4 Interior economies

Anti-consumer activism and the limits of reflexivity

By bringing the global flows linking corporate brands with sweatshop labour into a new level of popular visibility, the success of Naomi Klein's best-selling book *No Logo* facilitated the high-profile publication of similar books critiquing corporate power and contemporary consumerism (Hertz 2001; Schlosser 2002) and was itself enabled by the broader context of the movements for global justice which the book in part documents (Shepard and Hayduk 2002; Notes from Nowhere 2003; Wainwright 2003; Mertes 2004). But, by contrast, while the study of consumer culture has expanded in a multitude of interdisciplinary directions over the past two decades (Featherstone 1991; Nava *et al.* 1997; Slater 1997; *Journal of Consumer Culture* 2001–) academic studies of anti-consumerist activism have been relatively sparse. They have tended to focus on *histories* of consumer activism, and the little study of *contemporary* anti-consumerism there is available can often be more celebratory than critically interrogative (see, for example, Bordwell 2002). However, celebrating the 'resistance' of anti-consumerism will not get us very far in critically exploring its significance as the binaries of 'dominant' and 'resistant' are extremely limited tools of analysis. A more useful route to grappling with the complexities of anti-consumerist discourse might therefore be to use and extend some of the tools offered to us by cultural studies to understand and engage with contemporary anti-consumerist activism. For cultural studies has a rich tradition of both engaged participation and an ability to dissect the complex connections being made by its objects of study, through, for example, its models of articulation and transformative practice (see Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Grossberg 1997: 355; Hall 1997).

This chapter pursues this aim in one particular direction: by thinking through how different types of anti-consumerist activism imagine change happening, and how they envisage their own roles in relation to broader contexts; or what I call the 'interior economies' of anti-consumerism activist discourse. To do this, I focus the discussion on four particular examples, all of which relate, in their different ways, to various strands of anti-consumerism:

Klein's *No Logo*, Anita Roddick's (2001) manual *Take it Personally*, the work of the activist organization Adbusters, and Bill Talen's book *What Should I Do if Reverend Billy is in my Store?* In considering how these works position themselves as contributing to social and cultural change, the chapter attempts to identify what these anti-consumerist discourses understand as 'activism' and their own role in relation to it; the 'type' or characteristics of the (anti-) consumers they imagine; what narratives are being produced about how change happens; and what the implied consequences are for consumption and production.

Another way of putting this is to say that this particular analysis investigates the various ways in which these activist narratives can be understood as 'reflexive', and that it considers the possibilities and limitations of their various forms of reflexivity. To extend this discussion in more detail, the later part of the chapter draws on the work of Scott Lash, Donna Haraway, Judith Butler and Bruno Latour to draw out in more detail what might be termed 'the reflexive horizons' of different forms of anti-consumerism. In particular, I use them to suggest that two different types of reflexivity might be identified at work in anti-consumerist discourse, as well as in cultural theory: first, a relatively narcissistic form of reflexivity which acts to shore up an essentialized anti-consumerist activist self; and second, an understanding of reflexivity as a more relational and dispersed process.

The aim of this chapter, then, is to both focus on some of the possibilities and limitations of current anti-consumerist arguments, and to think about how these alternative systems of consumption are imagined as being brought into being. To begin with, let us turn our attention to one of the more dramatic instances that jump-started a new wave of popular debate about the problems of consumption: Naomi Klein's *No Logo*. I am primarily discussing *No Logo* here not because it is 'representative' but because of its important and fascinating status as an international best-seller. Starting with *No Logo* offers useful ways to think about the strengths and limitations of the reflexivity of anti-consumerist activism: of what is being understood as an anti-consumerist activist, and how its own work is understood and is being positioned in relation to this broader field of activity.

Identifying a politics: Klein's *No Logo*

> Then we had an idea. Maybe if we banged together the heads of all these activists and reconfigured the fragmented forces of identity politics into a new, empowered movement, maybe we could start winning again.
> (Adbusters founder Kalle Lasn, quoted in his book, *Culture Jam: the Uncooling of America*, Eagle Brook, 1999: xii)

There is an economy in the interior of a person. We need to find a new kind of vivid privacy.

> (Bill Talen, better known as 'Reverend Billy' from The Church of Stop Shopping, in his book *What Should I Do if Reverend Billy is in my Store?* The New Press, 2003: 83)

The rejection of, negotiation with or attempt to create a new form of 'identity politics' have been a key feature of many contemporary anti-consumerist texts and actions. For example, in her last book, *Take it Personally*, the political entrepreneur Anita Roddick states, spinning around that old motif of second-wave feminism, is personal: and so 'the future of the world depends on us all taking it personally'. But to Naomi Klein, focusing on the personal, on identity politics, has primarily been part of the problem:

> Many of the battles we fought were over issues of 'representation' – a loosely defined set of grievances mostly lodged against the media, the curriculum and the English language. From campus feminists arguing over 'representation' of women on the reading lists to gays wanting better 'representation' on television, to rap stars bragging about 'representing' the ghettos, to the question that ends in a riot in Spike Lee's 1989 film *Do the Right Thing* – 'why are there no brothers on the wall?' – ours was a politics of mirrors and metaphors.
>
> (Klein 2000: 107)

Her generation of university students, she argues in Chapter 5 of *No Logo*, were 'media narcissists' who focused on identity politics and on changing representations of gender, 'race' and sexuality, but left issues of social inequality untouched. 'We were too busy analyzing the pictures being projected on the wall', she writes, 'to notice that the wall itself had been sold' (Klein 2000: 124). The demands of these kinds of identity politics, in Klein's narrative, were partially met but mainly co-opted by corporate marketers, who absorbed the demands for equality of representation into their pursuit of private capital to be shared by the few.

This tale of the co-option of left identity politics is a familiar one. As well as being told by Klein in *No Logo* and historicized by Thomas Frank in *The Conquest of Cool*,[1] it is frequently dropped into conversation by academics such as Paul Gilroy, who has talked of how corporations have 'filleted' progressive ideas (Frank 1997; Smith 2000: 21). As Sheila Rowbotham put it in her cultural autobiography of the 1960s, 'ironically, openings created by social movements were to present market opportunities', leaving 'our hopes ... appropriated, our aspirations twisted' (Rowbotham 2000: xiv–xv). Recently the trope of co-option has been contested by writers who highlight the role of 1960s/1970s counterculture as *contributing* to thicker, more

complex versions of late capitalism and the shift to post-Fordism, and in doing so enables us to conceptualize such phenomena as involving more complex transmutations and articulations than the image of a simplistic 'takeover' can at times allow (Binkley 2003; Boltanski and Chiapello 2006).

No Logo's response to the perceived co-option of left identity politics is in part, as we see above, to argue that identity politics was not substantial or concerned with economic justice enough in the first place and as such should be dismissed. And yet, I would argue, this brings us to a contradiction, for it is precisely *No Logo*'s ability to make connections between identity politics and social inequality, precisely its act of linking these personal anecdotes and comments on media representation to examples of the extremities of global labour injustice which has created much of its cultural resonance and power. Take, for example, the beginning of the book, where Klein sets the global outsourcing scene by describing the 'ghost of a garment district' in Toronto where she lives. Here, while 'old Portuguese men still push racks of dresses and coats down the sidewalk',

> [t]he real action ... is down the block amid the stacks of edible jewelry at Sugar Mountain, the retro candy mecca, open at 2 a.m. to service the late-night ironic cravings of the club kids. And a store downstairs continues to do a modest trade in bald naked mannequins, though more often than not it's rented out as the surreal set for a film school project or the tragically hip backdrop of a television interview.
>
> (Klein 2000: xiii)

Rather than simply take Klein to task for invoking an essentialized 'real', we might learn from observing something of the pragmatics of its function. Here the 'real' of 'the real action' is not only what is perceived as quantitatively important, but as most qualitatively and experientially significant. In other words, what is being posited as being to some extent most initially socially pressing and culturally engaging (most '*real*'), is the Generation X Northern/Western youth from which Klein writes – and to a large extent, *to* which she writes. At the same time the narrative can demonstrate a reflexive awareness that it is addressing and privileging this particular constituency. As Klein's authorial persona shifts from downtown Toronto to a factory on the outskirts of Jakarta, where she interviews Indonesian factory workers (described as global 'roommates of sorts', connected through products and brands) she ruefully acknowledges how 'being the Western foreigner, I wanted to know what *brand* of garments they produced at the Kaho factory – if I was to bring their story home, I would have to have my journalistic hook' (Klein 2000: xv).

The book is presented as an exercise in defetishization, in connection-tracing, in linking the products of the contemporary life Klein shares with her

assumed audience back to the stages of their production, and there is a degree of reflexivity about to whom, how and why the story is being told. But we can also see how the success of *No Logo*'s critique of brands is dependent on Klein's acute eye for the vagaries of Western, middle-class, Generation X consumer culture. It speaks primarily to those in such groups with similar broadly sketched cultures of taste and *habitus* (those who have bought Nike clothes, those who can remember designer label culture, those who have ever been interpellated by 'youth' media) and such capacious lifestyle groupings have an extensive reach. Judith Williamson, wondering why Klein was focusing on the Nikes and the Tommy Hilfigers rather than Intel and major banks, '[g]radually ... grasped that *No Logo* is, at heart, a sort of *Bildungsroman* – the story of young North America's disillusion with capitalism, and its outrage at discovering the iniquities which fuel its own lifestyle' (Williamson 2002: 211). Many of *No Logo*'s chapters open with Klein's anecdotes about her own past and present experience. She recalls, for example, the classroom tyrant who went around checking designer t-shirt labels were not fake; recounts selling brands in the clothes shop Esprit; and describes how she and her brother begged her wholemeal parents for fast food (Klein 2000: 27, 143–5). In this way it functions to make connections between the structures of feeling inhabited by her readership and the context of global socio-economic inequality and exploitation.

To understand more fully why this is important, we might borrow a suggestive phrase from Lawrence Grossberg (adapted from a phrase of Rebecca Goldstein's, and merged with ideas of Deleuze and Guattari) of *mattering maps*.[2] These 'define where and how one can and does invest, and where and how one is empowered, made into an agent' (Grossberg 1997: 368; Grossberg 1992: 82, 398). In other words, 'mattering maps' are a way of considering how we not only have cognitive connections with cultural formations, but *affective* investments in them, investments of emotion, and feeling (feelings which are often prepersonal and are not necessarily libidinal). *No Logo* works to sketch a 'mattering map' for citizen-consumers of Generation X who can recognize their own experience. The book's *mise-en-scène* features snapshots of Klein's past and present that range across a variety of emotional states including shame, desire, embarrassment and pride. Alongside its investigative journalism into new protest cultures and the material origins of trainers, alongside its political exhortations, then, it speaks of and to emotional investments recurrent for a wide North American/European young constituency. This gives the text an affective pull that many other works analysing commodity fetishism do not always have.

As such, *No Logo* demonstrates the importance of taking into account the complexities of consumer identity, affect and desire when discussing alternative systems of consumption (for a survey of the recent explosion of work on affect, see Gregg and Seigworth, forthcoming). This is particularly marked

in the context of anti-consumerist discourse, which has, historically, often been characterized by its inability to acknowledge consumer desire, or to acknowledge it in anything other than reductive terms (Belk 2003; Galtz 2004).[3] Equally, however, *No Logo* also gestures towards a gamut of potential problems with the role of identity politics in popular anti-consumerist and global justice texts. For instance: might the focus on the interpellated individual consumer who is having their lifestyle connected to wider sites and frameworks of exploitation lead to an individualized consumer politics? Who exactly can have 'identity' in these discourses – who is allowed to say 'I', and who is included in the 'we'? And how do such specific mattering maps in turn map onto imagining wider social changes in systems and networks of consumption and production?

Anti-consumerist activism in *No Logo* is positioned as contributing to cultural change in both an explicit and implicit fashion. First, it works explicitly, through the anti-capitalist activism which the second half of the book is devoted to documenting. Klein's discussion of such activism works as a powerful corrective to conservative media reports dominating the subject, and one important reason for its success is that it also works to galvanize optimism (or 'resources of hope'). But at times, its coverage can also be presented in almost vanguardist fashion, in that descriptions of the protests and social movements taking place from Seattle onwards can be depicted as the leaders of an anti-consumer revolution whose expansion and victory are almost inevitable (see Ritzer 2002). Jonathan Dollimore has used the phrase 'wishful theory' to describe theory which forces itself to find what it wishes to see (2001: 37–45), and occasionally the sheer glorification of the protests might be thought of as a kind of variant on this (what we might call 'wishful journalism'), which can at times push beyond the boundaries of a usefully promotional performative-becoming.

But, second, activism works *implicitly*, through the function of the book itself. The implication is that readers have to find their own way to activism, and yet, for those outside activist circles, or uninvolved in the kind of educational spheres where such activism is examined, perhaps the possibilities of connecting are less clear. The act of reading *No Logo* is itself probably one of the most significant investments in 'the movement-of-movements' that many people will make. This brings us to one of the most important, overlooked and problematic points about *No Logo*: the great issue – unspoken of in the text and Klein's following book, *Fences and Windows* – of the role for books like *No Logo* in putting such debates on the agenda and turning them into ideas that will seem to be popular and feasible. In short, the issue of mainstreaming, of coalition-building and creating broad-based counter-hegemonies. In effect, to discuss this is to discuss *the role of the commodity of the book itself as a form of activism*. It is to focus on the role of the book as praxis, or on what Gerard Genette would term its epitext, the discourse which

is generated around a book which works to give it meaning (Genette 1997). While *No Logo* has taken a fair amount of flak for being published by a subsidiary imprint of News Corporation (Flamingo is owned by HarperCollins which is owned by News Corporation), the argument for *why this mode of publication is in itself a useful politics* is that, by using these tools of the transnational corporations, it has a discursive reach, and a popularizing role, that would be denied to it if it had been published by a small independent publisher. *No Logo*'s marked and widespread success may well, ironically, have already had just as much if not more impact than the protests it documents. Yet this factor is one with a strange status in the book's account of how change happens. It is simultaneously acted out and erased.

This disjuncture directly relates to another: the fetishization of the brand as cause and root of the ills of contemporary capitalism in *No Logo* rather than but one component of 'the problem' of a globalized late capitalist system. Clearly, using the multinational brand as a way of critiquing neoliberalism has enormous strengths and is a useful trope around which to generate a broad range of affective alliances. Yet one of its problems is that, as Michael Hardt has pointed out, 'it still risks focusing too much on corporations and leading to a politics that is merely anti-corporate' (2002: 221–2). It can mean, for example, only attacking large corporations while ignoring government policies which foster their inequalities. Klein begins to address some of the ramifications of the limitations of brand-based politics in the penultimate chapter in *No Logo*, 'Beyond the Brand'. Here, for example, she points out that when one logo is campaigned against, even when being used tactically to illustrate broader issues, 'other companies are unquestionably let off the hook'; notes that 'anticorporate activism walks a precarious line between self-satisfied consumer rights and engaged political action', and argues that the 'challenges of a global labor market are too vast to be defined – or limited – by our interests as consumers' (Klein 2000: 428). Such gestures towards 'moving beyond' brand-based politics continue into her next book, *Fences and Windows*, which ends by stating that symbols such as brands 'were never the real targets; they were the levers, the handles. The symbols were only ever windows. It's time to move through them' (Klein 2002: 246).

This fetishization of brands as responsible for contemporary capitalism has a further effect, one which is particularly pertinent here, in that it can also enact a slippage between any form of promotional popularization and neoliberal branding. This leaves the fact that *No Logo* itself is clearly a logo (one used to popularize an anti-neoliberal project) only too painfully exposed to critique. In many ways, this fetishization of branding also has parallels to how advertising was 'scapegoated' as, almost by itself, responsible for capitalism in the 1970s and 1980s, the critique of which position in turn became the staple fare of academic studies of consumer culture in the 1990s (see Nava *et al.* 1997). One task therefore seems to be to consider how it is possible to use

branding as a way into such debates without fetishizing it; to find languages to distinguish between its various modes, between the discourses to which 'the brand' in question – whether Nike Air, or *No Logo* – is articulated; for 'branding' can function as an empty signifier, or a screen on which to project various interests (see Arvidsson 2005; Moor 2007). In the terms in which I am particularly interested here – of thinking about *No Logo*'s reflexivity as an activist text – what this means is that there is a mismatch between its popular activist role and the explicit politics foregrounded in the book. There is a slippage between how 'branding' signifies neoliberal branding, the populist promotion of the book itself and its non-neoliberal alternatives. In short, *the role of popular anti-neoliberalism as promotional discourse is simultaneously acted out in praxis and denied at the level of discussion.*

No Logo therefore stages a rejection of identity politics while performing a reconciliation with and reworking of it. It emphasizes the role of activist enclaves and vanguards in broader political change, but its own success and implicit function, through its very accessibility and through offering a widely identifiable mattering map, render it more of a populist strategy for generating counter-hegemonic discourse. It castigates branding as the key cause of neoliberalism, yet itself demonstrates – through its own strategy as a populist text – a more sophisticated understanding of the political uses of promotion in socio-political discursive change. There is a disjunction, then, between a praxis which is very sharply attuned to the role of discourse in social and cultural change, and an explicit, foregrounded narrative which does not discuss this, focusing instead on relatively small enclaves of avant-garde activism. We might regard this as an example of performative rhetoric or of a text working through its own contradictions and strategies. But, at another level, it also undeniably indicates a lack of reflexivity about the role of the book as praxis and – despite how the function of the book itself contradicts this – a strain of Romanticism about the perceived purity of 'activism'.

Taking it (all?) personally

No Logo shows that connecting abstract or macro-analyses of consumption to particular structures of feeling or singularities can work well to connect and generate shared experiences and affective investments. But it also begs the question of whether some anti-consumerist calls-to-arms might actually recommend more *individualized* solutions than the modes of consumption they critique. For a potential threat of anti-consumerist identity politics is that it might degenerate into the quasi-pathology of consumer heroism or individualized forms of consumer activism, rather than emphasizing the relationships and connections between consumers and producers (and consumers and consumers).

One example of such a problematically individualistic ethic is the late Anita Roddick's book *Take it Personally: How Globalisation Affects You and How to Fight Back* (2001). This is an 'action guide for conscious consumers' featuring lists of resources, alongside the writings of global justice campaigners, NGO workers and journalists. The text predominantly interpellates the reader as a 'rational choice' consumer who, once equipped with enough information, will be able to challenge globalization from a personal perspective (Roddick 2001: 42–3). The personalized identity politics of this anti-consumerist text engenders an over-investment in individual agency, in which a series of mainly middle-class individuals are awarded the task of remoulding consumption. All the sections – which include topics such as 'Activism', 'People' and 'Environment' – feature personalized introductions by Roddick. These include narratives of her own growth as an agent-of-change, from hanging around in her mother's café (framed as the prototype for the Body Shop) to her rise as a philanthrophic CEO bearing touristic witness to the effects of globalization.

> I've held mutated babies genetically handicapped by toxic waste dumped in local streams. I've spied on illegal loggers in Sarawak. I've seen babies living near Mexican tobacco fields that were born without genitalia – and if anything made me take it personally, that did.
> (Roddick 2001: 7)

While Roddick's pronouncements do consider the relationships between producers and consumers in the North and South, and while Roddick herself had a history of contributing to a number of progressive/left causes (see Kalhar 2008) there are important limitations to her 'identity politics' in *Take it Personally*. In this example, for instance, the persistent focus on 'otherness' (and the innocent sanctity of childhood) is clearly problematic. It indicates little of the *complexities* of Northern consumer subjectivities that rely on these abuses for their lifestyle. The personal anecdotes are unproblematically self-congratulatory; compared to Klein, there is little sense of reflexivity about either her role or the emotional investments which matter to her. Because of this, Roddick's narrative of the corporate success story of a CEO who still identifies with 'the people' can easily slip into a rhetoric of patronage rather than egalitarian connection. Its self-aggrandizement enlarges the role of the individual, pushing it closer to the grandiose individualism of celebrity, rather than dissolving it into singularities of shared experience (Deleuze 1995: 6–7). Klein, in contrast, as we have seen, registers awareness of the dangers of slipping into a politics which degenerates 'into glorified ethical shopping guides: how-to's on saving the world through boycotts and personal lifestyle choices ... the challenges of a global labor market are too vast to be defined – or limited – by our interests as consumers' (Klein 2000: 428). In *Take it*

Personally, Roddick's strain of personal-growth terror-tourism, combined with the consumer-exoticism which is the Body Shop's stock-in-trade (Ware 1992: 243–8; Kaplan 1999: 139–56) can at times lend the title of the book an unintentionally ironic flavour.[4]

There are, however, also similarities with *No Logo*'s more extensive forms of reflexivity; as both books dramatize the historical genealogy of a particular ethics of the activist self, and narrating the reasons why they have come to formulate the relationship to their 'selves' that they have. In his discussion of 'The Cultivation of the Self' in the third volume of *The History of Sexuality* Foucault points out that complex processes of 'individualism' include 'the intensity of the relations to self, that is, of the forms in which one is called upon to take oneself as an object of knowledge and a field of action, so as to transform, correct, and purify oneself, and find salvation' (Foucault 1986: 42). *No Logo* can be read as a narrative in which Klein often takes herself as 'an object of knowledge and a field of action', dramatizing her own move towards an attempt to purify herself and 'find salvation'. But, with Klein, this latter stage is gestured towards as a *goal* to be reached: the text does not offer any codified account of *achieved* heroic anti-consumer salvation, unlike Roddick's narrative. Where perhaps less reflexivity is indicated in Klein's case is how the anti-consumerist *activist self* becomes an object of knowledge: or, in other words, how Klein is in a position to write in the first place (and this is also the case with *Take it Personally*).

While the 'movement-of-movements' is not predominantly 'white' in global terms, in Europe and North America, it has been known for featuring large amounts of white middle-class activists, although there are signs that this is changing. Bhumika Muchhala, active in the 'Students against sweatshops' campaign in the USA, puts this very interestingly:

> As with the mobilizations at Seattle and elsewhere, it's predominantly a white movement. Though the conditions in sweatshops resonate with Latinos and the Asian diaspora, these people aren't yet as politically active on campuses – *perhaps because they don't feel comfortable in organizing culture.*
> (Muchhala 2004: 199; my emphasis)

In other words, for those who are low in different kinds of social or cultural capital, it can be hard enough to even get a foot onto the pitch, let alone attempt to reconfigure the rules of the game. The point of such an observation is not to attack *No Logo*, a text which often explicitly attempts to encourage multiple points of identification (placing, for example a high importance on the exploitation of 'black' cultures) but rather to help us understand how Klein, like Roddick, is able to be in the very position to write this book.

Unholy investments

While Roddick's identificatory investments are presented as being seamlessly unproblematic, and Klein's more complex investments are all presented as happening in the past, evocative mattering maps of anti-consumerist activists which assess the vagaries of their route to activism and the continuation of complexities in the present do exist. Bill Talen, for example, who becomes the persona 'Reverend Billy' of 'The Church of Stop Shopping', is more revealing of his activist investments in his book *What Should I Do if Reverend Billy is in my Store?* The preacher and his gospel-singing church are perhaps best known for their Situationist-inspired invasions of branches of Starbucks, in which they stage impromptu theatrics against the café chain's bullying of smaller traders, its exploitation of coffee growers, and the homogeneity of its consumer environments (see http://revbilly.com; Kingsnorth 2003). These activities have been recorded and dramatized in Rob VanAlkemade and Morgan Spurlock's documentary *What Would Jesus Buy?* (VanAlkemade 2007). Working as an ironic strategy which pre-empts accusations of puritanism, humourlessness and 'worthiness' because of its anti-consumerist ideological stance, and dramatizing the *oddness* of attempting *not* to participate so fully in corporate consumer culture (which '[o]fficially ... is absurd, an anti-gesture, like an American who didn't go west, who didn't go into space, who had sex without a car', Talen 2003: xiii), Reverend Billy's performances have included a range of similar street and shop activist-theatre events including anti-consumerist 'conversions', blessings on sidewalks and choreographed mobile phone actions in Disney stores. *What Should I Do if Reverend Billy is in my Store?* describes Talen's moments of being empowered, of finding agency, and of working with people, alongside moments of 'True Embarrassment' (of the 'embarrassing moment that is revelatory' Talen 2003: 66, 82) of disillusion, doubt and being 'exhausted by loneliness' (2003: 57).

If, in *No Logo*, Klein produces momentary reflexive accounts of her past relationship to consumerism, on the nature of alliances and ties to other consumers, so does Talen, but he also does something more. Talen's reflections about his investments are particularly interesting because so many texts around the global justice movement are ethnographic travelogues, stories which unproblematically celebrate anti-neoliberal activism without connecting this to the activities, lives and investments of those who do not have the time or cultural capital to be full-time activists, or without offering much reflexivity about the investments of the activist themselves (for critiques, see Soar 2000; Gilbert 2008). Talen's complex narratives about the different relationship of people in 'the church' to consumerism, and some of the variable reasons for his own investments *in the present* as well as in the past,

therefore form something of a contrast with how Klein's and Roddick's attempts to keep their own activist-present relatively 'pure'.

But in some ways, while being layered with irony, Reverend Billy's narratives follow the tradition of positing psychological and material existence 'outside' of western consumer culture as 'the real', against which consumerism is merely a continuing shadow on the walls of Plato's cave (Bowlby 1993). Anti-consumerism is linked in a chain of equivalence to psychological completeness and to the rediscovery of an Edenic type of community which has been lost – what Reverend Billy calls 'ordinary life' and what Jean Luc-Nancy calls 'the phantasms of the lost community' (Talen 2003: xiv–xv; Nancy 1991: 12). And yet, there is at the same time an impetus to break from this discourse, to understand the important social and cultural bonds which can be forged from contemporary consumption (watching the shoppers, he writes 'they were locked in their dance together. Maybe theirs was a kind of community after all', Talen 2003: 56). There is also a sense of community which is defined not as a mythical 'wholeness' to be reconstituted, but rather, as in Nancy's sense, as resistance to immanent power. For instance, Talen writes of how the 'vivid privacy' which he thinks is necessary to find is ironically always accompanied by a community of support (Talen 2003: 83). In Reverend Billy's words and actions, then, interwoven through the irony, there is a concern to understand contemporary psychologies and socialities of consumption, to recognize 'the reach and grasp of desire that drives the purchase' (Talen 2003: 74). In other words, it demonstrates an interest in the psychologies of consumer and anti-consumer behaviour, and in how changes to such behaviour happens.

The performance of 'Reverend Billy' is therefore an oscillating fusion of the languages of discovering relatively essentialized 'real' pre-consumerist identities, and of the possibilities of creating, of *becoming* new forms of post-consumerist communal beings. 'There is an economy in the interior of a person', Talen writes, and we needed to 'find a new kind of vivid privacy' (Talen 2003: 83). This 'interior economy' is, simultaneously, a quasi-nostalgic defence of a private space, one which constitutes the 'real' pre-lapsarian consumer imaginary, and a strategic way of understanding the constructions, and the becomings, of new anti-consumerist activist subjectivities.

Reverend Billy and his Church epitomize anti-consumerism in one of its most entertainingly camp forms. They exemplify the politics of 'boycott culture', mixed prominently with a flamboyant advocation of consumer abstinence.[5] For some commentators, their approach simply works to ramify the publicity given to the brands in question, or runs the risk of stasis through its irony (Moore 2007: 48–52). But like the promoters of Buy Nothing Day, in which consumers are encouraged not to buy anything on the 27th November every year, The Church of Stop Shopping works less to advocate attempts to withdraw from corporate consumption as a continuous year-round general

strategy and more as a promotional tactic to create discursive space for rethinking the relations of consumption.[6] The publicity that Reverend Billy and the Church have gained in the USA and the UK in particular means that it works as a 'lever' or promotional tool to generate consideration of the effects of what consumers buy on them/ourselves, on the people who produce the goods and the environment; on the ties and alliances in question. Beyond this, its recommendations are either undefined or 'open', depending on your point of view, although a variety of potential actions are pointed towards: lessened consumption, alternative forms of consumption (second-hand swap shops), and unionized activity.

In turn, this begs further questions about not only what other types of change are imagined across the spectrum of contemporary anti-consumerist discourse as happening 'after the boycott' or 'after the action' but also *how* these changes are imagined as emerging. Some of the contradictions about how change is imagined as potentially coming-into-being are, perhaps, laid out most starkly in the activities of the Canadian-based anti-consumerist organization, activist network and magazine publisher Adbusters.

Meme machines and viral vanguards

Adbusters describes its activities as 'tinkering with the corporate genetic code'. One of the best known anti-corporate organizations, it is most famous for its subvertising and culture jams: spoof adverts of corporate behemoths such as Nike, Marlboro and Calvin Klein, many of which appear in its eponymous not-for-profit magazine. Founder Kalle Lasn frequently invokes the cybernetic metaphor of 'memes' – the Richard Dawkins-derived concept, prevalent in digital theory, which describes ideas jumping, contagiously, in bio-hyperlink fashion, from one head to another (Dawkins 1989; Terranova 1996; Blackmore 2000). What we need, Lasn states, is

> the ready for prime-time metameme – the big paradigm-busting idea that suddenly captures the public imagination and becomes a superspectacle in itself ... the meme-warfare equivalent of a nuclear bomb. It causes cognitive dissonance of the highest order. It jolts people out of their habitual patterns and nudges society in brave new directions.
>
> (Lasn 1999: 124–5)

In the cyberrevolutionary machine, Adbusters can be positioned as a kind of viral vanguard, the evolutionary fittest pushing forward the almost-inevitable revolution. The nature of media influence is frequently described in overtly hypodermic terms ('The commercial mass media are rearranging our neurons,

manipulating our emotions ... So virtual is the hypodermic needle that we don't feel it' Lasn 1999: 12). Just as Lasn's cyberhumans have been programmed, they can be deprogrammed by the apparently irresistible revolutionary force of the ultimate culture jam. This is the viral vanguard of an inevitable anti-consumer revolution, one speaking the language of cyberrevolution merged with Situationist anti-consumerism.

This rhetoric carries traces of the model of the brainwashed, zombieconsumer. It is a model which can be tracked from modernism's characterization of the duped and deluded masses (as Andreas Huyssen discussed so eloquently) through to Vance Packard's classic 1950s text on advertising's *Hidden Persuaders* and Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*; and at its worst, such perceived automaton behavioural patterns can work to stoke the self-righteous elitism of the all-seeing few (Packard 1957; Debord 1967/1994; Huyssen 1987). It is a language which also appears, in ironic form, in Reverend Billy's sermon: 'I believe that this will deprogram a consumer in the middle of a pseudo hip sip' (Talen 2003: 6). As Don Slater discusses in *Consumer Culture and Modernity*, there is a strain in theories of consumer culture as spectacle which both 'tend to produce highly totalized images of consumer society', and which 'appeal to a kind of libidinal self and body still lurking under the many layers of commodification and passivity' (Slater 1997: 126–7). The notion is of an unproblematically innocent consumer who is either placed 'inside' or 'outside' a hermetic system which appears to be produced in a zone beyond human agency. Such a paradigm can often inform Adbusters' rhetoric.

Yet at the same time, Lasn's is a social constructionist view of the world, an understanding which swerves between simplistic binaries of heroic viral vanguards and brainwashed cultural dupes, and sophisticated gestures towards a multifaceted, hegemonic, war of attrition, in which campaigning for change is all about 'finding the leverage point' (Lasn 1999: 131). This approach connects to other campaigns such as to the populist, coalitionbuilding strategy of French farmer José Bové and the Confederation Paysanne in their actions against the McDonaldization of French food and discriminatory American trade tariffs; which, by engaging with movements, popular issues and existing political systems, built successful alliances between anti-corporate activists, conservative citizens in Middle France, New Delhi farmers and local co-operatives (Bové and Dufour 2001; Littler 2002). Lasn's discourse therefore oscillates between assertions of the 'hypodermic' nature of media influence (and proposing a communal utopia which can sound almost feudal) to complex analyses of the workings of late capital, strategic policy suggestions and ideas for creating alliances.

This, then, is an anti-consumerism which swerves between reductive vanguardism and an innovative and sophisticated politics of complexity (calling, for example, for 'infodiversity' as well as 'biodiversity'). In addition,

Adbusters has also been an energetic proponent of a range of actions designed to provide actually existing alternatives to corporate consumer culture, from its anti-Nike ethical footwear initiative (the 'Black Spot Sneaker') to alternative forms of media (Littler 2004; Adbusters 2006). The future paradigms it gestures towards often focus on economic and environmental sustainability, which, they argue, should be achieved by the shift in public consciousness, by rewriting legal definitions of corporate behaviour and by unashamedly large-scale planning. Lasn, citing the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW) developed by Herman Daly and John Cobb, argues that we 'need more than "small do-goody gestures" for the environment – start teaching a whole new economic paradigm, design cities with pedestrians and public transport in mind' (Lasn 1999: 89–90, 112). This is combined with suggestions for political-legal strategies for change:

> We must rewrite the rules of incorporation in such a way that any company caught repeatedly and wilfully dumping toxic wastes; damaging watersheds; violating antipollution laws; harming employees automatically has its charter revoked, its assets sold off and the money funnelled into a superfund for its victims.
>
> (Lasn 1999: 157)

Adbusters can therefore be reflexive enough to put suggestions for changes to the law, and to regulation, on the agenda. Similarly, an often overlooked feature of *No Logo* is the extent to which Klein explicitly refers to the need to engage with other 'political solutions' beyond boycotts (Klein 2000: 442). As consumer boycotts are not enough, and company codes of conduct are not to be trusted, what we need, she argues towards the end of the book, is an updated version of union activity on a global scale:

> In the twenties and thirties, when the crises of sweatshops, child labor and workers' health were at the forefront of the political agenda in the West, these problems were tackled with mass union-isation, direct bargaining between workers and employers and governments enacting tough new laws. That type of response could be marshalled again, only this time on a global scale, through the enforcement of existing International Labour Organisation treaties, if compliance with those treaties were observed with the same commitment that the World Trade Organisation now shows in it enforcement of the rules of global trade.
>
> (Klein 2000: 438)

What is hoped for are governmental and international laws enforcing union-style curbs on the excesses of global capital (although it also leaves the door

open for the possibility of creating new modes of non-capitalist business). These possibilities, Klein's narrative implies, will hopefully be achieved through interconnections between activists in the embryonic movement-of-movements, which is where *No Logo* most explicitly locates the agency for change. Hopes of reclaiming citizenship over consumption, creating public space and common ownership and greater global parity of resources are invested in the forging of links between very different groups: the workers in export processing zones, culture jammers, ageing academics and anti-corporate campaigners; and so the book ends by repeating the Reclaim the Streets slogan 'the resistance will be as global as capital' (Klein 2000: 443–6). Klein's call is effectively making links beyond that of consumption: it points to how we need reflexivity as citizens as well as consumers.

Imagining anti-consumerism

I have been discussing how, in these particular cases, the role of anti-consumerist activism, the status of its consuming audience and cultural change are imagined. In terms of activism, *No Logo* enacts a politics in which change is ultimately conceived of as happening through global laws, brought about through the movement-of-movements. It displays a somewhat contradictory attitude towards its own role as activist-text. Adbusters argues, energetically, for large-scale social change by forming new principles of economic and environmental sustainability, and it imagines such change has the best chance of being brought about through ideological and discursive shifts. Roddick's imagined change will happen variously through activism, legal changes and individualized consumer power. Here Roddick represents an interesting faultline in anti-consumerism; for, on the one hand, she and the Body Shop have hugely popularized the issue of trade ethics, having a large discursive impact and extending the appeal of ethical consumption; and, on the other, it is clearly not a co-operative organization, but a capitalist enterprise that does not use the International Fairtrade Mark and seeks to set its own rules for its own brand of 'ethical trading' (a fact made only too apparent through its 2006 takeover by the giant cosmetics corporation L'Oréal). Reverend Billy's church makes specific, vivid performances against consumerism and gestures towards some alternatives, but for the most part it leaves future systems of consumption open or undefined.

Both the type of consumer and anti-consumer being imagined, and activism's relationship to them, differ in these modes of anti-consumerist activism. *No Logo* interpellates its audience of youthful Generation X consumers by gesturing emotively towards a shared habitus. Anita Roddick's work has primarily talked to a rational-choice consumer who needs to be educated into further change, towards which *Take it Personally* points as a

didactic primer. Adbusters' discourse can both imagine itself as viral vanguard waking up the duped masses, and can operate in more sophisticated strategic ways, not as the inevitable future victor, but rather as a tactical spanner in the cultural works that brings together coalitions and alliances to strike at points of neoliberal vulnerability and to attempt to fashion alternatives. Reverend Billy's church simultaneously addresses anti-consumers and consumers saturated with postmodern irony and activist ennui and anti-consumers and consumers who at some level need to have their attachments to dreams of consumer wholeness broken.

Relational reflexivity

We have looked at what these anti-consumerist discourses understand as 'activism', at how they understand their own role in relation to it, at the narratives they produce about how change happens, and at how the implied consequences or futures beyond anti-consumerism are imagined (or not). In other words, we have looked at how 'reflexive' such discourses are about their own positions and context. To extend this discussion, here I want to highlight some of the varied yet interconnected understandings of that fraught and richly suggestive term, 'reflexivity'. In particular, I want to draw on the work of Scott Lash, Donna Haraway and Bruno Latour, as their nuanced writings appear to me to open up interesting further ways to think about the implications of how reflexivity 'works' in these texts and movements, and of the problems and possibilities of the anti-consumerist discourses I am discussing.

Scott Lash's (2002) book *Critique of Information* develops his earlier arguments about reflexivity (Beck *et al.* 1994; Lash and Urry 1994) as a vital, constitutive feature of the technological present. In the post-Fordist information society, reflexivity is no longer something which takes place in a separate, rarefied (or reified) dimension of time and space from the everyday:

> Reflexivity in the technological culture is not a separate process of reflection. There is no time, no space for such reflection. There is fusion of words and things, of thought and practice. To think is not just at the same time to do; to think is at the same time to communicate. In the technological culture, reflexivity becomes practice; it becomes communication.
>
> (Lash 2002: 18)

Reflexivity in contemporary technological culture and life, then, is instantaneous, is immanent to being (and Lash is very alive to how this techno-social landscape is fissured depending on a given person's location and access to social and cultural capital). The time and space for separate reflection, a

constitutive experience for privileged 'moderns', have collapsed. In articulating this paradigm, Lash both draws on a variety of theorists – particularly Deleuze and Derrida – who have problematized and sought to erase the distinction between representation and object, and positions the generation of such theories as themselves being indicative of this social and cultural age. The generation of affective becomings becomes a key characteristic of this technoscape of informational reflexivity.

This provides a useful way to further our understanding of *No Logo*'s reflexivity. For example, returning to the passage I quoted earlier, when Klein recounts that '[m]any of the battles we fought were over issues of "representation" – a loosely defined set of grievances mostly lodged against the media, the curriculum and the English language', we might read this as much as anything, as the bemoaning of the outdated methodology of a previous era: as a *critique of representation* itself. Certainly the activist-text structure of the book, and its enormously successful performance *as information*, embody precisely the type of reflexive information Lash is discussing: it responds rapidly; it responds with inbuilt reflection; and it conspicuously generates information and affect. In these terms, *No Logo* becomes a paradigmatic anti-consumerist text of the information society.[7]

However, if 'reflexivity' has been understood, as here, as a driving and constituitive feature of modern informational society, it has also been understood, in a second, very different way, as a means of generating, or coming to elaborate upon or 'know' the self, as discussed for example in the work of Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens (Beck *et al.* 1994). Giddens' analysis of the generation of individualized forms of reflexivity has been taken up as a useful tool by academics in cultural studies, for example, to understand contemporary lifestyle magazines (Gauntlett 2002). Giddens' paradigm of reflexivity tends to foreground atomized and intensely individualized forms of sociality, from which 'reflexivity' can offer itself up to be understood as a relatively bounded form of narcissistic individualism (Giddens 1991), and the stories of Anita Roddick reflecting on her own self, her own heroic position, are perhaps particularly suited to being understood in these terms.

Yet this second sense of being 'reflexive' does not necessarily primarily involve reinforcing hyper-individualized social relations. We might, for example, think of the strong tradition, particularly shaped in cultural studies through feminist and postcolonial theory, of 'reflexivity' involving a discussion of the situated position of the academic-author-self in relation to the subject under scrutiny. Broadly, such reflexivity involves scrutinizing the situatedness of the author as an attempt to evade the fallacy of Enlightenment-derived scientific objectivity: both to reject its positivist empiricism and to break from the brutal historical baggage of its derogatory classifications of otherness (Clifford 1988; hooks 1990; Haraway 1997: 198–304; Harding 2003). To *not* engage in such reflexive actions means, in effect, to collude to

some extent with this tradition and its fantasies of transcendental authority. For many cultural studies scholars, making gestures towards or working from the position of a reflexive practice is a basic tenet of the discipline, as for a connected branch of social science, as outlined by Bourdieu and Wacquant in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (1992). This kind of reflexive writing also carries the risk of self-indulgent narcissism and of valorizing expressions of 'experience' which emerge from 'the self' as of somehow greater validity than other discourses. It carries the risk of potentially ignoring both questions of psychology and the unconscious, and re-importing 'objectivity' through a conduit of possessive individualism.[8] But its implications, as Lash puts it in *Reflexive Modernisation*, are also that 'reflexive human science would need to understand itself as just another ethnomethodology'. Whereas '[f]or Beck and Giddens it tends to involve the bracketing of the life-world to arrive at individualised, subject-object forms of social knowledge', this perspective 'involves bracketing subject-object knowledge and situating knowers in their life-world' (Beck *et al.* 1994: 156).

In her book *Modest_Witness*, after noting how the separation of expert knowledge from opinion was a founding gesture of modernity (Haraway 1997: 24), Donna Haraway moves on to think through some of the problems with being reflexive, in this way, observing Bruno Latour's reluctance to engage with a reflexive methodology because it seems to him to simply be a way of reproducing more of the same subject position. From here, Haraway makes the suggestive point that, as reflexivity could be thought of as simply ending up at the same position, instead '[d]iffraction, the production of difference patterns, might be a more useful metaphor for the needed work than reflexivity' (Haraway 1997: 34). This, she argues, can help any kind of programme which

> is committed as much to knowing about the people and positions from which knowledge can come and to which it is targeted as to dissecting the status of knowledge made.
>
> Critical reflexivity, or strong objectivity, does not dodge the world-making practices of forging knowledges with difference chances of life and death built into them. All that critical reflexivity, diffraction, situated knowledges, modest interventions or strong objectivity 'dodge' is the double-faced, self-identical god of transcendent cultures of no culture, on the one hand, and of subjects and objects exempt from the permanent finitude of engaged interpretation, on the other.
>
> (Haraway 1997: 36–7)

Haraway's model, in effect, highlights and extends the possibilities of thinking reflexive positionality and knowledge-production as relational and

temporal processes, and as imbricated in complex, contingent conjunctures, distributions, systems and networks of power. This connects back to Bourdieu's ideas about reflexive methodology as an anti-individualist strategy, a means of thinking how 'persons at their most personal are essentially the personification of exigencies actually or potentially inscribed in the structure of the field, or, more precisely, in the position occupied within the field' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 44). It emphasizes the *relationality* of reflexivity beyond the confines of a reflexivity which is solely anchored in individualism, by focusing on the nature of the alliances through which the individual is constituted and situated. Emphasizing *relationality* also has a resonance with what Judith Butler also gestures towards in her text *Precarious Life*, when she argues, (focusing on feminism) that

> It seems more crucial than ever to disengage feminism from its First World presumption and to use the resources of feminist theory, and activism, to rethink the meaning of the tie, the bond, the alliance, the relation, as they are imagined and lived in the horizon of a counterimperialist egalitarianism.
>
> (Butler 2004: 41–2)

Both Butler's and Haraway's understandings open up more ways of engaging in what we might highlight as 'relational reflexivity', and this, as I have been attempting to demonstrate, can help refine an understanding of the work of these contemporary anti-consumerist texts. It can help us think about whether, and how, the situated and specific nature of these knowledges and understandings being brought to anti-consumerist interpretations are being recognized; of how these understandings change in the process of 'activism' and travel somewhere else, become 'defracted', become different.

This can also help us see how it is not particularly helpful to simplify 'anti-consumerism' as a monolith. For if an awareness of the role of popular discourse in shaping the citizen-consumer can be found, so too can romanticizations of activist enclaves which shore up its boundaries; if there are spaces where consumers are shaped as dupes, there are also sophisticated understandings of the affective investments and complex psychologies of consumer identities. Identity politics or reflexivity in anti-consumerist texts can work to focus on the nature of the ties between consumers and producers, between consumer behaviours and to sketch mattering maps which engender alliances. This is partly how they gain their power; it can be the source of great affective reflexive strength, or the source of a more narcissistic reflexivity. They appear to be most persuasive, we might say, when they emphasize the nature of a particular alliance in question and reflect on their own positioning or standpoint; when the connections between consumers are considered as well as the connections between consumers and producers; and when the

interconnections between interior and exterior economies, and between affective and material currencies, are foregrounded. Anti-consumerist discourse is at its most effective when it is relationally reflective enough to be articulated to popular interests to form counter-hegemonies, and when it can create affective mattering maps with those who can link to their various modes of *habitus*. In other words, the more relationally reflective anti-consumerist texts are, the better, as it renders them the more open to making more, and more egalitarian, alliances.

Postscript: beyond the boycott

In his book *The Politics of Nature,* Bruno Latour moves beyond thinking about how a phenomenon (here, 'nature') has wildly variable historically and cultural specific formations to unearthing, radically problematizing and dispensing with the very category itself (in effect, doing for 'nature' what Judith Butler did for 'gender'). Instead, he suggests a complex schema for bringing its disaggregated elements – as part of 'the sciences' – into democracy. And in this radically reconstituted version of 'democracy', what will play 'an indispensable political part' is economics:

> The simplistic character of which economics is so often accused becomes on the contrary its most striking quality, the only one that can produce a scale model of the common world. Thinking they had come across an instance of self-regulation, the adherents of natural equilibria made a small mistake on the placement of the prefix 'self'. Yes, economics is a self-reflexive discipline, but it does not designate any *self*-regulated phenomenon: it simply allows the public to see itself, to conceive itself, *to constitute itself as a public.*
> (Latour 2004: 150–1; italics in original)

In this paradigm, economics will have a role in which it will no longer appear specialized in an abstract sense but will rather be a means by which we will make sense of our collective lives.

Whether we agree with the viability of Latour's elaborate schema or not, it is a very suggestive image; one which, in its own, inimitable, fashion, has something in common with the growth in studies of cultural economy (du Gay and Pryke 2002; Amin and Thrift 2004; Merck 2004). These studies – thinking through, for example, the always-already 'culturalized' dimensions of 'the economy', and emergent working practices in the post-Fordist creative industries – have developed new ways of interrogating the old question of how economic/cultural form shapes social identities, possibilities and life opportunities in a climate in which cultural economies have adopted

distinctive new forms. What I have been implicitly suggesting in this chapter is that there is, equally, much to be gained from thinking through the problems and possibilities of anti-consumerist activist discourse by using some of the theoretical tools offered by cultural studies and these adjacently networked disciplines of cultural economy and cultural theory. Theorizing anti-consumerist activism is just as important as theorizing new formations of trading floors, consumer debt or the fluctuating fortunes of advertising agencies. This is particularly the case as studies relating to anti-consumerist activism, particularly on co-operative movements and boycott cultures can tend to focus very heavily on historically oriented economic questions, and the little study of contemporary anti-consumerism there is available can understandably at times tend to be overly celebratory. Using and extending cultural studies' models of articulation and transformative practice can open up more possibilities for useful critical interrogation.

This chapter has attempted to use such an approach while bringing theories of (and relating to) cultural economy and consumer culture into dialogue with contemporary anti-consumerist discourses. While, in the past, it has been extremely useful to consider models of representation (such as the colonialist imagery of the Body Shop), it is perhaps now just as important for cultural studies to start engaging in the wider, much more messy and complex terrain which anti-consumerism occupies beyond representation; a terrain which includes how alternative economies elicit affectual investments (or not), and the social, theoretical and political economies – which are always, in their various forms, always-already cultural – of what is imagined as possibly happening after the action or boycott. Thinking about to what extent anti-consumerist discourses are relationally reflexive, I have been suggesting, is one of the many possible ways of doing this; that in attempting to extend *beyond* boycott cultures, it is often most productive to, at one and the same time, pay attention to investments and lives lived *during* (and *before*) them. As cultural studies and the movement-of-movements remind us, acknowledging investments, contingencies and fallabilities can often work as a crucial means of engendering openness and creating further alliances; and if, in Latour's terms, 'the global economy' is one means by which the collective can 'see itself', then much might be gained from reflexively interrogating anti-consumerist cultural economies too.

5   **Ecologies of green consumption**

Climate change has become a dinner-table conversation everywhere.
(Marianne Barner, Head of IKEA in Sweden, Barner 2007: 59)

Over the past few years, contemporary 'turbo' levels of consumption have increasingly become presented as seriously environmentally problematic, affecting areas both close to and far from home. Newspapers present us with images of 'dead seas' filled with garbage; television programmes air anxieties about plastic bags and patio heaters; journalists report that new power plants are being opened every week to cater for global production. Some of the most high profile responses to this have been attempts to 'green' consumption. Recycling is a hot topic, an increasing number of products are marked as 'green', we are offered 'carbon neutral' services, are told to consume less and sold organic goods and 'bags for life'. And yet attitudes towards such attempts to 'green' consumption are often sceptical and the subject is often shot through with contradictions. Green consumption is everywhere: and yet it is a slippery, multifaceted and often apparently contradictory subject.

This chapter approaches the question of what green consumption is and to what extent it might be thought to offer useful or 'radical' solutions to contemporary interconnected environmental problems. The first section outlines some contemporary contexts for green consumption, including global warming, peak oil, biotechnology and pollution, discussing these issues both in relation to popular anxieties and the emergence of niche markets. The second section suggests that one particularly useful set of terms to use to theorize contemporary green consumption and its contexts is Félix Guattari's work in *The Three Ecologies*, and so sketches his theory of 'eco-sophy'. Broadly speaking, Guattari demands that we think the psychological, the social and the environmental together, that we consider the connections and disruptions between them, and suggests that practices and discourses which do not connect them cause profound inequality and danger.

By bringing these two sections together, the third part of the chapter attempts to apply Guattari's theories to create one understanding of green consumption within what cultural studies likes to term 'the contemporary cultural conjuncture' (see, for example, Hall *et al.* 1978; Grossberg 2005). (In fact, as we will see, such an approach is in some ways fairly congruent with *The Three Ecologies*, as both attempt a contextualized, multifaceted and interwoven view of their subject.) It does so by suggesting that we might schematize contemporary 'ways of being a green consumer' into three key areas (buying 'green' products, recycling and consuming less) and then by discussing some of the most problematic disjunctions between social, mental and environmental ecologies at work in these realms of consumption. In effect, then, the chapter uses *The Three Ecologies* as a tool to help dissect the various reasons for paradoxes and contradictions within the realm of green consumption. In the process, it argues for an interconnected or 'ecosophical' approach to its analysis, regulation and practice.

Some contemporary contexts of green consumption

How might we begin to understand the contemporary surge of interest in being – however partially, paradoxically or hypocritically – a green consumer? Such a growth in interest in green consumption can be explained through a number of different contexts, which are often closely imbricated together: the issue of climate change and the activities of the environmental movement; the expansion of corporate niche markets; the question of increasingly 'toxic' or degraded environments; and peak oil. Let us look briefly at these issues in turn.

Climate change

The heightened nature of awareness and anxiety about climate change and global warming is one obviously crucial driver of green consumption. We are encouraged, for example (although many would say we are not encouraged enough, or are not provided with the facilities *to be able* to do this enough) to switch to long-lasting light bulbs, to dump the car and use public transportation, to consume products that can be recycled, to recycle many of the products we buy, to consume energy from renewable sources and to fly less. Anxieties that the planet will be, at best, profoundly unpleasant through the perpetuation of current rates of warming (through extreme temperatures, scorched earth, wide-ranging floods, species extinction and large numbers of human deaths), and, at the worst, that this process will cause feedback loops leading to an uninhabitable planet are taken increasingly seriously, even if relatively little in proportional terms has actually been done about it. In the world's richer, powerful states, awareness of climate change has been registered through both media coverage and changes in experience, which, while very different from the much more forceful effects hitting poorer nations first (Simms 2005) are nonetheless already tangible, in particular through erratic and 'unseasonal' weather (such as the 2003 heatwave in France and the 2005 hurricane in New Orleans).

Simultaneously shaping – and shaped by – this experience of 'strange weather' is an expanding media discourse about environmentalism.[1] This spans an extremely wide spectrum: from the reportage of melting glaciers in glossy magazines like *Vanity Fair,* through newspaper coverage of the UK-government commissioned 2006 Stern Report into Climate Change, to blockbuster films like *The Day after Tomorrow* and *An Inconvenient Truth* (Emmerich 2004; Guggenheim 2006; Stern 2006; *Vanity Fair* 2007). A recent study by Boykoff and Goodman notes an upswing in media coverage around the time of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 and an overwhelmingly dramatic increase in the media coverage of green issues from the mid-2000s (2008: 8–9). The 'peak' of media coverage of climate change *denial* (a PR practice itself funded, as many are now aware, by the petrochemical industry, largely Exxonmobil and its sponsored subsidiaries) appears to have passed (Monbiot 2007a: 23–7).[2] There are, in short, an increasing number of discourses and experiential indicators around that make it harder to avoid thinking and feeling about these issues, whatever may be thought and felt about them.

Cultural sociologist Noel Castree has assessed how this contemporary 'moment' of environmentalism is viewed as 'a cause' by comparing it to other moments in the history of environmentalism and analysing its reception by mainstream politics, business and the public. While the environmental movement had a 'thrilling late 1960s infancy and a rather successful 1970s adolescence', he writes, its development was thoroughly arrested in the 1980s and 1990s when it was stalled by the 'likes of Reagan and Thatcher'. By contrast, environmentalism is now big news again in the world's most powerful states, and politicians on the left and right want to be seen to engage with its agenda (Castree 2006: 11–21; see also Castree 2005). This clearly remains the case with many recent political gestures: in 2007, for instance, US President George Bush suddenly announced he had 'always' been involved with green issues, and one of the first subjects the newly-elected right-wing French President Nicolas Sarkozy talked about was 'the environmental agenda', by suggesting that a UN-steered world environmental organization be created (Tisdall 2007; White House 2007).[3]

Castree's question is: is this contemporary moment an unprecedented opportunity for environmentalism or a false dawn? For Western environmentalism is, as he puts it, 'a movement of paradoxes: it appears to exert real societal influence, whilst in practice being mostly ineffectual' (Castree 2006: 12). These paradoxes take three main forms. The first paradox is that environmentalism has been on the agenda of ruling parties for many years, but not in a way most environmentalists would recognize; the second, as sociologist Klaus Eder puts it, is that 'the environmental movement no longer dominates discourse on the environment'; and a third is that the public increasingly cares but does not act. For Castree, this is primarily because, from the 1980s, 'ruling parties saw it as in their interests to appropriate the

language of environmentalism, but to adopt the practical policies of its least threatening versions' (Castree 2006: 14). The language of environmentalism has therefore overwhelmingly been channelled to serve 'the cause of a specifically liberal, market-led form of environmental management in key Western states'.[4]

Neoliberal profit and post-Fordist niche markets

Castree's distinction, like that of Elder before him, is in this latter respect very similar to Timothy Luke's account of 'green governmentality' and to what Tim Forsyth and Zoe Young have in a recent edition of *Mute* described as a 'new green order' which they discern to be evolving 'before our fearful, blinkered eyes' (Luke 1999; Forsyth and Young 2007: 31). In this new green order, politicians such as Tony Blair, George Bush and Nicolas Sarkozy announce that debate over climate change should now begin and that the bigger policy debate about who should carry the burden of tackling the problem should start. But a highly delimited set of answers have already been sewn up:

> there seems to be a consensus among global elites about where to start (be afraid, be very afraid ... but always trust the government), how to address the challenge (change development patterns in the South to 'offset' carbon emissions produced by business as usual in the North), and who is responsible (mainly you and me). Real doubts and arguments are suppressed while market friendly 'solutions' are served up on a nice, glossy plate.
>
> (Forsyth and Young 2007: 29)

The 'new green order', in these terms, attempts to channel people's *fears* of climate change into endorsing one particular, neoliberal set of solutions: to continue market-led corporate expansion; to ramify divisions between economically powerful and weak countries; and to seek to gain approval and endorsement for these strategies by making climate change the problem of the 'individual' rather than by making governments or regulators effect significant policy changes through production and distribution.

To apply terminology from recent neo-Foucauldian work on governmentality (Bratich *et al.* 2003; Grossberg *et al.* 2003; Hay and Oullette 2008) to this account, the new green order is seen to involve burdening the individual with an overwhelming (rather than partial) responsibility for change, otherwise known as 'responsibilization'. This has significant implications for green consumption, as it implies that, by 'governing the soul' of the individual, by encouraging the idea that tackling climate change is down to the individual rather than corporations or governments, the green consumer

might, in effect, be read as a means or conduit to perpetuate and endorse neoliberalism. We will examine this question of to what extent green consumerism is a conduit for neoliberalism, and the scope of action in relation to this scenario, in more detail later on.[5] For the moment, it is enough to note that 'the new green order', in which contemporary neoliberalism works to 'responsibilize' the individual, is one significant driver of contemporary green consumption.

A related aspect of this complex is the *form* such an expansion of corporate power has taken in terms of production and consumption. By this I am referring to a topic this book has already looked at in a variety of ways: the emergence of the fragmented niche markets – or 'mass specialization' – of post-Fordism. While 'green' or 'environmental' products have a long history, since the 1970s green consumerism has emerged as a significant, specialized and itself highly variegated niche market. The proliferation of 'alternative' and green products and sensibilities in the 1970s (such as Celestial Seasonings tea and *The Whole Earth Catalog*) became by the close of the decade seized upon and turned into commercial opportunities (if they weren't already, and expanded if they were), spawning megabrands like The Body Shop and influencing the packaging and advertising of numerous other commodities. Thomas Frank terms this process *The Conquest of Cool* (Frank 1997). For David Brooks, 'Bobos', or 'bourgeois bohemians' wed capitalist enterprise to a hippie bohemian countercultural aesthetic, becoming both paradigmatic of the *zeitgeist* and a powerfully influential 'new upper class' in the process (Brooks 2000). In such ways, 'alternative' and bohemian values came to fuel important elements of the culture of late or post-Fordist capitalism. Such fusions of bohemia, environmentalism and the niche markets of post-Fordist late capitalism provide a key backdrop to any contemporary story of green consumption.

Pollution and biotechnology

What other contexts have helped create a fertile climate for green consumption's growth? The rise of green consumption can also be related to anxieties about both environmental pollution and biotechnology. The expansion of organic and genetically modified-free products, for instance, is a by-product of rising levels of pesticides and the development of genetically modified crops and intensive farming, all of which have spawned sizeable health and taste concerns (Bové and Dufour 2001; Seyfang 2003). Genetically modified (GM) food is highly significant in terms of consumer campaigning: in the UK, for example, the anti-GM campaign is regarded as one of the consumer movement's most high-profile success stories in recent years. Despite a rapidly expanding commercial biotech industry, the high profile stories that circulated in the British media in the late 1990s, combined with

NGO/activist campaigning and a broad-based popular outcry resulted in a number of supermarkets dropping GM food, which is widely thought to have killed off most of the biotech food industry in the UK (HealthWatch 2000; Shaw 2002; Brown 2004; Lezaun 2004).[6]

Similarly, the meteoric global rise of organic food, particularly in Europe, reflects a widespread anxiety that industrialized countries have become over-industrialized (Bell and Valentine 1997: 51, 194–6; Soil Association 2007). 'Organic' indicates an idea of 'purity' and attention to provenance. Just as GM can be connected to a fear of technological change, so can organic products be articulated to nationalistic, ethnocentric or class-bound sense of 'purity'. And such forms of what we might call 'fetishised de-fetishisation' (Littler and Moor 2008) can act as a means of compensating the consumer for environmental, social and cultural losses. However, obviously organic, non-GM and environmentally friendly products and discourses do not *have* to be, and are not *always*, connected in such ways.

Peak oil and the energy crisis

Another key contextual factor as to why green consumption is expanding today is anxieties about the lack of resources traditionally used for energy consumption. Non-renewable energy sources that have largely been used to supply power to industrialized countries are in steep decline. Worldwide oil, gas and coal supplies are running out (in that order). There is fierce debate over whether oil production has already 'peaked', or whether this process is one which will take place over the next two decades, but little controversy that the actual process is happening (Monbiot 2007a: 55–7). The decline of gas is expected to follow a decade or so after oil, followed a decade or so later by coal. Discoveries of *new* sites for oil and gas already peaked in the 1960s (Simms 2005: 24–6).

Consequently, global prices for oil are rising and, as in the 1970s, there is a reconfiguration of global 'geometries of power' because of the 'huge and disruptive transfer of wealth which is taking place between oil-producing and oil-consuming nations' (Massey 2002; Davis 2006: 54). As Mike Davis points out, consumers paid $1.2 trillion more for oil in 2004 and 2005 than in 2003 (Davis 2006: 54). These price rises have triggered both protests (in Britain, for example, by the car lobby) and concerns (ranging from the US Department of Energy to environmental campaigners and corporations) that it will precipitate a worldwide economic depression and 'resource wars' over this increasingly scarce commodity (Simms 2005: 24–7; Campbell 2006; Monbiot 2007a: 56–7).

Meanwhile, 'cleaner' renewable energy systems move higher up the discursive agenda but remain chronically under-invested in; and some 'alternative' fuel solutions are themselves causing serious problems. Biofuels, for

example – or the creation of transport fuels out of plant matter – are as problematic as fossil fuels in terms of the amount of CO_2 they emit, and the use of land to grow crops for fuel rather than for food is in itself more than problematic, as it has both pushed the price of many foodstuffs up beyond levels of affordability and has resulted in large amounts of forest clearance (Monbiot 2007a: 157–61). Palm oil, for instance, is the cheapest commodity to produce as a biofuel. Its production for use in cars has resulted in widespread forest clearances across Indonesia (where as a recent UN report pointed out, it threatens the orangutan with extinction) and Malaysia, where it has been responsible for 87 per cent of deforestation between 1985 and 2000 (see United Nations 2007; Friends of the Earth in Monbiot 2007a: 159). These factors have all stimulated forms of consumption that are less dependent on non-renewable energy. These include consuming food that uses few food miles, or does not rely on large energy-guzzling heated greenhouses to grow (i.e. seasonable and local food), switching to renewable forms of power (such and wind and solar), or cycling and using trains and buses rather than driving cars.

This sketch of key contexts provides a background to some of the reasons why there is a certain 'incitement to discourse' (to use Foucault's phrase) around green consumption at the present time. However, to theorize the subject in more depth, I want to turn to the combined theory of philosophy and ecology of Félix Guattari, or, as he termed it, 'ecosophy', as it enables some of these factors to be explored and interlinked in potentially productive ways. For what *The Three Ecologies* offers, I suggest, are interesting theoretical resources to understand contemporary neoliberalism's implicit tendency towards individual 'responsibilization' alongside the theoretical capacity to think of alternatives. Some strands of critical theory can have a tendency to simply carp without opening a space up for further movement. Guattari's work does not.

Theorizing green consumption

> It is not only species that are becoming extinct but also the words,
> phrases and gestures of human solidarity.
>
> (Guattari 2000/1989: 44)

While the analyst and critical theorist Guattari is best known for his collaborative work with Gilles Deleuze (particularly their two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*), later in his life he became extremely interested in ecology and stood as a Green parliamentary candidate in France (Deleuze and Guattari 1972/2004, 1980/2004; Genosko 2002: 18–23). *The Three Ecologies*, published in 1989 and fully translated

into English in 2000, elaborates these theories. As he wrote the work at the cusp of the 1990s, it can be situated in relation to the contexts I have described above (for many of these themes were of course fully existent or emergent then). The work begins by reflecting on how our current period of intense techno-scientific transformations are generating an 'ecological disequilibrium' which, unless remedies are found, will 'ultimately threaten the continuation of life on this planet's surface' (Guattari 1989/2000: 27).

In *The Three Ecologies*, Guattari considers how, wherever we turn, we seem to confront the same 'nagging paradox':

> on the one hand the continuous development of new techno-
> scientific means to potentially resolve the dominant ecological issues
> and reinstate socially useful activities on the surface of the planet,
> and, on the other hand, the inability of organized social forces and
> constituted subjective formations to take hold of these resources in
> order to make them work.
>
> (Guattari 1989/2000: 31)

Humans have the resources to resolve the current ecological disequilibrium, and yet have not been able to get it together to deal with it. Guattari describes how any attempt to confront or cut through at this paradox will, by necessity, need to work through three different formations, realms or 'ecologies': environmental, social and mental. These ecologies cannot be disconnected, as they are so interrelated ('It is quite wrong to make a distinction between action on the psyche, the socius and the environment', 1989/2000: 41) and working towards beneficial environmental change means working through all these areas as we perform and construct our everyday (or not so everyday) existences. For instance, therefore, considering 'mental ecologies' involves not just individualized psychologies or subjectivities (Deleuze and Guattari having been famously critical of this kind of 'subjective conservatism' in *Anti-Oedipus*) but of broader social psychologies, or 'minds' (Guattari 1989/2000: 54; Deleuze and Guattari 1972/1992). Considering 'social ecologies' involves, for example, thinking of how it is increasingly illegitimate that 'profit-based markets' should regulate human social activities, 'for there is a range of other value systems that ought to be considered' (Guattari 1989/2000: 64). Considering 'environmental ecologies' means that environmentalism 'must stop being associated with the image of a small nature-loving minority' (1989/2000: 52); and so environmental ecology might as well be renamed 'machinic ecology'. Through such multiple approaches, 'the ecosophical problematic', Guattari writes, becomes 'that of the production of human existence itself in new historical contexts' (1989/2000: 34).

The Three Ecologies, in its insistence on thinking ecology expansively, as a part of broader lifeworlds and lifestyles, fits within a realm of thought that is

sometimes termed 'deep ecology', although Guattari does not describe these connections to his work in the book (and within the Anglophone world the recent nature of these translations means that these linkages have not yet been made to any significant extent).[7] However, the work can be seen to depart from a major strand of this tradition, inhabited most fully and famously by Norwegian philosopher and green political activist Arne Naess, in three key ways. First, Guattari's view of the environment and the ecology is not one that reifies or essentializes 'nature' as separate from culture, humanity or technology, as deep ecology has sometimes been charged (Katz *et al.* 2000: xi). Second, deep ecologists such as Naess propound 'self-realization' as a core tenet, but *The Three Ecologies* offers a more critical and historical take on the very notion of the self by historicizing possessive individualism within the context of the rise of capitalist modernity (see Gare 2000: 212; cf. MacPherson 1962; Bauman 2000); instead, it suggests that we *reinvent* being together, as 'it is not only species that are becoming extinct but also the words, phrases and gestures of human solidarity' (Guattari 1989/2000: 44). This means that, for instance, mental and social ecologies for Guattari might mean inventing new formations of 'family' and living together (whereas for Naess it would be more likely to involve an individual from a more traditional nuclear family finding enlightenment alone out in a field). Third, his theory, while emphasizing interconnections (responses that address the problematic will be transversal, connecting all the ecologies) is defiantly anti-totalistic. Guattari is not interested in any idea of hermetic systems or hermetic solutions (or a 'stupefying and infantilising consensus' Guattari 1989/2000: 50; see also 2000: 34). This is in contradistinction to the Naess-inspired tradition, which is primarily interested in ecology as a *totality* (for one of many critiques of Naess on this front, see Katz *et al.* 2000: x–xi).

Critiques of *The Three Ecologies* are possible. Guattari's account of media, for example, will appear to anyone with any grounding in media and cultural studies to be reductive and one-dimensional. However, as I attempt to show in the next section, the framework is a suggestive one to 'think with' in the context of green consumption. In particular, the idea of paradoxes and contradictions within and across the various different ecologies can help facilitate a means of discussing how combined social, cultural and theoretical contexts might be considered together in order to make sense of green consumption and consumerism, its problems and possibilities.

Ecosophy and green consumption

Guattari's argument that without thinking the environmental, the mental and the social together we produce 'paradoxes' and more inequalities is particularly useful to relate to the contemporary expansion in green

consumption as there are so many contradictions in this area. In what follows, I use Guattari's concept as a kind of springboard to foreground paradoxes in green consumption. In particular, and by referring to the contemporary contexts I outlined earlier, I consider contradictions in three broad areas of green consumption: (1) buying 'green products'; (2) recycling; and (3) the act of 'consuming less'. These three areas of green consumption are clearly all interwoven and overlap with each other as well as between themselves (for instance, one reason objects are recycled is because we are consuming so many disposable and non-biodegradable objects). They are not the only issues we might place under this rubric, but they are key aspects of contemporary green consumption. By examining these areas in conjunction with Guattari's concept of paradoxes through and between ecologies, I want to try to identify and delineate some of their current contradictions.

Consuming green products

One immediately conspicuous problem with 'buying green' is the social and cultural divisions around it. 'Green' products have often come with a higher price tag attached and are therefore ripe to be critiqued as a lifestyle option for the privileged middle classes. (And *above* the middle classes, as the rise of branches of what we might call the 'eco-aristocracy' attest – witness aristocrat Zac Goldsmith editing the environmental magazine *The Ecologist* or Prince Charles' organic farms.) The recent expansion of green products has more thoroughly 'mainstreamed' them across a wider spectrum of the middle classes. In Britain, for example, organic food is available at the UK's most popular supermarket, Tesco; and in the USA, the Home Depot store has expanded its range of 'green' products (Williams 2007). But while environmentally friendly and organic products are now more widely available and disseminated among social groups, green consumption is clearly still often oriented, and is more *available* to, those with greater social and material privileges. The much-trumpeted opening of the US-owned store Wholefoods in London's upper-class white enclave of Kensington in 2007 was one of the more graphic instances of these forms of social stratification.[8] The first paradox, or problem, with green consumption then is that it tends to remain a more highly priced option in the market, ramifying all the attendant social divides this can bring.

To put it in Guattari's terms, paradoxes or contradictions like this occur because there is a disjunction between the types of environmental and social ecologies at play. In other words, buying green products may encourage healthy environmental ecologies, but they might also – intentionally or unintentionally – promote destructive social inequalities. Importantly, these paradoxes do not *have to*, and do not *always*, exist. Therefore it is worth

pointing out how some of these contradictions have, can or might be solved as well as produced. For instance, the higher price of many 'green' products is not the same across the board ('green' nappies, for example, in the form of re-usable re-usables, are often cheaper than disposables). Some critics would point out that the higher price of many green goods is higher in terms of the point of sale price, but not if we factor in the longer-term costs and expanded/contracted choices, or what Levett calls 'choice sets' (Levett 2003; IPPR and Green Alliance 2006: 17).[9] For example, in these terms, organic 'saves' in the long run because it leads to less costly and damaging disease; bikes and lower-emitting cars save because they lead to less asthma, car accidents and premature death through pollution. Such built-in costs are starting to be more widely considered; for instance, in Britain, in December 2007, the government instructed that the 'climate cost' of all policy decisions be factored into all reports, although whether these costs are taken notice of is a different issue (see Wintour 2007). In addition, markets that are subject to change set costs, and so such higher consumer prices are shaped through regulation. For example, as minimal product safety standards over 'toxicity' and pollution shift (such as with EU regulations over the legal amount of carbon dioxide emitted by fridges), the costs attached to the 'special' green product are minimalized as it in turn becomes normalized as a basic standard requirement. Green consumption therefore does not *inevitably* reinforce stark social and cultural divisions, but at the moment it only too often tends to replicate or reproduce these hierarchies rather than being organized in such a way as to *undermine* them.

A second paradox of contemporary green consumption is highlighted by Noel Castree:

> Environmentalism is about much more than a thing called 'the environment' ... there are still too many who regard 'green issues' as somehow separate from other domains of life. This way of thinking is what permits many people to salve their conscience by consuming products from The Nature Company whilst driving their children to school in a Range Rover.
>
> (Castree 2006: 12)

This paradox is the phenomenon of green consumption being separated off from other areas of people's lives and 'parachuted in' (whether to provide pleasurable green gratification and/or to salve consciences). This is perhaps one of the more glaring realms of contradiction (or hypocrisy, depending on your point of view). It is a contradiction that in part exists because green products are not only bought with the 'pure' or sole motive of saving-energy in mind: often they are bought because they are better tasting or more luxurious. And this does not always necessarily mark what would be, in

Guattari's terms, the 'subjective conservatism' of highly individualized hedonistic consumption. Equally, such motivations can fuel the more socially beneficial forms of individual consumption that Kate Soper terms 'alternative hedonism', such as buying a bike both because you enjoy cycling and also want to contribute in a small way to lessening car pollution (Soper 2008). Indeed, in these terms, the very reasons for such 'contradictions' can also be a potential 'lever for change' (Barnett and Soper 2005).

As Castree argues, this 'separating-off' involves thinking of 'the environment' as a distinct and hermetic entity – rather than, as in deep ecology, being everywhere, permeating all life. This separation is produced because 'green' forms of consumption are often articulated to or imbricated with a system of consumer capitalism driven by the pursuit of profit and 'economic growth', and as such leads to a third, increasingly apparent paradox: the production and consumption of more and more stuff in the pursuit of 'being green'. One example here was the consumer scrum in 2007 for the £5 bag created by high-end fashion designer Anya Hindmarch, which featured the words 'I'm Not A Plastic Bag'. This sold out within hours in London, becoming a collector's item (up to £200 on eBay) and spawning imitators (including the pastiche 'I'm A Smug Twat') as well as numerous fakes or knock-offs sold by street traders on Oxford Street and local markets in Britain.[10] As Michael Maniates puts it, '"living lightly on the planet" and "reducing your environmental impact" becomes, paradoxically, a consumer-product growth industry' (2002: 47).

This third paradox, then, is that green consumption can operate as a motor of 'economic growth'. Clearly green consumption is not *a priori* an engine of late capitalism, as many co-operative experiments – from health-food shops like Park Slope in Brooklyn to energy providers like the Sydney Energy Cooperative – attest. But green consumption often is articulated to capitalism. One means of addressing this contradiction is to attack the notion of 'economic growth' itself, and to point out its destructive environmental impact of prioritizing the increase of companies' financial profit for share-holders over the common good, as it overwhelmingly involves increased production and energy consumption. This, for example, is both what Clive Hamilton did in his book *Growth Fetish*, a best-seller in Australia, and the line the former British head of Friends of the Earth Tony Juniper often took in media appearances when discussing how to tackle climate change (Hamilton 2003; Juniper 2004; see also Mellor 2006).

At another point in the spectrum, however, the possibilities of green consumption in *expanding* economic growth have also been emphasized. As Timothy Luke has persuasively demonstrated, this has been the Clintonite context from which Al Gore sprang and is the narrative he overwhelmingly deploys (Luke 1999: 121–51), even while his 2006 film *An Inconvenient Truth* has gestured, in somewhat woolly and ambiguous fashion, towards the need

to have to selectively *reconceive* the notion of 'economic growth'. Partially supporting 'economic growth' can also be a discursive tactic strategically deployed by green activists to win consent: the argument that, for example, the renewable energy industry can provide more jobs can easily be connected to this idea (Bentley, in Murray, 1999: x–xv). Other voices in the green spectrum have argued that time needs to be spent pressing for immediate technocratic alternatives to curb global warming rather than attempting to dent one of the core ideological shibboleths of contemporary capitalism. As George Monbiot emphatically argues in *Heat*, if serious actions on renewable energy are performed immediately, it would be possible to halt global warming now through international, national, community and individual shifts in behaviour, through practices and policy shifts; in other words, while his suggestions involve in practice a shift away from prioritizing economic growth to such a full extent, his suggestions are primarily reformist in nature (though very significantly so). Either way, as Monbiot's remarkable book attests, and as even voices in alignment with 'the new green order' – such as Al Gore's – demonstrate, it is extremely hard to avoid some degree of engaging with the rethinking of 'economic growth' if attempting actually to tackle climate change (Monbiot 2007a, 2007b).

A fourth paradox is that a product can be 'green' in some aspects (such as through its discouragement of the continual use of plastic) but not in others, whether in the realm of environmental ecologies (the use of pesticides in non-organic fabric) or social ecologies (by using grossly overworked, underpaid and outsourced labour). The fact that Hindmarch's 'I'm Not A Plastic Bag' was produced in China using cheap labour and was produced neither using organic materials nor under fair trade conditions, for example, generated a considerably outraged if brief spurt of publicity in Britain. This is itself proof that these paradoxes are often very visible, and in turn can be mobilized to a number of different political ends, whether to extend 'green consumption' or reject it.[11]

In turn, this indicates a fifth paradox: the loose criteria for 'green' labelling and its potential use as a sales technique when the product might under scrutiny have precious little credibility on this front. For instance, a 2007 *New York Times* article discussed how US store Home Depot invited its suppliers to apply to have their products included in its 'Eco Options' campaign. Some 60,000 products were suddenly deemed to qualify (out of Home Depot's total range of 176,000), many on the most tenuous of criteria:

> plastic-handled paintbrushes were called nature-friendly because they were not made of wood. Wood-handled paintbrushes were promoted as better for the planet because they were not made of plastic. An electric chainsaw? Green, because it was not gas-powered.
>
> (Krauss 2007: 1)

This form of what Krauss calls 'overstated green marketing' can deploy a criteria so loose it becomes meaningless and of little help to sustainable environmental ecologies.

And a sixth and related paradox, already covered to some extent in Chapter 3, is when a company uses a small tokenistic investment in selling green products – such as organic, biodynamic or 'sustainable' consumption – to 'greenwash' its image. When the supermarket giant Wal-Mart, for instance, announced it was 'going green' in 2007, the strategy was widely perceived to be an attempt to deflect attention from the storm of bad publicity it faced, including Robert Greenwald's film *The High Cost of Low Price* and lawsuits filed against it for its employee-underpayment, sex discrimination and union-busting practices (Featherstone 2005; Spotts 2006; Haynes and Littler 2007). Clearly, while Wal-Mart's aim for 30 per cent energy reduction would be useful if it were fulfilled, the company is well known for making emotive and unspecific statements about generalized 'aims' and 'targets' without putting timeframes or goals to them. As Chris Kofonis from the Wake-Up Wal-Mart campaign put it:

> You have to look at what Wal-Mart does with an incredible degree of scepticism because this company has a history of saying one thing to main street and another thing to Wall Street. They say they're taking action to clean up the environment – that's a good thing. But which Wal-Mart is going to show up? The one that says it's improving healthcare benefits when they're actually getting worse? The one that says it pays good wages when in fact it doesn't?
>
> (Clark 2006)

Some alternatives to the paradox of greenwash have already been outlined in Chapter 3, most notably the lobbying for corporate social *accountability*. CSR debates on greenwash and these debates about overstated green marketing overlap in that, in both cases, the corporate commitment to 'being green' is minimal, tokenistic and loudly hyped while the company's larger-scale or structural practices remain unreformed. As a commentator in the *New York Times* article about Home Depot's reclassification scheme points out, if the company 'really wanted to promote sustainability, they would *discontinue* their products with the least green attributes' (Krauss 2007: 4). (This imagined action would be similar to British low-budget frozen food store Iceland's 1998 publicity campaign as 'the first UK store' to ban GM foods.) Or, as George Monbiot argues, supermarkets could stop using astronomical amounts of energy, rather than creating contexts where, in an ultra-brightly lit environment, banks of fridges and freezers with no doors do battle with heating, lighting and air conditioning systems. (Such a set-up uses so much energy so

inefficiently that Monbiot says, 'it would be impossible to believe, if it were not by now one of the most ordinary facts of life', Monbiot 2007a: 192.)

There are, then, many different and often-conflicting meanings of 'green' in the context of green production. But equally these paradoxes are not inevitable ones. While no regulatory mechanism is ever going to be immune to criticism and contest, precedents exist for putting in place a minimum agreed definition of what certain types of green product means (such as the Soil Association's definition of 'organic' and 'non-GM' in the UK). It could be argued that this has the potential to be extended: that as a culture or cultures we can invent better definitions of 'green'. Let's now examine the contradictions of a different area: consuming less.

Complex simplicities: consuming less

Industrialized (and 'post-industrialized') countries are consuming more and more: per capita growth in consumption is for many resources expanding eight to twelve times faster than population growth (Princen *et al.* 2002: 4). This is not only because of increase in the number of marked new types of good, but also because the 'planned obsolescence' rate of products has speeded up and the culture of disposable goods has become more firmly entrenched. Juliet Schor's recent research, for instance, maps contemporary American 'turbo consumption' empirically through an examination of the changing dynamics of the clothing industry. While in 1991 the average American consumer purchased 34 pieces of apparel each year, by 2003 it was 57 (more than one new piece of apparel per week). This, Schor point out, is 'an increase of 23 pieces over a mere 12 years, or about two more each year, every year for more than a decade' (2006: 47). Such an expansion of consumer goods uses intensive energy and resources, not only through producing the goods themselves, but also through distribution and retail. One solution to the energy-producing, resource-sapping nature of the rapid turnover of commodities might therefore seem clear: just consume less.

In *The Sustainable Culture Reader*, Thomas Princen points out that while there is a lot of research on what consumers and citizens do, there is 'little research on not doing': on what they *don't* consume or buy (Princen, in Jackson 2007: 52). While this is true, it is less true than it used to be. There is a steadily increasing research literature on people and communities who consciously consume less than they could do (see, for example, Shaw and New-holm 2002) and Princen's own piece is part of an expanding area devoted to discussing the subject of 'consuming less' in more abstract, cultural, global and/or philosophical terms (see also Princen *et al.* 2002; Schor 2006; Thomas 2008). Indeed, in broader terms, it has recently become almost a truism for cultural and social critics to discuss the connection between high levels of

consumption in the 'developed' world and relatively low – or lower than predicted – levels of 'happiness', personal satisfaction and fulfilment (see, for example, de Graaf *et al.* 2005; Layard 2006; Schor 2006; Barber 2007; James 2007).

The notion or practice of 'consuming less' is therefore an area of green consumption where a marked linkage between social, mental and environmental ecologies is already in circulation. For example, the idea that we are overwhelmingly collectively culturally conditioned to think that constantly purchasing new items is a primary source of pleasure (social/cultural ecology) and yet this practice, through high levels of production and consumption, harms the air that we breathe and the weather we experience (environmental ecology) and does not necessarily make us, after a while, any happier (mental ecology) is a central tenet of many recent journalistic and cultural commentaries. It is, for instance, the argument of the popular British cultural psychologist Oliver James' (2007) book *Affluenza*. Here the emphasis is on the cultural-psychological-mimetic) 'virus' that incites people, particularly in Anglo-American society, to consume increasing amounts while depression and mental illness rates skyrocket (James 2007). James' book is designed to act as a kind of social prescription for consumers to treat their 'disease'. Nor is James the first to use the term 'affluenza': in the USA, it is the title of a TV show and accompanying book devoting to helping people find practical ways to curb 'The American's habits of "buying, having and wasting too much"', or 'overconsumption' (de Graaf *et al.* 2005: xi, xix). More politically oriented analyses of 'affluenza' include *All Consuming*, written by Neal Lawson, the director of the British left think tank and pressure group Compass, and *Consumed*, penned by the popular American political scientist Benjamin Barber (Barber 2007; Lawson 2008).

Responses to 'affluenza' or consuming too much can be articulated in different directions: it has connections, as we shall see, with trends to 'downshifting' as a lifestyle option; links to the emergence of the 'slow' food movement (particularly in Italy); and roots in the 'voluntary simplicity' movement from the 1970s (particularly in the USA). Let us look at some of the problematic aspects, or contradictions, of these various different prescriptions for combating affluenza.

One problem of the practice of deliberately consuming less is that it is by definition an option practised by those with enough resources and cultural capital to be able to consume in the first place. The poor may be under-consumers, but this is rarely by active *choice*. This is why the 'voluntary simplicity' movement emerged from the world's most consumer-intensive country, the USA. Consciously reduced consumption is a practice pursued on the whole by those who could be more resource-intensive consumers if they chose to be: the practice arises primarily because they *choose* this path as a more 'enlightened', satisfying or less guilt-inducing alternative. To put

it another way, if we were to draw on Abraham Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs', most consumer downsizers fit into the pattern of having their 'basic' psychological and 'safety' needs for food, water and shelter met and practise 'consuming less' as part of a move towards social respect and self-actualization (which is clearly different from, say the underconsuming ultra-poor in Puerto Rican shanty towns) (Maslow 1943).[12]

Indeed, many strands of 'consuming less' discourse, from Duane Elgin's self-help manuals which propounded voluntary simplicity in 1970s and early 1980s America, through programmes about contemporary yuppies seeking to 'escape' from the demands of high consuming lifestyles and downsize into a 'simpler' rustic way of life, to the slow food movement, state these aims of self-actualization and social respect explicitly (Elgin 1981; Parkins and Craig 2006; Thomas 2008). Such practices are limited to those who are affluent enough to *choose* these lifestyles. In these terms, consciously consuming less is practised by minority groups – producing a kind of 'enclave politics', rather than a politics more *widely distributed* through the population at large. Moreover, 'consuming less' discourses often overlook the question of class. As David Bosshart puts it, 'What the customer gets at Dollar Stores is the feeling of at least minimal empowerment, because Dollar Stores offer a mix of consumer products that even the poorest can afford' (2006: 12). Taken together, this shows how the social ecologies of consuming less, in other words, are on a global scale unequal and imbalanced.

A second paradox is that 'living more simply' can also connect to buying more. A good example here is the glossy US-based women's magazine *Real Simple*, which mixes articles on streamlining your life with ones on acquiring new possessions (such as a new fridge, noticeboard or walk-in wardrobe) in order to be able to carry out that process of 'simplification' more effectively.[13] In effect, we might say, it harnesses the discursive history of voluntary simplicity to try to get us to buy more Ralph Lauren. Again, as with buying green products, this strand of 'green consumption' here becomes, perversely, connected to the idea of buying more goods, using more energy and supporting the logic of economic growth.

A third problematic lies in the realm of the 'mental ecologies' of consuming less. Sometimes, for instance – as in the voluntary simplicity movement – consuming less can be presented as a very simple thing. This has a certain performative power, but from an analytic point of view obscures the complexity of relationships and dynamics around the subject. Moreover, it clearly is not always a very simple business to get everyone to consume less. Often it is very complicated. The ways people practise consuming less are not identical: they are extremely varied in social and cultural terms, from 'light-living' eco-aristocrats to 'back to the land' baby boomers, from metropolitan professionals trying to cut spending to European environmental activists. These, we might say, are complicated simplicities.

This complication is borne out in differing attitudes to consuming less. Consuming less is often presented, particularly in its more enclave forms, as a means of streamlining the soul, of finding greater happiness, pleasure and fulfilment. This narrative forms the basis of TV programmes that Lyn Thomas has described as 'eco-reality': which contain, in some form or other, the message that we should be living lives which are less consumer-focused and more oriented towards home-grown and often rural pleasures; and books about individual desires to downsize from the postmodern detritus of urban life, such as Meaghan Daum's novel *The Quality of Life Report*, in which a young woman moves from Manhattan to a quiet Midwestern town to find fulfilment (Daum 2003; Thomas 2008). In contrast, for commentators like Clive Hamilton, it is crucial to recognize that widespread consuming less will not be *pleasurable* so much as entailing 'a kind of death'. For Hamilton, it will mean that people have to *give up* some sources of pleasure (Hamilton 2007: 91–2); a position opposite to that of Kate Soper's formulation of different pleasures, or 'alternative hedonism' (Soper 2008). In these terms, we might say that the complexities of psychological and social attitudes to the subject are many and varied, and it is both unhelpful and disingenuous to treat it as anything less.

The more multi-faceted nature of the pleasures and problems of consuming less are now often grappled with in newspaper and magazine articles and columns in which journalists dispense lifestyle advice on consuming more sustainably or 'ethically'. In Britain, this has more or less become a journalistic micro-industry unto itself over the past few years. Leo Hickman's column in *The Guardian*, for example, which was later turned into a book, followed the progress of his family as they tried to live a greener, more sustainable lifestyle. As Clive Barnett *et al.* point out, such trends are part of a wider increase in news coverage of ethical consumption since the early 1990s which related to the emergence of a select number of organizations (like the Fairtrade Foundation and Soil Association) as credible sources of news (Barnett *et al.* 2007: 240). Such journalistic projects can provide a more social way of letting people know about options that are available; they can begin to discursively normalize the 'exceptional' or the 'enclave' practice; and they can offer versions of the changing psychological process or mental ecologies which people can *consider* – whether to adopt, adapt, reject or ignore – in relation to their own lives and practices. The disadvantages are that they can often assume a baseline social position (house ownership, for example, or sufficient income levels) and can be argued to offer wholly individuated solutions to problems of consuming less, thereby perhaps repeating some of the more individualizing tendencies of contemporary consumer society.

Recycling

So far we have reviewed key paradoxes and contradictions in two areas of green consumption: buying 'green products' and buying less. But what about recycling? The potential of recycling to save energy is now well known to be enormous. Recycling saves three to five times as much energy as incineration (the practice of burning waste). If Britain raised its rate to 70 per cent, it would make a carbon saving of 14.8 million tonnes; if there was simply a 1 per cent increase in recycling in the USA, it would reduce carbon dioxide emissions by an amount equivalent to taking 1.2 million cars off the road (Murray 1999: 101, 26, 6). That its potential is vast and untapped can easily be seen by any number of league tables that compare the recycling habits of different countries. In European league tables for instance, Britain can be seen to be dragging along the bottom with Greece and Portugal (only recycling 18 per cent of its municipal waste in 2006, primarily because of low levels of household recycling) while the Netherlands and Germany continually achieve the startlingly higher rates of 65 per cent and 58 per cent respectively (BBC 2005; Foley 2006; IPPR 2006).

All areas of green consumption are complex: recycling is perhaps particularly so. This is mainly because of the variety of materials and methods involved, and the slowness with which many (but by no means all) systems have been able to adapt and integrate using them. This means that, while some of recycling's paradoxes are 'environmental', to deploy Guattari's terms, the majority are 'social' and 'mental'. 'Environmental' paradoxes, for instance, include the issue that currently too much recycling actually involves 'downcycling', or creating only one or two further uses for the material before it arrives at landfill, as opposed to recycling it back into the same material and therefore using less energy (such as turning plastic cups into pencils rather than turning them back into plastic cups). This is a para-dox that some environmental policy makers try to solve by 'closed loop' or 'cradle-to-cradle' thinking (see Braungart and McDonough in IPPR and Green Alliance 2006: 12). Put simply, such concepts emphasize a *continuity* of recycling, and its role in a wider context (of reducing, re-using and recycling) rather than conceiving recycling as a series of isolated actions or events. Such 'cradle-to-cradle' or 'closed loop' schemas therefore involve, for instance, a 'biological cycle', where all things that can be grown from the land are returned to the land (through compost) and a 'technical cycle' in which non-renewable resources are used and constantly recycled (rather than being allowed to 'escape' into landfill and incineration) (IPPR and Green Alliance 2006 : 12). This is what strategies of 'zero waste' – a target of a number of areas including San Francisco, Bath and New Zealand – have been attempting to move towards (IPPR and Green Alliance 2006: 6).

Another way of looking at these 'cycles' of objects is by borrowing Appadurai's concept, frequently used in cultural studies, anthropology and design history, of 'the social life of things' (Appadurai 1986). The idea that 'things have social lives', and that we might therefore chart the cultural journey of a dress from the store to the wearer to the second-hand shop, or the vase from kiln to gift to object of economic value, is suggestive for thinking about green consumption, or what we might call the 'green social life' of objects. It could, for example, be used to consider the economies of re-use at work in eBay, 'freecycle' networks or retro or charity clothing shops and to ask to what extent they either *incite* an increasing turnover of goods or conversely offer a means to *stem* the flow of energy required by the production of new goods (see Gregson and Crewe 2003; Hawkins 2006).

One key paradox of recycling is when objects are taken extremely long distances to begin their second (or third, or fourth) 'social life', thereby participating in a process of spewing out yet more carbon emissions in a supposed bid to save them, such as shipping plastics from the UK to China. Such events often spawn the most coverage by a gleeful right-wing press anxious to discredit anything 'green' because it might interfere with the 'free flow' of corporate business. Nevertheless, exporting recycling clearly remains a problematic paradox. Such contradictions are part of the wider picture of economic imperialism that affect production, with the zones of the world in which sweatshop and exploited labour are most predominant also tending to be those offering cheap, exploited labour in the recycling industries (often in highly toxic environments; see Ross 1997, 2006; Parks 2007: 38–9). Corporations wanting to use the 'secondary materials economy', such as recycled paper or aluminium, are not necessarily driven by long-term environmental consciences but by the search for shareholder profit. Countries and companies engaging in recycling but with low standards of labour regulation are therefore part of the same process of exploitation as with the production of cut-price running shoes, even if they are nominally part of the 'green economy'. This is the extreme example of an exploitative social ecology. Such practices are also created by a lack of fostering support for recycling facilities in the country sending its products abroad for recycling (Murray 1999).

This indicates that recycling's key problems and possibilities are bound up with issues of social organization. Nowhere is this clearer than when we look at nations' different recycling experiences and histories. For instance, Japan, Denmark and Holland all experienced the problem of not having enough land to continue using landfill, yet responded differently: historically, Denmark and Holland put their energies into recycling (this is why they are around the top of European league tables) while Japan put its energies into incineration (combined with a small number of token/model recycling villages; Murray 1999: 10–13). In the USA, recycling rates vary wildly: from some states averaging 8 per cent or under with other states over 40 per cent (and

areas within them reaching 70 per cent) (Murray 1999: 105). In Britain, recycling is increasingly popular (commonly voted the most popular service in municipal polling) yet government has been slow to facilitate recycling opportunities (IPPR and Green Alliance 2006: 17), continuing to subsidize the incineration industry in an example of what to waste guru Robin Murray is indicative of the governmental failure to adjust to technological change and to shift from chronic short-term planning (Murray 1999: 70, 83, 87).

Such divergent experiences foreground the *range* of ways in which recycling systems can operate and the lack of *inevitability* about whether or not they are put into practice. Perhaps nowhere has this been clearer than in France, which in the 1990s as a nation moved abruptly from an incineration to a recycling strategy, largely through the influence of the French Green Party (Murray 1999: 113). Such an example illustrates the possibilities of shifting social systems of recycling and how this also requires combined psychological shifts. In Germany, for instance, where environmental issues have a long history of being placed high on the political agenda, recycling became extremely popular because it was perceived to have potential for expanding employment. 'Green collar jobs' in recycling, in the form of both the sorting and organizing of waste streams, and production in the 'secondary materials economy', have as a result become a significant source of employment in Germany (as opposed to less far-sighted practices of other European countries like Britain or Greece) (Murray 1999: 51). In the process, the German example shows how what Guattari would term 'mental ecologies' of recycling, or conceptual attitudes to recycling's role, is pivotal to whether and how it is adopted (or not) as a more widespread system.

Such 'mental ecologies of recycling' have also increasingly become a topic of interest for artists and academics as the subject of waste both moves higher up the political agenda and offers a suggestive means to explore a number of aesthetic, epistemological and ontological issues such as the boundaries of the human; the liminal, the overlooked and the out-of-sight; and the agency of 'non-human' actors (see, for example, Strasser 1999; Scanlan 2005). For example, Gay Hawkins' suggestive study *The Ethics of Waste,* which explores the various different micropolitical ethical and psychological investments in waste and recycling, highlights how objects being recycled 'are a product of social relations and affect them at the same time' (Hawkins 2006: 79). A number of fascinating art projects have also explored such issues, from the pioneering 1970s work of American artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles, who worked as the artist-in-residence for the New York Sanitation Department for 30 years (producing pieces such as *Maintenance Art,* which explored the overlooked nature of people and systems involved in waste disposal), to the *Stray Shopping Carts of Eastern North America* project, featured on the cover of this book, which dryly presents shopping trolleys as 'wildlife' to spot, and so as producing social-machinic ecologies of their own

(Finkelpearl 2001; Kastner 2002; Montague 2007).[14] What such work draws attention to are the crucial importance of psychological or 'mental' interactions with recycling, and the opening up of possible new ways of doing and being in relation to it.

At their least effective, then, strategies for recycling can facilitate more environmental damage (through, for example, the production of more carbon dioxide); an increase in social inequalities (through, for example, environmental imperialism); and ingrained conservative subjectivities (through, for example, singularly moralizing dogmatic approaches to the subject). At their most effective, they interlink social, environmental and mental ecologies to enable the lessening of environmental damage (through, for example, cutting carbon dioxide emissions), by reducing social inequalities (by, for instance, expanding jobs in recycling, or making rail transport more affordable than plane travel), and by letting a range of ways in which we might potentially connect to and practise green consumption open up.

Conclusion: an ecology of ecologies

This chapter has attempted to use Guattari's notion of 'the three ecologies' to explore some of the problems and possibilities of contemporary green consumption. I have not aimed to produce a comprehensive survey, but rather to identify key sites of contradiction in the main areas of green consumption – recycling, consuming less and green products – and to attempt to sketch the paradoxes in and between these zones. As we have seen, in the case of green production, some key contradictions at present lie in its separation of 'the environment' from wider social and cultural systems, especially through commodity fetishization; in how the selling of green products can be used, perversely, to drive economic growth, thereby inciting the use of more energy; and in the reproduction of other social divisions through, for example, high price and cultural capital. A key paradox of consuming less is that it is sometimes perceived as 'simple', when such simplicities are frequently complex, given their divergent relationships to pleasure and social position (ramified by how consuming less as a deliberate practice is pursued by the resource-rich). And in the case of recycling, key contemporary contradictions include poor social organization, whether on a local, national or international level; an over-expenditure of energy, whether through downcycling or exporting waste; and restrictive cultural/'mental' ecologies towards its practice, such as the failure to consider the extent of its potential for benefiting broader social and environmental ecologies, whether this be in terms of creating more jobs or improving air quality.

In the light of having discussed these paradoxes, it is useful to return to the issue of neoliberal governance and in particular the idea that in 'the new

green order' individuals are responsibilized into dramatic yet ineffectual actions while corporations and the state shirk their responsibilities.[15] One counterweight to this perspective might be found in Robin Murray's point that in the UK 'householders are being asked to take more trouble in their handling of waste. They receive no financial compensation for doing so, yet they regularly press to extend it' (Murray 1999: 70). For Murray, this is an example of a kind of 'productive democracy' at work that local authorities and governments marginalize to everyone's loss. This perspective has a different emphasis from the analysis of the 'new green order' or green governmentality, which, we saw at the beginning of this chapter, emphasizes individuals as controlled and scapegoated rather than as potential levers for change.

Murray's approach introduces the possibility that individual/communal psychological desire to recycle is a *resource* which is too often ignored, rather than simply functioning as primarily an *imposition* on the populace who are being deluded into believing that their individual green activities are paramount (and in which neoliberal policy uses such public engagements with recycling as a diversion to carry on business as usual). As Gay Hawkins astutely points out in a discussion of Timothy Luke's work, such 'green governmentality' approaches can tend to posit a critical theorist who alone can see the truth while dismissing the activities of recyclers as little more than deluded false consciousness (Hawkins 2006: 111). By contrast, Hawkins herself emphasizes focusing on the micropolitics of affective engagements with waste, suggesting that productive forces can be found in noticing our small everyday interactions with it. She argues for a focus on the multiplicity of people's interactions with waste; on how bodily affects and habits of self-cultivation create an 'intersubjective ethos of politics' which occurs 'in conversations, in the media, in myriad relations in which practical examples of different ways of managing waste undermine normalised and exploitative practices and nurture receptivity to change' (Hawkins 2006: 127). These small actions and pleasures, she writes, are an important counter to prescriptive, top-down accounts of macropolitics, as they show how the minutiae of the everyday can 'stretch the moral sense of the possible' (Hawkins 2006: 90).[16]

While such accounts are very different, there is much that can be gained from bringing them together, as they both share a critique of Anglo-American government for not implementing green enough policies and together can be used to create a much more nuanced interpretation of contemporary green consumption. For while examinations of the micropolitical are richly suggestive of the *range* of potential interactions with green consumption, accounts of the new green order enable us to highlight how environmental change is not simply down to the personalized whims of the individual-as-sovereign-consumer, but rather the types of larger social and cultural organization that might enable them to act – or not – in particular ways. One

implication is that we need to put issues of recycling, green consumption and consuming less that cannot be addressed effectively by an individual or family unit higher up on the discursive and political agenda. For instance, household recycling is only a fraction of all recycling (bars, hospitals, restaurants and factories, for example, all having a vast impact); and similarly, procurement policies by schools, hospitals and local government have large purchasing potential for the buying of ethical products.[17] Linking these social, mental and environmental ecologies together, on both a small and large scale, can facilitate an understanding of the political uses that the 'mental ecologies' of individual consumers are being oriented towards, combined with the shape of wider 'social ecologies' that we both inherit and create. By connecting accounts of the micropolitics of desire with those of broader social, environmental and political shifts, and by considering the constant mutations between them, we can only gain a better understanding of, and interaction with, the ecologies of green consumption being created.