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Geographies of Consumption

Buying, using and disposing of commodities connect us to other people and other places in ways which may be beyond our imaginings. Commodities are more than just objects; they are shifting assemblages of social relations, which take place and assume form and meaning in time and space. For many individuals, consumption is both a visible and a pervasive part of everyday life in contemporary society. A trip to a market, a store, a fast food restaurant, the movies, or a local trader may be a taken-for-granted aspect of everyday life for many, but these actions play a critical role in the meaningful creation and expression of place. This book is about geographies of consumption: the ways in which relationships between people, things and places are constituted around the sale, purchase and use of goods and services. It is also about the perspectives geographers have used to interpret these things.

Consumption is fundamental to how geographies are made and experienced in contemporary society. From bodies to nations, cities and homes, through markets and retail outlets, this book examines how consumption occurs, through what processes and in what places. Geographies, as the spatial expression of social and physical processes, are in turn integral to how consumption processes are constituted and articulated. A key theme is the necessity of acknowledging the situatedness of consumption processes, that is, how they take and make meaning as they are created and expressed across space and time. A diverse range of case studies will be used to demonstrate that consumption processes are fluid and contextual, fabricated differentially and unevenly across space. The emphasis of this text, then, is on how geography matters to consumption and how matters of consumption are also geography matters (Clarke et al., 2003: 86).

Geography and Consumption Matter

Consumption has become 'one of the grand narratives of the second half of the twentieth century' (Mort, 2000: 7). The increased visibility of sites of consumption and the proliferation of consumer goods and images have led social commentators to suggest consumption rather than production is now the driving force in contemporary society (Corrigan, 1997). Consumption is so integral to the constitution of contemporary society that it is almost impossible



FIGURE 1.1 Advertising and shopping around London's Piccadilly Circus. Processes and practices of consumption are integral to the constitution of contemporary society

to avoid in capitalist social formations (Bocock, 1993). In fact there are 'few areas of everyday life not affected by or linked to processes and practices of consumption' (Edwards, 2000: 5), and being, working and living in the developed world are dominated by individuals' relationships with consumer goods (Miles, 1998a; Ritzer, 1999) (see Figure 1.1). Consumerism, whereby individuals (both producers and consumers) become enmeshed in the process of acquiring commodities, and formulate their goals in life in relation to the acquisition of commodities, is argued to be so ubiquitous in contemporary societies that it has become 'a way of life' (Miles, 1998a).

The increasing volume, variety and incursion of commodities in everyday life, growing commodification, greater social division and self-reflexivity have been associated with a hypothesized postmodern condition. In the postmodern epoch, commodities are assumed to have a more significant role in mediating social life than was previously the case. Commodities and commodity relations are promoted in popular culture and media as offering liberatory, hedonistic and narcissistic possibilities – being keys to self-realization, happiness and fulfilment (Douglas, 2000). Consumption practices and preferences are also instrumental in identity formation, self-expression and the development of lifestyle cultures built around such things as diet, fashion, music and leisure tastes (Featherstone, 1987: 55).

Landscapes of consumption are said to be increasingly ubiquitous and visible in contemporary society. The increasing incursion of processes of commodification

in everyday life is also promoting de-differentiation, or the blurring of previously discrete consumer activities such as shopping and banking services, theme parks and malls, medical centres and shops (Bryman, 1999). In an era in which sites of consumption are increasingly rationalized settings, the theming of places becomes a means of 're-enchantment' – replacing the impersonality and instrumentalism of consumption (Ritzer, 1999). Consumers' practices are changing too, with consumers increasingly servicing more of their own needs (Gershuny and Miles, 1983) and consumption being encountered more and more in dematerialized forms as services and representations and via non-material sites such as the Internet (Slater, 1997). The diffusion of information technology, time-space compression, and the emergence of networking and deepening communication and flows of information through electronic media are viewed as symptomatic of the network society (Castells, 1996) (see Box 1.1).

**BOX 1.1 GEOGRAPHIES MATTER TO CONSUMPTION:
eBAY – THE WORLD AT YOUR FINGERTIPS**

eBay, the Internet auctioneer site, was set up in the USA by eBay chairman Pierre Omidyar in 1995 and has surpassed Amazon.com, the online bookstore as the world's most popular shopping site (Measure, 2001). The site is a marketplace for the sales of goods and services with tens of millions of registered users globally. Anything can be put up for sale as long as it is not on the list of 'prohibited, questionable or potentially copyright infringing goods'. Commodities for sale range from antiques, collectibles and crafts to music, real estate, vehicles and industrial and commercial services. As part of eBay's philosophy of connecting people, users were initially engaged in bidding person to person (a process traditionally occurring at spaces such as garage sales and open-trader markets), but now they are also able to make purchases at a fixed price.

Speed of listing is one of the benefits of the sites, with the seller being charged a non-refundable insertion fee and for additional listing options which may help promote the item. eBay notifies the buyer and seller via e-mail at the end of the auction if a bid exceeds the seller's minimum price, and the buyer and seller complete the transaction independently of eBay. eBay does assist with processing credit card payments through its PayPal system, but there may be a number of hidden costs for potential consumers which include shipping costs, goods and services taxes, payment charges and import duties.

For eBay consumers, this virtual world of communication, information and exchange would appear to annihilate space, yet the 'death' of geography has not resulted (Dodge and Kitchin, 2000; see also Chapter 6). Though cyberspace is not a physical space it still retains a geography, and is constituted and understood in relation to material things and places. The creation of cyberspace for exchange of commodities may involve new connections between local and global and the creation of spaces which are simultaneously local and global, but producers and consumers are still located in particular places. Potential consumers, for example, may choose to enter eBay through

these place based portals to avoid costs associated with importation, monetary exchange, and delivery. Consumers are even described in terms of online communities – terminology which has been drawn from the linkages of people to territorial spaces. Buyers' choice of opening bids may be framed in relation to estimated costs in non-virtual markets, and the goods and services exchanged virtually generally travel across material sites and nodes (such as postal or freight services) from buyers to sellers. Issues of access to Internet bandwidths, computer and electronic technologies, and constraints on payment options are also related to 'material' geographies. Thus even in cyberspace, a space of hypermobile flows of information, geographies matter to consumption, influencing how it is understood as a meaningful space, how it is experienced, and the forms through which consumption/production relations are articulated.

While in the developed world such changes would suggest that people construct much of their everyday experience in relation to consumer landscapes and their actions as consumers (Sack, 1988), consumption also remains important in the lives of those who do not inhabit these places. Whether understood in terms of abundance or lack, need or desire, the meanings of commodities and consuming practices are not fixed and bounded in place but are fluid, fractured and changing across space in an increasingly interconnected world. Consumption in a globalizing world is thus unevenly constituted, 'characterized by stark inequalities of poverty and wealth, of hunger and malnutrition in some places and superabundance in others, of extravagance and waste amid scarcity and need' (Jackson, 2002c: 283). Such disparities are not unconnected (see Box 1.2): they cannot simply be mapped across developed and developing countries, but are features of the geographies of nation-states (whether classified as developed or developing), regions and localities too.

**BOX 1.2 CONSUMPTION MATTERS TO GEOGRAPHIES:
E-TRASH AS A WORLD OF WASTE**

Consuming commodities can be thought of as a relational process, rather than an isolated act because commodities can be conceptualized as bundles of social relations (Watts, 1999). Commodities are purchased, exchanged and devalued over time and across space. They are given meaning in complex networks of production and consumption through marketized and non-marketized processes. A consequence of the purchase of computer and electronic commodities, for example, is the geographies that arise from the use, disposal, storage and recycling of such material. In the USA replacement of electronic and computer equipment is often easier and cheaper than repair (Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, 2004). Despite the 'take-back' programmes of some manufacturers,

opportunities and incentives for recycling remain low and these commodities often end up as stockpiles of e-waste. In addition the USA has not signed the 1998 Basel Convention prohibiting the export of hazardous waste from the wealthiest OECD countries to all non-OECD nations and is the primary exporter of e-waste to China. Though the Chinese government has sought to stem the flow of e-waste by vowing to turn away illegal waste from its ports, the trade continues, encouraged by China's cheaper labour costs and less stringent occupational and environmental regulations (Chandran, 2002). In Guangdong Province on China's south coast an estimated 100,000 people scavenge through e-waste. An industry of traders, drivers and sorters has sprung up around the reprocessing of computer, television, mobile phone and other electronics and technology based refuse (Ni and Zhang, 2004). In the Guiyu area of the province, local entrepreneurs buy the trash in bulk and migrant labour is employed to break or burn it into component parts which are then onsold and re-used. Workers are usually unprotected from the damaging effects of lead, cadmium, toner, mercury, barium and beryllium common in hi-tech waste, yet the reprocessing industry provides a livelihood for local inhabitants and has been a critical part of the local economy of villages in Guiyu for the last decade (Ni and Xiuying, 2004). Thinking about e-trash connections between the US and China illustrates how consumption in one place may be linked to other places and peoples through complex networks in which production and consumption are mutually constituted. Processes and practices of consumption do matter to how geographies are created and expressed.

Commodification and the symbolic and material practices and spaces of consumption are seen as part of a globalization, remaking landscapes and transforming local cultures. Under 'the march of monoculture' social diversity and difference are said to be erased (Norberg-Hodge, 1999b: 194), with some commentators arguing local cultures, practices and spaces are subsumed under processes of commodification, Americanization (see Figure 1.2), Coca-colonization (Norberg-Hodge, 1999a), McDonaldization (Ritzer, 1993) and Disneyization (Bryman, 1999).

Yet the narrative of consumer culture presented here is a partial one. While commodities and their images, consuming practices and sites of consumption have a greater significance in everyday life for many people, the contemporary world is one in which consumption practices, places, knowledges and meanings have often been expressed in uneven, contradictory and hybrid ways. Geographical research has provided a foil to the generalized descriptions and universal processes implied by notions of contemporary consumer culture. It has provided insights into the ways in which people, places and things may facilitate or negate such processes across space and into how processes of consumption are made, manifested and vary across space. Through studying consumption, geographers have provided fascinating insights into ways in which economy and culture, the symbolic and the material, collide, demonstrating how



FIGURE 1.2 Eat American in Moscow. The globalization as homogenization thesis (see Chapter 6) suggests places are becoming increasingly similar, citing evidence for this in concepts such as the Americanization of places and consumption objects and practices

the complex meanings and expressions of consumption in place are in turn connected to other spaces and scales, and making a critical contribution to the relationship between society and space.

Conceptualizing Consumption

Consumption can be understood as the *complex sphere of social relations and discourses which centre on the sale, purchase and use of commodities*. Social relations comprise interactions, relationships, encounters and practices between people, places and things, and the outcomes and events which stem from them. Such relations may form structures and institutions (for example, family, state or firm) but they also operate at the level of the individual. Discourses refer to the ideas, knowledge and meanings inscribed in language, material objects and social practices by which people make sense of the world (for example, discourses of ageing which present consumerism as a means of retaining youth). People construct powerful discourses through their actions and interpretations but discourses also regulate social thought and action. Conceptualizing consumption as more than an act of purchase enables one to encapsulate a range of material and symbolic practices and meanings which centre on the sale, choice and selection of goods and services, and their purchase, use, reuse, or resale and disposal.

A commodity is an object of consumption and exchange (Lee, 1993: x). Commodities may be goods (concrete and tangible objects) or services (bungee jumping, dry cleaning), people (even body parts) and ideas (such as intellectual property and patents). This book focuses on processes of consumption which revolve around the purchase, use, reuse and disposal of goods and services by final consumers – individuals who will utilize the goods as ends in themselves (for example, food, apparel, holidays). This is in contrast to consumption which occurs as inputs to the production process (as in a firm's purchase of legal or financial services, or a manufacturer's purchase of cardboard for packaging). The spheres of production and consumption are interdependent: consumption is not simply about the using up of things, but also involves the production of meaning, experience, knowledge or objects – the outcome of which may or may not take the commodity form. Similarly producing objects, experiences, artefacts etc. usually involves consumption of things.

The concept of a commodity is central to understanding consumption. In capitalist societies, commodities exchanged through an economic system assume a use value (the capacity to satisfy a want or need) and an exchange value (the ability to command other commodities in exchange). Lee suggests that the essence of all consumer goods 'can be found in the fact that first and foremost they are commodities' (1993: xi) and that it is this aspect which gives them their distinctive character or soul. While production for profit will give a commodity a distinctive meaning or essence, meanings of objects also arise from their non-commodified moments. Geographers have been influenced by the ideas of Appadurai and Kopytoff, who have highlighted the ways in which commodities are exchanged and circulated outside, alongside and even in contradiction to capitalist relations of market exchange (Box 1.3).

BOX 1.3 THE SOCIAL LIFE OF THINGS: COMMODIFIED AND DECOMMODIFIED MOMENTS

In his book *The Social Life of Things* (1986) anthropologist Arjun Appadurai advocated a 'new' way of viewing the circulation of commodities. Instead of focusing on the forms and functions of exchange, he argued important insights could be gained into the politics of the link between exchange and value by studying the social lives of commodities (1986: 3). Appadurai suggested that understanding the meanings of commodities, their forms, uses and trajectories, could 'illuminate their human and social context' (1986: 5). Igor Kopytoff (1986) in the same volume utilized Appadurai's discussion of the social life of things to show how the value and meaning of things may alter over time. He noted how things became commoditized and de-commoditized as they moved in and out of the commodity state. Kopytoff noted, for example, how a person upon capture for the slave trade became a non-person and a potential commodity.

Once purchased as a slave and reinserted into a particular social setting he/she became rehumanized, but always remained a potential commodity whose value could be realized by sale. The same object may also be viewed by one person as a commodity but by another as something far removed from the sphere of capitalist commodity exchange. Both Appadurai and Kopytoff signalled the importance of the social trajectories and biographies of commodities, a point extended by geographers who have argued that commodities also have spatial lives (Jackson and Thrift, 1995).

Commodification denotes the extension of the commodity form to goods and services previously existing outside the market (Jackson, 1999) but commodities are also objects of cultural symbolic exchange. Anthropologists Douglas and Isherwood (1978) suggest commodities are an important means of communication in contemporary society and constitute a 'non-verbal medium for the human creative faculty' both conveying and constituting cultural meaning (1978: 62). They argue 'goods that minister to physical needs, food or drink – are no less carriers of meaning than ballet or poetry' (1978: 72). Thus consumption is 'as much an act of imagination' as it is the using up of things, with spatial and temporal contexts making the link between an object and its meaning (Goss, 1999a: 117). The process of ascribing meaning to objects, and the significance objects have for people, can be thought of in terms of material culture (see Figure 1.3 and Box 1.4).



FIGURE 1.3 Commodities are given meaning as they are incorporated in everyday life. Here using a bottle is a ritual of enchantment which helps turns the commodity (a doll) into 'a baby'

Commodity meanings are constituted through a diverse range of consumption practices including rituals of exchange (choice of purchase and presentation, gift giving), possession (e.g. cleaning, displaying, grooming, discussing) and disinvestment (removing, reusing, relinquishing or discarding) (McCracken, 1988). However, meanings are already inscribed in commodities prior to their consumption and it is often the characteristics of a commodity rather than its utilitarian aspects which are consumed, as in the anticipation of a forthcoming purchase or event (Miles, 1998a).

BOX 1.4 MATERIAL CULTURE: WHY, WHERE AND HOW THINGS COME TO MATTER

Material culture can be thought of as the tangible creations (such as artefacts, buildings, crafts, décor, art, tools, weapons, furniture) that society makes, uses and shares. Understanding material culture involves asking questions about how, why and where things come to matter, and how in turn things come to influence the construction of meaningful and power laden social relationships. In his 1987 book *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* Daniel Miller suggests that contemporary societies are increasingly established around the presence of objects, with objects, society and culture being mutually constituted. Like Appadurai and Kopytoff (see Box 1.3) Miller dismissed a concept of goods and services in which value exists only in their commodified form. Refuting a view of consumption as intrinsically negative, fetishist or alienating Miller also draws on Simmel's (1978 [1907]) work on objective culture¹ to emphasize the positive and meaningful ways in which consumption can contribute to expression of self and relationships with others in everyday life (Ritzer et al., 2000). As a consequence of this, spaces become more than just place settings for consumption of objects and services. For example, Miller (2001b) describes how he is 'haunted' by his inability to redecorate his house in a style in which it was constructed – one he aspires to, but cannot achieve. He is also let down by the material environment by which he presents himself to others. In this sense commodities as objects acquire agency; as Miller says, 'Where we can't possess we are in danger of being possessed' (2001b: 120). Material culture also has consequences which may not be an expression of one's agency or which may be unintended (such as when people read differing notions of taste into one's choice of home furnishings) (2001b: 109–11). Miller's ideas have been influential in geography, particularly with regards to ethnographic studies of consumption sites and the socialities associated with them.

Consumption, as the previous discussion has demonstrated, is not a singular, monolithic or static phenomenon but a complex sphere of relations and discourses which are actively (but not always knowingly) assembled, reproduced and expressed in diverse ways in place. Practices and objects of consumption and

their meanings also 'travel', occupying different social and spatial 'moments' and being transformed over time and across place. These spatialized trajectories, the biographies and geographies of commodities, are themselves consumed and produced (Watts, 1999). Geographers have provided critical insights into the ways this occurs and into the landscapes and processes which result.

Geographies of Consumption: Critical Social Science

Attention to consumption by social scientists appears to have emerged as a response to the development of a consumer society, commodification, and the predominance of consumption in structuring everyday life in the contemporary world (Edwards, 2000). Given the disparities between First and Third Worlds it is perhaps not surprising that academic interest in consumption, both supportive and critical of the notion of a consumer society, burgeoned in the 1990s (Jackson, 2002c). This is also the case for geography.² The publication of Sack's *Place, Modernity, and the Consumer's World* in 1992 was critical in establishing links between consuming practices and geographies (see Chapter 3). Such was interest in consumption that by 1995 Gregson was able to entitle her review article for the journal *Progress in Human Geography* 'And now it's all consumption?'. The 1990s also marked the publication of a number of significant edited social science collections on consumption (Burrows and Marsh, 1992; Edgell et al., 1996; Miller, 1995). These volumes sought to highlight the significance of consumption in the structuring of social life and to present consumption as a legitimate and worthwhile field of academic enterprise. In seeking to demonstrate the impossibility of thinking of consumption in a 'simple, one dimensional way' (Warde, 1992: 28) these publications (including geographers' Wrigley and Lowe's 1996 *Retailing, Consumption and Capital*, and sociologist John Urry's 1995 *Consuming Places*) were instrumental in demonstrating that place, space and scale make a difference to how consumption is manifested and experienced. The significance of leisure and tourism activity in contemporary social change (see Figure 1.4) has also led to a growing volume of geographical work on leisure/tourism practices and spaces with insights for consumption (Aitchison et al., 2000; Crouch, 1999). A defining feature of geographical consumption research over the last two decades has been the insights which have emerged through research collaborations and dialogues across disciplinary boundaries (reflected in publications such as Jackson et al.'s 2000 *Commercial Cultures*; Miller et al., 1998; and Clarke et al.'s 2003 *The Consumption Reader*).

Geographers have nevertheless provided critical theoretical and empirical contributions to social scientific consumption literature.³ They have not only filled the 'gaps on the map of consumer society' (Crewe and Lowe, 1995) by examining sites and landscapes of consumption but, as mentioned previously, produced theoretically informed research which emphasizes the detailed, complex and differential expression of consumption in place and the connections linking spaces.



FIGURE 1.4 Darling Harbour, a former dockside area now redeveloped into a site of restaurants, exhibition centres, tourist attractions and shops. Spectacular spaces of retail, leisure and consumption initially formed the focus of much geographical work

Geographic research has been at the forefront of efforts to overcome divisions between economy and culture, production and consumption (Sayer, 2001).

Geographies of consumption encompass a wide diversity of subjects: leisure, tourism, work, shopping, information technology, retailing, advertising; urban, rural, industrial and agricultural geographies; and studies of gender, ageing, ethnicity and sexuality. Table 1.1 presents a summary of some of the broad themes of geographical research, but these should not be seen as mutually exclusive or static categories. Geographies of consumption are marked by attention to a diverse range of studies underpinned by different theoretical traditions and perspectives which together provide insight into spatialities, socialities and subjectivities associated with consumption.

Spatialities of Consumption

Geographers have been concerned to explore *spatialities* of consumption. This includes a consideration not only of the places in which consumption is perhaps most visibly and/or actively created (tourist spaces, mega-malls), but of the sites that may be less visible (bodies as surfaces of inscription, home spaces) and the ways in which places and spaces are connected and made meaningful through consumption.

TABLE 1.1 *Themes in geographies of consumption*

Mode	Emphasis	Focus of study
Spatialities	Visible, often spectacular spaces of consumption	<p>Examples: spaces of festival and carnival, theme parks, department stores, malls, landscapes of advertising and branding, gentrified spaces, tourist spaces, urban and rural consumption spaces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consumption sites as spaces of representation and representational spaces (landscapes as text) • the historical and contemporary production of space • commodification and commodity fetishism (hidden relations of production) • political economies and structures of race, class, gender • place marketing and promotion • cultural economy
	Mundane, alternative and ephemeral spaces of consumption	<p>Examples: markets, car boots, local exchange trading schemes, Internet, home, workspaces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • geographies of everyday life • spaces as relational and social spaces • emphasis on consumers, and blurring of production/consumption roles and relationships • continuities and differences between historical and contemporary formations of consumption in place • construction of value • performativity
	Social-spatial connections	<p>Examples: transnationalism, displacement, global commodity chains, systems of provision, circuit and actor network approaches, commercial and commodity cultures</p>
Socialities		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the spatial and social constitution of consumption-production relationships • geographies and biographies of commodities (the social lives of commodities) • social-spatial relationships between producers and consumers • power geometries • consumer activism and politics • state and consumption relationships (discursive and material shaping of consumption, collective consumption) • regulation

TABLE 1.1 (Continued)

Mode	Emphasis	Focus of study
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • globalization • spatial imaginaries • cultural economies • retail geographies • imbrication of material/symbolic culture/economy/production/consumption
	Social relationships in consumption	<p data-bbox="621 528 1022 618">Examples: shopping, purchasing, using, discarding, eating, leisure practices, home provisioning and renovation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ethnographic and social geographies of consumption • emphasis on situated and social (rather than individual) context of consumption • emerging forms of sociality (e.g. via new technologies) • cultural politics • moralities of consumption • relationality of spaces, scales, processes and practices of consumption • material culture (role of commodities in social life) • decommodification
Subjectivities	People as consuming subjects, bodies and identities	<p data-bbox="621 1065 1048 1280">Examples: studies of self-fashioning and mundane provisioning, role of consumer discourses and consumption practice as part of subject formation, advertising discourses, bodies out of place, consumers as state subjects, embodiment and emplacement of identities, consumer narratives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • emphasis on poststructuralist perspectives and social construction of consuming subjects in place • shaping of consuming subjects • consumption and identity formation • geographies of consumption and gender, race, class, sexuality • geographies and discourses of the body • consumer agency • moral ascription • social exclusion • performativity • non-representational and embodied practice • cultural politics

Increasing attention has turned to the relational nature of space and scale, with places actively constituted in relation to other places, existing as fluid and changing entities rather than as tightly bounded containers which simply provide the setting for social processes. Thus the places and spaces and scales across which consumption and commodity meanings, expressions and experiences are assembled and transformed in themselves constitute particular spatialities. Spatialities are thus concerned with sites of consumption, but also with how people, things and processes (such as commodity knowledges) travel – transforming, reproducing, contesting, creating and disassembling particular constellations of social-spatial relations in place as they move.

Early work by consumption geographers made geographies of consumption visible, exploring their expression in sites of consumption (Jackson and Thrift, 1995). Aside from retail spaces geographers have examined a wide variety of sites, from cities to rural ‘post-productive’ spaces, heritage and tourist spaces, theme parks, festival and carnival settings, gentrified districts, cyberspace, leisure spaces, home and body spaces. There has also been considerable research on how institutional agents (such as local authorities, chambers of commerce) are promoting cities and rural spaces and developing places as sites of consumption for locals, inward investors and tourists, but emphasis has been on the production of these sites rather than on their consumption *per se* (Ateljevic, 2000). Research on historic places and practices of consumption has also offered insights into contemporary consumption practices.

Research on consuming places has become more theoretically informed with studies intended to explicate the material and symbolic construction of sites of consumption. In the early 1990s significant attention was devoted to the ideological construction and significance of consumption space (Jackson and Thrift, 1995). This involved semiotic approaches and techniques of reading landscape to explore the social construction and power embedded in built environments. Much of this work was influenced by Marxian traditions and by the writings of Baudrillard on signification and alienation, with spectacular spaces of consumption viewed as sites of commodity fetishism, illusory places of pleasure, leisure, hyper-reality and simulated ‘elsewhereness’ (Hopkins, 1991).

From the mid 1990s ethnographic studies emerged, in part a response to concerns that readings of consumer landscapes were resulting in a view of consumers as passive subjects reproducing discourses and structures of consumption framed by producers (owners, designers, marketers, managers and advertisers) (Gregson, 1995). Much of this research centred on what was first known as ‘alternative spaces of consumption’ such as car boot fairs, second-hand and discount stores, high streets and markets – sites of mundane and everyday provisioning for many people (Crewe and Gregson, 1998; Gregson and Crewe 1997a; 1997b). These studies revealed the ways in which places and practices of consumption are relational, for example, how malls and high streets are understood in relation to each other as ‘safe’ or ‘risky’ racialized shopping environments

(Miller et al., 1998). In this process, emphasis has tended to broaden from the study of sites to the examination of how consuming practices and meanings are constituted across space. Looking beyond processes of capitalist accumulation the importance of structures and discourses other than those connected with the accumulation, of capital, or with gender, sexuality, age, race, class, (dis)ability and postcolonialism, has also been highlighted. While retail and shopping geographies still appear to dominate geographical research on consumption, other spaces which have previously been deemed marginal (spatially, socially or economically, such as LETS: see Box 1.5) and spaces of mobility and ephemerality (such as airports, journeys and cyberspace) provide exciting new avenues for consumption research.

**BOX 1.5 ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIC SPACES:
LOCAL EXCHANGE TRADING SCHEMES**

A consideration of spatialities of consumption involves thinking not only about places, but about how consuming processes are constituted across particular spaces. Local exchange trading schemes or systems (LETS) provide an example of an alternative space of exchange which has endured despite the hegemony of capitalism. Since the 1980s these locally based systems of exchange have provided a form of community currency. Originating in Canada, they now operate in Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Western Europe and in Latin America, Asia and Africa. Participants in LETS are both consumers and producers, contributing and 'purchasing' skills and services (for example, child minding, plumbing, decorating and complementary therapies) and products and produce (such as handicrafts, baking, office products and leisure goods) (Pacione, 1997). The producer of a service or artefact is paid in non-commodified fictitious currency credits which are then exchanged as the participants consume other skills, services or commodities. Real money does not change hands; rather a credit/debit account is maintained. No interest is paid and credit is available as participants do not need to have a positive currency balance to consume.

The value of the trade produced and the economic significance of LETS at national levels may be relatively small, but what matters is their value to members (Seyfang, 2001). LETS have reconfigured dominant consumption, production and exchange processes in order to tackle issues of social and financial exclusion, and have generally been associated with 'green' ideologies, empowerment and community building. By expanding the social network of those who may be marginalized in society, and through recognizing the value and contribution of work in the informal sector, LETS provide not just a 'space' for the expression of alternative values (Seyfang, 2001: 993) but a form of life politics by which these values might be operationalized. Research with LETS participants in the UK suggests that sociality of consumption in such networks can outweigh their material or economic significance (Purdue et al., 1997: 657–9; Williams, 1996).

Local exchange trading schemes promote direct links between consumers and producers and rupture any associations of the former with passivity and the latter with activity. It is the consumer's productive role in consuming which helps another member to earn credits. Though consumer societies and LETS have the potential to provide a form of resistance to the hegemony of capitalist consumption and production, they do not exist in isolation from it. Many LETS members, for example, were reluctant to allow their accounts to go into debit because the concept of indebtedness was transferred from the cash economy (Aldridge and Patterson, 2002). Ironically, the potential of LETS for 'community renewal' and 'social inclusion' may also be limited as LETS become increasingly regulated by state institutions, and begin to reflect some of the gender and class characteristics of the wider community.

Increasingly geographers are exploring how people, entities and things are caught up and shaped within spatial systems and networks connected with particular geometries of power (see Box 1.11). Researchers have, for example, highlighted the spatial connections in production/consumption systems and the ways in which exploitative commodity relations might be unveiled (Hartwick, 1998). They have also considered how the politics of home consumption might be linked to other scales, processes and institutions in powerful ways (Leslie and Reimer, 2003). The 'pursuit of commodity stories' – research on the social and spatial lives of commodities across space – has become an increasingly prominent feature of geographical narratives on consumption (Bridge and Smith, 2003). This research explores not only what moves across space, but how meanings of consuming and of commodities become removed or displaced from their original contexts (Cook, Crang and Thorpe, 1999), demonstrating that spatialities of consumption are deeply intertwined with socialities, a concept to which we turn next.

Geographical research on sites of consumption, and the spatialities which characterize consumption practices in and across places, has been valuable in emphasizing how processes of production are deeply embedded in consumption and vice versa. This research has demonstrated how spatial relations are powerfully constituted through the practice of consumption and has signalled the importance of space and place in the construction, representation and reproduction of processes of consumption.

Socialities of Consumption

Another focus of geographic research has been *socialities* of consumption – the connections, relationships and social interactions between people. Though consumption has often been portrayed as a self-centred, narcissistic and individualist

enterprise, geographers (particularly those working within ethnographic traditions) have demonstrated the sociality and commensality associated with consumption. They have also noted the ways in which individuated practices are formed in relation to others, whether they are located near (as in family members or work colleagues) or are imagined and distant others (as in racialized understandings of food practices, or 'distant' recipients of clothing donated to charities). Socialities are not static; the relations are in a constant state of flux. The emergence of new forms of socialities (for example, the creation of Internet chatrooms or indigenous tourism ventures) has provided insights into the meaning and value of commodities, the significance and nature of consuming practices and spaces, the politics of consumption and the interdependence of consumption and production (see, for example, Dodge and Kitchin, 2000; Holloway and Valentine, 2001a; Wrigley et al., 2002).

Research on the socialities connected with consumption 'at home' has been fruitful in the breaking down of dichotomies (such as between work and leisure, public and private, production and consumption) and in thinking how relationships and discourses extend to other scales. Feminist geographies exploring patriarchal and sexualized discourses in space have demonstrated how relatively mundane activities such as eating and preparing food and dressing the body are politicized (Banim et al., 2001; Valentine, 1999a; 1999b; 1999c). Detailed ethnographic research has also demonstrated how commodity practices are productive of powerful discourses which define boundaries and relationships between people in everyday life and how these are linked to material geographies (for example, in differences between how shopping is talked about and practised: Gregson et al., 2002a). Much of this research has been underpinned by the concept of 'cultural politics', concerning how meanings are constructed and negotiated and how relations of dominance and subordination are established, defined and resisted (Jackson, 2000a: 140–1).

In addition, ethnographic research exploring the socialities of second-hand cycles of consumption and on the Internet has challenged constructions of value and commodity exchange as market-like, rational and profitable. This research has provided insights into how values are made and transferred and shift in and out of commoditized market relations in situated contexts (the social lives of commodities). The worked at, pleased, leisured and creative aspects of the production and consumption of objects nevertheless remain under-researched; more research is needed on what people do with commodities, how they repair, restore, value and devalue them (Crewe, 2000; though see Hetherington, 2004). An area in which limited research has been done is into the socialities and ethics associated with practices of acquisition and use (see Box 1.6) and particularly the surrounding issues of material need, poverty and lack (Clope and Widdowfield, 2000) and the super rich (Beaverstock et al., 2004).

**BOX 1.6 ETHICAL FOOD RELATIONS:
NEW SOCIALITIES, NEW GEOGRAPHIES AND ETHICS**

Lewis Holloway's (2002) research on Internet enterprises illustrates how consumption of commodities is underpinned by geographical and ethical socialities. The 'My Veggie Patch' online service presented customers in London with the opportunity of having vegetables grown for them in Suffolk. Consumers could decide what they wanted to grow and how their vegetables were to be grown, but the 'work' of gardening was done for them and their produce was delivered direct to their 'door' (2002: 73). A second site enabled consumers to adopt a sheep in the mountainous Abruzzo region in Italy, giving the client 'direct contact with the origins of what they eat' (2002: 74). Using an actor network perspective (see Chapter 5), Holloway argued both sites 'bring home' distanced food production to consumers and allow producers to provide a service to consumers without traditional intermediaries such as food retailers or distributors. However, in order to perform these roles, new associations and assemblages of people, entities and place must be established (for example, connections between customers, the Internet, adopted animals, vegetables, money etc.). Holloway's research demonstrates how the formations of socialities and spatialities are inseparable, and he highlights the way in which these new encounters between distanced things also involve the creation of particular sets of ethical relations (such as the notion of participatory care of the things involved in food production, or engaging with the risks of production such as disease).

There has been a significant amount of research on more formal characterizations of socialities and how these are manifested across space, that is, as frameworks and systems of social-spatial relationships. Research on consumption networks and systems, commodity chains and regulatory frameworks tended, at least initially, to be focused on institutional socialities arising from linear or vertical chains of connection in political-economic contexts (see Box 1.7). This research has made and continues to make a valuable contribution to debates about consumer sovereignty, power and the interdependence of production and consumption, for example in the linking of consumers with moral/ethical company practices (Johns and Vural, 2000; Silvey, 2002). Consumer protests about issues of globalization, sustainability, free trade and the power of transnational corporations have drawn attention to the influence of states, non-governmental organizations and transnational corporations in mediating social relations of production and consumption (Klein, 2000). Literature on the connections between retailing, regulation and consumption, for example, has also been critical in highlighting the spatial organization of retail capital and explaining the processes, structures and mechanisms which connect production and consumption (Wrigley and Lowe, 1996; 2002).

BOX 1.7 HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL SYSTEMS OF PROVISION

The work of Ben Fine and Ellen Leopold (1993 Fine, 2002) on systems of commodity provision has also been influential in work on consumption, in which geographers have sought to explore the interdependence of consumption and production, and the socialities and spatialities associated with this. Horizontal approaches are concerned with factors which apply across society and consumption as a whole (Fine, 1993: 599), such as changes in the advertising sector, retailing or distribution. Fine and Leopold based their systems of provision approach instead upon vertical chains of connection, exploring the multiple processes (and sites) of production, distribution, marketing and consumption and the material culture which surrounds the production and consumption of commodities. They note how vertical systems alter depending on the commodity and the structures and histories in which they are embedded (see Chapter 4), thus allowing for recognition of spatial and temporal contextuality of production–consumption processes. Vertical approaches have been important in conceptualization of commodity chains, and have provided valuable insights into how commodities are created and transformed across space and how social practices and knowledges may be articulated through different spatial contexts. However, geographers Paul Glennie and Nigel Thrift (1993) have critiqued the reductionism of this distinction between horizontal and vertical approaches – a distinction that circuit and network based approaches to conceptualizing consumption/production socialities and spatialities are suggested to have overcome (see Chapter 5).

Actor network (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997) and circuit approaches (du Gay et al., 1997) have emerged to address some of the concerns about the linearity and productionist bias of socialities framed from a political-economic perspective. These approaches also offer potential for thinking about ‘space’ itself, for understanding space as ‘multiply inhabited and characterized by complex networks, circuits and flows’ (Crang et al., 2003: 441). However, there remains a need for studies which explore multiple sites along networks, chains or circuits (Jackson and Thrift, 1995) and for more work on the spaces, socialities and subjectivities associated with consuming services (as dematerialized or ephemeral commodities).

A concern has been to move beyond accounts which privilege ‘economically driven explanations to the detriment of culturally sensitive accounts’ (Crewe, 2000: 276). Work on cultural economies which looks at the interdependence of the two spheres has burgeoned in the last five years (du Gay and Pryke, 2002; Scott, 2000), with studies of commodity and commercial cultures (Crang et al., 2003; Jackson, 2002a) trying to examine the imbrication of the two spheres rather than the inflection of each in the other (as in cultural industries, or the production of consumer culture). Work on commercial cultures has

focused on the particular socialities associated with the flows, constitution and transformation of the contexts and narratives surrounding commodities to understand how people and entities are caught up in transnational networks (Dwyer and Jackson, 2003). As with consumption practices, a recognition of the ways in which such networks are shaped in relation to moral and ethical concerns and environmental understandings is gradually emerging as a research agenda (Hobson, 2003; Wilk, 2002).

Though geographical research points to a view of socialities as institutional and collective interactions as well as individual social relationships, work on collective consumption appears to have waned in recent years (Fine, 2002). Nevertheless, research has continued on the role of the state and the local state as regulator and 'producer' of goods and services either directly (such as in provision of housing) or indirectly (as in tourism and leisure as a tool of local economic development and place marketing strategies). New Zealand geographers, for example, have explored the links between regulatory frameworks, commodification and the changing role of the state in documenting the emergence of consumerism in healthcare in a deregulated and neoliberal New Zealand economy (Barnett and Kearns, 1996; Kearns and Barnett, 1997) and the commercialization of tertiary education in New Zealand and Canada (Berg and Roche, 1997). However, considerable scope remains to examine how social practices and relations of consumption are regulated, legitimated, maintained and/or contested by people. Little is known, for example, about how discourses of 'consumer choice' are shaped by state and other agents of place, or how they are negotiated through consumption (Pawson, 1996).

Subjectivities of Consumption

The third concept, which has figured compellingly in the geographical literature, is the notion of *subjectivities*. Eschewing categorizations and typologies of consumers, geographers have examined how consuming subjects are made and performed through personal and collective acts, discourses, relationships and imaginings.

Different perspectives in human geography construct different narratives of subjects: for example, Marxian understandings of subject formation occur in relation to one's structural position, while humanist understandings locate subject formation in the autonomous capacities of human agents. The concept of the 'subject' utilized in this text draws from poststructural theory which emphasizes the ways in which people, individuals, bodies and identities are socially constructed in relation to others who are separate from 'self'.⁴ Much geographical consumption literature has also explored subjectivity through the lens of poststructuralism, arguing subject formation is an expression of power relations established through the disciplining operation of discourses. Discourses

operate through processes of exclusion and boundary making which define self and others. However, while subjectivities may be established through discourses they are not determined by them, and a key contribution of geographical studies has been to highlight their active constitution in specific spaces and the ways in which subjects are prone to moral ascription.

Geographers have emphasized the material and symbolic constitution of consumption, contributing to understandings of the ways in which people meaningfully experience and incorporate commodities in their life worlds. Much research had centred on the practice of everyday life (de Certeau, 1984), exploring how consumers are actively involved in using commodities and practices in ways that might differ from those intended by producers of such spaces (as in the formation of oppositional subcultures: Hebdige, 1979). An important finding of this research is that much commodity use and meaning are not anxiety ridden or identity based, but centred upon material, social and familial relationships and rationales (Valentine, 1999c).

Research on consumer subjectivities has extended beyond a consideration of issues of representation and textual readings of advertising, media and place based landscapes to explore the role of the consuming subject and the meanings people give to consumption practices and commodities (Stevenson et al., 2000). This work has destabilized the notion of 'the universal and passive consumer', instead focusing on the agency of consumers, examining the 'work' and skills employed in choosing, purchasing and using commodities, and the interpretations, sociality, tensions, meanings, emotions and knowledges inscribed in consumption practices (Crewe, 2001; Williams et al., 2001). Another significant area of research has been on the role of consumption in the place based constitution of social identities, problematizing the traditional separation between production and consumption identities (McDowell and Court, 1994).

Geographical research on consumption and identity formation has contested notions of homogeneous consumer cultures based around specific patterns of consumption, revealing that a critical part of the production of space involves how consumption is made meaningful through processes of embodiment, emplacement and performance (Skelton and Valentine, 1998). Poststructural research has emphasized bodies as surfaces of inscription, as powerful spaces, as sites no less critical to consumption than the 'spectacular' landscapes of consumption which initially dominated geographical attention. Work on embodiment has demonstrated how bodies are disciplined and objectified through consumption, for example by marking old or 'fat' bodies as out of place (Gamman, 2000; Gibson, 2000).

The way in which consumption practices intersect with relations and discourses of gender, sexuality, age, race and class has enabled geographers to understand how people (though primarily adults) are constructed as consuming subjects (see, for example, Box 1.8). Cultural politics has been demonstrated to be important in how subjects ascribe meaning to processes and practices of consumption. In exploring the subjectivities associated with

consumption of second-hand clothing, Gregson et al. (2000) noted how consumers negotiated bodily associations and potential histories of commodities, making them susceptible to bodily discourses in ways that other personalized commodities (books, electronic gear, whiteware) may not be. The emphasis on the role of bodily practices, movements, senses and habits (which are not necessarily subject to discourse) by which human beings meaningfully engage with and perform consumption (Thrift, 2000c) has also challenged the visual bias of discursive and representational understandings of consuming subjects. Consequently, through researching subjectivities, geographers have made important insights into both material and representational practices of consumers, into the often blurred distinction between consumers and producers, and into the ways in which identities and practices surrounding consumption are performed, reproduced and manifested in place.

BOX 1.8 MORT: MAPPING MASCULINITIES

In his studies of place and masculinity, Frank Mort has endeavoured to explore the power relations which are an integral part of how consumption is manifested, expressed, experienced, invested with knowledge and resisted (Mort, 1998). In his study of the 'Archaeologies of city life' (1995) Mort examined the ways in which masculine subjectivities were framed in discourses and material practices which surrounded historical and spatial change in London's Soho district in the 1980s. The social and sexual identities of homosexual men in Soho were shaped by practices and sites of consumption. Mort described how media and cultural entrepreneurs in the 1980s drew on the district's lexicon as a Bohemian site of sexual and cultural dissidence, youth styles, and artistic and literary culture which 'had been laid down at different historical moments' (1995: 577) to frame a particular rhetoric of style. This rhetoric was located in the newly emerging professional subjectivities and the commercial transformation of the area with the associated development of shopping, leisure and entertainment facilities. However, such constructions of social space were partial, ignoring the significance of gender and marginalizing people and practices centred on other forms of city life. In the 1990s a number of carnivals and gay commercial ventures contributed to a renaissance of the district as a space for gay consumption and homosocial relations. Mort notes how both 'formations were predominantly masculine, though they evoked quite different interpretations of geography and identity' (1995: 581). Mort went on to demonstrate how the arrangement of Soho's consumer culture drew these diverse communities into adjacent social spaces. His research demonstrates how place plays a powerful rather than a passive role in the formation of subjectivities, and how consumption practices can create diverse discourses and productions of place.

Spatialities, socialities and subjectivities of consumption are not mutually exclusive. Together they constituted geographies of consumption – geographies which are about the complex relationships between social and spatial relations, the ways in which people, material and symbolic practices, entities and things are connected, performed, transformed and expressed as they are created and move across space. Implicit in the discussion of spatialities, socialities and subjectivities is the question of how power is shaped, wielded and manifested through material and discursive practices in place.

Power Matters

In researching spatialities, socialities, and subjectivities geographers have brought critical insights to the operation of power, examining the taken-for-grantedness of consumption processes and practices and contributing to understanding how people, identities and bodies are disciplined and differentiated in specific contexts. While political, social, economic and cultural geographers have drawn on a wide range of social theorists to understand consumption (from Baudrillard's systems of objects and signs to Bakhtin's historical analysis of carnivalesque, from Bourdieu's cultural capital to Goffman's and Butler's performativity),⁵ debates about how power and the politics of consumption might be conceptualized appear to have been dominated by two intellectual traditions: the employment of Marxian theory in political economy approaches, and the insights offered by poststructuralism.⁶

Earlier research on consumption tended to position it as a consequence of economic production imperatives (Jackson and Thrift, 1995). Prior to the 1980s a significant amount of attention in economic and industrial geographies was directed at how commodities were provided (rather than consumed *per se*), and a predominant strand in this was the use of political economy approaches which drew on the writings of Karl Marx.

BOX 1.9 KARL MARX (1818–1883) PRODUCING CONSUMPTION: COMMODIFICATION AND COMMODITY FETISHISM

In the development of his historical materialist analysis of societal change, Marx interpreted the commodity in terms of the production process. Marx saw consumption as necessary to realize the exchange value of commodities and consequently essential to the continued survival of the capitalist mode of production through the accumulation of surplus value. In the *Grundrisse* Marx stated that though production was the predominant moment, it was determined 'by other moments' (1973: 96). He believed production, distribution, exchange and consumption were inseparable as 'members of a totality', with production and consumption each creating the other in completing itself (Harvey, 1982: 80).

Marx's concept of 'commodity fetishism' has been utilized by geographers to understand the way in which commodities (as bundles of social relations) may obscure exploitative relations of commodity production. This is a process whereby 'the value of the commodity assumes the guise of a value independent of human determination and thus appears to reside as an intrinsic property of the commodity itself' (Lee, 1993: 14). So while exploitative labour relations inherent in capitalist relations of production are reflected in the process of market exchange, the social and symbolic nature of the commodity form matters too as the product of labour becomes commodities which are both social and sensuous things.

Within Marxian theory, social relationships between people are reconstituted as relationships between things. Processes of commodification mean people are obliged to become consumers and purchase products they and others have made in the workplace (Miles, 1998a: 17). Commodification results in exchange values supplanting use values over time, as commodities are produced for market exchange rather than direct utilitarian value *per se*. As a consequence people are alienated or estranged from the products of their labour, and spatial and social division between production and consumption results (Lee, 1993). Ironically consumption performs a palliative role, offering both recompense and reward for processes of alienation, but never really achieving either because the individual is entwined in multiple processes of false consciousness (Edwards, 2000).

Marxism and political economy

Marxian theorization and the political economy approaches derived from it focus on the economic forces that gives rise to consumption (Box 1.9). Political economy approaches have emphasized the role of actors in their institutional settings, often paying particular attention to how state and economy are articulated through historical and material structures to produce societal transformation. The application of Antonio Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony, a refinement of Marx's concept of dominant ideology, has enabled scholars to consider how power operates ideologically through production and consumption. Hegemonic social relations are ones in which the capacity to control other groups does not arise out of a totalitarian exercise of power, but operates through institutions (such as the state, media, advertisers, retailers) in ways which may be subtle, hidden and taken for granted, so that the effect of power is often accepted and reproduced by citizens unknowingly. Marx's concept of commodity fetishism was also taken further in the work of Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) who suggest that mass consumption (and the culture industry in particular) is part of the ideological maintenance of capitalist society (Edwards, 2000). In their rather pessimistic view, the culture industry exists as a form of propaganda and manipulation which 'perpetually cheats its consumers of what it perpetually promises' (1944: 11).

In developing the concept of commodification, Marx provided a mechanism for societal change. His work recognized the interdependence of production and consumption and the redemptive qualities of consumption for the 'alienated' individual; it also pointed to the symbolic value of commodities and their ideological function. Geographers have used Marx's ideas to think about notions of freedom and constraint in consumption, to explore hidden commodity relations in commodity chains and systems of provision, and to examine the hegemonic construction of landscapes of consumption (e.g. Goss, 1999a). Marx's ideas of commodity fetishism have also been taken up in the writings of Cook and Crang (1996), who suggest contemporary capitalist societies are now subject to a double fetish whereby the imaginative geographies associated with commodities become as significant as the hidden commodity relations in things in constituting commodity meanings (see also Castree, 2001).

Marxian approaches have been criticized for examining consumption as a consequence of historical, spatial and social changes in production, as a pleasure seeking but repressive pursuit in which consumers are passively engaged and actively exploited (see Shammas, 1993, and Fine, 2002, for an opposing view). The primacy of class and labour relations in the structuring of production and consumption relations can also render other structures of social differentiation (sexuality, race, gender, age) less visible.

Nevertheless Marxian inspired work has underscored the complex and contradictory nature of consumption: its utilitarian and ideological aspects, its material and symbolic manifestations, and its role in the reproduction of social relations which may be simultaneously alienating and redemptive, socially divisive and socially cohesive. The impact of poststructural perspectives and approaches emanating from the 'new cultural geographies' seems however to have led to renewed scrutiny of previously taken-for-granted meanings of concepts such as 'production', 'consumption', and 'consumerism' and hegemonic constructions inherent in particular conceptualizations of society and space.

Poststructuralism

Poststructuralism is not a unified theory but a number of approaches drawing on semiotics, cultural theory and psychoanalysis which emphasize not only the material forms through which the world is structured, organized and manifested, but the way it is represented in relation to other things (Ward, 1997). The role of language as a sign system is seen as critically important to how meaning is produced and expressed in the social world. Poststructuralism views power laden relationships as internal rather than external to other types of relationship (such as economic relationships), rejecting notions of stable, coherent foundations to meaning and the idea of a central or universal truth. Meaning and identity are relational constructs, constantly being created out of difference (e.g. between self and other, or between texts) – acts of creation

which may centre on what is suppressed, absent or excluded as much as what is present. Discourses define appropriate ways of seeing and acting, placing limits on what can and can't be said.

Some poststructuralists employ 'deconstruction' to uncover the hidden assumptions that are embedded in discourses as taken-for-granted ways of approaching the social world. The ideas of Foucault (see Box 1.10) have also been influential in poststructuralist approaches.

BOX 1.10 FOUCAULT: PRODUCTIVE POWER

Foucault sees power manifest not so much in people, but through a distribution of bodies, surface, lights and gazes which operate via an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relations in which individuals are caught up (Foucault, 1979). The concept of surveillance is used to describe this automatic functioning of power, the governing at a distance which Foucault believes is symptomatic of contemporary society. Foucault (1979) used Bentham's concept of a panopticon (a tower from which everything can be seen without the observer ever being seen) to describe how surveillance operates to produce power in everyday life. Through his historical studies of prisons, mental institutions and sexuality, Foucault demonstrated how people become subjects of power, assuming responsibility for its constraints and engaging in power plays which may reflect and reproduce the discipline of the panoptic gaze (Ward, 1997). Thus Foucault's conceptualization of power was as productive rather than simply repressive, with people being subjects of and subject to powerful discourses. Power was not a thing wielded but a process which could be taken over by institutions (states, hospitals, schools, families) and apparatuses of governance (police, administration, familial relations). Power is expressed in discourses which establish claims to truth, defining what counts as legitimate or illegitimate statements, narratives and practices. Discourses consequently operate as systems of regulation in which forms of knowledge and power are produced.

Human subjects exercise power by reproducing and resisting discourses, while simultaneously being subject to them. Subjectivities are created out of this difference between self and other, with socially constructed identities (such as old, young, male and female) being fluid and contextual, formed and changing in relation to the discursive regimes that are part of how time and place contexts are constituted.

A focus on the discursive power created within the sphere of consumption has been augmented by geographers interested in the cultural politics of consumption. Cultural politics thus recognizes the ways in which cultural constructions which are part of everyday life may perpetuate inequalities of power (Jackson, 2000a: 141). This work has been associated with research on subjectivity, identity formation and representation but has increasingly explored the imbrication of cultural and material practices. In contrast to traditional political economy approaches that understand situated behaviour as being

underpinned by structural economic factors, poststructuralists would see behaviours, practices, strategies and techniques of power produced by the interconnections between discursive and material realms (Pritchard, 2000). Consequently studies of cultural politics of consumption have shifted beyond a consideration of the representation of people, places and things to highlight how power is effected to create social, material and moral geographies of inclusion and exclusion in both contemporary and historical contexts.

In seeking to explore consumption in its own right rather than in relation to its role as a particular manifestation of production, Fine (2002) has suggested this has resulted in too much emphasis on the cultural sphere and a relative neglect of the economic and material. However, studies on commercial and commodity cultures (Chapter 7), poststructuralist political economies (Chapter 5) and ethnographic social geographies (Chapters 3 and 4) have all explored how power is manifested through discursive and material contexts.

Though power is conceptualized differently in the two approaches I have outlined, they both continue to provide valuable insights into how consumption geographies are made and expressed in place. Geographers have emphasized how the effects of power are not free-floating but are 'placed' and relational, constructed in social-spatial networks which comprise consumption geographies. Power is spatially produced (see Box 1.11).

BOX 1.11 POWER GEOMETRIES: THE SOCIAL AND SPATIAL EXERCISE OF POWER

Doreen Massey's (1999) concept of 'power geometries' is useful for thinking about how space, place, production and consumption are connected. Massey proposes that power is exercised through all scales and levels, and that its 'geometry' must be understood in relation to how different social groups and individuals are placed in distinct ways in relation to time-space flows and interconnections (Massey, 1993). Difference cannot just be conceived in terms of a variance but must also be seen in terms of relational power, with people limiting or enabling the capacity of other groups to participate in consumption on the same terms. People, knowledge and things are situated in relation to flows and interconnections (for example, transportation, financial flows, communications, knowledge and social transactions). Places are viewed as articulated and hybrid moments in networks of social relations, with 'the spatial as a product of power-filled social relations' (1999: 41). The concept of power geometry thus encapsulates the unevenness within which individuals and groups operate and are positioned in relation to these flows and influences, and the multiple trajectories they create in power-knowledge systems. The concept of 'power geometries' provides an important reminder that consumption spatialities, socialities and subjectivities do not occur in a vacuum, but are constituted and transformed through space.

While approaches to consumption informed by different theoretical frameworks may not be reconciled easily, each offers differing insights into consumption processes. The interconnection of culture, economy, production, consumption, the material and the symbolic is a recurrent theme in this book. Similarly, I have not endeavoured to separate socialities, subjectivities and spatialities, but instead have discussed them as interconnected aspects of the topics which form chapters of the book. The book chapters examine substantive areas of geographical research: histories, spaces, identities, connections, commercial cultures, moralities.

Outline of the Chapters

The first chapter has examined how consumption has been conceptualized and has outlined some of the key contributions of geographies of consumption to social science. In researching socialities, subjectivities and spatialities, and the power that underpins them, geographers have produced significant insights into how consumption matters to geography, and how geographies matter to consumption.

Chapter 2, on histories, examines historical geographies of consumption, exploring the debates surrounding contemporary consumption and the theorized existence of a postmodern condition. The discussion highlights the impossibility of conceiving of consumption as a singular and undifferentiated process in time and space. Examining continuities and differences across place and time provides a way of interrogating chronologies and highlights the specificity of historical geographies of consumption. It also enables reflection on the insight they hold for understanding contemporary consumption practices and places.

Chapter 3, on spaces, explores sites and spatialities of consumption. Places are viewed as shifting and relational assemblages of social and spatial relations. Consumption is seen as vital rather than incidental to how geographies are created and experienced and how consumers and practices are embodied and emplaced, politicized and performed. This chapter explores both formal and informal sites of contemporary consumption to illustrate how spaces of consumption are both consumed and produced, noting that geographical perspectives on consumption in place have the potential to challenge traditional notions of place, space and scale.

The idea that identity formation is the primary reason for commodity purchase and related practices is critiqued in Chapter 4 on identities. The chapter emphasizes the grounding of consumption in the actions, experiences and imaginings of consuming subjects and the ways in which subjectivities are constituted in particular social and spatial contexts. Issues of corporeality and consumption are discussed with reference to processes of embodiment and emplacement. Drawing on the concept of performativity, the chapter then demonstrates how bodily activities and consumption practices operate productively even as they are enmeshed in relations of power. Ultimately this chapter critiques perspectives which suggest consumption is a superficial, individual and passive exercise.

Modes of connection form the substantive focus of Chapter 5. This chapter endeavours to examine three main approaches to linking consumption and

production across spaces. Challenging the notion of consumption as a bounded sphere, and essentialist notions of consumers and spaces which derive from this, the chapter examines commodity chains, circuits approaches and actor networks as metaphors for thinking about the movement of commodities, and the spatialities and socialities through which these occur.

Commercial cultures are examined through a series of case studies in Chapter 6. The chapter emphasizes the inseparability of cultural and economic processes in the construction of spatialities, subjectivities and socialities of consumption. Debates about globalization are examined and the chapter advocates approaches which centre on the situatedness rather than homogeneity or universality of cultural/economic change. The chapter demonstrates how perspectives on hybridity and transnationalism enable geographers not only to explore connections between commodities and subjects across space, but to understand how space itself is characterized and made meaningful through complex assemblages of people and things.

The final chapter of the book, on moralities, brings closure to the text by exploring the possibilities and limitations implied by the performative and moral nature of consumption geographies. It suggests different approaches are continually becoming in their capacities to do different sorts of work, to make different subjects and objects and to effect different power geometries in turn. Moral geographies are implicit in the subjectivities, spatialities and socialities of consumption and in the practices and products of geographical research. Moralities of consumption which position consumption as intrinsically negative are critiqued. Following Cloke (2002), I argue for a politics of consumption which is not just sensitive to others but is for them – for a space of politics which becomes a space of deliberation and practice with transformative potential.

Consumption and Geography Matter

Consumption matters to geography. Consumption is fundamental to how geographies are made and experienced in contemporary society. From bodies to nations, cities and homes, through markets, retail outlets and cyberspace, consumption is constituted through places and spaces. Consumption is significant as a place-making process as it is an integral (rather than incidental) part of everyday life, whether or not commodities are scarce or in abundance. Geographies are, in turn, integral to matters of consumption. Geographies of consumption are unevenly expressed in space and make a difference to how consumption practices, entities and experiences are constituted.

By using a variety of theoretically informed methodologies, geographers have provided critical insights into the creation, expression, nature and diversity of consumption practices and meanings in place. They have reflected on the politics of consumption to illustrate how institutions, identities, relationships and practices are produced, reproduced and represented powerfully across space. Geographers have researched interconnections between production and

consumption, economy and culture, the material and the symbolic – challenging the construction of these things as dichotomous and equivalent categories. Geographical work on consumption has also provided profound insights into how concepts such as space, value, scale and identity might be conceptualized in specific contexts. In exploring the connections between people, place, practices and entities, geographers have begun to understand how commodities, practices, experiences and knowledges are created and how they travel and translate across space and time.

Such is the volume of work on consumption in contemporary human geography that it is impossible in the space of this text to provide discussion of all geographical research on consumption. The remaining chapters of the text attempt to provide a sample of the diversity of approaches to consumption and the kinds of topics geographers have examined. Consumption is a powerful and pervasive process in contemporary society but it is not placeless: geographies do matter! I hope that readers of this book will gain some insights into how and why this is so, and the possibilities implied for critical understandings of society and space.

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NOTES

- 1 George Simmel's (1978 [1907]) discussions of modernity touched upon the role of consumption in society. He saw a tragedy of culture, emerging through exponential growth of the objective culture of material and immaterial commodities, and the subjective culture of people's capacity to use and control these objects successfully. Despite this tragedy Simmel saw commodities as performing liberatory functions as media for the expression of identity and freedom (Ritzer et al., 2000).
- 2 A search on GEOBASE, a primary electronic database for geography, reveals that the 1990s and early 2000s were the most prolific period in terms of writing on consumption and geography. In the 13 years prior to 1990 the database lists 373 records for consumption and geography; there are 1922 records in the 13 years from 1990. While this may be a function of changes in the breadth of database cataloguing, the difference would appear to be substantial.
- 3 For comprehensive reviews of the geographies of consumption I would draw your attention to Gregson (1995), Jackson and Thrift (1995) and Crewe (2000; 2001; 2003), whose papers I have utilized here. For more general discussion of consumption research in the social sciences see Fine (2002) and Miller et al. (1998).
- 4 Subjects exist through the relationship between the world (the other, objects that are distant to the subject) and themselves (Rodaway, 1995). A subject can be thought of as a reflexive and corporeal entity constituted materially and discursively, who possesses the capacity to act but whose actions are both productive of and subject to the operation of power. For example, Marxian understandings have subject formation occurring in relation to one's structural position, while humanist understandings locate subject formation in the autonomous capacities of human agents.
- 5 The ideas of these theorists will be discussed at other points in the book.
- 6 This is not to deny feminist approaches, which have contributed significantly to an understanding of gender differences, patriarchy, unfairly structured gender relations, and geographies of difference and diversity. Rather it is to suggest they too have been influenced by Marxism as exemplary radical and socialist theories, and in more recent times by poststructuralist and postcolonial theories.