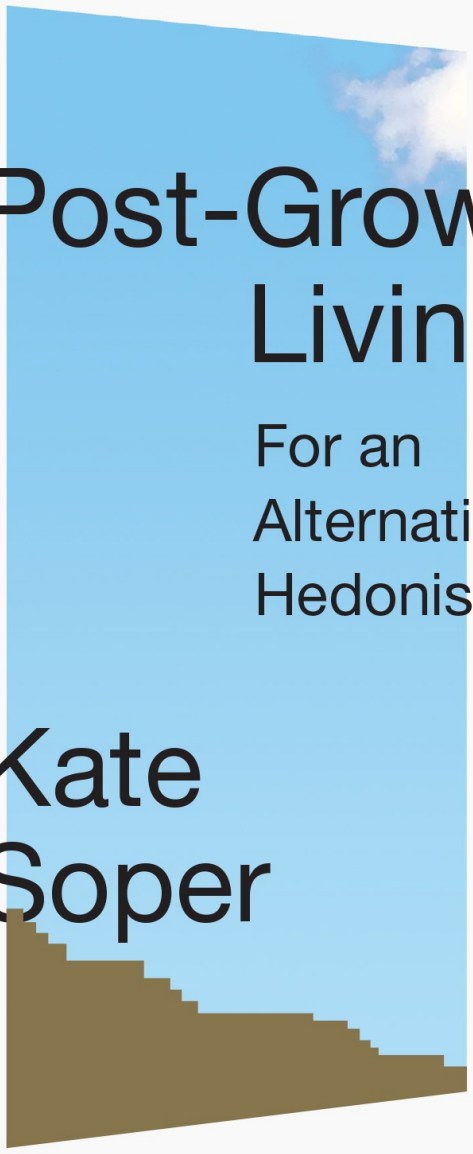

Post-Growth Living

For an Alternative Hedonism

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VERSO

London • New York

First published by Verso 2020

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

In the writing of the book, I have drawn on material included in a number of articles and chapters from my earlier publications, and am grateful in particular to: Edinburgh University Press for permission to use material from 'The Humanism in Posthumanism', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 9 (3) pp. 365–78, 2012, DOI 10.3366/ccs.2012.0069.

The Next System Project in America for permission to use material from 'A New Hedonism: a Post-Consumerism Vision', article posted 22 November 2017 at thenextsystem.org.

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I am also grateful for the kind permission of the author and The Gallery Press, Loughcrew, Oldcastle, County Meath, Ireland, to reproduce 'The Bronx Seabirds' from Derek Mahon's 'New York Time', *New Selected Poems* (2016).

Verso
UK: 6 Meard Street, London W1F 0EG
US: 20 Jay Street, Suite 1010, Brooklyn, NY 11201
versobooks.com

Verso is the imprint of New Left Books

ISBN-13: 978-1-78873-887-3
ISBN-13: 978-1-78873-888-0 (UK EBK)
ISBN-13: 978-1-78873-889-7 (US EBK)

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

Typeset in Sabon by MJ & N Gavan, Truro, Cornwall
Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

Contents

Acknowledgements

The thinking that has gone into this book goes back a long way. The origins of this thinking derive in part from my early interests in the philosophy of human need and welfare, and the encouragement given me by postgraduate tutors at Sussex University, namely John Mepham and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. The evolution of my argument on consumption and environmental politics, and specifically around 'alternative hedonism', has owed much since then to discussions with fellow philosophers at London Metropolitan University and my research colleagues in the Institute for the Study of European Transformations. From 2004–2006, the project I undertook on 'Alternative Hedonism, the Theory and Politics of Consumption' was in receipt of an ESRC/AHRB funded research grant in the 'Cultures of Consumption' programme. I am grateful for that support and to my co-researcher on the project, Lyn Thomas, for the media study she contributed and for the intellectual support and friendship she has given me throughout. I would also like to thank Frank Trentmann, the Director of the Programme, for his helpful input and advice, and his editorial collaboration.

I should mention here, too, the stimulus provided by discussions resulting from invitations to guest teach or provide papers for conferences at the universities of Amsterdam, Bilgi Instanbul, Copenhagen, Corvinus Budapest, Colorado School of Mines, Hamburg, the National University of Ireland at Galway and Cork, Linköping, Münster, Palacký Olomouc, Oslo, Tallinn, Trinity College (Dublin), Stockholm, Uppsala and Utrecht. In Britain I am grateful to the following universities and colleges: Bath Spa, Birkbeck, Brighton, Goldsmiths, East London, Edinburgh, Essex, Lancaster, Liverpool, Manchester, Newport, Queen Mary, Roehampton, SOAS, Strathclyde and Warwick, and Camberwell College of Arts, Plymouth Art College (at Dartington Hall), the Sustainable Development Commission at DEFRA, the Serpentine Gallery, the Wellcome Institute and the Whitechapel Gallery. Special thanks here should go to Andreas Malm for his initial interest in my work and for inviting me to be a guest lecturer at the LUCID Research Centre at Lund University in Sweden in

2011. Thus began a valued relationship with Lund University and especially with the Pufendorf Institute for Advanced Studies, where I was a Visiting Research Fellow attached to the project on ‘Sustainable Welfare’ during 2014–2015. I am grateful in particular to its director at the time, Sune Sunesson, and to Max Koch and Oksana Mont, the project coordinators, my co-author Maria Emmelin, and all those involved in this research. I also thank the current director, Ann-Katrin Bäcklund, for her continuing interest.

My thanks also go to Rosie Warren at Verso, for first persuading me back into writing on alternative hedonism, and to John Merrick, my editor, for his enthusiasm and very able guidance on the book. My daughter, Maddy Ryle, has offered some excellent advice and additions at certain points, and my six-year old grandson, Caspar Roa-Ryle, has been mildly ironic about the need for its production, but overall quite tolerant of it. If there is one person I have to thank above all for guiding me in its writing, it is Martin Ryle, who has, as usual, shown himself to be a marvellous editor, and endlessly diligent in teasing out the confusions of my arguments, cutting out undue flights of rhetoric, and improving my more inept expressions. This has been all the more heroic of him, given how familiar he had already become, over years of talking and co-writing on the central topics of the book, with almost everything I have to say in it.

Rodmell, November 2019

Introduction

This book is primarily concerned with the pattern of consumption in affluent societies, the potential for its transformation, and the leverage that such change might exert in building a more egalitarian and sustainable global order. It argues that environmental crisis cannot be resolved by purely technical means, but will require richer societies substantially to change their way of living, working and consuming. Green technologies and interventions (renewable energy, rewilding, reforestation and so on) will prove essential tools for ecological renewal, but only if they go together with a cultural revolution in thinking about prosperity, and the abandonment of growth-driven consumerism.

Not all, but many environmentalists would agree with this. A more distinctive feature of my argument is its alternative hedonism: its resistance to viewing the needed changes in consumption as a form of sacrifice and loss of pleasure. I present them, on the contrary, as offering an opportunity to advance beyond a mode of life that is not just environmentally disastrous but also in many respects unpleasurable, self-denying and too puritanically fixated on work and money-making, at the expense of the enjoyment that comes with having more time, doing more things for oneself, travelling more slowly and consuming less stuff. The call to consume less is often presented as undesirable and authoritarian. Yet, the market itself has become an authoritarian force – commanding people to sacrifice or marginalise everything that is not commercially viable; condemning them to long hours of often very boring work to provide stuff that often isn't really needed; monopolising conceptions of the 'good life'; and preparing children for a life of consumption. We need, in short, to challenge the presumption that the work-dominated, stressed-out, time-scarce and materially encumbered affluence of today is advancing human well-being rather than being detrimental to it. And that's quite apart from the effects our consumption is having on the natural world. Rather than hankering after technical quick-fix solutions that might keep labour and consumer spending indefinitely on course (and these, in any case, seem unlikely to be forthcoming

or to come without serious risks),[1] the developed nations would be better off focusing on the formation of a much needed alternative model of progress, and breaking with current ways of thinking about prosperity and well-being.

Until relatively recently scientific warnings on human-created global warming have gone largely unheeded by the general public. But between October 2018 and May 2019, while I was writing this book, that situation changed dramatically. During these months, the perils of climate change and species extinction received unprecedented publicity. It seems that some affluent nations, including Britain, are finally acknowledging these problems. I had not predicted this. Like so many other academics, researchers, journalists and activists in NGOs and progressive global networks, who for many years have been charting, theorising, reporting and agitating around ecological crisis and its resolution, I had become used to these issues and campaigns being given low priority by mainstream media and politicians. The eruption of attention and concern has certainly been welcome. Nonetheless, I fear it could rapidly dissipate, and I remain sceptical as to whether it will lead to the policy changes needed to keep the rise in global temperatures below 1.5° Celsius, the emissions target agreed at the Paris summit on climate change (as I write, the UN World Meteorological Association predicts a rise of 3° Celsius or more by the end of the century).[2] Moreover, I suspect – though I hope to be proved wrong – that the reporting of climate change in those parts of the world where it is already having the most catastrophic impact will remain startlingly inadequate: so far we have been more likely to get reports about how air travel is being disrupted by flooding at New York City's LaGuardia Airport, and the 28 million dollars to be spent on barriers and drains there, than on the food crises caused by climate change that have ravaged Madagascar, Ethiopia and Haiti.[3]

I am above all sceptical about whether the recent high media profile of climate change will encourage more interest in what I shall call 'the politics of prosperity'. In Britain we are still waiting for mainstream political debate on the purpose of all our labour and wealth production and on whether the competitive and acquisitive society perpetuated by such a system offers a satisfying way of living. Admittedly, the consumerist lifestyle has come in for criticism recently in relation to its ecological impact, particularly for the carbon emissions, air pollution and plastic that it generates. It has also been subject to justified ethical discussion and dissent because of its exploitation of labour and natural resources in the peripheral economies.[4] What is much rarer is to find consumerism called into question from an alternative hedonist point of view – from a position that dwells on the inherently negative aspects of affluence and on the pleasures it is

denying or removing.

In previous writings on alternative hedonism, I have argued (a touch cavalierly perhaps) that even if there were no environmental or moral obstacles to the triumphant spread of the consumer lifestyle, even if it could be extended to everyone forever, human happiness and well-being would not be enhanced. Today, in view of the latest IPPC and UN reports on the planetary condition, the urgency of checking growth and changing consumption to meet environmental constraints must be stressed in any argument. But if I place more emphasis than hitherto on the environmental – and therefore also moral – case for re-thinking consumption, that is not at odds with the attention I have paid, and still pay in this book, to the gratifications and forms of fulfilment that might be offered by an alternative hedonist rethinking of consumption. On the contrary: the more pressing it becomes for us to change our ways, the more important the hedonist critique becomes. Alternative hedonism makes an integral contribution to the creation of a new political imaginary that we urgently need. The main objective of this book, then, is to strengthen the environmental and ethical case for embracing a post-consumerist (and ultimately post-growth) way of life by foregrounding the pleasures this might bring us.

My argument takes note of indications of existing concern and discontent about the affluent lifestyle. It is grounded in already experienced ambivalence, and seeks to give voice to implicit aspirations for living differently. Rather than railing against the excesses of consumerism, I point to the disenchantments of consumers themselves. I examine the problems of time-scarcity and pollution along with the stress and ill-health of consumers and their lament for pleasures that our work-and-spend mode of existence has eroded or supplanted altogether. Although acknowledging the importance of altruistic motives for shifting to simpler and more sustainable ways of consuming, my argument revolves around more self-interested motives for doing so. This emphasis reflects my sense that appealing to what people could expect to gain from adopting more responsible ways of living may be more effective than instilling further panic over climate change. It also follows from my desire to avoid moralistic assertions about needs (or wants) which have no reflection in the experiences and responses of people themselves. The authors of the now classic *The Limits to Growth* may well be correct when they claim that ‘people need identity, community, challenge, acknowledgement, love, joy’, and that

> To try to fill those needs with material things is to set up an unquenchable appetite for false solutions to real and never-satisfied problems. The resulting psychological emptiness is one of the major forces behind the desire for material growth. A society that can admit and articulate its nonmaterial needs and find nonmaterial ways to satisfy them would require much lower material

and energy throughputs and would provide much higher levels of human fulfilment.[5]

It is, however, one thing to claim knowledge of what is ‘really’ needed; it is another to justify the claim by reference to the actual experience of people, and another again to demonstrate the transitional means through which the claimed needs might come to be collectively acknowledged and acted upon. Being sensitive to these difficulties, I am reluctant to impute or impose a structure of consumer preferences in the absence of any evidence of its existence. My argument, therefore, moves from expressions of concern to delineating an alternative structure of satisfactions, rather than presupposing unconscious needs for this alternative and then casting around in a theoretical void for consumers who might come to experience them.

That said, I do also argue in a more assertive manner that affluent societies must break with the social and environmental exploitations of money-driven, high-speed ideas of progress and explore less damaging ways of enabling creative and non-monotonous lives. This means opening ourselves to new forms of ownership and control over the means of provision for consumption, to more self-provisioning, mending and making do, to greener ways of travelling and, in general, to a less novelty-and fashion-driven way of meeting our material needs. For some, this will mean doing less work, and thus having more free time; for others it may entail working in differing ways and to different rhythms. It might mean resuscitating some earlier and slower ways of living even as we take advantage of the newest and smartest green technologies in the provision of our energy and such other key areas as medicine, transport, agriculture and construction. In this process, the monopoly of advertising over the hedonist imagination and the depiction of the good life will need to yield ground to a greened aesthetic of material culture in which polluting and wasteful commodities lose much of their appeal.

I am not confident that such changes will come about. But I am arguing that if the worst abuses of the environment are to be corrected, runaway global warming to be kept in check, and exploitation and inequality (both within the nation state and globally) to begin to be effectively addressed, then richer societies will need to accept a less expansionary, more reproductive material style of living. By this I mean that they will need to agree to a provision for the more basic material needs (for food, household goods and furnishings, clothing, toys, sporting and recreational equipment, and so on), that is less dependent on innovation and continuous replacement of goods. However, in exchange they can expect to have more leisure time along with the cultural and recreational provisions with which to enjoy it. And even though a more reproductive material

culture would provide fewer and less glamourous goods, it would have the advantage of making them more durable and of cutting out built-in obsolescence, thus reducing waste. In advocating these developments I dissent from the hi-tech utopian vision of a post-capitalist, post-work future currently influential on the left, with its anti-humanist ethos, its trust in levels of automation that would dispense with workers and its rather orthodox views on consumption.[6] Instead, I argue for a future that allows not only for more free time, and less conventional ways of using it, but also for more fulfilling ways of working.

In all this, the book reflects a sense, based in the recollection and endorsement of the eco-friendlier practices and pleasures that are being swept away by capitalist 'progress', that we need to resist the chronocentrism that refuses to look to resources in the past that could help us in the formation of a more viable and enjoyable future. I do not advocate unreflective nostalgia or elegiac escapism, but I recommend a cultural politics freed of the patrician and patriarchal relations of pre-modern societies which seeks nonetheless to restore, in transmuted form, some of the fulfilling and sustainable aspects of earlier ways of living. The aim is to open up the prospect of an eco-benign politics neither uncritically committed to technology, on the one hand, nor overly 'back to nature' in outlook on the other, but grounded in new ways of working and spending leisure time, and the sensual and spiritual pleasures they can provide.

These moves, of course, are diametrically opposed to those advocated by neo-liberal ideology. Indeed, they involve a break with capitalism as we now know it, and require at the very least a highly regulated version of it. They mean re-thinking the current commitment to growth and growth-driven conceptions of progress and prosperity. So entrenched is this commitment that a recent media study found that four out of every five articles on the economy felt able to use positive language about economic growth without specifying what its advantages might be.[7] In affluent economies, such a perspective is peculiarly distorting. As one commentator has put it, the notion that growth equates with progress

> seems to lead some people to think that the issue of whether the planet will be inhabitable a hundred years from now is subordinate to indications that an increasing share of the world's population is modestly improving its health, education, and purchasing-power. In this view, in other words, it does not seem to matter so much if we are generating changes that will lead to the extinction of our species, if increasing numbers of people today live somewhat longer, spend more years in school, and are able to consume a bit more than their parents.[8]

Those who continue to equate progress with endless economic growth, expansion of consumer culture and full employment will find the views

expressed in this book fanciful and dismiss its recommendations as utopian. But there are growing numbers, represented politically in the Green Parties and some parts of the left, who would argue that it is mainstream politicians and their supportive media who are today pursuing an ultimately unrealisable agenda. This book will have more appeal for them. But it is also offered as a source of argument and information for all those, wherever they may locate themselves on the political spectrum, who are beginning to feel that the old certainties and assumptions about the nature of progress are breaking down, and that these must cede to a politics of prosperity more suited to our times.

The book is also intended as a call to those on the Marxist left to rethink their disparagement of the political importance of consumption, and to overcome their general reluctance in recent times to imagine post-capitalist ways of living. In this context, alternative hedonism is presented as the impulse behind a new political imaginary or conception of well-being that connects with the arguments and outlook of left-wing parties and social movements, and also with various initiatives seeking to bypass mainstream market provision by means of networks of sharing, recycling and exchange of goods, services and expertise. At the same time, I insist that the demands posed by eco-crisis cannot be made supplementary to existing party programmes nor allowed to become subject to the usual jostling for political advantage. As Yann Moulier Boutang writes,

> The autonomy of green demands – the fact that they cannot be reduced to an adjustable variable of the situation – is not a recipe for electoral advantage; it is an ethical and political necessity, which lays the basis for the identity of any left party wishing to address social transformation. What appears now … is a new imperative, capable of uniting the field of radicals and reformists, to make an immediate and major green transformation the driving motor of politics. … Immediate social change is necessary because it will be impossible to carry through even the smallest programme of green transformation unless the population gets mobilised by itself and on its own account. If we decide that this is not possible, then the only remaining option … will be 'enlightened' authoritarian regimes … [W]ithout radical democracy and immediate elements of social transformation, there is no mobilisation.[9]

The thought that has gone into the writing of this book has been evolving over many years and undergone significant shifts of outlook and emphasis in the light of a political and cultural context that has itself been subject to significant change and evolution. But the book itself has been composed quite rapidly, in view of the ever more urgent need for social change, and in the hope that it can contribute to the mobilisation essential to the realisation of that change.

1

Society, Nature, Consumption

Stark warnings of the unprecedented horrors that will ensue if the world continues to heat at current rates are now being issued on an almost daily basis by researchers and those reporting their findings. Some of the more recent alarms have been sounded in the best-selling *The Uninhabitable World*, in which David Wallace-Wells catalogues the fires and floods, famines and plagues, ozone smogs and marine deaths that will afflict us, bringing social chaos and economic breakdown in their wake. Even at a warming of 2° Celsius (a best case scenario), he tells us,

> The ice sheets will begin their collapse, 400 million more people will suffer from water scarcity, major cities in the equatorial band of the planet will become unliveable, and even in the northern latitudes heat waves will kill thousands each summer …. At three degrees, southern Europe would be in permanent drought, and the average drought in Central America would last nineteen months and in the Caribbean twenty-one months longer. In northern Africa, the figure is sixty months longer – five years. The areas burned each year by wildfires would double in the Mediterranean and sextuple, or more, in the United States. At four degrees, there would be eight million more cases of dengue fever each year in Latin America alone …. In certain places, six climate-driven natural disasters could strike simultaneously, and, globally, damages could pass $600 trillion – more than twice the wealth as exists in the world today.[1]

The perils of global warming are, understandably, an overwhelmingly dominant concern of the now voluminous body of writings devoted to the natural environment and human relations with it. But there has also been significant growth in the less apocalyptic style of writing on nature: that which celebrates the beauty and importance of the countryside and wild nature, and calls upon us to recognise and re-establish our affinities with other animals. Both kinds of literature continue to offer essential and variously alarming and moving testimonies; and both have brought about a significant shift in public awareness of the issues and helped establish the environment as an unavoidable reference point for government and policy making. Yet both types of writing tend to hold

back from any serious and sustained targeting of the everyday consumption practices that are mainly responsible for environmental crisis.[2] The more alarmist literature often assumes that current consumption and lifestyles will continue unchecked, or if and when they have to be checked, it will be undesirable and to our detriment. Wallace-Wells, for example, speaks of us having, at best, to live in a world 'degraded by our own hands, and with the horizon of human possibility dramatically dimmed'.[3] For this way of thinking, technology in the form of artificial geoengineering, carbon capture and revolutionary ways of providing for emission-free energy offer the only realistic route to avoiding calamity – and even if they secure our ongoing survival, life will have lost much of its delight.[4] Advocates of more natural geoengineering schemes such as the 'half-earth' rewilding project put forward by E.O. Wilson or the 'Two-Thousand Watt Society' proposed by the Zürich Federal Institute of Technology both advise us of the austerity and sacrifice such projects would entail rather than noting any potential they may have to open the way to a more pleasurable way of living.[5] In other cases, when direct guidance is given on consumption, it tends to be either too general ('use energy more efficiently', 'reduce food waste') or too limited in its reach ('recycle', 'cut out plastic straws'). Nor is much proffered in the way of alternatives to affluent consumerist understandings of human need and pleasure. Recalling us to the beauty and value of nature can encourage greater appreciation of flora and fauna, pastoral landscape, wetlands and wilderness, but such appreciation is consistent with people continuing to consume in ways that threaten the natural environment and undermine its support systems. Think of the flight patterns of the eco-tourists, the globe-trotting of eco-critics moving from conference to conference, or simply the amount of car-driving that goes on to beauty spots and nature reserves. There is also a risk that the insistent attention to global warming and looming environmental disaster (whose concomitant institutional meetings, polar surveys of damage, academic seminars and the like also involve lots of flying around) encourages ecological despair rather than firing us to action. At any rate, my view – which underpins the general orientation of this book – is that green thought and writing, hitherto overly centred on the depletion of the natural world, now needs to focus less on the destruction of nature and its impact on a – supposedly unreformable – consumerist way of living, and more on human political culture and its reconstruction. The critical gaze should be centred on the activities of human beings in affluent societies, both as producers and as consumers; and it needs, too, to develop a more seductive vision of the very different forms of consumption and collective life we will need to adopt if we

are serious about ecological sustainability. The main aim must be to challenge the supposedly natural (in the sense of inevitable and non-political) evolution of both the capitalist growth economy and the consumer culture it has created, to undermine the sense that this development has been essential to human well-being, and to argue that we will prosper better without it.

De-naturalising capitalism

Thinkers such as Andreas Malm, Alf Hornborg and Jason Moore, have helped in this task of late by re-directing our attention to industrial history, and especially to the exceptional features of capitalism as a mode of production and their precipitating role in anthropogenic global warming.[6] In doing so they have, from differing perspectives and with differing emphases, renewed one of the most important themes of Marx's own argument on capitalism, namely, his insistence on its specificity. All forms of production, Marx argues, involve interaction between humanity and nature, and in this sense all epochs of production have certain common traits. Yet, 'just those things which determine their development, i.e. the elements which are not general and common, must be separated out from the determinations valid for production as such'. Capital (investment in labour-power for the realisation of profit) can be viewed as a 'general, eternal relation of nature' only if we 'leave out just the specific quality' which alone makes 'instrument of production' and 'stored up labour' into capital.[7] Yet a century and a half on from this, the naturalisation of the capitalist economy is as strongly embedded in current discourse as it ever was – perhaps even more strongly now that, after the demise of Soviet communism, the adherents of neo-liberalism feel free to present globalised capitalism as the only game in town, the option that human nature is hard-wired to choose (a position made easier to project thanks to the widespread misapplication of neuroscience in accounts of human behaviour).[8]

Neo-liberalism's apologists project the productivist dynamic associated with capitalist accumulation – the outcome of a specific history – onto human productive activity in general. However, as Marx saw, the production of material wealth need not and should not be seen as the main purpose of life. As Luis Andueza writes,

> The fact that within capitalism people and their social relations are rendered means for the production of objects is precisely what Marx considers perverse about the whole system, and the way in which these social relations come to be obfuscated and severed by the commodity-form is at the core of his critique of fetishism. The apparent autonomy and primacy of economic forms over

> their dynamic human content is what constitutes the topsy-turvyness of capitalist civilization.[9]

This naturalisation of capitalist priorities also, by implication, presents the ecological calamities now facing the planet as an almost inevitable by-product of human economic activity, ignoring the specific influences of a particular mode of production.

Similar evasions and occlusions arise when the concept of the Anthropocene is deployed. Those who use the concept do not always acknowledge the extent to which the development of the fossil fuel economy has obeyed capitalist priorities, or admit that other modes of production have been and might be less damaging. They are often silent about the long history of environmental controversy and about the warnings of ecological disaster that were being made many decades ago. The *Anthropos* which has supposedly now become a geologically shaping force is troublingly unspecific: the term says nothing about the vastly different ecological footprints of different nations, classes and individuals. As Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz put it in their helpful historical survey of these issues, 'whole books can now be written on the ecological crisis, on the politics of nature, on the Anthropocene and the situation of Gaia without so much as mentioning capitalism, war or the United States, even the name of one big corporation ….'[10] They caution us against a 'grand narrative of the Anthropocene' whose grandiose focus on interactions between the human species and the Earth system gives comfort to a minority of the planet's population, overlooks the environmental knowledge and activism of civil society both past and present, and favours the technocratic managerialism of the experts in climate science.[11] In their view:

> When we consider the multiform and general character of [environmentalist] oppositions and the intensity of environmental reflexivity through time, the major historical problem seems to be not that of explaining the emergence of a new 'environmental awareness' but rather to understand how those struggles and warnings could have been kept to the margins by industrialist and 'progressive' elites, before being largely forgotten … so that it can be claimed that the discovery that we are living in the Anthropocene is only very recent.[12]

Comparable criticism has been voiced by Jason Moore, who argues that to name the *Anthropos* as a collective author is mistakenly to endorse a concept of scarcity abstracted from capital, class and colonialism; a neo-Malthusian view of population; and a technical-fix approach to historical change. For Moore, it would be more apt to speak of a Capitalocene era rather than accept the reductive account encouraged by Anthropocene ideology.[13] Alf Hornborg is less ready to make that direct substitution, pointing out that socialism (at least of the

Soviet era) also zealously promoted the fossil fuel economy. But he makes the point that to designate our present time as the Anthropocene risks ignoring the inequalities of capitalism, and might suggest that climate change is the inevitable consequence of how our species is constituted. 'Although the potential for capitalism is inherent in our species,' he writes, 'it is not an inevitable product of our biology, nor something for which we all have a common responsibility.'[14] He also argues that the impasse of the Anthropocene forces us to accept that aspects of our modern thought systems are very poor reflections of the bio-physical world in which we are immersed: a view developed in his powerful critique of the non-naturality of capitalist-inaugurated technology and its central role, alongside money, in concealing the injustice of the hugely asymmetrical bio-physical resource flows in the global economy.[15] Modern, globalised technologies, argues Hornborg, 'represent not simply politically neutral revelations of possibilities inherent in nature, they are also products of unequal societal relations'.[16] Technological 'progress' has to be seen not simply as an index of ingenuity but as a social strategy of appropriation. And within that schema, it is of course always those at the neo-colonised periphery rather than the neo-imperialising centres who suffer most from the consequences of environmental depletion. Genuine progress would be to recognise that 'since the Industrial Revolution, economic growth and technological progress have served as supremely efficacious strategies for displacing workloads and environmental burdens onto other people and other landscapes. Viewed as strategies to achieve such displacement, they belong to a category of societal arrangements that includes slavery and imperialism.'[17] A more probing analysis would also forego the idea that the ecological 'debt' incurred through ongoing unequal exchange, can be understood in monetary terms: 'money cannot neutralize ecological damage in a physical sense. Monetary compensation for environmental damage can reduce contemporary grievances, but it is illusory to believe that "correct" reparations could be calculated, or that they would somehow set things straight … the ecological debt of Britain, for instance, is as incalculable as its debt to the descendants of West African slaves.'[18]

Very relevant to these arguments is Andreas Malm's counter-intuitive critique of technical-determinist accounts of the ascendancy of capitalism and its pursuit of fossil fuel (a pursuit in which Britain, the generator of 80 per cent of CO2 global emissions in 1825 and 60 per cent a quarter of a century later, led the field).[19] Against what might be called the Promethean myth of the Anthropocene (the view of Mark Lynas and others that it has been the inevitable outcome of the discovery of fire),[20] Malm (echoing Marx) insists that a necessary condition for

something is not necessarily its cause. The ability to manipulate fire is necessary for a fossil fuel economy but the cause lies elsewhere, most notably in the decisions of those capitalists who owned the means of production and chose to replace water power with steam power. Although the option for steam power was more expensive, it won out, Malm argues, because it better suited capitalist relations of production, not least the capitalists' preference for private property and for the independence of individual owners and managers, which led them to resist arrangements requiring cooperation among the cotton magnates. Moreover, the steam engine, which required and took advantage of growing urban-isation, was better suited to the de-skilling of workers and the imposition of greater discipline and control.

Malm also shows that the fossil fuel economy has been pursued despite strong opposition. In the nineteenth century, British workers resisted the labour processes imposed by the steam engine; under the Empire, Indian labourers were forced into coal mining. Today, workers continue to resist being dragooned into the extraction and use of fossil fuel. There is, for example, intense and widespread resistance to neo-extractivist pressures in Ecuador, Bolivia and elsewhere in Latin America – where this resistance is often based in an indigenous politics deeply tied to a history of resistance to colonialism and neo-imperialism, initially by Europeans and later by the United States (and now increasingly China). These are communities that have been on the sharpest end of a relentless process of colonisation that has sought to establish a globalised and racialised fossil fuel economy and suppressed attempts to stand against it through the harshest means: murder, militarisation, land grabs, displacement and ecological destruction which causes impoverishment and forces local communities into working cheaply for the industry.[21]

There can, then, be no disputing that greed for profit and power has imposed – and continues to impose – a fossil fuel economy to the exclusion of more eco-friendly alternatives. In the process, lives have been wrecked, the environment has been damaged, and Earth's climate has been altered. We have recently learned that both Exxon and Shell were informed by their researchers in the early 1980s that carbon emissions from fossil fuels would cause calamitous global warming by the middle decades of the present century, but they concealed the evidence from consumers and governments.[22] Little has changed since: North America is currently funding 51 per cent of the 302 pipelines in various stages of development around the world (in the US alone the output from these could increase carbon emissions by 559 million tonnes by 2040).[23] The author of a 2018 UN progress report on changes implemented since the Paris Agreement

speaks of ‘a huge fight by the fossil fuel industry against cheap renewables. The old economy is well organised and they have put huge lobbying pressure on governments to spend tax money to subsidise the old world.’[24] The G20 countries have obliged by increasing subsidies for fossil fuels from $75 billion (£58 billion) to $147 billion (£114 billion) between 2007 and 2016 to allow companies to compete with cheap renewables.[25] Consumers have also obliged, by continuing their love affair with the combustion engine and resisting efforts to increase tax on fossil fuels.

Against posthumanist advice on ecological politics

To insist that economic forms and categories have a history and that capitalism is but one possible mode of production is also to insist on sustaining an analytic distinction between nature conceived as an independent entity and permanent ground of all human activity and the social dimension with its political and cultural conditioning of the forms which that human activity takes. Nature on this understanding refers us to the ever-present forces and causal powers that are the condition of, and constraint upon, any human practice, however ambitious.

Despite claims to the contrary, the independent ontological reality of nature in this sense is not contestable. As I argued in my book *What is Nature? Culture, Politics and the Non-Human*, recognition of the reality of nature so conceived, and its distinction from what is socially and culturally instituted, is indispensable to the coherence of both ecological discourses about the perceptible environment and to claims about the genetically-engineered or cultural ‘construction’ or conditioning of humans, whether physical or psychological.[26] It is also, as Malm and Hornborg insist, essential to avoiding fetishised conceptions of the global economy that mislocate the real sources of injustice and environmental damage. We need to contest mainstream presumptions that technology is ‘natural’ and economics purely ‘social’, but to do so we must maintain an analytic divide between the natural and the social in the first place. This requires resistance to some of the more irrational and neo-animist tendencies of contemporary cultural theory.

Despite claims to the contrary, the absorption of nature in culture or culture in nature as advocated by much recent posthumanist thinking should also be resisted as unhelpful to environmental argument. According to the posthumanists, sympathetic responses to ecological issues require us to dispense with the nature–culture binary and the anthropocentric attitudes it has underpinned. Emphasising the relationality and continuity of all being,

posthumanists call for a blurring or collapse of what they see as misguided or arrogantly humanist distinctions between ourselves and other animals. Posthumanism in its 'new materialist' formulation has also invited us to think of inanimate objects as exercising agency no less extensively and effectively than human beings.[27]

Philosophical support for this kind of ontological destabilisation and ethical revision has derived from the anti-foundationalist shift associated with post-structuralist theory and philosophy especially from the arguments of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and their followers.[28] The actor–network theory of Bruno Latour with its resistance to recognising significant differences between the agency of human beings and that of non-human beings and objects has also been very influential.[29] The impact of neuroscience on social and cultural theory has likewise played a part, promulgating the idea (which lay people seem increasingly disposed to accept) that we are our brains: that minds and brains are one and the same.[30] According to Raymond Tallis, neuroscience has been responsible for the figurative attribution to other animals of human cognitive experiences, a process of 'Disneyfication' or a pincer movement in which humans get described in beastly terms, and animals in human terms. Talking down humans by denying them awareness of the nature, purpose and motives of their actions is complemented by talking up animals by anthropomorphising their attributes and behaviour.[31] An analogy often made in the neuroscientific argument implies that similarities in the behaviours of humans and apes indicate a similarity in the mental states that attend on and generate them.[32]

The writings of Donna Haraway and her followers have had a significant and comparable impact on environmental thinking. Defending her 'cyborg' ontology, Haraway has invited us to elide not only humans with other animals, but also the organic with the inorganic. The breakdown of these conceptual divisions is acclaimed as both emancipatory for humans and ecologically progressive: as an anti-anthropocentric advance that recognises the parity, connectivity and relationality of all forms of being. In endorsing this approach, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have argued that a primary condition of political progress is that we recognise that

> human nature is in no way separate from nature as whole, that there are no fixed and necessary boundaries between the human and the animal, the human and the machine, the male and the female, and so forth; … [and] that nature itself is an artificial terrain open to ever new mutations, mixtures and hybridizations.[33]

In their recent 'accelerationist' case for a technically driven post-work future,

Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams likewise enthuse about the contribution of ‘cyborg augmentations, artificial life, synthetic biology and technologically mediated reproduction’ to a posthumanist ‘synthetic freedom’, insisting that there is no authentic human essence to be realised and associating all such talk with a limited and ‘parochial’ humanism. (Although quite how this anti-essentialist position coheres with their own polemic against the ills heaped on human beings by capitalism, or their presentation of the contrasting fulfilments to be realised in a post-capitalist future, remains unclear).[34]

There are notable contrasts between these various types of argument, and it may therefore be misleading to assimilate them under a general posthumanist umbrella (Haraway has herself rejected the term). But they share several themes: the merging of nature and culture; the decentring of the humanist subject; the view that human–animal dualism obstructs ethical guidance on the treatment of non-human animals; a resistance to accepting human exceptionality. There is also, normatively speaking, some general agreement that the ecological crisis of unprecedented proportions now faced by humans and other species has been encouraged by the errors of ‘dualist’ and ‘humanist’ thinking.

Posthumanist theory, however, is produced exclusively by and for human beings and it seeks a response through their particular capacities for adjusting thought and behaviour in the light of argument. It thus relies for its theoretical coherence and ethical appeal on an implicit commitment to distinctively human qualities, and by extension to intentionality and conscious agency. Its critique of humanism is therefore self-subverting, and this surfaces in a particularly acute form in relation to its cyborg thinking and argument on inorganic being. Even those who would have us blur the mind–machine conceptual division, do so on the basis that advanced AI possesses mind- and soul-like qualities. But if these capacities or attributes themselves invoke a regrettably ‘humanist’ estimation of human powers of cognition and reflexivity, implying some preferential evaluation of minds and souls, then why should they be accorded any special attention? There is also some tension involved in maintaining a cyborg disregard for organic–inorganic distinctions while at the same time defending a blurring of the human–animal divide on the grounds that it will issue in more compassionate treatment of non-humans. To protest against the cruelties of agribusiness is surely to protest against the treatment of organic beings as if they were on a par with Cartesian machines and thus indifferent to their suffering.[35]

There are problems, too, with Deleuzian-influenced eco-critical approaches that refer us to the play of forces through which all living beings are united in a rhizomic universe. Recognition of the relationality of being is, after all,

consistent with any and every ethics or politics. Such theory tends to operate at so high a level of abstraction that little guidance is given on the economic and political institutions that might meet its professed objectives. In the absence of that guidance, however, it readily reverts to an essentially descriptive account of actuality: a comprehensive but somewhat scholastic mapping of practices and subjectivities attached to a messianic and hence ultimately evasive politics.[36] Rosi Braidotti, for example, has recently written that 'sustainability expresses the desire to endure, in both space and time. In Spinozist-Deleuzian political terms, this sustainable idea of endurance is linked to the construction of possible futures [… which in turn] entails the collective endeavour to construct social horizons of endurance, which is to say, of hope and sustainability … and hope gives us the force to process the negativity and emancipate ourselves from the inertia of everyday routines.'[37] This is well-meant, but it says very little about where or when or how or by whom any of this creative potential or hope will be mobilised.

Posthumanism, then, undoes itself if it attempts to dispense with human exceptionalism, and the only persuasive discourses offered under its influence are those which are prepared to recognise and talk about the humanism which irreducibly remains in play throughout its questioning of the human. It is fine to point out that we are all inter-connected in nature and share more with other animals than we previously thought. One can also agree with those who argue that what generates our moral response to animals and their treatment is not some distanced and impartial calculation of what consideration is rightfully due to them, but rather our sense of the mortality and vulnerability we share with them, and the compassion that goes with that.[38] However, it is precisely with a view to sustaining the philosophical coherence of this position, with its appeal to the distinctive role of human imagination and sympathy in generating a moral response, that we need to defend the difference between humans and other creatures. As Cora Diamond has put it:

> … if we appeal to people to prevent suffering, and we, in our appeal, try to obliterate the distinction between human beings and animals and just get people to speak or think of 'different species of animals', there is no footing left from which to tell us what we ought to do, because it is not members of one among species of animals that have moral obligations to anything. The moral expectations of other human beings demand something of me as other than an animal; and we do something like imaginatively read into animals something like such expectations when we think of vegetarianism as enabling us to meet a cow's eyes. There is nothing wrong with that; there *is* something wrong with trying to keep that response and destroy its foundation.[39]

We need, then, to avoid crassly anthropocentric approaches to human–animal

relations. We also, however, need to recognise that it is only humans who are in a position to extend moral consideration to other animals, and that even when posthumanists argue that animals should be treated on a par with human subjects, an appeal is being made to a capacity for moral discrimination that is exclusive to human beings. We also know that no animals can think of themselves as having responsibility towards us in the way that many humans do towards them. I am not denying here that some companion animals, dogs in particular, will sometimes show care and concern for their owners or handlers. What I mean is that other animal species do not conceive of or exercise any universally applicable form of concern for the members of other animal species, humans included. I mean, too, that they have not produced representations of us humans, orally, in writing or pictorially, nor are there philosophical arguments about their relations with us. This surely obliges us to say that they cannot imagine what it is like to be a human being. The sensibility that makes us (or should make us) hesitate about assimilating other animal species too closely to human beings must surely also acknowledge this failure of imaginative reciprocity between ourselves and other creatures. No other animal can recognise a right or feel an obligation to respect it; most other animals appear indifferent to the welfare of other species – fortunately so, in many ways. Most animal species would die of starvation were it not for the suffering of other creatures they catch daily, tear apart and eat alive. Human exceptionality, by contrast, is as readily manifested in extreme empathy with other animals as it is in arrogant disregard for them. We must respect this abyss between humans and non-human animals even as we ponder what to do about it.

In arguing this, I am by no means implying support for simplistic views (such as we find in Biblical and Enlightenment writings) on the right of human beings to exploit the natural world in whatever ways they see fit. I am insisting only that there are properties and powers exclusive to humans, which require us to demarcate clearly between ourselves and other animate beings. The same applies a fortiori in the case of inanimate beings (or objects).We can agree with Latour and the new materialists that objects can have major formative influence on humans and can generate their own consequences. But this is very different from imputing human powers of agency. I dispute the wisdom of those who have lately positioned themselves as friends of nature precisely by denying the subject–object, nature–culture and human–animal distinctions. I am also quarrelling with those who insist on the importance of a redemptive awakening to human continuity with nature, rather than on the (often grim) exceptionality of human economic and social practice. Indeed, if human forms of consciousness and agency are on a par with those of the rest of nature, then no special

responsibility for ecological collapse can be attributed to humans, and no eco-political strategies for redemption can be expected of them. Paradoxical as it may seem, the belief that humans occupy no special place in nature is likely to confound rather than advance the ecological cause. As Hornborg argues, the most problematic implication of attempts to dissolve the subject–object distinction

> is finally not the fetishistic attribution of agency to non-living entities, but the withdrawal of responsibility and accountability from human subjects. The denial of accountability in human subjects – accomplished by putting them on a par with non-humans – is quite congruent with the relinquishment of responsibility that is implicit in the posthumanist stance of Latour and his followers. The uniqueness of human responsibility – which simply cannot be extended to rivers, volcanoes, or even dogs – remains an insurmountable dilemma for posthumanism.[40]

The assimilation of humans to other animals in terms of their needs and desires (a reductive naturalisation of their consumption) is also an inadequate basis for thinking through the alternative modes of consumption essential to guaranteeing a sustainable future. Non-human animals may emulate each other, and some of them certainly observe their pecking orders, but they do not consume for display or symbolic reasons. They may be deceived in their quests for satisfaction, but non-human animals do not pursue fantastical pleasures, nor are they interested in dissatisfaction as itself a condition of enjoyment. Human consumption, by contrast, is of a two-fold and over-determined character, developed in relation to both needs for physical survival and reproduction and to the more transcendent needs of the spirit (currently much deflected and confounded). What is more, the material objects of human consumption – unlike those of other animals, especially animals in the wild – are seldom stable, but constantly mutating. In consumer culture what we consume has become ever more various, numerous and baroque. Hence my dissent from the suggestion that consumerism's negative consequences can be corrected by a simple 'return' to a naturally fixed and objectively knowable system of need satisfaction. But hence, too, my quarrel with those who tend to treat capitalist consumer culture as if it were the *only* form in which these distinctive qualities of human consumption could be accommodated; my quarrel, in other words, with those who are inclined to treat it as a natural development.

De-naturalising consumption

I suggested at the outset that Marxist approaches to industrial history are of critical importance in exposing both the distinctive role of capitalism in

propelling global warming and environmental degradation, and the various ideological moves that continue to secure its disastrous hegemony. But if Marxism is to avoid becoming merely a historical reflection on what has gone wrong, it surely also needs to provide some guidance on how to put things right – guidance about what could or should replace the capitalist order, and about the forces that might help to promote that. In claiming this, I accept how dire the current situation seems, and how difficult it is to feel anything but pessimistic about the potential for transformation. The reluctance of much contemporary Marxist commentary to speculate on post-capitalist arrangements or on the politics and agents of transition is in this sense understandable. Yet as David Harvey has suggested, the fact that it is precisely because we have been told for so long that there is no post-capitalist alternative that it becomes important to envisage one.[41] A Marxism that can summon no resources for thinking beyond capitalism succumbs to fatalism and thus to a form of idealism that espouses critical ideals which have no basis in reality. The reluctance to confront working-class opposition to socialism, if unsurprising, evades the all-important question as to who might now assume the transformative role that classical Marxism assigned to the proletariat.

I also want to suggest that Marxism today cannot continue to abstract from the role of consumption (including that by the metropolitan working-class) in sustaining capitalism and hence from its contribution to climate change. There is surely a striking contrast between the immiseration of workers in the nineteenth century and the much greater access of the work-force in contemporary industrialised societies to the commodities created through mass production: the now almost universal consumption of cars, air travel, electronic and white goods, home improvements, fashion items and so forth. This type of consumption has now fostered a problematic model of the ‘good life’ even in developing countries. Yet instead of a proper acknowledgement of this, we are too often offered (as in Jason Moore’s recent *Capitalism in the Web of Life*) a hypostatisation of the system, as if capital itself were responsible and acting autonomously. We are told of capitalism’s ‘arrogance’, its ‘desires’, its ‘choices’, and so on – along with a relative abstraction from the everyday life of ordinary people, either in their role as consumers or in their electoral support for the system. Thus the impression is given that only as workers do most human beings figure in the survival and reproduction of capitalism. Moore recognises that what is at stake today is not only class-struggle, but also ‘a contest between contending visions of life and work’. He says little, however, about how we might develop that claim, and offers no insights on any alternative vision.[42]

Or again (to take up a point, made by Bonneuil and Fressoz), it may be true that ninety corporations are responsible for 63 per cent of the cumulative emissions of carbon dioxide and methane produced between 1850 and the present day, but it is important to note that these emissions stem from the production of fossil fuels and concrete used in housing, building projects and in innumerable consumer articles throughout those years.[43] It is also true, as Andreas Malm says, that we cannot put the blame for Chinese emissions on Chinese workers[44], but we do surely have to put some blame on the very ready consumption of the cheap goods they are producing, a readiness shared around the globe and across class lines. We should also acknowledge the indifference on the part of large swathes of the population in affluent nations to the sweatshop conditions in which these goods are often produced, and the resistance of many workers to the imposition of fuel tax, or the curbing of today's dependency on car travel and cheap flights. As I write, the British Prime Minister is promising to freeze fuel tax – a promise campaigned for by the *Sun* newspaper and intended primarily to woo 'hard-working families'. Few among those welcoming the promise, one suspects, will agonise much over the illegal levels of air pollution currently condoned by the government, or over the recent imprisonment of those protesting against fracking, or even over the dire predictions of the IPPC Report on global warming released within days of Prime Minister Theresa May's address to her Party conference in 2018. In France, meanwhile, in a comparable, if more explosive scenario, President Macron has been forced to withdraw his planned raising of the fuel tax in an attempt to quell the Gilets Jaunes protests it generated.

It is true that the huge inequalities generated by neo-liberal policies in recent years have seriously undermined the social solidarity essential to the successful introduction of environmental taxation on everyday consumer goods.[45] But to recognise the negative impact of austerity measures and inequality on the support for higher duties on fuel is one thing. It is another to ignore the extent to which workers as consumers are collusive in the reproduction of the capitalist economy – an issue on which much of the left has so far been extremely evasive. Furthermore, however critical they may be of capitalism in other respects, socialists are still much too ready to subscribe to conventional views on the 'good life' and what constitutes a 'high' standard of living.

Those who object to attributing all environmental wrong-doing to the capitalist West while ignoring the ecological devastation of the Soviet regime are surely on target. But things might have been different had the Soviet leaders been less enamoured of the Western model of consumption and energy

provision, and more revolutionary in their thinking on human prosperity – had they been less ready, in other words, to ‘naturalise’ the consumption associated with capitalism. The point made some while ago by James O’Connor is still relevant here:

> An uncritical acceptance of Western-style development led to its mechanical imitation in socialist countries. The progress of socialism too often has been measured by its ability to keep pace with or outdistance, as with Sputnik, the West’s most technologically advanced accomplishments. In the course of this race, the idea of a qualitatively different type of progress, one measured by the quality of life rather than the quantity of technology or consumer goods, has been systematically suppressed.[46]

So, too, in many ways, is the rallying call of Rudolf Bahro, another early red-green thinker,

> Our customary idea of the transition to socialism is the abolition of the capitalist order within the basic conditions European civilisation has created in the field of techniques and technology – and not in Europe alone. Even in this century, a thinker as profound as Antonio Gramsci was still able to view technique, industrialism, Americanism, the Ford system in its existing form as by and large an inescapable necessity, and thus depict socialism as the genuine executor of human adaptation to modern machinery and technology. Marxists have so far rarely considered that humanity has not only to transform its relations of production, but must also fundamentally transform the entire character of its mode of production, i.e. the productive forces, the so-called techno-structure. It must not see its perspective as bound up with any historically transmitted form of the development of needs and their satisfaction, or of the world of products designed for this purpose. The commodity world that we find around us is not in its present form a necessary condition for human existence. It does not have to look the way it does in order for human beings to develop both intellectually and emotionally as far as we would like.[47]

It would be a pity if those responsible for the innovative arguments on ecology that have been developed of late within historical materialism were not to extend their insights onto capitalism as a perverse and dystopian biospheric organisation in order to provide an equally luminous de-naturalising assault on capitalism’s anachronistic conceptions of human prosperity and well-being. The definition of progress in terms of capitalist-driven technology and industrialisation can no longer be left unchallenged; nor can nations with the least sustainable environmental footprint any longer be allowed to figure as models of the good life for the developing nations.[48] A less techno-driven and growth-oriented organisation of nature has now to be viewed as offering more advanced norms of welfare and modes of providing it.

Orthodox Marxists may object, but those working within a broadly historical materialist framework of thinking must now encompass the politicisation of consumption, rather than restricting their focus to production and worker exploitation. They need to be as critical of capitalism’s success in promoting the

consumerist lifestyle as if this were the only one worth having as they have been of the naturalisation of its reliance on fossil fuel. They must allow criticism, too, of Marx's more extravagant claims about what a post-capitalist future could deliver. 'An abundance of needs', 'distribution according to needs' – heady though such slogans may be, they can no longer figure as appropriate summations of what could be achieved under socialism. Hence my own quarrel with the detached radicalism of some academic Marxists who have been happy to repeat the gesture towards an ever-receding utopian horizon of universal plenitude in order to spare themselves engagement in the necessary, though troublesome, reconstruction of the Marxian message on post-capitalist society. A cultural politics that sniffs at the idea of moderating consumption is clinging to an outdated set of assumptions about what would constitute post-capitalist forms of industry, labour process and worker emancipation. Nor can the left continue to advocate equal, universal access to Western affluent standards of living, not even if their production were to be revolutionised in ways that freed it from the exploitations of heteronomous labour. Demands for full employment, the end of austerity and economic security for all have to be coupled with, even replaced by, demands for a post-growth economic order based on fairness in global distribution and an essentially *re*productive order of material consumption. This in turn will require a revolution in our thinking about the very nature of progress and prosperity – a revolution that challenges the idea that consumer culture delivers the good life even to those with the means to buy its goods, that undermines attempts to maintain the hegemony of work over our lives and value system, and that highlights the pleasures for everyone of a less speed-driven, time-scarce, acquisitive way of living. Only if the left commits itself to an alternative politics of prosperity along these lines have we any real hope of setting off the relay of pressures that might issue in an effective mandate for change.

While I have a quarrel with those who would treat consumption as a nugatory factor in the 'crime' of the fossil fuel economy, I am equally reluctant to discount the possible role of revised ideas about prosperity, consumption and the 'good life' in leveraging some more radical economic transformation. The IPPC report of October 2018 charged states with a 'moral responsibility' to act with immediate and radical effect on global warming and presented them as the main agent of change. Since then there has been some state acknowledgement of our 'climate emergency'. But based on their record, it is difficult to see states committing to the radical action that is needed without being pressured to do so. But who will exert that pressure? Malm suggests that it would be folly to trust to

consumers to change their habits and demands.[49] He is by no means alone in this, and he may well be right. But by his own argument, it would be even more absurd to put one's faith in corporate elites to enforce state action in the creation of a just and sustainable future. Nor, surely, can we any longer expect meaningful opposition to the status quo to be initiated by a concerted proletarian movement. Paul Mason may be mistaken in claiming that everyone is now capable of becoming an agent of transformation thanks to global networking, but he is surely right in suggesting that those who cling to the idea that the proletariat is the only force that can push society beyond capitalism have failed to see how extensive and diverse the potential agency for change has now become.[50] In any case, the proletariat in Marx's now classic understanding of it as the class of immiserated factory-workers opposed to the bourgeois class and seeking its overthrow no longer corresponds to the realities of the contemporary capitalist formation and its possible sources and agents of transformation.

Foolhardy as it may be, I am therefore offering, in the ensuing chapters, a review and critique of affluent consumer culture that challenges a left–right consensus about its pleasures and its inevitability as a model of the 'good life', while highlighting the disruptive political potential of contests about consumption.

2

Why ‘Alternative Hedonism’? Why Now?

The model of prosperity associated with the capitalist growth economy and its consumerist way of living has always had its critics, but it has also come to exert a powerful influence over conceptions of progress and the ‘good life’. Many have defended it as the guarantor of freedom and democracy and the sole means of achieving a high standard of living. Capitalism has, indeed, brought many benefits, at least in the richer nations, and it has proved compatible with the advance of socially progressive agendas on ethnicity, gender and sexuality. But its benefits have been achieved at the cost of exploitation of both people and the environment; and it has done most for human well-being when it has been most subject to political regulation, as it was in European social democracies after World War II.

In recent decades, as post-war social democracy has fallen victim to neo-liberal ideology, the social costs of capitalist growth have soared with alarming consequences. The recent rise of populism in the UK, Europe and America, much of it though not all of it on the right,[1] reflects the disaffection of people excluded from the money-making, the cultural capital and the cosmopolitan lifestyles enjoyed by those who have gained from neo-liberalism – a disaffection expressed in the Brexit vote, the election of President Trump, and the rise of the extreme Right and its new media, movements and parties. Almost equally disturbing has been the impercipience or complacency of the political elites who over decades either failed to see this coming or chose to ignore it. Perhaps it is unsurprising that mainstream right-of-centre parties (although they have been among the electoral losers) have done little to check the rise of the new right. Particular blame should probably fall on the parties of the centre-left who, until recently at any rate, have seemed more eager to embrace than to resist neo-

liberalism.

In the UK, although the 1997 election victory of New Labour was welcomed as ending almost two decades of divisive Conservative rule, the Blair government showed little concern for the widening on its watch of the gap between richest and poorest. ‘We are intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich as long as they pay their taxes,’ famously remarked New Labour business secretary Peter Mandelson.[2] The gap has continued to widen. Nothing has been done to curb the greed and conspicuous consumption of the very wealthy. According to Andy Haldane, the chief economist at the Bank of England, workers’ share of national income has fallen from 70 per cent to 55 per cent since the 1970s. Employees now get proportionately less today than they did at the outset of the Industrial Revolution in the 1770s.[3] Those dependent on state benefits – the unemployed, the long-term sick and disabled, the old – have fared miserably: after a decade of austerity, despite rising prices and living costs, spending on welfare will have shrunk by nearly a quarter.[4]

Rising inequalities of income and opportunity have been experienced across the world. During the years of sustained economic growth between 1990 and 2005 in the major economies of China, India and the US, the rich became relatively richer and the poor relatively poorer. In the seventeen years between 1990 and 2007, the bottom billion increased their share of global income by just 0.18 percentage points (at which rate of progress it would take 855 years for them to receive 10 per cent of global income). In the estimate of a leading economist at the World Bank, both relative and absolute global inequality are now higher than at any point in human history.[5] And inequality is increasing: in January 2019, Oxfam reported that the wealth of the world’s 2,200 billionaires had increased by $900 billion or £687 billion ($2.5 billion a day or £1.9 billion) in the previous year. This 12 per cent increase in the wealth of the very richest contrasted with a fall of 11 per cent in the wealth of the poorest half of the world’s population. At the end of 2018, just twenty-six people owned as much wealth as that poorest half (in 2016, the number was sixty-one).[6] The wealth of the very rich now comes mainly from dividends, interest and rents derived from accumulated assets (such as shares, property and cash deposits) – all means that extract wealth from the goods and services produced by others. Less than 20 per cent is earned in salaries.[7]

These developments have been accompanied by dramatic changes in the conditions and experience of those who still do the producing – changes that are creating a looming crisis in the work-world and that must challenge the existing

economic status quo.[8] Automation continues to undermine job security and displace labour even as the work ethic maintains its grip on commercial thinking and social policy. More and more workers are exposed to the insecurities and abuses of the gig economy and zero-hours contracts, while intense dependency on work coincides with increasing scepticism about the value of many of its productions and its centrality in life. As work becomes more precarious, and the quest for work more desperate, the sense of purpose it provides diminishes. Even those in regular salaried posts are finding that work can frustrate rather than enhance self-expression and individual fulfilment. 'In contemporary capitalist societies,' as one commentator has put it,

> work manages to be one of the most sought-after, and one of the most complained-about activities: sought after because of the income that it provides to meet material needs, and because it is the most socially approved route to carving out an identity and becoming part of the pattern of other people's lives. But whether due to the monotony of the industrial production line, the emotional and performative demands of today's high-commitment organisations, the 'electronic panopticon' of the modern call centre, or the stress of long working hours, it is often as grievous as it is necessary.[9]

The environmental cost of growth

Alongside the divisions of monetary wealth seen in developed and growing economies with their current levels of worker insecurity and disaffection, there also exists a global division between richer and poorer nations resulting from the ongoing and unjust transfer of bio-physical resources from peripheral to core economies. Less than one-fifth of the earth's population currently consumes around four-fifths of its resources, with the United States representing 5 per cent of the global population but using about a quarter of the world's fossil fuel resources.[10] This ecological inequality is represented, under neo-liberalism, as a benefit of the 'progressive' openness to trade, which has replaced economic protectionism. 'Imperialism', Alf Hornborg writes, has been redefined as 'globalization':

> To open world trade to increasingly asymmetric (but unacknowledged) resource flows benefitting capital accumulation in core nations is thus currently represented as global emancipation. In terms of net transfers of resources, neo-liberalism can be viewed as a convoluted argument for the aggrandizement of core nations through neo-colonialism. It has become more evident than ever, however, that this means the aggrandizement of their elites, leaving most of the national population far behind.[11]

Hornborg's attention to 'resource flows' rightly emphasises the bio-physical basis of all wealth and thus its dependency on the natural environment. Inequalities, it may be said, have been with us since the advent of capitalism,

and have hitherto not proven to be much of an obstacle to its continued advance. Today's extreme inequality, however, coincides with the recent – if belated – recognition even by mainstream politicians that capitalism's continued expansion is coming up against unprecedented ecological barriers, including climate change, biodiversity loss, soil erosion, air and water pollution and unmanageable waste.

This is hardly surprising when we look at current figures on production and consumption. Despite the digital economy and greener technologies, more raw materials are being consumed currently than ever before in human history – and, as we have seen, in a very unequal distribution. According to a recent calculation, there are 1.2 billion motor vehicles, 2 billion personal computers, and more mobile phones on the planet than its 7.5 billion inhabitants.[12] Each year, the world consumes more than 92 billion tonnes of materials – biomass (mainly in the form of food), metals, fossil fuels and minerals – and this figure is growing at the rate of 3.2 per cent every year. Since 1970, extraction of fossil fuels (coal, oil and gas) has increased from 6 billion tonnes to 15 billion tonnes, metals have risen by 2.7 per cent a year, other minerals (particularly sand and gravel for concrete) have surged nearly fivefold from 9 billion to 44 billion tonnes, and biomass harvests have gone up from 9 billion to 24 billion tonnes.[13]

As already noted, the environmental limits to growth had been identified and emphasised before 1980, and have been meticulously charted in many recent writings. The evidence leaves little doubt that the current business-as-usual approach to growth is unsustainable. If the American model of the 'good life' were to be made available to all, at least three more planets would be needed to provide the necessary resources. To measure success in terms of market expansion in consumer goods is thus, as Andrew Simms has suggested, to measure success by failure.[14]

The imminence of ecological calamity is acknowledged by some of Silicon Valley's richest inhabitants, who are desperately seeking personalised technological escape routes from what they call the 'Event' (the rising waters, social chaos and anarchy of future environmental breakdown).[15] Naomi Klein reports that suppliers of weapons and private security services are getting ready to profit from disaster.[16] On the other hand, the advocates of geoengineering pursue their fantasies of solar radiation management[17] while eco-modernising economists persist in arguing that greener technologies will allow expansion to continue indefinitely and that we can have unending environmentally benign growth with little alteration to lifestyle.

Governments and corporate elites presumably believe them, since growth

remains the favoured measure of economic success. However, while green technologies, in combination with more locally based and democratic institutions for their development and use, will certainly play a critical role in weaning us from our dependence on fossil fuel and its by-products, there are no technical means for keeping an economy based on continuous growth permanently on course. In the current economic order, of course, technology is developed and harnessed primarily to enhance growth and thereby profit. It is, indeed, a key factor in the expansion of consumer culture – as is perhaps most clearly evidenced in the constant innovation of mobile phones, personal computers, and other individualised IT equipment (whose slimmer, smarter versions are reputed to be harder to repair than earlier models and therefore jettisoned sooner). Even if this changed, and genuinely sustainable technologies were widely adopted, it would remain the case that 'growth can't be green', to quote the title of a recent article by Jason Hickel. Hickel cites three extensive studies (dating from 2012, 2016 and 2017) which concluded that whatever efforts are made to optimise the efficiency of resource use and to limit carbon emissions, continued economic growth cannot be made sustainable. 'Ultimately,' Hickel concludes, 'bringing our civilization back within planetary boundaries is going to require that we liberate ourselves from our dependence on economic growth—starting with rich nations.'[18]

This negative verdict on the capacity of green energy to provide for indefinitely sustainable production is backed by figures over several years showing that more efficient technologies have hitherto always gone together with an overall expansion in resource use and production of more commodities.[19] Since 1975, American energy consumption per dollar of GDP has been cut by half, but energy demand has increased by 40 per cent. In aviation, fuel efficiency has increased by 40 per cent, but total fuel use increased by 150 per cent.[20] In the EU, emissions were indeed decoupled from growth between 1990 and 2012, but only at a rate of 1 per cent, which is only a quarter of that needed to reach the European Commission's roadmap aim to reduce emissions to 80 per cent below 1990 levels by 2050.[21] And such decoupling as has been achieved in affluent nations is in part due to reliance on emission-intensive imports from China and elsewhere. Meanwhile, it remains the richest who emit the most. If the top 10 per cent of the wealthiest reduced their emissions to only the EU average, total global emissions would fall by 35 per cent.[22]

The trouble with consumption

Injustice and inequality, impending environmental collapse, the crisis of work: the coincidence of these factors, all integral to the economies of affluent nations, is beginning to unsettle our relationship to a consumer culture that has long been taken more or less for granted. Consumption is emerging as an area of contention, a site where new forms of democratic concern, political engagement, economic activity and cultural representation might begin to have significant impact. Even commentators who are doubtful whether the necessary level of resistance can be mounted view the cultural politics of consumption as critical to any possible turn around. Wolfgang Streeck writes that in an era of crisis and systemic disruption of the kind we are now entering, capitalism will

> depend on individuals-as-consumers adhering to a culture of *competitive hedonism*, one that makes a virtue out of the necessity of having to struggle with adversity and uncertainty on one's own … That culture must make hoping and dreaming obligatory, mobilizing hopes and dreams to sustain production and fuel consumption in spite of low growth, rising inequality and growing indebtedness. [This will require] … a labour market and labour process capable of sustaining a *neo-Protestant work ethic* alongside socially obligatory hedonistic consumerism. … For hedonism not to undermine productive discipline … the attractions of consumerism must be complemented with fear of social descent, while non-consumerist gratifications available outside of the money economy must be discounted and discredited.[23]

As Streeck implies, this is an increasingly fragile political consensus to keep intact. The various signs of its fracturing will preoccupy a good part of this book.

One of the earliest (and more benign) of these signs has been the establishment and growth of the market for organic, fair trade, and locally and ethically produced goods. This is to be welcomed in that it reflects and encourages concern about the pollutants, food miles and exploited labour that go into articles of daily consumption. The motivations of ethical shoppers also overlap in some respects with those of a more radical anti-consumerism. One may assume that at least some of those committed to more responsible buying and investment are resistant to the shopping-mall culture and are seeking to move beyond a society of over-consumption.

Ethical shopping, it is true, is not an affordable option for everyone, and it can readily figure as 'greenwash' for producers and retailers. Being associated with dutiful buying rather than pleasure or self-interest it may not greatly alter our conceptions of our own well-being and the role of consumption in securing it. Nonetheless ethical purchase and investment reflect a more globally accountable way of thinking about one's supposedly private interests, and therefore challenge the conventional (rational choice) view of the consumer as obedient only to the most limited conceptions of self-interest and hedonism, and hence incapable of acting in the sphere of consumption on the basis of the

reflexivity and democratic concern they bring to their lives as citizens.[24] In fact, political theorists and sociologists of consumption have for some time acknowledged the significance of the more reflexive and self-consciously political constituencies behind the growth of 'virtuous shopping'.[25] The influential thinker Daniel Miller wrote more than twenty years ago:

> On the one hand, consumption appears as the key contemporary 'problem' responsible for massive suffering and inequality. At the same time it is the locus of any future 'solution' as a progressive movement in the world, by making the alimentary institutions of trade and government finally responsible to humanity for the consequences of their actions. … From the legacy of Ralph Nader in the United States, through consumer movements in Malaysia, to the consumer cooperatives of Japan, to the green movements of Western Europe, the politicized form of consumption concern has become increasingly fundamental to the formation of many branches of alternative politics.[26]

He goes on to suggest that the green movement has now tempered its mystical relationship to a reified notion of nature with a more rationalistic concern with the defetishisation of goods, and is showing increasing awareness of the real price of commodities for people as well as for the planet's natural resources.[27] These arguments chime with those voiced in Michele Micheletti's study of consumer campaigns, which show, she argues,

> that there is a political connection between our daily consumer choices and important global issues of environmentalism, labour rights, human rights, and sustainable development. There is, in other words, a politics of consumer products which for growing numbers of people implies the need to think politically privately.[28]

Ethical shopping, then, is one aspect of the more 'citizenly' approach to consumption in our time. Another is associated with disenchantment with the consumer lifestyle itself: other conceptions of the 'good life' are gaining more of a hold, and affluence is now commonly seen as compromised by the stress, time-scarcity, air pollution, traffic congestion, obesity and general ill health that go together with it.[29] In other words, consumerism is today being questioned not only because of its ethical and environmental consequences, but because of its negative impact on affluent consumers themselves, and the ways it distrains on both sensual pleasure and more spiritual forms of well-being. This questioning lies behind the many laments for what has gone missing from our lives under the pressure of neo-liberal economic policies, and the frequent expressions of interest in less tangible goods such as more free time, better personal relationships and a slower pace of life. Whether in nostalgia for a nationalised rail service (for a time, as a fellow traveller said to me the other day, 'when we were passengers, not customers'), or in dejection over an educational system tailored to the needs of industry rather than the intrinsic rewards of learning, or

in alarm over the commercialisation of childhood and the evidence of depression among the young, what is voiced is a sense of sadness that only monetary values can make headway in our culture, and that public goods cannot be expected to survive unless they make a profit. These voicings of discontent are not particularly class-based and remain low-key, diffuse and politically unfocussed. They are the frustrated murmurings of people aware of their impotence to take on the corporate giants and lacking a coherent idea of what to put in place of the existing order. But the regrets and disquiet are real enough, and feed into a widely felt sense of the opportunities we have squandered in recent decades for enjoying more relaxed and less narrowly reduced ways of living.

This is reflected, too, in the concerns of medical professionals, welfare workers and academic researchers about the economic and social effects of the high-stress, fast-food lifestyle. Recent studies have indicated that buying more does not bring greater happiness and that economic growth has no direct correlation with improved levels of well-being.[30] As the UK's independent watchdog on sustainable development (set up by the Labour Party in 2000 and abolished by the Coalition government in 2011) noted some while ago in its report on 'Redefining Prosperity',

> ever since the ground-breaking work of Abraham Maslow and Manfred Max Neef, psychologists and alternative economists have set out to demonstrate that, far from there being any automatic increase in wellbeing for every increase in levels of consumption, much of our current consumption is turning out to be a very inadequate surrogate for meeting human needs in a more satisfying, durable way.[31]

More recently, recognition that a time-scarce, work-dominated society is bad for the physical and the mental health of workers has led to many calls for GDP (sometimes dubbed the 'Grossly Distorting Picture') to be displaced in favour of other indices of social wealth.[32] While the huge contribution of unpaid activity such as household and voluntary work is discounted, GDP includes profits made from dealing with the consequences of mishaps and disasters such as air pollution, plane crashes and car accidents. A number of alternatives have been proposed, including the Human Development Index, which now recognises, alongside living standards measured by income, the role of life expectancy and knowledge in advancing well-being. The Genuine Progress Indicator (developed by Herman Daly and John Cobb in the late 1980s) also adds in the value created by domestic and voluntary work while subtracting the costs of crime and pollution. More recently, the Ecological Footprint, measures how much land and water a human population requires to produce the resources it consumes and to absorb its waste under prevailing technologies. The Happy Planet Index uses the

Ecological Footprint along with life expectancy and reported experience of happiness to calculate national levels of happiness. It thus includes ecological efficiency in providing for well-being as a key criterion of its achievement. Nations score well on the index if they achieve high levels of satisfaction and health with low levels of damage to the environment. To date many of the most industrialised nations, including the UK and USA, have scored pretty poorly on the index.[33]

There is, then, a climate of concern about the impact of unchecked consumption on ourselves and on the environment, which is reflected in an extensive body of research. But not much of this new thinking has entered into mainstream political argument, which still entertains only the most orthodox (and outdated) economic models and conceptions of prosperity. Even as it is progressively undermining the basic conditions of existence for millions alive today and for all future generations, the Western affluent lifestyle continues to be upheld as the model to which all societies should aspire. Mainstream political parties and corporate elites certainly profess concern about global warming, and have supported (often under some duress) measures to reduce emissions. Governments have also implemented schemes to reduce the collateral environmental damage of domestic consumption: encouraging and enforcing recycling, taxing plastic carrier bags and so on. But those in power have certainly not invited the electorate to think more radically and expansively about ideas of progress and prosperity. Little or nothing is heard about the purpose of all our wealth production, and whether it really enhances well-being; little or nothing is said about what might be gained by pursuing a less work-driven and acquisitive way of life. On the contrary, governments and mainstream opposition parties have been happy to allow consumer culture to retain its hegemony over the imagery and representation of our well-being, and they continue to encourage us to spend more on it. We heard this in the post 9/11 calls to commit to ‘patriotic shopping’ as a way of showing our support for the Western way of life (which said much about the dependency of corporate power on our continued loyalty to consumerism). The message is repeated in a never-ending barrage of advertisements and in the many incentive schemes to keep us spending. So culturally entrenched is the idea that our health and happiness as a nation is conditional on how much shopping we do that it seems eccentric to even question it.

To encourage ever-expanding consumption while professing concern about its inevitable environmental consequences is contradictory. There is, of course, a very obvious reason why acknowledgement of eco-crisis is not matched by

action, a reason summed up in Paul Mason's terse remark: 'If climate change is real, capitalism is finished.'[34] Since the global market thrives not on human or environmental well-being but on the multiplication and diversification of 'satisfiers' that can realise profit, counter-consumerism would prove disastrous for business. Ever fearful of what they term 'need saturation', corporations devote a great deal of ingenuity and money to encouraging new consumer whims. Since a constant flow of future buyers is required, massive budgets are expended on grooming children for a life of consumption. The average child in the US, UK and Australia sees between 20,000 and 40,000 TV ads a year, and marketers are also adept at camouflaging their messages by means of product placement that goes beneath the radar of most children and often deceives even their parents. The Internet also provides continuous exposure to on-screen and pop-up ads, with many brands offering games quizzes, and other entertainment on their own commercial sites. According to research by the National Consumer Council in the UK, the average ten-year-old has internalised 300 to 400 brands – perhaps twenty times the number of birds in the wild that they could name. Seventy per cent of three-year-olds recognise the McDonald's symbol but only half of them know their own surname.[35] Dependent as it is on the revenue from commercials, the media can hardly stem the flow of advertising. In consequence, representations of need, desire and pleasure not focused on consumption are marginalised. As Justin Lewis puts it in his study of the highly political role played by advertising in promoting consumerism (a role, as he notes, almost wholly outside the jurisdiction of the regulatory authorities):

> Since advertising carries no right of reply, its voluminous presence has created a lop-sided political landscape. Imagine, instead, what the world might be like if all that creative energy were spent encouraging us to think beyond consumer capitalism. It would represent nothing less than a seismic shift in our cultural environment.[36]

Left-wing critics of capitalism have been more bothered hitherto about the inequalities of access and distribution that a consumer society creates than about how it confines us to market-driven ways of thinking and acting. Employment is almost always prioritised over other goals. Labour militancy and trade union activity in the West have been largely confined to protection of income and employees' rights within the existing structures of globalised capital and have done little to challenge, let alone transform, the 'work and spend' dynamic of affluent cultures. In the past, socialists such as William Morris and Edward Carpenter offered imaginative and radical thinking on alternative consumption and ways of living, and dated though their argument now is in certain respects, it remains an important resource.[37] But there has also been a tendency on the left

to opt for patronising and simple-life accounts of fulfilment, rather than a more expansive way of thinking about the complexities and potentialities of human pleasure, and how it might be made richer and stranger in a post-capitalist society. Nowadays, the more influential left-wing commentaries on future consumption put their faith in technology to deliver material abundance,[38] and in some cases adopt a rather conventional hi-tech toys-for-the-boys approach to it. 'Rather than settling for marginal improvements in battery life and computer power', write Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, 'the left should mobilise dreams of decarbonising the economy, space travel, robot economies – all the traditional touchstones of science fiction …'.[39]

Alternative hedonism

Despite the paucity (and repression) of alternative visions among politicians and business communities, the contradictions between capitalist priorities and ecological imperatives and between what the economy demands and what is humanly valued are becoming widely noted and discussed. The sense that we must find another way is also expressed in a wide, if still marginal, array of projects, lifestyle choices and commitments. It is in this context that I have been pressing for what I call the 'alternative hedonist' approach to winning support for sustainable lifestyles and for forms of governance to promote them.

Unlike the more alarmist responses to climate change, alternative hedonism dwells on the pleasures to be gained by adopting a less high-speed, consumption-oriented way of living. Instead of presaging gloom and doom for the future, it points to the ugly, puritanical and self-denying aspects of the high-carbon lifestyle in the present. Climate change may threaten existing habits, but it can also encourage us to envisage and adopt more environmentally benign and personally gratifying ways of living.

Alternative hedonism is premised, in fact, on the idea that even if the consumerist lifestyle were indefinitely sustainable it would not enhance human happiness and well-being beyond a certain point already reached by many. Its advocates believe that new forms of desire – rather than fears of ecological disaster – are more likely to encourage sustainable modes of consuming. By supplying a broader cultural dimension to the existing arguments and outlook of the political wing of anti-systemic forces, it can help to build a more diverse and substantial opposition to prevailing economic orthodoxy. It can also provide an overarching 'imaginary' for the various initiatives seeking to bypass mainstream market provision via alternative networks of sharing, recycling, exchange of

goods and services and expertise (the Slow City, Slow Food movements, Buen Vivir, the New American Dream and now, most recently, and possibly most ambitiously, at least for the US, the Next System project).

In sum, a counter-consumerist ethic and politics should appeal not only to altruistic compassion and environmental concern (as in the case of Fair Trade and ethical shopping), but also to the self-regarding gratifications of living and consuming differently. It can seek democratic anchorage and legitimation for its claims about the attractions of a post-consumerist lifestyle in already existing ambivalence about and resistance to consumer culture. At a time when some economic theorists predict a terminal decline in capitalism's powers of accumulation,[40] and when the environmental obstacles to growth appear insuperable, it becomes urgent to renew an earlier tradition of positive thinking on the liberation from work, and to associate that with an alternative hedonist defence of the pleasures of a less harried and acquisitive way of living. The reduction in work needs, in other words, to be seen as an essential condition for relieving stress both on nature and on ourselves. If the circulation of people, goods and information were to slow down, then the rate of resource attrition and carbon emissions can be cut, and time freed up for the arts of living and personal relating currently being sacrificed in the 'work and spend' economy. Parents and children would then more readily reap the benefits of co-parenting, and personal fulfilment would become less dependent on the quick fixes of consumerism.

Today, then, critics of the existing political-economic system need to connect with and give voice to the political desires implicit in disenchantment with consumerism.

3

Consumption, Consumerism and Pleasure

The dominant, affluent model of the ‘good life’ is not only socially exploitative and ecologically very damaging, it is also increasingly compromised by its negative side effects for consumers. But what conditions and forms of agency might bring about a fairer allocation and a more responsible and life-enhancing use of global resources?

Alternative hedonism comes to the fore in the context of these concerns as a manifestation of distinctive, if still quite marginal, forms of ambivalence and disquiet about the supposed blessings of the consumerist lifestyle. It figures as a potential influence on cultural change and as the impulse propelling a new politics of prosperity. Alternative hedonism can also be seen as a source of new thinking about well-being that could promote (along with other developments) a shift to a more enjoyable, socially just and environmentally sustainable consumption.

Consumption’s troubled pleasures

This alternative hedonist ambivalence is evident in growing concern about the negative by-products of affluent living (high carbon emissions, toxicity, ill health, time-scarcity, over-work and insecurity). It is also reflected in expressions of regret for pleasures we can no longer enjoy. It shows up in angry complaints about urban air pollution, plastic in the oceans, gig-economy employment practices and land-grabbing developers. It can also be seen in the more subdued and private nostalgia over lost landscapes, communities and spaces for playing, socialising, loitering or communing with nature. It may centre around food waste or fast fashion or gendered marketing to children or the

absurd inadequacy of provision for cycling in most of the UK. It may surface as a more generalised lament over commodification, as a yearning for a less harried existence or as an elegiac sense that were it not for the dominance of the combustion engine, there would be much better provision for greener forms of transport, and both rural and city areas would look, feel, smell and sound entirely different. Or it may just figure as a vague and rather general malaise that descends in the shopping mall or supermarket: a sense of a world too cluttered and encumbered by material objects and sunk in waste, of priorities skewed through the focus on ever-more extensive provision and acquisition of stuff.

It will be pointed out that people in general show little inclination to cut back on shopping, driving and flying. That is true. But at the same time, the consumerist lifestyle is increasingly seen as a major source of over-work, poor health and depression, and as a growing threat to the basic livelihood both of people already struggling elsewhere on the planet and of the children and grandchildren of those in richer societies. Its irrationalities are widely acknowledged, if only with irritation or despair. Its work routines and modes of commerce mean that many people begin their days in heavy traffic or crammed into trains and buses, and then spend much of the rest of them glued to a computer screen, often engaged in mind-numbing tasks. A good part of its productive activity locks time into the creation of a material culture of ever-faster production turnovers and built-in obsolescence, which pre-empts more enjoyable and enduring forms of human fulfilment.

Instead of improved productive efficiency being used to shorten the working week so we could enjoy growing and preparing more food for ourselves, companies profit from selling us fast food and ready-cooked meals. Deprived of the leisure and facilities to make our everyday journeys by foot or bike, we are co-opted into weekend ‘health walks’ (with Apps to monitor them) or persuaded to buy stationary cycling and treadmill-walking sessions in the gym. We might have longer holidays, in which we could travel more slowly and experience more genuine relaxation, but meanwhile the tourist and therapy industries provide profitable mini-breaks and stress relieving services. When products are advertised and sold on the basis of their authenticity and naturalness, the market promises to salve nostalgia for the very losses inflicted by its own advances into everyday life.[1] In the USA, some shopping malls have been deliberately designed to evoke a pre-modern past in order to make it feel as if modern shopping were not happening.[2] As Roberta Bartoletti notes, this is one aspect of a wider pattern in which modern societies

> faced with [the] dissolution of traditional ties and the loss of a strong sense of ‘belonging’ … must

> identify new strategies able to motivate individuals to participate in its processes of social reproduction, in particular by keying in to their emotions. Within this framework the market plays an important role. The commodification of nostalgia can indeed be considered one of these strategies.[3]

Thus consumer society has become reliant on a collective preparedness to spend the money we earn by working too hard and too long on commodities, and commodified experiences, to replace the more diverse, enriching and lasting satisfactions we have sacrificed through over-work and over-production.

Some might argue that we accept the dominance of the market simply because of an innate desire constantly to work and consume more. But if that were so, the billions spent persuading us to buy would hardly be necessary. As Justin Lewis has said, 'the growth of consumer culture has been made possible by a parallel growth in the advertising industry. The more we have, the harder the industry has to work to maintain demand.'[4] Many social theorists, including some who take a pretty positive view of consumerism, doubt the directness of its gratifications, and analyse it instead as compensation or substitution for other losses. They see it, in other words, as reconciling us to deprivation and alienation rather than as intrinsically satisfying (a view echoed in the less erudite recommendations of shopping as 'retail therapy').[5] Colin Campbell welcomes consumer culture for combating 'ontological insecurity' and thus making good the loss of the 'meaningfulness' supplied by earlier cultures.[6] Daniel Miller, too, although previously resistant to any nostalgia about earlier societies as having provided more meaningful experiences or enjoyed a truer or more authentic relationship to our needs,[7] has in his more recent work presented consumption as a counter to the anomie created by 'vast institutionalized forces'.[8]

If much consumption in affluent societies is recognised as essentially compensatory, it is hardly surprising that some of their more reflective citizens, in a context of high anxiety about ecological exhaustion, are beginning to look beyond the limitations of this consumerist 'compensation'. However, this development may not bespeak a straightforward interest in returning to a simpler life, or give much credence to reductive theories about the falsity of consumerist desires and satisfactions. Much current consumption is certainly about the pursuit of desire, rather than the meeting of what are sometimes referred to as more primary, basic or natural needs.[9] Sustainable alternatives to it would also have to provide for distinctively human forms of need, and meet our appetite for novelty, excitement, distraction, self-expression and the gratifications of what Rousseau called *amour propre* (the esteem and approval of others we respect).[10] Indeed, the critique associated with alternative hedonism is directed more

against the limited and partial rein given to such appetites in our materialistic society than against the culture of desire as such.

The essential point here concerns the complexity of human consumption, its irreducible symbolic dimensions, and the difficulties of specifying some objective and naturally determined level of 'true' needs. Especially in the case of what might be called political needs – such as the 'true' needs that socialist or Marxist theory has imputed to the working class, or indeed to humanity at large – these must be acknowledged subjectively, if they are to claim any democratic legitimacy. Unlike the needs for blood or serum that a doctor imputes to a patient, these are needs that people can only properly be said to have if and when they come to feel them as their own. This means there is always an implicit reliance, in any such claims, on conscious experience as validating the imputation of need.[11] For these reasons, one has to be cautious about any discourse on human satisfaction and fulfilment that claims to have an independent knowledge of what conduces to it, and seeks to ground that knowledge in universal truths of human nature.[12] If we are to provide a critique of consumerism freed from this kind of Marxist knowingness, we must be ready to track the surfacing of desires for other ways of living, even if we find them in unexpected places, desired by unexpected people, and contaminated by all the banality and political confusion and ordinariness of the everyday consumer culture out of which they will (since from where else?) be emerging.

Because it attends to evident ambiguities in the reactions of consumers themselves, the alternative hedonist critique engages with an actually emergent culture of contradictory feeling. It points to expressed interests in less tangible goods – more free time, less stress, more personal contacts, a slower pace of life and so on – as lending support to criticism of consumer culture's narrow materialism. It makes few claims about what ought to be needed, or desired, or actually consumed by some particular class of persons, but draws on what diverse consumers are themselves beginning to discover about the anti- or counter-consumerist aspects of their own needs and preferences. This both respects the actual experience of people, and credits them with a degree of autonomy.[13]

Neither heroes nor dupes …

To argue along these lines is to open up a rather different framework of thinking about consumption, choice and citizenship to the ones that have prevailed until recently. In particular, alternative hedonism understands consumer freedom

differently from other approaches in consumption theory, whether liberal, Marxist or postmodernist.

In the conventional liberal view, the consumer is formally, if not always in reality, a genuinely 'sovereign' individual: an individual whose choice is self-determined and sacrosanct, and presumed always to obey a percipient and calculating rationality that privileges private needs and desires.[14] Some accounts, with greater or lesser irony depending on the author, depict this consumer as the defiantly autotelic manifestation of the Enlightenment subject: the 'heroic' shopper who follows the Kantian injunction of *aude sapere* ('daring to know') in being confident of what he wants and resisting all persuasions or enticements to the contrary. That it is a 'he' is reinforced by tendencies in the liberal perspective that have opposed the fully rational and therefore masculine consumer to the feminine-coded 'dupes' who are by nature less capable of reason and thus more easily seduced by the allure of unnecessary and frivolous goods. But this gendered divide between 'heroes' and 'dupes' does not gainsay the overall liberal-Enlightenment theoretical conception of the consumer as autonomous. The point, rather, is that the 'duped' do not fully live up to its expectations, and are seen as less able by their nature to realise this autonomy and freedom.[15] The market is in any case entirely indifferent to such discriminations of natural disposition, and its proper function, in the view of mainstream neo-classical economic theory, is simply to offer the maximum of individualised satisfaction to those with money to spend. In providing an abundance and diversification of goods, it allows for the ever-greater tailoring of consumption to the ever-more specific 'needs' (or wants) of the essentially private consumer – whose self-interested pursuit of goods disregards those of the community. If individuals concern themselves with the social or environmental impacts of their consumption, then they are presumed to do so in their role as 'citizens' rather than 'consumers'.[16] Here the consumer is presented as a relatively free agent, whose autonomy must be respected but is exercised only with a view to maintaining his or her own individual living standards. The values associated with an anti-consumerist or more community-oriented exercise (or withholding) of purchasing power do not find much register in this account of consumer freedom.

The same goes for the alternative Marxist and Critical Theory model, in which the consumer is regarded not as self-directing and free (if sometimes duped), but as systematically denied access to genuine self-understanding through the manipulations of the market and the culture industry.[17] On this account, what the consumer experiences as needs (or wants), whether for

material or for cultural goods, are ideologically inculcated and therefore deviate from what is truly needed – that is, from what would be chosen by the genuinely free subjects of an emancipated society. The purchases of those whom the liberal account regards as heroically 'free' will be no less alienated than the most frivolous whims of the 'dupes'. For consumer culture, which deceives individuals about the truth of their needs, compounds the injury by promulgating a general belief in the very 'freedom' of self-determination that it has in fact denied them. The market society, in other words, protracts its domination by subverting the will to resist it or to enjoy any system of pleasures other than the one it provides. According to Theodor Adorno, in whose argument this double bind finds its fullest and most dialectical register, it is therefore as incoherent, and in a sense as cruel, for commodity society to insist on personal autonomy as to insist on cultural determinism:

> If the thesis of free will burdens the dependent individuals with the social injustice they can do nothing about, if it ceaselessly humiliates them with desiderata they cannot fulfil, the thesis of unfreedom, on the other hand, amounts to a metaphysically extended rule of the status quo …. To deny free will outright means to reduce men unreservedly to the normal commodity form of their labour in fully fledged capitalism. Equally wrong is … the doctrine of [individual] free will which in the middle of commodity society would abstract from that society. The individual himself forms a moment of commodity society: the pure spontaneity that is attributed to him is the spontaneity which society expropriates.[18]

Numerous echoes of this critique of the Enlightenment position on subjective freedom can be heard in subsequent postmodernist approaches, most influentially perhaps in Michel Foucault's argument on the 'governance of individuality' – a concept through which he analyses how modern power wins compliance by means of 'techniques of individualisation' that are fundamentally normalising and regulatory of selfhood, rather than responsive to natural pre-discursive urges.[19] Foucault himself, towards the end of his life, claimed to recognise parallels between his critique and that of the Frankfurt School. However, he also always stated his distance from any theory of power as repressive of 'true' need rather than exercised through the construction of that 'truth'. Where he does talk most directly about consumption (which is seldom), it is to emphasise the continuous and unceasing reinvestments of individual choice through discursive power rather than to summon the possibility of a more radical mutation of its underlying economic relations. As he put it in his 'Body/Power' interview:

> Responding precisely to the revolt of the body [against the surveillance and suppression of sexuality], we find a new mode of investment which presents itself no longer in the form of control by repression but that of control by stimulation: 'Get undressed – but be slim, good-looking,

> tanned!' For each move by one adversary, there is an answering one by the other. But this isn't a 'recuperation' in the Leftists' sense. One has to recognise the indefiniteness of the struggle …[20]

Here Foucault would seem to be stating his distance from any political outlook – such as we find indicated, if only gesturally, in the argument of Adorno – that holds open the possibility of an end to 'recuperation' in favour of something more revolutionary. However, the gap between Foucault and the Critical Theorists closes again when we recall that the latter never conceived consumption as a site of revolutionary developments nor even envisaged individuals as politically enabled through their role as consumers. On the contrary, both in Foucault and in the Critical Theory analysis, individuals qua consumers are presented as moulded at the endpoint of a relay of powers, and so viewed as essentially passive constructs of the discursive regime or of ideological mystification. In neither perspective are their choices conceived as possibly catalytic of shifts at other levels of society – the consumer nowhere figures in either theory as a potential political actor.

Much the same is true of more recent postmodernist treatments (many of which draw on Foucault's discursive theory of the power/knowledge nexus) that emphasise the role of consumption in the affirmation of identity and status, and see it as part of a 'performative' repertoire.[21] Premised on the idea of a 'fragmented' and 'depthless' subject, these approaches necessarily rule out consumption choices as a direct expression of some natural and 'sovereign' selfhood. Yet, neither can they present them as the distortion or deflection of a more authentic self to whom commodification and the 'culture industry' have denied expression. Indeed, in this perspective it might be better to say that consumers are seen neither as free nor alienated, but conceived simply (which is to say, positivistically) as precipitates of consumer culture. Consumption may have acquired sign-value and thus be important in the creation of 'identity', but since this is viewed as a matter of relatively transient and narcissistic self-styling or performance, it does not figure in postmodernist theory as the vehicle for any concerted political action or republican sentiment. Postmodernity just allows for a plurality of lifestyles, tastes and opinions to find an outlet among consumers with enough money. Theorists who celebrate this individuation and diversification of choice do so without acknowledging the implications of consumption for projects of solidarity, in which indeed they show no interest. Consumers are here theorised as if the behaviourist enactment of an 'aesthetics' or 'ethics' of the self were their only desideratum, and they had no concern for any more stable and collectively effective form of empowerment. The paradox of a postmodern freedom of expression, Zygmunt Bauman has claimed, is that it

‘in no way subjects the system, or its political organisation, to control by those whose lives it still determines, though at a distance. Consumer and expressive freedoms are not interfered with politically so long as they remain politically ineffective.’[22]

There is clearly a significant division between liberal-subjective accounts centred on the heroically self-creating role of the modern consumer in perpetuating consumer culture, and accounts that emphasise its systemic aspects (either in constructing or manipulating needs and desires, or in furnishing a code through which consumers are prompted to signify status and identity). Consumer behaviour, treated as a matter of existential choice in the one optic, is viewed in the other as the less voluntary effect of transcendent economic and social structures and their systemic pressures and forms of governance. But whether consumers are viewed as exclusively self-interested buyers of goods and services, as ‘unfree’ manipulated victims, or as self-styling ‘constructs’ of the system, in none of these cases are they theorised as reflecting and responsible agents who can come to assume accountability to the world beyond their immediate personal concerns. In this respect, there is little to choose between these various interpretations: all of them present consumers as following their private inclinations, the only difference being that in the one case these are viewed as freely chosen, in the other as systematically distorted or constructed by commodity society. Hence the sometimes contradictory position of a socialist politics on the issue of consumer reflexivity and self-knowledge: it wants both to claim that its critique of the falsity of consumerism (with its implied knowledge of what people ‘really’ need) is democratically representative, and to explain any mismatch between what consumers actually demand and what it is claimed they really want by reference to their unfreedom – in other words, their ideological manipulation. However, it seems no more convincing to view shopping enthusiasts as merely the unfortunate and unaccountable victims of the consumer society than to view them as fully autonomous and self-knowing beneficiaries of it. A more complex and nuanced understanding is required to grasp the troubled and equivocal reactions to consumer society, which I am attempting to highlight in my argument on alternative hedonism.

I certainly want to bring back into focus the structural role of the capitalist economy in individualising consumption, since without reference to that we cannot understand the expansion of goods and services, and the forms they have taken, in affluent societies. Smaller household units and more insular modes of living, the marketing of goods and services previously made and supplied at home, the shift from public to private means of transport, brand marketing, the

studied catering to personal whims, and the personalisation of goods: all of these factors have allowed businesses to profit from multiplying goods and services that would otherwise not be needed at all, or could be supplied more collectively at less cost to the environment and in a less socially isolating manner. Advertising and marketing by capitalist firms have sought to make consumption the marker of social status, encouraging a competitive spiral of acquisition that preempts other less socially divisive ways of spending time and energy. People are exhorted to define and value themselves in terms of what they can afford to acquire even if this means borrowing to do so. Not only is everything promoted as new or improved, bigger or better, faster or smarter, but there is a constant suggestion that in purchasing it the buyer will gain some enviable personal distinction. In much of this marketing, we find stereotypical views on gender that serve to reinforce existing divisions between the sexes. Branding gurus are targeting both boys and girls with an ever-greater array of age- and sex-specific items. Preteen girls are the target of fashion and beauty articles and promotional magazines that presuppose their eventual entry into conventionally gendered roles and shopping practices. To oil the wheels of consumerism, the financial sector makes credit readily available – and keeps many consumers in a state of permanent indebtedness (outstanding consumer credit lending in the UK in November 2019 was £225.3 billion in the UK and household debt was nearing $14 trillion dollars in the US).[23]

In drawing attention to these profit-driven pressures, my analysis clearly connects with an earlier tradition of socialist critique of the market and commodity aesthetics. It also resonates with the more recent ‘practice-theory’ of those who have criticised consumption studies for being disengaged from production, overly semiotic and often having a rather celebratory preoccupation with fashion, self-styling and identity-affirming forms of consumption, at the cost of less self-centred and more routine practices of everyday consumption.[24] As Alan Warde has pointed out, the liberating aspects of more individual choice have in any case been exaggerated: product differentiation is imperative for profit, but ‘the effect is not highly distinctive. Extensive variety encourages undistinguished difference. The world of consumption is led less by great personal aesthetic imagination, more by the logic of the retailing of commodities.’[25]

However, the alternative hedonist approach resists the paternalism of earlier left opposition to commodification. It also differs from practice-theory accounts in its understanding of the desire, motivation and reflexivity involved in consumption, specifically through its emphasis on how consumers today are

beginning to problematise routine forms of consumption (of food, transport, and so on) previously more taken for granted. My main focus is neither on consumption as a bid for personal distinction and individualisation, nor on consumption as a relatively unconscious 'form of life', but on the ways in which a whole range of contemporary consumerist practices, both more or less everyday and more or less identity-oriented, are being brought into question by reason of their environmental consequences, their impact on health, and their distraints on sensual enjoyment and on more spiritual forms of well-being.

In attending to the savvy and reflective motives of consumers today, alternative hedonist theory invites a more complex and more civically oriented understanding of consumption than we find in the existing spectrum of theoretical perspectives. We are talking here of reactions to consumer culture driven in part by altruistic concern for the ecological and social consequences of consumerist lifestyles on a global level, but also in part by self-interest. Under this impulse, the individual acts with an eye to the collective impact of aggregated individual acts of affluent consumption for consumers themselves, and takes measures to avoid contributing to it. She might, for example, decide to cycle or walk whenever possible in order not to add to the pollution, noise and congestion of car use. The hedonist aspect of this shift in consumption practice does not lie exclusively in the wish not to contribute to the unpleasant by-products of collective affluence, but also in the intrinsic personal pleasures of consuming differently. The cyclist or walker enjoys sensual experiences, including those of greeting other cyclists and walkers, that the insulated driver cannot. But these different pleasures themselves require and thrive on alternative hedonist self-policing in car use and support for policies that restrain it.

People who think this way will be disinclined to invoke a them-versus-us, producers-versus-consumers allocation of responsibility for environmental damage. They will acknowledge the role of their personal consumption in the creation of the health and safety risks of modernity, rather than viewing themselves as innocent and passive victims of industrialism. For these consumers, the priority – reflected when they exercise or withhold their purchasing power – is not to sustain and hand down to future generations a high living standard as currently defined, but to consume differently now in order to sustain or reinstate the goods (and to deal more fairly with those who labour to provide them) currently being lost or jeopardised by 'high' standards of living. Their need is to enjoy those goods in the present and to preserve their possible enjoyment as a legacy for future generations.[26]

To defend the progressive dimension of this resistance to what passes for

progress is not to recommend a more ascetic existence. On the contrary, it is to insist on the sensually impoverishing and irrational aspects of contemporary consumer culture. It is to speak for the forms of happiness that people might be able to enjoy were they to opt for an alternative economic order. It is to open up a new political imaginary.

On happiness

Happiness is an elusive concept. It is difficult to pronounce on its quality or on how far it and its associated states (pleasure, well-being, satisfaction) have been realised. What should count in the estimation of the good life: the intensity of isolated moments of pleasure or the overall level of contentment? The avoidance of pain and difficulty or their successful overcoming? And who, finally, is best placed to decide on whether personal well-being has increased: is this entirely a matter of subjective report or open to objective appraisal?

Such issues have long been at the centre of debates between Utilitarian and Aristotelian approaches to well-being. Where the former has looked to a 'hedonic calculus' of subjectively experienced pleasure or avoidance of pain in assessing life satisfaction, the more objectively oriented Aristotelian focus has been on capacities, functions and achievements and with the level of fulfilment (*eudaimonia*) of one's life taken as a whole rather than with its more immediate feelings of gratification. Those defending the Aristotelian position will argue that if we disallow any objective knowledge of another person's well-being or what makes for a life well spent, we shall also be deprived of grounds to criticise those who pursue self-destructive or selfish and environmentally vandalising forms of pleasure. It has also been claimed that to conceive and measure happiness in terms of subjective feeling is to discourage the sense of community and continuity between generations that is essential to social and environmental well-being.[27] However, the Utilitarian hedonic calculus can take account of more civically oriented forms of felt pleasure and can register the subjective gratifications of consuming in ways that are responsible to others and to the environment – as in the case (discussed above) of the cyclist or walker, whose personal, sensual and spiritual pleasure is augmented by not contributing to the danger and damage of car transport. Moreover, as noted earlier, it is difficult in the last analysis to legitimate claims about well-being without some subjective endorsement on the part of those to whom they are being attributed. Discussions of hedonism and the good life must acknowledge this tension between the Utilitarian privileging of experienced pleasure and the more objective bias of the

eudaimonic tradition. Where the focus on having good feelings risks overlooking the more objective constituents of the good life and the good society, the latter does justice to those constituents but runs the risk of patronage, even of condoning the superior knowledge of experts over individuals themselves.

One may readily accept the complexity of gauging claims about quality of life and personal satisfaction. But that is very different from denying there is any evidence today of the self-defeating nature of ever-expanding consumption. Both sides of the hedonist debate are, in fact, in general agreement that happiness does not lie in the endless accumulation of more stuff. And although it cannot – and does not – aspire finally to resolve the philosophical issues in this area, the alternative hedonist perspective, by highlighting the narratives about pleasure and well-being that are implicit in the emerging forms of disaffection with affluent culture, seeks to open up a post-consumerist viewpoint on the good life while still retaining a link to felt experience. My argument for alternative hedonism thus seeks to avoid abstracted moralising about what people ought to need or want (although I accept it perhaps can't avoid it altogether …) while registering and expanding upon an emerging immanent critique of consumerism.

Democracy and political transition

I regard alternative hedonism as helping to foster electoral mandates for radical economic and political change. In the eyes of some, this shows an altogether too wishful trust in the power of democratic process to resolve the environmental crisis. Cumulative bottom-up pressures, they argue, almost always run counter to environmental and ecological desiderata, and only more top-down autocratic interventions will suffice. Ingolfur Blühdorn, for example, has questioned the effectiveness of democratic systems in delivering sustainable welfare and argued that since 'democracy is always emancipatory, that is, it always centres on the enhancement of rights and (material) living conditions … it is not really suited for any form of restriction of rights or material conditions affecting the majority.'[28] In this view, we must bid farewell to the emancipatory-democratic optimism that once viewed liberation as release from the alienating and unsustainable logic of growth and productivism upheld by institutional authorities and elites. It has given way to a conception of emancipation as the individual freedom to pursue a consumerist lifestyle, and has thus become compliant with the established capitalist system. In Blühdorn's view, it is futile, in the wake of this so-called 'post-democratic' turn, to expect democratic support for measures to achieve sustainability, since these would require a profound

value change and the acceptance of new cultural limitations and structural restraints. Contrary to the narratives of an emerging alternative hedonism, he argues, it is to be feared that in the conditions of advanced modern societies, more democracy might imply even less sustainability.[29]

At the limits to growth, then, democracy, far from enabling social transformation, is said to have become a tool for the defence of the status quo and the governance of unsustainability. Approaching the issues as a political philosopher rather than a cultural theorist, Susan Baker has argued in a comparable fashion that liberal democracy can be seen as inherently inimical to sustainable development since it takes human interests as the measure of all values. She therefore casts doubt on the capacities of representative democracy to advance sustainable ways of living.[30]

This kind of scepticism about liberal democracy is understandable, given that its political guardians and defenders are often indifferent both to the real world of need formation and satisfaction, with its huge inequalities of income and opportunity, and to the intractable environmental constraints on consumption. What one currently misses from the libertarian attacks on all forms of state governance over needs or policing of consumption is any recognition of the 'dictatorship over needs' that is now exercised by consumer society itself. Yet it has to be said, too, that what these sceptics themselves fail to acknowledge is that enhanced material consumption, while being 'permissive' in advancing the majority's 'rights' to go shopping can simultaneously be restrictive on 'rights', such as those to more free time, unpolluted environments and less noise. Nor do they adequately recognise the conflictual nature of affluent culture – where the rights of car users so often clash with those of cyclists and pedestrians; of those who want piped music in their shops and cafés with those who do not; of those who want airport expansion with those who do not, and so on.

It is also important to recognise here the evidence that people are 'conditional co-operators' who are much more likely to take action to combat climate change impacts and conserve resources if assured, by democratic voting, that their fellow citizens will do the same. Democracy, it seems, very considerably enhances the prospects for reciprocal cooperation.[31] Moreover, and on a more philosophical note, even if it were possible to enforce sustainable consumption through a top-down dictatorship of needs, this would have to count as a moral and political failure – and coerced sustainability would surely prove fragile and short-lived. As Peter Victor has insisted, policy changes cannot be driven solely from the top: 'they must be wanted and demanded by the public because they see a better future for themselves, their children, and the children

of others, if we turn away from the pursuit of unconstrained economic growth.' For Victor, the only option is bottom-up –'a groundswell of aversion to further growth in consumption'.[32]

The question, in any case, is what the sceptics would put in place of democratic transition. How do they envisage the institution of the more autocratic governance that they recommend as necessary to the promotion of sustainability? Who is the 'we' that Baker says will set aside certain liberal values in the interest of environmental well-being, and how does she envisage us or them attaining a position in which to do so? Even if one concedes that a benevolent elite, friendly to sustainability, might emerge, how could it gain the necessary power in modern democratic societies other than through an electoral mandate? (Similarly, we might ask of those who 'call' for global regulatory authorities to replace democratic process: to whom are you addressing the call?). These critiques of democracy themselves fail to provide a convincing account of the alternative means of transition to their recommended forms of governance. In its absence, we must either accept that the radical changes required will never come about, or else retain some faith in the power of democratic process.

These arguments apply equally in the case of any largescale state-led rewilding and reforestation projects that have been proposed as solutions to climate change.[33] The land reclamation essential to their successful implementation will be so extensive, and so major in its impact on human consumption and lifestyle, that it is difficult to see how it can proceed in the absence of democratic support for a revised politics of prosperity. A mandate for reduced consumption will also be critical to the ultimate replacement of fossil fuels by renewable energy, since the territory needed for solar and wind farms will otherwise prove unmanageably vast.[34] The importance of revising our thinking on consumption and its dependence on popular approval combine here to justify an alternative hedonist approach to the cultural politics of transition.

However, even if the alternative hedonist approach can be defended in these ways against the blanket dismissals of some critics, it remains vulnerable to the charge that it relies too heavily on individual consumer responses to change the world, and should instead target the structural and institutional obstacles standing in the way of personal change. It has also been construed as neglecting the formative impact of production and marketing strategies on consumer attitudes, and the objective constraints they place on personal consumption habits even when consumers show some interest in changing them. Finally, my engagement with consumer disaffection with the affluent lifestyle has been criticised because it ignores the development needs of impoverished nations and

communities.

Though understandable, these more specific charges do not fully grasp the political rationale for attending to the constituency of the 'affluent disaffected' in the argument for alternative hedonism. So, in conclusion here, I shall expand on the ways in which new forms of alternative hedonist experience emerge from and contribute to changed social policy in affluent societies, on the relay of pressures that this can initiate, and hence on the potential global reach of an alternative politics of prosperity.

On the first two points: it is true that revised paradigms of consumption accompany new regimes of capitalist accumulation and reorganisation of the labour process. Fordist production brought with it very significant changes in consumption norms – the commercialisation of goods previously supplied at home, the individualisation of lifestyles, suburbanisation and the shift from public transport to private car use, and so forth.[35] These trends have continued in the era of the IT revolution, and have been augmented by the Internet's transformation of work and consumption, the pervasive acquisition of personalised electronic equipment of all kinds and the immense acceleration of the fast-fashion dynamic and brand marketing across a whole range of goods.[36] I have already argued, however, that this correlation between regimes of production and of consumption does not justify a wholly deterministic account of consumer responses, which cannot reflect people's options for more ethical and sustainable ways of living. Nonetheless, the systemic curbs on the exercise of alternative choices are real and demand attention. It is here, indeed, that policy interventions can tap into subjective shifts of feeling and make them the basis for new policies that weaken or remove those curbs, while advancing ways of living that benefit ourselves and the planet. One frequently cited example is the way in which provision of safe routes and other facilities for cyclists not only leads to more cycling, with all the advantages to health and well-being that follow from that, but also lets everyone experience the pleasures of reduced motor traffic, reinforcing support for the transition to a less car-centred way of living. A related example that I have noted elsewhere is that of the congestion charging introduced in Greater London in February 2003. This was a policy that could appeal beforehand to a predisposition in its favour, given public concern about the gridlock and pollution caused by city driving. It could not have been imposed but for some already existing disaffection (even among London car owners and users) with the car culture and its impact on city life. But the level of explicit support for the policy was fairly low, and the response to its introduction was ambivalent. Had it been put to the vote, it would probably not have received

majority support.[37] Once implemented, however, the policy brought benefits (quicker and more reliable buses, quieter and less noxious streets) that widened public support and later allowed for its further extension.[38] This exemplifies the alternative hedonist dialectic in which an initial if still quite equivocal 'structure of feeling' legitimates the experimental introduction of certain forms of collective self-policing, and is then extended and consolidated because of the pleasurable consequences of that policing.[39]

Anti-and counter-consumerist pressures such as these remain insignificant compared to the mandates for policing consumption that would be needed to advance towards global sustainability. But the model of democratic procedure that they instantiate, whereby proactive green policy initiatives allow emergent structures of feeling to be actualised by providing for alternative forms of experience, can help us to envisage the larger-scale shifts in both experience and policy-making that will be essential in any transition to a sustainable economic order.

As well as pointing to the benefits that will follow from new regulations and modes of provision (greater sustainability – but also improved health, richer sensual and aesthetic experience, more amenable public spaces), those pressing for their introduction must be able to appeal to some pre-existing disposition in their favour. Policy moves introduced on the basis of quite limited and low-profile manifestations of public support can, through the positive effects of their implementation, prove educative in ways that overcome subjective prejudice against objectively good practice. Such a dialectic endorses a more complex sense of needs than government policy on 'empowerment' has ever wanted to acknowledge. For, where the notion of 'empowerment' has been invoked ideologically (as recently in Britain) in order to position us all as 'consumers' exercising individualised choices, it has also served as the rationale for a new form of statist condescension rooted in the reduction of the self to a merely consuming self, incapable of looking beyond immediate personal need or coming to decisions on the basis of objective knowledge. This can result in a paradoxical disregard for the citizenly dimension of public concern over environmental issues,[40] and allow experts to profess their scepticism about the wisdom of consultation exercises over such controversial issues as fracking or genetically modified crops.[41] We can thus see the importance of rendering explicit the desires and concerns implicit in current expressions of consumer anxiety and of highlighting the alternative structure of pleasures and satisfactions to which they gesture. This implicit alternative transcends and exposes the Janus-face response of governments that call on the public to adopt energy-

saving measures and issue repeated warnings on the health risks of fast food and low-exercise lifestyles, while giving every encouragement in their economic policies to the expansion of consumerism. New kinds of individual experience (involving new ideas about the aesthetics of material culture and the satisfactions it provides, and a heightened sense of the potential political power of consumption – or non-consumption) might not only hasten the introduction of specific policies, but may also press governments to confront more directly their contradictory stance on the growth economy. Anything that helps to promote such changes within affluent societies also has its wider global relevance, since the disproportionately high levels of consumption by the rich is a major factor in the deprivations of the world's poor.

The focus of the alternative hedonist approach is on individual disaffection with affluent consumption, and with possible alterations in consumer desire and behaviour in the rich nations. But the leverage that such alterations may have in bringing about a more egalitarian world order is integral to my wider argument. The international agencies and institutions committed to a sustainable welfare agenda will remain relatively powerless, and little pressure will be applied on national governments to cooperate in promoting this agenda, unless and until their electorates come to perceive the necessary changes in their own consumption as being in their own interests. Alternative hedonist thinking about the good life, which alters conceptions of self-interest among affluent consumers, can thus play a critically important part in setting off a relay of political pressures for a fairer and more sustainable global economic order. As well as winning the support of consumers in rich countries, an alternative and ecologically sustainable conception of the good life may also contribute to the critique of 'development' orthodoxy now evolving in less wealthy societies.

4

Work and Beyond

> ‘The manner in which the abolition of work is to be managed and socially implemented constitutes the central political issue of the coming decades.’
>
> André Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism*[1]

It is widely recognised that the availability of the kind of work in heavy industry and manufacturing once central in core economies such as the UK has for some time been under threat. This appears to be for two main reasons. The most significant of these until recently, has been the effect of outsourcing such work to the peripheral economies, especially China, which now play the dominant role in producing ‘stuff’ for first world countries. But digital technology and automation are also now displacing human labour at a growing rate. Some commentators estimate that ever more sophisticated computer applications, which are beginning to displace humans even from what was formerly seen as intellectual work (such as translation and the reading of legal documents), and the fast-growing use of robots and drones for unskilled tasks in factories and warehouses, will lead to dramatic loss of employment in the near future.[2]

It should be said that although these trends are powerful, employment levels currently remain high: jobs are still there and are still being ‘created’, especially in the service industries. There is also a continued and even intensified emphasis on the centrality of work, which defenders of neo-liberalism view as the sole means of providing entitlement to social goods. But the tendency for jobs to be eliminated, if it is as powerful and ineluctable as Jeremy Rifkin, Paul Mason and others have argued, is a major problem for capitalism itself, both because of the social unrest unemployment engenders and because the wage has been the means by which consumers acquire purchasing power. The pressures of new technology also make the ‘old left’, jobs-through-growth, remedies pursued by the likes of Bernie Sanders in the US and by some parts of the British Labour

Party unconvincing. In both neo-liberal and old left approaches, the sustaining of employment over time is dependent on continuous economic growth. As I have argued in earlier chapters, the pursuit of growth is incompatible with the actions we must take to counter global warming and other environmental damage. Business as usual is in this sense no longer so easy to defend, and will prove impossible to pursue.[3]

Work, then, is becoming scarce. It provides ever fewer workers with the social identity and lifelong income, which many in the affluent world once took for granted.[4] Moreover, numerous studies published over the last two decades show that it is becoming increasingly uncongenial for many of those who do have jobs.[5] Even the more privileged higher earners feel the pressures of the 24/7 work culture and its technologically driven confusion of the work–leisure boundary. This is particularly true of well-paid but often freelance employees in the new digital economy, who, as Paul Mason notes, are now paid effectively to exist, to contribute ideas to the firm and to meet targets, and for whom therefore the bond between wages and set hours of work has been eroded.[6] Some may appear if not quite to revel in this work-centred existence at least to experience a sublime thrill in the collapse of the distinction between home and work. It is for them, presumably, that such ventures as WeWork have been set up. WeWork has been operating in twenty countries providing laptop space and other amenities to freelancers, and the more recently founded WeLive rents out both office space and a range of tiny studio flats and semi-communal living spaces in the same building.[7] By catering to the blurring of the division between work and home, enterprises of this kind have helped to normalise it, and perhaps in some respects to make it more tolerable. But for many, stress and time-scarcity remain an ongoing cause of complaint. And since WeWork is now on the verge of collapse,[8] it arguably provides an instructive example of the ephemeral and vacuous quality of companies created through the freelance economy of creative workers – or of what has been termed the ‘Fyre Festival economy’.[9] There is also, so David Graeber has persuasively claimed, a widespread and tacit acknowledgement that their jobs are ‘bullshit’ on the part of those working in financial services and the vastly expanded administrative sector in such areas as corporate law, academic and health administration, human resources, public relations and the like. ‘Huge swathes of people, in Europe and North America in particular,’ writes Graeber, ‘spend their entire working lives performing tasks they secretly believe do not really need to be performed. The moral and spiritual damage that comes from this situation is profound. It is a scar across our collective soul. Yet virtually no one talks about it.’[10]

Freelance workers, even well-paid ones, can be numbered among the ever-increasing ranks of the ‘precariat’, for whom instability and insecurity of employment have become the norm (as Francesco Di Bernardo reminds us, it always has been for workers under capitalism outside the metropolitan heartlands).[11] Already in 2006, Richard Sennett was noting the rapid expansion of temporary work and short-term contracts in the US and UK.[12] The recent work of Guy Standing has tracked the subsequent development of this ‘precariat’, a new class (he argues) which ‘consists of millions of people in every advanced industrial country and in emerging market economies as well’, and which

> is being forced to accept, and is being habituated to, a life of unstable labour, through temporary work assignments (‘casualization’), agency labour, ‘tasking’ in Internet-based ‘platform capitalism,’ flexible scheduling, on-call and zero-hour contracts, and so on. Even more important is that those in the precariat have no occupational narrative or identity, no sense of themselves as having a career trajectory.[13]

The much-publicised abuses of the ‘gig economy’ in the UK are typical of what precarious labour can mean for the labourer.[14] Especially for those doing unskilled jobs, insecurity exists together with uncongenial hours, demeaning treatment while at work and continuous subordination to managerial discipline. In the worst cases, workers must tolerate the kinds of intrusive surveillance documented in the recent report of the House of Commons Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee into working practices at Sports Direct – practices which the report terms ‘appalling’.[15] And it is workers in this sector who find their already precarious jobs further threatened by automation: the average Amazon package now takes no more than one minute of human labour to prepare for the buyer.[16] The company, meanwhile, has been accused of ‘treating its [human] staff like robots’. One female employee reported that while pregnant, she was ‘put to stand ten hours without a chair’.[17] (Elsewhere, it can be even worse: in the US, there are poultry workers required to wear diapers as they are not allowed toilet breaks).[18] This kind of work can obviously offer little as a source of meaning or pride – especially when the workers’ level of education often exceeds what is required for the jobs they are able to find. Unless they are offered opportunities for more fulfilling lives, the resentment and frustration felt by people trapped in such employment may attract them to the politicians of the new nationalist right.[19]

In other settings, other kinds of pressure are brought to bear. Where less formally hierarchical workplace relations have been introduced, they have often

gone along with new forms of corporatist pressure and risible and humiliating expectations of loyalty.[20] 'Affective labour' is now routinely requested of retail and service industry workers. Paul Myerscough has documented how candidates for jobs at Pret a Manger must show

> a natural flair for the 'Pret Behaviours' (these are listed on the website …). Among the 17 things they 'Don't Want to See' is that someone is 'moody or bad-tempered', 'annoys people', 'overcomplicates ideas' or 'is just here for the money'. The sorts of thing they 'Do Want to See' are that you can 'work at pace', 'create a sense of fun' and are 'genuinely friendly'. The 'Pret Perfect' worker … 'never gives up', 'goes out of their way to be helpful' and 'has presence'. After a day's trial, your fellow workers vote on how well you fit the profile.

It would be surprising if these demands for genuine friendliness were met with complete sincerity, but Myerscough is surely right to conclude that 'the display of feeling' in shows of 'emotional availability' has become integral to work in late capitalist service industries.[21]

I have already mentioned the conflict sensed by those who suspect that their work – 'bullshit jobs' – serves no useful larger purpose. Many productive activities, however essential to workers' economic survival, issue in goods and services that are unsustainable for the planet and already damaging the prospects even of their own children. These employees, whether baggage handling at airports, creating ad-targeting software, taking payments at petrol stations, preparing junk mail, or packaging the endless supply of collectable plastic tat designed to elicit pester-power in supermarkets, may well feel at the personal level a contradiction reflecting that which obtains more globally between ecological sustainability and capitalist expansion. People, after all, are citizens as well as workers. However, trade unions, viewing their first duty as the protection of jobs and wages, have often been reluctant to address this increasingly conflictual situation, and have tended to ignore the tensions it creates at both the macro and micro levels. Until recently the Unite union has opposed those in the British Labour Party who want to scrap the Trident nuclear submarine system, and at Labour's 2016 Conference, where it was announced that a future Labour government would ban shale gas fracking, the GMB, which represents energy industry workers, attacked the decision as 'nonsense' and 'madness'.[22] Unite, however, opposes fracking, even though it too has members who might work in the industry, and recently renewed its calls for drilling in Lancashire to be halted.[23] There are also unions, notably that of the Communications Workers, that are now adopting a more 'post-work' direction as a route to surmounting some of the contradictions faced by trade unions in contemporary capitalism.[24] Acknowledging the importance of the report from the independent think tank,

Autonomy, on reducing the working week, Dave Ward, the General Secretary of the CWU, writes:

> Workers in the UK have never been under more pressure to work harder and faster, for longer hours and for less. As this report underlines, with growing levels of workplace stress and a huge increase in mental health issues, this simply isn't a sustainable path and we need a radical change in direction. We have to get away from a low-investment, low pay, low-productivity economy and a shorter working week should be at the heart of the fight for change. This is not a distant prospect – the Communication Workers Union has agreed a shorter working week in Royal Mail, one of the biggest employers in the country, which aims to take four hours off the working week for thousands of postmen and women between 2018 and the end of 2021. There are huge benefits from reducing working time for workers, employers and the country as a whole and the government should be driving this agenda forward now.[25]

Whether or not they are troubled by such larger issues, labourers will be aware of the increasing tendency of their jobs to affect areas – home, social life, leisure – once defined precisely by their separation from work, from which they offered a means of escape.[26] The impact not only in the form of worker ill-health but also on family life is considerable.[27] Parents on low wages are doing back-to-back shifts because childcare is proving too expensive, and may scarcely see each other, or spend time together with their children. Better-off workaholics addicted to the personal distinction their work confers, and able to pay for help, may well be less conscious of time constraints, but even they pay a price for being 'on' at all times – checking social media feeds, sending emails, messaging colleagues.[28] The resultant sixty-or seventy-hour work week limits time available for other activities and relationships. It makes for reliance on marketised provision of domestic and care services, propping up the compensatory dynamic of a consumer culture that profits from the commodification of such services to make up for what has been lost through overwork, and tends to reinforce the traditional gendered division of labor.[29]

Time-scarcity and the sense of being dominated by the demands of work place a constraint on personal liberty: the more caught up you are in work, the less time you have to envisage, let alone act on, alternative ways of living, or to acquire insight upon or formulate political resistance to the existing system. Through its theft of time and energy, the work and spend culture deters development of free thinking and critical opposition. The methods by which it drives growth and perpetuates inequalities of income, education and cultural capital also help to secure it against political subversion. Those suffering most from time-scarcity are unlikely to be spear-heading the revolution against the work practices that create it. But if the contradictions of the work-world are coming to a head and will never again be resoluble by strategies on production

and employment that did service in the past, then questions are raised – difficult, but long overdue ones. Questions arise about how to manage a situation in which new forms of disenchantment with work and our growing ethical concerns about its impact on the planet and the stuff it creates are co-existing with the elimination of work itself. And these questions draw us into further ones about how we conceive the purposes of productivity and the definition of human prosperity.

Towards the enjoyable reduction of work

Moving, then, into a more prospective and enquiring register, I want to argue that the probable future scarcity of work, though many no doubt regard it as a major crisis in the making, might be more helpfully viewed as an opportunity which we might belatedly grasp to replace a work-centred way of living with a more relaxed existence. As utopian as the suggestion may sound today, the idea of industrial productivity bequeathing an 'age of leisure' has been current, even in quite mainstream circles, since the early twentieth century. John Maynard Keynes in his 1930 essay on 'The Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren' predicted that by 2030 we could be working as little as fifteen hours per week. The problem of scarcity, Keynes argued, would by then have been resolved, and man could instead address the deeper problem of 'how to use his freedom from pressing economic cares, how to occupy the leisure, which science and compound interest will have won for him, to live wisely, agreeably and well'.[30] From a Keynesian point of view, then, the post-work society has clearly been a late developer. Juliet Schor, a more recent economist, offered in her 1991 book *The Overworked American* the most dramatic illustration of the scale of the sacrifice of potential free time since Keynes was writing:

> Since 1948, productivity has failed to rise in only five years. The level of productivity of the US worker has more than doubled. In other words, we could now produce our 1948 standard of living (measured in terms of marketed goods and services) in less than half the time it took in that year. We actually could have chosen the four-hour day. Or a working year of six months. Or, *every worker in the United States could now be taking every other year off from work – with pay*. Incredible as it may sound, this is just the simple arithmetic of productivity growth in operation.[31]

In fact, what had happened in the US (where, as elsewhere, any political choice in the matter was ruled out by the dictates of the economy) was that free time had fallen by nearly 40 per cent since 1973. Although the average American by 1990 owned and consumed more than twice as much as in 1948, they also had considerably less leisure. We can only guess how much free time might, in

principle, have been released in the thirty years since Schor's calculation, and how much of that has gone into the production of articles of consumption instead (though we do know that one in ten US households now rents storage space for their excess clutter).[32]

There are reasons for this lost opportunity: the power of the captains of industry wanting to keep profiting from business as usual; the fear of workers facing a future without the structuring of time and – in some jobs – the sense of purpose provided by paid employment; for individual employees, the question of whether reduced working hours will entail loss of income; and for society as a whole the question (discussed later in this chapter) of how to provide economically and politically for a society of reduced work. There may also be general uncertainty about the still relatively unexplored 'deeper question' Keynes raises: how would we most wisely and agreeably make use of this time?

Here, I submit, there are essentially two opposing responses on the left at present: the technological-utopian, and the alternative hedonist. The essential difference is that the tech-utopians trust digital technology and automation to cut out the drudgery they associate with almost all forms of caring and provisioning work, and to deliver an abundance of goods of the kind we already consume.[33] Their post-work future is conceived as greener (thanks to smart energy) and more idle (thanks to robots and drones doing most things for us), but it is still in essence consumerist in that much of its pleasure is tied to the availability and use of machines and hi-tech gadgetry.

Alternative hedonism, in contrast, does not aspire to dispense with work performed by humans altogether. Nor would that be desirable even if it were possible. I share the view of André Gorz that in a society dedicated to making labour more satisfying and less onerous, the need would remain for a good deal of heteronomous work (work to meet social and community needs, organised in ways that may not offer the worker much control of the labour process or provide much intrinsic satisfaction).[34] An alternative hedonist would certainly welcome the role of automation and green technologies in making free time more available, but need not accept that domestic and caring tasks – the work of running a house, and especially looking after children and tending to the less fit and able – are just a drain on time, to be handed over, wherever feasible, to automated systems. Debating the desirability of replacing people by machines in 'care work … including the raising of children', Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams recognise that we accord such tasks 'moral status' and that 'many would argue that [they] must be carried out by human beings'. But they are strikingly silent about the satisfaction we may derive from such roles, as well as about the

experience and needs of those being cared for.[35] On the latter point, Peter Frase, who similarly asks whether 'even some of the more emotionally complex aspects of care' have to be provided by humans, is more forthcoming. After all, he points out, many people like cats and dogs, and 'if people take emotional comfort from non-sentient [sic] animals, why not from robots? … A robot nurse could be more comforting than an overworked and exasperated human one.'[36] A post-work society pursuing a path of alternative hedonism would hardly accept that logic. Rather than seeking to abolish the work of care, it would accord it proper respect, ensuring that human carers (no longer, one would hope, disproportionately of the female sex) were themselves cared for and supported, rather than being left isolated and exhausted as they so often are today.

The consumerist lifestyle has created a dependency on goods and services supplied on the market, both in the meeting of everyday needs and for entertainment. An alternative hedonist perspective questions the desirability of this extensive commodification, and advocates a mode of living that would allow for more self-provisioning and autonomous activity. The aim, in a more conceptual sense, is to replace a work-centred understanding of prosperity and individual worth with one centred on engagement in intrinsically valuable activities that have no economic purpose, measure or outcome.[37] From that point of view, more free time would have multiple benefits, few of which would involve robotic dependence. On the contrary, once released from the worst constraints of the work-world people would take pleasure in doing things for themselves (alone or together with friends and relatives), and find mundane activities such as gardening, cooking, sewing and mending – even cleaning – more rewarding. David Frayne's study of the reactions of those who have voluntarily rejected work show how far this has been the case.[38] To quote from one of those he interviewed who had given up their former job and were living on less money:

> For me it feels massively indulgent. I think I have *more*, but more of different sorts of things. Like, when I talk to my friends in London they're all knackered and working really long hours and haven't got time to have a chat on the phone and I just think god, you know, that's the lifestyle that feels self-hating and puritanical.[39]

And in Frayne's own summation of his findings about his interviewees:

> Resisting capitalism's constant invocations to feel ashamed and dissatisfied with their possessions, they took pride in their ability to develop their own ideas of pleasure, beauty, sufficiency and well-being. They were reflecting on the relationship between well-being and commodity consumption, and discovering a new sense of mastery and rootedness in the world, as they developed their hitherto undiscovered capacities for self-reliance. Whilst it would be absolutely blinkered to deny that the

> escape to a slower pace of life is a practical impossibility for many people, who would not be able to survive economically, it is equally reckless to accept the idea that high-consumption lifestyles are the fixed norm to which everybody should aspire.[40]

To dispute the instrumental understanding of time expenditure and the purposes of life is to follow Walter Benjamin and other advocates of the exemplary qualities of play. There is a special pleasure in the concentration of the game and the uncertainty of its outcome, and by 'wasting' more time on the 'pointless' activities of play, rather than 'investing' it in instrumental work activity, this gratification moves against the commodifying logic of our times towards the 'loftier' stance that Marx imputes to the 'childish world of antiquity'.[41] When play and games are dismissed as childish activities opposed to the useful work of the real world, the contrast belongs to an adult conception, projected back upon child's play but alien to it. Children revel in the ludic because they are unaware that it is 'merely' play. In this sense, as writers including William Blake, William Wordsworth, Georges Perec and Kazuo Ishiguro have understood, they attain to a wisdom that tends to escape us in our maturity – in part precisely because of the dominance of work over life.[42] What a less instrumental idea of one's self and one's time might mean is indicated by one of the subjects of Frayne's study:

> recently I've just been telling people I'm unemployed and usually they'll get angry, but not always at me. They'll say 'oh it's terrible what you're going through', and usually I'm thinking, no actually, I'm just happy. I quite like being unemployed. Financially it's scary, but I'm doing stuff that I like every day. If the money wasn't a worry, and also the impending doom of getting made [by the job centre] to get a job, I would just really love it.[43]

In contrast to the alternative hedonist emphasis on free time as a resource for self-provisioning and the self-development that comes with that, the tech-utopians enthuse about what the networked information society can deliver in the way of collaborative productivity and abundance. In Rifkin's account, the

> coming together of the Communications Internet with the fledgling Energy Internet and Logistics Internet in a seamless twenty-first-century intelligent infrastructure – the Internet of Things (IoT) – is giving rise to a Third Industrial Revolution. The Internet of Things is already boosting productivity to the point where the marginal cost of producing many goods and services is nearly zero, making them practically free. The result is corporate profits are beginning to dry up, property rights are weakening, and an economy based on scarcity is slowly giving way to an economy of abundance.[44]

Srnicek and Williams envisage the role of automation in similar fashion:

> Our demand is for a fully automated economy. Using the latest technological developments, such an economy would aim to liberate humanity from the drudgery of work while *simultaneously* producing increasing amounts of wealth.[45]

That the networked society makes it possible to produce goods and information abundantly and cheaply is indisputable. So, too, is the emergence in consequence of what Gorz, in applauding this particular development himself, has termed the 'high-tech craftsman', working collaboratively in the new Internet-based Free Software and Free Network Communities:

> The division of labour into specialized hierarchical tasks is virtually abolished, as is the block on producers appropriating the means of production for themselves and self-managing them. The separation between the workers and their reified work – between this latter and its product – is, therefore, virtually abolished, it becoming possible for the means of production to be appropriated and pooled.[46]

Mason likewise recognises the counter-capitalist potential of new technology for 'eroding property rights and destroying the old relation between wages, work and profits', but notes, too, the opposition it will encounter for that very reason.[47] Under the present dispensation, he writes, 'info-capitalists' will seek to contain and stymie this potential, by introducing bugs into software to prevent copying and by making it 'legally impossible to copy certain kinds of information'.[48] For him, then, today, 'the main contradiction in modern capitalism is between the possibility of free, abundant socially produced goods, and a system of monopolies, banks and governments struggling to maintain control over power and information. That is, everything is pervaded by a fight between network and hierarchy.'[49]

'Network', we can agree, is preferable to 'hierarchy'. More contestable, however, is the implication that 'abundant goods' are self-evidently desirable. Also problematic from an alternative hedonist point of view are the associated claims made for the positive impact of AI on human subjectivity and culture. Mason shows unqualified zeal for every form of digital innovation. Living as an adult through the advent of the new technologies, he writes, 'was exhilarating enough. Even more exhilarating now is to watch a kid get their first smartphone and find it all – Bluetooth, GPS, 3G, WiFi, streaming video – as if it had always been there.'[50] Free, shareable and copiable digital information will create a 'new agent of change in history' in the form of the educated and universally connected human being: 'Any barista, or admin worker, or legal temp can become, if they want to, a universal educated person, so long as they have a basic education and smart phone.'[51]

This conception of the 'universal educated person' is related to the emphasis Mason and other writers place on what Yann Moulier Boutang calls 'the inventive activity of brains operating with computers that are mobilised in active

networks'.[52] The central role that software, computers and networks play in the economy is to be paralleled, Mason and Rifkin imply, by an equally central role in education, leisure and culture; the norms applied at work will apply to the rest of life (as is, of course, more and more the case already).[53] The huge productive potential of networked 'inventive activity' is already evident. However, the effects of the ever-closer intimacy between brains and computers surely require a more nuanced and equivocal assessment. Information, however complex, is not the same as knowledge or intelligence, and acquiring and sharing it online is not the same as gaining intellectual skills or practical know-how through experience, or learning in person from an expert practitioner. While computers are being provided for every British schoolchild, government funding for music education is being reduced.[54] The uses, pleasures and rewards of these different kinds of knowledge and engagement must not be confused. Intellectual and cultural knowledge of the kind we used to acquire off-line, at a slower pace, in a less distractible and distracted mode, are threatened with extinction as new waves of data, in unmanageable quantity, come online. The subtler properties of language, its potential for irony and its connotative richness, whose apprehension requires sustained and careful attention, are at risk when speed of access and ease of understanding are at a premium. The consequences of this for literary and philosophical writing are obvious; less obvious, but intimately connected, is the damage done to language as a means of careful argument, including political argument.

We have seen in recent times that data can be free of cost without necessarily being accurate or very liberating, and its now almost effortless reproducibility is no guarantee against dystopian and politically manipulative use. Even where social media is functioning more honestly and democratically, the very diversity and multiplicity of voices can detract from the formation of political solidarity and make it harder to reach agreements on policy or strategy. More to the point in this context, perhaps, and scarcely noted by any of those advocating a digital utopia, are the downsides of so much time spent looking at screens: the consumerism, passivity, self-centredness and obliviousness to the sensuous and material world that the PC and smartphone encourage. Without doubt, digital technology captivates, but not necessarily to our advantage. A recent report (2015) claiming that 'children aged five to 16 spend an average of six and a half hours a day in front of a screen compared with around three hours in 1995' – the screens include TVs, PCs, phones and games consoles – is surely a cause for disquiet rather than glee.[55] What really enriches the life of a child, the alternative hedonist will say, and provides the resources for a meaningful social and

personal life later, is the development of her imaginative and conceptual worlds, best provided by reading and conversation (not least with adults not engrossed in their own screens), and lots of outdoor activity. What is most stunting is to be an indoor screen-watcher, solitary and ignored, bombarded by an ever-growing stream of ads and activated only by video games.

Srnicek and Williams might well, however, view such criticisms and objections as bogged down in one of those outdated humanisms they refer to as 'parochial'. For them what matters is transcending obsolescent essentialist notions of the 'human' in order to realise the 'synthetic freedom' now promised by cyborg augmentation, artificial life, synthetic biology and technologically mediated reproduction.[56] Such an outlook is consistent with their lack of serious attention, noted above, to the 'moral status' accorded to care work and child raising and to the human sensibilities and preferences that might lie behind resistance to robot carers. Likewise, in assuming support for extensive domestic use of automation ('domestic tasks like cleaning the house and folding clothes … can be delegated to machines'),[57] they fail to recognise (or perhaps would dismiss as parochially humanist) what has been termed the 'environmental disconnection' and loss of any real sense of home that comes from having outsourced one's domestic tasks to others, whether robotic or human, so that (in Gorz's words)

> the spatial organisation of the dwelling, the nature, form and arrangement of familiar objects have [then] to be adapted to the routine attentions of service staff or robots, as they are in hotels, barracks and boarding schools. Your immediate environment ceases to belong to you in much the same way that a chauffeur-driven car comes to belong more to the chauffeur than the owner.[58]

There is no appreciation here of the extent to which paid work may be resented as a theft of time in which one might have escaped the provision of the convenience industries and done things with more interest and entertainment for oneself. David Frayne has remarked apropos of this how curious it is that

> paid work should represent such a powerful symbol of maturity and independence, given the realities of employment as a situation of profound dependency. I speak not only of the dependency inherent in the wage relation but also of the dependency on commercial products and services, which becomes the only way to meet certain needs after work has drained our time and energy. What the people in the *Refusal of Work* project help us to consider is the extent to which many of the needs conventionally met through private and expensive forms of consumption could actually be self-furnished, possibly with a good degree of pride and enjoyment, were it possible to work less and have more free time.[59]

Alternative pleasures of the kind welcomed by participants in Frayne's study hardly feature in any of the accounts of a tech-driven post-capitalism reviewed

here, which subscribe to current norms of what consumers want and why. ‘Abundance’ is viewed as enabling more of the current lifestyle to be provided more equally and economically, with technology yoked to ensuring environmentally preferable and cheaper-to-the-user modes of doing what we do already, rather than reimagined as potentially allowing not just for greener, but also for more convivial and considerate provision in such areas as housing, transport and agriculture. Thus self-driving cars are welcomed, but the needs (and more environmentally benign practices) of cyclists and pedestrians are overlooked and the car culture (which commands up to 60 per cent of the municipal land area in some US cities)[60] continues. In recommending a fascination with space travel ‘and all the traditional touchstones of science fiction’ for the way they ‘can feed a utopian imaginary beyond the profit motive’, Srnicek and Williams appear surprisingly unaware of how conventional and banal (and environmentally unsound – and boyish?) these astronautical fantasies can seem these days. Despite a mention here of decarbonisation as another techno-‘dream’ that ‘the left should mobilise’, their treatment of environmental issues is nugatory (and the fact that the authors admit as much in the afterword to the second edition of 2016 hardly excuses their ignoring such an elephant in the room).[61] Their main ecological claim is that using energy efficiency improvements for less work, rather than more output, would mean that such improvements would go towards reducing environmental impacts. But automation and productive efficiency are unlikely to give us a green and sustainable economy without the spur of a cultural and political shift in thinking about well-being.

The tendency, then, of the tech-utopians is to welcome the collapse of the capitalist economy while accepting the legacy of its lifestyle as if it were a largely unchallengeable heritage. While the alternative hedonist case for the reduction of work presents this both as essential to meeting ecological limits and as an opportunity to escape a work-driven consumer culture, these theorists focus on the technical means of overcoming environmental obstacles so we can continue with ‘western’ affluence. In this sense, they appear to endorse much of the prevailing narrative on the ‘good life’.

Moreover, what they say about the ecologically benign resourcing of their Internet-based economies of abundance is not convincing. A recent report in the *Guardian* brought together the conclusions of several international studies of present and likely future power consumption in the AI sector.[62] This is expected to triple in the next five years as more people come online in peripheral countries, and as the ‘Internet of things’, with its driverless cars and robots and

video surveillance machines, grows exponentially in core countries. On current trends, 20.4 billion Internet devices are likely to be in use by 2020. A single Apple data centre planned for Athenry in County Galway, Ireland is expected eventually to use 300 megawatts of electricity: over 8 per cent of the national capacity, and more than the entire daily usage of Dublin. When the wind does not blow, the plant will turn to the '144 large diesel generators' kept as back-up. Also by 2020, it is estimated that information and communications technology will be creating up to 3.5 per cent of global emissions – surpassing aviation and shipping – and up to 14 per cent by 2040 (around the same proportion as the US currently emits). Defenders of the informatics utopia will premise their claims for the future on massive improvements in power saving and a total conversion to renewables, and, in a best-case scenario, some researchers believe such improvements might happen. But on present trends, that defence is pretty wishful. Let us add to this that it also seems troublingly indifferent to the impact of the mountains of e-waste already exported to poorer countries. Since China, which previously recycled some 70 per cent of this, has now refused to take more, some 50 million tonnes of e-waste from the EU alone has been flooding into south-east Asia, to be disassembled and recycled by those working for a pittance in the dangerous and often semi-legal conditions of 'salvage capitalism'. In America, since the Chinese ban came into force, increasing amounts of recyclable waste are now being burnt, often at a cost to the health of the impoverished communities that tend to live closest to the incinerators.[63] One can only speculate on what the tech-utopians might have to offer as a way of pre-empting what would otherwise seem a massive growth in this form of toxic waste.

Of course, it might be said that it is equally wishful to trust a cultural revolution in our attitudes to consumption to bring about a more environmentally benign future. However, that at least is within our human powers to achieve, and will not be reliant on a technical fix that may – but more likely will not – prove feasible.

Post-work: funding, organisation, citizenship

Even if the idea of working less is still perceived as threatening by both employers and employees, significant progress in that direction has been made.[64] France pioneered the introduction of the thirty-five hour work week as early as 2000. It has proved especially popular with women, and despite its revocation under the Sarkozy presidency, it is still extensively in place. In Germany, the

largest Trade Union, IG Metall, is campaigning for shift workers and those with caring roles to be able to opt for a twenty-eight hour work week. In the UK, the New Economics Foundation has for some time been advocating a shift to a twenty-one hour work week, and arguing its benefits in terms of lowering the carbon footprint, reducing unemployment, improving well-being, and promoting better childcare, co-parenting and more equality between the sexes.[65]

These ideas have the support of the Green Party (which advocates a three day weekend and is calling for a Free Time Index to replace GDP),[66] and also of the Labour Party, at whose conference in 2019 John McDonnell, drawing on a motion that was passed from the Communications Workers Union, committed Labour to reducing the working week without loss of pay.[67] Reduced work patterns are also now popular with some employers, although primarily on the grounds that the shorter working week will reduce unemployment and has been shown to improve rather than distrain on productivity.[68]

The tension between commercial justifications for endorsing reduced hours of work and those appealing to the ecological rationale and/or the personal benefits of a more leisured existence are reflected in differing conceptions of the universal basic income (UBI) which in a post-work society would complement, and might eventually replace, a worker's wage or salary. Although there are now many UBI pilot schemes,[69] and a growing interest in them across the political spectrum, there are concerns on the left that it might be used by right-wing administrations to accelerate state withdrawal from welfare funding and foster more privatisation of services.[70] There is also a concern that if UBI is viewed as remuneration for the crucial contribution that time spent outside paid work contributes to productivity, then it legitimises rather than challenges the sense of life as most worthily spent in creating economic value. It would not then be a means, as Gorz has put it, of 'wresting life away from the commercial imaginary and the total employment model',[71] but would rather confirm their hold. To guard against this, he argues,

> the demand for an unconditionally guaranteed sufficient income must, above all, signify from the outset that dependent work is no longer the only way of creating wealth or the only type of activity whose social value is to be acknowledged. The guarantee of a sufficient income must mark the growing – and potentially preponderant – importance of that other economy which creates intrinsic wealth that is neither measurable nor exchangeable. … The collective realization, propagated by movements and unions of the unemployed and the insecurely employed, that 'we are all potentially unemployed or casual/temporary workers' does not simply mean that we all need to be protected against casualization and interruptions of the wage-relation; it also means that *we all have a right to a social existence that does not consist exclusively in that relation* and does not coincide with it.[72]

Others have argued in line with this that unless UBI is wholly unconditional, then it is really only a form of welfare, and does not initiate the process of undermining dependency on the wage-system and the business ethos that goes with it; and that even if it is made conditional only on some form of civic contribution, the element of coercion still risks undermining the proper sense of public service and exercise of citizenship.[73] Similar considerations apply to the level at which the income must be set if it is to be more than a supplement to paid work. Widely advocated as a step towards an emancipated post-work society, UBI might also be designed as a means for the capitalist order to manage the challenges that the crisis of waged work poses for capitalism itself. The underlying tension is addressed by Moulier Boutang, who argues that while guaranteed social income (his preferred term for UBI) can be decried as merely reformist, it might be implemented in ways that enable the transition to a post-capitalist society.[74]

Any society making unconditional UBI available would presumably be aiming at such an eventual transition – and would therefore also be facing pressing questions about the principles governing the extent, distribution and financing of paid heteronomous work, and about the contribution of the voluntary sector to social reproduction. Although such a society would be freeing itself from a dependency on market provision for many aspects of daily consumption, and would probably sustain more collaborative and collective living arrangements and enjoy more voluntary services rendered by citizens, it would still depend on heteronomous labour for infrastructure, utilities, transport, some aspects of health and social care – and much else. Incentives of one kind or another might still be necessary to secure continuous employment in the less attractive areas of the economy.

This is no more than a sketch of the problems that a post-work, UBI funded society in transition would confront. In a post-work society, such questions would be addressed by public intellectuals and civil servants, who would also have to conceive ways of managing the transition from the fiction of money as owned by banks and private investors to the recognition (which UBI begins to make) that it is the property of societies and citizens. These challenges are far from easy to resolve, intellectually or politically. But it would be a form of political emancipation even to confront them. As suggested in my opening remarks, a society in that position is better placed to resolve them than one clinging to work ethic priorities and seeking to manage inequalities in wealth, in opportunities and in jobs and job satisfaction through growth and technical fixes of a kind that are likely to become increasingly difficult to sustain.

Slow working and post-work hybrids of the future?

As already acknowledged, collaborative Internet production will have an important role to play in a less work-centred society, as too will green technologies, especially in providing renewable energy which has been brought under more local and democratic control. The greening of technologies used in such key areas as medicine, building, transport, clothing and agriculture will also be a priority. But to acknowledge the future role of smart systems is not to suppose that it is possible or desirable for them to supplant all forms of human labour. On the contrary, a post-capitalist order freed from the dictate of the law of value might for the first time in history allow us to avoid a chronocentric obsession with staying and thinking only within the parameters of our present modernity. It could also allow previously implausible hybrid conceptions of social relations and political economy: state of the art energy and medical technologies and an end to the gender division of labour combined with minimal heteronomous work and low material throughput and consumption.

A less intensive work culture might also provide more fulfilling forms of work, could potentially develop new skills and reinstate earlier ways of producing and providing. These could avoid the social and sexual exploitations of the labour processes of earlier communities while preserving their more congenial aspects. I have in mind especially craft ways of working, which by reason of their emphasis on skill, attention to detail, and personal involvement and control, run counter to prevailing views on the mental–manual division of labour with its imperatives to adhere to the work-and-spend economy. In a slower paced society, in which people had more time to provide for themselves, artisan production could expand and many more could benefit from the skills, the mental concentration and the satisfaction it can provide.

To argue this is to renew earlier debates on the left about the relations between work and artisanal activity, and their respective relations with other human activities: debates that themselves reflect a complex history of contested ideas about art, work and human fulfilment. On the left, much of this discussion has proceeded on the presumption that in fully commodified societies of mass production like our own, where the craft contribution has been effectively removed from mainstream economic activity, there can never be any general return to its labour-process. Therefore, there can no longer be a realistic appeal to it as promissory of a society of de-alienated labour in the future. In consumer society today, it is only, it has been claimed, through the relative autonomy of art, if at all, that we can retain an image of an exemplary form of human activity

and possible ground for future emancipation. From this perspective, only art can play an aesthetically redeeming role. It follows, then, that craft figures now as an almost entirely superseded form of labour and production, or else as an adjunct to 'fine' or canonical visual art, endowing practitioners with the skills and knowledge essential to the creation or performance of its works. Even in this latter dependent role it is no more than a lingering presence because visual artworks, after Duchamp and the readymade, and Conceptual and post-conceptual art, have largely moved beyond a reliance on the traditional artisanal skills of painting and sculpture and have themselves become 'de-skilled'.[75]

John Roberts, in *The Intangibilities of Form*, defends this repudiation of any 'return' to craft or William Morris-like critique of its loss. However, he still takes the view that 'social relations … have themselves to be transformed by non-heteronomous forms and practices', practices which he describes as involving a 'richly expanded manual and intellectual content of the relations of production and the "everyday"'.[76] He also suggests, reviewing Benjamin's and Adorno's objections to technological domination, that if their kind of 'anti-technism' today is to be truly transformative 'it must be grounded in forms of attention and interaction which visibly, and coherently, break with instrumental forms of attention and interaction.'[77] I agree, and see that break with instrumentality as integral to alternative hedonism. But it is difficult to see how the post-capitalist transformation of the labour process sketched in these somewhat abstract formulations can be fleshed out without invoking (or reverting to) something looking rather more like traditional craft modes and methods (and the terms of *their* defence) than Roberts would want explicitly to allow.

Although craft has since the Enlightenment ceded its status to art in the establishment of art's aesthetic autonomy, it has today regained a particular niche of its own, and craft works have come to enjoy their own auratic status relative to those of mass production. Craftwork, much of it created by amateurs not producing it for sale but simply for the pleasure of making or gift giving, is regarded as having an intrinsic 'hand-made' value not found in commodities made primarily for profit. Works of craft are especially esteemed for being durable and aesthetically pleasing, capable of acquiring patina in an era when many goods are shoddy and unattractive and marked for rapid disposal.

Important, too, is what one might call the 'ontology' of craft: the way it positions its maker in the world and the nature of the work it requires expose the estranging impact of modern industry and commerce. The disaffection at work that we have been charting endows this with new critical meaning and traction. Of course, the 'alienation' of the move from pre-modern relations and

institutions to those of the capitalist market had positive as well as negative qualities, and both have been in play in the constitution of new forms of disaffection with commodity society. Marx foresaw as much in his dialectical presentation of the impact on peasants and craft workers of their transfer to factory production. On the one hand, as he put it, they are rendered 'objectless', 'naked in their subjectivity', deprived of any inorganic extension to which they relate 'as to their own'.[78] But this self-loss is at the same time the pre-condition of the non-specific, all round expansion of personality that alone becomes possible when individuals are freed from all supposedly naturally endowed tasks and identities. Even, Marx tells us, as capitalist productivity casts its agents into the void of objectlessness, it also drives labour 'beyond the limits of natural paltriness', makes all earlier stages of production appear as 'mere local developments of humanity and as nature idolatry', and brings to an end 'all traditional, confined, complacent, encrusted satisfactions of present needs, and reproduction of old ways of life'.[79] The rupture with an earlier, more artisanal identity is also, then, the essential pre-condition of the emancipated individual who is to find 'unlimited' fulfilment in post-capitalist society. As he put it in another striking passage:

> In bourgeois economics – and in the epoch of production to which it corresponds – this complete working-out of the human content appears as a complete emptying out, this universal objectification as total alienation, and the tearing down of all limited, one-sided aims as a sacrifice of the human end-in-itself to an entirely external end. This is why the childish world of antiquity appears on the one side as loftier. On the other side, it really is loftier in all matters where closed shapes, forms and given limits are sought for. It is satisfaction from a limited standpoint; while the modern gives no satisfaction; or where it appears satisfied with itself, it is vulgar.[80]

Alienation, then, is here associated with escape from earlier traditions and from conformity to the set roles, activities and 'encrusted' needs of a parochial existence. By exposing the limits of previous complacencies, it generates the desire to break with the estranging conventions of earlier forms of the division of labour and older modes of relating (a break which can in turn thereafter generate new forms of discontent).

When looked at in this perspective, a sentimental nostalgia for earlier craft-based modes of producing is as problematic as the uncritical acceptance of the constant speeding up of the labour process, parcellisation of tasks and de-skilling that industrialisation and technical 'progress' in the workplace have brought. What we must be wary of, then, in developing an alternative hedonist advocacy of craft is what Adorno dismissed as the 'retrospective infatuation with the aura of the socially doomed craftsman'.[81] Even less can we endorse the nationalistic

Volk nostalgia that Heidegger succumbed to in developing his critique of technology. If contemporary over-development prompts us to consider the progressive potential of past ways of doing and making, we must do so without forgetting the social and sexual exploitations of earlier labour processes.[82] The reference in Marx's dialectical account to 'loftier' pleasures should also, however, be remembered. We should not be too quick to endorse the escape from all 'closed shapes' and limits as automatically a form of hedonist advance.

I am suggesting, then, that artisanal ways of working might be reclaimed as a component of an avant-garde, post-consumerist political imaginary, rather than dismissed for their association with pre-modern social relations and limits on pleasure. We are talking, in other words, of cutting the link between progress and economic expansion without falling into cultural regression and social conservatism. We cannot dismiss the advances in democracy and social and sexual emancipation that have accompanied the development of the market society and mass production, or deny the limitations on individual self-realisation formerly imposed by a more parochial existence. But since the continuing pursuit of economic growth threatens to bring environmental disaster, it is timely also to emphasise the constraints on personal pleasure and fulfilment, in and out of the work place, imposed by the drive to expand the production of commodities. The artisan ethos has an obvious affinity with newly emerging anti-consumerist trends and networks: with the new interest in 'slow living' that is being registered in the USA and Europe, and the formation of campaigning networks linking those who have opted for 'downshifting' and more sustainable lifestyles.[83]

This is not to claim that the alternative values expressed in these communities have yet made much headway against the dominant ethos of work. It is, however, to suggest that Marxist critics of globalisation might want to reconsider their repudiation of all Morris-inspired ideas in their thinking about the ideal future forms of time expenditure and labour organisation, and to acknowledge the unspoken – one might even say, suppressed – affinities between what art has been said to intimate for the form of labour-process in a society freed of the value-form of capitalism, and what craft ways of working may have to tell us about the possible realisation of that utopian aesthetic goal. Given our need for a politics of prosperity that dissociates progress from economic expansion and pleasure from resource-intensive consumption, a political aesthetics that seeks to purify the utopian vision of the quaintness and greenery associated with artisan activity seems itself to be clinging to an outdated set of assumptions about what would constitute post-capitalist forms of

industry, labour process and worker emancipation. Similarly, the tech-utopians might think less about drones and robots and more about the potential pleasures of ‘slow-working’ that could in principle be made available in a post-capitalist economy. Not all forms of work must be seen as chores that we would prefer to automate.[84]

Craft methods and ‘slow-working’ are eminently compatible with communally owned enterprises and cooperatives and, indeed, with any organisation of labour freed from the demands of making as much as possible in the shortest possible time. ‘Craftivism’, as the political wing of the craft movement is known, is now actively associating craft with escape from the prevailing codes of mass consumerism.[85] It is surely to be welcomed as a component of an avant-garde, post-consumerist political imaginary rather than dismissed for its association with pre-modern social relations. As Juliet Schor has suggested, defending her view of cooperative ‘plenitude’ against ‘business as usual’, the artisan will figure in new hybrid production practices that combine advanced green technologies with more personally rewarding forms of labour:

> We are circling back and plenitude is a synthesis of the pre- and postmodern. From the former it borrows the vision of skilled artisans producing for their own use as well as for the market …. From the postmodern period comes advanced technology and smart, ecologically parsimonious design. It’s the perfect synthesis. Technology obviates the arduous and back-breaking labour of the preindustrial. Artisan labour avoids the alienation of the modern factory and office.[86]

5

Cultural Politics and the Alternative Hedonist Imaginary: Transport, Leisure, Stuff

In earlier chapters, I have suggested that even if contemporary affluence were extendable to all and indefinitely sustainable, the model it provides for the good life is hardly compelling. I argued this in part on the basis of the insecurity, ill-health, depression and other ills that have gone together with the Western lifestyle; and in part on the basis of the sensual and spiritual pleasures that have already been curtailed or pre-empted and of which we may be deprived in the future. I have also of course defended alternative hedonism as offering a more humanly attractive, and perhaps more feasible, approach to avoiding a tipping point on global warming and other environmental calamities. Here I am at odds with *carpe diem* fatalists who think it is too late to salvage the planet, so we should enjoy it while we can; but also with optimists who seek rescue in technology. Although antithetical, both positions presume that we must preserve the consumerist lifestyle and that to forego it would mean misery. 'Live it to the full', advise the fatalists. 'Technology can keep environmental damage to a minimum,' suggest the optimists. Neither group envisages that it might be more fun to escape the confines of the growth-driven shopping-mall culture rather than keep it on track. Both imply that more frugal consumption would involve regression.

That, at any rate, has been the view frequently voiced by mainstream British politicians until relatively recently. Today, given the much greater awareness of climate change and ecological crisis, few politicians or government officials are likely to refer us, as did a Scottish Conservative Party enterprise spokesman in 2005, to 'the mumbo-jumbo environmentalist clap-trap of the Green Party'. Nor will they so overtly rubbish environmentalists as advocates of Stone Age cave

dwellings.[1] Yet a comparable disdain for the green agenda remains evident in the response of the Australian Deputy Prime Minister during the 2019 bush fires to criticism of government policy on climate change ('we don't need the ravings of some pure, enlightened and woke capital city greenies'),[2] in Boris Johnson's references to the Extinction Rebellion 'uncooperative crusties' with their 'heaving hemp-smelling bivouacs' during the 2019 London blockades,[3] or, more tacitly, in the empty parliament benches in March 2019 at the first Commons debate on climate change to take place since 2017. Lingering on in such reactions is the 'parochialism in time', as Raymond Williams termed it, of those who complacently project actual and historically instituted social orders as permanently necessary and exclusive, thereby discouraging those who have seen more clearly the crisis of the existing order.[4] It is a form of criticism presuming to hold a monopoly on the idea of progress and to be the sole arbiter of what is to count as human pleasure and self-indulgence. It is objectionable not just for its resistance to exploring the possible rewards of a slower-paced and less materially encumbered way of living, but also for its failure to acknowledge the unpleasurable and destructive aspects of the dominant model of progress. The smog that those in China are now having to endure thanks to their advance from mass bicycling to car use offers a poignant and often cited instance. Let us not forget that here in Britain there were twelve million regular cyclists at the start of the 1950s,[5] and that we now have one of the lowest rates of cycling in the world.[6] Several London schools have recently advised their pupils to use facemasks as protection against toxic fumes. There are fewer and fewer places within reach of where most of us live where the countryside can be enjoyed without the intrusion of traffic noise and light pollution and all the artefacts associated with transport, power and telecommunications systems. Landscapes unmarked by industry can scarcely be seen except in the recreations and excisions of film makers.

Cities have not fared much better. If we compare the Paris of Baudelaire's *flâneur* or Joyce's Dublin with those cities today, it is hard to feel that public space has become more enjoyable (which is not to deny the great improvements in housing and sanitation). Especially in busy times and places, moving about the city, both for pedestrians and for those trapped in jammed vehicles, has become a bruising, noisy, harassed experience whose subliminally hazardous feel is unrelieved by much in the way of beauty or relaxation. This of course is why so many enlightened city authorities have been attempting to reverse the progress that has caused all the damage.[7]

To emphasise the repressive and sensually abusive aspects of high-speed

living is not to deny the conveniences and comforts it can offer. But whenever we speak of the contemporary consumer's pleasure, we should also speak of displeasure and of delights we do not enjoy. That side of the hedonist account has received scant representation, not least some of the 'other pleasures' we are presently going without.

Going slow

Communication and transport: going faster or going slower

Acceleration in the sense of ever faster travel, exchange of information, and production and distribution of goods and services has been integral to the development of capitalism over the last two and a half centuries. We have come to associate speed with efficiency, and it remains at the core of our understanding of progress.[8] It would be thought bizarre for research teams and industrial designers to seek approval for their innovations on the grounds that they would allow us to do things at a slower pace. Those who opt to travel more slowly than they have to are often still regarded as mildly eccentric. Success in the rat-race as in athletics is about arriving first, and the faster one achieves this, the more it is acclaimed. Except in some less instrumental activities or, in Kant's phrase, 'purposeless purposes' (artistic creation and enjoyment, sex, play, conversation, slow-bicycle racing and so on), we come up against an insistent pressure to reduce the time spent, and we are expected to greet technology as a welcome aid in doing so.

Nowhere over the last fifty years has the technological contribution to time saving been more dramatically in evidence, and enthusiastically seized upon, than in the sphere of communication. This has primarily been due to the increasing computing power of silicon chips (which has doubled around every eighteen months since the mid-1960s).[9] Some people are excluded by reason of age or illness or disability, or simply disinclination, and can feel marginalised because of it, but most have adapted quickly to the fast processing of information and the billions of electronic exchanges via social media, email, texting and Internet browsing this permits on a daily basis. Users have also, of course, become extremely dependent on digital technology, and spend more and more of their lives engaging in some form of telemediation. In 2018, four billion people around the world spent on average six hours a day online (a total of one billion years).[10] In the UK, those aged between fifteen and twenty-four check their phones every six to eight minutes. Two in five adults first look at their

phone within five minutes of waking up. For those aged under thirty-five, the figure is 65 per cent. Similarly, more than a third of adults (60 per cent of those under thirty-five) check their phones five minutes before lights out. More than two-thirds say they never turn their smartphone off, and 78 per cent say they could not live without it.[11]

High-speed online access has clearly become essential to vast numbers of people and transformed their time expenditure. What is less clear – indeed it can only be a matter of speculation – is how far being online is experienced as the best use of time, or as better than doing other things. Searching, checking, buying and communicating online saves time in many respects, but it also entices you on to further unintended searching, checking, buying, and communicating. Not everyone, we know, is happy with the dominance of the smartphone in their and others' lives: according to the Ofcom report whose figures are cited above, more than half (54 per cent) admit that connected devices interrupt face-to-face conversations with friends and family. More than two in five (43 per cent) say that they spend too much time online, while a significant minority claim they feel more productive offline and are distracted by having constant access to the Internet. Email, the most commonly used tool for communicating in the workplace, gives rise to similar laments about overload and distraction. Its very rapidity causes problems. Messages, often imprecise, quickly pile up, and time is wasted reading unnecessary communications and sorting out confusions created by careless words.[12]

High-speed travel evokes comparable tensions and contrary responses. We have got used to ever-faster modes of transport and we often revel in them. Speed is convenient and can be exhilarating. However, our enjoyment of it is relative and historically mutable. Writing in *The Pickwick Papers* (1836– 1837) of a horse-drawn chaise travelling at fifteen miles per hour, Charles Dickens describes fields, trees and hedges rushing past 'with the velocity of a whirlwind'.[13] Many car users today regard a limit of twenty miles per hour as restrictively slow. Advocates of speed may seize on this relativity to decry attempts to slow us down: going slow, they may say, no more 'naturally' corresponds to human needs than going fast. But the passage from *The Pickwick Papers* also shows our adaptability, and therefore the ease with which we might adjust to a different tempo and come to prefer slower travel as quite exhilarating enough. Road capacity and considerations of safety will in any case impose limits on speed; as will congestion, which sometimes means that slower means of transport (biking or even walking) get you across towns and cities faster than motorised vehicles.

In the case of the bicycle, there is also the more metaphysical consideration that it provides a machinic prosthetic that gratifies the interest in going faster while remaining ecologically benign. As Martin Ryle has suggested, it 'embodies as well as queering machine culture, with its new appetite and capacity for speed'. The cyclist's velocity is a correspondingly paradoxical affair, involving the pleasures of going both quickly and slowly. Freewheeling is a 'uniquely lazy mode of going fast'. Approximations to such pleasurably sustainable paradoxes of velocity might perhaps also be claimed in the case of a number of other non-motorised modes of transport such as sailing or skiing or skating or horse-riding. But what is peculiarly distinctive to cycling, Ryle maintains, is that it both 'mirrors and subverts the general condition of bodies caught up in machine assemblages':

> In cycling the relationship between body and machine is symbiotic. Riders are subject to rhythms that they themselves create and sustain. Pedalling, they impart them to the bike, which translates them into its own forward movement; but these rhythms comply in the last instance to the cyclist's will. This is why the first riders, manufacturers and advertisers sought to convey the pleasures of bicycle riding in images of bird-like flight and centaur-like celerity, which suggest an extension of human powers within a new, integral and still-organic being.[14]

Planes and cars, and using them less

At present, however, jet-propelled flight and cars – the least sustainable ways of travelling – still command almost all investment, and are regularly represented as an essential aspect of contemporary life. The lack of adequate, affordable public transport and of safe provision for other ways of getting about makes daily car travel seem unavoidable to many workers. In Britain, commuters who use the train (to which there is no practical alternative for many rush hour journeys into large cities) face ever-rising fares, and these are already among the highest in Europe. They will not find the seating space, designated areas for children, recycling facilities and ample bike storage that make train travel attractive elsewhere in Europe and Scandinavia. Given the unreliability for which several privatised rail franchises have become notorious, they may not find a train at all.[15]

For holidays and short breaks, the pressure to make the most of time off from 24/7 work makes quick getaways and short journey times desirable. The plane is often the only feasible way to get to and from distant destinations within the time frames that constrain most holiday makers. I discuss this pattern of inter-dependencies, both a consequence and a cause of the general speeding-up of life, below. The environmental consequences are obvious and from that point of view,

the plans to expand London's Heathrow airport are, as Green MP Caroline Lucas has said, 'unforgiveable'. If they go ahead, future generations will surely not forgive the perversity.[16] As campaigners point out, you cannot agree to limit aviation emissions to 37.5 million tonnes annually by 2050, then put Britain on course to reach 43 million by 2030 and 73 million tonnes later in the century (an amount equivalent, according to Greenpeace, to the total output of Cyprus).[17] Or you can, if commerce is always allowed to trump moral duty – which is why those who regularly fly (and the most affluent 15 per cent of Britons take 70 per cent of the flights)[18] are also incurring their own pressing debt to the future. The challenge is twofold: to provide greener ways of reaching distant places, and to encourage slower travel to places nearer home. Here too, hedonist arguments can reinforce environmental ones.

Even for some longer journeys, flight is not the only option, since train travel can be as quick, especially when time taken getting to and from airports is factored in. Trains are carbon emitters, and they are expensive. But a journey from London to Paris by train instead of plane cuts emissions per traveller by 90 per cent, and an ecological pricing and taxing policy could make the train cheaper for this and similar journeys.[19] The environmentally preferable alternative is also more pleasant and interesting. Fields and hedges, rivers and hills, villages and towns, even if they flash past, offer 'images of nature and culture that restore something of the visual and existential delight long associated with travel. What we glimpse reminds us that to speed along is to miss something, and this might entice us to go slower next time.'[20] To judge by the enthusiasm that has greeted the website run by 'The Man in Seat Sixty-One' (www.seat61.com), which provides information on rail and rail–ship transport throughout the world, long distance train journeys are increasingly sought after, for their pleasures as well as their greener credentials. Nonetheless 'going local' must be at the centre of the cultural shift required to make holidays greener – all the more so if, enjoying a less work-dominated life, we take more holidays in future.

The CO_2 emissions caused by the growing aviation industry are compounded by those long associated with cars and road freight. Vehicle emissions in the European Union have barely changed over the last decade and the industry will exhaust its carbon budget within five to ten years unless there is a radical shift, according to scientists at the German Aerospace Centre (DLR).[21] Vehicle emissions also constitute the most important source of toxic air pollutants in industrial societies. Most of the world's population (90 per cent) is now affected by toxic air, to which some 7 million early deaths are attributed annually.

Children especially suffer, with 300 million now living in areas where toxic fumes are six times above international guidelines.[22] Hybrid and fully electric cars will be less polluting, but the electricity they use must be generated, the batteries wear out and must be disposed of, and like all cars they use large amounts of plastic in their construction.[23] What is more, they are dystopian in protracting the car culture with its dangers, congestion, ugliness and dominance of space, rather than moving us beyond its mindset.

Road traffic is responsible for bringing a premature and horrific end to the lives of many road users. Some 40,000 people died in traffic accidents in the USA in 2017, and almost 1,800 (of whom 26 per cent were pedestrians) in Britain, where there were also nearly 28,000 serious injuries.[24] A recent report by Dr Rachel Aldred shows that in Britain, children in socially and economically deprived areas are disproportionately likely to be involved in road traffic accidents, even though their parents are less likely to own cars.[25] Road vehicles also destroy the lives and habitat of living beings other than ourselves, at a time when the World Wildlife Fund is advising us that the current rate of loss of ecosystems and wildlife is no less threatening to our future than climate change.[26] Cars may not be the major cause of wildlife loss, but they certainly don't help, and being inside a car screens us from the damage they cause.

That same screening compromises and reduces the aesthetic pleasure of travel. Speeding along in a car, you see some of what you travel through, although the restricted frame of windscreens and car windows limits even visual pleasure. You are debarred from other sensory engagement, confined to what Alex Wilson, in his study of the making of the North American landscape, called the 'motorist's aesthetic'. The designers of the great American 'scenic' national parkways, Wilson explains, 'have created an essentially visual experience, one that has ruled out taste, touch and smell; for which landscape becomes an event in "automotive space", and is comparable in its one-dimensionality to the view that is had in aerial photography. In the process, the designers of the scenic routes have literally instructed their users in the "beauties" of nature by promoting some landscapes at the expense of others, by removing whatever bits of it were deemed unsightly, and by restricting all activities incompatible with the parkway aesthetic.'[27] Modern media have further added to the sense of 'nature' as something primarily seen, because so much of the experience of it now comes in virtual form: it is a matter of watching it on TV or on a computer screen, often as seen from the air or a motor vehicle, and this marginalises sounds and cuts out the contribution of smell and touch altogether.

By contrast, where proper provision is made to walk or ride or cycle, one is

able to enjoy sights and scents and sounds, and the pleasures (and benefits) of physical activity, and experiences of solitude and silence, all of which are denied to those who travel in more insulated and speedier ways. Slower methods of travel, as Wilson has suggested, allow people to enjoy a synaesthetic rather than voyeuristic experience. No one could rely exclusively on these modes of transport, but more could be done to encourage them, especially for short journeys, than is presently the case (a quarter of car trips in England are of less than two miles).[28] The obstacles to regular cradle to the grave biking could readily be overcome through committed and imaginative provision. Alongside London's velodrome in the capital's Olympic Park, which reinforces the cultural tendency in Britain to represent cycling as a niche sport and test of endurance, we need segregated space in the streets for everyone's everyday cycling. Instead of speed-rivalry on the indoor circuits and mangled riders outside on the roads, why not well-lit multi-lane tracks, with cover for those who want it, cycle rickshaws and electric bikes for the too young and less able, showers and changing rooms and cafés at regular intervals on cycle tracks? Schemes like this look utopian, but would cost very little compared to the infrastructure needed to provide for continuing mass car use – especially if one factors in the economic and social gains of better public health.

Reclaiming the streets

Speeding traffic kills communities as well as people. Research has shown that the higher the traffic volume, the less time people spend outside – and the less likely they are to know their neighbours.[29] Parents' fear of accidents has made streets no-go areas for their children, and this has had a serious impact on children's play, denying them many of its pleasures. In 1971, 80 per cent of British seven-and eight-year-old children went to school on their own; today it is virtually unthinkable that a seven-year-old would walk to school without an adult. As Mayer Hillman has pointed out, we've removed children from danger rather than removing danger from children – and filled roads with polluting cars on school runs.[30] In the past, children were free to escape from adults for significant periods of time, and to forget their cares in the moonlit ludic time–space so evocatively summoned in the nursery rhyme, 'Girls and Boys come out to play / The moon doth shine as bright as day …'. Today, whether in the country or in the city, they are seldom released from either the nervy surveillance of their elders, on the one hand, or the predation of drivers encroaching on them with their motorised vehicles, on the other. They are left with little choice: they

are vulnerably exposed to traffic, confined indoors or stuck in cars themselves.

It is not only children who suffer. For most of human history, as the Living Streets campaign has pointed out, in addition to children's play, streets also comfortably accommodated the full range of human activity: they were places for socialising, public meetings, entertainments, demonstrations. Today they have become traffic corridors, cutting swathes through local communities. The priority in the design and classification of most roads is how much traffic they can carry. The use of streets as social places has been largely overlooked, as is the fact that on many streets – particularly local high streets – there are far more people on foot than in vehicles. Roads and side turnings are widened and pavements narrowed to speed up the traffic. Barriers are erected to stop people crossing where they want. The lighting and street signs are designed for people travelling at speed. The overall result is an ugly and intimidating environment that discriminates against people on foot.[31] Since urban space and road systems have usually been organised around the expedition of vehicles rather than pedestrians, parks and precincts are often the only spaces available for relaxation and recreation. 'Public' shopping-mall areas (often privately owned and policed) also provide some protection from traffic, but here 'disreputable' (non-shopping) elements are under surveillance and regularly moved on. Nor is much comfortable seating supplied lest non-shoppers take advantage.

Streets, then, need to be reclaimed for the people who use them most. As the Living Streets Manifesto puts it:

> Why should walkers behave like vehicles – always keeping on the move? The only right enshrined in the Highways Act is to 'pass and re-pass along the highway' and it's a sign of the times that most words we use to describe stopping in the street should have negative connotations – 'loitering', 'lingering', 'hanging about'. Our streets are as much for leisure as for work, places to chat to neighbours, read newspapers or to watch the passing scene. Living Streets need nooks and corners, benches and walls where people can pause and pass the time.

Urban design and policies are belatedly beginning to recognise something of this, with cities and towns in Europe and elsewhere introducing imaginative green changes in the use of space. In some cases, inhabitants as well as town planners are taking the initiative. In Seoul, for instance, a four-lane elevated expressway that between 1973 and 2003 took 170,000 vehicles a day into the city centre, has been demolished and replaced by a long riverside park with 1.5 million trees, a cycle way and a festival venue by the Cheonggyecheon river that was long buried under the road. Traffic chaos was predicted, but residents have adapted, with many more now travelling by subway. Buried rivers have also been restored in Seattle, New York and Sheffield.[32] The *Guardian* recently

featured images of a number of cities, including Addis Ababa, Bogota, Mumbai, and Sao Paulo and Fortalezza in Brazil, where drab and dangerous urban intersections had been transformed into colourful pedestrian-friendly areas.[33] In Europe and Scandinavia, Freiburg im Breisgau has progressively pedestrianised since 1971, and is now largely car-free. Giethoorn in Holland, Nürnberg, Málaga, Seville, Siena and the Cinque Terre towns, Dubrovnik, St. Petersburg, Växjö, Malmö, and Copenhagen are among many other cities and towns that have become largely traffic free, at least in their old towns or more central areas. In Britain, some progress has been made in reclaiming streets from motor traffic and in some cases reducing speed limits, but it has not been remarkable, and the 20 m.p.h. limit is seldom policed and routinely ignored.

More exceptional, perhaps, are the changes that have recently come about in Doncaster, a working-class town surrounded by motorways and retail distribution centres, including a mammoth Amazon fulfillment centre on its outskirts. Doncaster is being reclaimed by councillors and local activists for a human-friendly 'artisan economy'. The former three-floor BHS store has become 'Flip Out', a trampoline park; part of the town once dominated by a car park now houses a theatre and arts venue; and in 2020 a new 'Cultural and Learning Centre' will open with a library and town museum. In the words of Rachel Horne, organiser of 'Cultural Crawl' (in which cafés, pubs and other venues cooperatively host music, poetry and exhibitions), and co-editor of the new *Duncopolitan* what's-on magazine,

> We're trying to create a different way of living. If I wasn't doing this, I'd be clinically depressed, in a job that I hated – like a call centre. There's not many other jobs here – so it's like, 'Make your own job.' … Donny is a working-class town, but that doesn't mean we're idiots. It doesn't mean we're not really creative or that we can't have a stake in what happens in the town centre. You can see the hunger for doing something different that's here, if we're just given the chance to make it happen. … Call centres and warehouses are the modern pits. But it doesn't mean that those people in there aren't really creative. It's just a job. … I don't really think we need the stuff we buy. I think we'll find new ways of occupying the space and the council need people like us to do that.[34]

Going local

Perhaps the most prized and seemingly irreplaceable advantage of fast travel is the ease with which it delivers us to far-flung holiday and conference destinations and allows large numbers of people (though always in global terms a tiny minority) to enjoy tourist experiences confined a century ago to the wealthiest elites.

It is difficult to dispute the pleasures of holidays abroad or the life-enhancing

aspects of encountering other spaces and cultures. Increasingly far-flung trips are taken in quest of that kind of difference, although unfamiliarity can also be experienced much closer to home: the hilltop towns of lower Normandy and the bogs of north Mayo, to take two examples, have no exact parallels in Britain. Exotic trips are all too likely to be exploitative both of the environment and of local workers servicing the tourist industry. Companies providing eco-tourist experiences keep quiet about the contradictions of encouraging influx into areas hitherto 'untouched' by the tourist trade. These organisations also seem particularly adept (as indeed they need to be in order to survive) at suppressing the role of long distance air flight in creating the 'threatened and fragile' environments that they invite their customers (often referred to as research or conservation 'volunteers') to come and help protect. The first and last step in these itineraries, it goes without saying, is an international flight, and many also require further domestic flights to reach their chosen outposts of civilisation. The journeys that bring tourists to watch tigers in India or polar bears in the Artic are major contributors to the climate change that is eroding the habitat of these threatened animals.

The environmental impact of many long-haul journeys is all the greater when these trips are short. This means that the visits themselves happen with greater frequency and enjoy a higher take-up rate because less time off work or school is needed. This escapist holiday culture of long distance short breaks is another instance of the interlocking forms of consumerist provision required and provided in a high-speed, work-intensive culture. Regular weekend breaks from Britain to New York and Scandinavian and European cities are seen as essential to sanity. The journey there and back, measured in time taken rather than miles covered, is just a way of reaching the holiday location. 'Escaping', it is rather unthinkingly assumed, cannot take place unless you travel a long way. Even schools are organising trips that encourage pupils to think no significant experience or excitement can be had without spending hours in an aeroplane cabin only to be deposited in some faraway part of the globe.[35]

We may well wonder whether trips of this kind give the sense of timeless immersion in a different environment with a different rhythm that once made holidays such objects of anticipation and nostalgia – particularly for children. The extreme contrasts to ordinary life presented by holidays in distant and culturally unfamiliar locales may even militate against the surreal and dream-like experience that can accompany a removal to somewhere closer to home yet still strangely different from normality. Proust's Marcel scarcely travels very far from Combray to his holidays in Balbec, where the 'tourist experience' is hardly very

dramatic or sublime. However, the subtle shift in what constitutes the routine and the familiar makes for a rare and entrancing experience. The days – all the more, perhaps, because each is similar to the next – merge with one another in a way that will yield memories of their beauty and exceptionality. It is not so far, either, from Lübeck to Travemünde on the Baltic (two or three hours by horse carriage, in the later nineteenth century). But for Thomas Mann's little Hanno Buddenbrook, it is the removal to an utterly different world of delight:

> Everything – the smell of the freshly washed table-cloth when the waiter shook it out, the tissue paper serviettes, the unaccustomed bread, the eggs they ate out of little metal cups, with ordinary spoons instead of the bone ones like those at home – all this, and everything, enchanted little Johann. And all that followed was so easy and care-free – such a wonderfully idle and protected life. There was the forenoon on the beach, while the Kurhouse band gave its morning programme; the lying and resting at the foot of the beach-chair, the delicious, dreamy play with the soft sand that did not make you dirty, while you let your eyes rove idly and lose themselves in the green and blue infinity beyond. There was the air that swept in from that infinity – strong, free, wild, gently sighing and deliciously scented; it seemed to enfold you round, to veil your hearing and make you pleasantly giddy, and blessedly submerge all consciousness of time and space.[36]

It will be said that Proust and Mann are recording the holidays of the privileged bourgeoisie – which, of course, is true: those from poorer families than Marcel or Hanno would certainly not have shared in their holiday joys. But that is beside the point in this context, since local holidays need be no more expensive than the trips to distant resorts that many families now take. (Where these do prove cheaper it will be because of budget flights and reliance on poorly paid local labour.) Long distance travel no longer guarantees anything very novel in the way of experience, since the global village has brought homogeneity as well as accessibility. Today, James Clifford has suggested, 'an older typography of travel is exploded. One no longer leaves home confident in finding something radically new, another time or space. Difference is encountered in the adjoining neighbourhood, the familiar turns up at the end of the earth.'[37]

Stuff: going without and providing for oneself

A potent grip: status buying and fashion following

The growth of consumer culture has been heavily reliant on the individualisation of consumption, due in part to the promotion of socially divisive status buying and the creation of personalised and privatised living arrangements. These developments have in turn relied on consumer interest in fashion and an aesthetic of newness. As profits have come to derive increasingly from quick

turnover and style innovation rather than from sheer volume production, this market dynamic has become insistent in our lives. Although the fashion cycle has taken hold in many areas of household consumption, electronic and sporting goods, it has long been clothing that has been most subject to it – and where it has had the most impact. This has been particularly exploitative and environmentally damaging because of the growth of 'fast' fashion with its deliberate encouragement of rapid turnover. Although production of fashionable clothing does not necessarily imply bad working conditions or the use of poor materials or shoddy manufacture, in the case of the 'fast' fashion industry it all too often does since the goods are produced not to last but to be thrown out after being worn only a few times. Fashion lines in shoes and clothes are now being replaced several times a year, and many garments in consequence have in effect become disposable, scarcely worn before being discarded. In America, the average consumer nearly doubled the amount of clothing bought annually between 1991 and 2006, from 34.7 to 68 pieces (equivalent to buying something every five or six days).[38] In the UK, it is estimated that some £30 billion of unused clothing hangs in wardrobes and 11 million items each week go to landfill.[39] Worldwide over one hundred billion items of clothing are produced annually, with brands shoveling excess production into incinerators.[40]

Both status buying and fashion following have paradoxical effects. The encouragement to engage in conspicuous and invidious consumption has certainly served the growth economy extremely well. But from the point of view of consumers themselves, its gratifications are jinxed by what has come to be known as 'hedonic adaptation' and the 'hedonic treadmill': buying new things ceases to make people happier, and trying to keep pace in the competition for status goods is like a treadmill where no one can win, and everyone has to keep walking simply in order to stay still.[41] Fashion following is inherently contradictory: it promises to make you special, but has no time for non-conformism. It provides escape from repetition (although at some aesthetic cost, if Oscar Wilde was right in defining it as 'a form of ugliness so unbearable that we are compelled to alter it every six months')[42]; and only on condition of submitting to the dictate of an alien collectivity. Individuals are linked by fashion following, but impersonally, and thus dispensably as individuals, since it matters not who follows fashion provided only that a sufficient number do so. This collectivity without solidarity, in line with the market itself, flourishes on constantly renewed but essentially homogeneous forms of consumption, rather than by promoting genuine difference and eccentricity. In this respect, clothing fashion is exemplary of the ways in which consumer culture plays on (and

profits by) the anxieties about individuation and self-expression that it both stimulates and condemns.

For all that, the compulsion exercised by status-buying and fashion remains powerful, and it would be foolish to suppose that their self-subverting tendencies have much deterrent effect on buyers. What has recently had more influence is the extensive information now available on the sweatshop conditions and massive environmental footprint of the garment industry. Several big fashion brands are turning to fabrics such as Econyl (made out of recycled plastics found in the ocean), and consumers themselves are adding to the pressures on makers to source sustainable materials.[43] There is also evidence that Millennials are now deeming it cool to go ethical, that Instagram influencers have had a role in making it so, and that these developments could have a critical impact on future buying patterns.[44] This, however, is by no means guaranteed. Lucy Siegle, noting the emerging turn against fast fashion, advises against any great optimism:

> To imagine that the generations subjected to this catastrophic abundance of fashion could be the ones to apply the brakes seems like fantasy. But we need them. To begin, Instagram influencers need to do more than post the odd positive message about vintage or recycled fibre. The influencers must become activists and take on the brands and habits plundering the planet.[45]

They also need to challenge the often very appalling conditions of workers in the garment industry, including those within the ‘dark factories’ operating even in the UK.[46]

Acquiring less, sharing more

One also has to be cautious in claiming any major shift from individual acquisition towards more collective forms of consumption. The entrenched individualising forces noted above have created a competitive mind-set inimical to co-owning and sharing. Inequality has also played its part since it discourages the formation of the mutual trust essential to successful sharing and more cooperative work (which needs flexibility in where and when things can be done).

Nonetheless, quite apart from the benefits to the environment, there are alternative hedonist reasons for reducing one’s personal acquisition and turning to more collaborative forms of consumption. Sharing tools, gadgets and machinery frees up space, reduces the labour and frustrations of cleaning and repairing, and means there are fewer problems of waste disposal. As feminist

commentators have been pointing out for some time, the hours spent on domestic chores have remained almost unchanged despite the huge expansion of labour-saving equipment: partly because standards of cleanliness have become more clinical, but also because more time is devoted to buying, cleaning and maintaining privately owned household machinery.[47]

'Going without' includes all those modes of acquisition and consumption that allow people to satisfy their needs for goods and services without buying new commodities or using commercial suppliers. These include jumble sales, charity and second-hand shops, and all the other resources for the re-cycling of articles (there is now a growing number of Internet websites such as ilovefreegle.org, Freecycle.org and Sharestuff. com). As well as saving money, this kind of exchanging and bartering allows people to acquire all sorts of unusual items they would never have found in retail stores. Where market provision based on mass production of standardised articles tends to homogenise the ways in which we meet our needs and wants, bypassing conventional retail outlets encourages eccentricity, bricolage, and heterogeneous ways of 'making do'.

'Collaborative' or 'connected' consumption networks dedicated to creating a not-for-profit parallel economy are becoming increasingly numerous and sophisticated, especially in America.[48] They include networks for car-pooling, time-banking, skill swopping and sharing, multiple use of household and gardening tools, exchange of clothing, home cooking (including supper clubs) and crafts, collective housing, land sharing and financial services. Prompted in part by the financial crisis of 2008, they aim to reduce carbon emissions and waste while at the same time creating more eco-sensitive communities and cooperative ways of living.[49] Some initiatives that began as non-profit making have since become commercialised (such as eBay or Craigslist), while other enterprises that were always for-profit, such as AirBnB, are sometimes counted as part of a sharing-economy even though they operate in a decidedly neo-liberal mode with little environmental concern (Uber is the most notorious example).[50] The genuinely non-commercial networks, however, remain popular both as a substitute for mainstream shopping and as a means of promoting conviviality. Renewing, as it does, something of the gradualism and dual power thinking of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's mutualist argument for bypassing state institutions and mainstream banking, collaborative consumption is already in some quarters being identified as a potential threat to capitalist markets.[51] The growth of parallel exchange networks based on ethical and ecological principles adds to the pressure on corporations to end their reliance on sweatshop labour and take

responsibility for the environmental costs of production. If encouraged by policies to protect and consolidate their presence, they could in time shift current thinking about markets and material culture in significant ways, challenging the mass-production aesthetic of 'newness' and encouraging shared use and ownership of vehicles, tools and appliances. Surprisingly perhaps, but interestingly, Maria Caulfield, the Conservative MP for Lewes in Sussex, recently welcomed the opening of a 'repair café' in the village of Chailey:

> Chailey Repair Café is an amazing new initiative to help reduce waste. By fixing and repairing items we can re-use things that would otherwise be thrown away. Chailey Repair Café is part of a world-wide movement where volunteer experts repair things free of charge. Anyone can bring along broken items or clothing needing repair from home, and have a cuppa and a cake while they wait.[52]

But in welcoming this we perhaps need to recognise the extent to which a certain kind of make-do-and-mend attitude has always intersected with particular kinds of paternalist Toryism. A sharing economy and collaborative consumption that became more universal and extensive enough seriously to threaten commercial provision and trading would presumably not so readily win the approval of Conservatives. It is relevant here to note, however, the comeback within the private sector itself, in the form of recent initiatives ('Conscious Capitalism', 'B Corp', 'The B Team', 'Just Capital') that are claiming their commitment to operate a more sustainable and less profit-centric business model.[53]

I shall conclude this section by noting a rather different sense in which going without might be considered a potential source of alternative hedonism. This is the loss of sensory experience encouraged by consumer culture. Tibor Scitovsky's argument on the 'joyless economy' is flawed by its elitist denunciations of mass production as leading to a tyranny of the more 'simple-minded' consumers and their conformist choices. But his insistence that modern technology, for all its benefits, pushes towards a standardisation and uniformity that inhibits creative and eccentric enjoyments is certainly persuasive. So, too, is his claim that money-making and high standards of comfort should not be confused with the enhancement of pleasure: the 'joyless economy' is not the economy of hedonism.[54] The machines and lifts and escalators and moving walkways that reduce our energy expenditure do so at the cost of the exertion of muscular power and the sense of vitality that goes along with that. Food satiety and over-provisioning create a vast amount of waste: it was recently reported that in 2015 the average family in the UK threw out food worth £470 (£700 if there were children) per annum – enough to fund everyone's Council tax.[55] The central heating and air-conditioning that ensures that those with access to it are continuously in the 'comfort' zone have constructed standardised concepts and

conventions of comfort that render interior space boringly homogeneous and reduce sensitivity to seasonal changes (UK homes are routinely heated above 21–22° Celsius and indoor environments in the US are often cooler in summer than in winter).[56]

To defend acute sensation against its muting by comfort is to celebrate the complexity and subjective dimension of pleasure. Yet the intensity of appetite – and of the pleasure in its ultimate satisfaction – applies, it might be said, only in the case of physiological needs such as those of hunger, thirst or bodily fatigue, and Scitovsky's argument thus overlooks the extraordinary capacity of the market to create new 'needs' and stimulate a continually unsated desire, with all the appetitive anticipation that goes with that. Colin Campbell has contrasted what he terms a 'traditional hedonism' of eating and drinking and sexuality, where satisfaction (so he claims) can easily lead to a jaded appetite of the kind Scitovsky associates with too much comfort, with a 'modern hedonism' that pursues pleasure as a life goal and finds all acts potentially pleasurable.[57] The 'joyless economy' of effortless push-button comfort certainly deprives us of sensual intensity, but we should also recognise the truth in Campbell's argument that pleasure is more than a matter of intensified physical appetite. All the same, Campbell and others who defend consumerism against its ascetic critics seem reluctant to acknowledge the pleasures of a less resource intensive approach to our more fantastical yearnings. In the first instance this requires – as I have argued throughout this book – a sharpened sense of what we have lost or are losing in the promotion of a hyper-consumerist culture; and of what, in that sense, we are already 'going without' or what we will soon be going without.

Going without non-humans?

The single most serious loss, in that it could entail the loss of everything else, is the Sixth Extinction of fauna and flora. In 2014, Elizabeth Kolbert in her book of that name estimated that between 20 and 50 per cent of all species may perish by the end of the twenty-first century.[58] The Living Planet Index (produced for the World Wildlife Fund by the Zoological Society of London, using data on 16,704 populations of mammals, birds, fish, reptiles and amphibians that represent more than 4,000 species) suggests that populations had already fallen by an average of 60 per cent between 1970 and 2014, and states that 'the wildlife crash is continuing unabated'.[59] Further confirmation of this has come from a recent UN report which tells us that the last two major biodiversity agreements – in 2002 and 2010 – have failed to stem the loss, which, it claims, could lead to human

extinction.[60]

Here, too, it is entrenched consumption habits that are primarily responsible, especially diets heavily reliant on meat due to the land clearance and agricultural practices catering to that market. A recent analysis shows that while meat and dairy provide just 18 per cent of calories and 37 per cent of protein, their production takes up the vast majority (83 per cent) of farmland, is the major source of wildlife loss, and produces 60 per cent of agricultural greenhouse gas emissions.[61] A predominantly plant-based diet could cut global carbon emissions by upwards of 15 per cent, spare animals the negative experiences of agribusiness and allow less intensive, more animal-sensitive methods of farming and fishing to become not only economically viable but also a positive environmental asset. Veganism – now becoming much more mainstream – will, of course, greatly help to reduce agribusiness emissions. But if based on rotational systems, permanent pasture and conservation grazing, meat and dairy production can do much, so it is argued, to restore soils and biodiversity, and also help to sequester carbon.[62] (The analysis in *Science* cited above claims, indeed, that if the most harmful half of meat and dairy production was replaced by plant-based food, this would still deliver about two-thirds of the benefits of getting rid of all meat and dairy production.) Less meat eating would also reduce the use of antibiotics in livestock, with positive effects for their use in treating human illnesses.

In other areas, too, releasing the hold of current consumption habits could prove beneficial for all parties. Non-human animals, it should be said, have always been essential to human beings, whether as food or for transport and recreation. And there has always been a contradiction between the abuse they suffer and the love with which humans respond to them. That contradiction between the instrumental use of animals as providers for human consumption and their kinder treatment as pets and companions has become ever more acute in consumer culture, where it takes new (and sometimes quite grotesque) forms due to the intense commodification of both aspects of the relationship. Factory farming and animal testing are but two examples of the intensification of the instrumental reification. This affective dimension is illustrated by the market for everything from luxury pet foods to animal spa treatments, designer bridal veils for guinea pigs, and diamond studded dog collars. A less instrumental, more considered relationship to other planetary life would seek to avoid animal testing in the chemical, pharmaceutical and cosmetics industries, and help protect against the misuse of non-humans for sport and entertainment or in ostentatious displays of wealth. It would also go some way to spare all of us the horrors of

the Sixth Extinction.

This contradictory relation to other creatures is well reflected in a recent poem by Derek Mahon: ‘The Bronx Seabirds’, from his ‘New York Time’ sequence:[63]

> INSIDER TRADING REPORTS ARE LINKED TO PRICE OF BONDS
> NO SOLUTION AT HAND WHILE NUCLEAR WASTE PILES UP
> NEW YORK TOUGHING IT OUT TO GET THROUGH COLD
> QUESTION REALITY DEATH IS BACK NIGHT OWL GABRIEL 141
> AT&T BOEING CHRYSLER DUPONT DIGITAL DOW JONES
> EXXON GENERAL MOTORS IBM NYNEX SEARS
> PARANOIA McCANN ERICKSON AMERICA AFTER DARK
> ESCAPED BRONX SEABIRDS SPOTTED IN CENTRAL PARK …
>
> … On ledge and rail they sit, Inca tern and Andean gull, who
> fled their storm-wrecked cage in the Bronx Zoo
> and now flap in exhilaration and growing fear
> above Yonkers, New Rochelle, Great Neck, Astoria,
> Long Beach, Red Hook, Bay Ridge, the whole ‘tri-state area’,
> a transmigration of souls, crazy-eyed as they peer
> through mutant cloud cover and air thick with snow-dust,
> toxic aerosol dazzle and invasive car exhaust,
> or perch forlorn on gargoyle and asbestos roof,
> fine-featured, ruffled, attentive, almost too high to hear
> the plaintive, desolate cab horns on Madison and Fifth:
> like Daisy’s Cunard nightingale, they belong in another life.
> They are intrigued, baffled and finally bored stiff
> by the wised-up millions lunching far below
> but vulnerable too as, askance, they stare
> at the alien corn of Radio City, Broadway and Times Square
> and up again at the clouds: where on earth can they go?
> They ‘won’t touch garbage’; so where and what will they eat?
> If you see one of these nervous birds on ledge or sill
> (dark blue, light grey, white head and tail, red bill),
> contact the Manhattan Avian Rehab Centre
> — (212) 689-3039 — and ask for Clare or Jill;
> though, to be frank, their chances are less than fair
> nor, to be honest, is our confidence great
> that these rare species will be fit to compete
> in the fight for survival on the city street
> with urban gulls, crows, and other toughs of the air.

The major contextual theme here is the dominance of corporate capitalism whose trading reports are rolled out ceaselessly around the clock, exercising such determination on all animal life, human and otherwise, while impacting in so many ways on the material environment (city architecture, nuclear waste, air pollution, car congestion and so on). But at the centre of the poem is the fate of

the seabirds, ‘escaped’ from the zoo thanks to a storm we may link to climate change and its anthropogenic sources (Mahon dwells on such links in a number of other poems, so we can presume that here too he intends a reference to the human hand in such ‘natural’ disasters). The birds can be said to have ‘escaped’ only to a very uncertain freedom, an emancipation that has exposed them to new dangers. The way they once lived in nature and the nature they inhabited have been so jeopardised that they can be expected to survive (even if not to flourish) only in captivity. Once liberated from their zoo, where ‘on earth’ can they otherwise go and hope to thrive? And what – given their specialist diet, their aversion to garbage – can they expect to eat?

The poem thus encapsulates the dialectic whereby capitalism, having destroyed the natural conditions of existence for such ‘exotic’ seabirds, protects them in zoos and avian rehab centres; and then at a later stage generates newly ‘natural’ forces of destruction – a storm for which human acts are at least partly responsible – that wrecks the zoo, sends the birds soaring in exhilaration above the New York skyline, but in the end entraps them again in their newly alien environment. In that environment, the poem concludes, faced with the competition from ‘urban gulls, crows, and other toughs of the air’, they are unlikely to survive.

Rather, then, as humans are caught up under capitalist relations of production in a battle for survival in which there are inevitable winners and losers, and the greedier and more fortunately placed are likely to make out best, so these birds, too, find themselves competing in an alien setting where only the more aggressive and indiscriminate are likely to survive. I am not drawing a direct parallel with human society and its inequalities of wealth and class, but only suggesting that the general conditions of existence for both humans and these birds are moulded by capitalism, and would be very different without that economic formation. Nor, incidentally, should I be taken to imply by this that animal suffering is necessarily that much worse under capitalism than under earlier modes of production. Some will argue that in certain respects they fare better now, and are spared a great deal of the torment they had to endure in earlier periods (no daily horse whipping, bull baiting, cock fighting, use of swans for chimney sweeping and so on). It is difficult to draw up any kind of balance sheet here, and I don’t intend to do so, but only to point out that different societies, cultures and economies impinge in differing ways on animals. Capitalism has subjected animals to new forms of misery even as it has rescued them from others. It has provided avian rehab centres, but has created the exterminating conditions that render them essential to bird survival in the first

place.

Mahon's poem is also the site of some interestingly ironic reflections on human–animal relations. The bird's eye view of the streets below, with their car congestion and polluted atmosphere, elicits a 'growing fear' while the birds perch forlornly on gargoyles and asbestos roofs. The poem gestures to a Romantic critique of this urban reality with a reference to the lines in Keats' *Ode to the Nightingale* about Ruth in her exile perhaps hearing the nightingale's song as she stood 'amid the alien corn'. The birds 'belong in another life', from whose optic life for New York humans is boring, under-developed, dominated by the sound and fumes of the combustion engine. Meanwhile, the privileged 'wised-up' diners munching away in their restaurants down below are oblivious to what they are missing, to the tedium of their own polluting and destructive mode of existence. Here, then, the optic of the non-human species serves to expose the confined and often paltry pleasures of the human – and thus to signal, dare I claim it, the 'alternative hedonism' that might be enjoyed by both human and non-human animals in a post-capitalist, post-consumerist order of being.

6

Reconceiving Prosperity

> ‘There can be no more talk of a linear and inexorable progress that used to silence those who challenged the market-based, industrial and consumerist order by accusing them of seeking to return us to a bygone age; from now on, the future of the Earth and all its creatures is at stake. And this uncertain becoming, strewn with tipping points, scarcely resembles the radiant future promised by the ideologists’ progress of the last two centuries, whether liberal, social democratic or Marxist’
>
> Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene*[1]

This chapter takes its cue from Tim Jackson’s pioneering arguments on the macro-economic and social preconditions of a sustainable global order, and echoes his call for a redefined ‘prosperity without growth’ in meeting them.[2] Here, the main focus is on the revised conceptions of progress, prosperity, development and the good life that would be involved in the transition to an economic and political order no longer dependent on growth.

A new politics of prosperity is intrinsic to the cultural revolution needed to inspire public support for a just and sustainable world order. It is in some ways akin to earlier romantic antipathies to modernity (for example, those evident in debates about tradition and modernity in Ireland). However, an alternative hedonist approach to modernity and its representation avoids the puritanism and social conservatism associated with traditionalist cultures of resistance; it rejects endless growth while also resisting cultural regression.

Perceptions of development

Ideas of progress, modernisation and development have long been associated, particularly during the last 150 years, with economic expansion and industrialisation.[3] This has provided the basis for secularisation, for social and sexual emancipation and for other progressive cultural movements. Yet this

progress has been built upon injustice of a kind we have not hesitated to condemn in earlier economies. Alf Hornborg has pointed out that although the terms in which we speak of 'economic growth' and 'development' are neutral or approbatory, the world they have created is characterised by 'increasingly obscene inequalities'.[4]

Given the pressing environmental reasons for moving to a post-growth economy, progress can in any case no longer be straightforwardly linked with increasing prosperity in terms of material and monetary wealth, whether social or individual. On the contrary: progress must be associated from now on with the critique of growth for its dubious record on delivering collective well-being, and its unsustainable reliance on an ever-expanding consumer culture. Nations with the least sustainable environmental footprint, whose citizens' consumption grossly exceeds the planet's carrying capacity, can no longer be thought of as models of consumption for the so-called developing world. Indeed, less westernised and industrialised societies might be viewed as practising modes of life and production that are more sustainable – and therefore more progressive.[5]

Western concepts of development and their neo-colonial export have of course been widely debated and contested.[6] Amartya Sen and his followers have notably claimed that the main objective of development should be the expansion of human capabilities, rather than economic growth.[7] Developing Sen's argument, David Clark has made the point that while growth may be necessary for development, it is not always sufficient. In broad terms (he argues) we can distinguish between growth-mediated and support-led development. The former operates through rapid and broad-based economic growth, which facilitates the expansion of basic capabilities through higher employment, improved prosperity and better social services. The latter aims specifically to develop welfare programmes that support health, education and social security.[8]

The capabilities approach, however, has had rather little to say about sustainability. It has generally presented growth as an essential ongoing condition of development, while conceiving development itself in terms of Western modes of self-enhancement and political, economic and legal institutions. Martha Nussbaum, for instance, while claiming that 'we do not have to win the respect of others by being productive … society is held together by a wide range of attachments and concerns, only some of which concern productivity',[9] also wants to promote education for profit and economic growth and talks of skills 'needed for a flourishing economy'.[10] Robert Lane, while acknowledging that economic growth does not guarantee any enhancement in

individual well-being once a certain level of income has been reached, claims that it nonetheless increases happiness by bringing collective goods in areas such as health and education.[11] However, that position presumes equality of access to such goods within the nation, and ignores global exploitation in the accumulation of national wealth in the first place.

Hitherto, only those theorists and economists who advocate degrowth as essential to sustainable living have seriously challenged the link between continuous economic expansion and improved well-being.[12] Serge Latouche eloquently presses the case for rethinking this linkage in his denunciations of the 'ethnocentrism of development' and imperialistic colonisation that have sacrificed the South to the North and destroyed its self-sufficiency.[13] We might also note here Alf Hornborg's argument that 'mainstream modern perceptions of "development" can be viewed as a cultural illusion confusing a privileged position in social space with an advanced position in historical time' and the overall critique of development economics associated with world system analysis and ecological unequal exchange studies.[14] To endorse these calls for conceptual revision of the idea of development is not to deny the importance of meeting basic needs of survival and well-being and of redressing oppression and affliction in the most impoverished communities.[15] But it is to recognise that growth in itself correlates directly neither with alleviation of poverty nor with a fairer distribution of wealth.[16] It is also to challenge the monopoly of growth-dominated ways of thinking over ideas about social progress and individual fulfilment.

Dialectics of modernity: the case of Ireland

Further light can be shed on this project of revaluation by looking at some of the ways in which traditional, less modernised (yet often colonised) societies have been represented relative to the metropolitan and imperial centres of power. In Ireland, by reason of its subordination to the exemplary modern state, Gaelic culture came to be seen as archaic or pre-modern relative to the anglicising influence. As such it was to be either transcended or preserved, depending on the political standpoint and cultural loyalties of the observer.[17] Douglas Hyde, later the first President of the Irish Free State, deplored English cultural influence in his 1892 address 'The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland'.[18] A traditional Ireland of 'saints and scholars', a place distinguished by its spirituality rather than its economic or social modernity, is canonically celebrated in Éamon De

Valera's St Patrick's Day speech of 1943:

> The ideal Ireland that we would have, the Ireland that we dreamed of, would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis for right living, of a people who, satisfied with frugal comfort, devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit … The home, in short, of a people living the life that God desires that men should live.[19]

Yeats, too, although he couched the idea in more aristocratic and aesthetic terms, spoke of Ireland as a place that had escaped the general corruption of a secular modernity, and that was spiritually opposed to the unholy trinity of British materialism, middle-class mass culture and orthodox Christianity.[20] However, while the invocation of traditional pieties was a significant rhetorical resource for nationalist argument, it did not go uncontested even in the earlier twentieth century. The preservationist invocation of Gaelic Ireland was condemned as reinforcing English hegemony by colluding in the imperialist's sentimental patronage.[21] Writers including James Joyce, Seán Ó'Faoláin and (later) John McGahern variously challenged the ideologies of nativism and traditionalism.

As Joe Cleary comments on these contested and complex cultural politics:

> Political economists over the last two centuries have consistently remarked upon the many ways in which Ireland can be seen to depart from those pathways to capitalist development regarded as normal in the Western world … [and they have been] left to debate whether Ireland had failed political economy or political economy had failed Ireland … Histories and sociologies of Irish modernity frequently turn into extended deliberations on Ireland's deficient modernisation, anxious ruminations on the ways in which Irish society had remained an uncanny site of the 'pre-modern' or the 'non-modern', despite its location astride the very highway of Euro-American modernity … But for others, this uncanny backwardness was trans-valued and recreated as its greatest resource … The country was construed as a sublime periphery to the European mainstream, a place that was out of the world, beyond the world, an alternative to the world.[22]

This vision of Ireland as an 'alternative to the world' was, as Cleary goes on to point out, increasingly discredited in the decades after independence. From the 1960s onwards, the state sought multinational corporate investment and EEC membership (which it attained in 1973). This has led to a more general convergence, culturally and economically, with other western European societies. Yet until relatively recently, Ireland might still be presented as offering a welcome respite from the complexities of the modern world – a place where 'history fades against its much sung landscape of rocky coastlines, rolling grasslands, misted mountain ranges, boglands and moor' and which paradoxically comes 'to represent both the romantic pleasures of solitude and seclusion and traditional virtues of conversation, sociability and close-knit communities'.[23] Caricatured as it often was (postcard images of sheep and cattle

on the road in ‘rush hour Ireland’), its relatively leisured pace could be presented as an attractive and ‘green’ advance on what was happening in Britain.[24]

Then came the extreme economic de-regulation of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ years. Car ownership and use rapidly grew, the infamous motorway was driven right past the Hill of Tara, and Bertie Ahern (Taoiseach from 1997 to 2008) dismissed objections to road building as being about ‘swans, snails and people hanging out of trees’.[25] Far from moving towards more sustainable development, Ireland propelled itself into the fore-front of what the ‘modernizing’ programme had now become, namely adaptation to the economic and social opportunities – and constraints – of the global capitalist market. Indeed, Ireland suddenly found itself fêted for its neo-liberal advancement relative to other centres of commerce who, not long before, had derided it for its backwardness. For a brief period, as Fintan O’Toole puts it, ‘the globalised Irish economy had itself become a global brand’ with Ahern’s speech on ‘the Irish model of development’ much in demand.[26]

Of course, that moment proved fleeting: boom gave way to recession, and the follies and corruption of ‘Celtic Tiger’ capitalism were exposed.[27] Another outcome of this trajectory was the creation of an even greater gulf between the wealthy elite and the rest of the population, of a kind that had opened up elsewhere. Between 1995 and 2006, the wealth of the top 1 per cent grew by 75 billion euros; that 1 per cent held 20 per cent of the country’s wealth, with the top 5 per cent holding two-fifths.[28]

All this is well known, and in its essentials it follows the usual course of boom and bust capitalism with its material legacy of new but long-unoccupied buildings and half-completed construction work. This ‘junk space’, found across the globe, is subject to the Alzheimers-like deterioration described by the architect, Rem Koolhaas.[29] It is the residue of a capitalism that, according to David Harvey, ‘builds a physical landscape appropriate to its own condition at a particular moment in time, only to have to destroy it, usually in the course of a crisis, at a subsequent point in time.’[30]

The Irish case, then, instantiates an economic and cultural evolution very pertinent to the reconceptualisation of progress and modernity that I am advocating here. Were we to enter a period of transition informed by such conceptual reconstruction, then nations figuring as relatively backward (as Ireland formerly did) might begin to reposition themselves, and to be perceived, as being in the vanguard by comparison with the overdevelopment of the imperial powers or metropolitan centres who had rendered them marginal and

pre-modern.[31] Joe Cleary has suggested, citing the role of the United Irishmen in 1793, that peripheral nations can on occasion function as sites of an 'alternative Enlightenment' where ideas of the modern are intellectually tested, creatively extended, radicalised and transformed, and may indeed be applied eventually to the metropolitan centre.[32] This chimes with James Joyce's speculation on the opportunities missed in his homeland: 'Had we been allowed to develop our own civilisation instead of this mock English one imposed on us, and which has never suited us, think of what an original, interesting civilisation we might have produced.'[33] (Emer Nolan writes of Joyce's *Ulysses* that it demonstrates a mode in which 'the archaic and the avant-garde may enter into explosively creative conjunction', and that it is a work where 'the notion of the emancipatory power of the modern is interrogated, indeed put under considerable pressure, rather than one in which the modern is uncritically ratified.')[34]

A more sober and spiritual consumption?

In arguing for the necessary transition to a post-growth economic and political order, one might wish to resuscitate something of the ideal of sober consumption and spirituality which the defendants of traditional ways of life in the colonised nation sought to pit against the materialism and commercialising values of the coloniser. To avoid misunderstanding, I would emphasise the role of conceptual reconstruction here, and the break with prevalent notions of spirituality that would necessarily be involved. Not least of the many difficulties in conceptualising these shifts is the lack of a vocabulary of the spirit that does not come loaded with either religious or mystical or ascetic connotations. Conversely, it is almost impossible to engage in critique of an overly materialist consumption without it being assumed that one is advocating some less complex and less sensually enriching mode of existence. Christianity has been the major influence on this ever since Thomas Aquinas's distinction between the pleasure of *delectatio*, in which other animals also share, and the greater pleasure of *gaudium* or joy, which is exclusive to humans and arises only from the exercise of reason. This distinction was given its specifically Christian and highly ascetic inflection, such that carnal gratifications of all kinds, but particularly the pleasures of sex, were frowned upon and to be as far as possible avoided.[35] From then on, it was not just that the pleasures of mental activity, especially philosophical contemplation, were regarded as superior to those of the flesh, it was also that fleshly pleasures came to be regarded as almost unworthy of the truly human soul, and as ones in which we revel at the cost of descending to the

level of the beast. Although I have argued that the tendency of consumer society is to erode or displace the more distinctively mental and spiritual dimensions of need satisfaction, this is not to value intellectual pleasures at the expense of the sensual. Indeed, not only is that line of thought caught up in a mistaken analysis of the nature of human gratification, it has also fostered a class and gender elitism whose legacy is still with us.[36] The important distinction from the 'alternative hedonist' point of view is not between the pleasures of the flesh and those of the mind. Some indication has already been given of how difficult it is to make such final discriminations. In revealing the indices of alternative hedonist shifts in thinking about the 'good life', my position shares more with Nietzsche's debunking of priestly ascetism, than it does with punitive self-denial of erotic and convivial pleasure. Any utopian images of happiness invoked belong more within the tradition of Critical Theory, with its emphasis on the importance of sensual pleasure and rejection of puritan disdain for the so-called 'baser' gratifications.[37]

By speaking, then, of spirituality, I am not implying that a less acquisitive consumption need find its basis in religious belief or ascetic practice, only that it would be less driven by the quest for accumulating stuff, more socially and environmentally aware and more engaged with the pleasures of art, craft and sociable living. It would be distinguished by its emphasis on neglected sources of enjoyment and indulgence – more outgoing, more generous and convivial, less narcissistic – and not by the cultivation of inwardness and personal austerity found in the tradition of religious asceticism which influences some of those who reject contemporary materialism.[38] There is nothing particularly unusual in valuing these more spiritual gratifications above those supplied through commercial transactions. After all, they are often defined approvingly as precisely those which money can't buy. Consumer culture can seem, in this sense, perversely ill-suited to supplying these more profound needs and desires (or those often claimed as the most sought after), and it can make good the deficit only in a partial and inadequate way – by deflecting spiritual yearnings onto forms of material acquisition. Policies informed by an alternative hedonist turn to the spirit would seek to redress this imbalance and to restore sources of direct spiritual well-being that have been sacrificed to the commodifying logic of consumer culture. (This could involve quite varied initiatives: more adequate provision of leisure time, the reclaiming of land for allotments and public parks, the promotion of easy access to the countryside, or a noise-free environment or provision for solitude or making education in music, literature and the arts, a more central, universally available and ongoing aspect of life). But a spiritual

focus would also be concerned with respecting and enhancing the aesthetic and symbolic aspects of a distinctively human consumption, even where this is involved in the gratification of needs or desires of a primarily sensual and material kind.[39] Even where it is a question of meeting the needs of the flesh (of satisfying hunger, for example) the tendency of consumer society is very often to whittle away or downgrade the more distinctively ritualised (spiritual and aesthetic) dimensions of this.[40] Food, for example, is frequently fast food, eaten on the run, and often consumed in solitary mode while doing something else such as office work or watching television. This is the bleak postmodern eating described in some of Michel Houellebecq's fiction.[41] What has gone missing from it is the sense of the meal as a convivial event having its own value in structuring time, fostering human exchange, and providing food for thought as well as bodily renewal. An alternative hedonist approach would thus argue that our more basic physical needs, such as for food, can be more or less spiritually accommodated depending on the importance attached to their cultural mediation, and the forms provided for that.

A more spiritual consumption, when conceived along these lines, would introduce new thinking about what constitutes a distinctively human flourishing. Conventional consumerist views on this have assumed that any advance on more basic or primary need satisfaction would always involve a more refined and luxurious level of material satisfaction – in other words, that not 'living by bread alone' must always mean, shall we say, 'eating cake'. It has also been assumed that without this conception of flourishing, the economy will falter and cease to expand. But it is only, of course, if we accept the 'materialist-consumerist' understanding of what it means to flourish or expand on basic need provision, that we shall share rather than challenge the standard liberal-economic anxieties about the stagnating effects of an essentially stable and reproductive provision of basic needs. If we break with the idea of an 'improved living standard' engendered by consumer culture, then we would no longer think of wants or non-basic needs always as extensions of, or ever more baroque and resource-hungry constructions upon primary physical needs, but as an altogether less materially encumbered and encumbering source of fulfilment.

A decent standard of living for all is in principle compatible with the furthering of human flourishing conceived as the gratification of desires (or less basic needs) provided these latter cease to be so fixated on tangible goods, and more directed to spiritual dimensions of satisfaction. Moreover, as already indicated, by confining ourselves to a more reproductive mode of providing for essential goods, we could even enhance the more directly sensory pleasures

derived from these through the enjoyment of better health, more free time and a slower pace of living.

This has important implications for the project of promoting sustainable consumption on a global scale. For if we allow that project to focus too exclusively on universal provision for common and basic human needs, we risk overlooking the critical fact that specific satisfiers of those common needs in the affluent and 'best performing' nations create deprivation elsewhere. What therefore has to be targeted by a global politics of need is not only what we share in the way of basic needs but the causal relationship between the highly elaborated and luxurious forms in which the more globally privileged are meeting their 'developed' needs and securing the protection of their affluent lifestyles, and the forms in which other communities are being deprived of even the more reduced forms of satisfaction of basic needs, let alone provided with the wherewithal to conserve for the future.[42] The demand for universal satisfaction of basic human needs must, therefore, be linked to a critique of the conception of human flourishing that has been promoted through the neo-liberal market, and needs now itself to be re-thought in the light of its deleterious consequences. If the more affluent peoples of the world need to restrain their material desires in order to secure a socially just and sustainable global order, then it is surely also true that a condition of the emergence of a will to sobriety in material consumption will be the fostering of an altered conception of pleasure and enjoyment.[43]

It is clearly an implication of my argument above, that the zeal for money and material possessions that is such a prevalent feature of market societies, is not an inherent feature of human nature, but compensatory at least to some extent for the absence or loss of other less tangible goods (for love, friendship, respect, security, justice, trust).[44] But I would also emphasise that the access to these goods in money-obsessed societies is certainly very unevenly distributed, as is the appreciation of their primary status as goods. This is so much so, that one has to speak of the privilege of appreciating what money can't buy: which is itself the privilege of other privileges, namely, of a caring and supportive family background, extended education and the self-knowledge and confidence all that provides. In short, the obsession with money, although probably attributable in some cases to individual pathology, is also a consequence of social and economic inequalities. Any attempt, then, today to pit the spirit against commerce or to discover new virtues in old ways of doing things will need to sever the link between progress and economic expansion while seeking to correct for the inequalities and social elitism, and the religious hierarchies, that

have so often gone together with economic backwardness.

Uncoupling progress from economic growth: (i) Gender and sexuality

Those who dissent from my argument that social progress and emancipation must be decoupled from economic growth may insist that the expanding capitalist market has been irreplaceable as the vehicle of social advance, especially in furthering gender parity and sexual liberation. Cultures whose patterns of work and consumption we might want to invoke as preferable to our own in terms of sustainability have not as a rule been progressive on gender relations and sexuality (the example of Ireland again comes to mind). It is also true that the modern feminist movement originated in capitalist societies. Marx pointed out that it was only when capitalism forcibly dissolved old family ties, and drew women (and children) into work 'outside the sphere of the domestic economy', that a foundation was laid for a 'higher form of the family and of the relation between the sexes'.[45] Feminists have generally endorsed liberal-market conceptions of individual autonomy and self-realisation, and have welcomed the role played by science, especially medicine, in female emancipation. Campaigners have appealed to Western biomedical norms and criteria of health in defending women in other societies from abusive practices such as female genital mutilation and in shielding them from ignorant and ill-judged medical practices. Even as feminists in the West have conducted an immanent critique of the inherent masculinity of a supposedly universal humanism, they have invoked its transcultural understanding of female needs and welfare in their criticisms of the repressions and bigotry of other cultures.[46]

But this does not mean that the liberal-market influence has been wholly benign or that it remains the precondition of any further progress. We can acknowledge the role of Western science and Enlightenment culture in advancing gender emancipation, but we should also note the negative impacts of the accompanying economic order. Neo-liberal societies today seek to subordinate women, like men, entirely to the culture of work. (One of the more recent instances of this was Christine Lagarde, the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, celebrating International Women's Day in 2019 with a speech calling for more women in the workplace as a way of boosting economic growth and productivity).[47] Women are also the special target of shopping mall culture: for them, buying things is supposedly an assured route to self-realisation. We noted in the previous chapter that the fashion industry,

offering an endless variety of very cheap clothing, has persuaded many into hyper-consumerist and throwaway dress habits. Cosmetics and plastic surgery are also a huge growth area. 'Third Wave' feminism and 'girl power' have themselves provided the springboard for all sorts of consumer-oriented media interventions, brand development and advertising spin.[48] As Nina Power has suggested, 'almost everything turns out to be "feminist" – shopping, pole-dancing, even eating chocolate … the desire for emancipation starts to look like something wholly interchangeable with the desire simply to buy more things.'[49] Feminists today are understandably wary of echoing the puritan or sexually repressive undertones of some critiques of commercialism. But the welcome given to consumer culture as a source of self-making, gender performance and personal empowerment has encouraged complacency about what has actually been going on in the world of shopping, where gender stereotypes, albeit now in a mildly ironised form, are deployed to market commodities whose production relies on sweatshop labour to turn massive profits.[50] In this sense, recent campaigning on gender and sexual issues has done little to unsettle the presiding structures and institutions of economic power or to promote greener and fairer ways of thinking about human prosperity. Nor has it done much to challenge the neo-liberal presumption that it is only paid employment in the public domain that counts as 'real' work. This ignores the huge and essential social contribution made through the unpaid activities of those – still mainly women – involved in childrearing and care of the infirm and elderly, and reinforces the existing work ethic and gender division of labour.[51] In Nancy Fraser's summary:

> Where feminists once criticised a society that promoted careerism, they now advise women to 'lean in'. A movement that once prioritised social solidarity now celebrates female entrepreneurs. A perspective that once valorised 'care' and interdependence now encourages individual advancement and meritocracy.[52]

Or as Nina Power has put it:

> The political imagination of contemporary feminism is at a standstill. The perky, upbeat message of self-fulfilment and consumer emancipation masks a deep inability to come to terms with serious transformations in the nature of work and culture. For all its glee and excitement, the self-congratulatory feminism that celebrates individual identity above all else is a one-dimensional feminism … If feminism were to shake off its current imperialist and consumerist sheen it could once again place its vital transformative political demands centre-stage, and shuffle off its current one-dimensionality for good.[53]

(ii) Affluence, health and sickness

In relation to health, it might seem perverse to question the benefits of economic growth. But even here the picture is complex. Increased GDP does generally, though not always, correlate with improved life expectancy.[54] Nonetheless, it is widely acknowledged that first-world affluence is in many ways becoming counterproductive for affluent populations. Lifestyle-related stress, lack of exercise, sickness due to air pollution, growing problems of mental health, obesity and diabetes – all are prevalent in rich societies. Waste disposal and recycling, especially of plastic and e-waste, have toxic consequences for the health of those who do the dirty work, mostly in newly industrialising countries.[55]

In this case, we have two grounds on which to question the appropriateness of exporting the consumerist model of the 'good life'. Not only may extension of this model to developing countries prove less sustainable than more traditional methods of provision, it can also foster ways of living that are intrinsically unhealthy. The adoption of Westernised conceptions of prosperity has led to a massive increase in car use instead of cycling in countries such as China and India – with the added irony that this comes at a point when attempts are being made in Western societies to reverse that trend, because of its adverse impact on public health. A related example of what the Chinese now sometimes describe as 'wealth deficits' (meaning the downsides of becoming richer in monetary terms) is the huge rise in obesity since the 1980s in China, where the Ministry of Health estimated in 2012 that 300 million were obese in a population of 1.2 billion, making it second only to the USA in the number of overweight people. Diabetes is also on the rise, with a tripling over the last twenty-five years of the number of children under fourteen suffering from diabetes.[56] The ill effects of modernisation are also evident in the spread of non-communicable diseases in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Coming on top of an existing burden of communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS, the impact of non-communicable illness is now threatening to offset the benefits of lower rates of respiratory infections, diarrhoeal diseases and tuberculosis.[57] In 2010, the Global Burden of Disease study presented heart diseases and diabetes as the top ten leading causes of death in southern sub-Saharan Africa.[58] Smoking is yet another health threat connected to modernisation. An increased awareness of its severe health consequences has led to restrictions in its use in most countries of the global North, making the tobacco industry intensify its efforts to promote smoking, especially in low-and middle-income countries of the Global South.[59] As Mike Jay reveals in his interesting essay on the cultural history of tobacco, this mirrors the overall pattern whereby the most noxious forms of tobacco use, themselves a

consequence of European industrialisation, became the general smoking practice in those countries where tobacco had originally been used in more ritualised and somewhat safer ways.[60]

These illustrations, indicative of certain tendencies that run counter to mainstream perceptions and claims about the necessary links between economic development and improved health, do not claim to provide an exhaustive account of what is clearly a very complex field of study. But they do suggest that there are a number of differing grounds on which to challenge the view that health benefits automatically follow from economic modernisation. Western medical science has indisputably played a role in improving many aspects of health on a global scale, but impositions of its biomedical model that are insensitive to the norms and practices of other cultures can prove damaging to pre-existing community-based forms of welfare provision, or counterproductive in other respects.

And, as I have argued, economic modernisation brings its own health hazards: the lifestyle promoted by consumer culture and its model of development is by no means an uncomplicated blessing in respect of physical and mental well-being. If we recognise how market liberalism can be said to have both advanced the self-realisation of previously oppressed constituencies but also to have skewed or foreclosed opportunities for another kind of development, then we need a conception of progress that, even as it defends certain Western-led assessments of health and well-being, rejects the consumerism of the dominant modernising discourse in favour of an alternative hedonist optic.

Cultural politics and alternative hedonism: ‘avant-garde nostalgia’

A more dialectical understanding of prosperity must offer new forms of representation of the relationship between past and present, tradition and modernity: in place of a stadial and evolutionist conception of history, a degrowth understanding committed to social justice and a fairer distribution of environmental resources requires a more complex narrative on the old–new divide, a transcendence of the current binary opposition between uncritical progressivism and elegiac nostalgia. It would recast certain forms of retrospection as potentially avant-garde.

My claim here has something in common with the idea of a ‘progressive’ nostalgia advanced by Jennifer Ladino,[61] and also chimes, in certain respects,

with Alastair Bonnett's suggestion that

> one of the most troublesome, and most interesting, aspects of nostalgia is that it complicates distinctions between modernity and non-modernity and between what is 'authentic' and what is 'invented'. Nostalgia transgresses and affronts modernity's hubris, it both emerges from and doubts the reflexive, critical capacities of the destabilised modern subject. Because it is 'in and against' modernity nostalgia opens up room for us to question modernity and the way that certain forces and forms acquire the status of being modern.[62]

I am, however, less concerned here than are most recent cultural theorists of nostalgia with either the definitive features of nostalgia, or its positioning vis-à-vis the tensions between the authentic and the constructed, or its register in literature. Distinctive to what I call avant-garde nostalgia (obviously a provocatively contradictory notion) is the element of critique: its retrospection or lament for the past seeks to restore what is lost, but in a transmuted and (so to speak) corrected form. I invoke the notion, in other words, in order to capture a movement of thought that remembers, and mourns, that which is irretrievable, but also attains to a more complex political wisdom and energy in the memorialising process itself. It is a form of retrospection through which a green renaissance or transcendence draws energy from the heightened sense of what has now gone missing, but might possibly be restored in a changed, less politically divisive and more permanent form. It is a perspective shared with those theorists who have insisted on the links between emancipatory futures and the scrupulous remembrance of things past, in both negative and more positive aspects. As Theodor Adorno wrote some while ago,

> so long as progress, deformed by utilitarianism, does violence to the surface of the earth, it will be impossible – in spite of all proof to the contrary – completely to counter the perception that what antedates the trend is in its backwardness better and more humane …. If today the aesthetic relation to the past is poisoned by a reactionary tendency with which this relation is in league, an ahistorical aesthetic consciousness that sweeps aside the dimension of the past as rubbish is no better. Without historical remembrance there would be no beauty.[63]

This emphasises the importance of the 'backward look' even as it acknowledges its fantastical dimension and the impossibility – and undesirability – of an unmediated return to past experience. Adorno's fellow Frankfurt School theorist, Herbert Marcuse, noted that the 'romantic pre-technical world was permeated with misery, toil, and filth, and these in turn were the background of all pleasure and joy.' But there was still, as he put it, 'a "landscape," a medium of libidinal experience which no longer exists.'[64] Raymond Williams also warned against both the 'simple backward look' with its patrician (and patriarchal) forms of nostalgia, and the 'simple progressive thrust' with its unthinking adulation of

industrial progress.[65] Indeed, in his later writings, notably *Towards 2000*, he comes close to acknowledging that socialism, engendered as it was from within the dynamic of modernity, seemed incapable of framing an adequate critique of progress: 'In every kind of radicalism the moment comes when any critique of the present must choose its bearings between past and future.'[66] Avant-garde nostalgia could here make a contribution by reflecting on past experience in ways that highlight and continue to endorse humanist conceptions of well-being and personal emancipation, while also exposing the ways in which a growth-driven consumerist programme for realising well-being may now be actively subverting it.[67]

Cultural politics and alternative hedonism: 'aesthetic revisioning'

An alternative hedonist politics of prosperity of the kind outlined above will depend in part on the evolution of an altered aesthetic response to the material culture of consumerism. It will involve wider resistance to the appeals and promises of advertising, and a more general shift of optic on the supposed attractions and compulsions of consumer culture. There is, of course, no guarantee that this will come about. If it does, it will, I suggest, follow the usual pattern of cultural change, in which aesthetic revisioning plays an important role. A new sense of self-interest will emerge, strongly influenced by environmental concern and discourse on sustainable consumption.

Self-interest, after all, involves something more than pursuing the needs and desires, and complying with the norms and values, dominant at a particular point in time. A fuller understanding of one's interests comes with a more reflective and complex engagement with one's times, and involves transformations in aesthetic responses and desires. Consumption theory devotes much attention to what is arguably a pretty shallow notion of self-change, where all the emphasis falls on the instability of 'identity' and the role of consumer culture in providing for its ceaseless performative remaking. Rather less attention has been paid to more profoundly reflexive and permanently achieved insights on personal need, whose impact at the level of consumption may be altogether more complex than is recognised in the idea of consumer goods and services being used to signal an ephemeral and transient self.

A salient instance of such deep change is the transformation in self-understanding brought about by feminism, whose cultural revolution 'raised consciousness' for both sexes in ways that have profoundly and permanently

affected their way of life. As individuals acquired a heightened awareness of the role of gender in their self-formation and could see the extent of its social construction – and hence mutability – so they entered into complex – and often painful – processes of self-change and 'reconstruction'. Such processes can involve dramatic revisionings of affective and emotional response: epiphanies through which the attractions and repulsions of the world of lived experience undergo a kind of gestalt switch. Persons or objects or behaviours or practices that were formerly erotically seductive or aesthetically compelling yield their enchantment to other instances of these that previously held little of those attractions.

There is an analogue here for the evolution in sensibility involved in the adoption of alternative hedonist ways of feeling and seeing. Rather, as individuals through the mediation of feminism arrived at altered conceptions of their selfhood and aspirations, so might an alternative hedonist sensibility transform the perceptions of affluent consumers and bring about similarly dramatic shifts over the coming decades in affective response and in perceptions of self-interest. Integral to any such gestalt shift will be an aesthetic suspension and reordering, as commodities and services and forms of life once perceived as enticingly glamorous come gradually to be seen instead as cumbersome, ugly and retrograde, thanks to their association with unsustainable resource use, noise, toxicity, or their legacy of unrecyclable waste and waste exports. The revisioning in question here is not a case of 'pure' aesthetic judgement in the disinterested Kantian sense,[68] since it is closely aligned with a general re-thinking of pleasure and the good life that would be achieved through a green renaissance. Comparably to the way in which there is a necessary correlation between ethical concern for an object and true beliefs about it,[69] there is a correlation between beliefs about and aesthetic responses to material culture. If you come to know that x does you harm, you tend to perceive it differently. Advertisers know this, and respond to shifting regimes of truth and belief. No one today would market an anti-greenfly spray with the image, used in the 1950s, of mother, father and child all wreathing themselves in clouds of pesticide as they assault the rosebush.[70] Until cigarette advertisements were finally banned, their imagery was rarely connected with the act of smoking. Car advertisements often rely on implausible depictions of the vehicle as a 'solitary' amidst nature.

Images of waste may have an important part to play in a greening of aesthetic response, since the junk excreta of consumerist society is so plainly repellent. Paul Bonomini's 'Weee Man', a 300-tonne, 24-foot high android

constructed in collaboration with the Royal Society of Arts was made out of the average weight of the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (or Weee) that a single person disposes of in a lifetime. Looming menacingly over London's River Thames in the spring of 2005, it was plainly intended to provoke an anti-consumerist aesthetic shift.[71] The recent images of plastic waste appear to have had some impact on consumer practice, even if they have so far led to little change in government policy on its creation and export.[72]

An anti-consumerist ethic and aesthetic should not dwell exclusively on the ecological necessity of revised ideas of pleasure and the good life but also on their hedonist potential. The revision is indeed essential on eco-political grounds, regardless of any other attractions it may have. But I would still maintain that even if it were possible to sustain the consumerist market indefinitely and to extend its regime throughout the planet (and maybe beyond), it would not enhance human pleasure or happiness. It would inhibit and stunt the discovery and development of other ways of meeting material needs and other sources of pleasure and satisfaction. To seek such 'other pleasures' is not against the grain of desire but fully consonant with it.

7

Towards a Green Renaissance: Cultural Revolution and Political Representation

> ‘I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act.’
>
> Greta Thunberg, aged 15, founder of the Youth Climate Change movement, to the political leaders and entrepreneurs gathered at Davos, January 2019

> ‘The scientists tell us we have just over a decade to turn the climate crisis around. I will not even be thirty by then. My whole life will be ahead of me, as will the lives of today’s almost two billion children.’
>
> Hugh Hunter, aged 15 in New South Wales, explaining why he will be striking on 15 March 2019

> ‘That those born today only have a carbon budget a fraction of the size of those from previous generations exemplifies the need for a transformative approach that puts social and economic justice at the heart of plans to tackle the climate crisis.’
>
> James Woodier, UK Student Climate Network, April 2019[1]

As climate campaigners around the world have been insisting for a long time, and especially vocally in the last two years, only radical action can secure long-term ecological well-being, and it can no longer be postponed. As I have argued in earlier chapters, this will require a revision of thought and behaviour in affluent societies that will prove convulsive at every level, social, cultural and economic. It will require an enhanced role for the state and a much less unequal society. It will involve a more reproductive meeting of material needs for food, shelter, clothing, transport, communication and recreation, instead of constant innovation (and proliferation) in the supply of goods and services. It will also involve many other factors: a displacement of the advertising message and aesthetic; a transport system in which cars and planes have for many journeys been replaced by trains, buses, bikes, boats and walking; and a way of living in

which free time for most people will be considerably increased, perhaps even exceeding time spent in work, allowing unprecedented participation in an environmentally sustainable but expanded range of intellectual and recreational pursuits. A green renaissance of such holistic dimensions cannot be ‘owned’ and pursued by any one social grouping or constituency, nor conceived as the triumph of any one political force or perspective over its adversaries. Its realisation would transcend the conventional agonistics of partisan politics, requiring and developing a new and hegemonic ‘common sense’.

Nonetheless, the agents and processes of conventional politics are sure to play a central role. Political activists, journalists and academics can elaborate on the essential economic and social preconditions for the radical transitions needed. Climate scientists and campaigners may put forward ambitious and innovative plans for rewilding, tree-planting, reductions in energy consumption, car-free cities, transition to a largely vegan diet, and so forth. These contributions, however, will remain theoretical in the absence of the powers and pressures required to translate them into effective practice – which means attention must also be paid to the possible agents and processes of transformation. This is a question in part about the formal political process of change at the international level, and the influence exercised on that by national governments. It is therefore also a question about parliamentary representation, about party policies and manifestos and campaigns and ultimately about which parties succeed in winning elections and forming governments. But that in turn comes back to a question about the formation of electorates themselves, the cultural influences upon them, and how these might encourage significant shifts in motivation and behaviour and thus provide new mandates for change. It is to these questions of cultural politics, and specifically to their possible impacts and repercussions in Britain, that I turn in this chapter.

In a *Guardian* article on Extinction Rebellion in the spring of 2019, James Butler, co-founder and senior editor at Novara Media, argued that given how short a time we have to bring emissions under control, the vehicles for transformation must be those that already exist, however imperfect, and that these will include national legislatures, international bodies and political parties. He went on to say that Extinction Rebellion’s

> laudable but vague three aims – that government and press tell the truth; to bring emissions to zero; that a democratic assembly oversees the process – remind me of the classic problem of politics. That is, knowing where you want to end up, but without any middle steps, failing to understand how to get there. Participation in the climate movement convinced me that action on the scale needed can be taken only on the state level. In Britain, in the timescale needed, that will require engagement with the only viable political force – the Labour party – capable of tackling climate change,

> alongside hard-nosed direct action against the hydrocarbon industry. This would mean developing a clear offer to the trade unions, many of whose regressive positions on the environment are rooted in a fear of job loss and impoverishment, as well as pushing the party to flesh out its currently vague and scanty climate commitments, and insisting on fossil divestment in public procurement. The Labour party's branch and constituency structure offers a vehicle to make climate a part of every campaign, on every doorstep in Britain.
>
> Such a proposal will be uncomfortable for many protesters, who rightly look at Labour's record on climate with scepticism verging on disgust. But, as Extinction Rebellion might themselves say, the situation is too urgent to do anything else.[2]

The position I argue for here is close to that outlined by Butler, and I shall elaborate on some of his themes, accepting that the Labour Party, hopefully in some kind of alliance with the Green Party (and maybe others too), is probably best placed to spearhead such a radical programme. But I shall also argue that any party or alliance of parties 'tackling climate change' must enhance and broaden its appeal through shifting some of the discourse away from the looming horrors towards the pleasures of living and consuming differently. I shall, in other words, seek to supplement the calls for party intervention and state action on the climate emergency with an alternative hedonist cultural imaginary and politics of prosperity.

My argument in what follows is organised with reference to three main questions or concerns. Who are the most likely advocates and protagonists of any green cultural revolution, and how might it become more politically effective? What might be the particular role of the left in developing this effective – eventually, hegemonic – green politics? And which aspects or themes of the alternative hedonist argument set out in this book might be especially prominent in the needed political argument?

Towards a cultural revolution: advocates and protagonists

In answer to the first of these questions, I have in previous chapters argued that the desire for a new economic and social order is already articulated, if only implicitly, in the emerging concerns and disaffections of affluent Western consumers themselves: their alarm over climate change, its floods and fires and large-scale migrations, the dire projections of its impact on the members of all future generations, wherever they may be living, their fears about soil erosion, species extinction, unmanageable waste and air pollution. I have also argued that disenchantment with the consumerist lifestyle, its tedious forms of work and time expenditure, its traffic congestion, stress and ill health, has begun to engender a 'structure of feeling' more open to an alternative hedonist revision of

thinking about prosperity and the good life.[3] To these changes in general sensibility we can add the explicit voice of many environmentalists and climate scientists and their various monitoring organisations and pressure groups; the growing civilian support and participation in projects for reforestation and wildlife protection; the protests and activities, most recently and influentially as far as the general public is concerned, of the Youth Climate Change and Extinction Rebellion movements; and of many other political organisations around the world who have been campaigning for years on climate change, alternative economics and sustainable consumption. These topics are the subject of numerous reflections in the media and in literature, film, art works and exhibitions, and of argument and research in the academy around the world (where there is now a swelling chorus of voices calling for an end to growth and a radical shift of economic governance). We can also note in Britain the concerns of local government (half of local authorities have to date declared climate change emergencies).[4]

Some of these activities and developments may be open to the charge of being too ‘immediate’ or ‘localist’ or ‘emotive’: in other words, of belonging within a ‘folk politics’ of the kind that Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams have presented as currently monopolising the practical and imaginative work of the left. For them, ‘folk politics’ (whose traces they detect in organisations such as Occupy, Spain’s 15M, and the Zapatistas, as well as in political localism, the Slow Food movement, ethical consumerism, and much else) embodies ‘strategic assumptions that threaten to debilitate the left, rendering it unable to scale up, create lasting change or expand beyond particular interests’. Leftist movements under the sway of folk politics, they argue, are thus not only unlikely to be successful, but are in fact incapable of transforming capitalism.[5] I would agree on the importance of transforming capitalism and on the need for strategic thinking on how to achieve that change, but Srnicek and Williams are, to my mind, overly scornful of the qualities they associate with ‘folk politics’. To remove immediacy, passion and a readiness to participate in actions against particular or local manifestations of larger systemic problems, is to remove much of the needed energy and motivation for political activism in the first place. Such an anti-humanist and sanitised version of politics also risks losing sight of the rationale in everyday human experience for seeking political transformation, and seems more likely to encourage quiescence rather than act as a summons to action. More credit should surely be given to the ways in which ‘folk political’ movements are themselves often aware of the limitations of their campaigns, as complementary to rather than opposed to systemic critique. For example, those

engaged in locally based resistance to fracking may be well aware of the limited scope of their initiatives, yet resist the description of their small successes as 'overwhelmed by failure'.[6]

I would welcome rather than quibble over the contribution of anti-fracking protests and their like. It is, however, undoubtedly true that as things stand, the forms of advocacy I have noted, while they may be becoming more politically effective, remain insufficient, and are still obstructed by the countering forces of corporate capitalism, its largely supportive media and the indifference or hostility of many members of the public. As Extinction Rebellion, Carbon Brief, the striking schoolchildren of the Climate Movement, Parents for the Future, and the Millennials forswearing giving birth to any children, have of late been pointing out in their various ways, few states or institutions of global economic governance are as yet prepared to confront the true scale of the changes that need to be pursued in the very near future. In November 2019, more than 11,000 scientists added their voice to this concern, declaring 'clearly and unequivocally' that 'planet Earth is facing a climate emergency' and that 'major transformations in the ways our global society functions and interacts with natural ecosystems' are essential to secure a sustainable future. They also added, for good measure, that such transformative change, together with social and economic justice for all, 'promises far greater human well-being than does business as usual'.[7]

In the UK, the Green Party has long led the way in placing sustainable consumption and new thinking on the politics of prosperity at the centre of its campaigning, and it has consistently pressed for more action on global warming.[8] Both the Conservatives and Labour, on the other hand, have been relatively slow to admit the urgency of the current situation. Until prodded by high-profile campaigns (of a 'folk political' kind), the two main political parties in the UK were not making speeches on climate change nor insisting that the response to it must take priority over all else.[9] Nor has either one said much to the public yet on the need to revolutionise methods of production and modes of consumption – and with immediate effect. The record of the Conservative Party has been particularly dire. To date, despite the agreement in May of 2019 in the UK Parliament to declare a 'climate emergency', there has been no significant change in government policy, which has remained dithering and contradictory, and green for the most part only in acknowledging the economic benefits of biodiversity and wind or solar power. Throughout their time in office, the Conservatives have increased subsidies to fossil fuel companies, supported fracking and airport expansion, slashed the budget of Natural England, and given every encouragement to developers to do more developing and consumers to do

more spending.[10] According to the government's own official report, the UK is set to miss almost all of the 2020 environmental targets it signed up to in 2010.[11] It remains to be seen what impact Brexit will have on Conservative policy on the environment, but the present signs are far from encouraging.

The position of the Labour Party has recently been more considered and consistent, and the policies included in its current manifesto, though open to criticism,[12] are much more progressive. In April of 2019, Labour endorsed the protests and demands of Extinction Rebellion, likening them to those of the Chartists, Suffragettes and Anti-Apartheid campaigners. The shadow health secretary, Jon Ashworth, at the same time pledged to make climate change a central focus of Labour's health and well-being policy, and expressed his support for a citizens' assembly on the issue.[13] Following the second of the schoolchildren strikes, the Labour Party Shadow Treasurer, Clive Lewis, joined with Caroline Lucas in tabling a private members' bill that would force the government to adopt a UK version of the Green New Deal recently proposed by the US Democrats. At its conference later in the year, the Labour Party itself adopted the Green New Deal. In doing so, it adds to the pressures already being exerted in America through the initiative of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign – and now being felt in a number of other countries – to commit to programmes that tackle poverty while reducing carbon emissions to zero by 2030. Agreement has yet to be reached, however, as to how Labour might implement these policies, its commitment to the 2030 deadline remains uncertain, and the dominant message from the Party is still largely about growth and jobs: little is said about pioneering an alternative politics of prosperity. Although Labour policy on the shortening of the working-week is greatly in advance of the Conservatives, the Party has yet to say much about the personal and social advantages of working less and the benefits of a post-consumerist way of living.[14] Nor has it as yet been as open as it should be with the public about the importance, if we are to secure ecological survival even for the children of our own children, of bringing the era of capitalist growth economics and ever-expanding GDP to a close within the next few decades. In this respect – sadly but unsurprisingly – it is still acceding to rather than contesting the general view that continuous economic growth is both necessary and benign. As Alf Hornborg has lamented, 'any presumptive politician naïve or honest enough to advocate degrowth is unlikely to have a future in politics. Economic growth continues to be the foundation of most people's hopes and aspirations. It is thus unlikely that a policy of intentional degrowth will be compatible with democracy in the foreseeable future.'[15] The assumption that

‘hopes and aspirations’ can only be met through growth has gone almost entirely unchallenged in the media. In their study of 591 newspaper articles in the British and US press explicitly referring to economic growth in developed countries over a ten-month period during 2010 and 2011, researchers Justin Lewis and Richard Thomas found that only seven referred to the environmental impact of growth and only one (reporting a speech by Prince Charles) concerned its failure to promote well-being.[16]

A new green economy and polity: a project for the left?

The reluctance of the major parties to move beyond the conventional framework in their political address is understandable in realpolitik terms, but that does not make it less regrettable. It is regrettable because we are entering a future in which the realpolitik conditions will soon have changed dramatically, and because in Britain (and Europe) the formal process of representative democracy offers the only means to bring about change. In claiming this, I am not denying the importance and potential impacts of major transnational agreements and state interventions. But these will necessarily incur significant changes in types and levels of consumption, and will thus only go forward with sufficient public backing for them. Therefore, campaigns and movements contesting the status quo in the name of ecological survival and envisaging a new politics of prosperity need to develop effective party representation (and eventually to consolidate it through alliances with like-minded parties in other countries). In Britain the search for such representation might look not only to the Green Party but also and especially to the Labour Party – as James Butler advocates, despite the Labour Party’s reluctance hitherto to challenge prevailing conceptions of progress and well-being.

There are several reasons why parties and movements of the left in the UK and Europe might take up, as they have not done hitherto, the project of inaugurating a truly effective green economy and polity in affluent societies. I shall discuss three. First, as repeatedly noted, no ecological salvation can take place without a simultaneous commitment to reducing and eventually eliminating the huge social-economic inequalities in affluent societies. Greater equality and social justice have always been the professed objective of the European left (and there is currently renewed support for such a programme from the Labour Party in Britain). Second, it is equally clear that capitalism is ultimately – and in the not very long term – incompatible with sustainability. A concerted, transnational project to bring neo-liberal globalised capitalism under

social-democratic governance must now be a priority of all parties and movements around the world (especially in Europe and America) seeking to redress climate change. Eventually, an economic and financial order not dependent on 'growth' will have to be designed and implemented. Here, too, it is – or used to be – the socialist parties which have been most prepared to implement political control of the economy, and this has a precedent in Britain in the programme of nationalisation and social democratic reforms introduced by the Labour Party post-1945. Third, it is obvious (and follows from the two previous points) that the State – at local, regional, national and European levels – will have to lead and manage much of this change. And again, the 'strong State' has been associated with Labour and Socialist programmes (and also has renewed advocacy within the British Labour Party).

However, there are also reasons to be wary of this association of eco-transformation with the left parties. It is important to acknowledge that the expert evidence on climate change, species loss, toxic waste and so on is not 'political', inasmuch as its validity is independent of prior political convictions: it presents a fundamental challenge to which liberal and conservative politicians and political ideas will also have to respond. The left may have good reasons to doubt the fairness or efficacy of the ways in which other political formations will meet the challenge. It will need to expose both the inadequacies of the current form of reliance on such measures as carbon sequestration or electrification of the car culture as well as the neo-liberal thinking behind the preference for artificial geo-engineering and the severe risks attached to that option.[17] It will also certainly need to make clear its adamant opposition to the eco-fascistic voices now taking advantage of the resurgence of chauvinism and far-right populism.[18] But it must also be prepared for other parties to advance eco-transformative agendas in the coming decades, and maybe at times even to cooperate on them.

A further reason to doubt whether the left is ready to pioneer a green politics of prosperity adequate to the task of achieving the necessary general transformation is the legacy of the (old) left project of 'seizing power' associated with the victory of one faction or class or ideology over others. The most unreconstructed version of this heritage is the continued commitment to the idea of proletarian revolution, which is now widely contested on the left itself. However, faith in the political awakening and activism of the traditional working class, or at any rate an emphasis on the working class as the only politically acceptable or plausible agent of general social transformation, still commands widespread support. It is an underlying, if often understated, assumption of much

Marxist discussion of the politics of transition, and it is implicit in the forms of address to the working class of the European socialist movements and parties. The economic desires and domestic outlook of its predominantly working-class constituency still provide the main focus of the current Labour Party in Britain.[19] Of course, the interests of working-class people must be addressed in the necessary effort to curb the inequalities of capitalism, in which they would be centrally involved. But the rationale and arguments for a green social and economic transformation cannot be adequately or honestly presented in terms of the interests of a particular class.

Moreover, the privileging of working-class political values and agency has gone together on the left with an almost exclusive focus on production as the locus of any political agitation against capitalism. Raymond Williams warned against dismissing or underplaying the political potential of consumer campaigns as merely middle-class issues:

> It is a consequence of the social order itself that these issues are qualified and refracted in these ways. It is similarly absurd to push the issues away as not relevant to the central issues of the working-class. In all reality they belong to these central interests. It is workers who are most exposed to dangerous industrial processes and environmental damage. It is working-class women who have most need of new women's rights etc. … Whatever movement there may be on issues at some distance from these local and decisive relations, there is no possibility of it becoming fully effective until there are serious and detailed alternatives at these everyday points where a central consciousness is generated. Yet it is at just these points, for historically understandable reasons, that all alternative politics are weakest.[20]

But for the most part, this counsel has fallen on deaf ears, and there has been little willingness to accept the importance of activism around consumption. We certainly need to keep in mind the inter-dependence of production and consumption, and the extent to which the specific character (and modes of exploitation) at the one level have their impact on what happens at the other. This has already been noted and discussed in chapter three. As we have seen, too, in chapter four, the expansion of the consumerist way of life is profoundly implicated in the work culture of modernity, and is the underlying cause of the 'work and spend' dynamic of recent decades. But it makes little sense to invoke the working class as the sole possible agent of opposition to the existing economic order, or to insist on the shop floor as the only potentially effective site of eco-socialist agitation. If anything, working-class people have been rather unlikely to commit to any greening of the economy (often by reason of their dependency on jobs in the aerospace, automobile, defence and other less than eco-friendly industries). Labour militancy and trade union activity have, by and large, become confined to the protection of income and employees' rights within

the existing structures of globalised capital rather than setting out to transform the consumerist dynamic of affluent cultures. That pressure is more likely to come in the form of consumption decisions to simplify and settle for a less materially encumbered and work-driven existence: decisions *not* to buy but to do without; decisions to boycott and bypass the brand articles of the hitherto all-powerful transnational providers; decisions to avoid the supermarkets, chain stores and shopping malls, and to purchase and invest only in goods and services of proven ethical and green credentials. Such 'agency' will no longer be class specific, but altogether more diffusely exercised – though probably in the first instance most of the rebellious consumers will come from the more affluent echelons.[21]

In this context, any left-wing project that continues to view worker militancy at the point of production as the key to change, or whose cultural loyalties are too exclusively directed to the working-class, is likely to seem increasingly irrelevant to those who otherwise agree about the need to counter the dominance of unregulated corporate capitalism. At the very least, we need to qualify the Marxist notion of workers as a 'universal class' by invoking a more general interest that may well at times conflict with the immediate aims and aspirations and special interests of organised labour.

A left-led green renaissance will nonetheless also need to recognise that wide disparities of income in countries like the UK stand in the way of effective action on climate change. It is essential that any project to secure sustainability is also a project to overcome inequality and guarantee more economic security (and this, as noted above, has historically been a project of the left). Affluent soceties, who have long enjoyed an unfair share of global resources and have the heaviest carbon footprint, clearly have a special responsibility to act swiftly and radically on climate change. Yet those living in poverty within them who are struggling on a day-to-day basis to make ends meet are unlikely to give high priority (even if they could afford to do so) to ecological campaigning or to greening their consumption. They may also be resentful and unsympathetic to what they see as a middle-class concern in societies where higher incomes not only tend to go together with a larger environmental footprint but also allow for lifestyles well removed from airports, flood risk, waste incinerators and the worst effects of pollution.[22] This is why the network of left groups in the European Parliament who have been campaigning for Europe to end its growth dependency are now also putting forward measures to combat inequality in the period of transition to a new economic order. In a letter circulated for signatures in 2019 ('What Europe needs is a Sustainability and Wellbeing Pact'), it is

argued that ‘inequality has been rising steadily and a growing feeling of (tax) injustice has spilled into social unrest and populism. The Gilets Jaunes uprising in France showed that you can’t tax pollution without a fair taxation system.’ It goes on to call for top income tax rates to be set above 80 per cent for redistribution to low- and middle-income families; for a tax on air travel to be used to fund better and low- to zero-cost public transport; for progressive carbon and resource taxes at source to be redistributed; and for tax incentives to be provided for the use of recycled materials.[23]

As any new left–green formation in the UK joins in a Europe-wide pressure for the introduction of sustainable policies to reduce economic inequality, it also needs to emphasise the collective character of the environmental crisis we now face and its resistance to commodifiable solutions. Clean air, fertile soil, unpolluted water, a climate no longer over-heating: these wider goods are elemental conditions of life and health which cannot (except in the wilder nightmares of science fiction) be preserved only for the rich while allowed to be destroyed for the poor. Unspoilt countryside, space in the city where people can move about and gather unharassed by cars: these pleasures, too, are not enjoyed only by a particular class, and they cannot be gratified through acquisition of individual commodities. It is for these reasons that socialists now need to try to mobilise a trans-class contestation of a free-market system which as it comes up against the absolute limits of ecological resources is also beginning to deny everyone’s primary needs.[24] The climate emergency has created a situation in which calls for greater equality of access to consumer culture must go together with a rethinking of consumption itself; in which promises to end austerity and prioritise fairness and economic security must be coupled with commitments to develop an economic system based on reproductive rather than ever-expanding material production.

Alternative hedonism, ends and means

Were the Labour Party or an alliance of parties on the left to adopt such a political programme, they would be able – and would need – to pursue cultural initiatives of a kind unprecedented in Britain. First of all, a public conversation would have to begin (perhaps by way of citizens’ assemblies on the ultimate purposes of economic activity and the values it should be guided by).[25] The aim would be to replace ‘means-contesting’ by ‘ends-debating’ politics: to bring to a close an era in which the main parties in British politics have essentially contested the best ways of delivering a largely agreed set of ends (economic

growth, universal employment, ever higher wages, and improved living standards as defined within consumer culture), and to inaugurate a politics of prosperity more suited to our times, in which these ends would be reconsidered in the light of ecological crisis, disaffection with consumerism, and new thinking on global solidarity, welfare, pleasure and the good life. Several themes discussed in the course of this book, and which I recapitulate here, would figure in that conversation.

Citizenship and consumption

In promoting this 'politics of ends' conversation, the new party formation could at the same time set out to dissipate one of the more insidious Thatcherite legacies in British politics, the creation, namely, of an analytic divide between consumption and citizenship by which the public becomes primarily a set of consumers (not just of commodities in the shopping malls but also of health and welfare benefits and public services generally). Over several decades, and under both Tory and New Labour governments, people have been subject to a series of measures designed to persuade them that, as consumers, they are also enjoying citizenly rights (in the form of commercial warranties and the like), and that their freedoms and concerns as citizens are best accommodated through an exercise of consumer choice.[26] This reductive representation of the exercise of citizenship as a form of individual consumption needs to be challenged and deconstructed. It fails to account for the popularity of activities 'consumed' in sport or culture (for example) whose appeal lies in the opportunity for participatory and collective involvement. It has also provided the rhetorical cover for an extensive privatisation of facilities whose real effect has often been to impoverish choice and to erode equitable provision of welfare services.[27]

On the other hand, and especially in the context of heightened environmental awareness, political parties and governments would do well to acknowledge that everyday acts of consumption – and of non-consumption – have a political dimension, and that a consumer's choices can be the expression of her identity as a citizen. The anxiety and ambivalence about affluent consumption increasingly felt by consumers-citizens, and the changes this is bringing in consumer practice, should be recognised and encouraged. An alternative hedonist understanding of the consumer as a reflexive and relatively autonomous agent whose self-interested needs can also come to encompass collective goods is essential to a left project for greening the economy, which will recast consumption as a site of republican pressure for sustainable living. In this view, citizenship necessarily

involves something more than enjoying rights and holding a passport, and embraces duties towards and concerns for the wider community, including the well-being of future generations and the planet.[28]

Well-being without consumerism

The importance of critical and oppositional consumption choices, and the broader role of alternative hedonist disenchantment in contesting and potentially transforming the current social and economic order, must be encouraged as part of any commitment to an alternative political economy. The contribution of growth-driven consumption to climate change, while obviously of great importance, is not the only reason for seeking an alternative. Consumerism's many negative impacts on health and well-being should also be stressed, and its benefits questioned.

It is clear that a first priority will be to curb the production of the goods and services that are most seriously damaging to the planet (roads, car parks, runways, out-of-town supermarkets, and rapidly obsolescent and throwaway commodities). More diverse and democratically functioning forms of ownership and control over what is produced and consumed will need to be encouraged. A left–green political formation will need to engender and support an ambitious cultural project, mocking and subverting the ways that advertising depicts prosperity and the good life and inaugurating a different aesthetic of material culture. The emphasis here should fall on enjoyment as well as on frugality, on the rewards of a socially just and eco-benign consumption as well as on the restrictions necessarily placed on former habits. This cultural politics is not issuing jeremiads against consumption, but rather presenting the consumerist way of living as offering too little health and fulfilment rather than too much. And it will seek legitimation for its claims not in some supposedly objective knowledge of 'true' needs (that only an elite group of experts has access to), but in the ambivalence people themselves are beginning to feel about the blessings of the consumerist lifestyle.

The future of work

The present system needs changing not only because of the environmental devastation and global injustice it is driving, but also because of the impact of its work-driven culture on time expenditure and thus on people's lives. As I argued in chapter four, post-Fordist innovation in the management of labour, together

with the IT revolution and increasing automation, have made working life for many people ever more precarious, tedious, stressful and insecure. Less formally hierarchical relations in the workplace have accompanied new forms of corporatism and expectations of loyalty. The emphasis on employment has led to unprecedented self-commodification, and educational curricula have been closely tailored to careers. Yet for some time, the sense of work as offering the main route to personal dignity and self-realisation has been waning. People are coming to view paid work, even if they avoid the endemic insecurity of the gig economy, as frustrating rather than enhancing self-expression and individual fulfilment. Hence the interest in 'time affluence' that is being registered in the US and Europe, and the formation of campaign networks linking those who have opted for 'downshifting,' reduced working hours and more sustainable lifestyles. As the environmental obstacles to endless growth appear ever more insuperable and the future of work more uncertain, the new political formation must stress the emerging opportunities for enjoying a fairer society and more relaxed, diverse and fulfilling lives.

We need to embrace a Green New Deal and to acknowledge the importance of smart technologies in developing a post-fossil fuel economy. But I have also suggested – counter to the argument of many influential voices on the left – that we should at the same time insist on the limitations of automation and defend the potential of less techno-driven and intensive – and more intrinsically rewarding – kinds of work. These could include mixed modes of making and doing that complement traditional methods with newly emerging green technologies. More artisanal ways of working are compatible, too, with communally owned enterprises and cooperatives in which labour is not subject to the imperative of maximising profit by reducing labour time. This more complex vision of the potential satisfactions of work should be reclaimed as an integral component of an avant-garde eco-socialist political imaginary, rather than dismissed as 'folk politics' stuck in pre-modern social relations. A post-work order supported by a universal basic income can help rather than hinder the breakdown of gender divisions of labour. It can promote socio-economic structures and institutions that eliminate rather than encourage the vast inequalities of income and cultural capital characteristic of consumer society.

Restoring and reclaiming public space

As argued in chapter five, an alternative hedonist approach would envisage a major shift away from air travel, and the demotion of the car in favour of cycling

and walking, especially in cities. It requires living in ways that are less dependent on long-distance travel and offer readier and safer access to local urban and rural spaces. This in turn means less reliance on supermarkets and shopping malls, and more encouragement given to independent and locally based producers. Land would need to be made available in both town and country for affordable and sustainable housing and for people to grow their own food. All this has major implications for the planning and development of public space, and for the ownership or control of its use. In England, in particular, wresting this control will demand determined efforts on the part of any new political formation.

As Peter Hetherington has pointed out, this means a reversal of recent trends: two million hectares of public land have been sold off since the 1970s, including NHS sites, valuable holdings in towns, and agricultural land put up for sale to fund cash-strapped councils.[29] In the process, benefits formerly enjoyed by ordinary citizens have been sacrificed and new obstacles have been created for any programme of environmental renewal. In London and other major cities, where global capital has been flooding in to transform urban space, uprooting older communities and providing 'deposit-box' properties for the ultra-rich, reclaiming control will demand outright opposition to neo-liberal development policies. The same is true if we are to resist the spread of so-called 'POPS' (privately owned public spaces) that has come about as municipal planners have come under economic pressure to cede control to private developers, in what some academics regard as an era of 'urban enclosure' comparable to the rural enclosures of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[30] Most criticism of these 'pseudo-public' spaces has been directed at the secrecy of their regulations on public use, their socially hygienic forms of policing or their corporate aesthetic. But their removal from public ownership also complicates the spatial and architectural conversions essential to the green renaissance of city life, and needs to be denounced on those grounds and reversed wherever possible. Anna Minton, arguing for what she calls 'the right to the city', recently wrote:

> The architecture of any period, including the production of space, reflects the socio-economic forces of that period and in that respect the growth in pseudo-public spaces is a reflection of the neo-liberal city. … This type of development is not inevitable: it's a very Atlanticist model, seen primarily in North America and here, and not so much in Europe, and it involves local government and the private sector working together in such a way that it is really undermining our democratic rights over the city.[31]

As a first step to building support for the reclamation of control over both urban and rural space, more transparency is needed. As Guy Shrubsole insists in his

recent *Who Owns England?* blog, the public needs to be informed about what has long been shrouded in secrecy: namely the astonishing inequality in national land ownership, where half of the country is owned by less than 1 per cent of the people. Only 5 per cent is in the hands of householders, some 30 per cent consists in the landed wealth of the aristocracy, and a further 35 per cent is owned by corporations, oligarchs and city bankers. Roaming rights for British citizens are confined to some 10 per cent of this land, while large tracts are held by shell companies and trusts in off-shore tax havens, which enjoy subsidies paid out of taxation.[32]

A new green-left party should therefore provide as much information as possible on the ways in which this pattern of ownership and control constrains what can be done to provide environmental benefits such as cycle tracks or allotments or access to urban and rural spaces. It should mobilise and encourage grassroots activism seeking new powers to reclaim land and to determine its use.[33] In some cases, this might simply mean re-invoking older powers: Shrubsole's ten point plan for reforming land use recommends that we reinvigorate buried pieces of legislation such as everyone's 'statutory right to an allotment' (at present we devote ten times more land to golf courses).[34]

Conclusion

I have focussed in this chapter on the role to be played potentially by party politics, politicians and state-led initiatives. I return in conclusion to the equally important contribution to be made by individuals, as green campaigners but also quite simply in their role as everyday consumers. According to a poll conducted by Greenpeace in April 2019, 63 per cent of Britons think we are in a climate emergency, and 76 per cent say that they would cast their vote differently to protect the planet.[35] If this is the case, they should also be ready to act on their opinions and rethink their lifestyles accordingly. Why, for example, are the 63 per cent not doing everything they can to minimise their car use? If even half of car owners did so, it would have a noticeable impact. Again, one might ask why universities are still building multi-storey car-parks to attract future students, and why students and prospective students (many of whom may well have supported the protests of Extinction Rebellion) are not doing more to expose such retrograde policies. If people in affluent societies are as troubled by climate change as they claim, let them change their voting patterns certainly, but let them also accept their personal liability and do something about it.

Here again I would question the reluctance of so many on the left to

recognise the responsibilities of individuals, as well as those of the profit-driven corporations supplying their demands for cars and phones and white goods and much else, together with the energy to run them. It is easier to enthuse about technological utopianism and ‘luxury communism’ than to rethink the Marxist promises of abundance and to press for new forms of both restraint and gratification. But as I have argued at various points throughout this book, those on the left who accept the need to qualify the Marxist message on proletarian agency should also revise their utopian aspirations and acknowledge the fatuity of accelerationist visions. Surely no one really supposes that we can continue with current rates of economic expansion and consumption for another century or two – let alone into the distant future. The politics of prosperity that we need today must dissociate pleasure and fulfilment from intensive consumption, from the endless accumulation of new machines and gadgetry, from tourist space travel and the like, and from so much else based on unworkable assumptions about what would constitute globally sustainable modes of life. In this context, eco-socialists and Marxists must press for a debate on the good life, and argue the need for the Labour movement to reframe their short term economic goals and environmental policies in ways consistent in the longer term with a vision of the future of work, consumption and human satisfaction no longer dependent on continuous growth. Historians, political commentators and campaigners in the Marxist tradition need to complement their powerful analyses of capitalist exploitation and environmental devastation with comparable attention to the possible lines of renewal. They need to say more about the alternative political economy and about the new ways of ordering relations between humans and nature whose necessity is implied by their critiques. They also need to be more vocal about the extent to which a technology-driven way of life has become the prime means of maintaining the global reach and command of corporate power at the expense of the health and well-being of both the planet and most of its inhabitants.

The integration of national economies in a pace of life determined by the dynamics of globalisation presents enormous obstacles, both political and logistical, to any curbing or reversal of the economy and the lifestyle it promotes. But we desperately need new ways of thinking about prosperity and its purposes, and a beginning must be made somewhere. Affluent societies, perhaps particularly in Europe, are well placed to spearhead a new order and to catalyse the political will for change. If they did so, they might initiate a broader critical appraisal of the conventions and goals of economic growth, and begin redressing some of the worst consequences of over-development in northern and western European countries.

The move to sustainable consumption may also require (I recognise how controversial this will sound) a more courageous challenge to the ‘political incorrectness’ of excessive and nonchalant consumers. It is still very difficult to criticise the environmental squandering involved in people’s consumption habits, and there is much embarrassment all round if one does. But given the damaging climatic impact of First World affluence on other more deprived areas of the globe and on all future generations, it is not clear why wasteful and polluting forms of personal consumption should remain exempt from the kinds of criticism that we now expect to be brought against racist, sexist, or blatantly undemocratic attitudes and behaviour. The commitment to an alternative politics of prosperity based on a sustainable economic order needs to be seen as a continuation of the emancipatory project. If we have a cosmopolitan care for the well-being of the poor of the world, and a concern about the quality of life for future generations, then we have to campaign for a change of attitudes to work, consumption, pleasure, and self-realisation in affluent communities. Such a revolution will be comparable in the forms of social transformation and personal epiphany it will demand to those brought about through the feminist, anti-racist, and anti-colonialist movements of recent history. Those who commit to it will be helping to improve both their own lives and those of future generations.

Notes

Introduction

1 On the risks of artificial geoengineering and reliance on ‘fracked’ petroleum or expansion of nuclear energy (as recommended by some environmentalists), see T. Vettese, ‘To Freeze the Thames’, *New Left Review*, May–June 2018, pp. 65; 71–6; S. Ribeiro, ‘Against Geoengineering’, *Jacobin*, 23 October 2018; cf. ‘Explainer: Six ideas to limit global warming with geoengineering’ at: www.carbonbrief.org.

2 A 3–5° Celsius rise was the UN World Meteorological Organization’s estimate in November 2018. It can be found at: public.wmo.int; see also its report of 22 September 2019, ‘Global Climate in 2015–2019: Climate change accelerates’; cf. J. Watts, ‘G20 nations still led by fossil fuel industry, climate report finds’, *Guardian*, 14 November 2018 and F. Harvey, ‘Decade of “exceptional” heat likely to be hottest on record, experts say’, *Guardian*, 3 December 2019.

3 F. Pearce, ‘Climate Change Spells Turbulent Times Ahead For Air Travel’, *Guardian*, 19 February 2018 and ‘Climate change “cause of most under-reported humanitarian crises”’, *Guardian*, 21 February 2019.

4 For a review of this impact, see J. Littler, *Radical Consumption: Shopping for Change in Contemporary Culture*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 2009. The environmental and social impact of consumer culture is treated at some length in chapter 2.

5 D.L. Meadows, D.H. Meadows, J. Randers and W. Behrens III, *The Limits to Growth*, New York: Universe Books, 1972, p. 216.

6 For references and discussion see, especially, chapter 4.

7 The no-growth economy is typically presented in this media study as creating a bleak and stagnant place. The research is reported in J. Lewis, *Beyond Consumer Capitalism: Media and the Limits to Imagination*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013, pp. 124–78 (and cited again here in chapter 7, note 14).

8 A. Hornborg, *Nature, Society and Justice in the Anthropocene: Unravelling the Money-Energy-Technology Complex*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. 42.

9 Y. Moulier Boutang, *Cognitive Capitalism*, trans. E. Emery, Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, pp. 174–5.

1. Society, Nature, Consumption

1 D. Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth: A Story of the Future*, London: Allen Lane, 2019. For a digest, see his article in *New York Magazine*, 17 July 2017. See also, J. Hansen, *Storms of my Grandchildren: The Truth about the Coming Climate Catastrophe and Our Last Chance to Save Humanity*, London: Bloomsbury, 2009.

2 I would except here the writings of the degrowth economists and the degrowth movement more

generally, and the now quite extensive literature on ethical consumption and sustainable welfare. There is also now a spectrum of positions among eco-critics not all of whom are happy with the emphasis on the encounter with nature (see G. Gerrard, *Ecocriticism*, London: Routledge, 2004, p. 168f; M. H. Ryle in *Green Letters*, vol. 10, 2010, pp. 8–18; M. H. Ryle and K. Soper, eds, *Green Letters*, vol. 20, 2, 2016, pp. 119–26).

3 D. Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable*, p. 34. A similar presumption about unchecked consumption is to be found in the view of those who claim that some kind of eco-induced societal collapse is now inevitable, and that we should direct attention to preparing for it (for an elaboration and critique, see S. Pirani, 'Disaster environmentalism 1: looking the future in the face', 5 December 2019, peopleandnature.wordpress.com).

4 A technologically provided 'deus ex machina' as D. Wallace-Wells puts it, ibid.

5 The 'half-earth' proposal is for 50 per cent of the Earth's land to be given over to nature in order to halt catastrophic species loss and extinction (see E.O. Wilson, *Half- Earth: Our Planet's Fight for Life*, New York: Liveright, 2016); the Zürich proposal is for a convergence on energy consumption per capita of 2,000 watts, to be attained by allowing the poorest of the world to double or triple consumption through a commensurate reduction by the richest (see E. Jochem, ed., *Steps Towards a Sustainable Development: A White Book for R&D of energy-efficient technologies*, Zürich: Novatlantis, March 2004). Both schemes are discussed by T. Vettese, 'To Freeze the Planet', *New Left Review*, May–June 2018, see esp. pp. 66–81.

6 A. Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming*, London: Verso, 2016; *The Progress of this Storm: Nature and Society in a Warming World*, London: Verso, 2018; A. Hornborg, *Global Ecology and Unequal Exchange: Fetishism in a Zero-Sum World*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2011; *Global Magic: Technologies of Appropriation from Ancient Rome to Wall Street*, London: Palgrave, 2016; *Nature, Society and Justice*; J. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, London: Verso 2015.

7 K. Marx, *Grundrisse*, Penguin: Allen Lane, London, 1973, pp. 85–6.

8 Cf. H. Rose and S. Rose, who argue that socio-biology's and evolutionary psychology's claim that we are genetically determined to be individualistic and competitive has been further fuelled by neuroscience's focus on the singular brain as the root of identity, *Can Neuroscience Change Our Minds?* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016.

9 L. Andueza, 'Value, Struggle and the Production of Nature', paper to the World Ecology Network Conference, Durham, 15–16 July, 2016.

10 C. Bonneuil and J.-B. Fressoz, trans. D. Fernbach, *The Shock of the Anthropocene*, London: Verso, 2017, p. 68, and see esp. pp. 148–252.

11 Ibid., p. 71; pp. 79–84.

12 Ibid., p. 287; see also pp. 253–87.

13 But in denying a clear analytic distinction between nature and society, Moore's arguments on the 'bundling' together of human and extra-human nature in the creation of the matrix (or 'oikeia', as he calls it) of capitalist relations are altogether too equivocal. As I have pointed out elsewhere, it is question-begging to charge thinkers who readily agree to the ongoing interaction of the natural and social, and thus to the historicity of environmental making within capitalist relations, with a false 'Cartesian dualism', while failing to discriminate between his own constant reliance on binary ideas of 'nature' and 'society' and the 'Cartesian' misuse of them (*Radical Philosophy*, 197, May–June 2016); Malm is less polite, claiming that 'beneath the arid semantic quibble' over the nature–society divide, there lurks an 'unbridled hybridism in Marxist garb': *The Progress*, p. 181 (cf. pp. 177–83; 190–6). For a more extended critique of Moore, see A. Hornborg, *Nature, Society and Justice*, pp. 203–8.

14 Hornborg, ibid., p. 191.

15 Ibid., pp. 9–11.

16 Ibid., p. 28.

17 Ibid., p. 30f.

18 Ibid., p. 59.

19 A. Malm, *Fossil Capital*, p. 13 (CO2 emissions rose from 5,000 to 60,000 metric tons in the years between 1760 and 1870, with Britain creating nearly twice as many as the US, France, Germany and Belgium combined in 1850). Cf. C. Bonneuil and J.-B. Fressoz, *The Shock*, p. 116f. For a fuller report of the devastation generally wrought by British industry and colonialism, see pp. 228–41. For a review of critical writing on the Anthropocene, including J. Moore and A. Malm, see B. Kunkel, 'The Capitalocene', *London Review of Books*, vol. 39, no. 5, 2 March 2017, pp. 22–8.

20 M. Lynas, *The God Species: Saving the Planet in the Age of Humans*, London: National Geographic Society, 2011.

21 Resistance generally takes the form of a struggle against a particular imposed 'development' project (such as fossil fuel or mining extraction) and its impacts in terms of land rights, water loss and contamination, ecological decimation, human rights, and cultural degradation. The discourse around these struggles also brings to light a broader indigenous 'cosmovision' of the position of humans *within* nature – as opposed to separate from and dominant to it – and the necessity of living in balance with other ecological forces (and indeed, with other humans). See E. Galeano, *The Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*, trans. C. Belfrage, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973 (25th anniversary edition, 1997); E. Gudynas, 'Buen Vivir: Today's Tomorrow', *Development*, vol. 54, 4, 2011, pp. 441–7; J. Martinez-Alier, *The Environmentalism of the Poor: A study of Ecological Conflicts and Valuation*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2003.

22 B. Franta, 'Shell and Exxon's secret 1980s climate change warnings', *Guardian*, 19 September 2018.

23 As reported by Global Energy Monitor in O. Milman, 'North American Drilling Boom Threatens Major Blow to Climate Efforts', *Guardian*, 25 April 2019.

24 J. Watts, 'G20 nations still led by fossil fuel industry, climate report finds', *Guardian*, 14 November 2018.

25 D. Carrington, 'G20 public finance for fossil fuels "is four times more than renewables"', *Guardian*, 5 July 2017. (But we should also be alert to neo-imperial dynamics in the development of renewables themselves – as, for example, in the construction of a huge solar plant in Tunisia which has been built by foreign companies. Cf. M. Berger, 'Turning On Solar Power in Tunisia', usnews.com, 29 May 2018).

26 K. Soper, *What is Nature? Culture, Politics and the Non- Human*, Blackwell: Oxford, 1995; see especially pp. 149–79.

27 For exemplification and critique see below and my article 'The Humanism in Posthumanism', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 9 (3), 2012, pp. 365–78; A. Malm, *The Progress*, pp. 114–56; A. Hornborg, *Nature, Society and Justice*, pp. 174–215.

28 G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. B. Massoumi, London: Continuum, 2004; F. Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. I. Pindar and P. Sutton, London: Continuum, 2008; see also, R. Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013.

29 B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor- Network- Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005; cf. G. Harman, *Bruno Latour: Reassembling the Political*, London: Pluto Press, 2014. For a critical discussion of Latour's work and 'new materialism', see A. Malm, *Fossil Capital*, pp. 78–118.

30 Neuroscience has also extended into cultural analysis itself, and we now find neuro-aesthetics defending a view of art as a neurally mediated activity by which the artist unknowingly promotes the replication of his or her genetic material. Neuro-literary critics are also studying brain scans to see how great writing affects the hard-wiring in our brains (see R. Tallis, *Aping Mankind: Neuromania, Darwinitis and the Misrepresentation of Humanity*, London: Acumen, 2010, pp. 61–2; 291–9). See

also Rose and Rose, *Neuroscience.*

31 Tallis, *Aping*, pp. 157–61.

32 Cf. Tallis's point about the anthropomorphism of 'personifying' the brain – which makes it that much easier to 'brainify' the person (*Aping*, p. 187). Though not explicitly owing anything to neuroscience, one might also note here Tim Morton's radical contestation of human exceptionality when he writes that we should not 'set up consciousness as yet another defining trait of superiority over non-humans'. Humans, he suggests, are 'fairly uniquely good at throwing and sweating, and that's about all', *The Ecological Thought*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010, pp. 71–32; cf. *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.

33 M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000, pp. 215–16; see also, D. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, London: Free Association, Routledge, 1991; *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium. Female-Manã_Meets_OncoMouse*, London & New York: Routledge, 1997; *When Species Meet*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008; C. H. Gray, ed., *The Cyborg Handbook*, London: Routledge, 1995; C. Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

34 N. Srnicek and A. Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work*, London: Verso, 2016 (revised ed.) especially p. 82f. For some objections to its posthumanism, see J. Cruddas, 'The humanist left must challenge the rise of cyborg socialism', *The New Statesman*, 23 April 2018. See also here, chapters, 4, 6 and 7.

35 Cf. my 'Of oncomice and femalemen: Donna Haraway on cyborg ontology', *Women: A Cultural Review*, vol. 10, 2, Summer 1999, pp. 167–72.

36 Cf. Gillian Rose's point that messianism is the refusal of 'an agonistic engagement with the present, one that remains with the "difficulty of actuality", a counsel of despair born out of the refusal to grasp law, reason and politics as formed and re-formed by the diremptions of modernity, within which we act and recognise ourselves'. See her *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 15–39.

37 R. Braidotti, 'Posthuman relational subjectivity and the politics of affirmation' in P. Rawes, ed., *Relational Architectural Ecologies: Culture, Nature and Subjectivity*, London: Routledge, 2013, pp. 37–8.

38 Cf. C. Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy and the Mind*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991, p. 334f.

39 Ibid., p. 333.

40 A. Hornborg, *Nature, Society, Justice*, pp. 205–6.

41 D. Harvey, 'David Harvey Interview: The importance of postcapitalist imagination', *Red Pepper*, 21 August 2013, redpepper.org.uk.

42 J. Moore, *Capitalism*, p. 100f; 126f.

43 C. Bonneuil and J.-B. Fressoz, *The Shock*, p. 68.

44 A. Malm, 'The Anthropocene Myth', *Jacobin*, 30 March 2015.

45 For further discussion on this point, see chapter 7.

46 J. O'Connor, 'Political Economy of Ecology of Socialism and Capitalism', *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 3, 1989, p. 97.

47 R. Bahro, *Socialism and Survival*, trans. D. Fernbach, London: Heretic, 1982, p. 27. Cf. André Gorz's similar arguments around the same time in his *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism*, trans. M. Sonenscher, London: Pluto Press, 1982; and *Paths to Paradise: On the Liberation from Work*, trans. M. Imrie, London: Pluto Press, 1985. See also chapter 4 for further discussion.

48 Cf. S. Latouche, *Farewell to Growth*, trans. D. Macey, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009: pp. 20–30; A. Hornborg, 'Zero-sum world: Challenges in conceptualizing environmental load displacement and

ecologically unequal exchange in the world system', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 50 (3–4), pp. 237–62. See also chapter 6 for further discussion.

49 A. Malm, *Fossil Capital*, pp. 364–6. For further discussion of questions of agency, see chapters 3, 4 and 7.

50 P. Mason, *PostCapitalism: A Guide to Our Future*, London: Allen Lane, 2015, p. 178. For further discussion of Mason's views on agency and change, see chapters 5 and 6.

2. Why 'Alternative Hedonism'? Why Now?

1 Arguably a feature of some European populist formations such as Cinque Stelle, Gilets Jaunes and Catalan Nationalism, is that they resist placement on the left–right spectrum.

2 This – perhaps the best-known remark of any New Labour politician – can be readily found on the web. It is cited, for example, in G. Parker, 'A Fiscal Focus', *Financial Times*, 7 December 2009.

3 A. Chakrabortty, 'Labour's Just Declared Class War. Has Anybody Noticed?', *Guardian*, 24 September 2018.

4 P. Butler, 'Welfare spending for UK's poorest shrinks by £37bn', *Guardian*, 23 September 2018.

5 B. Milanovic, *Global Inequality and the Global Inequality Extraction Ratio: The Story of the Past Two Decades*, Washington D.C., World Bank, 2009.

6 L. Elliott, 'World's 26 richest people own as much as poorest 50 per cent, says Oxfam', *Guardian*, 21 January 2019. We might also note here the need to challenge the claims (such as Bill Gates has made recently) that global poverty has been dramatically reduced. The graphs that Gates draws on not only use an inappropriate monetary measure of what counts as poverty (under two dollars a day when at least seven are needed to avoid extreme poverty), but also conceal the underlying exploitation and loss of land and resources and ways of living, prior to the introduction of money. According to Jason Hickel, what the numbers used by Gates actually reveal is that 'the world went from a situation where most of humanity had no need of money at all to one where today most of humanity struggles to survive on extremely small amounts of money. The graph casts this as a decline in poverty, but in reality what was going on was a process of dispossession' (see his article, 'Bill Gates says poverty is decreasing. He couldn't be more wrong', *Guardian*, 29 January 2019 and also his, *The Divide: A Brief Guide to Global Inequality and its Solutions*, London: Penguin, 2017).

7 G.W. Domhoff, 'Wealth, income, power' at whorulesamerica.ucsc.edu. Last updated February 2013.

8 For a full discussion (with references) of work in the context of ecological crisis and of the 'crisis of work', see chapter 4.

9 D. Frayne, 'Stepping outside the circle: The ecological promise of shorter working hours', *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism*, vol. 20, 2, 2016, p. 197.

10 'Overconsumption? Our use of the world's natural resources,' Friends of the Earth Europe, 1 September 2009; World Centric report on 'Social and Economic Injustice', 2004; 'The State of Consumption Today', Worldwatch Institute, report of 20 December 2018.

11 A. Hornborg, *Nature, Society and Justice*, p. 88–9.

12 S. L. Lewis and M. A. Maslin, *The Human Planet*, New York: Pelican, 2018 (cf. 'Universal basic income and rewilding can meet Anthropocene demands', *Guardian*, 12 June 2018).

13 J. Watts on Global Resources Outlook report, 'Resource Extraction Responsible for Half World's Carbon Emissions', *Guardian*, 12 March 2019.

14 A. Simms, 'It's the economy that needs to be integrated into the environment – not the other way around', *Guardian*, June 14, 2016.

15 D. Rushkoff, 'How tech's richest plan to save themselves after the apocalypse', *Guardian*, 18 July 2018, cit. in G. Monbiot, 'As the fracking protesters show, a people's rebellion is the only way to fight

climate breakdown', *Guardian*, 11 October 2018.

16 The weapons giant, Raytheon, Klein tells us, anticipates rising demand for its military products and security services in response to the droughts, floods and storm events resulting from climate change. This, she notes, 'is worth remembering whenever doubts creep in about the urgency of this crisis: the private militias are already mobilizing', *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014, p. 7.

17 See, for example, O. Morton, *The Planet Remade: How Geoengineering Could Change the World*, London: Granta, 2015; and for a more critical assessment, M. Hulme, *Can Science Fix Climate Change? A Case Against Climate Engineering*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014.

18 J. Hickel, 'Why growth can't be green' in *Foreign Policy* at foreignpolicy.com. 12 September 2018; Cf. G. Monbiot, 'The Earth is in a death spiral. It will take radical action to save us', *Guardian*, 14 November, 2018; H. Schandl et al., *Global material flows and resource productivity: Assessment Report for the UNEP International Resource Panel*, Paris: United Nations Environment Programme, 2016. See also, P. Frase, *Four Futures: Life After Capitalism*, London and New York: Verso, 2016, pp. 1–34.

19 See T. Jackson, *Prosperity without Growth: The Transition to a Sustainable Economy*, London: Sustainable Development Commission, 2009; P. Victor, *Managing without Growth: Slower by Design, not Disaster* London: Edward Elgar, 2008; M. Koch, *Capitalism and Climate Change*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012; 'The Folly of Growth,' *New Scientist*, no. 2678, 18 October 2008. G. Kallis 'In Defence of Degrowth', *Ecological Economics*, 70, 2011, pp.873–880; G. Kallis, G. D'Alisa and F. Demaria, *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era*, London: Routledge, 2015; K. Raworth, *Doughnut Economics: seven ways to think like a 21st century economist*, London: Penguin/Random House, 2017; G. Kallis, *Degrowth*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Agenda Publishing, 2018; S. Barca, E. Chertkovskaya, A. Paulsson eds, *Towards a Political Economy of Degrowth*, London and New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019.

20 J. Schor, *Plenitude: The New Economics of True Wealth*, London: Penguin Books, 2010, p. 89.

21 'EU reports lowest greenhouse gas emissions on record', European Environment Agency, 27 May, 2014; '2050 low-carbon strategy', European Commission, 6 February 2017.

22 D. Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable*, p. 187.

23 W. Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End?* London: Verso, 2016, p. 45.

24 Cf. K. Soper, 'Towards a Sustainable Flourishing: Ethical Consumption and the Politics of Prosperity' and L. Copeland and L. Atkinson, 'Political Consumption', both in D. Shaw, A. Chatzidakis and M. Carrington, eds, *Ethics and Morality in Consumption*, London: Routledge, 2016, pp. 11–27 and pp.171–88. For further discussion of the citizen-consumer relationship, see here pp. 65–6 and 176–7.

25 See ibid.; M. Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping*, New York: Palgrave, 2003; C. Barnett, P. Cloke, N. Clark and A. Malpass, 'Consuming Ethics: Articulating the Subjects and Spaces of Ethical Consumption', *Antipode*, 37 (1) 2005, pp. 23–45; R. Harrison, T. Newholm and D. Shaw, eds, *The Ethical Consumer*, London: Sage, 2005; J. Littler, *Radical Consumption*, esp. pp. 6–22; 92–115.

26 D. Miller, ed., *Acknowledging Consumption*, London: Routledge, 1995, p. 31; cf. 40–1.

27 Ibid., p. 47; cf. 'The Poverty of Morality', *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 1 (2) 2001, pp. 225–43.

28 M. Micheletti, *Political Virtue*, p. 2.

29 K. Soper, M. H. Ryle and L. Thomas, eds, *The Politics and Pleasures of Consuming Differently*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009; R. Levett, *A Better Choice of Choice*, London: Fabian Society, 2003; M. Bunting, *Willing Slaves: How the Overwork Culture is Ruling Our Lives*, London: Harper Collins, 2004; C. Honoré, *Challenging the Cult of Speed*, New York: Harper One, 2005; J. Tomlinson, *The Culture of Speed: The Coming of Immediacy*, London: Sage, 2007; N. Osbaldiston, *Culture of the Slow: Social Deceleration in an Accelerated World*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013; H. Shah, 'The Politics of Well-being', *Soundings*, 30, 2005, pp. 33–44; L. Thomas, 'Alternative Realities:

Downshifting narratives in contemporary lifestyle television', *Cultural Studies*, 22, (5–6) 2008, pp. 680–99.

30 New Economic Foundation, 'Happy Planet Index'; Cf. Centre for the Understanding of Sustainable Prosperity publications (at cusp.ac.uk); K. Pickett and R.Wilkinson, *The Spirit Level*, London: Bloomsbury, 2011, (originally published by Allen Lane in 2009), on the links between equality and well-being; K. Soper, 'A New Hedonism: A Post-Consumerism Vision', *Next System Project*, 22 November, 2017, pp. 26–7.

31 Sustainable Development Commission report 27 May, 2006; see also graphs in R. Wilkinson and K. Pickett, *Spirit Level*, pp. 7 and 9.

32 See, eg., editorial in 'Measuring Economies' series, 'Grossly Distorted Picture. It's high time our economists looked at more than just GDP', *The Economist*, 9 February, 2006; D. Pilling, 'Why it is time to change the way we measure the wealth of nations', *Financial Times*, 5 January 2018; S. Thomson, 'GDP a poor measure of progress, say Davos economists', World Economic Forum, 23 January 2016.

33 The Happy Planet Index (happyplanetindex.org) was introduced by the New Economics Foundation in 2006. In the 2016 rankings of 140 countries, the USA ranked 108 and the UK 34.

34 P. Mason, *Postcapitalism*, p. 247. Mason suggests that since climate change deniers know that climate science destroys their authority, their power and their economic world, there is a level of rationality in their position. (Meanwhile, President Trump and others have moved to stage 5 of 'denial': the stage at which denial yields to 'so, what the fuck?').

35 J. Ashley, 'The brands have turned us into a nation of addicts', *Guardian*, 10 December 2006. See also J. Schor, *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004.

36 J. Lewis, *Beyond Consumer Capitalism: Media and the Limits to Imagination*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013, p. 90; see also my chapters 4 and 5.

37 See E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, London: Merlin Press, 1976; S. Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love*, London: Verso 2008. For a recent overview, see L. Segal, *Radical Happiness: Moments of Collective Joy*, London: Verso, 2017, pp. 157–86.

38 Thus P. Mason, *PostCapitalism*; J. Rifkin, *The Zero Marginal Cost Society: The Internet of Things, The Collaborative Commons, and the Eclipse of Capitalism*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. For further discussion, see my chapter 4.

39 N. Srnicek and A. Williams, *Inventing the Future*, p. 183.

40 P. Mason, *PostCapitalism*; W. Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End?* (Reviewing some key economists on the issue, Streeck suggests that it is not so much a question of whether, but of how and when capitalism will end).

3. Consumption, Consumerism and Pleasure

1 Cf. A. Bonnett, *The Geography of Nostalgia: Global and Local Perspectives on Modernity and Loss*, London: Routledge, 2016, pp. 21–44. See also, L. Boltanski and E. Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, London, Verso, 2007.

2 M. Farrar, 'Amnesia, nostalgia and the politics of place memory', *Political Research Quarterly*, 64, 4, 2011, pp. 723–35, p. 728 (cit. Bonnett, p. 23).

3 R. Bartoletti, 'Memory tourism and commodification of nostalgia', in P. Burns, C. Palmer and J.-A. Lester, eds, *Tourism and Visual Culture: Volume 1: Theories and Concepts*, Wallingford, CABI, 2010, pp. 23–42, pp. 24–5, (cit. Bonnett, p. 28).

4 J. Lewis, *Beyond Consumer Capitalism: Media and the Limits to Imagination*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013, p. 53.

5 Z. Bauman, *Freedom*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988, pp. 57–61; 95–8; cf. *The Individualized Society*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001; *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001; D. B. Clarke, *The Consumer Society and the Postmodern City*, London and New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 150.

6 C. Campbell, 'I Shop therefore I Know that I am: The Metaphysical Basis of Modern Consumerism' in M.K. Ekstrom and H. Brembeck, eds, *Elusive Consumption*, London and New York: Berg, 2004, pp. 42–3.

7 D. Miller, 'Consumption as the Vanguard of History' in his ed. *Acknowledging Consumption*, London and New York: Routledge, 1995, pp. 1–57.

8 D. Miller, *The Dialectics of Shopping*, London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001, p. 188.

9 On the distinctive features of consumer desire, see C. Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1987; Z. Bauman, *Freedom*, pp. 58–63; A. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991, pp. 196–208; D. Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997, pp. 28–9; p. 76.

10 In this, I agree with Paul Mason's point that any adequate substitute would have to mirror the complexity of current consumption, *Post-Capitalism*, p. 234f.

11 My position here has some affinities with Amartya Sen's argument that what matters is what people can do (their 'capabilities') rather than the commodities to which they have access, and in particular with the way in which Sen's approach ensures the subjective participation of individuals in the definition of their needs. My concern here, however, is not so much with 'basic' needs or capacities and their objectivity, but with what constitutes 'flourishing' over and above the indispensable provisioning of basic needs, and who can claim the right to decide on this. The argument for alternative hedonism is considered more directly in relation to the literature and debates on needs in my 'Conceptualizing Needs in the Context of Consumer Politics', *Journal of Consumer Policy*, vol. 29, (4), 2006, pp. 355–72.

12 See, for example, M. Ramsay, *Human Needs and the Market*, Aldershot: Avebury, 1992.

13 Cf. K. Soper, 'Counter-Consumerism in a New Age of War', *Radical Philosophy*, 135, Jan–Feb, 2006, pp. 2–8.

14 Campbell, 'I Shop', pp. 36–9; *Romantic Ethic*, pp. 60–86.

15 Slater, *Consumer Culture*, pp. 33–62.

16 I return to this distinction in chapter 7, pp. 176–7.

17 T. Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J.M. Bernstein, London and New York: Routledge, 1991; cf. H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1964. W. Leiss, *The Limits to Satisfaction: On Needs and Commodities*, London: Marion Boyars, 1978; W.F. Haug, *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986; C. Lodziak, *Manipulating Needs: Capitalism and Culture*, London: Pluto Press, 1995.

18 T. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, [1966] trans. E.B. Ashton, New York: Seabury Press, 1973, pp. 263–4.

19 M. Foucault, 'Afterword, the Subject and Power', in H. Dreyfus, and M. Rabinow, eds, *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982, pp. 208–26; *Power/Knowledge, Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. C. Gordon, trans. C. Gordon, L. Marshall, J. Mepham and K. Soper, New York: Pantheon Books, 1980, pp. 55–62; 146–82.

20 M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 57.

21 M. Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, London: Sage, 1991; A. Tomlinson,

Consumption, Identity and Style, London: Routledge, 1990; J. Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, London: Verso, 1996; *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, London: Sage, 1998; Z. Bauman, *Consuming Life*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007; G. Ritzer, *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Continuity and Change in the Cathedrals of Consumption*, London: Sage, 2010.

22 Z. Bauman, *Freedom*, p. 88.

23 C. Lilly, 'Debt statistics: How much debt is the UK in?' at www.finder.com, 19 February 2020; 'U.S. household debt at record, nearing $14 trillion – NY Fed', www.cnbc.com, 13 November 2019.

24 A. Warde, *Consumption, Food and Taste*, London: Sage, 1997; 'Practice and Field: Revising Bourdieusian Concepts', ESRC, CRIC Publication, April, 2004; cf. T. Schatzki, *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996; T. Schatzki, K. Knorr Cetina and E. von Savigny, eds, *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, London, Routledge 2001; E. Shove, F. Trentmann and R. Wilks, *Time, Consumption and Everyday Life: Practice, Materiality and Culture*, Oxford: Berg, 2009.

25 A. Warde, *Consumption*, p. 194; pp. 201–3.

26 Cf. K. Soper, 'Re-thinking the "good life": The citizenship dimension of consumer disaffection with consumerism', in *Journal of Consumer Culture*, no. 7, 2, July 2007, pp. 205–29; 'Alternative Hedonism and the Citizen-Consumer' in K. Soper and F. Trentmann, eds, *Citizenship and Consumption*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008, pp. 191–205; 'Introduction' to K. Soper, M. H. Ryle and L. Thomas, *The Politics and Pleasures*, pp. 1–21.

27 J. O'Neill, 'Sustainability, Well-Being and Consumption: The Limits of Hedonic Approaches' in K. Soper and F. Trentmann, eds, *Citizenship*, pp. 172–90.

28 I. Blühdorn, 'The sustainability of democracy: On limits to growth, the post-democratic turn and reactionary democrats', *Eurozine*, 11 July 2011, pp. 6–7. Other commentators, he notes such as D. Shearman and J. W. Smith, *The Climate Change Challenge and the Failure of Democracy*, Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007 and A. Giddens, *The Politics of Climate Change*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009, pp. 56, 198–9 and 91–128, have likewise begun to regard participatory democracy as eco-politically ineffective and to suggest that liberal democracy is part of the current problem rather than the solution to it.

29 I. Blühdorn, 'The governance of unsustainability: ecology and democracy after the post-democratic turn', *Environmental Politics*, 22 (1), 2013, pp. 16–36.

30 S. Baker, 'Climate Change, the Common Good and the Promotion of Sustainable Development' in J. Meadowcroft, O. Langhelle and A. Ruud, eds, *Governance, Democracy and Sustainable Development: Moving Beyond the Impasse*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2012, pp. 266–68.

31 O.P. Hauser, D.G. Rand, A. Peysakhovivh and M.A. Nowak, 'Cooperating with the future', *Nature*, 511 (7508), 2014, pp. 220–3; World Development Report on 'Mind, Society, Behaviour', Washington, DC: World Bank, 2015, p. 167.

32 P. Victor, *Managing Without Growth*, pp. 221–2.

33 For example, the 'half-earth' project as noted in chapter 1, footnote 5. But on the Rewilding Britain project see D. Carrington, 'Rewild a quarter of UK to fight climate crisis, campaigners urge', *Guardian*, 21 May 2019; cf. G. Monbiot, 'The natural world can help save us from climate catastrophe', *Guardian*, 3 April 2019; and rewildingbritain.org.uk.

34 Cf. Troy Vettese suggests that *all* of the UK national territory might have to be covered in wind turbines, solar panels and biofuel crops to maintain current levels of energy production, 'To Freeze the Thames: Natural Geo-Engineering and Biodiversity', *New Left Review*, 111, May–June, 2018, p. 66.

35 M. Koch, *Capitalism and Climate Change: Theoretical Discussion, Historical Development and Policy Responses*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 68–75.

36 J. Schor, 'From Fast Fashion to Connected Consumption: Slowing Down the Spending Treadmill' in N. Osbaldiston, ed., *Culture of the Slow*, pp. 34–51.

37 See K. Soper, ‘Rethinking the “Good Life”’, pp. 220–22; when a congestion charging policy was put to the vote in Edinburgh prior to any implementation, it was rejected.

38 For some reports on this, see J. Jowit, *Observer*, 15 February 2004; A. Clark, *Guardian*, 16 and 18 February 2004; J. Ashley, *Guardian*, 19 February 2004.

39 ‘Structure of feeling’ is a concept first used by the cultural critic, Raymond Williams, to refer to emergent or pre-emergent responses or qualitative changes of affect that ‘do not have to await definition or rationalisation before they exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and on action’. See his *Marxism and Literature*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977, p. 132; cf. pp. 128–36.

40 J. Clarke, ‘A consuming public?’, lecture in the ESRC/AHRB Cultures of Consumption Series, Royal Society, London, 21 June 2004, included in Research Papers (phase 1 projects); ‘New Labour’s citizens: activated, empowered, responsibilised or abandoned?’, *Critical Social Policy*, 25(4), 2005, pp. 447–63.

41 K. Soper, ‘Rethinking the “Good Life”’, p. 219.

4. Work and Beyond

1 A. Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class*, pp. 3–4.

2 J. Rifkin, *The Zero Marginal Cost Society*; P. Mason, *PostCapitalism*; N. Srnicek and A. Williams, *Inventing the Future*, (2016 edition).

3 Cf. S. Barca, ‘“An Alternative Worth Fighting For”: Degrowth and the Liberation of Work’, in S. Barca, E. Chertkovskaya and A. Paulsson, eds, *Towards a Political Economy of Degrowth*, London and New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019.

4 This tendency (the demise of what he terms ‘social capitalism’) is already noted, especially in firms at the cutting edge of financial and technical change, by Richard Sennett in *The Culture of the New Capitalism*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006.

5 A. Gorz, *Reclaiming Work: Beyond the Wage-Based Society*, trans. C. Turner, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999; A. Hochschild, *The Time Bind*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 1997; R. Fevre, *The New Sociology of Economic Behaviour*, London: Sage, 2003; J. de Graaf, ed., *Take Back Your Time: Fighting Overwork and Time Poverty in America*, San Francisco: Berret-Koehler, 2003; M. Bunting, *Willing Slaves: How the Overwork Culture is Ruling Our Lives*, London: Harper Collins, 2004; A. Hayden, *Sharing the Work, Sparing the Planet: Work- Time, Consumption and Ecology*, London: Zed Books, 2013; K. Weeks, *The Problem With Work*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011; D. Frayne, *The Refusal of Work*, London: Zed Books, 2016 and ‘Stepping outside the circle: the ecological promise of shorter working hours’, *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism*, vol. 20, 2, 2016, pp. 197–212.

6 P. Mason, *PostCapitalism*, p. 209.

7 As reported by John Harris in the *Guardian*, ‘What Happens When the Jobs Dry Up in the New World? The Left must have an answer’, 16 January 2018. The erosion of any barrier between grafting and down-time, and the fading-out of any meaningful notion of home, is found at every level of the tech industry, Harris tells us, and it is ‘reflected in big tech’s innate insistence that we are “on” at all times – checking our feeds, sending emails, messaging colleagues. You see the same things even more clearly among rising numbers of networked homeworkers – translators, CV writers, IT contractors, data inputters – whose lives are often a very modern mixture of supposed flexibility, and day-to-day insecurity.’ Cf. P. Mason, *PostCapitalism*, pp. 209f.; J. Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*, London: Verso, 2014, pp. 70–1.

8 As I write (November 2019), it is threatened with bankruptcy.

9 The reference is to the much-advertised tropical island festival that people paid thousands of dollars to

attend only to find an empty site and no party. Cf. I. Kaminska, 'The entire economy is Fyre Festival', *Financial Times*, 21 February 2019, ft.com.

10 D. Graeber, 'On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs: A Work Rant', *Strike!* magazine, 3 August 2013.

11 'Precarity,' writes Di Bernardo, 'in reality, is not any sort of "new" condition, and not the result of unprecedented post-Fordist transformations of labour and production, but rather a symptom of a return to a status quo ante of pre-Fordist and pre-welfare-state labour conditions. … Precariousness is, quite simply the condition of the working-class under capitalism. It always has been and it always will be.' 'The Impossibility of Precarity', *Radical Philosophy* 198, July–Aug 2016, pp. 7–14.

12 R. Sennett, *Culture of the New Capitalism*, 49. Nina Power views the precariat as the prime instance of a general 'feminization of work' in the post-Fordist era in *One Dimensional Woman*, Winchester: Zero Books, pp. 20–2.

13 See G. Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, London, Bloomsbury, 2016 (4th edition). The passage quoted is from the summary of his findings and arguments that Standing published on the website of the Great Transition Initiative (Guy Standing, 'The Precariat: Today's Transformative Class?', greattransition.org; accessed 19 October 2018).

14 On bogus self-employment, and the brilliant work in defence of those caught up in it by the UK's newest trade union (The Independent Workers Union of Great Britain, IWGB) founded in 2012, see Y. Roberts, 'The Tiny Union Beating the Gig Economy Giants', *Observer*, 1 July 2018.

15 The report, with related documentation, can be found at 'Working practices at Sports Direct inquiry', Report published on Friday, 22 July 2016; www.parliament.uk; accessed 14 November 2018.

16 See the CNN report by M. McFarland, 'Amazon only needs a minute of human labor to ship your next package', 6 October 2016; www.money.cnn.com; accessed 15 November 2018.

17 See the article by S. Butler, 'Amazon Accused of Treating UK Warehouse Staff Like Robots', *Guardian*, 16 May 2018.

18 As noted by an Oxfam executive director, Winnie Byanyima, in an address on worker dignity to the Davos meeting of 2019 (see M. Farrer in the *Guardian*, 30 January 2019).

19 This was discussed previously by C. Offe, *Disorganised Capitalism*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985, but see also Z. Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000 and U. Beck, *The Brave New World of Work*, Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2000; Standing, *The Precariat*.

20 Cf. P. Mason, *PostCapitalism*, pp. 207–13.

21 See P. Myerscough, 'Short Cuts', *London Review of Books*, 3 January 2013.

22 See J. Stone, 'Unite union vote to keep Trident at Labour's Party Conference', *Independent*, 27 September 2015; and R. Mason and A. Vaughan, 'Labour's pledge to ban fracking in the UK is "madness", says GMB', *Guardian*, 26 September 2016. There were indications however at the Labour Party conference of 2019 that it may be revising its position on this.

23 'Unite calls for fracking to be halted as further tremors strike Lancashire', 30 October 2018; www.unitetheunion.org; accessed 14 November 2018.

24 'Agreement between Royal Mail Fleet and CWU on implementation of the first hour of the Shorter Working Week', 8 August, 2019, www.cwu.org; see also K. Bell, 'A four-day week with decent pay for all? It's the future', 30 July 2019, www.tuc.org.uk.

25 *The Shorter Working Week: A Radical and Pragmatic Proposal*, Autonomy: Cranbourne, Hampshire, 2019. Kate Bell, Head of the Rights, International, Social and Economics Department at the Trade Unions Congress also hails the report and speaks of 'the critical role of trade unions in achieving it'. For a more academic survey of the issues, see S. Barca, 'On working-class environmentalism: a historical and transnational overview', *Interface*, vol. 4, 2, 2012, pp. 61–80.

26 Statistics on average working hours are hard to interpret, as they do not take separate account of part-time workers. A recent (2017) OECD report showed UK working hours as longer than those in several EU nations, but shorter than in the USA, Russia and Ireland (see O. Smith, 'Which nationalities work

the longest hours ?', *Daily Telegraph*, 7 February 2018). The perception that work has become a burden that damages enjoyment in life is documented in several of the books cited above, especially those by Bunting, Weeks and Frayne (see note 5).

27 Since women's fuller participation in the world of work (by comparison with mid-twentieth century levels) has not been accompanied in the UK by any reduction in normal working hours, it has intensified the time pressures on families, and hence increased stress for all those in work. 'Work-related stress, anxiety or depression statistics', at: www.hse.gov.uk show that in 2018/9 there were 602,000 cases (or 1,800 for every 100,000 workers). Current estimates suggest that 37 per cent of all work-related ill-health is due to stress, depression and anxiety, and 45 per cent of working days lost to poor health. See W. Stronge and D. Guizzo Archela, 'Exploring our latent potential', *IPPR Progressive Review*, vol. 25, 2, Autumn 2018, p. 226.

28 See J. Harris, *Guardian* report quoted in note 7 above.

29 See K. Weeks, *The Problem with Work*; V. Bryson, 'Time, Care and Gender Inequalities', in A. Coote and J. Franklin, eds, *Time on Our Side: Why We All Need a Shorter Working Week*, London: New Economics Foundation, 2013.

30 This (oft-cited) passage, from Keynes' 1930 essay 'Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren', is quoted by D. Frayne in *The Refusal of Work*, p. 200; and by P. Frase in *Four Futures*, p. 43.

31 J. Schor, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure*, New York: Basic Books, 1991, p. 2.

32 J. Schor, *Plenitude*, p. 38. Although some of it may be due to smaller accommodation units, this represents an increase in storage use of 65 per cent since 1995.

33 I here have in mind especially the texts cited above by P. Mason, J. Rifkin, and N. Srnicek and A. Williams.

34 A. Gorz, *Farewell*; *Reclaiming Work*; *Critique of Economic Reason*, London: Verso, 1989. For a recent digest of Gorz's writings, see F. Gollain, trans. M. H. Ryle, 'André Gorz: wage labour, free time and ecological reconstruction', *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism*, vol. 20, 2, June 2016, pp. 127–39; also, F. Bowring, *André Gorz and the Sartrean Legacy*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000.

35 N. Srnicek and A. Williams, *Inventing the Future*, p. 113; and see pp. 110–13.

36 P. Frase, *Four Futures*, p. 47.

37 Cf. A. Gorz, *The Immaterial: Knowledge, Value and Capital*, trans. Chris Turner, London: Seagull, 2010, pp. 130–1.

38 D. Frayne, *Refusal of Work.*

39 Ibid., p.161

40 Ibid., p.188.

41 K. Marx, *Grundrisse*, London: Verso, 1971, p. 226.

42 See W. Blake, *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and *Songs of Experience* (1794), notably the two poems entitled 'Nurse's Song'; W. Wordsworth, 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood' (1807); Georges Perec's privileging of ludic time and inspired engagement with the jig-saw, chess, acrostics and literary puzzles in his *Life a User's Manual*, [1978] trans. D. Bellos, London: Vintage, 2003; and *W, or The Memory of Childhood*, trans. D. Bellos, London: Harvill, 1988; and Kazuo Ishiguro's acute and moving representations of the child's world in *The Unconsoled*, London: Faber, 1995, *When We Were Orphans*, London: Faber, 2000, and *Never Let Me Go*, London: Faber, 2005.

43 D. Frayne, *Refusal of Work*, p. 201. As the heading to his PhD thesis, Frayne also quotes another interviewee claiming: 'I just have this excitement that I've done the thing that so many people want to do – walked away from that sort of rat race experience and gone towards something. It felt like growing up because I was doing things I had consciously chosen to do for the first time.'

44 J. Rifkin, *The Zero Marginal Cost Society*, p. 11.

45 N. Srnicek and A. Williams, *Inventing the Future*, p. 109.

46 A. Gorz, *Immaterial*, p.14, cf. F. Gollain, art.cit., p. 136–7.

47 P. Mason, *PostCapitalism*, p. 112; he cites published work by 'the American economist Paul Romer', 'US journalist David Kelly' and 'Yochai Benkler, [formerly] a law professor at Yale'.

48 P. Mason, *PostCapitalism*, pp. 117–18.

49 Ibid., p. 139.

50 Ibid., p.124.

51 Ibid., p. 115, cf. p.xvii.

52 Y. Moulier Boutang, *Cognitive Capitalism*, p. 163. This productive labour, claims Moulier Boutang is 'at the heart of value today', and his book as a whole provides a thorough exposition of the view that 'general intellect' is now the most important productive force.

53 See J. Rifkin's rather naïve claims for the educational potential of online learning in chapter 7 of *Zero Marginal Cost Society*.

54 See the BBC report of 3 June 2014 by Judith Burns, '"Crazy funding puts music education at risk"', 3 June 2014. www.bbc.co.uk; accessed 23 November 2018.

55 See BBC report of 27 March 2015 by Jane Wakefield, 'Children spend six hours or more per day on screens'. www.bbc.co.uk; accessed 19 November 2018.

56 N. Srnicek and A. Williams, *Inventing the Future*, p. 82f. In arguing this, they embrace a form of posthumanism – or more accurately, transhumanism – that one of their critics, Jon Cruddas, has denounced as a 'new eugenics' and as such the recurrence of a 'disturbing drumbeat within the history of the left'. See 'The humanist left must challenge the rise of cyborg socialism', *New Statesman*, 23 April 2018. (Posthumanists dispense with humanist theory and argue for the breakdown of clear-cut conceptual discriminations between humans and other animals, the organic and the inorganic. But they do not necessarily support the modification of humanity by means of digital and bio-technology and genetic engineering endorsed by transhumanists, nor do they subscribe to scientific projects to overcome mortality).

57 N. Srnicek and A. Williams, *Inventing the Future*, p. 113.

58 A. Gorz, *Critique*, p. 158.

59 D. Frayne, 'Stepping outside', p. 209.

60 C. Gardner, 'We Are the 25%: Looking at Street Area Percentages and Surface Parking', *Old Urbanist*, 12 December 2011.

61 N. Srnicek and A. Williams, *Inventing the Future*, p. 183. In his review of their book, Ian Lowrie writes, 'despite their repeated insistence that their post-work future is an ecologically sound one, Srnicek and Williams evince roughly zero self-reflection with respect either to the imbrication of microelectronics with brutally extractive regimes of production, or to their own decidedly antiquated, doctrinaire Marxist understanding of humanity's relationship towards the non-human world. Similarly, the question of what the future might mean in the Anthropocene goes largely unexamined. At the very least, they are extremely overoptimistic about the democratization and diffusion of expertise that would be required for informed mass control over an economy planned by machine intelligence,' *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 8 January 2016.

62 '"Tsunami of Data" could consume one fifth of global electricity by 2025', *Guardian*, 11 December 2017.

63 O. Milman, '"Moment of reckoning": US cities burn recyclables after China bans imports', *Guardian*, 21 February 2019.

64 A. Beckett, 'Post-Work: the radical idea of a world without jobs', *Guardian*, 19 January 2018.

65 See New Economic Foundation reports '21 Hours. The Case for a Shorter Working Week', 13 February 2010 and A. Coote, '10 Reasons for a Shorter Working Week', 29 July 2014 both at www.neweconomics.org; accessed 6 October 2016. Cf. H. Hester, 'Demand the Future – Beyond

Capitalism, Beyond Work', at Demand the Impossible, April, 2017, www.demandtheimpossible.org.uk; accessed 13 November 2018; M.H. Ryle and K. Soper, eds, Introduction to special issue on 'The Ecology of Labour', *Green Letters*, vol. 20, No. 2, June 2016, pp. 119–26.

66 P. Walker, 'Never mind GDP – make free time the measure of UK well-being, say Greens', 4 October 2018. This would show how much free time people have to enjoy, a replacement of GDP justified by the Green Party on the grounds that leisure is a better measure of happiness than wealth.

67 'McDonnell commits Labour to shorter working week and expanded free public services as part of Labour's vision for a new society', 23 September 2019, labour.org.uk and L. Elliott, 'John McDonnell pledges shorter working week and no loss of pay', *Guardian*, 23 September 2019.

68 C. Hughes, 'Four day week could transform our lives', *Independent*, 14 March 2018.

69 For continuous updates on the recent UBI campaigns and pilot projects, see BIEN (Basic Income Earth Network) at basicincome.org. Also the Autonomy Institute at autonomyinstitute.org. For some interesting reflections, see Y. Moulier Boutang, *Cognitive Capitalism*, pp. 152–66; R. Skidelsky and E. Skidelsky, *How Much is Enough?*, London: Allen Lane, 2012, pp. 197–202. For earlier defences of the scheme, see A. Gorz, *Reclaiming Work*, p. 100f.; D. Purdy, 'Citizens' Income: Sowing the Seeds of Change', *Soundings* 35, 2007: 54–65.

70 See interviews on UBI with Jamie Woodcock and David Frayne at www.autonomyinstitute.org

71 A. Gorz, *Immaterial*, pp. 26–7.

72 A. Gorz, *Immaterial*, pp. 130–1; cf. P. Mason, *PostCapitalism*, pp. 284–6.

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5. Cultural Politics and the Alternative Hedonist Imaginary

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66 R. Williams, *Towards 2000*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1985, p. 36.

67 Of some relevance here is Bonnett's discussion of the ways in which nostalgia has emerged over the last two decades as a powerful economic and cultural force in a number of rising Asian economies, *Geography*, p. 11, and see pp. 73–96.

68 Kant regarded judgements of beauty as 'disinterested' because uninfluenced by any concern for their utility or extrinsic purposes. They could thus *claim* universal assent (even if that was not, in fact, forthcoming) in a way that distinguished them from judgements of what is agreeable (for example in food, clothing and so on), where there is no quarrelling about personal tastes. See his *Critique of Judgement*, ed., W.S. Pluhar, London: Hackett, 1987 [1790], pp. 44–64.

69 Cf. J. O'Neill, 'Humanism and Nature', *Radical Philosophy*, 66, 1994, p. 27.

70 For an image of this, see A. Wilson, *The Making of the North American Landscape: From Disney to the Exxon Valdez*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1990, p. 99.

71 A. Akbar, 'A 300-ton solution to the problem of electronic waste', the *Independent*, 30 April 2005, p. 3. The sculpture is now permanently on display at the Eden Project, Cornwall.

72 Cf. G. Monbiot, 'Britain's dirty secret: the burning tyres choking India', *Guardian*, 30 January 2019; S. Buranyi, 'Plastic Backlash: What's Behind our Sudden Rage? And will it make a Difference?', *Guardian*, 13 November 2018.

7. Towards a Green Renaissance

1 See D. Carrington, ‘Climate crisis: today’s children face lives with tiny carbon footprints’, *Guardian*, 10 April 2019.

2 J. Butler, ‘The Climate Crisis demands more than blocking roads, Extinction Rebellion’, *Guardian*, 16 April 2019.

3 R. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977, p. 132. For a definition of ‘structure of feeling’, see chapter 3, footnote 37.

4 The list of declarations and timetable for action on what is an ongoing process can be checked through ‘Declare a Climate Emergency’ at climateemergency.uk.

5 N. Srnicek and A. Williams, *Inventing the Future*, (2015 edition), pp. 10–12.

6 Cf. their remark that, ‘residents across the UK, for example, have successfully mobilised in particular cases to stop the closure of local hospitals. Yet these real successes are overwhelmed by larger plans to gut and privatise the National Health Service. Similarly, recent anti-fracking movements have been able to stop test drilling in various localities – but governments nevertheless continue to search for shale gas resources and provide support for companies to do so.’ Ibid., p. 16. For an interesting critical discussion defending degrowth politics against accelerationist ‘technologism’, see A. Vansintjan, ‘Accelerationism … and Degrowth? The Left’s Strange Bedfellows’, *Undisciplined Environments*, 12 October 2016, undisciplinedenvironments.org.

7 ‘World Scientists’ Warning of a Climate Emergency’, *Journal of Bioscience*, 5 November 2019.

8 Both Caroline Lucas in the House of Commons and Jenny Jones in the House of Lords called in the spring of 2019 for government to recognise a Climate Emergency (see also, note 10).

9 Although the Labour Leader, Jeremy Corbyn, to his credit, did offer one or two, largely unreported speeches, on its importance. In that of 23 April 2019, he said of the striking school children, ‘They were condemned by Tory ministers because they said they should have been studying … they should be working, they shouldn’t be doing all that … All I simply say to them is “thank you for educating all of us that day”.’

10 Cf. Caroline Lucas’s rebuke to Philip Hammond: ‘Wake up Philip Hammond. The climate crisis needs action not lip service’, *Guardian*, 14 March 2019. Analysis by the Labour party, which has pledged to ban all fracking, shows that the amount of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere if the Tory government’s plans go ahead would be the same as the lifetime emissions of 286 million cars – or 29 new coal-fired power plants (see report from Matthew Taylor, ‘Fracking plan “will release same $C0^2$ as 300m new cars”’, *Observer*, 24 March 2019).

11 D. Carrington and P. Wintour, ‘UK will miss almost all its 2020 nature targets, says official report’, *Guardian*, 22 March 2019.

12 For those of the Red Green Study Group response to the Labour Party consultation on the Environment, see ‘Social justice and ecological disaster: Red Green Study Group comments’, 28 June 2018 at *People and Nature*, peopleandnature.wordpress.com.

13 M.Taylor, P. Walker, D. Gayle and M. Blackall, ‘Labour endorses Extinction Rebellion after a week of protest’, *Guardian*, 23 April 2019.

14 K. Mathieson, ‘Labour scrambles to develop a British Green New Deal’, *Guardian*, 14 February 2019.

15 A. Hornborg, *Nature, Society and Justice*, p. 72.

16 In a summary of their findings, the researchers write: ‘Amid an overwhelming consensus of sources from the political, financial and business sectors, the one critical voice in the sample was a member of the British royal family. This is, in many ways, bizarre, but it highlights the notable absence of others – notably critical economists, environmental scientists, and social scientists – who might have offered a very different view of the merits of growth. So, for example, the New Economics Foundation – whose

research offers a trenchant critique of the growth model – were entirely absent', J. Lewis, *Beyond Consumer Capitalism: Media and the Limits to Imagination*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013, pp. 126–7.

17 The low price on carbon, it is argued, has hitherto made carbon capture and sequestration all but ineffective. ExxonMobil estimates that the price would need to be $2,000 per tonne for global warming to be limited to a rise of 1.6° Celsius. At present the price is in the region of $10, T. Vettese, 'To Freeze the Thames', *New Left Review*, no. 111, May–June 2018, pp. 69–70; see also, J. Burke, R. Byrnes and S. Frankhauser, 'How to price carbon to reach net-zero emissions in the UK', LSE, Grantham Institute Policy Report, May 2019. Quite apart from their excessive use of space, the manufacture of electric cars and their batteries is high in carbon emissions, and there is speculation that the amount of cobalt that will be needed will demand seabed mining of a kind not undertaken before and which would be very destructive of marine life. See BBC report, D. Shukam, 'Electric car future may depend on deep sea mining', 19 November 2019; on the perils of artificial geoengineering (firing aerosols into the skies to reflect sunlight into space, and the like), see C. Hamilton, *Earthmasters: The Dawn of the Age of Climate Engineering*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013, pp. 74–84; P. Mirowski, *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste*, London and New York: Verso, pp. 325–58 (cit. T. Vettese, p. 64); cf. A. Malm, *The Progress*, pp. 170–1; 205–6.

18 Cf. J. Wilson, 'Eco-fascism is undergoing a revival in the fetid culture of the extreme right', *Guardian*, 20 March 2019.

19 For a critique of the current Labour Party's relative abstraction from issues of socialist internationalism, and the economistic mindset of its 'jobs-first Brexit', see J. Stafford and F. Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, 'Editorial – Work, Autonomy and Community', *Renewal*, 27, 1, 2018.

20 R. Williams, *Towards 2000*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1983, p. 255.

21 Ulrich Beck and others have also theorised the shift that has taken place from a politics of class organised around provision for basic material needs to a mass politics of 'risk' organised round the fears of contemporary consumers (although Beck's tendency – mistakenly in my opinion – has been to emphasise our collective victimisation by industrial pollution rather than our collective implication in its creation). See U. Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, trans. Mark Ritter, London: Sage, 1992; cf. A. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991: 109–143.

22 It is this aspect that was emphasised by Jeremy Corbyn in a speech of 3 March 2019: 'It's working-class communities that suffer the worst pollution and the worst air quality. It's working-class people who will lose their jobs as resources run dry. And it is working-class people who will be left behind as the rich escape rising sea levels.'

23 On the occasion of a post-growth conference at the EU Parliament, the group sent a letter signed by 238 academics (and widely published in the European press) to EU member states and institutions to end the growth dependency. This was followed up by the sustainability and well-being initiative (for report see 'The EU needs a stability and wellbeing pact, not more growth: 238 academics call on the European Union and its member states to plan for a post-growth future in which human and ecological wellbeing is prioritised over GDP', *Guardian*, 16 September 2018).

24 Cf. K. Soper, *Troubled Pleasures*, London: Verso, 1990, pp. 64–5.

25 A Citizens' Assembly is a representative group of citizens who are selected at random from the population to learn about, deliberate upon, and make recommendations in relation to a particular issue or set of issues. There is one currently operating in Ireland, and similar assemblies have been held in parts of Canada. For more information, see citizensassembly.co.uk.

26 N. Fairclough, 'Conversationalisation of public discourse and the authority of the consumer', and K. Walsh, 'Citizens, Charters and Contracts', both in R. Keat, N. Whiteley and N. Abercrombie, eds, *The Authority of the Consumer*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994, pp. 253–68 and 189–206.

27 J. Clarke, 'A Consuming Public?', Lecture in the ESRC/AHRB Cultures of Consumption Series, Royal Society, 22 April 2004, included in Research Papers (phase 1 projects), 21 June 2004; see also L.

Segal's reflections in *Radical Happiness*, pp. 89–95.

28 Cf. J. O'Neill, in F. Trentmann and K. Soper, eds, *Citizenship*, pp. 185–90.

29 P. Hetherington, 'So 1% of the people own half of England. Inheritance tax could fix that', *Guardian*, 18 April 2019.

30 These are not subject to ordinary local authority bylaws but rather governed by restrictions drawn up by the landowner and usually enforced by private security companies. See The Guardian Cities Investigation by J. Shenker, 'Revealed: the insidious creep of pseudo-public space in London', *Guardian*, 24 July 2017.

31 A. Minton, *Big Capital: Who is London For?*, London: Allen Lane, 2017, chapter 6. See also her *Ground Control, Fear and Happiness in the Twenty-First Century City*, London: Allen Lane, 2009, reissued with new material, 2012.

32 G. Shrubsole, *Who Owns England? How We Lost Our Green and Pleasant Land and How to Take It Back*, London: Williams Collins, 2019. Cf. R. Evans' review of Shrubsole, *Guardian*, 17 April 2019.

33 The shadow minister for the Cabinet Office has hailed the significance of the findings and called for a full debate on the issue, adding: 'The dramatic concentration of land ownership is an inescapable reminder that ours is a country for the few and not the many.' Cf. J. Shenker, 'Corbyn joins calls to reclaim pseudo-public space from corporate owners', *Guardian*, 25 July 2017.

34 T. Adams' review of *Who Owns England?*, *Observer*, 27 April 2019.

35 Link to Greenpeace's climate manifesto at greenpeace.org.uk. Cf. M. Taylor, 'Two-thirds of Britons agree planet is in a climate emergency', *Guardian*, 30 April 2019.

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