

Consumption at long sight

Gerhard Schulze

University of Bamberg, Germany

THE AIMS OF THE PAPER

Consumption is a changing social phenomenon that has its roots in history and looks set to undergo fundamental transformation in the future. Science has to assess consumption in a multidisciplinary way, not only in terms of the economic sciences, but also in terms of sociology, anthropology, psychology, philosophy, and ecology. These aspects are interrelated both in history and consumer biographies. The article starts with a look back on the history of consumption (including the author's childhood in post-war Germany) and ends with a view on its future. The *purposes* are (I) to identify specific stable features of consumption in the long range, (II) to describe the actual global situation as a mix of three stages of transition, and (III) to describe various facets of absurdity that may announce the coming of a post-consumption era. The last section (IV) anticipates what could happen as a result of collective learning, of changing collective self-observation and of normalization of new forms of creation of values.

METHODOLOGY

Methodologically the analysis is guided by the approach of Understanding Sociology according to Max Weber in combination with an anthropological interpretation of actors under the condition of continuous expansion of options since late 18th century.

MOST IMPORTANT RESULTS

The *results* consist firstly in the specification of several universal features of consumption, secondly in the identification of the idea of arrival as opposed to the idea of increase as a contemporary global trend, thirdly in describing exemplarily four patterns of absurdity as stimuli of collective learning in the long range.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The *recommendations* concentrate on ways of new thinking and collective self-observation: normalization, distance, maturation, objectification, individualization, de-materialization, collective goods, and self-perception.

Keywords: phenomenology of consumption, stages in the history of consumption, consumption in global perspective, absurdities of consumption, future of consumption

HISTORY OF CONSUMPTION IN FAST MOTION

When I was a child I was lucky from a sociological point of view, because I learned a lot about the world before modernity. We lived in a little village in the countryside – an environment which had fallen back to an almost preindustrial stage in the years after World War II: agriculture to produce what people ate; no tractors but ox-drawn carts; a fire stove in the kitchen; no mass media, not even a radio. Everybody knew everything about everybody in the neighbourhood instead of knowing what happened in the world outside. And there was a grocer who already anticipated the idea of the supermarket on 12 or 15 square meters: selling margarine, noodles, smoked herring, and a universe of sweets containing about 10 different products.

Having lived in these circumstances, I experienced the history of consumption from point zero. The first object that started the endless flow of new products and items into our household was a radio. It was followed by a long series of consumer goods in our home – more and more shoes and clothes, a washing machine, electric kitchen utensils, a car, a television set, and finally an electric dishwasher.

In my family these innovations were regarded as “normal”. In the history of consumption markets, such social comparison always has been a strong force. This field of history may appear short, when compared to the history of markets in general. If we define markets, following Max Weber, as social relationships in which persons compete for opportunities to exchange (Weber 1964), markets came into existence about 3500 years before Christ in Mesopotamia (Mikl-Horke 1999). From the very beginning, markets connected apart places of production and utilization; they evolved as hubs of exchange networks. Markets were global at an early state already, geographically limited only by the respective actual knowledge of the existing world. Cities attracted markets, and vice versa markets often stimulated the growth of cities.

But for the longest time markets were *not* markets of consumption in the sense of mass markets for standardized mass products. Consumption is a relatively new phenomenon. Historians like McKendrick or Mikl-Horke date the origins of consumption to the 18th century first in England, then in continental Europe, then in the United States (McKendrick & Plumb 1982, Mikl-Horke 1999). What are the distinctive cultural features of consumption markets that allow identifying them in history and present times? Five characteristics are essential:

(1) *Choosing*. If there is no choice, we say “bird, eat or die” in German. Consumption starts beyond this situation. Having a choice stimulates self-reflection and comparison: What do I want? What is better for me? What is the relation of the goods to my needs? These questions are focussed on objective qualities on the one hand, like nutritional facts of food, durability of materials, functions of technical devices, and last but not least prices. On the other hand, consumer goods are judged subjectively. Having a choice means having permission to exceed the absolute basic needs of sheer survival. Even in its simplest and primordial forms consumption gives way to the idea of a playful, esthetical relation to the world, searching for something that is unnecessary, but inviting, stimulating, seductive. To say it in the words of Oscar Wilde: “Let me be surrounded by *luxury*, I can do without the necessities.” This corresponds to a congenial aphorism of Friedrich Schiller: “We are human beings only if we play.” In consumption we play with tastes, colours, sounds, stories, symbols or social messages, no matter whether the consumer goods are clothes or potatoes. In the course of time, the subjective aspect increasingly gains the upper hand. The focus of choosing moves from objective qualities to subjective experiences.

(2) *Access for everybody*. Consumption makes all people equal in a certain sense: everybody could purchase everything provided he or she has the necessary money. At this point a well-behaved sociologist might immediately protest: “But you are forgetting social inequality! Not everybody has enough money for everything.” I would answer: But *if* one had, one could consume whatever one’s wishes would be. In the era of consumption, living like a king has become a realistic dream for potentially all people. This dream of the great majority transformed into an economic power that in the long run created both consumer goods and money. Producers quickly learned that the wages they paid were not at all lost money but prospective profits. When Henry Ford was criticized for raising the salaries of his workers he answered: “Cars don’t buy cars.”

(3) *Expansion of needs and objects*. The history of consumption means the explosion of wishes, desires and pretended needs. Providers invented more and more new utilities for given private contexts: cars, telephones, electric kitchen utensils, radio, television and so on. In the long run, the needs of everyday life are like an avalanche: New things create new needs. Let us take a banal example: Before the era of consumption many

people possessed only one pair of shoes, if at all. By and by, they could afford a second pair, a third and so on. The more shoes they had, the more things they needed in addition: shoe creams in various colours, brushes for various functions, and finally a shoe cabinet with special shelves. In that manner, the avalanche of consumer needs in everyday life leads to an avalanche of objects in every household. On average, a person in Germany today owns more than 10.000 things (Kruse 1995).

(4) *Diversification*. In the long run, consumption implies ongoing diversification of all kinds of goods. There is not only one alternative, there are dozens, hundreds or thousands. Go into a supermarket and ask a shop assistant to give you “a” soap. In my childhood days, the grocer would have brought me the only sort of soap he had. But in a supermarket of today, asking for “a” soap would be what Garfinkel (1967) called a breaching experiment, putting the shop assistant into a crisis. A breaching experiment is a method to make forgotten normality evident by ignoring it. In a contemporary supermarket it is normal that there are loads of concurring products for any purpose. Some weeks ago, I counted 43 different soaps in the small supermarket in my neighbourhood, solid and fluid ones, many of them specialized only for parts of the body, with more flavours and skin-friendly additives I could ever have imagined. So we see yet another avalanche in the history of consumption: the permanently growing avalanche of diversification.

(5) *The increase game*. The characteristics of consumption that have been mentioned so far are all embedded into a phenomenon I call the *increase game* (Schulze 2006). The increase game is a pattern of collective interaction between several actors in permanent mutual stimulation. Though consumers and providers are important players, they are by no means the only ones. Other participants are applied sciences, high tech development, private banks, stock exchange, advertising, mass media, economic sciences, politics, central banks like the FED or the European Central Bank, and transnational institutions like the OECD. The common denominator of all these players’ intentions can be simply expressed by the term “more”.

Mechanization and digitalization enable factories to produce more things for less money generating more profit; the shares of such factories become more valuable; science and high tech development construct new apparatuses, materials and goods that facilitate more purposes in any respect; politicians promise more to voters;

advertising promises more to clients; consumers want more goods for their money, more objects in their home, more choices in the supermarket, more channels on television, more functions in hardware and software – generally speaking more in the sense of a higher standard of living, defined as disposability of consumer goods.

The increase game consists in transactions aimed at achieving more within the particular frames of reference the different players keep in mind. In Niklas Luhmann’s general theory such a common semantic frame of reference is defined as “guiding difference” (Luhmann 1987). Guided by the difference of “more”, the actors in the increase game are able to understand each other and to interact.

(6) *Scarcity, rush, affluence*: Consumption is driven by a momentum permanently renewing its dynamic. In the long run, it becomes evident that there are typical stages in the history of consumption. Roughly speaking, three stages can be discerned: *scarcity*, *rush*, and *affluence*. Of course, consumer goods are different according to technological development, but anthropologically speaking the story is always the same. It is the story of permanently enlarging individual opportunities and choices in everyday life.

At the beginning, at the stage of *scarcity*, it is very easy to understand the irresistible power of desiring better living conditions, like in post war Germany or in many African or South American States today. It is still easy to understand consumers in the *rush* era, for instance my sisters and me getting on our parents’ nerves until we finally acquired the electric dishwasher. In the *rush* era, people live in a mixed mood of satisfaction and discontent. Satisfaction with new consumer goods quickly fades away, because the new opportunities become trivial. Discontent, on the other hand, drives consumers to detect something that is still lacking. Little by little, the dialectic of satisfaction and discontent leads to *affluence*, and the initial simplicity of consumption transforms into complexity. In the stage of *affluence*, people have by far more choices than time, energy and attention to actually realize them or to simply take them into consideration. This is the point the most developed nations have reached today and that more and more other nations are due to reach soon.

THE PRESENT GLOBAL SITUATION

After this short historical phenomenology the focus shifts to present time. In the history of markets, globalization is not at all a recent development. Quite the contrary, markets always had a tendency to stretch to the limits of the world that has been known and accessible at a given period. The same holds true for the relatively brief history of consumption. When I went to the grocer in my childhood days, a sign over the entrance read: *Kolonialwaren*, which means *colonial goods*. This word emerged in Germany in the early 19th century, referring to globalization long before anybody spoke about it. However, present-day globalization has reached a new dimension in respect to speed, flow of goods and information, and also in respect to standardization of goods. For tourists at any place of the world shopping has become a pleasure with less and less surprises because the same consumption goods are offered anywhere.

The increase game has expanded all over the world, but there are different regions in correspondence to the three stages of consumption – scarcity, rush, and affluence. We observe a worldwide asynchronicity between these zones. Of course, the transitions between these zones are vague, and there is much inequality within these zones. Nonetheless, people tend to assimilate their perceptions of normality according to their context. The concept of the three stages refers to different normalities that become obvious in comparison to the exceptions within a given society.

When *scarcity* is normal, even a plastic basket, a pencil or an egg has a high subjective value. This is what I experienced in my early childhood. But unlike today we had no smartphones, iPads and TV to perceive normal affluence in other parts of the globe. Today, even the poorest people around the globe compare their situation with that of the wealthier. For them, a middle class household in Hungary seems like paradise. This provides a strong drive for migration, for instance from Africa to Europe or from South America to the United States. On the other hand, evident global inequality discourages those who stay. The economic distance seems too big, the local elite too corrupt, and life too short to bridge the gap.

In the *rush zones* of the world, people are governed by a very different mentality. They experience continuous increase, while still remembering scarcity very well. They feel their success and enjoy all the things they or their parents formerly

could only dream of. For instance, countries in the Far East like Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar or Vietnam today resemble post-war Germany at the time of the “Wirtschaftswunder” in the fifties and sixties, but on a higher level of technology, with far more diversification of consumer goods and multiplied purchasing power of people with an average income.

Where formerly there had been bicycles, there are now cars and motorbikes in traffic jam. Where there had been candles and weak electric bulbs, there is now a flood of light and colours illuminating the night. Where there had been shanties of wood and grass, there are now stone houses. Where there had been silence, now powerful sound systems fill the air with a permanent soundtrack of music, but nobody complains. As an observer coming from the world of affluence is confronted with an almost forgotten atmosphere of consumption pride, joy and self-staging. In the zones of rush classical distinction still is a vital force to stimulate consumption: Look, I also own a car! Look, my car is bigger than yours! Look, I can afford a holiday trip!

What will come next is the stage of affluence. More than a half century ago, the US-economist John Kenneth Galbraith published his book *The Affluent Society*, analysing the United States which had already reached this stage long before the European states (Galbraith 1958). Affluence, according to Galbraith, does not mean the end of inequality; neither does it mean the end of consumption. Affluence means a stage of a national economy, in which production exceeds consumption. The absorbing power of the people concerning consumption goods doesn't match the production power of the providers any more. As against the years of scarcity and rush, the average marginal utility of consumer goods has sharply declined, whereas the capacity of production is multiplied. In the present era of globalization the expansion of rationalized and cheap production is still enormously accelerated by new rush states like China.

In the stages of scarcity and rush it is more or less clear what people need and desire. Hence, the producers are able to roughly anticipate the immediate future of the market. Scarcity and rush are stages of relative certainty, in which the increase game can be stabilized and continued. Under those conditions, a national economy is like a train driving at full speed on secure rails.

But in the era of affluence, this metaphor is misleading. Formerly successful strategies of orientation don't fit any more. Well established dogmas, as they are fixed in the routines of market

research, in the paradigms of economic sciences, in the interventions of politicians and central banking authorities like Mario Draghi, come out of date, in spite of their scientific dominance and their pretended certainty. The clear connection between consumer goods and needs, which was normal in scarcity and rush, is dissolving fast in affluence.

Little by little, this will give rise to the idea of arrival. Affluence is a challenge for all players of the increase game, because it requires new perspectives instead of the accustomed perspective of regular change. Modern culture has always been dominated by development, progress, growth, and expansion of choices. On the one hand, this view of the future still seems valid. Some examples: We are on the threshold of the so-called *internet of things*, where an unimagined individualization of goods will become trivial. *Artificial intelligence* is in a stage of a quantum leap coming up to the abilities of the human brain. *Genetic engineering* has reached the level of designing and actually constructing human beings. *Science* still has enough riddles to resolve and is far away from the End of Science as James Horgan pretended twenty years ago (Horgan 1996). Last but not least, the *world population* still is growing exponentially. In 1800, the world population reached the first billion. Over the last ten years, it *grew* by one billion. So we witness long-term developments that seem familiar and regular, governed by the principle of *more*.

On the other hand, as for consumption, the limits of *more* come into sight. These limits appear both in the smallest system involved in consumption and in the biggest one – the subject on the one hand, and the planet on the other. The analysis of both systems suggests that more and more people consider the idea of *arrival* and begin to look sceptically to the accustomed idea of *more*.

ABSURDITIES ON THE THRESHOLD OF ARRIVAL

Dennis Meadows' book *The limits to growth* was a milestone in the ecological self-reflection of modern culture (Meadows 1972). This critical tradition has become stronger and stronger down to the present days, including several actualizations and improvements of Meadows' first study. Part of this tradition is a simple and striking indicator of the United Nations – the *world overshoot day*. This day is calculated anew every year. It is the day, when mankind has spent the resources it could consume in one year under the condition of sustainability. In 2016, the world overshoot day

was on August 8. Every year, this day's timing is advanced more and more. One need not be a pessimist, to suspect a global breakdown, even if we take into account technical progress and the detection of new resources.

Here the other system with a limited capacity of consumption comes into sight: the subject. Are our needs endless? Indeed, this is the inherent paradigm of all the various players in the global increase game. But there is some reason to challenge this paradigm. Indeed, the idea of "enough" is becoming more and more popular, not only in private consumption but also in worldwide social movements and political discourses. But chiefly this idea gets ignored, and this has its price. It causes absurd patterns of consumption. Let me briefly comment on four such patterns: consumerism, rebound, rationality of experience, and Dadaism.

(1) *Consumerism*. In the last decades, the word "shopping" has established internationally describing consumption as an end in itself. Here, the main purpose of consumption is not to discover objects in relation to clearly felt needs and wishes, but rather it is a sort of occupational therapy against helplessness to use one's time without external stimulation. So consumerism results in homes full of things that are not needed, in mountains of garbage, in shopping malls everywhere, in apps to guide you to the next shopping opportunities as quickly as possible. A recent app simply counts a person's visits to a network of certain shops. The more steps one has taken and the more shops one has visited, the more discount will one get. It doesn't matter whether one actually buys something or not, the discount will be granted until one has finally decided on something.

(2) *Rebound*. This also is a word that has acquired a new meaning. Originally rebound was defined in merely physical terms as change of direction of a force, for instance if you throw a ball against a wall and it bounces back to you. In recent years, the notion of rebound has entered the sphere of ecology, economy and sociology (Buhl 2016). Here, rebound refers to goods and services that are meant to save time, energy, and resources, for instance smartphones, notebooks, or cars. But in contrast, the saved time, energy and resources are immediately used for new purposes. So we are more stressed and live less sustainably than ever.

(3) *Rationalization of experience*. In the history of consumption, the relevance of basic needs continually diminishes in favour of emotions, sensations, fascinating events, aesthetical preferences, or in a word: experiences. In his theory

of postmaterialism, Ronald Inglehart gathered a lot of international empirical evidence for the shift of existential goals from objective to subjective purposes – self-fulfilment, identity, community, values, emotions, feelings (Inglehart 1977). On the consumption market, this shift led to a frame of reference I call *rationalization of experience* (Schulze 1992, 2013). In that pattern, consumption goods are acquired and offered as means to stimulate experiences: more happiness, more incredible excitements, more unparalleled thrills. Within this frame the subject is modelled like an input-output-device. The input of goods and events allegedly results in the output of experiences on an endless path of increase by rational psycho-engineering of feelings. But experiences cannot be bought, only the opportunity to possess them or not, as the philosopher Jon Elster points out in his book *Subversion of Rationality* (Elster 1985). Experiences are subjective constructions for which standardized consumer goods and services can only be helpful, but consumption cannot substitute the active subject. Experiences are familiar to works of art: they are finished in the conscience of the subject, depending on its skills, patience, self-reflection and creativity.

(4) *Dadaism*. Many people perceive or at least intuitively feel those absurdities of consumption. There are many things they don't take seriously, including themselves. Irony and tolerance for craziness have become indispensable habits to live in an atmosphere of competition for attention with an inflation of superlatives. Advertising is omnipresent. Sounds, promises, suggestions, gags and slogans have created a sort of folklore. The public doesn't perceive advertising as information, but as a familiar ambiance in a global home country. Apps have been developed to block pop ups while surfing the internet, and hundreds of millions of users have downloaded these apps. But they cannot escape, advertising is everywhere. Recent studies on the perception of advertising have revealed that most people don't even understand the sense of the presentation, and if they do, most of them don't know what concrete consumer good the picture or video is about (Yougov 2016). This folklore of senseless communication resembles an episode of art history that began in Zürich in 1916 – Dadaism, the poetry and painting of nonsense.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THE FUTURE OF CONSUMPTION?

Considering the subjective and planetary limits of consumption raises a question: What will happen? What is the future of consumption? We know the implicit answer of the players of the increase game: They expect the future to continue the past. They expect more in any respect, ignoring the objective and subjective limits. Also in economic sciences past observations are often interpreted as manifestations of universal laws that determine the future of consumption. This also means ignoring the limits. Economic predictions are regarded as the outcome of unchangeable necessities; in this respect they resemble weather forecasts, but in contrast they rarely come true.

Consumption is not a natural phenomenon. It belongs to the realm of culture and has to be treated accordingly. The future of consumption depends on what people think about consumption and how they observe themselves both individually and collectively. Hence, my subsequent approach to the future of consumption has not been derived from pretended universal laws but is based on a hypothetical understanding of consumers of tomorrow (Schulze 2016). Inevitably, this is a trip into the field of thinking under the condition of uncertainty, where scientific intersubjectivity can only take the form of plausibility. The following theses are all based on a common assumption – namely that the idea of arrival will gain more and more importance. How will this idea take shape in the field of consumption? I will present several keywords with short comments.

(1) *Normalization*. The future of consumption will turn to a less dynamic phase. If we compare the history of consumption with a journey, the future of consumption is a time of arrival, of becoming stationary, of business as usual, including both folkloristic and common sense elements. In the long run, the dynamic pattern of scarcity, rush and affluence will come to an end, social inequality in consumption will still exist though on a higher level. This development can already be observed in the zones of affluence. Consumption will chiefly consist in providing the goods whose availability is regarded as normal. For national economies, consumption will remain important but it will be just one force among various other forces. The productive forces will be needed for other purposes too, as I will point out in the following

(2) *Distance*. In the situation of affluence patterns of distance towards consumption evolve,

including irony, anti-consumption and demonstrative disinterest. Consumers play with many styles; their homes and cupboards can be regarded as archives for a sort of self-staging in the theatre of everyday life. On the same day, a person may represent a sportsman, a tramp, a gentleman and a bourgeois husband through different styles of consumption including anti-consumption. Demonstrative consumption is no longer as seriously related to one's self esteem as it was in the rush period, when it was essential for the consumers to demonstrate their social rank and their position on the scale of material prosperity. Symbolic consumption has become idiosyncratic, limited to small groups of connoisseurs, fragmented into normative communities, grouped around ideologies, heroes, abilities, passions. And it often has an ironical touch, it doesn't matter so much. Even anti-consumerism, symbolizing overt refusal to consumption has become a pattern in the archive of consumption styles, as demonstrated by shabby chic, second hand dresses or car sharing, or furniture made out of rough, unpolished wood or cardboard. The various forms of distance towards consumption will remain stable in the future, I assume, because they are a result of collective self-reflection.

(3) *Maturation*. The above described patterns of consumption have become more and more popular. Arthur Schopenhauer would feel strongly confirmed. According to his philosophy, all of us are driven by an unoriented energy – the “will” – that needs to be organized in episodes of action at any rate. Schopenhauer ridicules his contemporaries because of their desperate attempts to waste their time by doing something like playing cards. We can imagine what his sarcastic comments would be if we would take him to the nearest shopping mall.

But collective learning proceeds in dialectical terms. Hence the absurdities of consumption could trigger just the opposite – reason and common sense. Perhaps Schopenhauer was too pessimistic to concede us the ability to learn and stop wasting our time with distractions of any kind. More and more people use consumer goods in order to *escape* consumption, to concentrate on themselves, to communicate, to watch nature in silence, to read a book. According to official statistics about two times as many Germans visited museums than football matches of the German Bundesliga in the last years. Maturation means: being able to return to one's self instead of being distracted by animation, by self-imposed stress in the framework of rebound, or by delegating the responsibility for one's experiences to a pretended supplier of fascination. As stupid and silly consumption can be – I rather

expect a long range collective learning of self-fulfilment.

(4) *Objectification*. An additional and important form of maturation is the renaissance of objective criteria in the evaluation of consumer goods. In the history of consumption symbolic criteria soon became important, intensely strengthened by advertising. Distinction, identity, group membership, stories, aesthetical attributes and suggestions of experiences combined to form a symbolic, postmaterial surface that covered the objective qualities of goods and services. This phenomenon has by no means disappeared, but today the non-symbolic, objective qualities are becoming more and more salient as a consequence of the internet, where consumption goods are critically judged by clients or consumer goods advisers. In the history of consumption, this is an unexpected counterpoint to absurd consumption patterns.

(5) *Individualization*. The extreme differentiation of consumer goods in affluence paradoxically has led to individualization in spite of mass production. Nutrition, health, housing, mobility, sleeping comfort, cosmetics, personal hygiene, entertainment – whatever the needs of the consumers may be, they have to choose between countless alternatives promoted by a babble of euphemistic messages. In that situation, many consumers undergo a permanent process of trial and error in order to find out what is good for them. Choosing among myriads of diversified goods in relation to one's own needs has become difficult. More and more people read the comments of other consumers on the internet, which are often contradictory. Who is credible? Who judges along the same criteria as oneself? So choosing has become rather sophisticated, because it implies the cultivation of a meta-level judgement of judgements like in science. The result is a specific form of individualization, which consists in the unique combination of mass products a consumer composes as an expert for his or her own need management.

At present, this phenomenon is going to be radicalized by the forthcoming individualization of production, based on the internet of things. This means a turnaround of one of the oldest trends of consumption – the trend of standardization of goods. While this trend still exists, we observe a contrary trend towards de-standardization right through complete individualization. Cars for instance will be adjusted to very specific wishes of clients. Adidas will soon offer individualized sports shoes. This trend towards individualization implies more and more goods: clothes, kitchens, journeys, foodstuffs, learning, cooking, cars, and health.

Individualization will proceed on two ways: high tech production on the one hand; and the return of the small handicraft enterprise like the shoemaker, the tailor, the carpenter on the other hand.

(6) *De-materialization*. Throughout its history, consumption has implied materials and energy. In our time the physical consumption of the planet has increased more than ever. On the other hand, the immaterial share of economic activity has also augmented. Theories of post-industrial society by Alain Touraine (1972) and Daniel Bell (1973) analysed this process in the late 20th century, and Manuel Castells supplemented their description by his theory of the *Information Age*, published in three volumes. Castells describes a global transformation of value creation. Services, knowledge work, and information processing will substitute more and more traditional work (Castells 1998).

If this process will continue, it is possible that the absolute consumption of materials and energy will also decrease and growing shares of consumption things will transform into consumption of personal activities like care, education, therapy, counselling, coaching, research, training, housework and the like. A child, for instance, consumes time, energy and attention of the parents who can never be replaced by robots.

I admit that this is a very unusual, new perspective on consumption: the consumption of parent's productivity by the child. But it is a perspective in which the imbalance of the affluent society according to Galbraith would disappear: over-productivity in relation to the capacity of consumption leading to the limits of the planet and the subject. In the parent-child-relationship productivity and consumption are in equilibrium. In a world of arrival, the parents' investments could be seen economically as value creation, as a mode of production beyond rationalization that should be rewarded.

(7) *Collective Goods*. On the one hand, collective goods are in monetary competition to private consumption. On the other hand, some collective goods are indeed damaged by excessive private consumption. This will enhance the legitimacy of giving money for collective goods, even at the cost of private consumption. The most obvious example is the environment. Other examples of growing importance are silence, aesthetics of the public space including architecture, and last but not least the reduction of global social inequality. These goods are sensible for everybody, but they cannot be acquired by private consumption,

so a shift of value production from private consumption to collective goods will become still more popular and accepted.

(8) *Self-perception*. *To conclude, I will focus on an essential difference between nature and culture and the respective sciences: The objects of cultural sciences are subjects. This seems very simple, but is still ignored by many sciences that claim to be so-called hard sciences. Physics, mathematics, chemistry, biology, meteorology and the like are the successful models for other academic disciplines. But cultural sciences have to come to terms with the subjectivity of their objects of research: consciousness, reflexivity, constructiveness, and self-perception. As for consumption, self-observation has two main aspects: personal and collective self-observation.*

Actually, there seems to be more change in personal than in collective self-perception. Individual self-perception is getting influenced by discourses both on ecological and anthropological limits of consumption. Collective self-perception, in contrast, still is focused on macroeconomic growth as the most important indicator of success. Consumption may be as absurd and damaging as possible, but nevertheless it is appreciated all over the world because it contributes to macroeconomic growth. Classical economic thinking still governs the globe.

It has to be supplemented by cultural sciences like anthropology, sociology, psychology, history, and philosophy. But major changes in economic theory seem on the way. Since the year 2002 four Nobel laureates in economy were protagonists of the substitution of the classical model of homo oeconomicus in favour of a more complex perspective, taking into consideration cultural and emotional phenomena as well as historical singularity: Daniel Kahnemann, Vernon Smith, Robert Shiller, and – in 2017 – Richard Thaler. The future of consumption depends on the contribution of the cultural sciences to new perspectives of personal and collective self-perception. This contribution was too one-sided in the past, too anti-hedonistic and too far away from Oscar Wilde and Friedrich Schiller. "We are human beings only if we play." Consumption will change, but it will remain. Of course, consumption should be observed critically; but it also should be acknowledged as a part of the human potential.

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Prof. Dr. Gerhard Schulze, PhD
Chair of Sociology, especially Methods of Empirical Social Research
gerhard.schulze@uni-bamberg.de
University of Bamberg