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## Introduction

### Cultural Studies and Anti-Consumerism: A Critical Encounter

A recent mock-article in the satirical US-based newspaper *The Onion* announced that ‘consumer product diversity’ – the sheer number and volume of different commodities out there in the world – has now replaced biodiversity. ‘In the light of the crumbling global ecology’ the parodic news story argued, ‘it is vital that we furnish the diversity of the global marketplace by buying the widest range of consumer products possible’. If we do so, ‘lush, highly developed supermarkets’ will replace the deteriorating ecosystems symbolised by fallen rainforests and melting glaciers.<sup>1</sup> The tone - like so much in *The Onion* - is at once ironic, rueful and critical. Beginning from the precept that we have our head in the sand about the implications of current levels of consumption, it pastiches the right-wing, pro-corporate positions that fuel it, and, at the same time endorses the pleasurable comforts of a robustly distanced perspective that is only too acutely aware of its own lack of power. Its humour is a kind of survival strategy; it touches a sensitive cultural nerve; and it occupies a position that can lend itself to a number of political purposes.

*The Onion*’s article is one example of a widening popular discourse on the problems of contemporary consumerism. It has a specific character, gesturing as it does toward the environmental consequences of the rise of ‘turbo-consumerism’ - a significant increase in the sheer *volume* of goods and services (Honore 2004, Lawson, forthcoming). This phenomenon has been created from new trends like the expansion of electro-digital scrap, more ‘units’ of clothes being bought annually, a ballooning global economy in ‘cheap’ or ‘bargain’ products and services, from toys to airplane flights, and the expansion of new markets - in China, for example, a new Wal-Mart is currently opening every day (Parks, 2007; Ross 2004; Schor 2006; Watts 2006). If a key anxiety around consumerism of the last decade has been trained on the sweatshopped labour behind large commercial brands, as documented by Naomi Klein’s bestselling book *No Logo*, one of the key anti-

consumer anxieties emerging in the present is the environmental consequences of the ballooning economy in 'bargain' and 'cheap' goods. (Klein, 2000; Bosshart, 2006)<sup>ii</sup>

*The Onion's* article also indicates something of the pronounced lack of approval of contemporary consumerism which is currently manifest in our cultural landscape in all kinds of ways, on all kinds of themes, with different forms of intensity ranging from polite disquiet to virulent unrest. A rising awareness of labor conditions in overseas plants, the environmental impact of intensified consumer lifestyles and the global effects of neo-liberal privatization have all stimulated a variety of forms of popular cultural opposition. *Buy Nothing Day* enacts a yearly protest of excessive consumption. TV programmes such as *No Waste Like Home* and *Affluenza* tell us how to consume less. There is an anti-IKEA scene in the film *Fight Club*, a pastiche of the 'caring' corporation in *I Heart Huckabees*, a mixed critique of overconsumption by the affluent in *The Edukators*, even a gestural critique of consumerism in the DreamWorks animation *Over the Hedge*. Islamic brands such as Mecca Cola position themselves as opposed to 'fierce materialistic capitalism'. Sales of fair trade brands have risen by a third worldwide in the past year (FLO 2006). And with direct actions against Esso and Starbucks, the defaced adverts and 'culture jams' of organizations like Adbusters, and films and books like *Supersize Me* and *McLibel*, increasingly belligerent strands of anti-consumerism have elbowed their way into popular culture. Such attitudes, attitudes that are critical of consumerism, are shaped in a variety of popular spheres rather than simply through activism or policy. They are registered in the home as well as the protest, the television programme as well as the supermarket purchase, the book as well as the boycott. And they are increasingly mainstream.

In the context of this activity, it is notable that the subject of anti-consumerism has received relatively little theoretical or empirical attention from practitioners of cultural studies. On the one hand, this relative lack of engagement is surprising given the discipline's historical investments in extending radical politics and exploring the complexities of consumer desire. At the same time, we can observe how certain of cultural studies' central tenets (most notably its opposition to determinist accounts of

consumer culture and its rejection of chest-thumping denunciations of the ‘culture industry’), have at times blinded it to rising popular sentiments among contemporary consumers: that they *are* in fact manipulated, and that intentional, organized opposition to this manipulation is possible. Long championing mundane consumption as always-already radical, some strands of cultural studies have sometimes seemed reluctant to embrace anti-consumerism as a popular source of opposition, as this would seem to imply a return to the stereotyped totalizations of its age-old nemesis: the mass culture critics and the Frankfurt School Marxists. It is to this dilemma that contributors to this special issue of *Cultural Studies* aim to respond. What productive understandings, in other words, might result from a critical encounter between the theoretical and methodological legacies of cultural studies and the scattered contemporary phenomenon which we might term ‘anti-consumerism’? By way of an introduction, and in an effort to provide a framework within which such a question can be posed, we offer a brief reflection on cultural studies’ troubled relationship with one of the left’s favorite intellectual parlor games — the critique of the commodity form.

### Cultural studies and the critique of commodities

[In the commodity] a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a 'phantom objectivity', an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people. (Lukács 1967, p. 83)

With these words Georg Lukács summarized Marx’s well known explanation of the commodity form as an expression of alienated sociability, of a world turned upside down in which, as Marx put it: ‘the definite social relations between men themselves assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things’ (p. 165). It is perhaps not an overstatement to argue that, for many years, cultural studies has taken on as its own project the overturning of the determinism implicit within this view, long maintained within continental cultural Marxist traditions, of the commodity as the embodiment of

suspended, obfuscated or arrested sociability. Indeed, this project has borne many valuable rewards: a powerful and convincing thread of analysis has uncovered a multitude of such relations 'between men' (and perhaps even more between women) not concealed behind but taking place all around and through the commodity, in the everyday spatial and temporal coordinates of its consumption and use, and in the rich diversity of interpretive practices by which commodities come to signify as emblems of identity and articulations of difference. By considering the commodity a pliable, polysemic source of meaning in the semiotics of everyday life, and by reading the consumer as a nuanced bricoleur of commodities understood as symbolic instruments in the struggle for identity, cultural studies has undercut any claim concerning the properties of the commodity *per se* as a monolithic mediator of social experience in general. What has mattered is less commodification as a general process, but specific commodities applied to specific uses, contexts and situated interpretations.

The strengths of this approach are beyond dispute. Inquiries into consumption as a cultural process have emerged from a range of fields from anthropology, sociology, historical studies, political science and economics, many bearing the influential stamp of cultural studies' early inquiries into consumption as a rich semantic domain, and the consumer as creative producer of novel articulations (for a useful discussion, see Miller 1995). The relevance and timeliness of such studies is becoming more apparent as new trends and currents reshape the consumer cultures of advanced capitalist societies. However, a popular suspicion of the commodity as a general form that obscures or inverts 'real' relations between men, and by extension obfuscates a potentially more 'authentic' relation we might otherwise develop with ourselves, has also increasingly come to take a new and impressive presence in the everyday desires and habits of consumers themselves. This tendency is apparent in the glut of products resonating with the discourses of recent anti-globalization and environmental movements, boisterously proclaiming their biodegradability and environmental friendliness, or flaunting the sweatshop-free conditions of the 'relations between men' in the manufacturing process. More than just marketing ploys, such a new seriousness resonates with consumers who often and increasingly bring powerful desires for personal authenticity and transcendence

to the de-fetishization of the commodity form, even in the case of commodities that come in forms that are already partly de-fetishized. Indeed, what we would call 'a fetish for de-fetishization' now constitutes a powerful and pervasive disposition among consumers, an animating new consumerist rhetoric whose mark is increasingly apparent in advertising, social movement discourse and in everyday discussion. Evidence of this sensibility is widespread: from a rising interest in fair trade, through the expansion of slow foods, to neighborhood anti-Wal-Mart mobilizations; through American Apparel's penchant for conspicuous disclosure of its manufacturing conditions, the Body Shop's insistence on the use of indigenously grown ingredients, and Citibank's exhortations to transcend materialism; and by an expanding interest in downshifting, in 'simple living' networks and Voluntary Simplicity circles, which variously prescribe methods for streamlining the soul and cleansing ourselves of the detritus of postmodern life.

The phenomenon of contemporary anti-consumerism presents not only a complex development in a terrain the contours of which cultural studies has long held a rich familiarity, but also an opportunity for the field to build upon its strengths and apply them to emerging new objects, discourses and practices. Such an inquiry does not demand cultural studies practitioners to jettison those assets that have traditionally proven useful in the study of consumption, such as the deep distrust of manipulationist theories or a longstanding devotion to the intrinsic politics of everyday practice. Nor does an inquiry into anti-consumerist politics (which can sometimes be defined by ideologies of personal authenticity and essentialist notions of community) mean that cultural studies has to forfeit its traditional commitment to a politics of anti-foundationalism and a deep reluctance to include essentialist categories in any of its critical frameworks. Cultural studies' anti-essentialism does not consign it to relativism - a point often lost on its most vociferous critics - nor does it prohibit it from uncovering the liberatory potential of movements and cultural articulations bearing the mark of essentialist beliefs. While it is certainly true that many anti-consumerist groups counter the dislocations and wild vertigo of contemporary neo-liberalism with appeals to the authenticity of consumer subjectivity, or to the ontologically innocent sociality of consumers themselves, it is the work of cultural studies to locate these essentialist assertions conjuncturally, as contextual

negations, not as flat-out doctrinal beliefs to which we must subscribe. Neither does an anti-essentialist commitment somehow align cultural studies with the same machinations of capitalism (now expressed in the rebellious, anything-goes triumphalism of the new economy) against which it has traditionally mobilized (Frank 2002). Whilst it is important to recognise that relativism, in and of itself, does not necessarily mark a critical position for cultural studies in the face of neo-liberal marketisation, clearly critiques of anti-essentialism do not necessarily stand between the critical aims of cultural studies and the activities and strategic essentialisms of contemporary anti-consumerist movements.

One of the key objectives of this issue is to confront the thorny question of the politics of cultural studies as it relates to the broader effects of consumerism head-on. In interrogating anti-consumerism, it is not the aim of our contributors to effect either an easy drift to the right nor a lurch back into some zone of pre-theoretical certainty. Rather, the aim is to use the critical resources of the present to arrive at better understandings of the dynamics between consumerism and power: understandings which can deal with both the complexities of pleasure, status and power that consumer culture brings on the one hand, and its involvement in social disparity, ecological devastation and cultural harm on the other.

Cultural studies clearly has unique resources to offer the subject, given its deft sensibility for the manner in which broad structures of power are negotiated or articulated with everyday (and not-so-everyday) cultural practices. Such treatments can offer us the ability to make powerful interrogations of the processes by which forms of consumption produce meaning in people's lives. As Juliet Schor puts it, the key is not to disparage or ignore symbolic value, but rather to think about what this symbolism *means*, where it is coming from, and to explore how different types of symbolic meaning might be created through more egalitarian processes. Cultural studies can allow us to consider how commercialism has proved a crucial tool in the dissemination of meaning; and how disparagement of the commercial has often been made because of its articulation to the feminine and the lower-class (Bowlby 1985, Husseyn 1987, Nava 1992, 1996).

The constructive encounter between cultural studies and recent anti-consumerist movements we envisage here draws on existing strains of activity that includes in particular the work of Andrew Ross (in books like *No Sweat* (1994) and *Low Pay, High Profile: The Global Push for Fair Labour* (2004)) alongside earlier inquiries into the possibilities of political consumerism as indicated by texts such as Mica Nava's *Changing Cultures* (1992). Moreover, as the contributions that follow make clear, other disciplinary cross-pollinations (or border raids) with areas including philosophy, social geography, political science and media studies can serve to expand the resources available for the analysis of anti-consumerist outlooks and mobilizations. However, before we elaborate on such specific examples, we need to delineate and clarify what we mean by 'anti-consumerism' itself.

#### Anti-Consumerism: Toward a Definition

What exactly is anti-consumerism? Is it indeed necessary, the reader may well ask, that we suffer yet another neologism crafted in the Ivory Tower's left-leaning workshops? On the most general level, we might perhaps say that anti-consumerism is an ethical standpoint which results from a highly contextual and variable hybridization of any number of thoughts and sentiments, rhetorics, postures, discourses, modes of expertise and institutional mobilizations, which combine at various historical junctures to posit some larger meaning or value outside of or beyond the world of mass produced goods and services. It is a grafting together of a range of positions, traditions, fundamentalisms, rhetorics, group memberships and networks around an opposition to the commodity form. It is, in short, a discursive formation, in the sense developed by Michel Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*: it is a contingent unity composed of a broad set of existing social movements and their discourses, which range from religious, and traditional groups to ecologists, labor and anti-globalization activists and cultural vanguards (Foucault 1997, pp. 31-39). It might draw somewhat serendipitously from Eastern mysticism, New Age therapies, Western dietary and fitness regimes, left social theory and economics, nationalisms and fundamentalisms of various species, cultural vanguardism, myriad strands of individualism, communitarianism and modernism.



While their repertoires are disparate and in many cases incommensurable, anti-consumerist practices resonate with each other across their shared regard for the consumer market as an obstruction to some other ethical, moral, political, social or cultural objective. Indeed, anti-consumerism as a discursive formation therefore involves a cluster of articulations, in the sense developed by Laclau and Mouffe and popularised by Stuart Hall (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Hall 1997a, 1997b), certain of which resonate with others (as in the case of, say ecological feminism, left anti-globalization struggles and ethical culinary practices), while others threaten to break out into direct contest (as with religious critiques of consumer hedonism and countercultural anti-corporatism). As we explore below, it is important to be specific about the politics of the various practices that might be associated with the term. For some articulations to anti-consumerism clearly stretch the category to breaking point; for example, a recent book by Rod Dreher, an editorial writer for the *Dallas Morning News*, entitled *Crunchy Cons: How Birkenstocked Burkeans, Gun-Loving Organic Gardeners, Evangelical Free-Range Farmers, Hip Homeschooling Mamas, Right-Wing Nature Lovers, and Their Diverse Tribe of Countercultural Conservatives Plan to Save America (or At Least the Republican Party)* (Dreher 2006). The title itself presents an itinerary of unlikely hybridizations from across the cultural and political spectrum. ‘We made fun of our liberal friends,’ Dreher explained to a *Washington Post* reviewer, ‘until we actually tasted the vegetables they got from the farm. We're converts now, and since you asked, I don't remember being told when I signed up for the GOP that henceforth, I was required to refuse broccoli that tastes like broccoli because rustic socialist composters think eating it is a good idea’ (Stuever 2006). Similarly, in the UK, the Conservative Party has attempted to reinvented itself by promoting an image of itself as the ecologically-minded party. Articulations to and from anti-consumerism, it is clear, can take a very wide range of forms.

The student of anti-consumerism is forced to forego the search for consolidated agendas, doctrines and firmly demarcated constituencies and to focus instead on the linkages, appropriations, coalitions and contextualized applications of many varied anti-market discourses and mobilizations. But it is also in this spirit, as Andrew Ross points out in

this issue, that anti-consumerism can be understood as a useful term providing a point of mobilisation for a vast range of grievances against, and attempts to change, consumer culture, as well as providing a means to attract additional constituencies that a language more explicitly redolent of ‘politics’ simply cannot reach:

While ‘anti-capitalist’ critique is often considered too redolent of the old left, anti-consumerism is one of the most visible, culturalist faces of the global justice activism, embodied in the rallying cry of *No Logo*, the title of Naomi Klein’s generative book (Klein, 2000). As a tendency, anti-consumerism cuts a broad swathe – from the ‘pure church’ advocates who extol the virtues of an alternate economy (based on barter, recycling, or second-hand consumption, and self-sufficiency) to the more urbane ‘adbusters’ and ‘culture jammers’ who do battle on the field of commercial icons and symbols.

Within this broad swathe, however, it is possible to discern two very general tendencies, the delineation of which can help organize the variable and sometimes contrasting objectives of the authors in this issue. A distinction can be made between, on the one hand, anti-*consumption* (consuming less) and anti-*consumerism* (consuming differently). Anti-consumerist movements are not opposed to consumption *per se*, but seek alternatives to existing forms of consumer capitalism. According to such usage, ‘consumerism’ retains its meaning as a distinct ideology of (late) capitalism. To be anti-consumerist in this regard is to attempt to challenge the current mode of consumer capitalism, as evidenced by boycotts and legal challenges posed by the *No Logo* generation to hyper-capitalist behemoths like Nike and McDonalds. It could also include Fair Trade practices, which - although the extent of their radicalism is controversial, as Matthias Zick Varul argues in this volume - do critique and challenge international trade rules; or by the consumption of goods originating in producer co-operatives. Anti-*consumption*, on the other hand, can be used to denote a position against consumption *per se*, regardless of the socio-cultural economic system in which the product is used up. To put it bluntly, anti-consumption requires us to consume less in general. Examples in this category include Stop Shopping activism and the ‘voluntary simplicity’ movement of the

United States, both of which reflect ascetic and anti-materialist sentiments entrenched in pockets of radical communities since at least the 1970s. Such movements and networks, which often have a close connection to a wide variety of ascetic discourses on ‘simple living’, have sought in various ways to surpass the traditional aims of other social movements by including ethical projects of self-development and personal experience in their practical goals. These anti-consumption discourses are typically articulated together with any of a variety of other politics and practices, many of which dovetail with other anti-consumerist aims (such as a left-oriented environmentalism and alter-globalization) and many of which do not (such as Dreher’s ‘crunchy con’ Republicans or David Cameron, the leader of the UK’s Conservative Party, flaunting his environmental credentials). The lines between the two spheres can also become indistinct as they hybridize: the *Buy Nothing Christmas* campaign, for example, simultaneously provides an injunction to consume less and offers a critique of capitalist commercialization.

To complicate matters further, alongside the permutations of these distinctions there is a further strand woven into the meaning of ‘consumerism’ in Anglo-American societies which refers to the movement for consumers’ rights (this, for example, is how Matthew Hilton uses the term in the title of his history of the movement in the UK, *Consumerism*). Such a tradition is expressed in the value-for-money ethos of magazines like *Which?* — a ‘consumerist’ tradition that, as Juliet Schor points out in this issue, often embodies a very rational, male, value-oriented perspective (one which can ‘see through’ the hucksterism of Madison Avenue, for example) and seek to equip a consumer imagined as rational and sovereign with fuller knowledge. Ironically, ‘consumerism’ as a movement which crusades on behalf of the consumer, can, in some forms (such as Ralph Nader’s work or some of the work of the National Consumer Council) be a discourse which acts against ‘consumerism’ as an ideology, and therefore be ‘anti-consumerist’ in this sense. Understanding how particular practices can be distinctively and specifically articulated across this varied field, then, is a key objective of this issue, alongside the process of identifying broader tendencies and theorizing complexities.

‘Anti-consumerism’ is therefore a site of a range of complex articulations, or ‘a broad church’ in Ross’s terms, and the articles in this collection seek to sort out and clarify some of its intertwined strands and histories. The contributors deal with the subject not only by looking at activism and policy but also by attempting to situate the complexities of the subject historically and considering the subjectivities involved in its constitutions. They consider, for example, the apparent contradictions of commodities and corporations which proclaim their anti-consumerist status within standardized discourses of consumption, advertising and brand identity, and discuss the often problematic status of hedonism in relation to anti-consumerist practices. There is often sizeable disagreement between the positions taken in these various papers, and it is in the spirit of what Chantal Mouffe terms ‘agonistic debate’ that we include such a wide range of opinions (Mouffe, 2005)

The issue begins with an appraisal of the difficulties encountered by practitioners of cultural studies in their approach to consumerism. Angela McRobbie suggests that much contemporary feminist media and cultural studies has ‘suspended its critique of consumer culture’, leading to a mode of critique that is more often than not complicit with neo-liberalism. She offers a reflexive excavation of cultural studies’ work in this area – including her own - and identifies routes that would help generate more nuanced understandings of changing gender dynamics and their relationship to neo-liberal cultural economies. Jeremy Gilbert suggests that we can deploy post-structuralist and post-Marxist philosophy as well as parts of our tradition – Deleuze and Derrida alongside Raymond Williams - to critique the hegemony of consumerism and competitive individualism ‘without succumbing to the temptations of too much socialist nostalgia’. He suggests that much recent cultural studies work on consumerism has quite rightly been involved in critiquing mid-century discourses of austerity, restraint, and patriarchal normativity, but that such a reflex is now anachronistic, and we need to develop critiques against the competitive neoliberal individualism of the current era.

The question of the relationship of consumerism to environmentalism is opened up by a number of the contributors. Kate Soper tackles the issue of the wedding of anti-

consumerism and sustainable consumption to ideas of self-denial and austerity, and argues that we might, instead, locate the strain of a 'hedonist imaginary' within alternative contemporary practices of consumption and anti-consumerism. Drawing on her earlier philosophical analyses of the place of 'needs' in Marx's thought, she argues for a more nuanced and capacious philosophical understanding of 'needs' than that presented in subsequent strains of Marxist cultural theory or in postmodern celebrations of consumer culture as a resource for fantasy and self-styling. Similarly, Lyn Thomas addresses the question of how consumer needs are negotiated in relation to environmental concerns about over-consumption. However, Thomas chooses to explore this not by focusing on clearly contestatory voices and practices (such as anti-capitalist or environmental campaigns) but on the more ambivalent site of British lifestyle and reality television. By examining how the questions of downsizing, down-shifting and quality of life is addressed by the genre she labels as 'eco-reality', she makes a case for 'ambivalent consumerism' to be understood (in good cultural studies fashion) as more of a discursive cultural continuum than a practice merely construed by a self-defined cadre of full-time activists.

This cultural continuum of what it means to 'consume differently' is theorised in the subsequent collection of articles that focus on modes of consumption that are explicitly defined as offering 'alternatives'. Using the case study of research into fair trade consumption, Clive Barnett, Nick Clarke, Paul Cloke and Alice Malpass address the question of how to theorise the relationship between individual consumers and neoliberalism, arguing that the analytical model of governmentality is problematic in that it replicates some of the individualistic tenets of neoliberalism itself. They argue for a shift from individualised understandings of ethical consumers to a conception in which ethical consumers can be understood as having interactive, communicative accountability fashioned in specific places and spaces and in the company of others. Sam Binkley demonstrates how Zygmunt Bauman's thesis on 'liquid modernity' might be adapted to develop a theory of 'alternative' forms of consuming as 'liquid consumption'. Binkley argues that many anti-consumerist practices and sensibilities shape personal identities by appealing to a decommodified sociability, such as slow food and downsized interior

décor, but that these examples of ‘fetishised de-fetishisation’ are often not capable of reinforcing the anti-consumerist effects they aim to consolidate. ‘Alternative’ forms of consumption are also considered by Sharon Zukin, but in the context of social/cultural capital and public space. Her article tackles the issue of the consumption of authenticity and the problems of gentrification, displacement and exclusion that become bound up with such forms of mobility.

A further strand of this issue addresses forms of anti-consumerist activism and their complex relationships with politics, notions of globalism and consumerism itself. In interview, Juliet Schor discusses the question of how academic work in this area can intersect with and be a form of activism alongside the issue of constructing alternatives to turbo consumerism. Liz Moor and Jo Littler consider how the ‘transparency effect’ of the clothing company American Apparel negotiates with anti-consumer activism, as a brand aimed at hip young metropolitan consumers that promotes itself on the basis of its purportedly fair labour practices, refusing outsourcing strategies in order to be ‘sweatshop free’. They discuss its problematic negotiations with ‘fourth worlds’, or the zones of exclusion Castells terms ‘the black holes of informational capitalism’, interrogating the implicitly gendered and racialised cultural economies through which its brand of caring capitalism is constructed.

Next, Michelle Micheletti and Dieter Stolle explore how the expanding discourse on social justice is being fashioned through what they call a ‘push and pull’ mechanism between alter-globalisation activists and corporations desperate to improve their image. Drawing on research into political consumerism in Sweden and the role of online activism, the paper outlines the changing landscape of consumerism by and in relation to demands for social justice. Finally, Andrew Ross appraises the successes and missed opportunities of recent anti-sweatshop activism. Taking a more critical line than Micheletti and Stolle on the promises of ‘corporate social responsibility’, Ross’s thorough and poignant analysis points out that we need to be much more critical of the vacuous promises of CSR and to find ways of connecting and articulating the environmentalist concerns of downsizers with the focus on labour rights of the anti-sweatshop movement.

His conclusion, in arguing that the great challenge is for the two main facets of anti-consumerism - the red and the green - to find better ways of pulling together, echoes the logic of this issue of *Cultural Studies* as a whole.

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<sup>i</sup> 'Consumer Product Diversity Exceeds Biodiversity'. *The Onion* online, Issue 34: 12,  
Accessed June 2006. <http://www.theonion.com/content/node/38901>

<sup>ii</sup> The cheap product has been with us for a long time, but its meanings are shifting again  
in an age where the middle-class are embracing cheap goods as a savvy strategy to obtain  
a more affluent lifestyle in other spheres of the mixed cultural economies of their lives,  
and lower-class consumers embracing increased production to provide what David  
Bosshart calls 'a feeling of minimal empowerment'.