed class position, a term which "encapsulates both the ability to consume and maintain a lifestyle, as well as the actual material goods that can be afforded" (Phadi and Ceruti 2013:155). They discuss affordability in order to demonstrate the pervasive existence of an awareness among informants that income played an essential role in securing access to these commodities. This observation, they believe, allows them to build a bridge between the subjective understandings of class they investigated and more measurable, material class structures posited by conventional class analysis , especially of a neo-Marxist variety (Alexander 2013a:29; Phadi and Ceruti 2013:155–56, 159). We are told that "through

affordability, identities are explicitly connected to income, and therefore to having good work or having some other means of generating an income" (Phadi and Ceruti 2013:159).

A first problem with this is that it is far from clear that this appeal to affordability really does the work they want it to do. Income needn't derive from wage labour, as they acknowledge (Ceruti, 2013:76, 82–85). Sowetans, like most South Africans, meet their livelihood needs through a complex mix of market purchase, state redistribution and family and communal reciprocity. In order to banish the complexities that this raises for neo-Marxist understandings of class of the sort they go on to defend, the solution sought here is simply to consign all human activity not relating directly to waged work or informal self-employment to the category of "reproduction". Reproduction, as they use the term, clearly serves as a merely residual concept for spheres of social life that evidently have great importance but exist outside of the sphere of production. Reproduction comes to cover "consumption, and the dynamics of family life, and interventions of the state in the realm of welfare payments, basic services, schools, health care and so forth" (Alexander 2013b:244), and the implication is that all these domains of practice simply reproduce an antecedently established productive order.

As the previous chapters should have already suggested, a less question-begging approach to stratification would have been to consider how it is reproduced or altered through *all* the forms of integration that unite people in pursuit of a livelihood or style of life and not just the market. Some of these assume greater importance than others in certain times and places, in ways that have to be left empirically open. This, however, plays havoc with any reductive class schema. Here the problem is dodged by asserting, *a priori*, that of all these variables in fact *only* waged labour matters for stratification, and everything else is only instrumental to this. Yet, outside of the discomfort that might be felt when departing from productivist orthodoxy, there is no self-evident reason for privileging production, indeed commodity production, as the real foundation of this system and describing all other activity as playing out in a manner that is determined by it.

Viewed more pragmatically, it is clear that in contemporary South Africa the ability to obtain goods that determine a person's standing within stratified social orders is not only determined by one's position in the world of waged work or informal enterprises. It also depends on one's status as a citizen eligible for state grants, upon which many South Africans depend for their livelihoods, and on where one stands as a member of a nuclear or extended family or peer group in which complex relationships of reciprocity are essential for obtaining the material and immaterial goods one seeks. Income gained through reciprocity, in particular, is routinely tossed out of economistic understandings of class. The problem is that, even where there is some understanding of how fully many people's livelihoods depend on reciprocity, it is almost impossible to quantify the extent to which this is so. Most reciprocal exchange – care for the young, old and sick, for instance – is never assigned a monetary value. This is a long-standing argument made by feminists discussing the world of "care", but its enormous implications for discrediting quantitative or "objective" approaches to class still tend to go unappreciated. As

one example of this, we saw that the Zionist churches were a form of extremely widespread reciprocity in South Africa, uniting people beyond their other reciprocal bonds of nuclear or extended family and ensuring the constant shifting of money and other needed goods to the poor. None of this is determined at the point of production, yet it makes an enormous difference for poor people's life chances.

Acknowledging how people's social standing and life chances are determined not just by the market but also by reciprocal ties must also lead to an acknowledgement of the deeply racial structure of all this even in contemporary South Africa. Ironically, market consumption holds out the prospect of social change leading to deracialisation in the form of black entry into the privileged schools and residential areas in which whites still predominate. Such changes have so far been modest tough, and to the extent that they have occurred this has been almost exclusively due to the racially based affirmative action policies implemented by the new black political elite and not due to any purely economic mechanism, because the legacy of apartheid still ensures that whites generally remain far more skilled and better connected in the world of work. Reciprocity networks remain thoroughly racialised too, as the races still scarcely mix. Once we acknowledge the social and political foundations of both class reproduction and change then, it becomes apparent just how fully race and class still converge in contemporary South Africa.

A further problem with the *Class in Soweto* research is that all the immense range of human activity conceptually consigned to the domain of reproduction is understood simply as a strategy of "survival" (Alexander 2013b:244). At best, however, this appeal to survival would be appropriate only to the most economically devastated parts of South Africa. These are towns like Dimbaza in the Eastern Cape or Phutaditjaba in the Free State where unemployment rates are staggering, where people generally possess no skills that would allow them to escape from unemployment, and where they live through hawking food or making clothes for exceedingly low sums, and for the most part survive on government grants and self-grown food alone, sharing what little they have with relatives to get by. Some Sowetans are desperately poor, but most of them, and indeed most poor South Africans, live slightly above this level (Seekings and Nattrass 2015:130). Despite being poor, and the material constraints that clearly come of it, the people interviewed in *Class in Soweto* appear more like the mineworkers that Ferguson encountered on the Copperbelt, or the migrant women that Belinda Bozzoli studied in South Africa, who move within a meaningful margin of choice despite being poor.

For such people too, creativity is not an abstract idea but a basic assumption about how life is to be lived, despite a clear awareness of the constraints that very limited financial resources impose on one's access to commodities. Even though their consumer choices were severely limited, in ways they themselves lucidly grasped, Ferguson (1999:101) argues that it was widely believed among those he encountered on the Copperbelt that there was nonetheless "a certain amount of play, that a great many aspects of social life are not rigidly determined but left up to creative improvisation." Similarly, Bozzoli's (1991:127) detailed study of migrant

African women raising children and maintaining homesteads in apartheid-era South African townships found that, despite the huge constraints binding on them when pursuing their livelihoods,

> [i]t is useful to see these women as active participants in the construction of their own households, rather than as passive victims of the arbitrary requirements of "reproduction". Of course, the process of household construction took place within clear structural constraints…. But the women worked and schemed to overcome or find ways around these constraints, to operate the system to suit their own requirements. Although their designs were not always successful, their own self-image is that of people who regarded the city as a place that provided the resources which they could use, albeit inadequately and at a price.

Ferguson and Bozzoli do not idealise or exaggerate the creativity of the African subjects they encountered, and do not dismiss their obvious hardships, but show that these subjects were doing a great deal more than simply reproducing the workforce through biological nourishment or reproducing existing class structures. They were clearly doing the former, and may or may not have been doing the latter. But I take Bozzoli to mean that this reproduction is "arbitrary", not in the sense that it didn't take place or didn't matter at all, but in the analytical sense that, in either case, this does not itself *explain* the concrete choices they were constantly making. These choices were systemically constrained but not systemically pre-scripted, and the appeal to reproduction falls short of telling us anything meaningful about these choices.

7.2.3 Rethinking the economic context of consumption in South Africa

In moving some distance from the economistic explanations of consumer practices at both a global and a domestic level, and thinking of the significance of consumption rather in terms of more localised social and political forms of solidarity and social integration, I do not mean to suggest that we wholly abandon a concern with the market. Rather, I want only to highlight basic problems that remain unsolved in the existing literature. Firstly, issues that loom large in the international literature on consumption have yet to show up in the South African case. The most important of these is the extent and nature of the penetration of global capital or global forms of local commodification into local contexts. Aside from some research into the establishment and use of shopping malls, advancing the thoroughly contestable claim that these highly commodified zones constitute public spaces of meaningful inter-racial exchange (Houssay-Holzschuch and Teppo 2009), and the more credible but thinly substantiated portrayal of them as representing the interface between processes of neoliberal globalisation and local African life (Houssay-Holzschuch and Teppo 2013), there has been very little qualitatively rich social science inquiry into these issues. As suggested above, the applicability of a globalisation thesis when explaining observed consumer patterns has to be receptive to historical context. Because the focus of globalisation discussions tends to be the market, insofar as the issue of consumption arises it is almost invariably that of commodity consumption

alone, often at the high end of the market. This is somewhat misplaced in the South African setting, and indeed in many other parts of Africa and the global South, where livelihoods are typically spread across market and reciprocal forms, as well as, in cases like South Africa, supplemented by increased redistribution of a sort that, however meagre, fits very poorly with the general experience of "neoliberal" globalisation elsewhere.

I have argued that in African areas like Soweto, taken as an index for urban African life in South Africa more generally, people are often poor but seldom reduced to the level of mere physiological survival. That said, they are of course on the more modest end of the market. Thus Ferguson's observation on globalisation research in Africa, despite his own awareness of the ultimate impossibility of generalising about somewhere as bewilderingly large and diverse as Africa, and despite his statements elsewhere about the real existence of choice even for the poor, still rings true for South Africa too:

> much of the critical literature on globalization seems oddly out of place in Africa. Most Africans can hardly feel that they are being dominated by being forced to take on the goods and forms of a homogenizing global culture when those goods and forms are, in fact, largely unavailable to them. "Globalization" has not brought a global consumer culture within the reach of most Africans, and still less has it imposed a homogenization of lifestyles with a global norm. Rather, it has brought an increasingly acute awareness of the semiotic and material goods of the global rich, even as economic pauperization and the loss of faith in the promises of development have made the chances of actually attaining such goods seem more remote than ever. Under such circumstances, the problems of homogenization that loom large in many accounts of globalization's evils (such as the "McDonaldization" of cuisine or the "culture-eroding" effects of American television) can hardly appear to be burning problems to those who are largely unable to act as consumers of the goods of the global consumer society. (Ferguson 2006:21)

Secondly, when reasoning about the economic dimension of consumption at a more domestic or local level, a great deal more remains to be done to integrate historically-informed accounts of consumer practices at the micro-level of a given consumer field into existing large-scale narratives about historical change. This has to be done in such a way as to clearly challenge or affirm existing narratives of race and class, of the sort that I have briefly touched on in this chapter, and indeed of other large-scale narratives such as nation and gender, which I have not looked at in this study but which are certainly not uninteresting. Doing so should ideally not just be an empirical exercise, and entails also working with generalisable concepts and making one's conceptual approach maximally explicit so that it too can be challenged and modified in accordance with its propensity to reveal, obscure or connect up important historical detail.

Thirdly, and no less importantly, once more of this joining-up work has been done and we have a clearer understanding of the complex and still largely unstudied world of consumption in South Africa, a major challenge is to find a way of balancing the ubiquitous production-side explanations of social change with those on the consumer side when accounting for social

change on the large scale or widely diffuse change at the level of everyday life. Here, too, there needs to be a compromise between empirical and conceptual work, as the answers to these questions do not simply leap out at one when engaging in grounded research but depend also on anterior assumptions. In South Africa, and indeed in many other societies, there is of course an enormous tradition of productivist historiography, going back to the "class" side of the "race–class debate" and recurring in contemporary research like that of Bond or of the *Class in Soweto* project. When explaining specific social changes and balancing production- and consumption-side approaches, Marx's prioritisation of production over consumption can be set off against Sahlins' reversal of this. There are various ways of going about this, but I have suggested that, insofar as action appears intentional, Sahlins is entirely justified in prioritising consumption. This would, however, have to be applied to particular cases, and we would need to think of how the desire for things is met by producers both in and outside of the market sphere, as well as how people respond to this; for instance, by demanding more or better distribution of housing and municipal services, which amounts to the insistence that the goods needed for a livelihood be exchanged through state redistribution instead of on the market and that the state exert itself as an agent promoting the decommodification of everyday life.

7.3 Producing consumption, and consumption's products

In Chapter 2 we saw that, while ludic accounts of consumption alone are capable of registering its expressive potential, we need to avoid the culturalist, largely uncritical understandings of consumption such approaches offer by selectively extracting insights from the production of consumption and socially productive approaches, taking Fine and Bourdieu, respectively, as the most important exponents of each tradition. Here I approach the question of how the conceptual orientation of these traditions, as refracted through the work of these two scholars, can be re-evaluated in light of the proceeding historical and conceptual discussions in order to find points of connection between the study of consumption and critical social theory more generally. I will argue in the sections that follow that the general observations about consumption discussed in this section are relevant both to historiographical reasoning and social science critique. They point towards the practical manner in which, firstly, we can open up analytical territory that tends to be occluded by an economistic overstatement of the power of the market, and particularly of market-oriented production, to systemically structure social and political life. Secondly, these observations about consumption help to reveal the shortcomings of a one-sided focus on reproduction as the outcome of consumption. Thirdly, they allow us to moderate the assumption of egoism and a striving for domination that leads critical accounts of consumption to perpetuate a highly reductive explanatory account of the motivations underpinning consumer action.

7.3.1 The limitations of critical economism in production of consumption approaches

The need to not overestimate market dynamics as a determinant of consumer practices is not only significant for applied historical work, but also has implications for conceptual approaches to consumption. All production of consumption approaches set out from the assumption that the market mediation of social life is already absolute or very nearly so, and that particularly under post-war conditions of capitalism all subjects have been intensely regimented and dehumanised, assenting to the forward march of the market and doing whatever the market itself requires of them to ensure its sustained functioning. Such a view of the social world, while by no means inherently uninteresting in its own right, seems at variance with observed social life. Critical thinkers like Polanyi have been rediscovered in recent times precisely because they argued, in a manner that was both theoretically and empirically sophisticated, that the intrusion of the market tends to be critiqued and resisted when its social and political effects become too harmful, without for all this suggesting that commodification is not a potentially serious problem. Following the lead of Polanyi, while also looking back to Mauss, other economic anthropologists and sociologists have noticed the sustained presence of non-commodity forms in the pursuit of livelihood even in advanced capitalist societies.

Looking at the consumer practices of the African social majority in South Africa, I have argued above that this is particularly true when we turn our attention away from the luxury consumption that dominates most of the consumption literature and also consider everyday forms of consumption, among the relatively wealthy and poor alike. Here it only need be briefly added that doing so suggests that approaches to consumption that remain fixated on the commodity form, and especially on luxury commodities, can be seen to provide weak tools for reaching general conclusions about consumption. When stepping around the consumer society literature and rather working with a thin understanding of consumption that views it as a universal dimension of all human action, not only can the study of consumption be applied empirically with equal ease to both Northern and Southern societies, but also to both rich and poor within and across these societies. When adopting only the minimal, *prima facie* universalisable assumptions about what consumption potentially entails as laid out in Chapter 1, it becomes immediately apparent that consumption among the poor is heavily reliant on redistributive and reciprocal forms of production and exchange, such that a market-centred conceptual approach to consumption is unworkable in these settings in precisely the same proportion that people at any given time and place do not, as a matter of contingent, historical fact, meet their lifestyle needs through production, exchange and consumption on the market.

Fine's systems of provision approach, the most sophisticated among the production of consumption approaches, offers no way out of the problem. We saw in Chapter 2 that Fine is exceptional within the production of consumption tradition for allowing in principle that non-market influences like race or gender – which he labels as "cultural" – can shape consumer action in a non-derivative fashion, at least for certain classes of consumer goods. This opens the door to a complex, constitutive understanding of class and race, and also of gender and other

variables I have not considered, as potentially essential social dimensions of practices that are usually considered to simply effect or be effected by a purportedly distinct domain of economic practice, including consumer practice. Unfortunately, while allowing for this in principle to inform his proposed systems of provision approach to consumption, in practice Fine never for a moment allows this to be so and indeed proceeds to assail this very idea at almost very turn. What appears to cloud Fine's judgement on these issues is a more basic set of historical assumptions that he never adequately interrogates. He assumes a clean division between the cultural on the one hand and the economic on the other, the latter clearly modelled on market forms characterised by capitalist social and economic arrangements.[123] It is against this background that Fine's entire systems of provision approach sets out to assess the purportedly independent effect of economic variables in ideal-typical systems of capitalist production on consumer behaviour, in strict opposition to the culturalist approaches to consumption that he believes are too dismissive of economic determination. The latter turn out to have a place, but only *within* a more basic determination by the former. To suggest a tension *between* these modes of provisioning is never seriously contemplated, and to *reverse* this order of precedence, as Sahlins does, invariably occasions in Fine poorly substantiated accusations of postmodernism, yet all of these are empirical possibilities that have to be decided from case to case and not in principle.

While Fine adopts a strongly critical approach to economic practices, he appears to possess no grounding for thinking of them outside of capitalist commodity production, which is why he seems so intent on bringing everything back to it analytically. Thus his splitting of the economic and the cultural seems insufficiently critical of the capitalist ideal of an unregulated economic domain of market-oriented production and exchange that simply *affects* other spheres of social life loosely lumped together into a residual cultural domain, or that is affected by them, overlooking the constitutive relationship between the economic and the cultural, on the market and beyond. This assumption also leads Fine to focus almost exclusively on physical commodities produced under capitalist economic relations when articulating what systems of provision are. He therefore perpetually slides between discussing systems of provision as such and discussing *commodity* provision in particular without qualification (e.g. Fine 2002:174–75; Fine et al. 1996:69–72), even despite having conceptually modified his earlier position on these issues to take non-commodified forms of consumption into account.

7.3.2 Delinking consumption and reproduction

A second generalisable claim of my discussion of consumption above is that any *a priori* connection between consumption and reproduction in either the physical or social senses of this term cannot be sustained. We must rather always ask in an open-ended fashion whether and in what way consumption leads to either social reproduction or change, with this always being applied to specific fields of consumption in concrete times and places. What we can assert in general terms can then be framed at an intermediary level between specific consumer

fields and all consumer action as such, by considering how consumer practices alter the forms of integration they are constitutively bound up with. Here too we clearly are very unlikely, for historical reasons, to be able to conceptually generalise across any entire form of integration, but what we can do is significantly expand our understanding of how all forms of integration have ambivalent *potentials* for social reproduction and change that can be consciously harnessed by consumers.

We can, for instance, show that any attempt to portray consumption on the market as necessarily reproducing social stratification is misguided. Individuals and sub-cultural groups, even among the poor, while acting within the obviously restrictive limits of lower incomes, can often be found to deliberately adjust their consumer behaviour to reposition themselves within an existing stratification order or to break away from an established order of stratification by inverting or altering its guiding values among a milieu of like-minded outcasts and innovators. Similarly, socially and politically aligned groups can deliberately choose to leverage markets through measures such as boycotts. Or in the case of redistribution, writers like Marcuse (2002:52–54) and Bourdieu (1990 [1980]:122–23) have argued that redistribution, despite its material benefits, can have socially harmful social and political consequences insofar as it reinforces domination by making people dependent on central authority, and this is not at all difficult to confirm, as we have seen in the case of South African housing provision. But looking at redistribution over significant stretches of time can, as we also saw, equally be revealing of the manner in which dissatisfaction with redistribution in the context of consciously formed social norms and expectations for future social change can feed into massive social discontent that threatens regimes.

Fully registering the complexity of the options available here therefore requires that one take some distance from the literature that continues to equate consumption *as such* with reproduction. Here I will briefly consider what this might mean when applied to Bourdieu's writing in particular, whose authority is still routinely invoked in all the leading consumption literature, while also having a very wide resonance far beyond consumption studies. Bourdieu's understanding of reproduction does not relate to the bodies of labourers selling their labour power or to the overall maintenance of capitalism in particular, as it does for Marx and Engels and for those adapting these ideas in the production of consumption tradition, but rather to the maintenance of hierarchical social divisions within human societies considered in more anthropologically embracing terms.

The fundamental problem is that in Bourdieu's field analysis, especially as worked out in *Distinction*, the whole question of whether to relate consumption to reproduction is determined in advance across all fields of consumption. This is in its turn the consequence, not of the complex empirical observation of consumer practices that Bourdieu offers, but of the conceptual reading of this material in terms of a functionally understood *habitus*. Consider again the conceptual work that *habitus* is meant to do. *Habitus* is the basic explanatory principle in Bourdieu's mature work, in the sense that it is invoked to explain how objective order and

subjective intelligibility inhere in the social domain. As conditioned by the objective makeup of the various social fields at any given time and in a given society, it is through the existence of *habitus* that "all the practices and products of a given agent are objectively harmonized among themselves, without any deliberate pursuit of coherence, and objectively orchestrated, without any conscious concertation, with those of all members of the same class" (Bourdieu 1996:172–73). Where social change occurs, this is because the *habitus* has, usually unconsciously and blindly, evolved through the cumulative effects of subjectively isolated but objectively homologous struggles for domination. Bourdieu nonetheless perpetually highlights how social domination is *reproduced* by *habitus*. Bourdieu is an obviously sophisticated thinker and clearly grasps that social reproduction and change are two dimensions of a single inter-connected problem. All the same, this has no real effect on his conceptual or empirical work, and at least in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* and *Distinction* he perpetually places the emphasis squarely on reproduction when discussing the social effects of consumer practices (e.g. Bourdieu 2013:72–87; 1996:109–112, 164–65, 250–51; see also Bourdieu 2000:172–80).[124] What Craig Calhoun (1993:70) says of Bourdieu in general is certainly true of these two pivotal works:

> Bourdieu repeatedly urges us to see history and sociology as inseparably linked, but his sociology does not offer much purchase on the transformation of social systems…. [H]is accounts of the general system of social and cultural organization always render it as essentially conservative; they suggest no reasons why a logic of reproduction would not work.

As Calhoun implies here, there is nothing in principle misleading about identifying both reproduction and change within any given social collectivity over time. What is nonetheless problematic, due to its propensity to lead to reductive empirical work, is to systematically portray all observed forms of change as themselves captive to a more fundamental logic of social reproduction and then to suggest that we can safely generalise outward from this to all other social cases. In this manner Bourdieu explains away all evidence of what he thinks of as cultural change as subservient to what he posits as the deeper reality of perpetual, unchanging social domination along class lines. This is not simply a matter of methodologically *emphasising* elements of social reproduction for the purpose of drawing attention to something that has been left out of or downplayed in scholarly debate, which can indeed be useful. Bourdieu constantly pushes the idea that, by overlooking the perpetuation of social domination, scholars overlook what is in itself of most significance for explaining the most basic features of all forms of action within society.

With *habitus* posited as a kind of hidden hand steering all social practice there is, at the individual or micro level, a certain objective homogeneity between the behaviour of individual members of classes. At the macro level at which these classes inter-relate, Bourdieu further assumes both the constant success of strategies aimed at class distinction and a principle unifying all social behaviour that ensures that the gap between classes remains completely static, with whatever statistical turbulence that arises here at any given moment always being

balanced out over time. At the individual level this purported tendency toward deep-level stasis despite surface-level turbulence is experienced as the gradual, grim settling in to a fate that was always pre-determined, a purely statistical variation on what disenchanted social scientists know to really be "collective destiny" (Bourdieu 1996:112):

> Social ageing is nothing other than the slow renunciation or disinvestment (socially assisted and encouraged) which leads agents to adjust their aspirations to their objective chances, to espouse their condition, become what they are and make do with what they have, even if this entails deceiving themselves as to what they are and what they have, with collective complicity, and accepting bereavement of all the "lateral possibles" they have abandoned along the way. (Bourdieu 1996:110–11)

As a description of the fatalist approach to life that oppressed and disenfranchised, or thoroughly depoliticised and isolated, individuals might in some societies slip into, this seems a fair and sobering description, but it is perhaps telling how Bourdieu seems to conflate a historically peculiar condition of extreme heteronomy with the human condition in general. Admittedly, however, Bourdieu is everywhere infinitely less interested in individual experience and its ethical or emotional underpinnings than in the collective interactions through which social production and reproduction are ensured. At the macro level which really interests Bourdieu, he believes social production and reproduction hinge in large measure on the constant renewal over time of social institutions that work as "objective mechanisms"[125] to limit competition, such as the conferral of titles of property, nobility or academic and professional qualifications, which safeguard the overall hierarchical structuring of society (Bourdieu 1996:161; 2013:183–90). It is for the safeguarding or attainment of these that much consumer activity strives. Bourdieu realises, however, that institutions exist only in virtue of their constant renewal by individuals, and are often contested, all of which entail a certain dynamism and might suggest that socially productive change prevails over reproduction, or that at any rate the two hang in a dynamic balance. In *Outline of a Theory of Practice* and *Distinction* he nonetheless repeatedly assigns social change to an ephemeral surface phenomenon and social reproduction to the deep structure of society, such that this tension is effectively dissolved. For this reason Bourdieu's insistence that he is not fundamentally interested in reproduction has been rightly resisted by many critics as it indeed does not square with his actual explanatory strategies.

In *Distinction*, this insistent prioritisation of reproduction turns into a discussion of how attempts by members of lower placed social classes to circumvent institutionalised obstacles to status competition and achieve upward social mobility, by adapting their lifestyles and the everyday consumption practices underpinning them, are constantly offset by the similar efforts of their social superiors to recuperate lost ground. This can be viewed as an implicit negation of the efficacy of strategies of consumer resistance that theorists such as Certeau would later try to introduce into social science thought. Bourdieu (1996:151–61) asserts, without evidence, that

the two sets of effort always cancel one another out, such that the original class structure remains unchanged in its essentials. The overall effect is, metaphorically, one of a

> race in which, after a series of bursts in which various runners forge ahead or catch up, the initial gaps are maintained; in other words … the attempts of the initially most disadvantaged groups to come into possession of the assets previously possessed by groups immediately above them in the social hierarchy or immediately ahead of them in the race are more or less counterbalanced, at all levels, by the efforts of better-placed groups to maintain the scarcity and distinctiveness of their assets. (Bourdieu 1996:160–61)

In this race members of a lower-placed group may, over time, attain the same substantial style of life as their former superiors, or at least some of the same tokens, but by then members of the higher-placed group will themselves have moved on, in the process shifting the basic co-ordinates of the whole status system (Bourdieu 1996:164–74). The stasis assumed in reproduction is therefore not in the concrete objects that signal status – clothing, housing, furnishing, and so on, along with immaterial professions of taste and modes of consuming – but rather in the differential access to them on which the whole system of status is built. In Bourdieu's (1996:164) telling formula, "what the competitive struggle makes everlasting is not different conditions, but the difference between conditions".

A large part of the problem is that Bourdieu does exceedingly little in *Distinction* to explain how social domination in general, and domination through the market in particular, responds to critique, often of a political nature. At the most general level, we could say, in Castoriadian terms, that Bourdieu's conceptual assumptions about action and subjectivity, which pre-structure his inquiry, lead him to consistently overlook or play down autonomous action and to correspondingly exaggerate the empirical presence of heteronomy in everything he turned his attention to, while further projecting this heteronomy backwards in time in ways that are arbitrarily related to his own complex empirical investigations. As Luc Boltanski has pointed out, once domination has been identified and challenged it thereafter has to find ways to explicitly legitimate itself, such that most systems of domination can be found empirically to rest on corresponding forms of conscious legitimation. Bourdieu is not wholly unaware of this problem, at least in later works (Reay 2010:80–82), but it is fair to say that his efforts to systematically play down the importance of conscious knowledge as an independent variable when accounting for both social reproduction and change lead him to consistently overlook the ways in which the violation of social norms meets with critique and requires justification, as well as the manner in which such attempts at justification can fail (Boltanski 2011:2–6, 20–22). The result is an approach to social life in which systemic reproduction of an underlying class order is posited as an eternal social fact. We are led to believe that consumer action can reinforce this "everlasting" order but can never meaningfully challenge it, yet this fails to correspond to what we can in fact observe.

7.3.3 Questioning the consuming subject

In addition to the need to avoid prejudging the extent of commodification as a determinant of consumption, as well as the need sever any strong connection between consumer action in general and reproduction, we also have grounds for being cautious about flattening out our understanding of consumer motivations. The question of consumer motivation is essential for any agentic understanding of consumption, and it is indeed here that considering concrete consumer practices over time against the conceptual background of an expressivist approach to consumption suggests the strongest reasons for departing from existing approaches to consumption. As we saw in Chapter 2, ludic approaches like those of Bell and Campbell posit a hedonistic consuming subject, while sometimes also allowing for greater depth, as in Bataille's or Turner's unsystematic but interesting accounts of anomic forms of consumption in search of heightened sexual or spiritual experience. The values that move these consumers to action are what would usually be called cultural, such as the Romantic Ethic for Campbell and the spirit of "modernist" hedonism for Bell, although again Bataille and Turner also consider in places the consumption of more marginal groups, implying a greater plurality of consumer motivations within any given cultural milieu than that allowed by a basically dichotomous split between the Protestant Ethic and an opposed hedonic ethos. Production of consumption perspectives have an altogether different understanding of consumer motivation, always seeing it as in some sense induced and illusory and arising on the side of the economy, in the sense of a capitalist market. Even where consumers are understood as hedonistic in production of consumption approaches, they are simultaneously thought of as pursuing pleasure at the bidding of a larger system of total domination, thereby also concretising their own oppression, and are invariably viewed as at bottom miserable or simply too dehumanised to feel authentic emotion at all.

Both approaches ultimately tend to reason about consumption in overly generalised terms and offer little critical purchase on the complexities of consumption that become apparent when looking at particular consumer practices from a historically-informed perspective. In my close-up examination of specific consumer practices in chapters 4–6 I argued that they were apparently set in motion by complex understandings of the place of the self in relation to others against the backdrop of colonial-era racial domination and their subsequent outgrowths, as well as a more recent, still-incomplete attempt to dismantle this domination, not only politically but also socially. In this regard, socially productive approaches to consumption take us some way forward, with Bourdieu's development of themes pioneered by Veblen and Simmel having attracted a phenomenal amount of interest due its theoretical and empirical complexity. Here I want to suggest what is unsatisfactory about this approach when considered specifically from the perspective of what it tells us about consumer motivation, which we can get at by probing the lingering economism in Bourdieu's critical project. Bourdieu strongly repudiates economistic thinking, and clearly departs from its assumptions of rational and highly individualised calculation. A number of critics have nonetheless noted, from the perspective of the social subject's assumed ethical orientation in Bourdieu's work,

how very little this understanding of human motivation actually differs from the strategic calculator of profits assumed in mainstream economistic thought. Bourdieu has tried to deflect such accusations by arguing that the type of interest he assumes makes no trans-historical claims and has to be determined empirically, but in fact Bourdieu everywhere makes the universalist assumption that all interest is interest in enhancing power or wealth (Calhoun 1993:70–71; Honneth 1995a:xvi, 199–201; Joas and Knöbl 2011:13–17).

One could, of course, defend Bourdieu by arguing that he by no means ruled out an ethical and emotional relationship to the social world as in some sense subjectively significant, and simply considered ethics and emotions of little relevance to the explanation of the basic objective dynamics of social life, and especially of social reproduction. This is indeed quite likely, and the neglect is hardly just Bourdieu's. It is of course difficult to generalise in these terms, but here Bourdieu would seem, despite the overall extreme complexity of his thought, merely to reflect a far wider tendency in the social sciences, which pay altogether very little attention to the manner in which the world is a matter of *concern* to people (Sayer 2011:1–10). I touched on this problem in Chapter 1, when arguing that thinkers like Castoriadis and Sahlins usefully advance our understanding of social action by highlighting its semantic nature, but themselves also have little to say about why actors in fact choose between different meaningful choices of action. This requires some understanding of human motivation, and of values as the link between meaning and motivation. Of course, it is not the case that all forms of ethical or emotional concern are totally overlooked in critical social theory, but often that they are only very reductively assimilated to the explanatory principles used to account for social life. To the extent that people are understood as concerned beings, there appears to be a tacit assumption at work to the effect that explanations of social life in terms of self-interest and power are far more clear-sighted and scientific than grounding one's analysis in ethics and emotions (Sayer 2010:96). However one wishes to characterise this tendency – Sayer calls it "scientistic and macho" – it seems inevitably to lead to reductive social science.

To my knowledge, the best existing framework for thinking critically about ethics and emotions as significant dimensions of *social* life, and especially of the political and economic dimensions of social life, is in terms offered by theories of recognition. As exemplified in pivotal works like Honneth's *The Struggle for Recognition* (1995b), recognitional accounts of human motivation work as a corrective to the strongly utilitarian bias of much common-sense and academic thought, where the assumption is that desire for things motivates domination over others. From a recognitional perspective, this is only exceptionally true. Rather, as deeply sociable beings, humans are assumed to want to relate favourably to others, and under ordinary circumstances the desire for things is a means to this sociable end.

In *Pascalian Meditations* Bourdieu explores the recognitional dimension of symbolically mediated social relationships, but given his unfailing association of the symbolic with the illusory, Bourdieu's discussion really amounts to an exploration of "misrecognition". By choosing to portray recognitional exchanges as zero-sum games in which the stakes are quantifiable and finite packets of capital, his discussion of recognition is also best understood

in terms of the necessarily positional form of recognition usually called "status", "honour" or "prestige". Admittedly, in an uncharacteristically humanistic moment, Bourdieu acknowledges that the stakes in the struggle for recognition of symbolic capital are high, as "there is no worse dispossession, no worse privation, perhaps, than that of the losers in the symbolic struggle for recognition, for access to a socially recognized social being, in a word, to humanity" (Bourdieu 2000:241). Such dispossession is the essence of "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu 2000:168–72). However, while he argues that recognition is about conferring meaning on life (Bourdieu 2000:240–41), Bourdieu (2000:242–45) brings this back to what he views as a *more fundamental* struggle for domination. The recognition of symbolic capital is in Bourdieu's world always a matter of assuming impersonal roles and thereby throwing up illusions about the self in order to better dominate others while escaping domination by them, and is only to be taken at face value by the hopelessly naive:

> Every kind of capital (economic, cultural, social) tends (to different degrees) to function as symbolic capital (so that it might be better to speak, in rigorous terms, of the *symbolic effects of capital*) when it obtains an explicit or practical recognition…. In other words, symbolic capital (male honour in Mediterranean societies, the honourability of the notable or the Chinese mandarin, the prestige of the celebrated writer, etc.) is not a particular kind of capital but what every kind of capital becomes when it is misrecognized as capital, that is, as force, a power or capacity for (actual or potential) exploitation. (Bourdieu 2000:242; emphasis in original)

In taking such a narrow view of things, Bourdieu overlooks how recognition might also function as a basic human necessity without which people in any human society would appear to be unable to realise their most elementary human potentials. People everywhere, whatever else they might require, appear to always need a shared framework of understanding characterised by respect and love, failing which they either succumb to developing pathological forms of self-identity or else struggle socially and politically in order to establish relationships in which their recognitional needs can be met (Honneth 1995b; Taylor 1992). Bourdieu's reductive account of motivation is symptomatic of the general problem that in his laudable attempt to expose the saturation of everyday life with forms of domination he simply loses sight of all the other ways in which people relate to their social worlds. However one might choose to characterise this brand of reductionism in critical social theory – as implicitly conveying an almost "gnostic" sense of a fallen and desiccated world, for instance (Graeber 2001:30) – it is certainly problematic. People always possess some set of more or less individual desires, but they do not invariably take a selfish perspective on whether or how to satisfy these. Even in thoroughly individualised or fragmented societies, there is almost always a whole lot more going on.

By seeing domination everywhere, a Bourdieuvian perspective on the social world has in one sense a strong claim to offering a *critical* social theory. It achieves this, however, at the cost of forfeiting the capacity to qualitatively distinguish between instrumental and expressive forms of agency, reducing the latter to the former in an *a priori* manner that is constitutively incapable of registering historical nuance without departing from its own basic assumptions. To see why

this is, consider the argument in *Distinction* that aesthetic judgement, despite its seeming disinterest, is really interested judgement, unconsciously formed by one's class position and aimed at domination. If this is so then everything in the social world we relate to aesthetically (that is, for Bourdieu, also symbolically or culturally) would appear to be subsumed into this functional relationship of domination. What appears to get completely lost here is the sense, discussed in Chapter 1, of how we might relate to others, and to others through things, in an expressive manner, or *both* expressively and instrumentally, which was how Mauss understood the manner in which people relate aesthetically to the objects of the world and ethically to one another. Aesthetically guided action might then entrench symbolic domination very much in the manner that Bourdieu claims it does. But because it also might not, or might do so only very partially, we would need to avoid generalising about aesthetic behaviour in the manner that Bourdieu does and we would have to develop a far more nuanced understanding of the *stakes* of social action. In short, as suggested in Chapter 6, we would have to know how to recognise the gift when we see it.

Like the early Frankfurt School thinkers discussed in Chapter 2, Bourdieu's relentless critique of the present in *Distinction* tends to be strikingly one-sided, and the cost of this is the tendency to overlook existing potentialities for what might plausibly count as progressive change. Similarly, in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, where Bourdieu sets out his account of reciprocity through gift exchange in what is teleologically understood as the "pre-capitalist" world, Bourdieu's brand of demystifying social science may in principle shed light on individual case studies but is poorly suited for formulating general principles. As Graeber (2001:27–29) argues, we do far better to follow Mauss in distinguishing between more or less agonistic contexts of giving instead of subsuming them all under a universal principle. Thus even if we are convinced that Bourdieu accurately describes the economic practices of the Kabyle, instead of indiscriminately projecting calculating motives onto those he observes in all spheres of their ceremonial life, he still offers no compelling reason for extrapolating from this case to all "pre-capitalist" economies, as he constantly does.

In *Pascalian Meditations* Bourdieu (2000:191–202) speaks of the "twofold truth of the gift", which might superficially suggest a more nuanced position, but there he simply restates and elaborates on his earlier position without relinquishing his basic thesis that altruism in gift-giving is a matter of individual and collective self-deception facilitated by the passage of time between gift and counter-gift, with the logic of gift-giving essentially no different from that of market exchange other than the former being in bad faith about the self-interest involved. Thus for Bourdieu the phenomenological "truth" of disinterestedness is, in fact, as seen from the demystified perspective of the social analyst capable of taking a temporally broader and dispassionate perspective on the interaction, not a truth at all. Reciprocity, in the form of gift exchange, is nothing but "a collective hypocrisy in and through which society pays homage to its dream of virtue and disinterestedness" (Bourdieu 2000:201).

In the end, all that sets Bourdieu apart from the "economistic" thinking he takes issue with is his claim that the interest in question is not a matter of intentional calculation by atomised

individuals but rather of individuals burdened with the socialised dispositions of classes. The perspective I have developed, following Castoriadis and Sahlins, rather views instrumental action as always one moment in the larger pursuit of ends that are ultimately non-instrumental outside of certain limiting cases. Thus even at the intra-societal level at which Bourdieu focuses his analysis, we do best to distinguish between those instrumental actions that are functional to the maintenance of social hierarchies and those aimed at encompassing larger social or more personal ends that are inherently ethical or expressive. Such action will differ between groups, but what is at stake here are actions motivated by the desire for self-realisation and which will usually as such also require social recognition. Bourdieu, however, flattens out the distinction in the interest of formulating what is a basically functionalist account of social life by arguing that expressive action is only ever *seemingly* uninterested in class domination.

7.4 Consumer studies and anti-reductionism

Above I have suggested that the ultimate potential of consumer studies lies in ranging beyond the narrow field that goes under this name, using the insights that can be gleaned from it to show up dimensions of social life that are conventionally ignored or misrepresented. The study of consumption, I have argued, can be used to challenge the economistic, and especially the productivistic, reductionism of much critical social theory, though caution also has to be taken in order to avoid an opposing culturalist reductionism. Conventional historical narratives that have taken on these productivistic biases might be expanded or reworked in a manner that allows them to register the potential significance of consumer action in shaping the institutional life of society, in the process identifying social and political practices that are not systemic outgrowths of more basic productive action but potentially undetermined, creative endeavours.

At the institutional level, I have argued that consumer practices can give rise to associational forms that are invariably overlooked in conventional narratives of social life employing broad sociological categories such as race and class. Social and political life in South Africa has never ceased to be deeply patterned by both race and class, even while class differences have become more salient in the post-apartheid period with the dismantling of some of the boundaries to social mobility across racial lines. Nonetheless, consumer practices, with varying degrees of success, have always sought both to reinforce and to erase these race and class differences. These practices have established market-based, redistributive and reciprocal forms of integration existing between the level of races and classes and that of isolated individuals that better resemble what are variously discussed in terms of sub-cultures, social movements or kinship groups. Globalisation, which looms so large in contemporary discussions of consumption, has had an effect on the consumption of tradable commodities like clothing, facilitating the adoption of cosmopolitan styles among sub-cultural groups, although these styles have always been to some extent creolised and have to be understood as, above all, responses to domestic and regional dynamics of racial domination and poverty. The

penetration of increasingly global trends like urban commodification and new public management on the production side has also shaped housing consumption, but this pertains to its private dimension and not to public housing provision. The latter has always been subject to domestic social and political steering in accordance with the peculiar redistributive goals of the apartheid and post-apartheid elites, and has occasioned grassroots resistance by those that have failed to benefit from this redistribution in a manner that fits with their expectations. When considering faith healing, the influence of globalisation is even harder to discern given the very localised dynamics of reciprocity that faith healing practices respond to.

At a social-theoretical level, I have argued, these low-level social formations can effect meaningful social change in ways that are not determined by the system of commodity production and which have to be conceptualised in their own right, without making any reproductive assumptions. Production of consumption theories fail to take this into account, and I have argued that ultimately the more sophisticated socially productive approaches to consumption, directly traceable back to Veblen and Simmel but most influentially developed by Bourdieu, fare little better in this regard. The basic problem here is, ultimately, an incomplete break with structuralism and an associated tendency to adopt a thoroughly reductive view of the social agent. Bourdieu's brand of critical theory has a certain claim to sober, realistic diagnosis of the social constraints that weigh down on individuals. At the same time, this critical dimension is so thoroughly expanded that it leads into a constant evasion of another indispensible critical task: that of identifying emancipatory potentials within the present or past, especially among lay people at the level of everyday life. At one level, this has the unintentionally elitist consequence of making it seem as if the real work of emancipation must issue from the endeavours of insightful sociologists alone. As Boltanski (2011:19) notes, "in Bourdieu's case the enterprise of emancipation is mainly based on the practice of sociology itself". At a yet deeper level it is probably also not altogether unfair to view Bourdieu's project, as Alexander (1995:129) has argued, as itself insufficiently critical of the "corrosive cynicism of our time", for "[n]o matter what the ideals of an actor, a group, or an age, Bourdieu's theory of practice suggests, they are bound to be degraded by the strategic will to power that underlies, and undermines, every dimension of social life." I have tried throughout to suggest that, when yoking the study of consumption to a wider critical enterprise, less reductive possibilities exist, and that if used correctly these do not disable the critical potential of social theory. Rather, they allow theory to adopt a more nuanced and articulate position on the inescapably ethical dimension both of everyday social life and the enterprise of social theory itself, allowing critically-minded social theorists to rest content, at times, with merely articulating and critiquing the emancipatory endeavours of ordinary people.

Conclusion

Consumption and institutional change

I have argued that consumption does not always passively respond to production. It can both reproduce and alter a given social order. The study of social change cannot afford to ignore the significance of consumer practices because consumption has the potential to do more than sustain people's bodies or to otherwise safeguard the production of any given social order. The work of reproduction is certainly not trivial, but the tendency to equate consumption and reproduction at a conceptual level leads to unnecessarily reductive empirical analyses. On the other hand, we also should not overstate the significance of consumption as a propeller of change on purely conceptual grounds. While work here is necessary for showing up the questions begged in purely instrumental and functional accounts of consumer practices, we have to avoid deciding such questions in advance, although we can of course go on to draw attention to one or other side of the conceptually inseparable pair of change/reproduction for expository purposes.

When arguing for the need to pay more attention to the potential connection between consumption and social change, I have avoided associating consumption with any particular institutional field. Instead of viewing consumption as market purchase, I have viewed it, loosely following Marx, as the realisation of value. From this perspective, consumption can be viewed as a universal activity and not something limited to "consumer societies". I have also argued that consumption is not necessarily less of an agentic and morally interpretive domain of action than all others. Here I have engaged with Arendt, who develops an impressively universal understanding of consumption, as a foil for my own position by arguing that consumption potentially possesses all the attributes of the expressive activity she calls "action" and reserves for political activity alone. I have also argued that Sahlins offers compelling reasons for maintaining that consumption precedes production in the order of explanation when accounting for the observed institutional makeup of all human societies. I have contended, however, that we cannot directly *assume* this any more than the more common reverse proposition. We can nonetheless assume, with Giddens, that social life is generally intentionally patterned, and insofar as people behave intentionally it indeed is difficult to grasp how Sahlins might be wrong, as consumption is always the intentional end of production.

In working from this very general approach – the "expressive" approach to consumption sketched out in Chapter 1 – I have tried to avoid slipping in to a culturalist reductionism of the sort I associated in Chapter 2 with the "ludic" approach to consumption. Despite the insights it contains, the ludic approach usually explains social action in an excessively voluntaristic fashion, ignoring issues of a generally economic nature, or paying little attention to social

power. Relating consumption to culture has, however, often been the most effective way of escaping from economistic reductionism, and particularly the productivistic reductionism of much critical social science thought. Indeed I would suggest that productivist reasoning about consumption has become so commonplace within critical social theory as to constitute something like an unreflective common sense or folk wisdom. Departures from it, even when well-grounded, simply seem suspicious, too close to the marketer's image of a society of free consumers ecstatically shaping their worlds in obedience only to the vagaries of caprice. Sahlins's rigorous and unsparing critique of productivism in *Culture and Practical Reason* (1976) nonetheless remains an excellent point of departure for seeing what productivism misses, and Sahlins certainly cannot be accused of buying into this shallow view of consumption. By systematically extending Sahlins's argument beyond the market to the "human economy" as a whole, I believe there is far more to be learnt from this book than from any other single major work on consumption.

Social science cannot make any progress in formulating or challenging generalisable propositions without relying, even if only implicitly, on ideal-typical constructions. At the same time, by reasoning in this fashion one always runs the risk of analytically reifying observable social practices. What allows the intentional nature of consumer practices to go unnoticed is excessive reliance on a very common but highly abstract mode of basically political-economic reasoning. It is sufficiently commonplace in critical social science literature to discuss the economy as co-extensive with the market, itself driven by agentless forces of supply and demand, for people to forget that supply and demand are ideal-typical abstractions. Abstraction in these terms is useful for keeping questions about large-scale and long-duration social processes in sight and enabling generalisation, but this mode of reasoning is also difficult to pull off without simultaneously reifying the vastly more complex and diffuse practices that are in fact being gestured at.

Relying on ethnographic research is indispensible for escaping this reification, as social events are explained in more humanistic terms, giving us some sense of what people think and feel about the things they do, and the complexity of life closer to the everyday level comes into focus. For this reason I have drawn heavily on ethnographic work from my chosen South African case, and especially from the largely forgotten neo-Weberian and anthropological work on urban African life, while also trying not to lose sight of how these very temporally and spatially focussed studies might form part of a larger historical picture that is of necessity only conceivable through abstraction.

I have posed the question of the institutional dimension of consumption in terms of its capacity to foster socio-political change. Socially, I looked at whether existing group integration was widened or fragmented, or else atomised through individualisation. I have also asked whether consumption promoted political mobilisation or demobilisation, and whether consumer practices served to shore up the legitimacy of the status quo or call it into question. When looking at clothing consumption we see neither blanket individualisation nor depoliticisation,

as one would expect from reading mainstream critiques of consumption. There were elements of both, but also some political resistance through boycotts and a great deal of sociation occurring between the level of the individual, on the one hand, and a cohesive race or class on the other. Housing consumption on the market has been tied up with the social reproduction of class and race distinctions in the post-apartheid period. When looking at the political dimension of housing consumption, however, we get a clear picture of the potential of consumer practices for fomenting change. The effect of dependence by poor, black South Africans on the state for redistribution, along with dissatisfaction with the performance of state officials, especially at the local level, led to massive housing boycotts and other protests in the apartheid period that were a major incentive to regime change. Similar changes are afoot in the post-apartheid period, though not generally of the same radical intensity, often being caught up in the in-fighting between factions within the local state that still command divided loyalties. Importantly, however, insofar as redistributive housing provision has been a tool used by state officials for attempting to produce docile or loyal political subjects, it failed to attain its ends, giving rise in the apartheid period to the kind of social movements united through collective consumption of the sort that Castells discussed. The current ruling party enjoys more legitimacy, but this legitimacy is being heavily eroded by disappointed expectations that improved redistribution would lead to a levelling of living standards in South Africa.

Production and consumption are being used here in an extended sense, and this can be stretched even further, into the domain of reciprocity. The type of subjectivity produced through faith healing was apolitical, despite a slight turn toward politics in the dying years of apartheid. In this sense, and assuming that the political neutrality of millions of citizens is best read as a social or political fact of enormous consequence, then one might even argue that it reproduced political domination under apartheid. Zionism in South Africa can be seen as a utopian social project by the South African poor (Sundkler 2004:248; 1976:313; Comaroff 1985:214), but one which, for most of the apartheid period did little to oppose the attempted establishment of a white racial utopia, and which has only since around the 1990s ventured into the domain of pragmatic political mobilisation. The real change has, however, been a social change at the level of everyday life. In the perpetually increasing Zionist churches, at any rate, millions of South Africans have found a way to attain both material assistance and inter-personal recognition in what amount to extended kinship groups premised on the pursuit of health. Ironically, while pursuing reproduction of the body, a new form of communitarian reciprocity has been created at the social level.

Further research on the consumer dimension of social change in South Africa could flesh out this picture far more across all the forms of integration, but I am in no position to do this here. In addition to providing a more complete and ordered outline of consumer practices than exists at present in the South African literature on consumption, such research could form part of an even more ambitious attempt to join the picture that would emerge from this up with the existing production-side narratives of the neo-Marxists and of other scholars rightly stressing

the importance of production in South African history. My intention here has only been to suggest that such an attempt can be made, and to lay out what I believe is a useful approach for reconstructing the consumption side of this fuller picture, while also indicating how the issue of the relative explanatory priority of production or consumption can be approached conceptually.

Consumption and the motivational grounds of solidarity

I ended Chapter 7 with the argument that one of the challenges that remains for research on consumption is to better articulate the motivational grounding of consumer practices. While certainly the most important work on the institutional significance of consumption in all societies, Sahlins's *Culture and Practical Reason* has very little to offer in this regard. Sahlins is excessively structuralist in his implicit understanding of human motivation there, and indeed later went on to occasionally invoke Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* in his own work (Sahlins 1985:29, 51). This allows Sahlins to bypass complex questions of human motivation in the same fashion that Bourdieu himself does, though he clearly understands that human motivation is complex in ways that a flattened moral psychology concerned only with domination cannot adequately register. I have argued that consumption is an activity rendered meaningful by social imaginary significations and motivated by the desire to realise value. When speaking of the imaginary dimension of consumption I refer to its semantic constitution, and insofar as "cultural" discussions of consumption of the sort that Sahlins offers bring this to light they help to resist the idea that consumption is a passive, systemically-conditioned form of action. If we go only so far, however, we still do not do enough to convey the agentic nature of consumption, and more deterministic, structuralist accounts of consumption can acknowledge this. Bourdieu is often claimed to have advanced a picture of agency against an excessively structuralist view of the human subject, but I have argued that this is misleading. People are both thoughtful and inventive, for Bourdieu, sometimes manipulating cultural codes of correct behaviour in order to attain their ends. However, this is mapped onto a larger backdrop of social struggle in which entire societies are caught up. Individuals are dragged into this struggle by force of their socialisation as members of classes (and class fractions) or kinship groups, instead of any real choices that they have made and experiences they have had, and they unwittingly perpetuate this struggle in all their actions. Ritual or aesthetic action, in which consumer activity is couched, is indeed the most insidious form of this for Bourdieu, because it passes itself off as disinterested in domination when in fact this too is its sole purpose.

In order to fully register the potential agency and creativity of consumption, we also have to grapple with its motivations. Without in any way suggesting that consumer practices happen in a space of limitless opportunity, which would indeed play into the naive view of unconstrained consumption mentioned above, I believe far more needs to be done to articulate the ethically evaluative dimension of consumer action. I have suggested how this might be done in Chapter 1, but its implications for theories of consumer practice deserve a mention,

and I would also like to suggest how this line of thinking could be usefully extended in future. In so doing I will also briefly return to the "ludic" approach to consumption, which, for all its shortcomings, still has something very important to say. I argued in Chapter 2 that, despite such approaches being closest to my own proposed approach, they were ultimately committed to a culturalist reductionism when explaining consumption, while also finally not telling us enough about how to more or less systematically articulate the historical significance of consumption. All the same, I believe the deepest insights about the agentic dimension of consumer practices can be found there. In this regard, Bataille's extensive writing on consumption in particular still poses a challenge that has yet to be taken up, raising further questions that I do not hope to answer but which I believe are fascinating to ask.

I have argued that there are grounds to be very suspicious of some of Bataille's basically mystical or Romantic pronouncements on consumption and on social life more generally, but that the central intuition underpinning much of his work is completely valid: the ultimate point of social life, from the perspective of concrete people, is to allow for self-realisation through non-instrumental consumption. In the Aristotelian ethical register employed in some contemporary political philosophy, this is to say that people's reasons for living together almost always exceed the securing of biological life itself and have to be explained more fundamentally by their pursuit of the good life as they understand it. This does not necessarily carry any methodological-individualist assumptions, even if Bataille often reasoned like this, but is rather an effort to open up the question of what sorts of desires animate consumer practices that have been socially institutionalised. At the motivational level the question does to some extent have to be posed in terms of individual desires if we are to avoid reasoning in terms of supra-individual subjects, but these desires are themselves shaped, imperfectly and unevenly, within social contexts that confer on them some minimal consistency even in very individualised societies.

Although I have not explored the immensely important and complex world of production and reproduction here, Graeber's production-centred approach to social life is useful for explaining the deeper significance of production, where people seek to make and remake social life and the sort of subjectivity that sustaining it requires. What separates Bataille from Graeber is that Bataille distinguishes systematically between instrumental and expressive action and argues that people are most motivated to pursue expressive ends, universally, and that something in us recoils from a life lived purely instrumentally. Read eudaimonistically, this makes perfect sense. It should not be read – or at least I do not read it – as a suggestion that production and reproduction are *unimportant*. This would be very blind. Rather, it remains a useful reminder of the need to resist the conceptual assimilation of consumption into a schema of social activity that acknowledges only production and reproduction. This has the empirical consequence of an exaggeration of top-down social ordering and an oversight of the expressive complexity of experience that people contrive to build into their lives even in very straitened circumstances. Bataille really offers a socially critical, anthropologically-grounded argument that in its essentials spells out what Smith or Keynes, from a less critical if more sober position, took to be

self-evident: that consumption is the proper end of all economic activity. Bataille reasons not only from the total institutional perspective of a given social order, but also from the subjective perspective of emotionally complex human beings. His basic intuition is simply that, subjectively, when rank-ordering their values, people view their productive and reproductive life as instrumental to their consuming life.

In this way, Bataille offers a basically psychological explanation for the explanatory primacy of consumption over production that is different to Sahlins's essentially structural argument to this effect. Building on his teacher, Mauss, what Bataille really does is to insist on the link between economic and ethical thinking when explaining aggregate social formations, albeit in a highly eccentric fashion. For Sahlins, consumption has primacy over production in the order of explanation because it is the domain of practice in which the values of an entire society are consummated. These values are particular to such societies – which Sahlins call "cultures", in the sense of ethical communities joined by semantically-dense understandings of the ends of human life – with production always being adapted to these societal values. For Bataille, at least implicitly, this mode of explanation still does not go far enough. The primacy of consumption, for him, owes also to its potential to offer expressive satisfaction to individuals or to entire groups. Bataille does not, however, tell us how the individual motivations underpinning consumption might take on a social dimension. This is probably not incidental, as his romanticised, frequently Nietzschean ideas about human motivation would seem not to in any way exhaust the range of values that people pursue when consuming, even if he does usefully remind us that there is a darker, stranger side to consumer activity than conventional economic discourses might acknowledge, and that it can involve violence and dissolution as much as prudent material and immaterial sustenance or harmless caprice.

Thinking beyond Bataille, who I mention only as an early articulator of the limits of productivist thinking and not as a major intellectual resource to be compared with Sahlins when thinking through these issues today, we need to go further in thinking about the motivational grounds of social solidarity. Against a one-sided focus on socio-political domination or economic exploitation as the source of institutionalised social order, the importance of ethical solidarity as a force that imparts order on the social world is a basic insight that has re-emerged in the critical social theory of recent years, after a long detour through more neo-Marxist and neo-Nietzschean territory, with Habermas being a major figure here (Rehg 1994:1–3), but the insight has also been central to a lot of political philosophy and is a shared premise in the debates between liberals and communitarians. I mentioned in Chapter 1 that Taylor to some extent, and Honneth centrally, have linked individual motivation and social order by seeking out the roots of social change in terms of struggles for recognition, although within this framework both struggle and co-operation are central elements. This, in Honneth's case, is an attempt to reason in less abstract terms than Habermas's philosophy of language about the everyday sources of normative order underpinning social structures, while still providing a philosophical-anthropological interpretation of the roots of social order that might potentially apply to all human societies.

When looking at consumer practices in Chapters 4–6, I have also suggested throughout that there is a recognitional dimension to consumer behaviour, and that struggles for both minimal material security and social belonging, as well as for social distinction, are not separate from this. Attending to the recognitional grounding of social life offers a route out of the dead end of the utilitarian assumption that when consuming things people are fundamentally concerned with the things themselves as opposed to the social relationships that the possession of things makes possible. Reasoning from within a recognition-theoretical perspective understood on the terms in which Honneth has developed it, we can identify two on-going problems that continue to be poorly conceptualised in the consumption literature: firstly, there is a need to understand the consumer dimension of market processes without reifying questions of demand; and secondly, we also have to mark off the boundaries of consumer agency insofar as it generates unintended consequences, but without bypassing people's meaning-making and motivational faculties or simply assuming consumer behaviour is explicable in terms of false consciousness.

The social roots of market demand

Seeking out the recognitional dynamics that underpin consumer practices even on markets makes it possible to resist the tendency of critical social thought to naturalise social competition, or to see it as an all-pervasive feature of social life in capitalist societies, the consequence of a sort of seamless ethical colonisation of human lifeworlds accompanying the encroachment of the market. Though by now a common-sense position in most critical thought, it is more problematic than is generally realised. One major advance in mainstream critical social theory is Honneth's contention in *Freedom's Right* (Honneth 2014 [2011]:183–91) that markets cannot function without ethical justification. This is another break from Habermas, and entails a rejection of Habermas's famous arguments in the *Theory of Communicative Action* that market processes are best analysed through a system logic. Honneth is speaking of the very existence and sustained functioning of markets though, as well as how markets can break down when their justification is robustly challenged. He does not engage with the problem of why consumers consume in any specific way, or the ethical problem of how markets can facilitate competition between people *within* a wider social acceptance of their justification. Here more needs to be said about how market competition feeds off of more basic social competition, without leaning too heavily on any of the simplifying assumptions that usually accompany this idea: that consumers can be effortlessly interpellated by advertisers, that people have a natural lust for material goods, and that people always desire to surpass others in status through the possession of finer goods.

What my discussion of market consumption in Chapter 4 implied is that there is nothing in the very nature of clothing or other commodities provided through the market that ensures their consumption need by definition function to ensure distinction. This is because it doesn't follow from the mere fact of possessing sufficient money or credit to conspicuously consume objects

signalling high status that one will in fact choose to do so, as opposed to saving or consuming commodities in ways that do not augment the consumer's status. Of course, income disparities invariably ensure that objects of value on the market can potentially be used in this way by higher-income or otherwise privileged groups. Nonetheless, we saw that, with commodities like clothing, as opposed to others like private housing, even poor consumers can attain them through self-sacrifice in other domains of consumption and indeed have been frequently observed to do so. Moreover, at least when setting out from a more basic set of agentic assumptions of the sort outlined in Chapter 1, we need to always ask *why* consumers would be disposed to use commodified goods to create distinction, and I argued that in South Africa this has had a lot to do with understandings of respectability. These are not unique to South Africa, but took their own form there, influenced by the colonial and neo-colonial discourses of civilisation mentioned in previous chapters.

Such details are completely invisible from a conventional political-economic perspective, which can usefully tell us about price-making mechanisms, or their modes of regulation, but which is oblivious to questions concerning the social roots of demand. This turns us back to Polanyi's (2001:48) affirmation, mentioned in Chapter 1, that "man's economy, as a rule, is submerged in his social relationships", and that material goods are usually valued only as a means to the establishment of these relationships. At the most general level, market demand arises out of complex human needs, which are at bottom social needs, and which are amenable to formulation in terms of recognition claims. In shifting towards this perspective we can begin to see markets as less abstract, less self-propelling and less omnipotent than they often appear to be in both critical and uncritical social theory. This conceptual shift can be done naively, and it can be exaggerated, but it needn't be, and can rather be a tool for thinking in a less heteronomous fashion about the place of markets in social life. It is not just that price-making and other market mechanisms are potentially always subject to reformulation where there is a strong social or political will, as Honneth implies, as the obstructions to such will-formation may nonetheless be enormous and the workings of price-making mechanisms very opaque. It is rather that there is an incredible amount of creative destruction and on-going change in markets, and this is not all the work of producers but also, and indeed more basically, due to changing consumer needs. It is these needs that determine, in advance of price-making activity, whether certain market goods will be viable at all or whether – as they perpetually do out of sight or all critical social theorising on the subject and in ways that have been observed to be completely impervious to massive marketing initiatives – they will fail.

The limits of consumer agency

From this ethical perspective, we can reconstruct what could very loosely be called the rationality of consumption on the market, and indeed in all other domains, by articulating the ethical motivations informing it. A second conceptual problem that this raises, however, is that if we go too far in this direction we might also lose sight of the possible irrationality of

consumer practices in situations where consumers fail to adequately grasp their antecedent causes or producing unintended consequences. Attempting to reconstruct the *possible* rationality of consumer behaviour, and all other social behaviour, is the first step any critical engagement with social practices needs to make. Failure to go far enough here is, I suspect, the reason why the notion of consumers as pure hedonists in many ludic approaches, and as fully coerced by advertisers in the production of consumption literature, tend to be accepted despite their ultimately reductive construal of human agency. When looking at clothing consumption, for instance, it is clear that people would make enormous sacrifices to obtain clothing. In doing so, they could offer cogent reasons for their behaviour and nothing suggests they were operating capriciously or were in the grip of some sort of commodity fetishism. For the consumption of both market commodities like clothing and redistributed goods like state-provided housing, I have also not claimed that those involved invariably or even generally understood the complex network of production and exchange relationships that practically supported their consumer practices. In both cases, however, this was not due to an apparently *distorted* understanding of social life, but rather an incomplete one. While generally overlooked or played down in the heavily producerist historiography informing much critical writing on South African history, boycotts show how people were able to organise in a manner that presumes some measure of understanding of these larger systems and the political power structures underpinning them, employing their power as organised consumers to pursue social and political change.

Socially productive approaches are far more insightful when seeking out the logic of consumer behaviour in status-seeking and domination, but such explanations alone are also very limited in their existing versions. We saw that a logic of reciprocity underpinned not only by the pursuit of status but also resembling what is sometimes discussed in terms of an ethic of care is also often at work in consumer practices like faith healing. In this manner the limits of the socially productive view can be overcome to some extent, but this still does not help us to come to grips with the full complexity of things, as sometimes consumer practices do indeed appear irrational. How, to take an obvious example from the above discussion, do we really account for the consumption of such things as divination and faith healing services if we buy into none of the ontological assumptions of the producers and consumers themselves? In Chapter 6 I argued that a secular, social logic can indeed be reconstructed when explaining these practices, but at a deeper level of inquiry this still does not explain why the people involved seem unaware of this, and why they appear to misconstrue the social meaning of their own action. In the face of such difficulties, I suggested in Chapter 7, it is tempting to fall back on some notion of *habitus* for dealing with such puzzles – not in the sense of an internalised structure of dispositions and schemas for engaging in diffuse forms of class-based domination, but as an inferred faculty for understanding how socially meaningful actions can more or less systematically emerge from practices in which some measure of misunderstanding seems to be at work. Even were we to take this step, however, doing so fails to place healing rituals in their times and does not explain their apparent creativity, as the Comaroffs have insisted we do, and which in Chapter 2 we saw is a key element of Victor Turner's understanding of ritual practice.

I would like to briefly suggest that encountering dilemmas of this sort may call for further reflection on the "social psychology" or "moral psychology" of consumption.

Insofar as an actual faculty need be posited to account for the manner in which meaningful action emerges in ways that escape actors' awareness, without falling back on some conception of system integration, Bruno Frère (2011:262–64) suggests Castoriadis's understanding of the psyche as both socially formed and creative is a more useful starting point than speaking of *habitus*. Indeed, without any special reference to Castoriadis, thinking in broadly psychological terms – in the sense of what is sometimes called moral or social psychology – is to some extent essential for critical social thought if we are to come to terms with the presence of apparently irrational beliefs and unintended consequences, in all societies, and not just in an African context (Honneth 2012:195). However we choose to construe these psychological dynamics – I will not make any attempt at this here – they have to be placed in social and political perspective. I have argued that practices like faith healing can be explained in terms of a complex understanding of everyday life where poverty and radical uncertainty means that people are deeply dependent on one another's good-will, and as a consequence are completely vulnerable to ill-will or to the total severance between people that comes of extreme individualisation. Forming strong attachments to others is a basic necessity of life in the face of uncertainty and vulnerability, and the usual fears that accompany this are magnified by one's social circumstances. In this regard we saw that Monica Wilson was correct to relate insecurity to a lack of care as much as to poverty, which highlights the connections between recognition and reciprocity of both a material and immaterial nature.

But in what generalisable terms can we conceive of these attachments? Honneth's (1995b:95–130) impressive attempt at outlining a universal, ideal-typical division between recognitional demands in modern societies is a useful starting point. He breaks these down into demands issuing from needs for love (generating self-confidence), solidarity (offering self-esteem) and rights (conferring self-respect), and posits that the failure to meet any of these everyday needs can, when diffusely experienced across a society, generate struggles by social movements. In this manner the motivational rationale for social action can be reconstructed and evaluated by external social critics. When adopting a critical position the social critic need not abstract from the emancipatory claims of those involved but can rather help to articulate them, place them in a wider social context of action and help to reflexively evaluate them in the light of current knowledge.

Honneth's useful schema would need to be adapted to different institutional settings in ways that Honneth accepts in principle but overlooks in practice. Focusing only on the first two forms of recognition here, Honneth believes self-confidence requires tight bonds of affection within the family or between lovers, while self-esteem comes from knowing that one makes a valuable contribution to the life of the community, largely in one's capacity as a worker. He appears to assume a society made up of nuclear families, all fairly independent of one another, and of people who are regularly employed and relate to their wider communities through the

division of labour, and who are therefore socially integrated outside of the family by Durkheimian organic solidarity. In the poor African communities I have looked at, however, during both the apartheid and post-apartheid periods, things have not always been like this. There are much tighter webs of commonality between neighbours and people in the same residential areas, organised through religious groups, savings clubs and drinking groups, among other things, as well as social events involving the wider community, especially for funerals. These practices often integrate people into tight networks whose members' livelihoods are interwoven through relationships of reciprocity where the boundary between family and community is not clear-cut. Community bonds take on more of a familial character, often up to a point at which we are justified in speaking of kinship bonds. In such circumstances, people also make relatively strong demands on one another beyond the nuclear family, and enormous strains can form if they go unmet.

These anxieties are projected onto witch figures, who when identified are then subjected to extreme symbolic or physical violence. In the process, vulnerable members of society are consistently harmed. This sort of domination is however, an unintended consequence of healing practices and not what *explains* them. At the same time, faith healing consumption becomes a way in which people seek protection from the greatly heightened fears that their attachments create. Prophets, ministers and diviners, unlike biomedical healers and more like psychologists, listen to people's anxieties about these things. They offer supernatural cures whose efficacy is not subject to rigorous testing and certainly seems dubious, even if we cannot discount out of hand that some of it might work and that it might also have real psycho-somatic benefits. In this sense, then, we can see how irrational beliefs can create a mass demand structure, and how this can also have adverse social effects of which people are unaware. From this perspective we can also appreciate the limits of consumer agency and examine its unintended consequences, but here criticism does not appeal to systemically generated delusions. The analysis remains grounded in a social-psychological claim about people's understandings and motivations as well as an appraisal of the historically contingent institutional contours of their social worlds.

Bringing consumption back in

Pierre van den Berghe (1965:282), speaking of the challenge of formulating social-theoretical generalisations from the sociological observation of South African life once wrote that "[t]he perverse complexity of a society like South Africa should not only be an excuse for exploding the boundaries of existing theory, but also a challenge for the construction of more generally applicable theory." I have not attempted to blow anything up here, but I have tried to identify blind spots or weaknesses in some of the most informative existing approaches to consumer action in contemporary critical social theory, and engaging with South African history has never ceased to throw up fascinating details that reveal the eventual crudity of even the best generalisation. The reflections above are intended as a contribution to a larger, still-emerging

argument in the social sciences about the need to factor consumption back into our understanding of action in a way that truly makes a difference for how we understand the social world. This could perhaps be viewed, metaphorically, less an exercise in pyrotechnics than in cartography. As the unmapped continent of consumption begins to be better known, it becomes possible to establish connections within a more complete map of the manner in which people inhabit their social worlds.

One major benefit of doing this, I have suggested, is that it allows critical social scientists to nuance or adapt historical narratives to better accommodate what thinkers as completely different as Arendt and Sahlins have understood as a fundamental dimension of action in all human societies. The study of consumption promises to expand our understanding of how people behave as complex, thinking-and-feeling beings that act erratically and always somewhat blindly but nonetheless intentionally, hemmed in by institutions but also possessing, to varying degrees, the capacity to reshape these institutions creatively. Exactly how people go about this depends an enormous amount on the peculiarities of social life in time and space. In the end, no social theory can come close to exhausting the complexity of any single human biography, let alone the ultimately inconceivable complexity of the spatially and temporally extended social relationships we gesture at when speaking of society. All we have are conceptual maps, and maps have in some manner or other to reduce the complexity of social reality. Failing this, they would be the fantastic monstrosities that Borges (1998 [1960]:42) speaks of in his parable "Of exactitude in science", where cartographers begin producing maps that come to inhabit the same space as the empire they describe. The ultimate problem in social science research, strictly speaking, is therefore not reductionism as such, but rather misleading or excessive reductionism, which makes or invites correspondingly misleading generalisations. By thinking about the institutional dimension of consumption in expansive terms that range significantly beyond the market, and by fleshing out our understanding of the consuming subject into a truly complex being, we can begin to fill out or alter existing economistic and culturalist narratives of social change to better fit with the amazing variety of observable consumer practices. In so doing, we can also arrive at a fuller understanding of the present, and have more resources at hand with which to critically evaluate the potential for progressive change residing within it.

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Endnotes

1 See Ingerid Straume's "A common world? Arendt, Castoriadis and political creation" (2012) for an extended comparison of major themes in Arendt and Castoriadis.

2 I will speak of "empirical" and "historical" research synonymously below, favouring the former usage when speaking in more methodological terms, but proceeding on the assumption that empirical phenomena are always historically constituted.

3 In an attempt to avoid this error, Sahlins tries to steer around the term "society" wherever possible, at times using the term "culture" in a substantive sense to designate what others would speak of in terms of society while underscoring the necessary semantic coding of social relations, and at times referring more abstractly just to this system of meaning itself. When speaking of culture in the former sense Sahlins (e.g. 2013:161) sometimes refers to the "cultural-historical" which, like Castoriadis's (2005) long discussions of the "social-historical", and Sahlins's own occasional use of this same term (e.g. Sahlins 1976:132), underscores the inescapably historical constitution of the human world.

4 What I am calling the semantic dimension of action is often discussed in terms of the "symbolic" or "semiotic" dimension of social or cultural life in more linguistically-rooted discussions of meaning-making. On this alternative terminology, and its background in Anglo-Saxon theories of the symbol and French theories of the sign, see Sahlins 1976:117–18.

5 Sahlins (1976:55) believes the choice in question here is one of deciding "whether the cultural order is to be conceived as the codification of man's actual purposeful and pragmatic action; or whether, conversely, human action in the world is to be understood as mediated by the cultural design, which gives order at once to practical experience, customary practice, and the relationship between the two. The difference is not trivial, nor will it be resolved by the happy academic conclusion that the answer lies somewhere in between, or even on both sides (i.e., dialectically)." Sahlins misleads by rejecting the possibility of a third way between these two understandings of culture, and the crux of Castoriadis's work on social imaginary significations and Giddens's attempts to theorise what he calls the duality of structure resides precisely in articulating such a third position.

6 Castoriadis tends to speak here of *central* imaginary significations (e.g. 2005:117, 129, 133–34, 362–65). Although they can be embodied or personified, upon examination they point back to nothing more basic in experience and rather serve to symbolically gather disparate elements of experience into symbolic networks within which meaningful action can take place and institutions form. When referring to social imaginary significations as "the non-real condition of the real coexistence of social phenomena", Castoriadis is not embracing ontological idealism but rather making a statement about meaningful social action (2005:364).

[7] From this it should be clear that I do not follow the distinction sometimes made in the social sciences between values and attitudes, where the latter alone refer to the relationship to action.

[8] Eudaimonism is usually translated as happiness or, more usefully, as human flourishing. It is generally used, as I also use it, outside of its strictly Aristotelian context to gesture at any form of self-realising action that accords with a conception of the good life. For a discussion of what gets lost by dissociating the term from its Aristotelian or Classical Greek articulations, see Arendt 1998:192–93, where she argues that, strictly speaking, this flourishing applies to a human life viewed as a whole. My use of the term "expressive" bears no relation to its use by analytical philosophers to refer to the expression of sentiments, as opposed to facts or beliefs (D'Arms and Jacobson 1994). I speak of "expressive" action here in a way that very loosely derives from Charles Taylor's (1985a:227–34, 1995:112) occasional use of it as a way of articulating strong value through language and other symbolic media and of acting in accordance with such articulations. This association between expressivism and strong value is somewhat in tension with Taylor's (2001:368–90, 2003 [1991]:61–66) historical discussion of expressivism as a form of nationalistic consciousness, individualised self-exploration, and artistic achievement pioneered in the modern West along with an ideal of authenticity, which (when related to self-exploration and the arts) may in addition to its moral dimension also possess an aesthetic dimension. There is a great deal to suggest, however that Taylor views these as historically situated articulations of a more universal capacity, which would diminish the tension. At any rate, my own use of expressivism refers only to its apparently more universal aspect, as discussed by Hans Joas (1996:75–84) and Axel Honneth (2008:71–72).

[9] To this we might add that we do well to reject the simplifying moral psychology that views duty and self-fulfilment as practically incompatible, as moral action may be motivated *both* by a desire for fulfilment and by a sense of duty. Nonetheless, if fulfilment is entirely lacking then the act ceases to possess an expressive dimension (or strictly speaking, it ceases to be eudaimonistic). Also, as Taylor has emphasised, expressivity implies that knowing or feeling, on the one hand, and doing on the other, are mutually constitutive. Expressivity therefore also entails what is sometimes discussed in terms of "performativity".

[10] Here, in particular, terminological uses are bewilderingly varied. Polanyi (1977:5–15) and David Graeber (2001:8–9, 46) also discuss the social science orientation I am calling utilitarianism here, but unlike Sahlins call it "economism", in Graeber's case out of a desire to avoid confusion with philosophical utilitarianism. I follow much of Graeber's discussion while sticking with Sahlins' terminology. Speaking of utilitarianism instead of economism here makes it possible to avoid confusing this with what Polanyi discussed in terms of the economistic fallacy, which is based on a different set of assumptions. I view utilitarianism as one aspect of economism.

[11] Similarly, Polanyi, speaking of "the needs of material want-satisfaction", understood the class nature of society to be shaped primarily by the status or recognitional order:

[12] For an excellent general comparison of major themes about structure and agency in Giddens and Bourdieu, see Sewell 2005:124–151. For the idea that Giddens and Bourdieu concur in stressing the lack of reflexivity in action, which misrepresents Giddens's position, see Joas and Knöbl, 2011:12.

[13] Sewell (2005:228) defines an historical event as "(1) a ramified sequence of occurrences that (2) is recognized as notable by contemporaries, and that (3) results in a durable transformation of structures."

[14] This social view is usually attributed to Talcott Parsons and other structural-functionalists, but it has a much wider history, in both sociology and anthropology, discussed in Eisenstadt 1990:243–45.

[15] I am borrowing the term "productivist" itself from Castoriadis (1993 [1974]:200) and Arnason (2003:194), who employ it in passing to designate an intellectual current originating in Marxism but extending far beyond it. This general tendency is sometimes also called "productionism" (e.g. Campbell 1989:7).

[16] Here Arnason borrows the term "modes of accumulation" from Alain Touraine but uses it to his own ends.

[17] Sahlins also shows that the very notion of storing up a surplus at all has varied profoundly between societies. One often finds a certain "prodigality" in the expenditure of resources, with strong norms of group reciprocity serving to offset the crises that this can cause (Sahlins 1972:36). For Sahlins (1972; 1976), too, this indicates how the form of production in a society is shaped all the way down by cultural norms.

[18] The point of Mauss's (2002 [1950]:102–03) sometimes difficult discussion of the total "services" (as his term *prestations* is sometimes rendered into English) involved in gift exchange is most fundamentally that making these the focus of his inquiry offered him a way of looking at history that avoided detailed discussion of what he viewed as static sociological abstractions such as religion, law or the economy. Mauss's (2002 [1950]:103) interest was in ethically significant forms of social action, that is, "the way everything moves, the living aspect, the fleeting moment when society, or men, become sentimentally aware of themselves and of their situation in relation to others." Polanyi's understanding of exchange as social interchange is best captured in his discussion of what he called "forms of integration", which I discuss further below.

[19] The pervasive presence of these immaterial exchanges is to some extent a unique feature of the "post-industrial" era and the emergence of "information" or "service" economies insofar as fewer people work in agriculture and much craft production in large factories has shifted from the centres of the global economy to its periphery. Nonetheless, even a short reflection on the incredible profusion of care work, education, and ritual in *all* human societies suggests the limitations of viewing immaterial exchange as an historical peculiarity. As with the lawyer – or psychologist, teacher, nurse, choreographer, accountant, financial advisor, or what have you – when calling on the services of a spiritual diviner, healer, actor, priest, musician, or whatever the case may be, more important than the exchange of materials that takes place is the exchange of knowledge and experience.

[20] I do not mean to imply that survival is itself a negligible problem. Taking food insecurity as the major index here, today there are an estimated 795 million undernourished people in the world, meaning that just over one in nine people suffer this globally. Under-nourishment is most concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa, where just under one in four people go hungry each day (Food and Agriculture Organization of

the United Nations et al. 2015:8). In such cases, while nothing permits us to reason about social action in fully naturalistic terms, appealing to survival obviously does have explanatory power. We might, in such cases, speak of poverty in absolute terms. Beyond this, however, poverty cannot be lucidly understood outside of a pre-given, substantive mode of life. While seldom spelt out as such, this is in fact clearly implicit in poverty usually being defined in quantitative studies that relate, not immediately to an absolute income measure, even in cases where income is all that is discussed, but to income insofar as it facilitates the purchase of typical baskets of consumer goods using aggregate consumer price indices, which differ profoundly between societies and across time. Sahlins is in this sense quite right to argue that poverty does not relate *directly* to possession or money: "[p]overty is not a certain small amount of goods, nor is it just a relation between means and ends; above all it is a relation between people. Poverty is a social status" (Sahlins 1972:37).

[21] Speaking of materiality might be useful for highlighting the obvious truth that some form of material practice is usually involved in economic action, as well as for warding off misconceived accusations of idealism that have a way of attaching themselves to this position. However, it has two clear disadvantages. Firstly, at a methodological level, it invites the misleading idea that the material form of these practices can explain the practice as a whole, whereas it is often arbitrary and what counts is rather the shared meanings attached to the act. For instance, an offering of food may have entirely different meanings in different contexts. In one situation, it may be a ritual offering of hospitality, and in another a means of subsistence. The food type could be physically identical in both cases but the effects of consuming would be entirely different because in the first case, whatever nourishment it provides is incidental to what it seeks to achieve as a meaningful act, which is the establishment of a social bond. What is significant, then, is not the materiality of the offering, but rather the relational context in which it is made. Secondly, at an ontological level, fixing on materiality also invites a return to the reductive utilitarian idea that people are invariably more concerned about their possession of things than the social relationships that such possession allows them to establish, while this is only plausible when accounting for human life under historical conditions of *absolute* scarcity.

[22] Here I very loosely follow one of Weber's (1978:926–27) famous definitions of power, without committing to any of his more elaborated treatments of the theme in terms of coercive and legitimate forms of power.

[23] Consumption can of course be seen as either functionally determined by production in ways that escape the consciousness of consumers, or as *manipulated* by producers, but Graeber does not explore these ideas and I will defer their discussion to Chapter 2.

[24] Profitability is directly affected by such things as wage differentials reflecting social perceptions of the status and desirability of certain jobs, as well as the efficacy of organised labour to negotiate wage levels. Profitability also depends on productivity, which itself depends on such things as technological optimisation. In *Capital* Marx tended to eliminate technology as a variable in the determination of surplus value extraction by assuming differential technological capacities would equalise to a far greater extent than they actually have (Castoriadis 1978:708–17; Elster 1985:130–31). This is despite him having allowed in the *Grundrisse* that technological advance could independently increase the rate of profit in total isolation from labour time spent in production (Habermas 1988:226–27). The theory is also seriously undermined, in ways that Marx anticipated but then illegitimately dismissed, by the apparent impossibility of finding any empirical reference point for the pivotal notion of abstract labour as a universal, biological sub-stratum of labour power underpinning the observable plurality of standards of

acceptable labour time and of reproductive needs among labourers. In ways that differ profoundly between societies, these differently affect the amount of surplus value that can be extracted from labour power, ensuring that the profit derived from labour will always depend profoundly on social factors wholly external to the labour process (Castoriadis 1978:708–17; Habermas 1988:230–31). Here we should add that this results directly from Marx's tendency to simplify or ignore the reality of consumer action, positing "fixed coefficients of consumption" that appear wholly fictitious (Elster 1985:12).

[25] Indeed, as Arendt (1998:28–29) points out, to speak of an economy in today's common language or in the more specific sense of a "political economy" more or less corresponding to the nation state, according to its original meaning in the classical Greek context, a simple contradiction in terms. This causes Arendt to largely prefer to speak of modern economic matters in terms of "the social", meaning by this not what I have been calling the social but rather a political economy. This limiting of the economic to its original appearance seems unnecessary to me, and indeed seems to nudge Arendt into an excessively critical reading of economic action in modern societies as basically a malformation of what should properly be a household economy.

[26] Gell explains that he is limited in this regard by his case study, which explores social reproduction through consumption by focusing on a social milieu in which conspicuous consumption serves to establish communal solidarity instead of the sort of distinction that Veblen and Bourdieu describe. His point is, however, that the issue of social reproduction or social change through consumption must be an empirical one, as examples of what he calls "adventurous" consumption point away from a conceptualisation of the social effects of consumption in terms of social reproduction.

[27] Something brief should be said to clarify what I mean by intentionality and meaning, as well as the associated concepts of value and rationality. Meaning can be either the subjective interpretation of the significance of action by a given subject, or the meaning assigned to an act by an external observer, or indeed to some practical compromise between the two. Intentionality, as I will use the term, refers to being oriented toward a goal, either instrumentally or expressively. The subject of intentional actions, as Elster (1985:8) rightly points out, should always be taken to be individuals. Intentionality needn't be fully explicit, but it does require some minimal level of reflexive awareness, without which action would be indistinguishable from a mechanical response or biological reaction. Moreover, I assume that intentionality always implies subjectively-interpreted meaning, as people only intend to do that which appears meaningful to them to do. The sense of value is that which yokes our intentions to one course of meaningful action over another, but which cannot attach to actions that, from the perspective of the actor, appear entirely meaningless. All this is to say nothing about the rationality of action, at least where rationality refers to the possession of what from an external perspective must be practically coherent intentions. I am also not adopting the sort of rational-choice model of agency that interests Elster and many other methodological individualists, where rationality is also tied up with the idea of instrumental maximisation of goods.

[28] Arendt (1998:143–44, 177, 204) herself does not speak of creativity but rather of "natality" and the capacity people have of creating new, unpredictable beginnings in the human world.

[29] Or: "work", using "work" and "labour" synonymously here.

[30] Arendt (1998:243–44) comes close to implicitly conceding this in her discussion of the human faculty of promising as a remedy for uncertainty, which she associates with contractualism. But these insights apply equally to ritual, as Mauss clearly saw, which is why the entire argument of *The Gift* is framed against the implicit background of thinking about mutual indebtedness and social self-making *outside* of the contractualist tradition, not only for the sake of better understanding large tracts of non-Western history, but also for identifying human potentialities that Westerners also possessed.

[31] Arendt (1998:220, 233) does of course acknowledge that uncertainty and irreversibility are inevitable characteristics of action but views these as at least remediable.

[32] This discussion was originally drafted in the *Grundrisse*.

[33] Sahlins (1976:149, 153–53, 168) notes that there are occasional passages in Marx where he appears to take a more subtle view of use-value, but argues that these are rare and always contradict Marx's own line of argumentation whenever Marx directly addresses issues of the production–consumption link.

[34] For brief attempts in the consumption literature to link Turner's discussion of ritual to consumption see McCracken 1988:84, Illouz 1997:142–44 and Featherstone 2007:22.

[35] Bell (1978:244–51), arguing from a basically conservative position, also believed that increasing taxation and state intervention in the economic life of society meant that, without an ethos of civic-minded self-restraint, the state would be unable to reconcile the diverse redistributive demands placed on it. Increasingly, what he believed were irreconcilable demands driven by a new sense of material entitlement were leading to excessive bureaucratic expansion and fiscal crisis.

[36] This disagreement also has a normative dimension, in that Turner affirms the need for this mutual dependency between structure and anti-structure while Bataille believes that what is most valuable about human life must by definition exist beyond any instrumental determination.

[37] Alan Warde (2014:279–84) has recently offered an overview of criticisms levelled at cultural accounts of consumption, which he is sympathetic to. I believe these are largely ill-founded, but here I try to suggest in a general way where critiques of culturalism do make points worth heeding.

[38] Taylor (2007:661–64) expresses qualified interest in Bataille's understanding of sovereignty and intimacy, and there is a protracted discussion of sovereignty by the largely disapproving Habermas in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1998 [1987]:99–105, 211–36).

[39] Thus, for instance, Horkheimer and Adorno (2002:21) contend that "[o]n its own account, even in advance of total planning, the economic apparatus endows commodities with the values which decide the behavior of people."

[40] This Fine (2002:78) does despite a clear statement to the contrary. Thus he promisingly affirms early on in the book what, both in posing his research question and in answering it, he nonetheless proceeds to perpetually negate:

> Most important is to reject the dichotomy between economy, the material or society and culture. Objects do not arrive through the market as blank sheets after which culture can do its work upon them to create (symbolic) use-values. The material processes by which commodities are provided are themselves cultural, reflecting the cultures of work, design, retailing, etc. In short, capital and capitalism are simultaneously economic and cultural categories.

[41] Fine borrows this term from Wolgang Haug's *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics* (1986).

[42] For Veblen (2007:15–16), "[t]he concept of dignity, worth, or honour, as applied either to persons or conduct, is of first-rate consequence in the development of classes and of class distinctions."

[43] The 1977 edition is the expanded English edition, based on the 1972 original French edition.

[44] Douglas and Isherwood (1996:11–13, 26–35) do, however, show how assumptions about consumption form an important part of the economic theories of John Maynard Keynes, James Duesenberry and Milton Friedman. However, what also becomes clear from reading their discussion of these thinkers is how astonishingly simplifying these economists' assumptions about the reasons for behaviour on markets were. They must be seen as simplifying devices needed for quantitative econometric calculations and financial predictions to be possible but, from a sociological or anthropological perspective, and indeed from any historically-informed and qualitatively-rich angle, they deliberately make extremely simple assumptions.

[45] When thinking in political terms, the most Douglas and Isherwood (1996:63–66) have to offer is to suggest that social policies should include measures to relieve the social unavailability accompanying poverty – in order, it seems, to allow the poor to also individually compete in the race for social domination.

[46] Bourdieu differs from Veblen, however, in arguing that the working class tend to opt out of the status competition game. For Bourdieu, the middle classes as the real imitators.

[47] As Karl Maton (2010:56) explains, outside of various sociological and philosophical discussions of "habit", "[a]mong thinkers who predate Bourdieu in describing something akin to 'habitus' are Aristotle, Ockham, Aquinas, Merleau-Ponty, Husserl and Elias, as well as Durkheim and Weber. Bourdieu himself also cites Hegel's 'ethos', Husserl's 'Habitualität' and Marcel Mauss's 'hexis' as precursor ideas to his own conception". For a brief discussion of the debt to Merleau-Ponty, see Bourdieu 2000:142–43.

[48] Bourdieu refers to a great many other forms of capital; for instance, in constant references to "educational capital" in *Distinction* (1996), although this can be understood as part of his larger discussion of cultural capital, and because in *Distinction* he takes educational level to be a proxy for cultural capital when designing his questionnaires and organising his data. Bourdieu (1996:116;

Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:99) speaks of such things as "juridical" capital when stressing the intervention of the state in society, and in other contexts mentions such things as "literary" and "scientific" capital. It would appear, in fact, that there are potentially as many forms of capital as there are fields, and that the tripartite division into economic, social and cultural capital is just a simplifying taxonomy.

[49] In *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (2013), what was later separated out into social and cultural capital tend still to be assimilated into what Bourdieu calls "symbolic capital". He later lists symbolic capital *alongside* economic, social and cultural capital, arguing that any of the latter three forms of capital can become symbolic insofar as their true operations are misunderstood, as happens when interested action is collectively understood as disinterested and the whole background of domination legitimised (e.g. Bourdieu in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:119). For instance, cultural capital can become symbolic capital when all the privileges of one's upbringing, such as the prolonged freedom from necessity required to gain a good education, are misrecognised as innate, legitimate competence and thereby are naturalised (Bourdieu 1997:49).

[50] Thus, immediately following a nod to the active nature of knowledge-construction, Bourdieu (1996:468) proceeds to assert, by way of a corrective to any possible subjectivist reading of his claims, that such activity is determined by a pre-existing class structure:

> The practical knowledge of the social world that is presupposed by "reasonable" behaviour within it implements classificatory schemes…, historical schemes of perception and appreciation which are the product of the objective division into classes (age groups, genders, social classes) and which function below the level of consciousness and discourse. Being the product of the incorporation of the fundamental structures of a society, these principles of division are common to all the agents of the society and make possible the production of a common, meaningful world, a common-sense world.

[51] Although he does not dwell directly on Bourdieu's views on commodity consumption, one element of Luc Boltanski's dissatisfaction with Bourdieu's research project is Bourdieu's neglect of uncertainty. See Boltanski 2011:21–22.

[52] Brubaker (1985:764–69) shows that there are in fact four distinct manifestations of class discussed at various points in *Distinction*: (1) primarily, the expression of taste and concrete acts of consumption that make up a lifestyle, which is explained by (2) class-specific habitus and by (3) distance from necessity. However, these are themselves all dependent on (4) differential possession of capital, in terms of both overall volume and composition. My discussion here has been focussed on this last, and most important, element of class, having discussed the others above.

[53] Campbell argues that Weber's analysis of the Protestant Ethic is convincing in its essentials, but that it becomes historically unfocused from around the end of the 17th century. This neglect leads Weber to overlook the cultural influence of Protestant movements subsequent to Calvin's synthesis of Protestant dogma, and especially the ethic of feeling that became known as sentimentalism. When coupled with the diffusion among the middle classes of a previously aristocratic aesthetic sensibility, in which intuition and feeling were privileged over traditional authority and reason, and in which the sincerity accompanying creative "genius" trumped the propriety associated with aristocratic notions of taste,

there was a further cultural shift to a Romantic Ethic. Through this Romantic Ethic an antinomian ethos of feeling and of pleasure became lauded as the apogee of human attainment and the necessary cultural antidote to the socially corrosive effects of utilitarian materialism.

[54] Harvey (1992:180–81) defines a crisis of over-accumulation as "as a condition in which idle capital and idle labour supply could exist side by side with no apparent way to bring these idle resources together to accomplish socially useful tasks. A generalized condition of overaccumulation would be indicated by idle productive capacity, a glut of commodities and an excess of inventories, surplus money capital (perhaps held as hoards), and high unemployment."

[55] Bauman's thick understanding of modernity, clearly intended to gesture at a state of post-war Western society, should not be conflated with the far thinner and more universal understanding of modernity discussed in the Introduction. Bauman (2006:29–33, 51–52,69–72, 119–21) variously associates modernity, in its present "liquid" phase, with such things as individualisation, the erosion of the public sphere, the loss of faith in teleological accounts of human life, the dominance of financial capital, and much besides.

[56] The best reconstruction of this debate is offered by Deborah Posel (1983). Writing in an admittedly schematic fashion that allowed for various exceptions, on the liberal side she places writers like Francis Wilson and S. H. Frankel, while suggesting that I. D. Macrone and Pierre van den Berghe fit only partially into the liberal camp but were nonetheless regularly characterised as liberals by various revisionists when the latter were writing in a polemical vein. Those Posel calls the "functionalist" revisionists included Harold Wolpe, Martin Legassick, Rob Davies, Dan O'Meara, Alex Callinicos, John Saul, Stephen Gelb, Marion Lacey, and Mike Morris. Her article essentially aims to appreciate the important insights emerging from these revisionist writers despite their reductionism and functionalism, while suggesting how these problems could be overcome. She also allows, however, that there were "non-functionalist" writers emerging at the time who also were producing works of a revisionist nature, including William Beinart, Peter Delius, Shula Marks, Stanley Trapido, and Charles van Onselen. Following Posel, when speaking of the revisionists here I am referring to the former group, and doing so in a schematic way that excludes many subtleties. In order to highlight the distinction between the two sorts of revisionists, I will refer to the former as "neo-Marxists", as the latter thinkers, while deeply interested in Marx and in a broadly materialist approach to history, tended to follow debates that showed up the weaknesses in structural versions of Marxism and increasingly allowed for non-structural forms of explanation in which consciousness was seen as an independent variable and where forms of association other than class were also in principle considered historically significant.

[57] "Homelands" and "reserves" were synonymous terms used to designate African settlements on the land allocated to Africans by the state. From the mid-1960s, the term "Bantustan" also came into use as the idea of granting these areas limited political autonomy emerged (Mabin 1991:35, n.4). These were Lebowa, QwaQwa, Bophuthatswana, KwaZulu, KaNgwane, Transkei and Ciskei, Gazankulu, Venda and KwaNdebele. They were created with the intention of justifying land removals and fragmenting African resistance along ethnic lines (Beinart 2001:162).

[58] Burger and colleagues (2015) provide a useful overview of the existing literature on the middle class in South Africa, which also highlights other attempts at delineating classes through measures such as occupational skill.

[59] The writers Seekings associates with this tradition include Leo Kuper, I.D. MacCrone, Pierre van den Berghe, Mia Brandel-Syrier, Archie Mafeje, Monica Wilson, and Thomas Nyquist.

[60] The trilogy is made up of *The Black Man's Portion* by Desmond Reader (1961), *Townsmen or Tribesmen* by Philip and Iona Mayer (1974 [1961]), and Berthold Pauw's *The Second Generation* (1963). It is an extension of many of the research themes in the East London area prior to the Second World War by Monica Hunter (later, Monica Wilson) in her *Reaction to Conquest* (1964 [1936]). Leslie Bank's book is *Home Spaces, Street Styles* (2011).

[61] Posel is not uncritically reviving a demeaning colonial trope, but attempting to make sense of unambiguous statements to this effect by populist politicians as well as theatrical displays of wealth by them that appear to conform to this reading.

[62] In speaking of "class" here, I provisionally follow the broadly Weberian convention of discussing class in terms market position as determined by income or by profession as a rough proxy of income. I will, however, also signal the discrepancy between this and various understandings of class throughout the discussion in the chapters to follow.

[63] It should be noted that this popular understanding of modernity, associating it with new lifestyles and freedoms, is not to be confused with the far thinner, social-scientific understanding of modernity mentioned in the Introduction.

[64] Nuttall (2008:165, 167) tells us that advertisements have "an articulatory function—a function that palpably affects lifeworlds", and that the particular advertisements that interest her were found by market researchers to have been received as clever and "funny" by youth respondents, but such statements are not in themselves very informative.

[65] Albeit more anecdotally, Clowes (2002:77) also cites Emma Mashinini's recollections in *Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life* of fighting with her husband about household spending in the 1950s: "while we were going without small things for the home he would still manage to be such a natty dresser. That was something none of us could fathom about our men in those days, especially the uneducated ones, who would spend all their money on clothes imported from the USA."

[66] This allowed local retailers to further shift their sourcing towards imports, partially as a response to many local producers reneging on supply agreement between 2000 and 2002, at which time a depreciating Rand made it more lucrative for them to begin producing for buyers operating on lucrative international markets (Seekings and Nattrass 2012:7).

[67] Rogerson (2000:693) claims that there has been a corresponding growth of informal clothing production in these metropolitan regions, but Seekings and Nattrass (2012:12–13) argue on the strength of Labour Force Survey statistics that register informal employment that this is probably not generally the case.

[68] Writing in support of the boycott the following year, Julius Nyerere (1959:7–8; emphasis in original) reasoned that

> the customers of a business do more to keep it going than its shareholders. We who buy South African goods do more to support the system than the Nationalist Government or Nationalist industrialists. Each one of us can remove his individual prop to the South African system by refusing to buy South African goods. There are millions of people in the world who support the South African Government in this way, and who can remove their support by the boycott…. I must emphasise that the boycott is really a *withdrawing of support* which each one of us gives to the racialists in South Africa by buying their goods. There is a very real sense in which we are part of the system we despise, because we patronise it, pay its running expenses.

[69] "Township" became the term most popularly used to designate segregated urban housing areas for blacks on the urban periphery or a little beyond it (Mabin and Smit 1997:206).

[70] From its founding in 1912, until 1925, known as the South African Native National Congress

[71] For instance, Monica Wilson and Archie Mafeje (1963:15) observed a category of "semi-urbanised" people in the apartheid-era township of Langa, on the periphery of Cape Town, in the contemporary Western Cape. They claim that women often fell into this category even where their husbands were committed townspeople because women often left their children to be raised in the country by relatives and felt that, were their husbands to die, they would be entirely exposed and forced to retreat to the country, where they retained supportive kinship networks. Absolom Vilakazi (1962:76–78) also mentions the *abaqhafi* in Natal, a category of men that had largely cut themselves off from their kinship networks in the course of lengthy spells of labour migration. They had become both individualised and secularised, demonstrating "an absolute lack of respect for old traditions", a regard for "Western manners", and "a particular form of dress which showed very clearly the influence of the American Wild West". The *abaqhafi* later became known as the a*magxagxa*, who in Vilakazi's day retained the habit of hiking their pants up to the knee and tying handkerchiefs around their necks as a nod to the breeches and neck mufflers worn by cowboys.

[72] *Osishutzana* in Zulu (Vilakazi 1962:78), and playfully adapted into Xhosa as *Ooscuse-me* (Wilson and Mafeje 1963:26–27).

[73] Speaking of "tradition" here, it should be added, is to make no necessary claims about the objective nature of this tradition, which of course may be far less eternal, authentic, laudable, and so on, than its adherents imagine. Likewise, as Ferguson (1999:85–93) has stressed, the actual relationship between traditional and modern, or rural and urban, and other such dichotomies, which do not belong only to the register of social scientists but, at least in southern Africa, are frequently encountered at an everyday level even among poorly-educated informants, needn't be accurately understood to have a real effect on social, political and economic action. These are, in short, social imaginary significations, not objective structures. Nonetheless, by people interpreting their action in light of these significations, very different social, economic and political patterns of action result.

[74] Also *amapantsula*, or *pantsula*, in the literature

[75] Soweto became the largest African township during the apartheid period, and was subsequently administratively assimilated into Johannesburg.

[76] Indeed this may be less a clean break with the past than an accentuation of a trend present even in the apartheid period. Deborah Posel (2001; 2010) has argued compellingly that even under apartheid racial classification in South Africa has always been split between a popular biological understanding of race and an official understanding in which race is explicitly not reduced to biology, and is rather indexed to commonly-understood markers of status. Nonetheless, the changes in the legal structure of South African society surrounding the 1994 democratic transition, as well as the general social and political acceptance of the inevitability of major reform by 1990, have clearly done a great deal to render racial boundaries more permeable than in the past.

[77] Specifically, in Masiphumelele, Fish Hoek and Ocean View

[78] This is the Xhosa form, but it is often also called by the Zulu *izikhothane* ("those who lick"), or *skhothane* ("to lick") (Richards 2016:1).

[79] It is also peripherally discussed in Jones (2013). For a thoroughly moralising academic account, see Tshishonga (2015).

[80] Mkhwanazi (2011:105) and Vincent and Howell (2014:63, n.1) suggest that such a comparison could be made, without pursuing it themselves.

[81] One crew member explained that "[p]eople respect you when you dress expensively and stylishly. It brings you the fame and fame brings you the girls. Ultimately, people in the township like bringing others down. You have to prove to them that you are worth a lot" (Nkosi 2011). Another similarly states that participating in *i'khothane* "has grown my self-esteem, it has groomed my ability to face people and it has groomed my confidence because if you are *i'khothane* you see lots of people that you must show what you are made of, you must be confident in yourself" (Vincent and Howell 2014:68).

[82] This was true even of cases such as the early 20th century Glasgow rent strikes where one indeed does observe "an organized and militant working class fighting for the reproduction of its labour power" inhabiting a "capitalist city as formulated by some Marxist theory" (Castells 1983:31, 32) because, in this case, industrialists sided with the workers in making greater redistributive demands of the state (Castells 1983:22–36).

[83] The term *apartheid* emerged in the 1930s among Dutch Reformed Church missionaries. By the 1940s the term had gained wider currency, at least among the "arcane discussion groups of the policy-making intelligentsia", and was used in parliament by D. F. Malan in 1944 (Dubow 2014:10). Malan was then in opposition, and would later become Prime Minister from 1948 to 1954.

84 It should be noted, however, that some colonial officials preferred to confine Africans within systems of "traditional" social mores and laws that were in fact a set of largely restrictive, patriarchal customary practices selectively distilled from a much wider pool of pre-colonial institutions (Healy-Clancy and Hickel 2014:10–11).

85 Matters were, of course, significantly more complex than this, and Bozzoli (2004:53) mentions that between 1945 and 1965 there were indeed 96 separate laws passed dealing wholly or in part with the administration of urban Africans.

86 Verwoed was Prime Minister from 1958 until his assassination in 1966.

87 Africans were also, though less commonly, allocated to "site and service schemes", that is, programmes granting them small plots of land with a toilet and access to water on which they could build houses from corrugated iron and wood.

88 This was effected through the Native Laws Amendment Act of 1952.

89 Less commonly, people would illegally squat on unoccupied land and build free-standing shacks, or would rent accommodation in hostels. Both of these increased somewhat from around the mid-1970s, but only significantly from the mid-1980s, when tentative reform initiatives became a wholesale reform package that, among other things, saw the abolition of influx control. The mid-80s are also significant because Africans were from then on legally able to purchase private homes in the townships or in the "white" cities, although most lacked the financial means to do so (Hindson 1996:79; Huchzermeyer 2002:89; Mabin 1989:7–8).

90 This depended a great deal more on local-level administration and pre-apartheid land ownership systems than on changing national-level land policies, and both were remarkably inconsistent even in the apartheid years.

91 She calls this township by the pseudonym "Reeftown".

92 Krige (2012:29–34) has criticised Brandel-Syrier for this sort of ahistorical reductionism.

93 These social-psychological strains were also a concern of South Africa's black consciousness movement. When speaking of a generic "black man" in essays like "We Blacks", it was clearly actual or aspiring middle-class, urbanised Africans and other black South Africans that Steve Biko (1987 [1978]:29) had in mind where he argued that "[h]is heart yearns for the comfort of white society and makes him blame himself for not having been 'educated' enough to warrant such luxury."

94 Between 1996, shortly after the democratic transition, and 2007, the number of people living in backyard shacks grew by 46 per cent, as opposed to a 16 per cent increase in other informal dwelling

(Lemanski 2009:473, n.6). 2011 census figures are more striking, showing that there had been a 55 per cent growth in backyard dwellings in the previous decade, as opposed to a 9 per cent decrease in free-standing shack dwelling over the same period (Turok and Borel-Saladin 2013; 2016:387). Similar sub-letting systems have been studied in cities such as Lima, Calcutta, Bangkok and Cairo, although backyard tenants in South Africa most resemble the *allegados* (literally, those who are near or related) of Santiago de Chile insofar as there is a similarly high level of social interaction between tenants and house owners (Crankshaw et al., 2000:841–42). In the Chilean case, this often assumes the form of shared household budgeting for consumer basics such as food, while in South Africa this mostly entails landlords sharing their access to services such as electricity, sanitation, running water and refuse collection with tenants in exchange for rent (Crankshaw et al., 2000:842; Turok and Borel-Saladin 2016:387).

[95] The Black Local Authorities Act was a development that itself has to be understood in the context of the policy shift that began in 1971 with the creation of Bantu Affairs Administration Boards (BAABs), as a form of rationalising central control over African townships by largely removing them from the control of local city councils. In response to the uprisings of 1976, the Community Council Act was passed the following year, which allowed for elected African councils as a subsidiary layer of urban governance within the BAABs as an attempt to co-opt Africans into supporting these structures and to decentralise fiscal responsibility. The Black Local Authorities Act gave these community councils increased powers to independently run their own affairs, with Africans now also allowed to vote for councillors in those townships where the system was in place (Beinart 2001:254–56).

[96] The party, formed in 1921, changed its name to the present South African Communist Party when it went underground in 1953.

[97] Bozzoli's (2001:206–32) larger point is that in the early- and mid-1980s neither the African National Congress (ANC), then in exile but still in contact with militants through clandestine publications and broadcasts on Radio Freedom, nor the legal umbrella body the United Democratic Front (UDF) (which formed in 1983 and largely represented the exiled ANC while gathering in other civil society organisations under its umbrella) had the sort of reach at the time that they have been retrospectively credited with. Their reach was wide and significant, but it was uneven. Through close historical research she demonstrates the presence of a wealth of other social movements that were equally or more important in provoking and sustaining urban rebellion in Alexandra. Bozzoli believes that this is likely to have been true of many other localities in South Africa that saw sustained and intense resistance to the apartheid state, and that not enough research has been directed at answering this question because the ultimate success of the UDF and the ANC in toppling apartheid have led to a retrospective overstatement of their historical reach – an idea which the ANC in government has not been at pains to discourage.

[98] These have begun to receive some scattered attention in the South African press where, for instance, one hears of entire inner-city buildings being illegally "hijacked", that is, forcefully occupied by groups seeking to usurp the role of the body corporate or property agent and rent the building out to others. The extent of these occupations is unknown, although in Johannesburg alone the Inner City Property Scheme estimates that 400 buildings in the city have been hijacked (Cox 2015; Steyn 2015).

[99] If the National Department of Human Settlements is to be trusted, then an estimated 2.8 million houses (and 800,000 serviced sites) have been provided to those in need in the two decades following the democratic transition in 1994 (South African Human Rights Commission 2015:15), to a population that in 2015 was estimated to stand at 54.4 million (Statistics South Africa 2016:8). This is arguably an impressive figure, although it does not take into account the size and quality of these houses, which are both very modest.

[100] Powell and colleagues discuss those falling into the poorest 25% of South Africans according to the 2011 Census definitions, which corresponds to all households earning below R9 600 annually.

[101] These are sometimes also called African "initiated", "instituted" or "indigenous" churches in the literature too.

[102] The 80 per cent figure appears in a dense web of cross-references but, tracing these back in time, it seems to derive from a number of misleading World Health Organisation reports. These reports, also mutually referencing, ultimately rely on Robert Bannerman's *Traditional Medicine and Healthcare Coverage*, a book written in 1983. Citing no evidence, Bannerman states that 80 per cent of the world's disadvantaged population turn to "traditional" healers first when ill (Wilkinson 2013).

[103] These are the most recent statistics we have, as questions of religion were omitted from the 2011 census.

[104] Venter's figures, based on official census data and various studies of the AICs, is for the black population alone. Given that AIC membership is almost exclusively black, and indeed African, this does not alter the picture substantially.

[105] There is unfortunately no consensus whatsoever on the finer typological points when classifying AICs in the literature. I will consider Pentecostal churches as distinct from AICs, though they are sometimes subsumed into this category. Apostolic churches are also usually considered as AICs, but as a variant of the broader Zionist church movement, and are sometimes referred to as Zionist-Apostolic churches for this reason. I will follow this trend too, although it is possible to view Apostolic churches as a distinct from of AIC – or perhaps more usefully, to speak with Garner (2004:86) of a "Zionist- Apostolic continuum". Following Jean Comaroff (1985:238), I also assimilate the "Messianic" churches into the general category of Zionist churches, though others prefer to separate them. I do this only as a simplifying device for the discussion that follows. The major distinctions I work with are as follows: (a) mainline churches, which in South Africa are mostly Protestant denominations; (b) Pentecostal churches, which include what are sometimes also discussed as "charismatic" or "prosperity" churches; and (c) AICs. When speaking of differences *within* the AICs, the main distinction I work with is between Ethiopian and Zionist Churches. For a useful overview of these and other distinctions in the literature, see Venter 2004:19–26.

[106] For instance: "Of at least one famous prophet it is believed that he can see in his sleep; he has eyes on his feet and through these extra eyes he watches, even in his slumber, the thought and deeds of his followers"(Sundkler 2004:165).

[107] Within the "Apostolic" churches – which I will consider a small sub-category of the Zionist churches but which are sometimes considered as a third family of AICs – healing is also less central (Schoffeleers 1991:91-92). In Ethiopian churches, healing practices usually occur within church services, with prayer and the laying on of hands for the sick being shared among the entire congregation. For Zionists, congregational healing, usually accompanied by dancing, ritual confession or the distribution of holy water, is almost always reinforced by rituals of healing involving the whole group as well as through individual consultations with healer-prophets, both of which are far less common in the Ethiopian churches.

[108] Wakkerstroom is a rural area in the contemporary Mpumalanga province. The initial web of churches that grew out of the breakaway at Wakkerstroom became linked to a church in Johannesburg, but this was only one of the churches appearing at the time, and the original congregation there was mostly European. The movement soon passed over into African hands, however, in what are now the Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal provinces and in Swaziland.

[109] Zionist churches also tend to proscribe polygyny and to strongly condemn adultery and promiscuity (Kiernan 1997:246). Sometimes they also forbid the consumption of herbs and medicines form diviners and observe taboos on foods mentioned in Leviticus, which they adapt into local terms (Kiernan 1997:246; Niehaus 2001:34). Niehaus, for example, encountered Zionists who would not eat pork, hare, mopane worms, flying ants or any animal that had died of natural causes.

[110] Umbrella bodies, like the South African Council of Churches (SACC) have been lacking in legitimate leadership and have failed to speak with a unified voice on most issues (Bompani 2010:309).

[111] As mentioned in Chapter 5, this is a catch-all term that in South Africa is often used to describe the obligations of the local state to municipal residents.

[112] The Limpopo Province was formerly known as the Northern Province, and is discussed as such by Niehaus.

[113] West (1975:179–80) encountered both an Ethiopian and a mainline church (Methodist) pastor in Soweto who sometimes sacrificed to ancestors without explicitly highlighting the fact that this was what was going on to their congregations, although West believes that many of those present would have understood their pastors' unstated intentions.

[114] Berglund, who refers to ancestors as "shades", mentions a Zulu expression used in this context, *ukubulala nya*, which he translates as "kill utterly, annihilate". "If a man is killed totally by witches in that he becomes a familiar," explained one of Berglund's (1976:277) informants, "then there is not a shade. The shade is no more. It is finished."

[115] Mayer (1974:156) quotes one informant as saying that "[o]ne's ancestors are disturbed when one lowers the name of the family or clan. They are like living beings who are very proud of their own

people." Another informant put it as follows: "Our ancestors disapprove of any one of us who is a wrongdoer because he brings disgrace to his people and family". Incorrigible wrongdoers would therefore often be reproached for bringing shame on their ancestors.

[116] When one looks at what the Comaroffs have argued, as opposed to how they have been received, there are many moments when they themselves undermine any strong claim on their part to having resolved these problems, and rather portray their work as provocation for further research that would better be able to establish compelling links to local and global phenomena, while also encouraging those setting out to resolve these problems to reason in terms of *multiple* modernities. While heavily emphasising what they suspect are the global economic drivers of witchcraft, they thus also encourage considering the altered role of the state and civil society, and political convulsion more generally, as potentially pertinent to the apparent rise in witchcraft and similar occult activities (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999a:294). The real significance of their research, then, is to have reinvigorated research into the connection between occult practices and large-scale social change, without themselves having put any of these questions to rest.

[117] Myhre suggests that explanations about social change and relational fragility are competing alternatives, but I view them as potentially complementary.

[118] My description of the emotions associated with witchcraft collectively as resentment is indebted to Adam Ashforth's (2005:86–87) suggestion that this term might best be used for this purpose.

[119] This is itself a paraphrase of Peter Geschiere's description of witchcraft as "the dark side of kinship".

[120] To speak of all this is not in any way to exoticise or demean Africans, but rather to note that excessive talk of community cohesion and *ubuntu* in African communities, usually by well-intentioned academics, can easily be misleading. It has definitive value as a way of exposing the untruth in demeaning portrayals of African life as singularly depraved, violent and lawless. But if viewed as an accomplished social fact rather than a fragile, perpetually embattled ideal that is only ever partially realised in certain times and places it can very easily incline toward an equally false picture of Africans as essentially noble savages. What emerges from the best discussions of witchcraft is that it is tied up with uncertainty and communal fragmentation as a consequence of resentment, and what is interesting about it from my perspective is that it has emerged alongside enormously popular movements to contain it.

[121] The full title of the report is the "Commission of Inquiry into Witchcraft Violence and Ritual Murders in the Northern Province of the Republic of South Africa". It is commonly referred to as the Ralushai Commission report.

[122] Here I am, very loosely, following Nathalie Karagiannis's (2007:154–57, 162) interesting suggestion for thinking of solidarity in a non-reifying manner, and for using the concept to analyse social and political life well beyond the original socio-political setting of revolutionary France in which the term first gained intellectual currency.

[123] For Fine, "capitalism creates a structural separation not only between the economy and society but also, within the economy, between production and exchange" (Fine 2002:181).

[124] Bourdieu (1992:79–83, 89–91) is aware of such criticisms and denies them, but not very convincingly. Philip Gorski (2013:2) has weighed in on this by arguing that the emphasis on reproduction is most marked in Bourdieu's middle period, in the works first published between 1970 and 1980, when the influential *Reproduction, The Logic of Practice, Outline of a Theory of Practice,* and *Distinction* were first published. As my reading of Bourdieu here is based mainly on the latter two works, this may indeed mean that what I say of Bourdieu applies only to them, or to this stage of Bourdieu's career, and not to his oeuvre as a whole, where Bourdieu's disclaimers may indeed apply. On the other hand, Craig Calhoun (1993:70–73, 82) believes one can observe this tendency to emphasise reproduction over transformation, by consistently viewing the latter as historically inconsequential, even in works falling outside of the period identified by Gorski, including *Homo Academicus* and *The State Nobility*, where social change is an explicit theme.

[125] The term comes from Bourdieu 2013:189.