



## Work and consumption: Entangled\*

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### Introduction

The broad themes of work and consumption have received substantial attention in *ephemera* (e.g. Beverungen et al., 2013; Bradshaw et al., 2013; Chertkovskaya et al., 2013). Following concomitant debates, this *special issue* aims to bring together these two realms. While work, understood as the process of production, and consumption, understood as the consummation of objects of production, have always been related to each other (Baudrillard, 1998/1970), the intensity of their interconnectedness and the plethora of its forms have lately captured particular attention among organisation studies scholars and social scientists more generally (e.g. Dale, 2012; Gabriel et al., 2015; Pettinger, 2016).

First, elements of consumption have been entering the realm of work and employment in ways that exceed the customer focus that emerged with the rise of the 'service economy' (du Gay and Pryke, 2002). Consumption now tends to be sublimated into work itself (Bauman, 2000, 2007), so that workers are asked not only to invest energies into the production of material, objectified value (Hochschild, 1983), but to align their very subjectivities with this work and the organisations that command it (Dale, 2012; Land and Taylor, 2010). As such, work is reconfigured as 'an activity through which people produce and discover a sense of personal identity' (du Gay, 1996: 78). This entails a form of self-commodification and self-consumption, which is impelled by the institution of the 'consumer' as the master category of identity (Lury, 2004) and consolidated by the images connected to acts of seemingly sovereign consumption (Besen-

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Cassino, 2014; Reddy, this issue). This is the phenomenon that we roughly refer to as the ‘consumption of work’, or consumptive work, in this issue.

Second, the practices of everyday consumption now often contribute to the production process – a phenomenon we refer to as the ‘work of consumption’, or productive consumption. That is, consumption has become subsumed under the division of labour (Glucksmann, forthcoming), as evidenced through practices such as ‘self-service’ and, more recently, through ‘co-creation’ (Cova et al., 2011). While the former is by now normalised, for instance, via the use of self-checkins at airports and self-checkouts in supermarkets, the latter is a relatively new form wherein consumers are refigured as ‘prosumers’ (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010), i.e. those who engage in the so-called co-production of end goods and services, by sharing, for example, their knowledge, ideas, or ‘data’ about themselves (Charitsis, this issue; Merz, this issue) – in service of potential exploitation and valorisation (Hanlon, 2016). Much of this (non-paid) activity has been stimulated by new technologies, particularly the worldwide web and new techniques of scientific knowledge production (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010).

The interconnections between work and consumption are signalled in the title of this special issue as the ‘consumption of work’ and the ‘work of consumption’. While this conjunctive formulation seeks to undermine traditional distinctions between the spheres of work and consumption, it does, however, not do full justice to the variety of ways in which these spheres can interact (see Gabriel et al., 2015). The contributions to this issue challenge common attempts at ordering and categorising work and consumption by highlighting the inevitable connections between the productive and consumptive aspects of work and consumption (e.g. Charitsis, this issue; Merz, this issue; Reddy, this issue). In so doing, they draw attention to the *entanglement* of work and consumption and how this entanglement, more generally, organises the conditions of living, i.e. who we are, what we do and how we relate. We thereby use the term entanglement in the precise sense advanced by Karen Barad, to suggest that work and consumption are not simply intertwined with one another, ‘as in the joining of separate entities’, but ‘lack an independent, self-contained existence’ (2007: ix).

As such, the contributions to this issue gesture towards the entanglement of work and consumption as a site of social contestation, thereby referring to the contemporary ‘spirit of capitalism’ (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005) as an inherently ethico-political system. Indeed, the fantasies that surround work and consumption mask ethico-political processes behind them – i.e. deprivation and depletion of living beings and ecosystems, the reproduction and justification of global geo-social divisions, or the creation of a monoculture with subjectivities that contribute to these. While doing so, they maintain the hegemony of

capitalism and capitalists (Dunne et al., 2013; Hoedemaekers, this issue). That this is often achieved by highlighting the new autonomies, ‘freedom’ and ‘choice’ concomitant with the rise of consumer capitalism (Gabriel et al., 2015: 630; Korczynski, 2007), emphasises, in our view, the essential entanglement of work and consumption.

While we will stay with the analytics introduced in this special issue, our aim is not to consolidate but instead to further complicate these analytics and their political and ethical implications. The rest of the editorial will unfold as follows. We will start by introducing the contributions to this issue and how they speak to the broad themes mapped in the introduction. Building on this, we will provide an overview of the blurred realms of work and consumption within the overarching imperative of productivity and productivism. The remainder of the editorial will be devoted to explaining how consumption and work are not merely interconnected but entangled realms. We will further address some core political and ethical issues that are inherent to this entanglement.

### **The contributions: Challenging established orders**

This special issue starts with Deepa Reddy’s note, which shows how closely work and consumption are intertwined in the context of post-liberalisation India, where material progress and consumption came to symbolise the ‘good life’. It is shown how work has become an aspirational undertaking, seen as both a path to and a mechanism of consumption. At the same time, such an individualised understanding of work and the subjectivities it constructs conceals labour, its insecurity and precarity. Using the example of the Nokia manufacturing plant, it is shown how labour realities become visible again in times of capital flight, highlighting the fragility of new work arrangements and the subjectivities they are surrounded by.

While Reddy’s note vividly describes what we have referred to as consumption of work in the call for papers of this issue, it goes beyond it in reminding us that behind such work aspirations there is human labour, conditioned by and vulnerable to the demands of capital. The next contribution in the issue, an article by Vassilis Charitsis, in turn, looks at the work of consumption, i.e. (the labour of) consumption as a productive and value-creating undertaking, and often an opportunity for capital accumulation.

Charitsis brings our attention to digital prosumption, which has become important in economic value creation in the era of Web 2.0. In contrast to scholarship that positions prosumption as co-creation of consumers and

producers, this article brings its politics to the forefront. It zooms in on the phenomenon of self-quantification, made possible by increasingly popular self-tracking devices, and positions user generated data as a form of prosumption labour. Drawing on Dallas Smythe's concept of the 'audience commodity', it is argued that through data generated via self-quantification, the subject becomes both the 'prosuming self' who creates value through tracked life, and the 'prosumed self', an active and entrepreneurial subject that is governed to produce the kinds of data that bring value for firms.

The issue Charitsis' article ultimately illuminates is the commodification and valorisation of life through self-quantification practices. The work of consumption, or prosumption labour, on top of being an opportunity for capital accumulation, also governs people's lives and subjectivities. How life has been succumbed to particular understandings of work and consumption, as well as the difficulties to resist these, is exactly what the article by Casper Hoedemaekers brings up.

In his article 'Work hard, play hard' Hoedemaekers discusses the images of work and consumption that so-called 'shock media' produce. While at first glance these images tend to question and undermine idealised representations of current work and consumer subjectivities, Hoedemaekers' Lacan-informed paper illustrates that the 'space of transgression' these media produce is not or is not used as a space for effective critique. Consuming alternate images of work and consumption promises to provide opportunities to (temporarily) escape from the 'ego ideal' underlying prevalent modes of working, consuming and living. Yet, as Hoedemaekers proposes, it may bind individuals even closer to identities and ego ideals fostered within and beyond contemporary organisation.

Barbara Samaluk's paper on post-socialist migration to the UK builds upon the critique of the images of work and consumption through a postcolonial approach. The author offers a critical history of the 'orientalisation' of the region that contemporary geo-political discourse has labelled 'Central and Eastern Europe' (CEE). This conceptualisation of CEE locates its subjects as not-yet-modern due to the difference in their consumption possibilities – specifically, their limited consumption capacities and the lack of access to 'western' goods. Samaluk argues that, within this epistemological framing, neoliberalism becomes posited as a modernising project, so that engaging in associated imaginings of consumption constitutes an act of 'catching-up'. Through interviews conducted with post-socialist CEE migrants in the UK, Samaluk highlights how the legacy of orientalisation produces racial and gendered complexities in their experience of work, and how migrants negotiate these realities with their desire for consumption.

The final paper in this issue, authored by Sibille Merz, demonstrates how neoliberal multiculturalism mobilises racial difference as a site of capitalist valorisation. In particular, the author offers a critique of genetic testing companies that seduce African Americans into becoming ‘prosumers’ as a means to uncover past histories lost to the violence of slavery. In so doing, these companies not only reinforce geneticised notions of racial difference but also reproduce the colonial history of exploiting this difference in the extraction of un- or under-remunerated labour. As such, Merz’s analysis highlights how, even as the lines between work and consumption are beginning to blur globally, raciality remains a critical strategy of power for the extraction of surplus value.

Following the full papers, this special issue includes four book reviews, addressing aspects of consumption and/or production integrative to the contemporary socio-economic and political configuration of capitalism.

Peter Watt reviews *Consuming higher education: Why learning can’t be bought*, which offers insightful accounts on how the (UK) higher education has become a sector of consumption and consumerism. The book in particular challenges and problematises the implications that increasing consumerism has on academic work and work practices.

In Kenneth Weir’s review of *Selling the Splat Pack: The DVD revolution and the American horror film* we learn more about current commodification tendencies occurring within the (US) horror film industry. These tendencies are, among other things, associated with distinct tensions between readings of horror as art and understandings of horror as a product and commodity.

The review by Oliver Mallett of *Identity and capitalism* discusses identity as a popular yet highly contested category of organisational theory and practice. With reference to contemporary flexible capitalism, identity is portrayed as a category and construct that is all but given. To the contrary, dynamics and frictions of current production and consumption modes tend to result in an increasing complexification and precarisation of identities, their formation and regulation.

In the last review included in this special issue Nathan Gerard discusses *The wellness syndrome*. Following the book’s critical tone and alignment, Gerard’s review reflects on prevalent societal and organisational moral demands and imperatives such as ‘be well’, ‘be fit’ and ‘be healthy’. It thereby evokes that, within the current capitalist complex, ‘be well’ often – and ever more so – means and implies ‘be productive’. Gerard’s review, once again, raises the theme of subsumption of life to capitalism, a theme that goes throughout this special issue. The possibilities for this subsumption are, among other things, created by

the increased blurred-ness of work and consumption, which we will now focus on.

## The blurred worlds of work and consumption

The spheres of production, reproduction and consumption were mainly considered as distinct in the context of industrial-fordist capitalism (Dale, 2012; Loacker and Śliwa, 2016). During this era, the production of goods and services took place within ‘the factory’ or ‘the office’ and, thus, within enclosed organisational boundaries (du Gay, 2007; Kallinikos, 2004). It was here that value, mainly functional and material, was located and produced (Thrift, 2002). The sphere of consumption, by contrast, was traditionally considered as the sphere where goods and services – the necessities for life – were bought and sold (Williams, 1976). The sphere of reproduction eventually belonged to the domestic and thus private realm, located beyond spaces of production and consumption and, hence, attempts of valorisation (Hanlon, 2016).

However, with the rise of post-industrial, post-fordist capitalism, in which the market emerges as the central regulative principle (Foucault, 2008), the boundaries between these three realms start to dissolve (Barratt, 2008, du Gay, 2007; Hoedemaekers, this issue). Within the post-industrial cycle, the production of goods and services, and hence value, no longer occurs within confined organisational boundaries, but rather across different social spheres (Kornberger, 2010; Loacker and Śliwa, 2016). Concurrently, a shift is observed from a focus on the material-functional value of goods and services to the intensification of their symbolic-cultural value, wherein the social signification of goods and services becomes more important than their specific content (Thrift, 2002). To wit, consumption is consolidated as a signifying process rather than a primarily utilitarian one (du Gay, 1996). At the same time, we observe that consumption is brought into the work and organisational realm where it becomes an integral part of production (Dale, 2012; Korczynski, 2007). Work becomes a *self*-signifying activity whereby workers are made up as ‘entrepreneurs of themselves and their human capital’ (Weiskopf and Munro, 2012), and thereby seduced into consistently cultivating and mobilising their personal, *unique* ‘potentials’ and ‘potentialities’ (Costea et al., 2012; du Gay, 1996). Consequently, workers are asked to approach work – and themselves – as a site of consumption itself, so that that the distinction between producer and consumer becomes increasingly blurred (du Gay, 2007; Gabriel et al., 2015). This ‘self-commoditisation’ of workers, in turn, enables the workplace and organisations to ‘consume their employees’ (Dale, 2012) as bundles of *objectified* potentials, abilities and ideas (Brannan et al., 2011).

Whereas it seemed characteristic for the industrial-fordist era to define the subject as a 'source of value' (Hanlon, 2016) in terms of his/her productivity, in contemporary market- and enterprise-invested times, the value of working subjects is thus equally defined by their contribution to consumption – that is, their capacity to consume at and beyond work (Bauman, 2007; Trojanow, 2015). That said, in our times, all social spheres – including the formerly domestic sphere of reproduction – seem to have been subjected to the market maxim and capitalist productivity imperatives (Land and Taylor, 2010) *and* to idealised demands for consumption (Gabriel and Lang, 1996). Consumption is thereby no longer considered to be an activity of simply using up (im/material) value which was produced elsewhere (Williams, 1976); on the contrary, the very act of consumption is itself turned into an act of production of, for example, value, symbols and a particular type of identity (Brannan et al., 2012). While work-related subjectivities and identities are still prevalent and influential, they increasingly tend to interact, collide and co-emerge with or as consumer identities (Dale, 2012), emphasising once more that who we are today and who we are made to be is no longer exclusively defined and assessed by the sphere of work, production and organisation, but, to a large extent, by what and *how* we consume in different spheres of life (Bauman, 2007; Thrift, 2002).

Having outlined the increased interconnectedness of work and consumption in light of – 'boundaryless' – capitalist productivity and valorisation rationalities, we will now proceed with showing how work and consumption are not only interconnected, but inherently entangled realms, as well as the politics and ethics of this entanglement. We will do this by elaborating on three main points. First, we will highlight the often concealed production side in consumption practices, bringing up both human labour/work and natural resources as central for the possibility of consumption (see also Dunne et al., 2013). The two remaining subsections will bring further nuance to this entanglement. We will bring to attention the geo-social divisions within the entanglement of work and consumption, thereby mainly visibilising the history of racial- and gender-specific subjugation that founded and enables the relentless expansion of global capitalism. This helps us to rethink the 'consumption of work'. Following this, we will argue that despite pronounced geo-social divisions, injustices and inequalities, we – including the more privileged of us – are all *animal laborans* (Arendt, 1998/1958), as elevating human life for constant production within the 'tribunal of the market' (Foucault, 2008) has become the ultimate expression of human activity. This eventually helps us to rethink the 'work of consumption'.

## The unbearable (in)visibility of production in consumption

Consumption may be referred to in two distinct but connected ways: the action of using up a resource and, under capitalism, the process through which commodities are used to gratify human wants (Campbell, 1987). While consumption is something people engage in no matter which mode of production they live in, it has become one of the central preoccupations and aspirations of capitalist societies (Baudrillard, 1998/1970; Bauman, 2007). This makes it possible to characterise these societies as consumerist (Gabriel et al. 2015); though the very possibilities to be preoccupied with consumption vary strikingly for different countries and groups of people, marked by geo-social divisions of our world. In any event, the preoccupation with consumption comes with substantial costs, both social and ecological. However, the production side tends to be invisible in the act of consumption.

The notion of ‘commodity fetishism’ (Marx, 2007/1867) has been a fundamental critique of consumption under the capitalist mode of production, posing labour, which is essentially based on reproduction and thus life (Hanlon, 2016: 6; Dalla Costa and James, 1972), as the primary resource consumed for the purpose of commodity production. In this process, products of labour acquire an exchange value, appearing ‘as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and with human race’ (Marx, 2007/1867: 83). This ensuing ‘commodity fetishism’, wherein social relations appear as interface amongst commodities, hides the human substance of the society of producers (Bauman, 2007) and, as such, undergirds the politics of consumption. Here, even when consumers are aware of the – often exploitative, alienating and degrading – processes of production that make their acts of consumption possible, they mostly act *as if* they are not, and propagate this process by engaging in a collective forgetfulness (Billig, 1999; Dunne et al., 2013). Even if social reproduction and labour is not a mere necessity and has meaning for the people on (and beyond) the production side, acquiring the status of work (see Radin, 1996), this critique of consumption still holds.

While human labour was central to Marx’s theory of value, with regard to nature and natural sources, it assumes abundance and a constant state of ecosystems. However, the multiple ecological problems – caused by intense usage of natural resources in production of commodities, as well as their long-distance transportation and utilisation (Brei and Böhm, 2011) – make it important to bring ecology into the picture. The reformulation of Marx’s theory of surplus value in terms of appropriation of usable energy was first done by Sergei Podolinsky in 1883, but neglected at the time (including by Marx and Engels), and was picked up by ecological economists much later (Martínez-Alier and

Naredo, 1982). Similarly to labour, when consuming natural resources, we do not see the complex and oftentimes precarious flows used in and affected by their production, transportation and utilisation. The politics of consumption is then not only in concealing the human labour appropriated and used in production, but also the natural resources that made it possible, as well as harm to them. This holds not only for industrial, but also for the so-called post-industrial capitalism with its expansion of the service sector and the digital economy, which are still reliant on very material technology production, transportation and, often toxic, utilisation (Roos et al., 2016).

While this extended understanding of the notion of ‘commodity fetishism’ is a fundamental critique of consumption under industrial and post-industrial capitalism, it is important to note that geo-social divisions are inscribed in how labour and natural resources are defined, positioned and used up. Social and environmental challenges, frictions and injustices go hand in hand, with less privileged populations often being more affected by ecological problems and more vulnerable in struggles over natural resources. The notions of ‘environmentalism of the poor’ (Martínez-Alier, 2002) and ‘working class environmentalism’ (Barca, 2012), for example, denote how environmental struggles often involve subaltern populations, such as peasant, indigenous and working class communities, often in the global south, but not limited to it. Or, the notion of (ecologically) unequal exchange is used to describe how in international trade, labour time and natural resources are exchanged at a lower ‘market value’ when coming from some locations than from others, illuminating its imperialist and colonial features (Emmanuel, 1972; Hornborg, 2015).

The increased blurred-ness of the realms of work and consumption, referred to as the consumption of work and the work of consumption in this issue, adds two more layers to the production-side of the politics of consumption outlined above. First, when work itself becomes an aspirational undertaking and a site for consumption, the labour of those producing is forgotten about also by *themselves* (Hanlon, 2016). In other words, what we have termed consumption of work conceals labour realities from labour itself. This is demonstrated by Deepa Reddy’s contribution (this issue), where work, and not only consumption, invisibilises labour. It restricts, among other things, unionisation or other forms of collective organisation of labour, making it difficult to shape the workplace or effectively ‘mobilise’ in times of crisis. This phenomenon does not have to be restricted to cases in the global south or in so-called low-skilled jobs, though this is where its consequences would be felt most sharply. For example, the willingness of middle class youth in the US to take ‘cool’ jobs in suburban cafeteria despite poor and precarious work conditions (Besen-Cassino, 2014) may also be a case of the invisibilisation of labour, where those contributing to and

engaging in production are not only not or hardly 'valued', but also do not actively try to change extant labour conditions, mainly due to the symbolic value such work has.

The second layer added to the politics of consumption outlined in this section is in consumers themselves being the labour that brings value. The literature on the work of consumption highlights that work and labour can come not only from producers, but also from consumers of commodities (Arvidsson, 2005; Lury, 2004). Glucksmann (forthcoming) actually positions consumers as part of the division of labour, with 'consumption work' often being undertaken by them to buy, (re)use and dispose of goods, services and ideas. Critical literature on prosumption, in its turn, has explicitly highlighted value creation by prosumption labour (e.g. Comor, 2011; Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010; see also Charitsis, this issue; Merz, this issue). Producing consumers and those engaged in consumption work often do not know or do not care that they are themselves the labour, but create value that is sold in 'the market', nevertheless. Here consumption becomes a way of invisibilising labour not only of producers, but of consumers too. In contemporary times, labour is hence also subsumed to capital – by modulating the, non-paid, activities of working and producing consumers and making them 'ready for valorisation' (Hanlon, 2016: 7).

We have now outlined the often invisibilised fundamental entanglement of production, work and consumption. While we argue the realms of work and consumption are by no means independent or having a self-contained existence (Barad, 2007), in this section we have further reflected on the politics of what has traditionally been referred to as the increased blurred-ness of the realms of work and consumption (Gabriel et al., 2015). In what follows, we will elaborate on the geo-social divisions of work and labour inherent to the entanglement of work and consumption.

### **The geo-social divisions of labour: Unpacked**

Conditions of work and consumption possibilities are marked by geo-social divisions, that is, for example, the global distribution of racial, gender, sexual, class, as well as geo-political and geo-economic divisions. Unpacking them allows us to bring nuance to the way consumption and work are entangled and see 'consumption of work' in a different light. To do this, we will first bring to attention a set of issues and problems encompassing slave labour, which we consider as a primary exemplar of the consumption and commodification of work and labour. We will then bring this discussion into the context of contemporary geo-social divisions.

In the introduction to *In the break*, Fred Moten (2003: 6) responds to Marx's invocation of a hypothetical 'speaking commodity' by referring to those enslaved by and within the US – labourers who were commodities before the labour power was abstracted from their bodies. Notably, according to Moten, slaves had value *prior to*, not merely in and as an effect of exchange. The slave is a commodity and, as such, represents exchange value and use value (Marx, 2007/1867). While the former is realised in profit or surplus value determined by the market (*ibid.*), the use value of slaves is a material relationship, contingent upon the master's consumption of them as commodities. This consumption proceeds through the expropriation of their productive and (given that rape by masters and forced copulation between slaves were also a means of 'commodity' production) reproductive capacities. It also comes with a symbolic depletion, fulfilled through subjective degradation.

This degradation is accomplished through what Spillers (1987: 67) refers to as the 'theft of the body' that inaugurates the slave. As such, the original relation between body and person is severed, only to be re-materialised as 'slave' through the external imposition of meanings and uses – i.e. as commodity on the auction block – and degraded, being under the master's literal and metaphorical whip. In this circumstance, the captive-turned-slave body provides 'a physical and biological expression of "otherness"' (*ibid.*: 67), which is the condition of possibility for the master to locate himself *qua* Master and Man. At the same time, the work of a slave is the site and activity of self-consummation whereby s/he actualises him- or herself *qua* slave. The denial of subjectivity signified therein – instituted by the proposition of his or her non-personhood and confirmed by self-consumptive work – is mobilised in the production of surplus value. In sum, the slave is forced to reify and consume his or her work in order to realise material as well as symbolic value for the Master *qua* Man.

Insofar as the analytic 'consumption of work' indicates the blurring of the line between work and life or the subsumption of life under work and consumption (Hanlon, 2016), slavery is a primary instantiation of this circumstance under the capitalist mode of production. While plantation slavery has meanwhile been (mostly) abolished, we now argue that the particular form of 'consumption of work' it was surrounded by did not cease. It continues, although in mitigated forms, in the situation of many workers, as, for example, types of 'neo-tayloristic work' or so-called 'McJobs' (Ritzer, 1996) suggest (see also Fleming and Sturdy, 2011). Indeed, the ethical-economic circumstance that instituted slavery persists for those positioned on the 'other side' of the geo-social division of labour. In 'Scattered speculations on the question of value', Gayatri Spivak (1985) describes the contemporary arrangement of capitalism as the appearance of advanced productive forces that obscure, yet at the same time are made possible by, the

appropriation and suppression of productive forces elsewhere. In other words, she highlights a distinction – by no means a clear-cut one – that may be drawn between workers who appear ‘super-adequate to themselves’ versus those who are ‘super-adequate to labour’, with differential conditions of and possibilities for work and consumption (*ibid.*).

Moreover, consumptive work is concerned with the production of subjectivities that are activated not only under the complex guise of self-expression and self-actualisation (Hoedemaekers, this issue), but also mobilised for the creation of surplus value, utilised in the name and interest of capitalist production (see also Böhm and Land, 2012). Workers who are ‘super-adequate to themselves’ have the ‘possibility’ to engage in what Spivak (1985: 80) calls ‘affectively necessary labour’, i.e. labour undertaken due to the affects it promises to create. Here, akin to the consumptive worker, the subject seems to (also) accumulate value for him- or herself through the consumption of own labour power (mental, physical and emotional capacities) and self. That this is made possible through the rendering of some workers as ‘super-adequate to labour’ – i.e. reduction to use value, and the consequent degradation and devaluation of subjectivity – illustrates once more how the subsumption of life under work is fundamental to the capitalist system.

Following Spivak (1985), it is crucial to note that, on a geopolitical landscape, the subjectivities or self-actualisation of workers ‘super-adequate to themselves’ are made possible and promoted through the suppression of a segment of workers ‘super-adequate to labour’. As such, the materially and symbolically productive activity – i.e. that which produces economic and, supposedly, subjective value – of the consumptive worker and the working consumer is contingent upon the reproductive and life-consuming work, or more precisely, the work that uses-up life of those not or not-yet super-adequate to themselves. At the same time, even for these workers, work may be the contested site and activity for promoting desires for, and commitment to, achieving ‘valuable’ (consumer) subjectivity (Reddy, this issue; Merz, this issue). In sum, workers are asked to consume their work as a means to actualise themselves *as* consumer subjects which, in turn, produces the material and symbolic conditions for the proliferation of so-called super-adequate subjects.

This account of prevalent geo-social divisions of work – and slavery as its political-economic progenitor – reveals, on the one hand, a near indistinction between work and consumption, in particular from the perspective of slaves and workers closely tied to labour for which the consumption of work coincides most obviously with the consumption of self and life (see also Dale, 2012). On the other, it reveals how the forms of work undertaken by these workers are

contingent upon and inform the material and symbolic consumptive possibilities of more privileged, 'super-adequate' subjects (and masters in former times) and, therewith, what and how they can consume, as well as what and how they can be and become.

Overall, contemporary geosocial divisions of work and labour tend to be substantive, with arguably most of the world's population (primarily in the global south) not having access to consumption or work beyond necessity and having their work appropriated and consumed by others (see also Skeggs, 2011). We thus argue that these divisions deserve more attention in discourses and accounts of modern work and consumption. Despite partly acknowledging the complexities, frictions and precarities encompassing current work, consumption and living modes (e.g. Böhm and Land, 2012; Dale, 2012; Dale and Burrell, 2013; Hanlon, 2016), more often than not, these accounts remain western- and northern-centric in their focus and approach, thereby invisibilising and reproducing extant divisions and, generally, the colonising power of 'western knowledge' (Castro-Gómez, 2007).

### **We are all *animal laborans*: Subsumption of life to work and consumption**

Notwithstanding the geo-social divisions within our global societies, the irony is that the lives of the more privileged of us have also been subsumed to work and consumption for capitalist accumulation and reproduction (Charitsis, this issue; Hoedemaekers, this issue; Samaluk, this issue). This is the third aspect marking the entanglement of work and consumption, which we would like to further discuss by drawing in particular on the work of Hannah Arendt.

In *The human condition*, Arendt (1998/1958) critiques Marx for his failure to distinguish between labour and work. Her address is directed, in general, at the glorification of labour in modern society as the primary descriptor of one's productive activity. This elevation, in her opinion, leaves unconsidered the political implications of labour in its historicity, blurring thereby the distinction between products of labour and their relation to life- and world-making. Referring to the basis of labour in antiquity, Arendt remarks upon the condition of the subject of labour – i.e. the *animal laborans* – as one of enslavement and animality. Here, being subject to the needs of his or her body and hence attending to the commands of another, he or she was deprived from involvement in human activities. Labour, in its strict sense, produces nothing but life (Dalla Costa and James, 1972), with no end-point to the process of labouring – a repetitive and continuous cycle that ends only with the death of the labouring

organism (Arendt, 1998/1958). To be liberated from labour, however, is to have the capacity to materialise the world.

Liberation from labour enables *homo faber*, one who produces objects that ‘guarantee the permanence and durability without which the world would not be possible at all’ (Arendt, 1998/1958: 94). Arendt distinguishes this form of productivity from labour, designating it as work. *Homo faber* – as the one who fabricates the objects that generate an enduring world – is thus the subject of work. This is in contradistinction to the figure of the *animal laborans* who is a servant to nature and the world. Moreover, while the *animal laborans* produces objects primarily according to, and used (up) by, the exigencies of life, the products of *homo faber* are an effect of reification. To wit, the products of work emerge from an ‘image or model whose shape...not only precedes it, but does not disappear with the finished product, which it survives intact, present, as it were, to lend itself to an infinite continuation of fabrication’ (*ibid.*: 141). While the products of labour leave no (direct) material trace in the world, products of work materialise the world. Consequently, Arendt notes, it is not labour but work that is the true human expression.

One may think that the distinction between *animal laborans* and *homo faber* would be marked by the broad geo-social divisions that were identified in the previous section, with subjects ‘super-adequate to labour’ being assigned the role of the former and the subjects ‘super-adequate to themselves’ having the role of the latter. However, according to Arendt, contemporary societies are not divided between *animal laborans* and *homo faber*, but fully constituted by the former. This is because the elevation of labour as the ultimate expression of human activity demands of it a repetitious and eternal character. Under this condition, the products of labour must be constantly consumed and cannot bear an enduring quality:

...the endlessness of production can be assured only if its products lose their use character and become more and more objects of consumption... In our need for more and more rapid replacement of the worldly things around us, we can no longer afford to use them, to respect and preserve their inherent durability; we must consume, devour, as it were, our houses, and furniture and cars as though they were the ‘good things’ of nature which spoil uselessly if they are not drawn swiftly into never-ending cycle of man’s metabolism with nature. (*ibid.*: 125-126)

Indeed, it seems that the lives of all of us, including the relations to ourselves and others, have become subsumed to the imperative of productivity and productivism, wherein work, consumption and their increased interconnectedness are mobilised for relentless capital accumulation and capitalist valorisation (Hanlon, 2016; Land and Taylor, 2010). The contemporary society of *animal laborans* does not only consist of those subject to the evident

bondage of necessity, i.e. those being ‘super-adequate to labour’. It simultaneously consists of those subject to perpetual consumption and work, and especially so, to the superfluities of life. The latter seem to be able – and asked – to express their (still normalised) subjectivity, whereas the former lack the possibility of such expression and performance. What is more, the distinction between privileged, ‘autonomous’ and deprived, dependent subjects of work/labour and consumption is increasingly contested and dynamic (see also Jeanes et al., 2015). The refinement of labour now produces the possibility, indeed the imperative, for unfolding oneself ‘in the world’ – mainly through acts of productive consumption, whether within or outside of work and organisation (Dale, 2012; Korczynski, 2007). Following this line of thought, we deduce that contemporary subjectivity is (still) informed by the consumption of work, but within extant ‘cultures of performativity’ (Thrift, 2000) it proceeds just as much on the basis of the work of consumption. In fact, what we see is that productive and produced selves and consuming and consumed selves are increasingly intertwined and thus simultaneously constituted within the current capitalist configuration or world.

Hence rather than ‘making this world’, subjects appearing super-adequate to themselves are continuously reproducing and trying to fit into it, by eternally working, consuming and, generally, appropriating and capitalising on themselves, their capacities, potentials and relations (Hanlon, 2016; Samaluk, this issue). This, however, does not necessarily bring ‘fulfillment’, ‘self-actualisation’ or ‘well-being’, with societies consisting of many workers being characterised by anxiety, depletion and fatigue (Han, 2015; Salecl, 2004). The inability to continuously ‘invest’ in and develop one’s ‘human capital’ and ‘human potentials’ – and hence perform the ‘fast subject’ (Thrift, 2002) anywhere and anytime – is concomitant with the risk to become quickly marginalised and excluded (Skeggs, 2011; Weiskopf and Munro, 2012). Those who do not or cannot participate in extant ‘games’ of hyper-productivity and hyper-consumption are essentially considered irrelevant, redundant and, thus, as ‘waste’ within the rationalities underpinning the contemporary capitalist system (Trojanow, 2015). While certain cultural, ethnic, and occupational groups are more obviously disadvantaged and marginalised than others, in current times, precarious work – and precarious lives (Butler, 2005) – are increasingly widespread, also amongst those commonly understood as ‘super-adequate to themselves’ (see also Bauman, 2007). The risk of not creating enough value in the entangled realms of work and consumption and hence being or becoming a ‘subject of non-value’ (Skeggs, 2011) (and thus redundant) is one we all tend to live with, and ever more so.

## Conclusion

A central aim of this special issue is to go beyond a technical, instrumental and apolitical portrayal of the entangled realms of work and consumption and to further discuss this complex beyond a narrow focus on the organisational realm (Gabriel et al., 2015). The contributions to the issue help us problematise the categories of consumption of work and the work of consumption by highlighting that they cannot be detached from each other – and from social and human life. Moreover, they highlight the ethico-politics of the increasing interconnectedness of the realms of work and consumption, which is more often than not mobilised for capital accumulation, thereby reproducing and justifying social divisions, as well as shaping who we are and who we should aspire to be(come).

It is this latter point that we have elaborated on in the editorial, arguing that consumption and work are not only interconnected but entangled realms, with one lacking an existence independent from the other (Barad, 2007). The contribution we thereby aimed to make is three-fold. First, we visibilised the production side, including labour/work and natural resources, that is often concealed in the act of consumption. This visibilisation highlights the fundamental entanglement of work and consumption. Second, we showed how geo-social divisions are framing and refining this entanglement, creating subjects with different conditions of work and possibilities of consumption, whereby better conditions and larger possibilities for some imply more precarious and exploitative conditions and limitations for others. Third, we suggested that despite this division and the opportunities and ‘choices’ that more privileged working and consuming subjects have at their disposal, we are all *animal laborans*. We also discussed some of the ethical and political implications accompanying this conjuncture.

The entanglement of work and consumption within a seemingly boundaryless market- and productivity-centric world is aimed at value creation. The value produced is, however, accelerated and uncertain, reproducing capitalism with all its divisions and crises. Whatever is considered as value and valuable hence appears to be dynamic, transient and distinctively short-term oriented (Hanlon, 2016; Thrift, 2002); what is valued today may be devalued tomorrow (Böhm and Land, 2012). This results in increasing pressures to be simultaneously and persistently productive and consumptive. Despite strong efforts to produce value, whether via engagement in work or consumption, it seems that an increasing number of people do not succeed to (continuously) produce enough of it and are hence considered to be not productive, consumptive and ‘good’, ‘usable’ and thus ‘valuable enough’ (Skeggs, 2011; see also Schlosser, 2002). An effect of such an arrangement is then not only the producing of (exchange) value and the

reproducing of capitalism (on the basis of work, labour and consumption activities), but also the producing of a lot of waste. This is not only waste in the ecological sense, generated from excessive consumption and production, but also ‘human waste’ (Trojanow, 2015), consisting of those whose lives do not matter and are used up as a resource for (re)production. It further consists of those ‘bundles of (supposedly) limitless potentials’ who are asked to ‘enjoy’ work and consumption, which is often physically and mentally challenging and draining in itself (e.g. Loacker and Śliwa, 2016).

Though oftentimes the entanglement of work and consumption – characterised by appropriation, exploitation and divisiveness – seems unalterable, there may be possibilities to organise production, work and consumption differently, whether in specific contexts or in more systemic ways (see e.g. D’Alisa et al., 2015). Following Leonard Cohen’s line of a song, ‘there is a crack in everything, that’s how the light gets in’, we suggest that possibilities for change and alternative organising are also and precisely evoked by the complexities and frictions of the current capitalist configuration, and the multiple crises that have become inherent to it (Brand and Wissen, 2012). While exploring these alternatives has not been the focus of this editorial and special issue, there is an ongoing interest in and commitment to their exploration in *ephemera*, as highlighted by already published (e.g. Swann and Stoborod, 2014; Bialski et al., 2015) as well as forthcoming issues, such as ‘Organising for the post-growth economy’, ‘Whither emergence?’ and ‘What are the alternatives?’.

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