



Working to consume: consumers as the missing link in the division of labour

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Abstract:

This paper argues that the work of consumers is a significant and constantly developing field of work, and proposes a conceptual framework for understanding consumption work as part of the division of labour. The labour associated with consumption is not new, but has been rapidly expanding in recent years as a consequence of both socio-economic change and technical innovation. Few goods or services are delivered 'complete' to consumers in the sense of being ready for use without further activity, yet the role of consumers in completing a system of provision is rarely acknowledged in theories of either work or consumption. Recognition of the interdependence between the work undertaken prior to and after the purchase of goods and services problematises any assumption that all post-purchase activity comprises consumption and calls for a conception of the division of labour that extends from the market and world of paid employment to encompass also the usually unpaid labour of the end user. Consumption work is defined as 'all work undertaken by consumers necessary for the purchase, use, re-use and disposal of consumption goods'. Its key characteristics are delineated using examples from everyday life, and the approach towards it is distinguished from the practices and theories of consumption, domestic labour, and co-production/prosumption. The paper draws on current international comparative research in three socio-economic fields of activity (the work of food preparation, the installation of broadband and household recycling of waste) to illustrate its main arguments and explore the varieties of consumption work, their shaping by prevailing systems of provision, and their place within the division of labour.

Keywords/tags:

consumption work, division of labour, consumption, co-production, ready-made food, recycling, broadband installation

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1 INTRODUCING CONSUMPTION WORK

This paper has two related aims: first, to argue for recognition of the work of consumers as a significant and growing field of work that merits attention both in its own right and as an integral component of the division of labour. And second, to propose a preliminary conceptual framework for understanding consumption work as part of the division of labour which rests on reformulating and expanding traditional approaches.ⁱ The labour associated with consumption is not new, but it has been rapidly expanding in recent years as a consequence of both socio-economic change and technical innovation. We are all familiar with self-service in supermarkets, now expanding to self-scanning and self check-out, with online airline check-in and with self-assembly furniture and equipment. Not only is an increasing range of tasks transferred from producers and retailers to consumers, but emergent forms of leisure activity, travel arrangements, financial management that are often internet dependent introduce new kinds of work for consumers that were previously unknown. Few goods or services are delivered 'complete' to consumers in the sense that they are ready for use without further activity. On the contrary, work is normally required before they can be consumed. Recognition of this interdependence between the work undertaken prior to and after the purchase of goods and services problematises any assumption that all post-purchase activity comprises consumption or that the final transfer itself is constitutive of the consumer. It challenges the notion of 'production' and 'consumption' as watertight realms, and calls for a conception of the division of labour that extends from the market and world of paid employment to encompass also the end user.

Opening up 'consumption work' as a new empirical terrain for investigation draws attention to the work of consumers as a hitherto ignored, yet increasingly important, aspect of the division of labour. Over the years a number of scholars have commented on developments requiring greater input on the part of end consumers, for example the growth of self-service in retail (Humphery 1998) and fast food outlets (Ritzer 2001), the 'work transfer' in health care (Glazer 1993), and the proliferation of 'self-provisioning' activities including DIY (Pahl 1984).ⁱⁱ Yet the full range of such developments has not been systematically brought together; nor have their broader theoretical implications been explored. Incorporating the consumer into the division of labour poses a challenge to this foundational and enduring concept, given its traditional focus on the technical division of tasks and skills within a labour process or sector of work relating to paid employment. Yet, insofar as the completion of a circuit of production, distribution, exchange and consumption is predicated on consumers undertaking work in order to consume, analysis of the division of labour would be incomplete without their inclusion. If tasks are reallocated from producers or retailers to consumers, then the framework of analysis requires extension in order to comprehend the reconfiguration of the division of labour. Work does not simply disappear when it shifts across socio-economic boundaries. Similarly, it is important to develop concepts capable of capturing the range of tasks required of consumers before or after they consume on which consumption itself is predicated. At present this realm of activity figures neither in the study of work, nor of consumption, and so a further aim is to establish another bridge between the study of these two fields.

Two everyday examples provide a flavour of the issues involved, self-assembly furniture and the washing machine. Whereas in the past, furniture was made and assembled by the manufacturer and sold and delivered by retailers in its final form, flat pack removes the assembling stage from paid employment and transfers it to the consumer. Transporting the goods from store to home also becomes the responsibility of the customer. The labour and costs of transport and assembly thus shift downstream and across socio-economic domain to the consumer. Insofar as the furniture has to be assembled in order to be useable, the consumer has labour to undertake *after* having bought the goods, but *before* they can be consumed and used. Consumers either accomplish it themselves (unpaid) or employ one of the new small companies offering assembling services. The self-assembly of furniture required by a company such as IKEA is an integral component not only of the firm's business model but also of its whole manufacturing and design process. All the different stages from raw material preparation, design, through manufacture, carpentry and upholstery, to packing and distribution not only connect with each other but presuppose that final assembly work will be undertaken at its eventual destination by the consumer. Thus, the emergence of flat-pack

shifts the final assembly work associated with making furniture ready for use from the traditional terrain of 'production' to that of 'consumption', moving it out of the factory and shop and into the home, where it incorporates the unpaid labour of the consumer.

In the second example of a washing machine, the range of work activities undertaken by the consumer to support consumption is again fairly self-evident. When buying a new machine the consumer will need to research the range of possible machines, and compare specifications in order to decide on a particular model. S/he also has to find out about retail options and which outlet sells what models, and then order online or by phone or in store and arrange for delivery. In addition to such research, plumbing alterations may be required for installation, and any necessary arrangements have to be made for these, normally by acquiring the paid services of a plumber. On delivery, the machine has to be unpacked, then installed, either by the consumer her/himself or by paying for this to be done. S/he also will need to study the instructions, become familiar with the machine's functions and learn how to use it; undertake periodic maintenance, and, at the end of its life, arrange for its disposal and recycling. All these tasks are distinct from the actual act of consuming or using the machine to wash, and cannot be simply subsumed as domestic labour.

Both these examples highlight the distinction between the 'consumption work' that is a prerequisite for consumption, and consumption itself, in the sense of consuming or using a product or service, a distinction that will be developed below. The distinction between production, retail and consumption work is also evident. The first example points to the historical reconfiguration of the technical division of labour involving the transfer of some production work across socio-economic spaces to consumers. Part of the more generalised expansion of consumption work is associated with such transfers in a variety of fields. By contrast, the second example does not point to anything new. Rather it brings into view a normally 'invisible' range of tasks: the work required of consumers in order to get and keep equipment up and running, and to arrange services and their delivery. A similar range of demands applies to the many kinds of domestic, leisure and personal equipment that our routine lives increasingly rely on. Not only is work necessary in order for the consumption of goods and services to take place, but in addition many forms of consumption themselves create work as a consequence of use (e.g. disposal in the case of washing machines). And since many forms of consumption work presuppose particular competencies or knowledge, its relation to learning and skills acquisition will also be an important area for consideration. Coordination represents a further significant aspect of consumption work: over and above the tasks linked with specific goods are those required both to coordinate a range of products that are used in combination and also to coordinate between consumers where consumption is a collective or social activity. Examples including both these dimensions of coordination might be commensality (coordinating the various elements of the meal and the people eating it), a camping trip (researching the location, getting together the equipment, means of transport, participants), or a game of tennis (club membership or court booking, acquiring the appropriate clothing, rackets, balls etc). These and other distinctive characteristics of consumption work will be developed below.

Recognising consumption work as a terrain for study in its own right entails a number of theoretical presuppositions and implications. Conventional approaches to the division of labour, which focus predominantly on the market and paid employment, or which study one industry or work place, are unlikely to include the work of consumers within their analytical frame. Yet such work, usually unpaid, is often essential to completion of a process of production or service provision. The following discussion and conceptual outline are programmatic and schematic, aiming to clarify the terrain of consumption work, its empirical significance as field of research enquiry, and to define and delimit it in relation to existing concepts and concerns. The first section situates consumption work within a broader three dimensional framework for analysing divisions, or 'socio-economic formations', of labour. In the second, consumption work is defined and characterised and its contours and features are delineated, using examples drawn largely from everyday life. The following section distinguishes consumption work and the approach to it being developed here from other activities and forms of work that may overlap with it and the literatures conceptualising them. The three main foci here are consumption, domestic labour, and the linked approaches of co-production, prosumption and co-creation. The penultimate section draws on ongoing current international comparative research in three distinct socio-economic fields of activity (the work

of food preparation, the installation of broadband and household recycling of waste) to illustrate the main arguments of the paper and explore the varieties of consumption work, their shaping by prevailing systems of provision, and their place within the division of labour. Despite the disparate content of their work, I suggest that the input of consumers is a key component of economic process in each of these domains. Some broader implications of this argument are drawn out in the brief conclusion.

2 CONSUMPTION WORK AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC FORMATIONS OF LABOUR: DIVISIONS OF LABOUR, SOCIO-ECONOMIC MODES OF WORK, INSTITUTED ECONOMIC PROCESS.

The approach towards consumption work builds on the multi-dimensional conception of the division of labour (Glucksmann 2009) formulated to initiate renewal of this foundational concept. The complexity and diversity of contemporary forms and connections between labour of different kinds cannot readily be captured by a taken-for-granted understanding of this basic concept. To meet the analytical challenge, first principles need to be revisited. Fundamentally, every new specialisation of work (a process of differentiation) entails new interdependencies and coordination (a process of integration). At a first level, three dimensions of differentiation and interdependency can be identified. The first remains the traditional one of technical specialisation, both intra-organisational and sectoral. The second concerns historically and socially varied forms of work conducted in different economic modes and their interdependencies: market and non-market, paid and unpaid, formal and informal. The third concerns the shifting differentiation and interdependencies of work across the economic processes of production, distribution, exchange, and post-exchange. Any work activity can be analysed in terms of technical, modal, and economic processual differentiation and integration. A simple example here might be the baking of bread which can involve different specialisations of skills; can be produced by industrial or craft actors, in the private or public sector, or unpaid in the household; can be fully produced by manufacturers, sold by retailers, and sliced by consumers, or part-prepared by retailers in store to be finally baked by consumers.

This approach therefore distinguishes two further forms of differentiation and integration of labour from the dominant traditional understanding of the division and complementarity of tasks. The first dimension (division of labour or DL) remains the technical division of skills and jobs within particular work processes, organisations or sectors, and their allocation to different kinds of people usually in a hierarchy. (To avoid confusion the term division of labour will here be confined to the traditional definition.)

The second dimension of differentiation and interaction, is of labour across socio-economic modes (TSOL or total social organisation of labour). These domains include the state, market, not-for profit sector, household and community where the same tasks (e.g. care work) may be undertaken on very different bases (paid or unpaid, formal or informal). Work may shift across socio-economic boundaries from one domain to another for a variety of reasons (including privatisation, outsourcing or cuts in public services), and the boundaries themselves may change. The work undertaken in one socio-economic domain presupposes or interdepends with that undertaken in another. For example, the recent history of welfare and care work across many European countries provides an instructive case, where a pre-existing division between private and public provision has been reconfigured, often with the result that unpaid household and community labour assumes a greater role than previously (Lyon and Glucksmann 2008). In different countries and at different times work activities are distributed in particular ways between socio-economic domains, resulting in distinctive 'modal' organisations of labour. These are operative and may be discerned at a variety of scales, from particular fields of economic activity to the national or societal level. Some countries are characterised by the dominance of the market, with the public and not-for-profit sectors being relatively undeveloped, while in others the public sector may account for a large proportion of employment and the market for less. Interaction and interdependence between the multiplicity of socio-economic modes is a basic characteristic of contemporary capitalism, which may be

more accurately described as 'multi-modal' than a 'mixed' economy.

Shifting perspective, a third differentiation and connection of labour comes into focus when the work conducted at the various different stages of an overall instituted economic process is considered. Karl Polanyi's radical insistence on the shifting place of economy in society drew attention to the variability of that place across time and space, the different ways economic relations might be instituted within society, and differentiated to a greater or lesser degree from social, political, cultural, and other relations (Polanyi 1957). The content of economic relations is always specific. In his anthropological conception, 'economies' are constituted by two basic process, distribution and ownership whereby goods change place and hands, by means of redistribution, reciprocity or exchange. In a recent development, the neo-Polanyian framework (presupposed by the approach towards consumption work being elaborated in this paper) expands this by the addition of two further processes of transformation, those of quality and of function or use, or in other words, production/provision and consumption. Harvey and colleagues (Harvey et al 2001, 2002, 2007) consider production, distribution, exchange and consumption as a relational complex of four distinct but mutually dependent and interrelated processes. Their conception of instituted economic process (IEP) focuses on how these four processes are instituted, and how relations between them become stabilised so as to form distinctive configurations enduring over a given space and time.

The framework being developed here approaches the conception of IEP from the perspective of work or labour. Adding work into the framework (instituted economic process of labour or IEPL) involves recognising that the work undertaken to effect each process is also differentiated and interdependent. For example, work done in the exchange phase may impact on the work of distribution (Glucksmann 2004, 2007), or the work of production may affect the work of consumption. 'Ikea-isation', as already suggested, reconfigures the work of production, distribution and consumption. So the work activities of the different processes are also connected and mutually shaped, and they too may vary historically and/or shift between different stages. Crucially, this third component of differentiation and interdependence of labour provides the opportunity to include work undertaken at the consumption phase of an instituted economic process. It also recognises that the work of consumers cannot be understood in isolation or as self-standing, but only in relation to work undertaken in production/provision, distribution and exchange. Treating consumption work as part of an IEPL will involve exploring how its nature and extent are shaped in relation to work undertaken at other phases of that overall process.

In summary then, the analytical framework of consumption work rests on a multi-dimensional conception of 'socio-economic formations of labour' (SEFL) rather than a simple notion of a single technical division of labour. Three dimensions of interdependence and differentiation of labour are distinguished (as represented in Figure 1):

- Technical: the 'division of labour' as a technical division and complementarity of tasks and skills, and their allocation to different kinds of people (DL).
- Modal: interdependencies of work across differing socio-economic modes) where labour is undertaken on different socio-economic bases (market and non-market, formal or informal, paid or unpaid and so on) ('total social organisation of labour' or TSOL).
- Processual: connections of labour across the various stages of instituted economic processes encompassing work undertaken across the whole span of a process of production of goods or provision of services, including the work of consumers. (instituted economic process of labour or IEPL).

Taken together, these three dimensions integrate a relational conception of the work of consumers *within* the analysis of the overall socio-economic formation of labour. Conversely, consumption work provides an analytically key entry route for exploring articulation of the three dimensions of socio-economic formations of labour. The work consumers undertake (what skills are acquired, the amount and range of work to make consumption possible) depends on how goods and services are sold, how 'complete' they are, and on their potential uses. As shown by the simple example of bread, the unpaid non-market-mode of work that consumers need to do

depends on how work is technically organised, as well as on how work is shifted upstream and downstream in the system of provision and marketing. In short, consumption work itself is characterised by inter-modal interdependence, technical divisions of labour, and by how work is distributed between actors across economic processes.

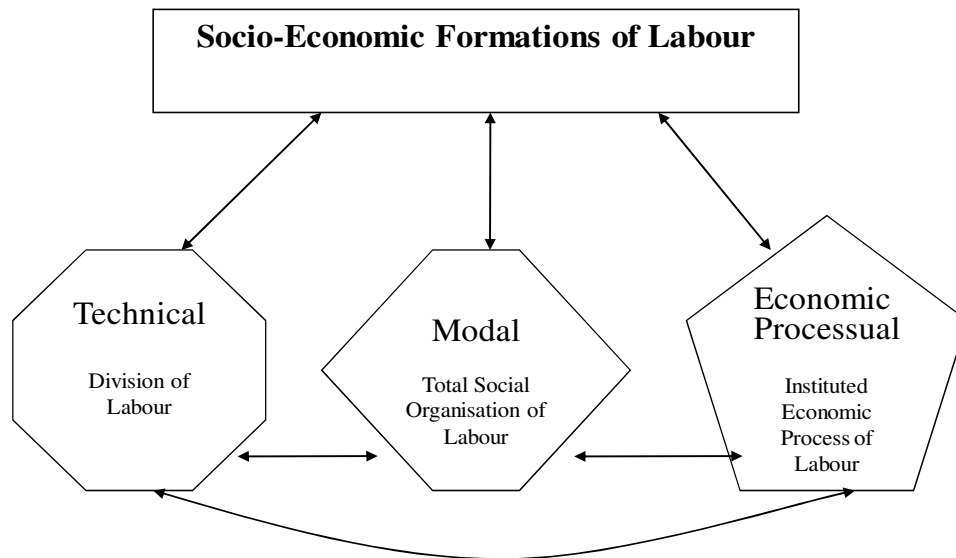


Figure 1. Dimensions of differentiation and integration of labour

If the work of consumers is shaped in relation to work undertaken elsewhere in the particular process, and across socio-economic domains, then the primary questions for empirical research will centre first on the shift of work (to and from consumers) across socio-economic boundaries and along instituted economic processes and second, on interactions (between consumers and other workers) across modes and phases of work. This will throw into relief configurations where the work of consumers and others combines in specific ways, which may vary considerably between times and place. Although a main objective of the paper is to establish consumption work as a terrain of research and to integrate the consumer within a revised approach to the division of labour, no assumption is made of a unilinear historical direction of change, nor that change proceeds in the same direction across all socio-economic fields. In some fields or at some times work may shift away from consumers as it become progressively commoditised through market expansion, while in others the spread of 'self-service' results in the shift being in the opposite direction. The framework outlined in this section makes no presuppositions about the direction of change and is designed to incorporate both these and other possibilities.

3 CHARACTERISING CONSUMPTION WORK

The following characterisation of consumption work is necessarily provisional, an initial attempt at concept building and delineation of contours. Let us start with a preliminary definition of 'consumption work' as *all work necessary for the purchase, use, re-use and disposal of*

consumption goods and services. 'Consumption work' is thus to be understood as distinct from consumption itself in the sense of using or using up goods or services. Very few products or services are complete, in the sense of being immediately ready to use, at the point of final transaction without any prior intervening activity on the part of the consumer. Moreover, this final preparation for use determines what exactly is eventually consumed.

The work of consumers includes a whole range of activities both prior to, during and post acquisition of goods or services that are a precondition of using or appreciating them. Each good or service comes with its own specific range of consumption work tasks. These will be introduced sequentially with reference to some familiar everyday examples before more formally identifying some key generic characteristics of consumption work.

Prior to the purchase or acquisition of goods and services is the associated searching and research work. Although a readily recognised feature of web enabled or remote transactions, it is also presumed by other more traditional modes of purchase. Online searches and comparisons, consulting catalogues, visiting stores, becoming familiar with the range and specifications of items comprise the most common consumption tasks associated with this initial phase by means of which consumers gather sufficient information to enable an informed choice. Clearly the nature of such research will vary according to the goods or services to be acquired, be they internet service provision, concert tickets, or clothing.

Following on from this is the actual purchase, involving shopping, effecting the exchange and, where necessary, the transporting of goods. Shopping at IKEA imposes quite different demands on the customer than buying goods from a traditional local grocery store, and this in turn differs from buying an insurance policy online or by telephone. New modes of shopping, often arising from technological innovation, presume new skills and work on the part of the consumer, if they are to be enjoyed as objects of consumption. Historical changes in modes of selling are necessarily accompanied by corresponding changes in modes of buying and their associated demands and skills (eg Kingston 1994, Humphery 1998, Zukin 2004, Gottdiener 2000). That work is required of consumers prior to purchase demonstrates that the exchange and distribution phases (IEPL) presuppose the active input of the end consumer prior to the final transaction or sale.

Once acquired, a different range of tasks often has to be accomplished before goods or services can be used or appreciated. In the case of the washing machine, and much other mechanical equipment, this may involve making adaptations in order to install it, as well as learning how it works and how to operate it. Preparing a meal from bought ingredients would present a very different scenario, requiring a range of learned competences on the part of the cook, but also presupposing the presence of a working infrastructure of cooking equipment and utensils and a source of power. Appreciating classical music may not require any immediate input from the consumer, other than keeping equipment in working order. Nevertheless, appreciation could well rely on familiarity with musical forms and their complexities, and with particular modes of listening, representing knowledge and skills often honed over years. Assembling a desk or cupboard from a flatpack kit poses a quite different range of demands on the consumer, that are more readily recognisable as requiring an input of labour after acquisition but prior to consumption.

Maintaining goods and services may be required for their continuing re-use, the nature and frequency of such consumption work varying with the goods in question. Regular servicing, updating software, renewing contracts, coping with breakdowns all require attention which is the consumer's responsibility to organise or effect. Over time, technological developments including the emergence of more user-friendly systems, may reduce the time intervals or labour input required for maintenance. Thirty years ago car maintenance was a far more onerous task than it is today, involving all sorts of checking under the bonnet with gauges and specialised instruments (including to measure and adjust the points gap) whose use had to be learned. Nowadays the demands are minimal by comparison: consumers are encouraged to take their cars to car-dealers utilising computer-reliant maintenance technologies rather than to do it themselves.

The eventual disposal of goods after they have been consumed may also demand work on the part of the consumer, and this is increasingly so as societies become more environmentally aware. Of the various modes of disposal recycling of household waste imposes regular and routine demands on consumers if their rubbish is to be collected. Over the last decade,

transformation of waste collection and disposal has had a marked impact on routine household activity, requiring consumers to sort and assemble various categories of waste in a particular manner either for kerbside collection or for transfer to recycling centres. This represents a new and expanding form of consumption work.

These are some of the tasks to be included under the rubric of consumption work. Different stages in the instituted economic process or cycle of production and provision, through distribution and exchange, to consumption require different kinds of input on the part of consumers: before acquisition, selecting a provider or product and organising the exchange and delivery and, once acquired, preparing goods for use, as well for their eventual disposal. Virtually all goods require further activity on the part of the consumer after purchase and prior to use in order to render them consumable. Following the final transaction, consumption work converts the product into an object for consumption according to how the consumer wants to use it. ⁱⁱⁱ Work undertaken post-exchange but prior to use has a non-market character: it is not organised or specified by the seller or other market agents but falls to the consumer to accomplish outside of exchange relations. The need for such activity on the part of the consumer remains the case even where the bulk of responsibility for preparatory work lies with the producer rather than consumer, or has moved towards the provider through a process of commoditisation (eg food) or public provision (e.g. water).^{iv} This point will be developed in the discussion below of ready-made food and broadband installation.

Looking at the consumption work tasks that arise sequentially in relation to particular objects of consumption also helps to identify some more generic the characteristics of consumption work. Four of these may be distinguished.

3.1 Consumption work as an economic activity

In most cases, consumers will take for granted the demands made of them as simply the normal way of doing things, without giving them a second thought or thinking of them as work or onerous. Yet, from the perspective of economic activity, accomplishment of the tasks is integral to and presupposed for completion and repetition of the process. The fact that they are individualised and become the responsibility of individual consumers or households, that they are undertaken outside of market or formal economy relations, and that they are unpaid, should not detract from their role. Moreover, when considered separately in relation to a particular phase of the circuit, or to a particular consumption good, they may not amount to much. However, when considered collectively as the totality of all tasks associated with all the stages of a process, in relation to all consumption goods and services, the picture looks rather different. From this viewpoint, consumption work may be seen as an extensive realm of activity, and one that is not normally acknowledged, certainly in theory but often also in practice. Just because the work required of consumers is not usually named, and may not be experienced as such, does not mean that consumption work as a form of work is insignificant, or not amenable to analysis. The aim in grouping together under one heading and naming the disparate range of tasks is to open up a large black box, and to highlight a form of labour, which although necessary, has largely been invisible or ignored.

3.2 Acquisition of appropriate knowledge and skills

Consumption work frequently involves acquiring a set of competencies, rather than simply using a product instruction manual or a single skill. Cooking, for example, relies on the prior accumulation of a range of knowledges, which, if not transmitted informally or intergenerationally, have to be formally learned (Leadbeater 1999). That such knowledge may often be tacit does not detract from its existence. While the presence of such knowledge is taken for granted and unproblematised, the same cannot be said when it is absent. The presumed decline of cooking skills in the UK occasions periodic social soul searching bordering on moral panic at fairly regular intervals (eg Lang and Caraher 2001). Driving a car also relies on the prior acquisition of definite competencies: learning how to drive, reading maps (though this can be eliminated by satnav), becoming conversant with the highway code and rules of the road. Indeed this is legally enforced through the requirement to pass a driving test in order

to acquire a license to drive. Thus, one important element of consumption work, in addition to undertaking the tasks themselves preparatory to consumption, is acquisition of the skills and knowledge required in order to perform them. ^v

3.3 Co-ordination

The contours of consumption work look different depending on the lens through which it is approached. Viewed from the perspective of the individual consumer or the consuming household, the issue is one of undertaking the tasks in relation to individual goods or services. But departing from a product-centred view, consumers confront the challenge of co-ordinating, and creating coherence amongst, the performance of all the tasks associated with the full range of consumption goods and services. At any one time the consumer is likely to be orchestrating multiple tasks in relation to many objects of consumption, requiring co-ordination. S/he co-ordinates what needs to be accomplished with respect to clothing, food, travel, housing so on so as produce coherence and complementarity across the many fields that together are constitutive of social life. Producers and retailers do not script that coherence. Most deal only with a particular range of products, but even supermarkets do not coordinate either the preparation for or use of products, and nor do they create coherence between the many disparate acts of co-ordination. While markets for different goods are clearly differentiated they are also interdependent (eg kitchen apparatus and food, sports equipment and clothing, pets and pet food), and consumers' work of coordination across products and services is critical to achieving complementarity between market players.

Co-ordination of all consumption work activities therefore adds another dimension above and beyond what is required by each product or service considered individually. It comprises the sum of consumption work activities in relation to all products or services and is an important consumer or household activity in its own right. Rather than being limited to tasks relating to specific goods, the work of consumers involves combining all these activities together, which involves planning as well as co-ordinating. Consumption work is thus much larger when viewed as a form of consumer or household activity than when considered in relation to specific products or services. Given that much consumption is a social rather than individual activity, it involves co-ordinating between people (as in the case of commensality) as well as between products and services. The commonly-held assumption of the market as the primary co-ordinating institution for bringing together buyers and sellers neglects the range of co-ordination tasks required of buyers, as a pre-condition for the market co-ordination between buyers and sellers.

3.4 Outsourcing of consumption work

Thus far consumption work has been described as undertaken personally by consumers without pay. However, there also exist opportunities for consumers to outsource certain tasks to others for a payment. Many small businesses offer services to assemble furniture or install computer equipment. The large UK supermarkets all offer a home delivery service for internet shopping. So consumers may either do it themselves or pay for it to be done by others. When tasks are outsourced, they shift across socio-economic boundary from the unpaid labour of the consumer or household to paid employment in the market. When undertaken for a monetary payment by intermediate businesses the labour counts as paid work rather than as consumption work. If consumers employ intermediaries to do the shopping, or install equipment, then the activity is effectively 'sent back' into paid marketised work. However, if consumers do the same tasks themselves it is consumption work. Supermarket home delivery involves a different range of consumption work tasks from shopping in store. While it presupposes the consumption work of ordering groceries online, the work of selecting, packing and transporting the goods is undertaken on behalf of consumers and reverts to conventional paid work.

Consumption work can thus be characterised as comprising a large and disparate range of activities, required for the purchase, use, re-use and disposal of consumption goods and

services, their precise nature dependent on the particular good or service, and its system of provision. The need to acquire appropriate competences and knowledge, and to co-ordinate activities are central to the performance and organisation of consumption work, and are to be included in its characterisation. However the possibility for consumption work to be outsourced serves as a reminder that the socio-economic relations within which tasks are accomplished are crucial in determining whether or not work activities count as consumption work.

4 DIFFERENTIATING CONSUMPTION WORK

While consumption work may overlap with, or be undifferentiated from other practices, this paper suggests that it nevertheless comprises a distinctive realm of activity, which is not coterminous with any of them. The attempt to conceptualise consumption work resonates with a number of existing literatures relating to some characteristics or aspects of what is here being brought together under one heading. This section attempts briefly to distinguish consumption work from three well developed allied fields of scholarly research: consumption, domestic labour and 'co-production'/ 'prosumption' (the loosely linked group of approaches highlighting the active role of the consumer).

4.1 Consumption

The characterisation of consumption work and the examples given so far posit a distinction, both real and analytical, between consumption and consumption work. The latter revolves around tasks and activities enabling the consumption of goods and services to take place, facilitating their appreciation, and undertaking whatever is required for consumption to endure over time or to be discontinued. Consumption itself, by contrast, relates to the using or using up of goods and services, appreciating or in other ways consuming them. Of course there are blurry boundaries between the two, with some activities comprising both consumption and consumption work (e.g. window shopping). Although much consumption is predicated on consumption work, the amount of work involved may be quite elastic, rather than being specified or laid down in a fixed manner by the consumption goods. Preparing a meal would be an obvious example: the amount of work depends both on the degree of preparedness of the ingredients and the labour required in order for them to be made ready to be eaten, and also on the many different ways of converting the same ingredients into a meal, from the simplest to the most elaborate. How much work is undertaken will depend on the particular circumstances of the occasion, personal preference, and the cook's range of competence. Weekday meals are often simpler and quicker to prepare than those at weekends, and those prepared for guests tend to be more elaborate than those for household members. But this does not undermine the general point. Some people love cooking or engage in it as a form of leisure activity but this does not detract from it also being consumption work. While the expressive, normative and social aspects of cooking might be stressed by consumption theorists (eg Kaufman 2010), there is, in addition to the consumption work, also a material social reproduction aspect to it (to be explored below). So other important dimensions are present even if the activity is pleasurable. Activities do not have to be one thing only but may be leisure, pleasure, consumption and work all at the same time. Yet the components remain analytically separable even if they are experienced as an undifferentiated mix.

As far as I am aware, the main approaches to consumption do not deal explicitly with consumption work, nor make a distinction between consumption and consumption work. Given the vast and disparate sociological literature on consumption that has accumulated over the last half century or more, it is difficult to generalise. Nevertheless, it is probably safe to say that, while lacking a shared or central definition, most are inclusive and tend to consider all the activities associated with consumption as consumption.

Alan Warde provides a succinct and uncontroversial definition with which many would concur '...I see consumption as a process whereby agents engage in appropriation and appreciation, whether for utilitarian, expressive or contemplative purposes, of goods, services, performances, information or ambience, whether purchased or not, over which the agent has

some degree of discretion' (Warde 2005: 137). Work is not mentioned, although it could conceivably be included under the rubric of activities associated with appropriating or appreciating. Much hinges on what is actually meant by 'appropriation', which, given the context, seems to imply 'taking control of' in a social rather than proprietorial sense, and that the manner of using or consuming the goods or services is not scripted or pre-written into them. Warde's broader theoretical aim (eg Warde 2010) is to ground consumption and consuming as distinctively *social* activities to be analysed in their own right as such, rather than in relation to the economic or political context in which they occur and which may shape them. Thus the moment of consumption is bracketed off from the moment of production. In this sense, his definition protects a sociological conception of 'appropriation' as opposed to an economic one, even though his analyses always highlight the significance of different modes of provision. An earlier co-authored piece had argued that 'it is important to acknowledge the substantial, but partial, autonomy of consumption behaviour. From the point of view of consumers, utilisation of items, for purposes defined by the logic of their social practices, is at the core of the process of consumption. Consumption is not to be equated with purchase, but is the process of making use – practically and symbolically – of items.' (Harvey et al 2001:52). The work required for consumption is not singled out in Warde's definition, but may rather be subsumed within it. However, differentiating out consumption work as a specific activity distinct from use need not challenge his definition. The question hinges on the attention accorded to what occurs *inbetween* his 'moments' of production and consumption, and how the relation of consumption as a partially autonomous activity is seen as linked with economic activity.

An earlier, but equally well-known, 'simple working definition' is that of Colin Campbell who views consumption 'as involving the selection, purchase, use, maintenance and repair and disposal of any product or service' (1995:102). This is clearly an extremely broad definition, including in addition to use, many of the activities I have referred to as consumption work. The explicit aim of his definition was to establish a material sociological stance towards consumption to counter the then-dominant postmodern and culturalist approaches whose primary focus was on meaning and identity. However, carving out the material and social space of consumption was also problematic for Campbell, because of the perceived intrusion of the economy. He followed his definition with a caveat about the 'continuing influence of economic assumptions' (1995:119) implicit in the terms 'product and service' with which he was distinctly uncomfortable.

A wider review of the literature confirms that the study of consumption is characterised by a multiplicity of frameworks, empirical fields and theories, but very few, if any, include consideration of the work required on the part of the consumers in order to consume. Many volumes have been devoted to shopping as a form of consumption, for example, in both its exotic and routine manifestations (Chaney 1983, Miller, D. 1998, 2001, Crossick and Jaumain 1998, Miller, M. 1981, Lancaster 1995). But the prior knowledge and efforts associated with shopping are not often differentiated from the activity of shopping. Once acquired, the way that consumers individualise or personalise consumption goods and endow them with meaning are central foci of interest (Shields 1992, Radner 1994, Miller, D. et al 1998), but the work that may be a necessary part of the preparation to consume does not often feature. However, if shopping is considered through the lens of instituted economic process, the picture alters: it becomes a clear form of consumption work involving research, searching, comparison, a necessary step in the transition of commodities and services into the hands of the consumer. This kind of consumption work has expanded with the extension of self-service into self-scanning and self-check-out, and their web-based counterparts in online shopping, though conversely it may also be reduced by the growth of one-stop shopping. Looked at in terms of its interdependence with other stages of a system of provision, shopping is seen as work, even though many consumption scholars may view this as the first phase of consumption.

The impression of a black box intervening between the work associated with producing and distributing consumption goods and services on the one hand and their non-work appropriation and appreciation on the other is little challenged by the dominant approaches to both work and consumption. This is the space which consumption work aims to unpack. My contention is that consumption work determines what is actually consumed. Different people may acquire the same goods but what they consume will differ depending on the consumption work expended on them. What is bought does not determine what is consumed, and consumption work

represents a key bridging activity between acts of purchase and acts of consumption.

4.2 Domestic labour

While consumption work and domestic labour overlap in the sense that certain activities might be considered both as contributing to reproduction or household work as well as to completion of a system of provision (eg food preparation), the two are not coterminous. Not all forms of consumption work may also be understood as domestic labour, nor vice versa. Moreover, while many consumption work tasks may actually be undertaken within the home, they could just as well be effected elsewhere. Domestic labour is spatially located, and defined, almost by definition, in relation to the household, but the same does not hold for consumption work. Skills acquisition, online transactions, shopping, are examples of consumption work that are not in themselves 'household activities', and need not be conducted in domestic space.

Studies of consumption work and of domestic labour are not mutually exclusive. Rather they approach their subject matter from different analytical perspectives and with a different conceptual lens. These are not necessarily incompatible but ask different questions, have a different focus and so prioritise different aspects even of the same activity. While the consumption work frame is primarily concerned with the division of labour and work necessary for the consumption of commodities, the domestic labour lens is preoccupied with reproduction and the labour undertaken within the home to this effect.

Discussions of domestic labour in the 1970s highlighted for the first time not only the significance of work within the home but also its glaring neglect in social and economic theory. The 'discovery' of its importance was predicated on recognition of the historical emergence of 'separate spheres', the domains of 'private' and 'public', home and work with their respective specialisation in reproduction and production, in unpaid work and paid employment. This dichotomy was overlaid and structured by gender division, with men firmly positioned on one side and women on the other. Drawing attention to women's unrecognised domestic labour was at the same time a challenge to male-centred accounts of socio-economy.

Two basic approaches characterised the study of domestic labour: a socialist feminist discussion that emerged during the third wave women's movement of the 1970s, and a slightly later but eventually more enduring sociological version that drew on the original but prioritised different concerns. The former concentrated on analysing the household as the sphere for reproduction hitherto neglected by traditional Marxism's overwhelming focus on production and the commodity sphere. A variety of socialist feminist and/or feminist Marxist (depending on their emphasis) formulations countered this omission by emphasizing the contribution of unpaid domestic labour to both generational and daily reproduction of the species (through childbirth and childrearing, and through reproducing the conditions of daily life so that workers could return for the next day's work fed, clothed and clean). Most of this discussion operated within the classical Marxist conception of the commodity circuit and the labour theory of value, which it did not challenge but rather attempted to revise and extend through the inclusion of domestic labour. The appropriation of women's domestic labour was a major preoccupation, revolving around the question of whether men (husbands, fathers, sons) or capital (employers) were the main beneficiaries, and the mechanisms through which the value of the labour was transferred to capital. Some argued that indirect appropriation of women's unpaid household labour by capital reduced the cost of male labour; others focused more on the 'exchange' of labour and financial resources between husband and wife. The arguments linked with different political emphases and campaigns. Over the years, the 'domestic labour debate' became increasingly arcane with minute variations in attempts to fit domestic labour into the pre-existing value and commodity framework (for lucid overviews see Molyneux 1979, Kaluzynska 1980, Zaretsky 1976) until it wore itself out. From the perspective of consumption work, the most problematic aspect of the feminist socialist approach towards domestic labour was its continuing productionist treatment of all work outside of employed labour as being ultimately dedicated to the re/production of capital, through re/producing labour for the labour market. In this perspective, domestic labour is analysed in relation to social reproduction, and seen as one side of the dualism home/work, unpaid/paid. The paradigm had no space for consideration of the work necessary for the consumption of commodities, whether or not these are part of reproduction, and regardless of where they are undertaken.

The more sociological approaches to domestic labour concentrate more centrally on the nature,

extent and distribution of work undertaken in the home, the domestic division of labour, and especially the disproportionate contribution of women to household and caring tasks. The precise link between performance of these tasks and the market economy is of less concern, except in so far as domestic responsibilities are seen as a barrier excluding women from the wage economy and making them financially dependent on men. Ann Oakley's *Housewife* (1974) graphically demonstrated the oppressive conditions of her existence, and laid down the gauntlet to established sociological approaches to the family and to work. It remains the most renowned in a long and continuing line of research (eg Malos 1980) on gender division within the home. Over the decades the politics has become muted, and the focus shifted to investigation of the relative contribution of men, women and children to household work in terms both of time and labour, their respective areas of specialisation, and the questions of convergence between the genders and across socio-economic groups (Scott et al 2012, Kan et al 2011, Sullivan 2006). Again, prevailing household tasks are the prime object of scrutiny, rather than the work required for and by the consumption of commodities, or the connection between such labour and work conducted in other phases of a process of provision or production.

Both these approaches define domestic labour in relation to the site in which it is undertaken, while the consumption work lens is focused on the division of labour and shifting boundary between work undertaken in different socio-economic modes in relation to consumption goods and services. It has different theoretical objectives than the analysis of domestic labour and a different range of empirical subject matter, even if some of these overlap with and may also be interpreted as domestic labour.

In contrast to both approaches towards domestic labour, the prescient work of Pahl on 'self provisioning' and informal forms of household labour, including DIY (1984) did draw attention to work that could be conducted on different economic bases. Similarly, Gershuny's 'chains of provision' incorporates both paid and unpaid forms of work (2000: 18). Both prefigure the consumption work optic being developed here.

Food preparation work, to return to an already familiar example, is certainly a form of domestic labour, but it is not defined solely by that feature, nor by its spatial location in the home. The 'consumption work' lens highlights the connection between food preparation work undertaken in the household and work undertaken by others in food manufacture and retail more widely, in production, distribution and exchange. Domestic food work thus completes a process that extends far beyond it. While cooking may be the most obvious example of domestic labour that is also consumption work in the sense that it is a prerequisite of consumption, other domestic tasks may not be amenable to such interpretation. Childcare is not consumption work, but finding the best nappies may be. Using a duster or a vacuum cleaner is readily understood as domestic labour insofar as cleaning contributes to reproduction of the household fabric. It might also be seen as a form of consumption (using the cleaning materials). But it would be a big stretch to interpret cleaning as consumption work in the sense of completing a process of production, unless cleaning is also seen as work in preparation for consuming the clean home.

There will be many grey areas, moot points and fuzzy boundaries, but these are part and parcel of the framework being developed here, and do not present a problem. On the contrary, they help to clarify the different perspectives. The aim is not a taxonomy or categorical definition with sharp edges separating consumption work from consumption and domestic labour. What comes into focus depends on the optic.

And of course the picture is not static. The spread of new domestic technologies is bound to have an impact, reconfiguring the nature and amount of work undertaken as consumption work and domestic labour, in many cases increasing the former and decreasing the latter. This could be argued for the vacuum cleaner, but perhaps not for the freezer. Searching for the right model of cleaner to buy and its ongoing maintenance are new consumption work tasks (when contrasted with brooms and brushes) but using the vacuum cleaner normally reduces the time and physical effort of cleaning. The freezer also requires searching, installation and maintenance, but may simply be associated with a different technology for food preservation (in contrast say to kilner jars) or even an increase rather than a reduction, given the new potential it offers for time-shifting food preparation (Warde 1998, Shove and Southerton 2000). Bread-making machines, to take a more recent innovation which shift (a small amount

of ?) bread-baking labour (but not machine producing labour!) from the commodity sphere to the household, involve both consumption work and domestic labour, and possibly also consumption!

4.3 Self-service, Co-production, Prosumption etc

Over the years scholars have identified a variety of ways in which work has been transferred to consumers or where changes in production come to incorporate the labour of the consumer as an essential component of the process. Glazer (1993), for example, highlighted managerial practices of 'work transfer' in retailing and health service occupations in the US in the 1980s where tasks were shifted from paid to unpaid labour. Self-service has been of particular interest to historians of retail, who have explored the spread of new shopping technologies with the switch from counter service to self-service in supermarkets from the 1950s onwards, and the co-optation of customers to the new regimes of selling (Humphery 1998; Alexander *et al* 2009). They draw attention to the 'co-creation' of supermarket self-service, the contribution of shoppers being essential to the success of the project. Many examples of McDonaldisation exposed by George Ritzer (2001; 2010) rely on the consumer's input of labour to complete the process of purchasing at fast-food outlets (including MacDonalds itself), at ATMs and in internet shopping.

This section briefly characterises the disparate group of approaches that focus variously on self service, co-production, co-creation or prosumption. Building on Toffler's 'proactive consumers' (1980) most reject a traditional sociological conception of the passive consumer 'dupe', emphasizing instead a notion of the active consumer who is more involved in the process of design or customisation of the end product. Little attempt has been made to systematically compare the various approaches (but see Humphreys and Grayson 2008), possibly because of their diverse disciplinary identifications and aims, and empirical subject matter, and this is not the place to do so. Superficially there appear to be similarities with consumption work. However, the framework being developed here differs in important respects from these approaches.

All the 'co-production' approaches emphasize the active role of the consumer in the production of goods, value, brands or services. For example, the consumption sociologist Colin Campbell argues for recognition of the 'craft consumer' where 'craft is used to refer to consumption activity in which the "the product" is both "made and designed by the same person" and to which the consumer typically brings skill, knowledge, judgement and passion while being motivated by a desire for self-expression' (2005:23). Recent theories of prosumption or co-creation highlight the interactive relation, and feedback loops, between producer and consumer, especially prevalent in new media, such that consumers become co-producers, and the distinction between producer and consumer is blurred. Basing their interpretation largely on the spread of user-generated online content facilitated by Web 2.0, Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) go so far as to hail the emergence of 'prosumer capitalism' which they see as characterised by distinctive forms of control and exploitation, notably the trend towards unpaid labour, cost-free products and a 'new abundance'. Zwick, Bonsu and Darmody (2008) have a quite different take on co-creation as 'a political form of power aimed at generating particular forms of consumer life at once free and controllable, creative and docile'(2008:163) promoted largely by business schools and marketing gurus. Their Foucauldian and neo-marxist analysis views the discourse of value co-creation as linked with new ways of disciplining consumers, through exploitation of creative and valuable forms of consumer labour.

For present purposes it is helpful to distinguish the variety of approaches into two broad camps, already exemplified in these examples. The first interprets consumers' involvement as a broadly positive development which benefits consumers, either through a process of empowerment that enhances and acknowledges their impact, or which values their creative potential by incorporating their input into the design and production of goods and services. While online content co-creation is the dominant example cited by prosumer enthusiasts, others draw attention to its extension to marketing and branding. Frank Cochoy (2008, 2010, 2011) suggests the evolution of self-service into self-marketing, through new market devices including sophisticated bar codes ('datamatrix') and smartphones apps, which enable

consumers to decide how much information they want to receive about products. This transforms them from passive receivers of noisy information to coproducers of the commercial information. Co-production has also become a buzzword in public service provision where it is heralded as a key innovation to involve citizens and service users in the design of services. A UK Cabinet Office Strategy Unit discussion document (Horne and Shirley 2009) argues for the acceleration of co-production, defined as a 'partnership between citizens and public services...[which] empowers citizens to contribute more of their own resources (time, will power, expertise and effort) and have greater control over service decisions and resources'. Co-production is presented positively in contrast with three alternative modes of governance, managerialism, paternalism and voluntarism. A plethora of public and non-governmental organisations echo the empowerment argument, including a comprehensive research report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Boyle et al 2006) on co-production projects in the public and voluntary sector.

The second camp takes a much more negative view of putting the consumer to work, scholars interpreting co-production as the offloading of tasks from producer to consumer and part of a process whereby the producer realises and retains the value created out of consumers' work. This complements the 'workshift' (noted above) where work previously undertaken as public services (especially in the health and social care sectors) in advanced western economies is shifted onto communities, households and family members. Examples from the commercial world include the increasing prevalence of customer satisfaction and feedback surveys or online reviews of goods, understood as providing free market research for companies (eg Fuller and Smith 1991, Sherman 2011). The extension of self-service from its original location in supermarkets to many other spheres is also seen in this light, as is the spread of 'ikeaisation' where consumers complete the final stages of a process that used to be undertaken as part of 'production'. Ritzer's accounts of ATMs and fast-food outlets fall squarely under this negative heading and are symptomatic of the 'disenchantment' he attributes to McDonaldisation. This well known and influential critique of the transfer of work to customers sits rather uncomfortably with Ritzer's recent turn to prosumption.

Perhaps the most comprehensive analysis in this vein is that of French sociologist Anne-Marie Dujarier (2008) whose book on the work of consumers was a best seller in France for some months, seemingly speaking to a common perception that consumers were being required to do more than previously. She distinguishes three main ways in which consumers are put to work: first, 'managed or forced self-production' through 'externalisation' of simple tasks from producers to consumers who have no choice but to undertake them if they want to consume (eg petrol stations, supermarkets); second, 'collaborative co-production', primarily deploying interactive web technologies which is more 'voluntary' and focuses around transactions on eBay, creating a Facebook page or sharing photos through Flickr; and third, 'organisational work' resulting from new marketing techniques, that transfer to consumers the task of undertaking product and price comparison, or lead them to buy something they don't really want on a special offer. Dujarier's emphasis is on the co-optation of the consumer by new business strategies to undertake tasks that were previously the responsibility of the producer or seller. Her three forms of consumer work benefit market organisations and turn the notion of the 'sovereign consumer' on its head.

Whether negative or positive, stressing exploitation or empowerment, these various accounts of co-production all differ in significant respects from the analysis of consumption work outlined above, despite some obvious empirical and analytical overlaps. Many remain descriptive, deriving from business and management approaches to advertising, marketing and branding. They are not attempting a broader analysis of the transformation of work, nor of reconfiguration of the division of labour across socio-economic modes or between instituted economic processes. Most operate within a dualistic producer versus consumer paradigm where production is undifferentiated and includes retail and exchange and all other market-based operations in addition to actual production itself, while the consumer is on the other side of a boundary, in the equally unpacked realm of consumption. The focus then is on the shift of work across these boundaries. In the positive interpretation, consumers enter the producer camp, doing unpaid labour and dissolving the boundaries between paid and unpaid, and between production and consumption which become conflated. Yet, while the emphasis is on creativity and the positive nature of consumer input, there is little consideration of how power relations are affected. Internet companies continue to determine the contours of consumer-

generated data and to make enormous profit from it. In the negative version, work is transferred out of the realm of production and dumped on consumers, but with little attention to the wider reconfiguration of the distribution and organisation of labour throughout the particular economic process. To say, for example, that IKEA transfers the tasks of assembly and distribution of furniture to consumers is true. But this it is only part of a much larger reconfiguration of the division of labour: the final flatpack product is an entirely different one to traditional manufactured furniture, and predicated on transformation of the work associated with design, tooling, manufacture and so on. Most of these analyses lack a historical dimension in their concentration on the present day shift from market to consumer; they tend to ignore the large amounts of consumption work that had to be done in the past (including going from shop to shop) before commoditisation of many household activities. They focus on a one-way shift rather than on the moving boundary, and thereby also avert attention from domains (such as food production) where the current shift is in the opposite direction.

5 RESEARCHING CONSUMPTION WORK

Elaborating the concept of consumption work rests on an iterative relation between empirical research and analytical reflection. Development of the argument throughout this paper has also relied on illustrative examples, some of which are drawn from an ongoing comparative research programme on societal divisions of labour and consumption work.^{vi} This research centres on three quite distinct domains (the installation of broadband in the home, food preparation work, and domestic recycling of waste), selected for the range of issues they raise about the part played by consumption work in the division of labour. The nature and amount of consumption work differs not only by domain and system of provision, but also nationally insofar as nationally prevailing systems of provision place different demands on consumers. Consumers' work in broadband installation, food preparation and recycling are thus investigated comparatively (UK, France, Sweden, Taiwan and Korea). The objective of the following brief outline, based on initial findings, is to demonstrate the specificity and varied characteristics of consumption work in different fields, and the significance of consumers' contribution to completion of nationally varied processes of provision.

5.1 Installation of domestic broadband

Having online access to the internet at home requires accomplishment of a range of tasks, not only to establish connection in the first place, but also to maintain and update it. Our investigations suggest that four components of 'broadband consumption work' may be distinguished.

First, consumers have to undertake research, comparison and filtering of the plethora of ISP packages offering different services, 'bundles', contracts and speeds, in order to choose a contract. It is often difficult to make direct comparison, given the 'special deals' and variety of contracts, and in our UK survey many chose either the cheapest or opted for the most familiar company.

The second task is installation itself: getting broadband up and running (or at a later stage switching between providers). Online access requires co-ordination of infrastructure (cabling, including high speed), with routers connecting infrastructure with provider, and software for internet service provision.^{vii} Depending on the access technology purchased, consumers need to physically connect the router to the available telephone/cable infrastructure and to their home computers. Over the past decade technological advance has made this a far more user-friendly and less demanding process. In the UK it is now normal for routers and instructions to be sent in the post for 'self-installation', ISPs devolving this task entirely to consumers. In Korea, by contrast, self-installation is unknown, but is included in the ISP package, so a technician comes to set it up and ensure everything is working properly. Here companies compete on the quality and efficiency of their after sales service, rather than on (low) price as in UK. This contrast is also evident if consumers decide to switch between providers: in the UK they have to get the MAC code from their existing provider, and undertake all the technical

tasks associated with de- and re-installation, which in Korea are undertaken by the new provider. Sweden and France lie somewhere between these two extremes.

A third consumer task relates to interoperability: ensuring compatibility between various devices using the internet. Synchronising fixed and mobile broadband, and ensuring the same access across all devices in the home can present difficulties. While some consumers may be able to work out their own solutions, others rely on personal networks or advice online, or resort to paying small installation companies or ISPs to do it for them for a fee.

Finally, keeping broadband up and running (if it breaks down, goes slow) and routine upgrading and maintenance (such as changing a router) comprise the fourth element of consumption work, and often the most trying for UK consumers who often do not (or cannot) know whether their system failure is down to the ISP or to the infrastructure. Given the forced separation between infrastructure and ISP in broadband provision, they can be caught between two companies, each of whom blames the other. Commercial internet service providers offer similar customer support in the UK, Sweden and France (call centres initially, but increasingly virtual help, through avatars and consumer online fora). But if recourse to the ISP does not solve the problem, then there is the option of asking friends, following message boards or blogs, paying a dedicated computer company to sort it out, or taking out an insurance policy to devolve the solution of problems before they occur. Again, Korea contrasts markedly with the UK since ISPs take full responsibility for solving maintenance issues.

Although ever-simplified over the years, broadband cannot be bought and is not provided 'ready to use' without consumption work. The four components are of course specific to broadband, but they also reveal all of other general characteristics of consumption work outlined earlier. The work called for is clearly economic in character; it presupposes deployment of appropriate knowledge and technical skill; co-ordination, between ISP and infrastructure and between bits of equipment, both technical and financial, is a central aspect of the operation; and the work is amenable to outsourcing.

However, how much of the work is the responsibility of consumers differs according to the prevailing system of provision. National variations in the extent of vertical integration between infrastructural and service provision, and in the relative weight of public, private and not-for-profit sector involvement, have a significant impact on the choices and co-ordination tasks confronting consumers. Within this, population density, and the nature of urban housing (apartment blocks versus houses, rented versus owned) also play an important part. In the UK there is strict division between infrastructure (British Telecom remains responsible) and service provision, ISPs include varying amounts of 'technical support' as part of their sale, and intermediary companies offer services to consumers who do not possess the necessary expertise to undertake co-ordination themselves. So this component of consumption work may be undertaken either on an unpaid basis by consumers themselves or they can buy it in. In Sweden, by contrast, with its heavy reliance on web-enabled financial and health services, infrastructure provision is largely undertaken by municipalities (local state), and is often provided as part of basic housing equipment, while the Korean government initiated both major infrastructure investment and IT literacy programmes targeting hard-to-reach groups.

The precise nature and extent of consumption work, as well as the manner in which end-users are construed as citizens or consumers, varies according to the socio-economic character of the system of provision, in particular the more or less active involvement of the public sector. In terms of the broader multi-dimensional approach to divisions of labour, the 'socio-economic formation of labour' associated with domestic broadband consumption can be seen as articulating a technical division of labour with interdependencies across both socio-economic domain (TSOL) and work undertaken across the whole span of provision of broadband (IEPL).

5.2 Food preparation

Food preparation work in the home is conceived in this research as a form of consumption work, through which household members work on raw materials or part-prepared goods purchased from the market to turn them into meals and food that is ready to be consumed. Food has become increasingly commoditised over the last century, with a progressive shift of labour to the market from the household, involving a move from unpaid work in the home towards paid employment in processing plants, factories and shops. This transformation, linked

with rising levels of women's employment, is particularly evident in the UK, where the trend was reinforced since the 1990s by proliferation of ready-prepared fresh meals by the major supermarkets.^{viii}

The redistribution of food work straddles all three dimensions of the socio-economic formation of labour given its reliance on new technical processes and jobs, and its double movement, first from end-users upstream to various stages of production, distribution and retail, and second, across socio-economic mode from household to market. In the case of food, the direction of shift of work is noteworthy: it is moving in the opposite direction from many other kinds of consumption work referred to in this paper, that is, away *from* the consumer and *towards* the market and commodity sector. But as suggested earlier, a central interest of the theoretical framework is the boundary between socio-economic modes, and shifts in and across that boundary, with no presupposition about unidirectional movement. Food commoditisation varies nationally in nature and quantity, for reasons that are cultural and historical, as well as social and economic. France (with its traditional craft ready-made and culinary priorities), Taiwan (where rapid urbanisation, pressure on domestic space, and high levels of female employment may account for the dominance of eating out and part-prepared foods), and the UK (with its dramatic recent change in culinary practices, including an emphasis on 'convenience') are the key comparator countries for investigation (Glucksman 2012).

As in the case of broadband installation, consumption work associated with domestic food preparation comprises a number of specific components which it is helpful to distinguish. First, there are a number of routine daily repetitive tasks: planning meals, shopping for ingredients, cooking, clearing away, washing up and disposing of waste and leftovers. In addition there is, second, the temporally less frequent work of acquiring equipment, learning how to use it, and maintaining it. Third, food preparation relies on the prior accumulation of a range of knowledge, both abstract and practical, which, if not transmitted informally or intergenerationally, has to be formally learned. So a further important component of consumption work involves acquiring competences in cooking, and many kinds of knowledge, from hygiene to cuisines, to practical skills in following recipes, or having sufficient expertise to improvise. Eating 'properly' according to cultural norms also involves acquiring competence in the use of appropriate tools, whether these are knife and fork, chopsticks or fingers. Finally, the co-ordination of activities, people, and products comprises a fourth element. Commensality, for example, doesn't just 'happen' but relies on a concerted and often quite complex organisation of household members being assembled together at the right time, and food acquired and prepared so that it is ready for them to eat in the accepted sequence of courses. Shopping for raw materials and meal ingredients involves a different kind of coordination, as does going to a restaurant.

Comparative analysis of the balance between cooking at home on the one hand and buying in or eating out on the other reveals that the boundary between market and household labour has shifted in all 3 countries towards greater market input since the 1970s. But the shift varies both in degree and speed: Taiwan has experienced the greatest and fastest transformation, notably in contrast to France where the scale and pace of change are lower. In the former, eating-out and buying-in prepared food appear to have become the norm, especially with the growth of convenience stores. France, by contrast, has experienced far less reduction in time spent on domestic cooking, and institutional buttresses to traditional French cuisine have been reinforced by the growing emphasis on local or regional provenance ('terroir'). Markets, independent food outlets, and traditional craft ready-made 'traiteurs' remain resilient despite the growth of supermarkets. The UK lies between the two extremes: the consumer is confronted by a plethora of fresh prepared food and ready-meals for eating at home. These appear to have diversified further during the recession in terms of quality and range, thus challenging the presumed return to cooking from scratch.

These national variations impact on the nature of work required on the part of consumers to complete the system of food provisioning. In France, consumers' work encompasses all of the four components outlined earlier. The same holds for the UK, although here there is less commitment or time input to cooking and to learning than in France. In the case of Taiwan, and especially for urban dwellers born after 1970, food consumption work centres on shopping, planning and co-ordination, but rather less on other routine daily tasks, or on learning and

skills acquisition. The work of food preparation is thus being reconfigured in different ways in different countries, with different effects for consumption work and the relative salience of its various components.

5.3 Recycling of Household Waste

Historically unprecedented levels of domestic waste, combined with the need to reduce carbon footprints, have led to both public concern and a range of concerted government strategies for its disposal. The consumer plays a central part in this, as in the market economy of materials reuse, and the wider division of labour of waste management. Our research focuses on the interface between consumers, state (often local state), market and third sector in relation to the work of domestic recycling, the division of responsibilities between these parties, and the consequent shaping of household recycling as a form of post-consumption work (Wheeler and Glucksmann 2013). Although rooted in state policy, recycling strategies are usually implemented by municipal authorities. The market plays a key financial role in the production of value from waste, buying and selling on recycled materials, while the third sector is significant as pressure group, promoter of good practice, provider of public education and inculcator of norms.

Much of the variation in recycling consumption work observed in our two comparator countries can be explained by national differences in the respective systems of waste management. In Sweden, a legal distinction between packaging and all other recycling results in division of responsibility between producers (FTI), who provide for the infrastructure and collection of recyclable packaging, and municipalities, who provide recycling centres for all other household materials. The Swedish consumer must sort and transport their waste to either the FTI or municipal centres. Waste must also be routinely sorted into far more fractions than in many other countries (light bulbs, batteries, electronic equipment etc), and there are sanctions for putting it in the wrong containers^{ix}. The producer and municipal systems operate on a not-for-profit basis, and this impacts on how consumers are encouraged to recycle. In England, by contrast, the municipality is responsible for all waste services, with many outsourcing this work to private waste management companies. Consumers' recyclable waste is collected from their home which they must sort as their municipality, or its private contractor, demands. There is huge variation regarding how to recycle (what materials, how many fractions etc), so that neighbouring boroughs even in the same local authority may demand very different amounts of sorting (commingling or separation). Recyclable materials represent a financial resource for municipalities for selling to recycling companies.

As in the case of broadband installation and food preparation, the tasks confronting the consumer are specific ones. Here they revolve around three central activities (Wheeler and Glucksmann forthcoming). First, waste has to be sorted into different categories (eg plastic, paper, glass, food, metal), and cleaned or readied for its onward journey. Knowing what counts as a particular material can be tricky and has to be learned, especially in the case of plastic, of which there are many different kinds, not all of which are accepted by the local collection system. Our household survey reveals wide variations in willingness either to wash out jars and cans, or to separate packaging into its component materials for allocating to different recycling fractions. All this is left to consumers' goodwill or commitment to recycling. Second, the different kinds of waste have to be collected together and stored in appropriate containers. In the UK these are usually provided by the local authority, while in Sweden they are not. Storing the recycling can involve cluttering up domestic space with numerous bags and boxes in between collections. Swedish respondents complained of keeping up to seven separate containers, which filled up their kitchen cupboards or basement, until there was so much they had to get rid of it. Third, consumers must leave their packaging recycling outside the house (UK) or transport it to the collection points (Sweden).

Consumers' work is clearly crucial to the market economy of material re-use and constitutes economic activity. It also presupposes the knowledge to discriminate between materials, the ability to sort them appropriately, and to co-ordinate their transfer to the next stage in the cycle. But in both Sweden and the UK routine household recycling cannot be understood outside of the institutional system of which it is part, just as successful operation of the system presupposes active participation through the routine and regular consumption work.

But recycling differs from the other two cases of consumption work in relying heavily on internalised norms. Although sanctions may be in place, compulsion is hard to implement and commitment is often key to the successful performance of recycling work. Consumers are not remunerated (indeed they pay for recycling services through their local taxes) but are rather motivated through a complex set of moral norms. In Sweden, environmental citizenship remains the key discourse for encouraging participation, while in the UK, the recession and recent cuts to public spending have introduced a new message, encouraging people to recycle in order to save public money (Wheeler forthcoming).

However, like the other examples, the work of recycling may also be analysed as a three dimensional socio-economic formation of labour: the work is separated into different stages which are distributed in a complex and often global division of labour (DL); there is interaction between work accomplished on differing socio-economic bases (unpaid household; formal employment in the state, not-for-profit and market sectors) (TSOL); the different phases of work undertaken by respective parties in accomplishing the overall process of recycling are clearly connected (IEPL).

6 CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper has been both empirical and theoretical: to draw attention to consumption work as a distinctive form of labour whose conceptualisation calls for expansion of traditional understandings of the division of labour. Work does not cease when goods and services are transferred to consumers and leave the realms of production and retail. Yet the labour required to complete the process of provision or production on which final consumption is predicated has had little place in the study of either work or of consumption. My hope is both to initiate a bridge across that gap, as well as to suggest a multidimensional conception of the division of labour capable of incorporating the integral role of consumers. The 'socio-economic formations of labour' framework highlights that divisions and connections of labour are not only technical, but also straddle and link diverse socio-economic modes and the differing stages of instituted economic process. Consumers may play a crucial part in both the technical and processual division of labour, yet undertake it in a quite different socio-economic space.

Historically, consumption work appears to become important only with the development of commodity capitalism, in so far as it intervenes between production and use. In subsistence or non-commodity economies people produce primarily for direct use, but the introduction of commodity exchange creates a rupture between production and use. Paradoxically then, expansion of the commodity sphere also creates expansion of non-commodity labour like consumption work. While it is not new, consumption work is growing in the current period, and for a variety of reasons. The increasing dominance of business strategies to shift work out of the market (and implicitly onto the consumer) is one important underlying factor, often associated with discourses of consumer control or sovereignty. The technological development of digitisation is another insofar as this facilitates the reconfiguration and pruning of organisational chains, enabling a more 'direct' relation to be established with end-users by cutting out a number of previously intervening links in the chain. On the other hand, it is important not to forget that many aspects of self-service are welcomed by consumers: whatever Ritzer continues to say about ATMs (2012), most people find it much more convenient to be able to get cash 24/7 than to queue in a bank during standard working hours. Moreover, many consumption work tasks may not be experienced as work, while others certainly are. How they are understood or experienced is a separate question from their role in the division of labour and completion of a system of provision. The relational framework developed sees no incompatibility being an activity being both work and pleasure: a 'both... and' rather than 'either...or' approach is being advocated. While I have emphasized the shift of work to consumers, there are some spheres, of which food production is one but certainly not the only example, where, as new commodities are developed, work is shifting in the other direction across the boundary, from household labour to the market. The aim of the three dimensional framework is encourage a focus on the various boundaries or continua within each dimension (between work tasks and occupations, socio-economic modes of working, and phases of an economic process) and the shift of work across and along these.

The discussion has focused predominantly on the consumption work associated with market exchanges of goods and services, and it will be important to also explore the non-market sphere and the spread of consumption work there. In the medical domain, for example, patients are not only increasingly construed as consumers but also as being responsible in part for ensuring and monitoring their own health. The rhetoric of the 'responsible' individual (whether consumer, citizen, patient, worker, parent) suggests a further cascading down and spreading of 'responsibilisation', as part of the process of 'devolving' power and responsibilities to the lowest level so people become 'take ownership of' and become responsible in part for their own outcomes. There are clear parallels between the shift of tasks or responsibilities from the public sector to the citizen and the market sector to the consumer, but these need to be investigated much further.

Sociology has been slow to recognise work when it is unpaid, as was spectacularly the case with domestic labour until the 1980s, and remained so in the case of 'voluntary' work until far more recently. Nowadays both of these are fully acknowledged, yet the tendency remains to separate them off to be studied as self-standing forms of work rather than to explore how they interact with, complement or replace paid employment.

If most products presuppose work on the part of consumers after they have been sold but before they are consumed, then it is no exaggeration to claim that continued development of market economies or commodity production is predicated on a commensurate evolution of consumption work. Innovations in products often presuppose consumers acquiring new skills or competences, and consumers thus have a vital part in preparing the ground for the emergence of new products and markets. Equally, novel ways in which consumers combine and coordinate goods and services (eg texting) create opportunities for commercial innovation. The 'socio-economic formations of labour' framework elaborated in this paper proposes an integrative approach to the processes spanning production through to final consumption, highlighting their relational and configurational evolution in which consumption work plays a critical role.

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NOTES

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ⁱⁱ See Section 4 below for an extended discussion of these literatures.

ⁱⁱⁱ Theorists of consumption have drawn attention to the customising, personalising and individualising of consumption goods by consumers, often seen as an identity and meaning creating activity (eg Shields 1992, Jackson and Holbrook 1995, Miller, D. et al 1998). See section 4 below.

^{iv} Drinking water from the tap requires very little consumption work. However, this is restricted to those living in the global north in the current epoch, and results from a long historical process of shift in responsibility from consumer to provider. For an illustration of the varieties of consumption work associated with water provision in comparative and historical context see Harvey 2012

^v While basic literacy and numeracy are taken for granted in the global north, they nevertheless comprise an essential underpinning for much consumption, for example using a computer or following instruction

manuals. Where these skills are not universal, as in much of the global south, they need to be acquired in order for consumption to occur.

^{vi} For detail see Footnote 1 above. For this section I wish to acknowledge the contribution of Dr Katy Wheeler especially to the research on recycling, to Dr Yujen Chen on food in Taiwan, and to Dr Eunna Leegong on broadband in South Korea. Dr Esther Ruiz Ben also made a contribution to the comparative European research on broadband. provided

^{vii} For simplicity this discussion refers only to ADSL and associated wifi. The installation of fibre optic and cable, although now increasingly widespread, is more technically complex and currently remains the responsibility of the ISP.

^{viii} Prepared food is of course a relative notion: products that first appear as novelties, such as sausages, custard powder, or washed vegetables, become normalised as standard within about 10 years.

^{ix} In England, people are also expected to sort these and take them to recycling centres. But 'hazardous waste' has not become a unique category of waste here in the way it has in Sweden.