



Cultural consumption

Before you read this chapter ...

- Make a list of all the cultural objects, texts and commodities you have used so far today.
- What have you *done* with these objects in practice?
- How do these practices matter to you and your sense of identity?

Chapter Map

- Introducing consumption
- Consumption: *doing culture*
- Geographies of cultural consumption
- Consumer agency: subcultures and resistance
- Connecting cultural production and consumption

3.1 Introducing consumption

In Chapter 2, we noted that a great deal of classic work by cultural geographers and cultural studies researchers focused on processes of **cultural production**: that is, how cultural objects and spaces are made, regulated and come to have particular associated meanings and norms. We reiterate that this body of work was very

significant in the development of cultural geography, and in unveiling previously hidden cultural processes and politics. However, if you have read Chapter 2, a few nagging questions may already have occurred to you:

- What do people actually *do* with all these cultural objects?
- What *actually* goes on in cultural spaces once they have been produced?
- How *do* people deal with hegemonic forms of cultural power in their everyday lives?

Questions like these have motivated a second major body of work within cultural geography and cultural studies that has called for a focus on 'consumption', exploring consumers' practices *with* cultural objects and *within* cultural spaces. In this chapter, we introduce notions of consumption and consumer culture, and explore how geographers have contributed to understandings of them. Section 3.2 describes a 'turn' towards the study of consumption within cultural studies and human geography during the 1990s. The chapter's next two sections outline two important lines of work that resulted from this 'turn'. Section 3.3 focuses on research that addresses the complex geographies of consumption, encompassing how consumption matters in everyday lives, the production of spaces *for* consumption,

and practices that involve the consumption of particular landscapes or spaces. Section 3.4 foregrounds research about links between consumption and identities, which has been important in exploring how people deal with, and often resist, hegemonic cultural politics within their everyday lives. Finally, Section 3.5 is a kind of concluding reflection for Part 1 of the book: here, again, we emphasise the importance of thinking about connections between the processes described in Chapters 2 and 3.

3.2 Consumption: *doing culture*

During the early 1990s many cultural theorists and human geographers called for a turn away from the kinds of production-focused research featured in Chapter 2, towards a focus on 'consumption'. So what are cultural geographers talking about when they talk

about 'consumption' in this context? In Box 3.1 we offer both a short answer and a long answer to this question. For the moment, the short answer will suffice: consumption refers to the purchase and use of commodities, texts and services. To study consumption is therefore to explore what people actually *do* with cultural objects and spaces in practice, once they have been produced. However, as you read this chapter, you should begin to notice that consumption is no simple process: this is where the 'long answer' in Box 3.1 serves as a reference point. For, ultimately, it is important to recognise that buying and using any commodity is a deceptively complex process; after all, it involves all manner of actions, feelings, meanings, decisions, desires and social interactions, all contextualised by the norms, discourses and cultural politics detailed in Chapter 2. Moreover, it will become clear that the term 'consumption' has been used to refer to a vast array of practices: 'everything from art to



Box 3.1

What do cultural geographers mean by 'consumption'?

The short answer ...

[T]he complex sphere of social relations and discourses which centre on the sale, purchase and use of commodities. (Mansvelt 2005: 6)

The long answer ...

As the cultural theorist Raymond Williams (1976: 78–79) outlines, the word 'consumption' has had a complex history.

1. In its earliest uses, from the fourteenth century onwards, to 'consume' (from the Latin *consumere* – 'to completely use up') meant to physically devour or ravage: 'to destroy, to use up, to waste, to exhaust' (Williams 1976: 78). This meaning survives in terms such as 'consumed by fire' or 'consuming a meal', or in metaphors such as 'consumed by grief' or 'consumed by envy'. Similarly, until the nineteenth century, the disease now known as tuberculosis was commonly called 'consumption', to evoke the rapid, devastating and often terminal way in which the disease 'laid waste' to human bodies.

2. A closely related word, 'consummate' (from the Latin *consummare* – 'to bring to completion') has been used since the sixteenth century to describe a state

of fulfilment attained through the completion of a particular task or transaction. The term has a particular risqué meaning too: traditionally, consumption refers to 'completing' a marriage via the first sexual relations between newlyweds. In each of these senses, consumption refers to both the act of completion and the sense of satisfaction arising from doing so.

3. In eighteenth-century Europe a new notion of 'the consumer' emerged to describe someone making a purchase or making use of some kind of good or service. Here, 'consuming' meant the act of buying and using some kind of commodity. Williams (1976) suggests that the emergence of this new notion of 'consumption' was closely linked to the emergence of new, increasingly large-scale and organised forms of capitalist political economy. He suggests that traditional forms of buying and selling had involved close, loyal relationships between suppliers and their customers. New, large-scale capitalist commodity markets led to the breakdown of these kinds of relationship, and a new vocabulary ('the consumer', 'consuming') was needed to describe and legitimate the more detached, alienated relationships that existed between buyers and

Box 3.1 continued

sellers in this context. This notion of 'the consumer' has become increasingly popularised over the last century, in terms such as 'consumer rights', 'consumer culture', 'consumer goods' and so on.

Clarke *et al.* (2003: 1) note that these different meanings are kind of "rolled into one" when cultural geographers talk about 'consumption' now. So consumption is about:

- the process of selecting, purchasing and using some kind of commodity or service (as in point 3 above);

- and the literal, physical, bodily act of using up, wearing out or making use of that commodity or service (point 1);
- and the ways in which commodities or services are put to use; the kinds of things that consumers do with them in practice, and what they get out of them, and the resulting meanings, feelings and accomplishments (point 2).

All of this, and more, is going on in "the complex sphere of social relations and discourses which centre on the sale, purchase and use of commodities" (Mansvelt 2005: 6).

shopping, to watching television, receiving welfare and visiting a zoo" (Edgell and Hetherington 1996: 1). Or – as in this chapter – everything from strolling in a shopping mall, to photographing a tourist attraction, to pursuing a hobby, to having a particular hairstyle, to engaging in forms of protest and resistance.

The turn to consumption emerged from a set of critiques of classic **production**-focused research (see Chapter 2) in cultural studies and cultural geography. Some key critiques from this context were as follows.

- It was argued that it was necessary to correct a "productionist bias" in the methods and concepts used to study cultural processes (Urry 1990: 277). Classic research had produced numerous rich accounts of cultural production, but it was increasingly evident that this told only part of the story. Many researchers called for new methods and debates to explore how cultural texts and media are experienced, used, debated and enjoyed (or not) by consumers and audiences.
- It was argued that classic accounts of cultural politics substantially underestimated the role and agency of consumers. Consumers were, arguably, too often positioned as blank figures or passive, powerless dupes at the inevitable mercy of systems of cultural production. Therefore many researchers called for acknowledgement of consumers' significant and potentially subversive creativity in their engagements with popular cultural texts and objects (Seiter *et al.* 1989; Miles and Paddison 1998).
- Many critics felt that the 'productionist bias' in classic approaches betrayed a kind of cultural elitism, closely linked to hegemonic notions of 'high culture' (see Chapter 2). That is, it was increasingly felt that many forms of popular consumption were implicitly treated as perhaps frothy, insubstantial and irrelevant: certainly unworthy of academic concern, compared with the weighty analysis of cultural politics of production. Treating popular cultural consumption as a legitimate topic of academic research was seen as an effective way of unsettling this elitism. It was also seen as a way of recognising the fundamental importance of consumption practices for individuals' everyday lives and identities.
- Perhaps most significantly, it was argued that a 'productionist bias' had led to many researchers and theorists overlooking very substantial social and geographical transformations arising from the rise of 'consumer culture'. 'Consumer culture' is widely used as a shorthand for complex cultural-historical shifts variously ascribed to: the development of European capitalist commodity markets during the eighteenth century; the proliferation of affordable mass-produced consumer goods afforded by the nineteenth-century European industrial revolution; the expansion of leisure time and disposable income for many people in Europe and North America in the aftermath of the Second World War; and ongoing processes of globalisation and connectivity via communications technologies. In this context, a vast proliferation of consumer goods and popular

cultural forms has become available for a mass audience. It is argued that the acquisition and use of consumer goods has thus become increasingly central to many people's everyday lives and identities. It is also noted that in many parts of the world there has been a decline in the importance of manufacturing industries and an increase in the economic importance of cultural industries devoted to the production of objects and spaces for consumption. As we outline in Section 3.3, it is also argued that there has been a vast proliferation of specialised spaces of and for consumption in this context.

3.3 Geographies of cultural consumption

The debates and critiques outlined in Section 3.2 sparked a substantial enthusiasm, across many disciplines of the social sciences, for consumption-focused research: essentially exploring the diverse things that people do with cultural objects, and within cultural spaces. Many cultural geographers were very much caught up in this turn to consumption, and in the following subsections we highlight three key ways in which geographers have contributed to understandings of consumption. The following points can also be read as answers to the question: why have many geographers cared so much about consumption?

• Consumption matters in everyday geographies

It is often argued that the rise of 'consumer culture' has had two important consequences: a vast proliferation of consumer goods relating to practically every aspect of human life, and a shift in the way in which many consumers perceive and care about all these goods. In short, it is suggested that there exists an ever-increasing array of commodities, and that consumers perhaps value, debate, worry about and attach value to commoditised consumption as never before. Certainly, consumption should be understood as fundamentally important for everyday geographies in four ways.

First, most simply, people spend so much time in the act of consumption in the spaces we occupy. Think

back to the question at the beginning of this chapter: just how many consumer goods or services have you been using today? Much of this consumption may pass unnoticed or be taken for granted, but consumption practices are central to so many aspects of everyday lives: eating, drinking, shopping, wearing clothes, using products and technologies, watching, reading or listening to cultural products and media, discussing or thinking about any of the above. It is actually difficult to think of moments when, as inhabitants of consumer culture, we are *not* engaged in some form of consumption: as we go about our everyday geographies, commodities really do surround us and prove to be central to all manner of everyday activities. Even as we sleep, we are typically surrounded by, and actually in the process of using, consumer goods: think of pillows, alarm clocks, pyjamas, teddy bears (Kraftl and Horton 2008; Horton and Kraftl 2009). So, as a basic point, it should be clear that consumption practices – the things that people actually do with cultural products – should be important to anyone seeking to understand everyday geographies. To explore this point further, see the later chapters on **performances** (Chapter 7), **identities** (Chapter 8), **everydayness** (Chapter 9), **material objects** (Chapter 10) and **bodily practices** (Chapter 12).

Second, consumption practices can significantly affect how people experience spaces. As one example, Box 3.2 presents some findings from Anderson's (2002, 2004) research about listening to popular music. Note how, in these moments, listening to even a short burst of a particular tune has turned these individuals' moods, and affected how they feel about themselves and the space they occupy. These examples reveal the potential of particular consumption practices to transform one's mood and experience: such that a loud blast of ska can make one forget about worries and responsibilities, or a favourite tune can make time pass a little more swiftly when doing chores or homework. We might think about other kinds of example too: listening to music on headphones can transform the experience of a long journey; a shopping trip might cheer us up (or make us despair); a book or film might play on our mind for days, or change the way we see the world; a television programme might form the basis for an ice-breaking conversation with a stranger; a shared cultural interest

Box 3.2

Moments of cultural consumption: listening to popular music



Photograph 3.1 Listening to a favourite tune can transform how we feel, and the space we are in.

Source: Alamy Images/Fancy.

Anderson's (2002, 2004) research on practices of listening to popular music reveals how cultural consumption can be profoundly important for individuals' everyday lives. Anderson's research participants – from the North-West of England – describe moments where they were aware of how music mattered to them within everyday spaces. Consider three examples. Note how the act of listening to a particular tune changes these individuals' mood, and their experience of everyday spaces and tasks. Can you think of instances when you have used music in this kind of way, or when hearing particular music has affected you in a similar way?

That evening I had the house to myself ... in a temper, put [my son] to bed and I came downstairs and I would normally do a bit of housework, might watch TV or I might read my book and I just thought ... I want to put some music on LOUD. So I put ska music on and I danced and danced and it were BRILLIANT, absolutely brilliant. I managed to switch off ... I had a great, great time ... It's funny – after that I stopped and thought 'GOD, you're 35, stop this ... put the brakes on, grow up, turn it down ... get the washing up done' and I screeched to a halt with it and felt a bit silly for a bit ... but in that moment I ... just danced, danced me heart out and it all lifted, just for a bit. It's a cliché but I WAS somewhere else. (Anderson 2002: 211)

Things like cleaning the bath ... I just hate it, there are certain things I don't like that have to be done ... I was really, really bored so then I went downstairs and got some music. David Gray, and it made me forget what I was doing, I was on automatic pilot now, it was just my hands doing it ... It makes it more bearable and I almost actually enjoyed it, it definitely made me feel better about ... having to do it. (Anderson 2002: 214–215)

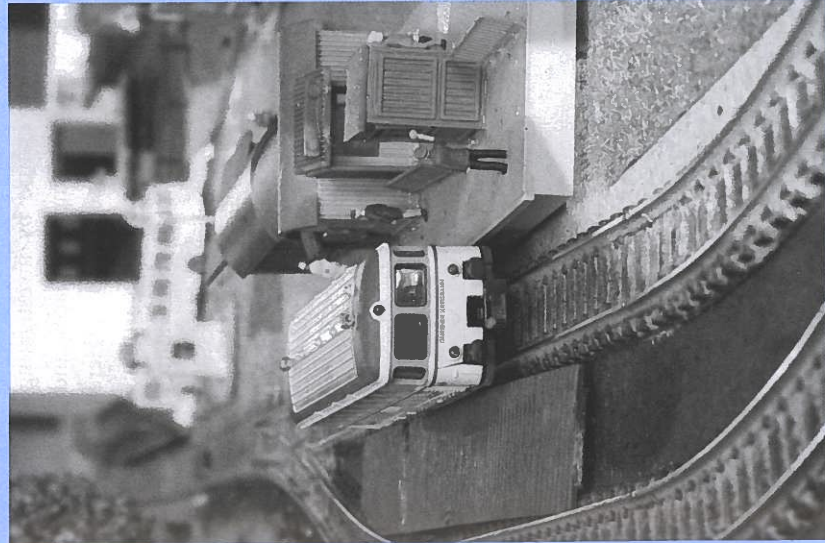
I'd just got home from school. I was like hurghh can't be bothered to do any work ... I started doing it but I was just SO bored ... I just couldn't concentrate so I put on some music while I was doing my work ... It was S Club 7, quite happy, you can just go along to it ... It did make me more happy whilst I was doing the homework, changed the way I felt about it, I sung along to it sometimes and then got on with my work ... sort of forgot that I was having to do homework ... You can't be bored to that song anyway. (Anderson 2004: 744)

might form the basis for a friendship or love affair. As these examples suggest, consumption practices can sometimes transform everyday geographies, even though consumption is often a taken-for-granted part of everyday life (see also Horton 2010, 2012). Third, relatedly, consumption can really matter to people: enthusiasm for particular consumption practices can occupy our thoughts and, again, transform our experiences of everyday geographies. Sometimes, this kind of enthusiasm can be short-lived and intense: perhaps as we get caught up in a particular tune (see



Box 3.3

Hobbies and craft-based consumption: 'a hedgehog there, a stoat there'



Photograph 3.2 A model railway: an example of craft-based consumption.

Source: Alamy Images/Picturesbyrob.

Yarwood and Shaw's (2009) research with model railway enthusiasts explores forms of hobby- and craft-based consumption that occupy many people for 'tens of years, if not longer' (p. 428). Consider one of their interviews with a model railway enthusiast at a convention in South-West England. In the following extract, the creator of a model railway layout gives a 'guided tour' of his layout, and reveals some of the patient, detailed work involved in its creation.

I had to go to Shepton Mallet, the newspaper records, and they wrote what was happening there. Then I went to Bath to find out what was happening up that end ... It took me a year to get it right, and two years to get it sort of all worked out and a year to build it ...

This is all made of polystyrene ... And these are made from what you get your bacon or your fish in ... So much is thrown out. This you see, you cut this near enough to

shape and you use a soldering iron just to get your little curves in it, just put it here and it will fizzle back so that you get all these marks from a hot soldering iron ...

Everything has got to have a story, it's got to make sense. [Pointing out individual elements of the railway layout] You have got a hedgehog there, a stoat there, a badger ... here, they have had a load of sleepers and ballast that they are tidying up. He is just trimming the weeds off. That's the gang for this side. You have got the quarry workers ... There is a horse and cart, the old coal delivery, you are in the fifties, and granny watching the coal delivery ... Granddad is talking to her and he is feeding the sheep with hay, a shepherd and his dog.

(Yarwood and Shaw 2009: 428)

Yarwood and Shaw (2009) note that this kind of hobby- or craft-based consumption has several key characteristics:

- It involves significant time commitment, expertise and attention to detail. This kind of activity often involves decades of careful work, craft or collection (somewhat in contrast to the fleeting moments of pleasure and excitement in consumption related in Box 3.2).
- It can involve significant expenditure, over a long time period, on specialist materials and resources. Many of these materials are commercially mass-produced (e.g. Hornby trains, in the example of model railways). However, consumers often also exercise a great deal of creativity to make their own components (as in the enthusiast above, making scenery from bacon packets), or to incorporate remarkable elements of humour and realism (as in the stoats, hedgehogs and archival information from Shepton Mallet above), to 'bring to life' mass-produced commodities.
- Hobby- and craft-based consumption practices are served and maintained by networks of enthusiasts and experts. These networks gather and share, compare and contrast expertise at particular spaces and events such as conventions, clubs, trade shows, exhibitions, specialist retailers and online discussion boards. Within these networks, individuals are noted as particularly 'good at', 'serious about' or 'devoted to' their hobby or craft. There also exist numerous subdisciplines and interest groups within these networks: for example, at the model railway convention discussed above, Yarwood and Shaw note that enthusiasts tend to focus on either models of later diesel engines or nineteenth-century Great Western Railway steam trains.

Fourth, consumption practices are absolutely central to identities: how people see and construct themselves and 'others'. Consumption is therefore recognised as important for understandings of social and cultural geographies, and this realisation has been key for the work of many human geographers. As we explore in detail in Chapter 8, people's decisions, tastes and usage of consumer goods and services can be instrumental in the way in which they present themselves, connect with fellow consumers, or construct some people as 'other'. Consumption practices can effectively cut across or compound other lines of social difference, such as age, gender, ethnicity, disability or social class: sometimes serving as a point of connection between previously disparate social groups; sometimes deepening the perceived 'otherness' of already excluded groups; sometimes creating divisions and tensions within apparently homogeneous groups of people. These points are pursued in Section 3.4, where we focus on the role of consumption in the constitution of 'subcultures' and acts of resistance in relation to contemporary constellations of cultural politics.

● There are countless spaces of/for consumption

A great deal of consumption-focused research within the social sciences deals with the proliferation of spaces that are expressly designed and used as venues for specific cultural practices. Research in this context has identified two broad spatial trends that have characterised the development of contemporary consumer culture. First, cultural theorists, geographers and historians have charted the inception and early development of distinctive consumption spaces such as coffee shops, pubs, department stores and shopping malls. The *Arcades Project* by the German cultural theorist Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) is widely hailed as a classic work in this context. This text compiles Benjamin's profuse, detailed notes and observations made during strolls through glass-roofed shopping arcades in Paris during the 1920s and 1930s. These arcades were among the first of their kind: they were constructed in the 1820s, at a time when similar spaces for shopping, strolling and 'window-shopping'

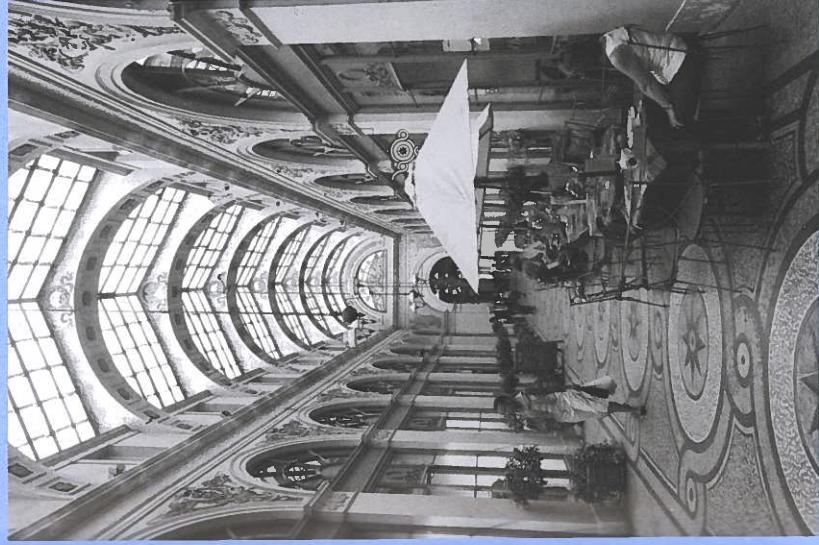
were being constructed, and were considered fashionable and tasteful (see Chapter 2), in many European cities. Benjamin's notes are usually interpreted as an attempt to understand the emergence of modern consumer culture by investigating details of these particular consumption spaces, and observing traces of their history (see Box 3.4). Here and now, spaces such as shopping malls, department stores and coffee shops can seem totally commonplace and taken for granted. However, historical research by a number of geographers – taking a somewhat similar approach to Benjamin – has revealed how such spaces emerged at particular social-historical moments, and how they embody particular norms, rules, tastes and cultural politics (see Chapter 2) of their context. As noted in Chapter 2, the continued, present-day production and regulation of consumption spaces such as shopping malls remains a key concern for many geographers. Crucially, as part of the turn to consumption, many geographers have begun to explore the activities, mobilities, subcultures and social interactions of people within consumption spaces. For example, see Box 3.5 for examples of how people may bend the rules, make their own entertainment, and do their own thing within consumption spaces.

Second, cultural theorists have attempted to describe a series of ways in which consumption spaces have undergone restructuring and transformation over the last century: how certain spaces have, perhaps increasingly, been reshaped as centres for consumption, specifically designed to afford and encourage consumption. These trends – which Paterson (2006: 58) wittily summarises as 'McDisneyfication' – are thought to have resulted in the homogenisation of consumption opportunities, the ubiquity of global brands, and the prevalence of particular kinds of highly 'stage-managed' consumption spaces.

This notion of 'McDisneyfication' gives a nod to several key sociological theorisations of these trends, which are summarised in Box 3.6. These ideas have been widely cited in academic and popular literature, and certainly in many ways they ring true: witness the homogenisation of many high streets, supermarkets and shopping malls, the global reach of many brands, and the global spread of so many consumption fads, fashions and phenomena. In the following subsection, too, we note that claims in

Box 3.4

A shopping arcade, 1822: Benjamin's *Arcades Project*



Photograph 3.3 Galerie Vivienne: a Parisian shopping arcade, which opened in 1826.

Source: Alamy Images/Alex Segre.

Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* is a brilliant, enigmatic and famously large piece of work: most editions are more than 1000 pages long. The book was unfinished at the time of Benjamin's death in 1940, so we are left with a vast, fragmented assemblage of notes, observations and reflections on glass-roofed Parisian shopping arcades. The arcades were built during the 1820s (Photograph 3.3) and encountered by Benjamin about a century later. It is an in-joke among social scientists that no-one has actually read the book from start to finish, but it is well worth exploring: practically every page contains some kind of interesting observation or thought about the nature and development of modern urban consumption spaces. Benjamin's reflections on the arcades are characterised by numerous thought-provoking points going on simultaneously. Let us consider just one paragraph:

Most of the Paris arcades are built in the fifteen years following 1822. The first condition for their development is the boom in the textile trade. *Magasins de nouveautés* [fashion boutiques], the first establishments to keep large stocks of merchandise on the premises, make their appearance . . . The arcades are centres of commerce in luxury items. In fitting them out, art enters the service of the merchant. Contemporaries never tire of admiring them. For a long time, they remain an attraction for tourists. An *Illustrated Guide to Paris* says: "These arcades, a recent invention of industrial luxury, are glass-roofed, marble-panelled corridors extending through whole blocks of buildings, whose owners have joined together for such enterprises. Lining both sides of the arcade, which gets its light from above, are the most elegant shops, so that the passage is a city, a world in miniature. The arcades are the scene of the first attempts at gas lighting. The second condition for the emergence of the arcades is the beginning of iron construction."

(Benjamin 1999: 15)

It is fair to say that there is a lot going on here. In just one passage, Benjamin directs us towards four key characteristics of the arcades, and modern consumption spaces in general.

- The arcades were constructed in a particular social-historical context, particularly: a booming textile trade, new practices of merchandising and stock control, new technologies of iron production and construction. (Elsewhere in the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin discusses at length how these contexts of cultural production were afforded by the contemporary economic, political and industrial context of France and the French empire.)
- In the construction of the arcades, great attention was paid to aesthetics, mood and design. Lighting, textures, construction materials and techniques of display were deliberately employed to create pleasant spaces conducive to strolling and window-shopping, as well as making commodities appear as attractive as possible. Hence Benjamin's description of the arcades as exemplifying a shift towards 'art in the service of the merchant'.
- By bringing together different fashionable shops in one place, the arcades created specialist spaces that were destinations for consumption. New ideals of luxury, elegance, fashion and taste (see Chapter 2) were closely attached to these spaces: the arcades were at once spaces where one could purchase fashionable luxury goods and luxurious spaces where it was fashionable to be seen (and unfashionable not to be seen). They

Box 3.4 continued

were also spaces where new national and international fashions could be encountered and purchased. In this context, many consumers changed their shopping habits, choosing to travel to shop in particular arcades rather than local shops.

- The development of the arcades afforded new consumption practices. Benjamin particularly notes the way in which absent-minded strolling and window-shopping in arcades became fashionable in Paris (and many European cities) during the nineteenth century. The arcades also created new routes through the city,

and afforded new habits and experiences: for example, Benjamin notes that it became commonplace for passers-by to shelter in the arcades during sudden rain showers, and spend time window-shopping until the weather improved. The arcades also became destinations for tourists from all over France, and were thus integral to the development of contemporary travel and tourism industries. (As such, the arcades themselves became the focus for consumption practices of tourists – see the subsection 'Many consumption practices involve the consumption of spaces themselves' below.)



Box 3.5

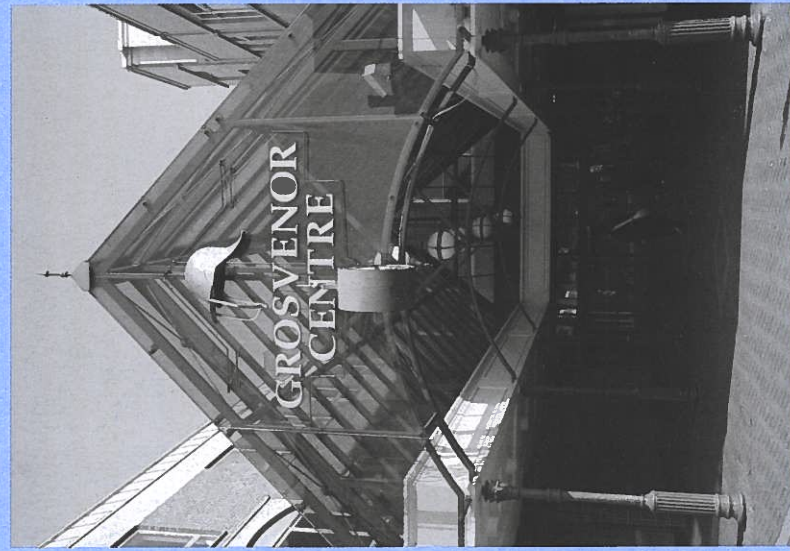
A shopping mall, 2000: teenagers' geographies of a consumption space

A number of geographers have investigated how different people inhabit, and do consumption, within consumption spaces such as shopping malls (Shields 1989), coffee shops (Laurier and Philo 2006a, 2006b) and bars (Jayne *et al.* 2006). For example, Matthews *et al.* (2000) conducted research with 400 young people aged 9–16 in five shopping malls in the English East Midlands. Consider three extracts from Matthews *et al.*'s (2000) interviews with teenagers in the Grosvenor shopping centre in Northampton (Photograph 3.4). In particular, note what these young people are actually doing in this space designed for consumption:

I like it here [outside HMV music shop]. We can listen to the music, chat with each other, see our friends, two or three of us will turn up here and soon there'll be five maybe more of us. We know that we will see someone we know. (p. 286)

We meet here and then move on. What's good is you don't get bored. There's always someone to talk to, someone to see. We can check out the clothes and that too. See what's new, see the latest fashion. Can't afford none of it: just look and that. (p. 287)

See that geezer [a security guard], he picks on us. What a prat! We don't go though. If he says "get going" or something, we then mooch around a bit until we find somewhere else where he can't see us. We won't leave until we want to go! (p. 290)



Photograph 3.4 The Grosvenor shopping centre, Northampton.

Source: Alamy Images/Colin Palmer Photography.

A number of key observations are evident in these quotations.

- All kinds of social interaction and practice were going on within the space of this shopping mall. At any given moment, young people were meeting, hanging out, listening to music, chatting, moving on, getting moved on, window-shopping, or 'mooching around'. Indeed, the interviews suggest that young people spent most of their time in the shopping mall doing *anything but shopping*. (Although, of course, practices such as window-shopping and listening to music are themselves consumption practices and may lead to purchases.) The shopping mall was a key place in these young people's lives even though, in many cases, they were unable to buy anything; indeed, they often related the mall's importance to its usefulness as a place to meet and shelter as much as to its shopping opportunities.
- Shopping malls are complex social spaces where multiple social groups interact, and can sometimes

come into conflict. For example, in this shopping mall, Matthews *et al.* (2000) recorded the existence of at least 20 different local gangs of young people who inhabited the mall, and interacted in different ways, at the time of the research. Moreover, the research describes tensions between adults and these gangs, manifest in the actions of security guards and police, who were frequently called upon to 'move on' young people, following (or anticipating) complaints from store managers or members of the public.

- Many young people actively attempted to bend the rules, evade the attentions of security guards, and make their own entertainment within the regulated, consumption-focused space of the shopping mall. This could involve a range of activities, from window-shopping, chatting and strolling to running, skateboarding, shoplifting, smoking or alcohol consumption.



Box 3.6

McDonaldisation–Disneyfication–Coca-colonisation

A number of social scientists have attempted to define how consumption spaces have undergone transformation over the last century. Three widely cited definitions – which identify the tactics of major global brands as key case studies – are outlined below. Try to identify: (i) examples of spaces in your everyday life that have some of these characteristics; (ii) instances where these features of consumption spaces are unsuccessful or resisted by consumers.

McDonaldisation

This term was coined by sociologist George Ritzer (1993) to describe a set of processes through which consumption spaces have been increasingly rationalised and regulated over the last century. He argues that these processes can be observed in any fast food restaurant, and should be understood as exemplifying four broader trends within global cultural, service and leisure industries.

- Towards greater efficiency and cost-effectiveness of functioning. Consumption spaces are increasingly designed to facilitate rapid throughput of customers, to maximise expenditure, and to minimise staffing costs

(e.g. the proliferation and normalisation of drive-thru, self-service and self-clearing fast food restaurants).

- Towards greater consistency and predictability of products. Chains of consumption spaces are designed to offer consistent, predictable experiences and products, irrespective of location (e.g. one can buy a Big Mac, a Big Mac, and a Big Mac in Los Angeles, Paris and Berlin respectively, and expect to receive essentially the same product).

- Towards greater calculability of outputs, stock control and profit margins. Consumption spaces are specifically designed and regulated to ensure this calculability (e.g. through technologies and processes that strictly and precisely regulate portion sizes in fast food restaurants).

- Towards heightened control of production and consumption practices. Employees and customers are subject to intense regulation in many consumption spaces, to the extent that their agency and decision-making are limited (e.g. in fast food chains burgers are pre-prepared, pre-measured, cooked in automated fryers, and prepared to predetermined instructions; improvisation, creativity and imagination on the part of staff are limited and discouraged).

Box 3.6 continued

Disneyfication

Bryman (1999) suggests that consumption spaces are increasingly 'stage-managed' to direct consumers to purchasing opportunities, and create atmospheres and scenarios where expenditure is encouraged. He suggests that this stage management involves four main strategies, which have been perhaps most spectacularly applied in Disney theme parks.

- Theming and branding – the creation of spaces with particular themes, concepts, atmospheres and brand associations (e.g. Disneyland is not just a theme park, but a Disney theme park: it is marketed and staged as a magical, special place; it contains multiple themed zones associated with different Disney characters and brands).
- De-differentiation – the removal of barriers between different kinds of space (e.g. in theme parks, attractions, gift shops, retail opportunities and food outlets are closely integrated; parks are designed so that visitors pass numerous consumption spaces while they are in the process of visiting the park).
- Merchandising – the proliferation of branded goods, souvenirs and memorabilia, and spaces in which they can be purchased.

- Staff training in emotional and performative labour – the work involved in staging and maintaining the theme and atmosphere of a consumption space.

Coca-colonisation

This term was coined by Wagnleitner (1994) to describe the spread of global brands of consumer goods. He identifies two geographical processes, as exemplified by the global ubiquity of the Coca-Cola brand.

- Global colonisation – the way in which particular products become available and desired worldwide; such products are produced, marketed and consumed via increasingly complex global commodity networks (see Chapter 2), and these networks have complex geographical consequences.
- Lifestyle colonisation – the way in which consumer capitalism colonises even the most intimate spaces of everyday lifestyles; how branded consumer goods can come to surround us, and matter to us, as we go about our everyday lives.

Box 3.6 about the heightened commodification, 'staging' and merchandising of experiences can be useful when thinking about the consumption of spaces via tourism and heritage consumption.

However, although these ideas do provide a useful frame for understanding broad characteristics of many present-day consumption spaces, it is important to recognise that they do not tell the full story. As with the production-focused approaches summarised in Chapter 2, these accounts of the production and restructuring of consumption spaces can have the effect of overemphasising ways in which consumers are regulated, duped and constrained by market forces and cultural producers. For this reason, many geographers have increasingly researched the ways in which consumers actually behave, and often develop creative, resistive and 'alternative' practices through their consumption behaviours: see Section 3.4 for more information about this line of work. It is also the case that social scientists writing about consumption spaces have often tended to focus on rather spectacular case studies (such as mega-malls, or

consumption practices involve the *consumption of spaces themselves*. In other words, they suggest that spaces are not just where consumption happens; rather, it is often the case that spaces are the 'thing' being consumed, and the whole point of much consumption is to spend time somewhere or to relate, somehow, to a particular space.

The work of the sociologist John Urry (1990, 1995) has been really important for geographers thinking along these lines. Urry (1995: 28–30) points to a whole range of examples of consumption of particular spaces. These include: visiting a tourist attraction or landscape; paying an admission charge to access a particular space or viewpoint; choosing a place to go on holiday; buying gifts and souvenirs related to a tourist destination; purchasing products because of their association with a place (perhaps buying a particular bottle of wine because it reminds you of holidaying in the Loire); or visiting a place to do a specific, renowned activity (perhaps seeing a musical on Broadway). He also suggests that, as people go about their daily lives and consumption practices, they often 'buy in' to more abstract feelings, ideas or myths about particular landscapes or localities. So, for example, if you love the English countryside, it is quite likely that all kinds of consumption practice will relate to that broad sense of the countryside's loveliness. You might: visit country parks, spend holidays in rural locations, buy souvenirs of your trips, enjoy books or television programmes that evoke England's green and pleasant land, spend loads of money on walking gear, maps and guidebooks, furnish your home in rustic cottage style, or even buy a house in the country. Indeed, a large body of geographical research has investigated how British rural spaces are imagined and represented as 'idyllic', and how a vast array of products, texts and commodified experiences allow consumers to 'buy in' to this notion of 'rural idyll'. We can also consider how this notion of consuming place is relevant to other types of enthusiasm or worldview: for example, what kinds of spaces might someone be drawn to consume if they love heritage, adventure, nature, nightlife or the arts? Or if they belong to a particular subculture (see Section 3.4 and Chapter 8), or if they are a fan of a popular cultural phenomenon or have a hobby (see Box 3.3)?

Notably, Urry also considers how spaces are actually consumed in practice. Urry's most famous work *The Tourist Gaze* (1990) considers how spaces, landscapes

and attractions are consumed by tourists via particular practices of looking. He argues that 'gazing' is quite central to being a tourist: fundamentally, it is what tourism is about, and what the consumption of space, in this context, is. For:

the ... characteristic of tourist activity is the fact that we look at, or gaze upon, particular objects, such as piers, towers, old buildings, artistic objects, food, countryside and so on. The actual purchases in tourism (the hotel bed, the meal, the ticket, etc.) are often incidental to the gaze, which may be no more than a momentary view. Central to tourist consumption, then, is to look individually or collectively upon aspects of landscape or townscape which are distinctive, which signify an experience which contrasts with everyday experience. (Urry 1995: 131–132)

Urry (1990) identifies some key characteristics of this 'tourist gaze' (see Photograph 3.5). In so doing,



Photograph 3.5 Tourist photography: an example of the tourist gaze.

Source: Getty Images/Tim Graham.

he begins to highlight what people actually do when they consume a space as tourists – although we could note here that Urry's notion of gazing can be criticised for over-privileging visual consumption (see Chapter 12 for a sense of why this may be problematic). Some characteristics of tourist gazing are as follows.

The tourist gaze arises from movement of people to, and their stay in, ... sites which are outside the normal places of residence and work ...

The places gazed upon are for purposes which are not directly connected with paid work and normally offer some distinctive contrasts with work (both paid and unpaid) ...

Places are chosen to be gazed upon because there is an anticipation ... of intense pleasures, either on a different scale or involving different senses from those customarily encountered ...

The viewing of ... tourist sights often involves ... a much greater sensitivity to visual elements of landscape or townscape than is normally found in everyday life. People linger over such a gaze which is then visually objectified or captured through photographs, postcards, films ...

[T]he gaze is constructed through signs and tourism involves the collection of signs. When tourists see two people kissing in Paris, what they capture in the gaze is 'timeless, romantic Paris'; when a small village in England is seen, what they gaze upon is the 'real olde England'.

Urry (1995) also notes how different kinds of tourism can involve subtly different kinds of gazing: seeking different 'signs' through different activities. For example, we might consider how gazing practices might differ between tourists who are interested primarily in activities as diverse as backpacking, winning and dining, sunbathing, boozing, extreme sports, heritage, wilderness or volunteering. Any such gazing practices are invariably framed by contemporary systems of **cultural production** (see Chapter 2), and served by an ever-increasing array of cultural and tourism industries. Thus Urry (1990: 2–3) suggests that the tourist gaze also has the following properties.

A substantial proportion of the population of modern societies engages in such tourist practices and new socialised forms of provision are developed in order to cope with the mass character of the tourist gaze ...

Such anticipation is constructed and sustained through ... film, newspapers, TV, magazines, records and videos which construct that gaze ... [and] provide the signs in terms of which the holiday experiences are understood ...

An array of tourism professionals develop, who attempt to reproduce ever-new objects of the tourist gaze."

We have quoted at some length from Urry's work here because his work has been so significant for geographers studying tourism, leisure and many forms of consumption. A substantial body of geographical research has followed Urry's lead by exploring how spaces of leisure and tourism have increasingly been restructured, commodified and 'stage-managed' in order to regulate, direct, and maximise profitability of the tourist gaze at particular sites.

3.4 Consumer agency: subcultures and resistance

In Section 3.1 we noted that, during the early 1990s, many geographers, sociologists and cultural theorists advocated a 'turn' to consumption, to correct a 'productionist bias' in much previous research. These critics called for research exploring the practices, experiences and agency of consumers: in other words, what consumers do, what they think and feel, and how they make decisions about consumption. Two decades on, there exists a vast and diverse body of consumption-focused literature dealing with these issues, and exploring all manner of consumption practices and spaces. Type 'consumption AND' into a university library catalogue, or any database of academic publications, and you will encounter an extraordinary array of resources. In this subsection we highlight three key, recurring lessons from this body of work. We recommend that you familiarise yourself with these points and then spend some time exploring academic literature that relates to a form of consumption you care about or find interesting. Reflect on the second and third questions at the start of this chapter: what forms of consumption have you been doing today, and how are these practices important to you? As you read this section, consider

in the following quotation relate specifically to young people's consumption practices, but the points about 'symbolic creativity' can be applied to any social group.

We are thinking about the extraordinary symbolic creativity of the multitude of ways in which young people use, humanise, decorate and invest with meanings their common and immediate life spaces and social practices ... [through] personal styles and choice of clothes; selective and active use of music, television, magazines; decoration of bedrooms; the rituals of romance and subcultural styles; the style, banter and drama of friendship groups; music-making and dance.

(Willis 1990: 2)

Activities such as these often involve a great deal of work, knowledge and collaboration among consumers (for an example, see Box 3.9) Crucially, such practices can result in activities, meanings, spaces and styles that are novel and unexpected. These practices can be subversive and critical towards cultural norms and **hegemonic** forms of cultural power (see Chapter 2). As we outline in points 2 and 3 below, consumer goods can be used in ways that differ markedly from the intentions of cultural producers. Consequently, the active and creative nature of consumption can be strongly politicised as consumers seek to refuse and resist contemporary cultural norms through practices that draw on available cultural resources. The work of the cultural theorist John Fiske (1989) was particularly important in theorising this potentially politicised nature of consumption. Fiske recognises that

the resources [used by consumers] – television, records, clothes, video games, language – carry the interests of the economically and ideologically dominant; they have lines of force within them that are hegemonic and that work in favour of the status quo. But ... these resources also ... carry contradictory lines of force that are taken up and activated differently by people situated differently within the social system.

(Fiske 1989: 2)

Points 2 and 3 below provide some examples of how such 'contradictory lines of force' have been activated in practice through the lifestyles of particular subcultures, and through resistive and alternative consumption practices.

Point 1: Consumers are active and creative

Underlying all consumption-focused research in the social sciences is a realisation that consumption always involves *doing* something. Even sedentary activities such as reading, watching television or Internet browsing, or taken-for-granted habits such as shopping and snacking, entail some degree of activity, engagement and decision-making. In this respect, all consumers can be thought of as active, to a greater or lesser degree, as they undertake consumption practices. Moreover, a great deal of consumption-focused research has explored how consumers are often very deliberate, knowing and purposeful: they actively decide to do (or not to do) certain consumption practices for particular reasons and to achieve certain outcomes. As the cultural theorist Paul Willis notes, consumption practices are often done to make a point or to express something about oneself. For consumption is central to

[the] vibrant symbolic life and symbolic creativity in everyday life, activity and expression ... through which individuals and groups seek creatively to establish their presence, identity and meaning ... all the time expressing, or attempting to express, something about their actual or potential cultural significance.

(Willis 1990: 1)

As this quotation suggests, consumption practices also involve some degree of creativity on the part of consumers. The activities through which cultural objects and spaces are interpreted, invested with meanings, and appropriated into one's everyday life are central to consumption, and can all be understood as creative acts: each can spark new understandings, experiences and ways of being. Much consumption-focused research can be read as celebrating the capacity of individuals and groups to engage creatively with cultural objects and spaces, and thus make their own meanings, styles and statements. As Willis (1990) notes, creative acts of consumption are extraordinarily diverse, and can be profoundly important and inspirational for individuals and groups. The examples

● Point 2: Consumption is central to identities

Theorists of consumer culture often argue that consumption practices have become increasingly central to individuals' identities over the last century. It is argued that consumption is widely approached (and promoted) as a kind of "life project" where consumers "display their individuality and sense of style in the particularity of the assemblage of goods, clothes, practices, experiences, appearance and bodily dispositions they design together into a lifestyle" (Featherstone 1991: 86). In other words, the things that we do with cultural objects and spaces are fundamentally important to our everyday lives, our sense of who we are, and how we present ourselves to others.

The work of the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) (1968–2002) has been hugely influential for social scientists seeking to understand the importance of consumption for lifestyles and everyday geographies. A succession of classic studies by CCCS researchers investigated how 'subcultural' groups resist, and do their own thing within, contemporary hegemonic norms. The term 'subculture' is a popular one as well as an academic one: broadly, it refers to "groups of people that are in some way represented as non-normative and/or marginal through their particular interests and practices, through what they are, what they do, and where they do it" (Gelder 2005: 1). The classic CCCS studies focused on postwar UK youth subcultures, particularly mods, skinheads and punks. It was noted that these diverse groups shared some key characteristics.

- Consumption practices were central to becoming a member of, and belonging in, these groups. Listening to particular music, wearing particular clothes, consuming particular drinks and substances, and sporting particular hairstyles or bodily adornments were central to the practice of being a mod, skinhead or punk.

- These subcultural groups were created and maintained through particular "expressive forms and rituals": using consumer goods, clothes and everyday objects in the context of lifestyle practices that made a particular point and/or symbolised group membership and "self-imposed exile" from the

"natural order" of society (Hebdige 1979: 2). These forms and rituals were often described as a process of 'bricolage'. This was originally an anthropological term describing how people have historically attempted to comprehend the world by using resources and material objects that happened to be at hand. Thus it was suggested that youth subcultures used diverse available cultural resources, drawing on objects and influences from old, new, popular and obscure contexts. In the process, new, often subversive, meanings were attached to familiar objects, and new statements, styles and emotions were created.

- This subcultural bricolage was politicised and resistant on three levels: (i) as a way of upsetting, and distancing oneself from, parents' norms and values; (ii) as a statement of dissatisfaction with the music, stars and styles of contemporary popular culture, and the limited possibilities offered by contemporary cultural industries; and (iii) as a broader symbolic rejection of the repressive conformity, small-mindedness, conservatism, austerity, social injustice and lack of opportunities that were felt to characterise postwar Britain (Hall and Jefferson 1976).

- Youth subcultures were thus understood as a way in which young people created *their own* spaces and practices, resisting rules, norms and expectations imposed by parents, the cultural industries, and contemporary society in general.

- Youth subcultures have often been figured as problematic, deviant, antisocial and immoral by contemporary mainstream media. Members of subcultural groups have often been treated as 'folk devils' by many adults. They have often been the subject of 'moral panics', and represented as symptomatic of contemporary societal ills.

- Although initially treated as deviant and alarming, the styles of youth subcultures are typically very quickly appropriated and repackaged as 'cool' by the mainstream cultural industries.

The CCCS approach to subcultures remains profoundly influential for social scientists exploring the role of consumption in identity formation. This body of work presents cultural geographers with a rich seam

- focusing almost exclusively on the subcultural practices of white, British, male protagonists, and ignoring the exclusionary whiteness, maleness and Anglo-centrism of these groups;
- focusing on *youth* subcultures, and ignoring the cultural activities of other age groups (and also being complicit in labelling young people as deviant and antisocial);

However, a certain degree of caution is required when approaching this body of work. Classic work on youth subcultures has been criticised for:



Box 3.7

Hebdige (1979) on the 'semiotic guerrilla warfare' of punk



Photograph 3.6 Punk style: semiotic guerrilla warfare?

Source: Shutterstock.com/Lakov Filimonov.

The following extracts are taken from Dick Hebdige's (1979) *Subculture: The meaning of style*, a classic CCCS text that explores the meanings and politics of subcultural groups and consumption practices. The book includes a well-known analysis of 1970s punk as a form of 'semiotic guerrilla warfare', and the following quotations outline how this cultural warfare was waged. As you read, think about the following questions. (i) How would you describe Hebdige's style of writing? (ii) How does this writing make you feel? (iii) What does Hebdige's account tell us about the lives and experiences of punks themselves?

Punk reproduced the entire sartorial history of British working class youth cultures in 'cut up' form, combining elements which had originally belonged to completely different epochs. There was a chaos of quiffs and leather jackets, brothel creepers and winkle-pickers, plimsolls and pakamacs, moddy

crops and skinhead strides, drainpipes and vivid socks, bum-freezers and bower boots – all kept 'in place' and 'out of time' by the spectacular adhesives: the safety pins and plastic clothes pegs, the bondage straps and bits of string which attracted so much horrified and fascinated attention.

(Hebdige 1979: 26)

The names of the groups (the Unwanted, the Rejects, the Sex Pistols, the Clash, the Worst, etc.) and the titles of the songs ('Belsen was a Gas', 'If You Don't Want to Fuck Me, Fuck Off', 'I Wanna Be Sick on You') reflected the tendency towards wilful desecration and the voluntary assumption of outcast status which characterised the whole punk movement. Such tactics were, to adapt [famous French anthropologist] Lévi-Strauss's famous phrase 'things to whiten mother's hair with'.

(Hebdige 1979: 109–110).

- glamorising a small number of iconic, spectacular, resistive examples of subcultures (and thus promoting a somewhat partial and caricatured view of the role of consumption in resistance and identity formation);
- treating subcultures as fairly coherent, singular, stable entities (e.g. talking about 'Punk', but failing to acknowledge differences between punks in different communities or spaces);
- overlooking some social-cultural changes that render the notion of 'subculture' obsolete – it no longer makes sense to speak of a single mainstream culture (because of globalisation, simultaneous multimedia, and the multiple geographies of cultural production, as outlined in Chapter 2, there are many coexisting cultures and no straightforward relationship between 'culture' and 'subculture');
- suggesting that subcultural groups are always in the process of resisting hegemonic power, and shoe-horning all subcultural practices into this narrative of resistance;
- over-theorising subcultural practices, and writing in a style that is inaccessible and irrelevant for members of subcultures themselves;
- methodologically, failing to engage with the opinions, experiences and everyday geographies of the members of subcultures themselves.

Box 3.8

A punk's perspective on CCCS studies of subcultures



In the following extract, Muggleton (2000), who had been a teenage punk before training as a sociologist, recalls his first experience of reading Hebdige's (1979) *Subculture: The meaning of style* (see Box 3.7). As you read, note the contrasts between Muggleton's experiences and the vivid claims made about punk in Box 3.7.

From late 1976 onwards I became increasingly involved in the emerging provincial punk scene. I took on certain aspects of the subculture's dress code, jettisoning my flares for straights, platforms for trainers, my bright orange, wing-collared shirt for a white button-down bri-nylon... I listened less and less to Pink Floyd and more to the Ramones... I never sported safety pins through my lip, nor stopped

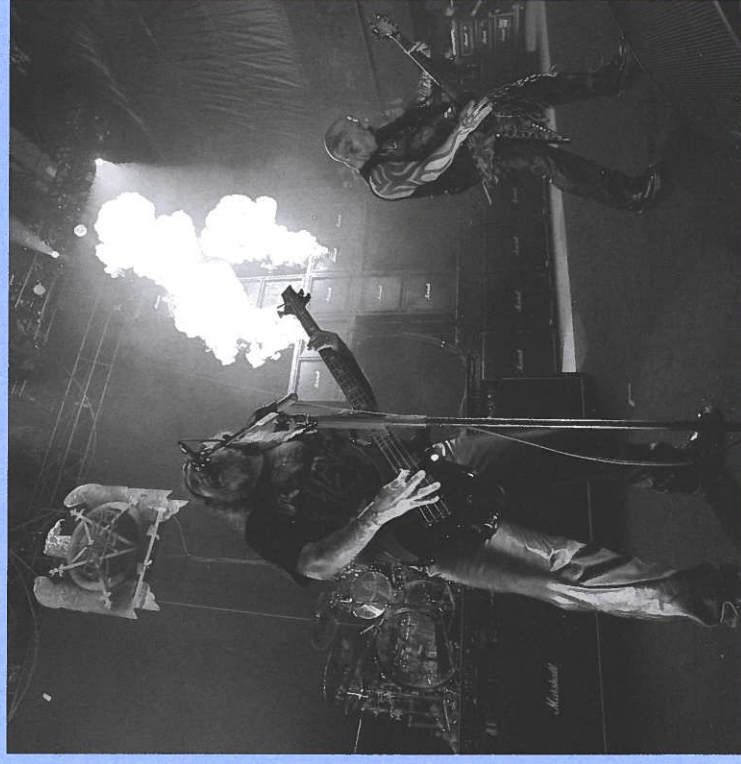
wearing my beloved denim jacket... I wasn't aware of Britain's economic decline or the fracturing of the political consensus, nor was I angry about unemployment... Some years after, I was browsing in a... bookshop and my eye caught the lurid cover of Dick Hebdige's... *Subculture: The meaning of style*... [T]he cover image and the title prompted me to buy, hoping perhaps that it might help me to recapture the feeling and spirit of those heady times. I took it home and began to read and could hardly understand a word... I fought my way through... and was left with the feeling that it had absolutely nothing to say about my life as I had once experienced it!

(Muggleton 2000: 1–2)



Box 3.9

Show No Mercy: extreme music but mundane consumption practices



Photograph 3.7 The thrash metal band Slayer.

Source: Getty Images.

First time I heard Slayer, I couldn't handle it... the first album *Show No Mercy*... I'd heard about it, I knew it was fairly, totally fast, totally manic, hardcore metal and I couldn't handle it – man it was like, all this satanic stuff, it's like 'whoa, what's going on here?' (Extreme metal fan, quoted in Kahn-Harris 2004: 111)

The album *Show No Mercy* (1983), by Californian thrash metal band Slayer, is widely hailed as a classic of the genre. The album cover features a painting of Satan holding a sword next to a pentagram, and photographs of scowling band members, clad in black leather and metal spikes, posing with inverted crosses. The music is characterised by ultra-fast guitar riffs and drumming, and screamed lyrics about torture, the Blitzkrieg, Satan's impending rise, violent hatred, serial murder, black magic, mutilation, souls tormented in hell, the Third Reich, battlefield slaughter, and a world where there is no future and, indeed, 'no fucking world to be saved'. Give it a listen: maybe you too will be 'like whoa, what's going on here?' Or maybe not.

In its style, content and iconography, *Show No Mercy* could be read as a fairly spectacular example of a subcultural phenomenon. Indeed, fans of Slayer (and countless other extreme metal bands and sub-genres) have been analysed as subcultural bricoleurs, appropriating violent, shocking, misanthropic imagery to rebel against parental conservatism and suburban alienation (Harrell 1994; Petrov 1995). However, Kahn-Harris's (2004) research with Scandinavian extreme metal fans suggests that this interpretation misrepresents the actual lives and experiences of these fans in at least three senses.

- Interpreting the extreme metal scene as antisocial and shocking overlooks strong bonds of friendship, care, mutual support and a kind of collegiality that constitute the scene. Kahn-Harris's (2004) work describes the more 'mundane' everyday pleasures of being an extreme metal fan: listening to music, hanging out, debating and bantering about new releases, anticipating and attending gigs, collecting merchandise and

Box 3.9 continued

so on. He also notes the enduring friendships and romances that can blossom within the scene. Also – and rather contrary to the assumption that extreme metal is purposefully repulsive to parents – he notes how extreme metal fandom can sometimes bring families together via discussions, common musical reference points, or forms of parental support (providing lifts to gigs, lending money for recording sessions, buying tickets, giving CDs as gifts, etc.).

- Most academic readings of subcultures such as extreme metal scenes overlook the significant care, commitment, knowledge and work involved in 'scene membership'. Kahn-Harris draws attention to the mundane everyday practices that are central to the consumption of extreme metal: cataloguing and sharing CDs and mp3s; writing emails and letters to other fans; contributing to blogs, zines, mailing lists and message boards. He also notes the listening practices through which the ostensibly spectacularly violent sounds of extreme metal are incorporated into individuals' everyday lives and spaces. Although many fans are – as in the quotation above – initially overwhelmed by the music, we might say that they 'domesticate' it by listening with headphones, with friends, and in

everyday contexts (while driving or doing housework or homework). These practices can be rather bookish and scholarly, too: Kahn-Harris notes that most extreme metal fans have a working and opinionated knowledge of several thousand different pieces of music, and countless sub-genres and sub-sub-genres of extreme music.

- Kahn-Harris (2004) also problematises the assumption that extreme metal is an aggressively and purposefully shocking subculture, by exploring how extreme metal fans interact with 'non-scene' friends and family members. He notes that considerable care is often taken to avoid causing offence or creating tension. This can involve concealing CDs and posters, not wearing lurid or offensive band merchandise, turning music off or down, or choosing to play more 'accessible' or 'popular' tunes while in the company of 'non-scene' friends.

Incidentally, one of the authors of this book once saw the singer from Slayer in the audience at a gig. He appeared to be clutching a hotdog, a broadsheet newspaper, and a packet of throat lozenges: more evidence that 'extreme' subcultural identities invariably involve mundane consumption practices!

practices through which 'extreme' sounds are domesticated. For many cultural geographers it is precisely this kind of detail and subtlety that is crucial for understandings of everyday geographies of consumption.

● Point 3: Consumers can actively resist and subvert cultural politics

In point 2, above, we noted the importance of classic research about subcultures in recognising the role of consumption practices in subverting or resisting contemporary cultural norms. However, we also suggested that this work often foregrounded just a few glamorous, dramatic, iconic examples, and thus tended to overlook other more subtle, complex and everyday forms of resistance and lifestyle. Consequently, we should be aware that classic work on subcultures presents us with a particular, and often slightly caricatured, understanding of the roles of cultural consumption in forms of resistance. By contrast, geographers

identities (Chapter 8). In the quotation above, note how forms of consumption (listening to loud music, getting a tattoo or haircut, buying a loud t-shirt) are explicitly or implicitly central to some of Pile's examples. Not all consumption is resistive, and not all resistance involves an act of consumption; but, in many cases, practices of consumption and resistance are closely interrelated. This relationship can take a range of forms: some examples are illustrated below.

Resistance using icons and objects of consumption

There is a rich, diverse heritage of forms of activism and protest that deploy subversive humour, slogans, iconography and public performances or demonstrations to broad politicised ends. In this context, icons of contemporary consumer and popular culture have often been spoofed, defaced or subverted in order to make a particular point, to highlight some absurdity or injustice, or to critique the activities and interests of the economically and politically powerful.

The tactics of 'culture-jamming' activists provide one example of this form of protest. The term 'culture jamming' refers to a range of politicised 'communication strategies that play with the branded images and icons of consumer culture to make consumers aware of surrounding problems and diverse cultural experiences that warrant their attention' (CCCE 2011: unpaginated). Culture jamming can involve the production and circulation of posters, pamphlets, graffiti, internet memes, emails or blogs, and/or the staging of campaigns, protests, stunts, parodies, hoaxes, or website hacks. These practices are often humorous and satirical in nature (Woodside 2001), and explicitly inspired by theorists' critiques of cultural production (see Chapter 2; also Dery 1999). Culture jams seek to 'communicate with citizen-consumers who often avoid political problems and topics in favour of building an isolated reality around consumer comforts' (Pickarel *et al.* 2002: 3). Many culture jams are designed to puncture this sense of consumer comfort, by directing attention to problematic media representations, inequitable cultural politics and unethical corporate practices and interests:

[M]any culture jams are simply aimed at exposing questionable political assumptions behind commercial culture so that people can momentarily consider the branded

environment in which they live. Culture jams refigure logos, fashion statements, and product images to challenge the idea of 'what's cool', along with assumptions about the personal freedoms of consumption. Some of these communiqués create a sense of transparency about a product or company by revealing environmental damages or the social experiences of workers that are left out of the advertising fantasies. The logic of culture jamming is to convert easily identifiable images into larger questions about such matters as corporate responsibility, the 'true' environmental and human costs of consumption, or the private corporate uses of the 'public' airwaves.

(CCCE 2011: unpaginated)

Subvertisement – a contraction of 'subversion' and 'advertisement' – is one culture-jamming tactic, as popularised by groups such as Adbusters in Vancouver (www.adbusters.org), the Billboard Liberation Front in San Francisco (<http://www.billboardliberation.com/>), and countless local groups and campaigners. See Box 3.10 for an introduction to this practice. Subvertisement is just one example of the way in which particular icons and objects of consumption have been purposefully transformed (e.g. through graffiti, defacement, or vandalism) or recontextualised (e.g. through performance or parody) by activists to make their point.

Resisting particular consumption spaces and practices

Some acts of protest and resistance target specific sites of/for consumption. For example, the opening of corporate retail outlets, or spread of branded consumption opportunities, frequently prompts localised opposition, often with an underlying concern to preserve traditional or local consumption spaces and practices. In some contexts, this kind of protest intersects with other forms of activism. See Box 3.11 for one example: note how the manifesto links local concerns (e.g. disruption to a bus stop) with much broader concerns about consumerist lifestyles and corporate practices and consumption spaces.

Adopting alternative or ethical consumption practices

Lifestyles based upon purposeful ethical decisions about everyday consumption practices have proliferated, in many parts of the world, over the last century. Consumption practices such as vegetarianism and environmentally friendly living – or the boycotting

Acts of resistance are discussed in more detail in later chapters on **performances** (Chapter 7) and



Box 3.10

A subvertisement from Bristol, UK



Photograph 3.8 Subvertisement.

Source: Rex Features/Invicta Kent Media.

Subvertisement involves the manipulation or defacement of advertisements for politicised ends. Frequently, this practice is intended to problematise contemporary consumerist norms and products: using the medium and iconography of commercials to disseminate critical and politicised messages about the product or corporation being advertised. The manipulation of advertising billboards is perhaps the most common form of subvertisement. Subvertisements can be witty and intellectual, or crude and direct; they can entail activities ranging from one-off, impulsive defacement to organised national or international campaigns

(see LibCom 2009). See Photograph 3.8 for a recent example. The billboard originally advertised the British Legion's Poppy campaign and read 'for their sake ... wear a poppy', but has been transformed into a critique of former Prime Minister Blair's foreign policy interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Consider:

- How effective is this subvertisement in subverting the original advert?
- What tactics are used in this subvertisement?
- What is your reaction to this image?

of commodities that originate in unethical political contexts, or have substantial carbon footprints, or which are not fairly traded – are increasingly commonplace. Nevertheless, as anyone who has been quizzed about being vegetarian knows, such practices go against some powerful cultural norms about consumption, and continue to be considered weird and 'alternative' by many people.

The extent to which these kinds of consumption practice are resistive and politicised varies considerably between individuals. It can be instructive to think about such consumption practices in terms of a broad spectrum of decisions and behaviours: from personal, private, mild or occasional engagement with

ethical consumption to deep, politically activist commitment to wholesale transformation of lifestyles and norms. There are numerous typologies of consumers' attitudes and behaviour (see Tallontire *et al.* 2001; Connolly and Prothero 2008). Typically, these typologies classify consumers depending on how critical and aware they are of impacts of consumption decisions, and the extent to which they acknowledge the need to change their habitual consumption practices. See Box 3.12 for two examples.

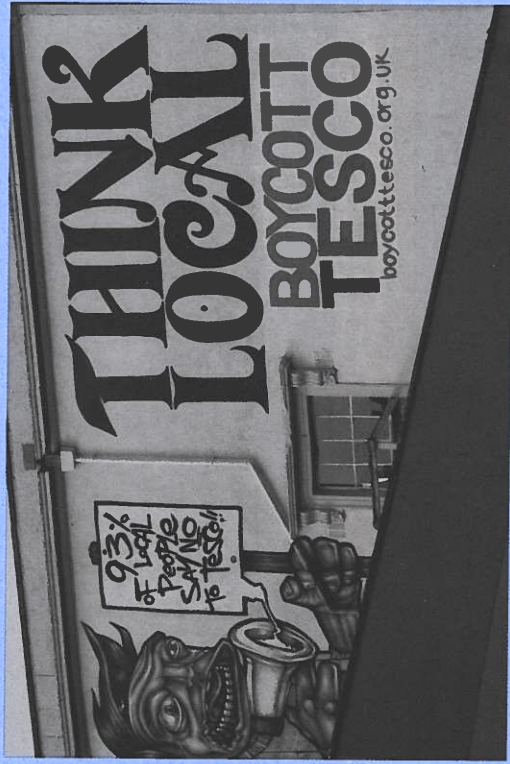
Producing alternative consumption spaces

Dissatisfaction with spaces of/for consumption, and their underlying cultural politics, can prompt the



Box 3.11

The 'No Tesco in Stokes Croft' campaign



Photograph 3.9 Anti-Tesco graffiti in Stokes Croft, Bristol, UK.

Source: Alamy Images/Adrian Arbib.

On 1 December 2010, a group of 40 protesters dressed as a Tesco delivery lorry walked up Stokes Croft Road in Bristol, UK, and stopped to make a 'delivery' – a banner reading 'NO TESCO' – to the site of a proposed Tesco supermarket. The protest aimed to demonstrate how traffic, pedestrians, a cycle lane and a bus stop on a busy arterial road would be disrupted by delivery lorries in the event of the store opening.

The 'human delivery lorry' was just one event in a year-long campaign by local protesters opposing the opening of this consumption space. In the 12 months following the announcement that Tesco intended to open a store on the road, local residents orchestrated a campaign of emails to TESCO HQ, 2,500 postcards sent to local councillors and planning officers, attendance and impassioned contributions at public meetings, letters to Members of Parliament, petitions and contributions to planning and judicial review processes, a massed rally, and picketing and placards outside the proposed store. Graffiti (Photograph 3.9) and subvertisements appeared along Stokes Croft Road: 'NO TESCO' was stencilled on every other paving slab, and a banner reading 'Tesco: every little hurts' (spoofing the supermarket's advertising jingle 'every little helps') was raised above the building. The building was squatted and temporarily used as a community space, hosting gigs, films, language classes and a soup kitchen.

When the store opened in February 2011 – despite these forms of local protest and opposition – it became a focal point for more violent forms of protest: windows

were smashed, paint was thrown, the store was looted, and riot police and 24-hour security guards were required to disperse a number of riotous community members. The celebrated Bristol graffiti artist Banksy created images, across the UK, depicting Tesco flags being hoisted and saluted. Banksy also produced a limited edition print, with all proceeds donated to fund ongoing contributions to planning and judicial review processes, and to support community members arrested while protesting.

A number of local groups, campaigners and bloggers coordinated or publicised these diverse forms of activism. The following manifesto was circulated within this network (<http://notesco.wordpress.com/thecampaign/why-dont-we-want-a-tesco/>). As you read, note the reasons given for opposing the opening of this Tesco store, and the links made between local concerns and broader politicised concerns with corporate practices and consumption spaces.

Why Don't We Want a Tesco?

Tesco and big supermarkets generally have adopted a model which is good for short-term gain, making money for distant shareholders. Unfortunately, this is bad for sustainable economic growth, drives out local business, undermines workers' rights and damages the environment.

- **Local Economy:** A thriving local economy feeds off itself with money being re-circulated between different trades and businesses. This sustains a diverse range of jobs and enterprises. The **money spent in a Tesco**

Box 3.11 continued

would go one way, out of Stokes Croft and out of Bristol. To grow a resilient local economy Stokes Croft needs independent local businesses that buy their products and services in Bristol...

- **A Fair Deal for Producers:** Supermarkets have a history of slashing the price they pay suppliers under the banner of serving us cheap food. Often our food isn't actually that much cheaper and this behaviour is mainly about increasing their margins. The end result is **farmers and suppliers struggling to survive**. Often they get bought out by bigger businesses willing to disregard issues like fair trade, deforestation, and workers' rights.

Tesco are now strongly fighting the introduction of a supermarket watchdog that will stop unfair practices.

- **Playing Dirty:** The big supermarkets have become **increasingly devious** with their marketing giving us the impression food is cheaper than it really is. A couple of tactics that are hard to spot: price-cut campaigns on high-profile products that coincide with a net increase of the price of all their goods; price flexing, changing prices up and down over a number of months so customers don't know whether they're getting a bargain or being ripped off – generally it's the latter (No Tesco 2011: unpaginated).



Box 3.12

Two typologies of consumer behaviour

Two typologies of consumer behaviour are outlined below. As you read, think about the following questions:

- How would you classify yourself using these two typologies?
- Why would your consumption habits be classified in this way?
- How useful are typologies like these for understanding individual consumption practices?

A typology of green consumption

Steffen (2009) classifies consumers into four categories, depending on their commitment to environmental-friendliness:

- **Dark green environmentalists** – advocates of substantial changes to consumer behaviours; often deeply critical of contemporary consumerist norms and practices; they may call for withdrawal from contemporary globalised systems of cultural production, adopt activist lifestyles, and advocate community-level transformations as solutions to environmental problems; they may also seek to persuade others of the need to adopt these actions and changes.
- **Bright green environmentalists** – consumers and activists who believe that environmental friendliness must be accompanied and incentivised by economic prosperity; a belief that entrepreneurial spirit, technological advancement, and new consumer products are the best path to environmental sustainability.



Box 3.13

'Pound for the sound': creating alternative consumption spaces

"Jay, where's the party?" ...

"On the other side of the river – there's a geezer meeting people on the bridge once an hour to take people over."

"What's the place like?"

"It's a knackered old pub, man ... , derelict."

The ... pub had been derelict for several years after the docks had closed. Whoever had broken in and taken the metal grille off the windows had cleaned it up and got the electricity on and fixed the water in the toilets. A bloke on the door repeated to everyone "pound for the sound".

(Chatterton 2003: 217–218)

Chatterton's (2003) research on geographies of urban nightlife in a British city reveals numerous case studies of consumers working to create alternative consumption spaces. He explores the motivations of individuals and groups who – as in the preceding quotation – put on parties, raves, gigs, club nights and events in squatted buildings, derelict spaces, houses or warehouses. These events are often organised on an unlicensed, not-for-profit or cooperative basis. Organisers are often motivated by dissatisfaction with what are seen as limited, homogeneous, inauthentic nightlife opportunities in their hometown, and are often actively politicised and linked to broader anti-consumerist campaigns, and critiques of the state of contemporary urban nightlife. The staging of these events involves considerable work on the part of organisers: consider the work involved in making a derelict pub suitable

- **Ethicals** – occasional to regular purchasers of fairtrade and ethical products; consumers who are concerned about, and wish to know more about, ethical issues associated with their consumption habits; however, these consumers often do not change their consumption habits in the light of this information.
- **Semi-ethicals** – infrequent purchasers of fairtrade and ethical products; consumers who seem to be rarely concerned about ethical issues associated with their consumption habits. These consumers may or may not become more regular consumers of ethical products if these products are cheaper or more readily available.

production of alternative spaces and opportunities for consumption. Consider the example of illicit raves and squat parties in Box 3.13. Events such as these require considerable skill and commitment on the part of individuals and groups typically motivated both by disappointment with the forms and cost of nightlife within their local context and a broader critique of

the commercialisation of urban consumption spaces. These activities often originate, and attempt to proceed, in out-of-sight or derelict spaces, beyond the norms and regulations of contemporary geographies of cultural production. As such they are often viewed and valued as 'underground' or 'alternative' spaces for consumption. The production of 'alternative' spaces

for a party in the example above. This work often entails networks of trust, fundraising, and collaborative work linking diverse committed local individuals:

drawing upon their own energies and resources, creative communities of designers, promoters, musicians, fanzine makers, pirate radio producers, DJs, film-makers, writers, squatters, punks and artists have inhabited the margins, signalling their opposition to corporate activity.

(Chatterton 2003: 216)

Chatterton (2003) explores how the production of such alternative spaces is often linked to subcultural lifestyles and identities, and can be part of a broader repertoire of activities through which consumers can resist and avoid mainstream consumption spaces. He also notes the tactics through which organisers seek to conceal alternative consumption spaces from police and local authorities, or at least regulate the behaviour within the space to the extent that events are tolerated despite their illegality. The 'pound for the sound' night passed off without intervention by the police.

The police drove past a few times ... but did nothing to stop the party. They knew it was contained and out of the way and that it wasn't the type of crowd to cause trouble. And anyway, it would be more hassle than it was worth to kick everybody out.

(Chatterton 2003: 218)

off/for consumption is practically a characteristic of urban spaces: there are countless examples of this kind of alternative cultural production, spanning the work of disgruntled concert promoters, to the practices of young people hanging out beyond the gaze of adults, to opportunities for the consumption of criminalised substances, to the committed and passionate work of anarchist and activist collectives.

3.5 Connecting cultural production and consumption

Chapter 2 introduced the notion of **cultural production**, and the present chapter has explored some issues relating to **cultural consumption**. As we have discussed these cultural processes, we have explained that much research by social scientists, including human geographers, has tended to be *either* production-focused or consumption-focused. That is, much classic (and especially early) work on cultural processes and politics tended to focus on *either* cultural production (how, where, and under what conditions cultural stuff is made) or cultural consumption (what is done with cultural stuff in practice, and how these practices are important). There were usually reasonable and logical reasons for this either/or focus: simply, different groups of researchers – with different motivations, interests, expertise, methods and concepts – tended to gravitate towards research on one topic or the other. However, as a consequence (and as we have reflected in the foci of Chapters 2 and 3), we are left with two rather separate bodies of work, dealing with production and consumption respectively. This can give a sense that cultural production and consumption are quite different, neatly separable, processes. However – and this is a big, important point – it is important to recognise that processes of cultural production and consumption are actually always interconnected in practice.

The interconnectedness of cultural production and consumption has been increasingly recognised by social scientists. Researchers in media and cultural studies have attempted to describe this interconnectedness in different ways. In the remainder of this section we outline six key ways in which relationships between production and consumption have been

theorised. You may find the diagrams in Figure 3.1 helpful in making sense of these concepts. As you read on, think about whether these concepts resonate with your own experience. For each of the concepts shown in Figures 3.1a–f try to identify an example from your own experience as a consumer in contemporary society: do some of the concepts ring truer than others?

a) Production-led understandings of culture

In Chapter 2 we noted the importance of concepts of **hegemony**, **ideology** and **discourse** in many classic studies of cultural production. We introduced a line of influential research in cultural studies that sought to unmask hegemonic, ideological meanings – implicitly reflecting, serving and promoting the interests of those who are most often involved in cultural production – in many popular cultural texts and media. Accounts of this kind tend (see Figure 3.1a) to understand cultural texts and media – and their producers – as overwhelmingly powerful (also consider the power ascribed to corporate cultural producers in ideas of McDonaldisation, Disneyfication and Coca-colonisation in Box 3.6). Conversely, in this kind of account consumers can seem to be rather passive, being influenced, conditioned or duped by hegemonic discourses. A similar logic is commonly found in anxieties about the effects of popular media: for example in media scares about the effects of the latest scary movie, the latest violent computer game, the latest controversial television programme, and so on. Here, again, consumers are positioned as vulnerable recipients of powerful media messages created via contemporary processes of cultural production. Perhaps, as you read this, you can think of a current example, wherever you are, of anxiety about the effects of a cultural text or medium: to what extent do you think this anxiety is justified?

b) Consumption-led understandings of culture

In Chapter 3 we have introduced research exploring the importance of **consumption practices** and the **creative agency** of consumers. We noted how, in distinction to earlier production-led understandings, many social scientists sought to acknowledge, and give voice to, the audiences of popular cultural texts and media (see Figure 3.1b). The recognition of the importance of creative cultural bricolage – using texts, media

and anything else to hand as resources for practices of identity formation – was a major component of work in cultural studies and, subsequently, the **new cultural geography** (see Chapter 1). As we suggested earlier, in the discussion of punk culture, researchers have often been drawn to instances where consumers can be seen to be powerful, autonomous and creative: making their own lifestyles and cultures from resources available to them in contemporary cultural contexts. Sometimes, this has produced accounts in which cultural production processes seem rather incidental to

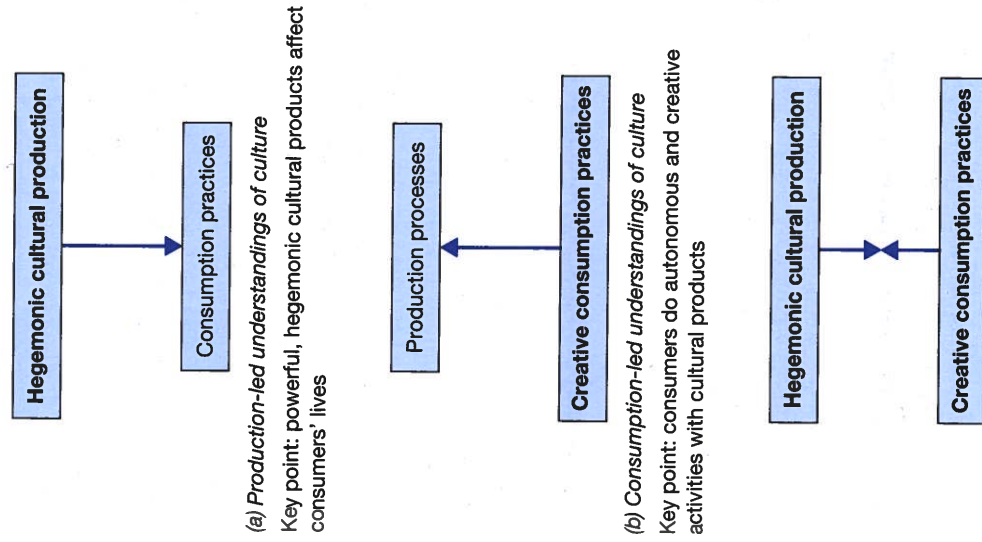


Figure 3.1 Six ways of understanding relationships between cultural production and consumption.

Source: Figure 3.1(e) after *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman*, 1 ed., Sage, London (P. du Gay 1997) Introduction, Circuit of Culture p. 3.

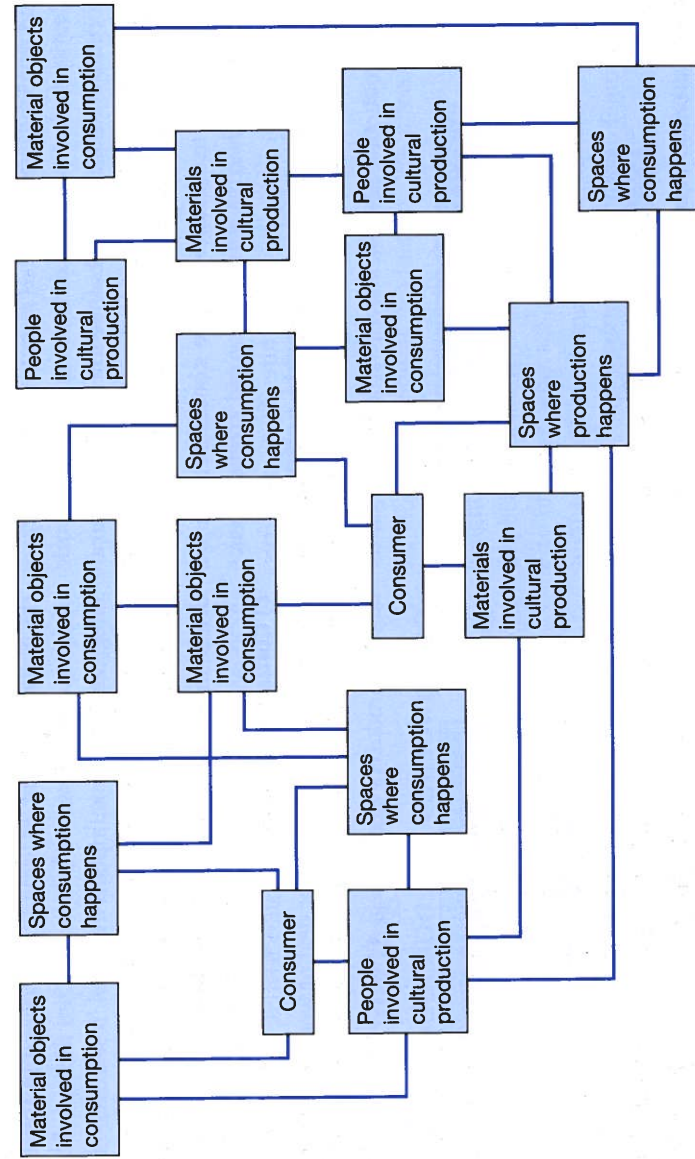
(a) Production-led understandings of culture
Key point: powerful, hegemonic cultural products affect consumers' lives

(b) Consumption-led understandings of culture
Key point: consumers do autonomous and creative activities with cultural products

(c) Culture as dialectic
Key point: there is tension and conflict between the 'top-down' power of cultural producers and the 'bottom-up' agency of consumers

(d) Culture as ambivalent and paradoxical
Key point: Individual consumers may, on the one hand, do some cultural practices that are creative and autonomous but, on the other hand, do some practices that are uncritically aligned with hegemonic cultural power

(e) Culture as a circuit (after du Gay 1997)
Key point: culture is an ongoing, continuous process, in which production and consumption are two key, interconnected elements



(f) Culture as an actor network

Key point: cultural phenomena are very complex processes in which diverse humans, non-humans, communities, spaces and processes are interconnected

Figure 3.1 continued

of consumers (see concept b). We have already noted in this chapter how the work of the CCCS was especially important in this respect, in exploring consumers' lifestyles and their relationships to hegemonic cultural formations. Frequently, this relationship was imagined as a dialectical tension (indeed, often a conflict or struggle) between the 'top-down' power and cultural forms imposed by cultural producers and the 'bottom-up' agency of groups of consumers (see Figure 3.1c). The examples of **subcultural** and **resistive** consumption practices highlighted earlier in this chapter can be seen as neatly exemplifying this kind of agency, and this kind of dialectical cultural clash, between the interests and norms of powerful, elite cultural producers versus the creative and subversive activities of contemporary consumers, who use and refashion hegemonic cultural products to their own ends, in their own ways, to create their own lifestyles and identities. Try to think of an example of this kind of lifestyle activity, wherever you are. Do cultural producers or consumers ultimately have most power in this instance? To what

extent does this kind of lifestyle resist, or to what extent is it compromised by, hegemonic cultural power?

d) Culture as ambivalent and paradoxical

As some of the examples in this chapter have suggested (see Boxes 3.3, 3.8 and 3.9), the relationship between cultural production and consumption is not always a straightforward struggle between hegemonic cultural production and resistive consumer agency (although one could easily get this impression from classic work on subcultures – see Box 3.7). Many cultural theorists now recognise that things are often simply more complex, subtle and puzzling than this: not all cultural producers can be easily painted as hegemonic, ideological bad guys (e.g. in Box 3.3, consider the company that manufactures miniature stoats and hedgehogs for model railway enthusiasts), and not all consumers are necessarily engaged in powerfully purposeful projects of subversive identity formation (consider Boxes 3.8 and 3.9). Moreover, 'consumption' involves acts of creative cultural productivity (and

besides, cultural producers are, themselves, consumers of cultural products too).

This kind of realisation has prompted many cultural theorists to consider the subtleties of cultural processes in practices (see Figure 3.1d). For example, Hall (1980) recognises that many consumers can have an ambivalent relationship to hegemonic culture: on the one hand (and at certain moments) we may be reasonably or unquestioningly satisfied with dominant-hegemonic cultural products; on the other hand (or in certain situations) we may find ourselves in distinct opposition to the ideological meanings inherent in contemporary popular culture. More commonly, he argues, consumers engage in a process of cultural *'negotiation'*, appropriating some elements of hegemonic culture, while ignoring or learning to live with others.

Others have reflected upon some of the quirks and paradoxes inherent in this kind of negotiation (Miles 1998a, 1998b): for example, the way in which consumers can utterly reject some hegemonic discourses and yet apparently unquestioningly live with others, or the way in which apparently 'top-down' and mass-produced hegemonic cultural forms can enable individual experiences and personal meanings (see also Box 3.2). Again, try to think of an example from your own life. How do you 'negotiate' with contemporary popular culture? Which elements do you take on board, which do you reject, and which do you put up with? (And how does this actually happen in practice?)

e) Culture as a circuit

Cultural theorists have increasingly recognised that cultural production and consumption should be understood as interconnected and part of broader global, political and cultural processes. du Gay's (1997) 'circuit of culture' is the most widely cited attempt to model this interconnectedness (see Figure 3.1e). du Gay (1997: 3–4) identifies five major, interconnected processes – production, consumption, as well as representation, identity and regulation – which together

complete a sort of circuit – what we term the circuit of culture – through which any analysis of a cultural text or artefact must pass if it is to be adequately studied... We have separated these parts of the circuit into distinct sections but in the real world they continually overlap and intertwine in complex and contingent ways.

The key point here is the recognition that culture is an ongoing, continuous process, in which production and consumption are just two (albeit key) elements. The circuit of culture also recognises the complex connections between production, consumption and other key processes on the circuit: note that the arrows in Figure 3.1e go in all directions, to evoke the way in which processes can affect one another in practice (often in very complex, iterative ways). Note, too, the point that diverse aspects of any cultural phenomenon must be considered to get any kind of holistic, realistic sense of what is going on. How useful do you find the circuit of culture as a way of making sense of cultural processes? (What would you say are the key pros and cons of this kind of model?)

f) Culture as an actor network

The circuit of culture is widely admired and used as a basis for mapping cultural processes. Certainly, it is a very helpful tool for recognising the interconnected processes that are inherent in all cultural phenomena. However, it is increasingly argued that it is problematic to reduce cultural processes to a neat diagram, with clear, linear boxes and arrows. Here, it is argued that cultural processes are just more complex, messy and contingent than can be represented in this way. In Chapter 10 we shall introduce approaches such as **following the thing**, **material culture studies**, and **actor-network theory**, which have been important for many geographers and social scientists seeking to articulate the complex ways in which commodities are produced. Likewise, many cultural theorists have begun to interpret cultural phenomena as very complex actor networks: heterogeneous associations of humans, non-humans, communities, spaces and processes (see Figure 3.1f). We recommend that you visit Chapter 10 to get to grips with this idea, and then return to this section, to consider the usefulness of these ideas for thinking about cultural production and consumption.

In this section we have sketched six ways in which relationships between cultural production and consumption can be understood. Each of the concepts in Figure 3.1a–f has its strengths and weaknesses, and it is the case that all of them can ring true in certain contexts (hopefully, as you have gone along, you will have

identified how these concepts are relevant, or not, to your own experiences as a cultural consumer). It is not our intention to prescribe which of these models is the best (although, as you read on, it will probably become clear that we favour the recognition of complexity and everydayness in non-representational and actor-network approaches to human geography). Instead, we want to highlight the key point that runs through each of these concepts: the way in which cultural production and consumption are always interconnected, even though they may have been researched and written about by somewhat disparate groups of human geographers in the past. We shall return to this point in Chapter 10, where, in particular, we shall recommend the work of the geographer Ian Cook as important, thought-provoking research that connects processes of commodity production and consumption. Moreover, we hope that our later chapters on **performances** (Chapter 7), **identities** (Chapter 8), **everydayness** (Chapter 9), **emotions** (Chapter 11), **bodies** (Chapter 12) and **space and place** (Chapter 13) will enable you to develop an increasingly complex and sophisticated comprehension of the processes introduced in Chapters 2 and 3.

Summary

- Many classic accounts of cultural processes tended to focus on cultural production (see Chapter 2). To correct this 'productionist bias', many social scientists have explored the lives and geographies of cultural consumers.
- The work of cultural geographers has been important within a turn to explore cultural consumption. There is now a great deal of research that addresses the complex geographies of cultural consumption, exploring, for example, how consumption matters in everyday lives, the production of spaces for consumption, and practices that involve the consumption of particular landscapes or spaces.
- Consumption practices are often very important in the constitution of individual and group identities. For example, a great deal of work by social scientists has explored how consumption practices are central to the lifestyles and spaces of subcultural groups. This work highlights how consumption practices can enable people to deal with, and often resist, hegemonic cultural politics within their everyday lives. However, as we have discussed, accounts of subcultural resistance and creativity can sometimes be a little over-romanticised, and overlook complex geographies and interconnections between production and consumption processes.
- Much classic work on cultural processes and politics tended to focus on *either* cultural production *or* cultural consumption. This can give a misleading sense that cultural production and consumption are neatly separable processes. However – as we map out in Section 3.5 – it is important to recognise that processes of cultural production and consumption are actually always interconnected in practice.

Some key readings

In addition to the following list, we recommend you also refer to the suggested readings at the end of Chapter 10, many of which deal with the consumption of commodities and material objects.

Bell, D. and Valentine, G. (1996) *Consuming Geographies: We are where we eat*, Routledge, London.

An excellent introduction to ideas of consumption and their relevance for human geographers. The book focuses on one particular form of consumption – eating – and explores geographies of eating practices in different spaces and at different scales.

Crewe, L. (2000) Geographies of retailing and consumption. *Progress in Human Geography* 24, 275–290.

This engaging paper challenged geographers to take consumption seriously. The author's specific interest is in retailing and shopping: she argues for geographical work on these topics, drawing on some of the concepts we discuss in Chapters 9–13.

Clarke, D., Doel, M. and Housiaux, K. (eds) (2003) *The Consumption Reader*, Routledge, London.

An excellent collection of classic and more recent essays on consumption. The collection is particularly rich in

conceptual material that illustrates the complexly spatial nature of consumption practices.

Lury, C. (1996) *Consumer Culture*, Polity Press, Cambridge. An excellent introduction to concepts of consumption and consumer culture. The book is wide ranging in its influences, and is particularly strong on concepts of material culture (which we discuss in Chapter 10).

Mansvelt, J. (2005) *Geographies of Consumption*, Sage, London.

An outstanding, detailed reflection on the complexly spatial nature of consumption practices. The book is rich in case studies (both historical and recent), and provides detailed introductions to key thinkers and concepts.

Paterson, M. (2006) *Consumption and Everyday Life*, Routledge, London.

A very readable and engaging introductory text that situates consumption practices in the contexts of everyday

geographies. We particularly enjoy Paterson's way of selecting thought-provoking and very current examples to illustrate and ground concepts relating to consumption.

Seiter, E., Borchers, H., Kreutzner, G. and Warth, E. (eds) (1989) *Remote Control: Television, audiences and cultural power*, Routledge, London.

A classic collection of essays dealing with issues of cultural consumption and audience agency in the context of television viewing. The chapters by Ian Ang, David Morley and John Fiske are widely cited as important in the development of the idea of consumer agency.

Urry, J. (1995) *Consuming Places*, Routledge, London.

As discussed in the chapter, Urry's work on the consumption of places – and his concept of the 'tourist gaze' – have been widely used by geographers. We like the way in which Urry's work attempts to detail how consumption practices – such as gazing – happen in practice, and some of their consequences.