#### Production focus cant solve—need to analyze overconsumption to open up other avenues to well-being

Princen et al, 2002

[Thomas, Ph.D., Political Economy and Government, 1988, Harvard University and Associate professor at the Univ. of Michigan school of natural resources and environment, Michael Maniates, Professor of Political and Environmental Science at Allegheny College, and Ken Conca, Program Director the School of Global Environmental Politics at American University, Confronting Consumption, “Confronting Consumption.” Pg. 1-20. Published by The MIT press] /Wyo-MB

Although these emerging concerns about consumption have an environmental dimension, they transcend narrowly biophysical considerations to embrace issues of community, work, meaning, freedom, and the overall quality of life. For some the concern is consumerism, the crass elevation of material acquisition to the status of a dominant social paradigm. For others it is commoditization, the substitution of marketable goods and services for personal relationships, self-provisioning, culture, artistic expression, and other sources of human well-being. For still others it is overconsumption, in the popularly understood sense of using more than is necessary. For most, these themes converge in a troubled, intuitive understanding that tinkering at the margins of production processes and purchasing behavior will not get society on an ecologically and socially sustainable path.

#### The kritik makes your impacts ineivtableGlobalization makes traditional policy approaches to environmental protection fail

Conca, 2002

[Ken Conca, Program Director the School of Global Environmental Politics at American University, Confronting Consumption, “Consumption and Environment in a Global Economy.” Pg. 133-153. Published by The MIT press] /Wyo-MB

The changes at the heart of globalization have important implications for a global political ecology of consumption. First, the polarizing effects of globalization force us to rethink the essence of the ‘‘consumption problem’’ in that they draw attention to the erosion of the planet’s ‘‘sustainable middle’’—the diverse array of relatively sustainable communities and lifestyles that are often hidden from view between the excesses of a billion overconsumers and the desperate struggles of a billion marginalized poor. Second, to the extent that global economic restructuring increases the spatial and social distance between production and consumption, it does further harm to the already-damaged negative-feedback mechanisms that are an important dimension of sustainable economies. Third, by rearranging the balance of power among the economic agents in a commodity chain and between those agents and the regulatory state, globalization renders regulatory and technological approaches to environmental protection much less effective. As a result, these traditional tactics are increasingly likely to target the weakest nodes in the chain rather than the strongest.

#### State not powerful enough to solve consumption problems—

Conca, 2002

[Ken Conca, Program Director the School of Global Environmental Politics at American University, Confronting Consumption, “Consumption and Environment in a Global Economy.” Pg. 133-153. Published by The MIT press] /Wyo-MB

But state power is not what it used to be. Greater capital mobility shifts bargaining leverage away from the regulatory state, flexible specialization facilitates the rapid shifting of activities among a transnationally dispersed myriad of potential suppliers, and the resulting competitive pressures undercut regulatory initiatives (environmental and otherwise). Reorienting state power to play a more constructive role in global environmental protection is problematic, because the bounded geographic spaces known as states too often cannot or will not control that space in isolation from broader developments in the global production chains that pass through those spaces. Globalization also alters balances of power among key economic agents. The traditional vertically integrated manufacturing multinational of the 1960s and 1970s enjoyed dominance through economies of scale, barriers to entry, and technological dominance concentrated at the manufacturing node of the commodity chain. But globalization exerts both an upstream and a downstream tug on that concentrated power. Upstream lies the explosion of global finance capitalism, shifting power from fixed industrial capital to institutional investors and well-heeled global speculators. Their choices increasingly dictate both national policy and long-term investment decisions. The instability in global financial markets that generated the so-called Asian flu in late 1997 was symptomatic of the upstreaming of power; an entire array of East Asian industries previously lauded as models of international competitive efficiency found themselves plunged into crisis by choices made upstream

#### Policy making fails to address consumption—locked in the production paradigm. Fails to solve the root of scarcity crisis

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Such intuition is even making its way, albeit slowly, into scholarly circles, where recognition is mounting that ever-increasing pressures on ecosystems, life-supporting environmental services, and critical natural cycles are driven not only by the sheer numbers of resource users and the inefficiencies of their resource use, but also by the patterns of resource use themselves. 6 In global environmental policymaking arenas, it is becoming more and more difficult to ignore the fact that the overdeveloped North must restrain its consumption if it expects the underdeveloped South to embrace a more sustainable trajectory. 7 And while global population growth still remains a huge issue in many regions of the world— both rich and poor— per-capita growth in consumption is, for many resources, expanding eight to twelve times faster than population growth (see box 1.1). Given current forces of economic globalization, these ratios are likely to endure, if not rise. It is little wonder that one leading nongovernmental organization (NGO) recently placed ‘‘The Consumption Juggernaut’’ at the top of its list of ‘‘ten hot sustainable development issues for the millennium.’’ 8 How might ordinary people living in high-consumption societies begin to clarify and act on these unsettling intuitions? Where can they turn for insight, systematic analysis, support, intervention strategies, or hope of effective action? Certainly not to the policymaking arena. There one finds processes of thought and decision dominated, perhaps as never before, by two forces: a deeply seated economistic reasoning and a politics of growth that cuts across the political spectrum. According to prevailing economistic thought, consumption is nothing less than the purpose of the economy. Economic activity is separated into supply and demand, and demand— that is, consumer purchasing behavior— is relegated to the black box of consumer sovereignty. The demand function is an aggregation of individual preferences, each set of which is unknowable and can only be expressed in revealed form through market purchases. Thus analytic and policy attention is directed to production— that is, to the processes of supplying consumers with what they desire. Getting production right means getting markets to clear and the economy to grow. If a problem arises in this production-based, consumer-oriented economy, corrections are naturally aimed at production, not consumption. Running in tandem with this reasoning is a simple but compelling political fact: expanding the stock of available resources and spreading the wealth throughout the population carry a much lower political price tag than trying to redistribute resources from the haves to the have-nots. Economic growth, facilitated at every turn by public policy, becomes the lubricant for civic processes of democratic planning and compromise. 9 The dominance of economistic reasoning and the pragmatism of growth politics conspire to insulate from policy scrutiny the individual black boxes in which consuming is understood to occur. As a result, an entire realm of questions cannot be asked. No one in public life dares— or needs— to ask why people consume, let alone to question whether people or societies are better off with their accustomed consumption patterns. People consume to meet needs; only individuals can know their needs and thus only the individual can judge how to participate in the economy. Consumption becomes sacrosanct. If water supplies are tight, one must produce more water, not consume less. If toxics accumulate, one must produce with fewer by-products— or, even better, produce a cleanup technology— rather than forgo the production itself. Goods are good and more goods are better. Wastes may be bad— but when they are, more productive efficiencies, including ecoefficiencies and recycling, are the answer. Production reigns supreme because consumption is beyond scrutiny. One might think that environmental activism would offer a different logic, a new way of approaching problems related to throughput, growth, consumerism, or the ‘‘more-is-better’’ trap. But in fact many mainstream environmentalists— especially in the United States and, it seems, increasingly elsewhere— have embraced the production-oriented logic. Consumption, if addressed at all, is raised only obliquely. Because production is the problem, regulation of producers becomes the answer. Producers must internalize the cost of pollution or simply cease their abusive activities. Forests are overharvested because timber companies are shortsighted, greedy, or ignorant of proper management techniques, all warranting a change in incentive structures via laws and regulations. When these do not work, forests must be set aside from production. If such measures push production offshore, then environmentalists must go offshore, too, helping other countries to develop their regulatory apparatus or promoting international environmental law and organization. In mustering their energies for these campaigns, the largest environmental organizations have spent considerably less time and effort questioning the forces that compel those ever-larger harvests, the ever-more-intensive use of a tract of timberland, and the unending search for new forest frontiers. They tend not to challenge whether society really ‘‘needs’’ more paper (let alone more paper per capita) or the lowest possible prices on wood products. That, once again, would be to enter into the forbidden territory of consumer sovereignty.

#### Production focus inevitably reproduces value extraction and reduction from resources, a consumption focus is necessary to solve for environmental problems like overconsumption

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Cultivation In cultivation, one begins to see both the extension of consumption beyond single items and the external effects of consumption. Consumption in cultivation begins when a forest is cleared or a grassland plowed. It ends when the crop is harvested and the wood burned or the bread eaten. What is expended— used up or degraded— is not just the wood fiber or seed of individual plants. Rather, it is, first and foremost, the ecosystem that preceded the cultivation and, second, the cultivated plants that no longer function within integrated ecosystems. Cultivation may be conventionally thought of as production— that is, as adding value. But from the consumption angle, a perspective grounded in the biophysical, cultivation is a set of degrading behaviors— clearing, breeding, harvesting, and ingesting. 19 Manufacturing Whereas cultivation involves rearranging extant plants and animals, manufacturing, quite literally, is making things by hand. It is applying human labor and ingenuity to create wholly new substances. Ecologically, it draws on more than the available soil and water and associated ecosystems. In particular, manufacturing extends consumption beyond the direct use of individual organisms and ecosystems to the use of energy sources and waste sinks. Converting a log into lumber and then furniture entails an expenditure of low-entropy fuel and the disposal of waste material and heat. From the production angle, this is value added. But from the consumption angle, it is using up secondary resources (energy and waste-sink capacities) to amplify and accelerate the use of primary resources (forests, grasslands, fisheries, and so on). Consuming here may entail permanent and unavoidable depletion as with fossil fuels or a temporary drawdown with the possibility of regeneration as with soil buffering. Both cultivation and manufacturing risk permanent degeneration in ecosystem functioning. But manufacturing is generally more risky due to the separation of activity from primary resources. High technology and global finance are extreme examples where so-called ‘‘wealth creation’’ is far removed, some would argue completely removed, from a naturalresource base. The consumption angle directs attention to the heightened risks of such distanced material provisioning. 20 In sum, an ecologically grounded definition of consumption takes as a starting point human material provisioning and the draw on ecosystem services. It is distinguished from definitions that begin with market behavior and ask what purchasers do in the aggregate, and from definitions that start with social stratification and ask how consumption patterns establish hierarchy or identity. The potential of such an ecological definition is to escape the confines of both limits-to-growth and economistic frameworks that tend to prescribe top-down, centralized correctives for errant (i.e., overconsuming) human behavior. An ecological approach to consumption directs attention to ecological risk and the myriad ways clever humans have of displacing the true costs of their material provisioning. The next step in conceptualizing the consumption-environment nexus is to specify what excessive or maladaptive consumption is. In particular, it is to ask how a given act of consumption (e.g., eating the apple, converting the forest, manufacturing the chair) can be interpreted or judged. I start with the broad biophysical context in which consuming behavior can be interpreted as ‘‘natural’’ or ‘‘background’’ and then consider both ecological and social definitions of degradative consumption, what I call overconsumption and misconsumption.