The Consumption of Anticonsumption

Consumption is a problem. One of the most interesting aspects of our consumer culture is that this statement really requires no argument. Consumer culture itself proclaims consumption to be a problem. For example, we are inundated with advertising that attacks the absurdity of advertising, people buy books that condemn consumption, and, indeed, as we will argue later in this chapter, products are often consumed to express disdain for consumption.

Whatever the problem, advertising has tried to position a product as its solution—not simply for the personal problems of halitosis, shyness, or unattractiveness, but also for social problems such as oppression or inequality. For example, advertising has always portrayed itself as on the side of liberation, especially from everything old and traditional. This usually takes the form of liberation from old commodities in favor of new and improved commodities, but there has sometimes been an actual political component. For example, advertisements for cigarettes were early public proclamations for women’s equality. A leading advertiser of the 1920s described an advertising-inspired parade where, with the support of a prominent feminist, some young women lit “torches of freedom” (i.e., cigarettes) “as a protest against woman’s inequality” (Ewen 1976, 161). Gender inequality could be solved by buying the right brand of cigarettes, the right toys for little girls, the right suit for the businesswoman.

By the middle of the 1950s, consumer culture and advertising were increasingly seen as parts of the problem rather than as
solutions. People were beginning to realize that if there is any connection between increased consumption and happiness, it is a negative one (see table 3.1). A common theme of popular magazine articles, movies, and sermons, as well as of academic writing was the problem of conformity, of consumerism, and the loss of the work ethic. The appearance of this theme shows the

Table 3.1 Consumption and Happiness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changes in Consumption</th>
<th>Changes in Quality of Life</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In 1992, people were, on average, 4.5 times richer than their great- grandparents at the turn of the century.</td>
<td>Percent of Americans reporting that they were &quot;very happy&quot; were no more numerous in 1991 than in 1957.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median size of a new house built in the United States: 1949: 1,100 square feet 1970: 1,385 square feet 1993: 2,060 square feet</td>
<td>51 percent decrease in quality of life in the United States since 1970, as measured by the index of Social Health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Americans can choose from: Over 23,000 supermarket items 200 kinds of cereal 11,092 magazines</td>
<td>75 percent of American workers ages twenty-five to forty-nine report that they would like to see a return to a simpler society with less emphasis on material wealth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In 1987, the number of shopping centers in the United States (32,563) surpassed the number of high schools.</td>
<td>99 percent of American teenage girls report store-hopping as favorite activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By the time they graduate from high school, American teenagers are typically exposed to 360,000 advertisements.</td>
<td>Employed Americans spent 163 hours more per year on the job in 1991 than they did in 1969.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since 1960, the daily average number of hours spent viewing television has risen by 39 percent.</td>
<td>Doctors comprise the highest income group in the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctors and lawyers comprise the professions with the highest proportion of unhappy people.</td>
<td>American parents spent 40 percent less time with their children in 1991 than they did in 1965.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69 percent of Americans would like to &quot;slow down and live a more relaxed life.&quot;</td>
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protean ingenuity of consumer culture in that advertising was able to present even this problem as solvable by more consumption. Because this innovation was so important to the spread of consumer culture, we will examine it in detail.

**Hip Consumerism**

Thomas Frank, in *The Conquest of Cool* (1997), has described changes in advertising as one of the most important processes behind the counterculture of the 1960s. Frank’s main thesis is that the counterculture received its impetus from the momentous transformation that advertising underwent in the early 1960s. Advertising made the hatred of consumer culture one of its own themes and presented the consumer as a rebel against the “establishment” and conformity.

The counterculture of the 1960s was deeply critical of consumer culture. One of the founding documents of the counterculture, the Port Huron Statement, condemned marketing techniques intended to “create pseudo-needs in consumers” and to make “wasteful ‘planned obsolescence’ . . . a permanent feature of business strategy” (Miller 1987, 339). However, both critics and admirers have commented on the deep connections between consumer culture and the counterculture of the 1960s. Both promulgated a doctrine of hedonism, liberation, and continual transgression. Frank makes sense of this contradiction by demonstrating that consumer culture was itself critical of consumer culture, and the counterculture was, to a large extent, a reflection of that.

The central theme that gives coherence to American advertising of both the early and late sixties is this: Consumer culture is a gigantic fraud. It demands that you act like everyone else, that you restrain yourself, that you fit in with the crowd, when you are in fact an individual. Consumer culture lies and seeks to sell you shoddy products that will fall apart or be out of style in a few years; but you crave authenticity and are too smart to fall for that Madison Avenue stuff (your neighbors may not be). Above all, consumer culture fosters conventions that are repressive and unfulfilling; but with the help of hip trends you can smash through those, create a new world in which
people can be themselves, pretense has vanished, and healthy appetites are liberated from the stultifying mores of the past. (1997, 136)

In other words, consumer culture presented consumption as a solution to its own problems.

The generally accepted story of the relation between the 1960s counterculture and consumer culture is that the latter co-opted the former. In the beginning, the story goes, there was an authentic counterculture that was in opposition to capitalism and corporate culture. However, this authentic movement either sold out or was effectively mimicked by a mass-produced counterfeit culture of groovy, psychedelic products that captured the youth market and subverted the real counterculture’s threat. Frank contends that the mass-produced counterfeit culture was “not so much evidence of co-optation, but rather evidence of the counterculture’s roots in consumer culture” (1997, 27).

Of course, few would deny the connection between the counterculture and the popular music and “rebel” celebrities of consumer culture. Furthermore, the role of television and popular magazines in advertising the “summer of love” and the entire hippie phenomena is unquestioned. Frank’s argument goes further than this to claim that it was in the heart of the beast, in advertising itself, that the first changes occurred that triggered the counterculture and the hippie movement: “The changes here were, if anything, even more remarkable, more significant, and took place slightly earlier than those in music and youth culture” (1997, 27).

Frank’s study of advertisers in the late 1950s and early 1960s shows that they were developing their own counterculture. A new generation of advertisers was growing tired of the repetitive, “scientific” advertisements of the 1950s and was finding success with advertisements that were ironic, rebellious, and that attacked or made fun of consumer culture itself.

In 1960, the advertising company Doyle Dane Bernbach launched a campaign that was to define hip consumerism (see profile of William Bernbach in chapter 6). It was for the Volkswagen beetle (see description of Volkswagen Beetle in chapter 6). It is no accident that the commodity most identified with the 1960s counterculture is the Volkswagen.

Most car advertising before the 1960s consisted of beautiful fantasies of some sort: a verdant green countryside, elegantly dressed models, and gleaming metal; or a racetrack, skimpily dressed models, and more gleaming metal. Its photography
grabbed you, and its text labored powerfully to extol the virtues of the car. The Volkswagen advertisement, in contrast, was simple, not flashy; self-deprecating, not self-congratulatory; and funny, not serious. It was the opposite of the advertising that everyone was used to. One of the first advertisements was a full page of mostly white space with a small picture of the car in the upper corner, a small headline toward the bottom saying “Think Small,” and a couple of paragraphs that described how strange the car was.

Most significantly, the Volkswagen advertisements made fun of the product, of advertising, and of consumer culture. It was the advertisements that first called the car a “beetle” and said that the station wagon “looked like a shoebox.” But it was at consumer culture itself that the advertisements aimed their sharpest barbs. They ridiculed the use of cars as status symbols. They poked fun at dealers’ sales tactics. They pilloried the faddishness and planned obsolescence of the fashionable commodity.

These new advertisements were extremely successful and initiated a revolt in advertising against the hard sell that still dominated the industry. In this “revolution,” the new generation of advertisers saw the emerging counterculture “not as an enemy to be undermined or a threat to consumer culture but as a hopeful sign, a symbolic ally in their own struggles against the mountains of dead-weight procedure and hierarchy that had accumulated over the years” (Frank 1997, 9). This partnership changed consumer culture.

Almost no American car manufacturers were still using the idealized, white-family-at-play motif by that year [1965]. And with the exception of luxury lines (Cadillac, Lincoln, Chrysler), virtually every car being marketed in America introduced its 1966 model year as an implement of nonconformity, of instant youthfulness, of mockery toward traditional Detroit-suckers, or of distinction from the mass society herd.... The critique of mass society, leveled by the American automakers was noticeably different from that of Volkswagen and Volvo. The ads of the Big Three automakers were not concerned with evading planned obsolescence, but with discovering for annual style changes a more compelling meaning. Where Volkswagen and Volvo emphasized authenticity and durability, Detroit stressed escape, excitement, carnival,
nonconformity, and individualism. It is a cleavage that goes to the heart of the commercial revolution of the sixties: every brand claimed to be bored, disgusted, and alienated, but for some these meant the never-changing Volkswagen and blue jeans; they steered others toward the Pontiac Breakaway and the Peacock Revolution [see description of Peacock Revolution in chapter 6]. (Frank 1997, 156-157)

What we see then is not the emergence of a movement that opposed consumer culture and was then co-opted and defeated by it, but rather a change within consumer culture itself. In the 1960s, consumer culture entered a new phase that Frank calls “hip consumerism.” It is now more resistant to criticisms, because it is able to transform those very criticisms into reasons to consume. Hip consumerism uses the ambivalence, the contradictions, and the disappointments due to advertising’s constantly broken promises as further inducements to buy more. The protests against manipulation, conformity, and loss of meaning are transformed into reasons to consume. Disgust with consumerism is turned into the fuel that feeds consumerism because we express our disgust with consumer culture through consumption.

Advertising no longer sells a commodity so much as a rebellious stance. For example, Benetton advertisements have not used pictures of its products since 1989. Instead, their advertisements feature shocking images of AIDS victims, racism, war, and death-row inmates. Oliviero Toscani, Benetton’s head of advertising, sees these advertisements as a criticism of consumer culture: “The advertising industry has corrupted society. It persuades people that they are respected for what they consume, that they are only worth what they possess” (Ticnic 1997, 9). This is not the head of the politburo speaking, but the head of advertising at a major international company.

Hip consumers are anticonsumption, but they have been taught to express their attitudes through what they buy. They are rebels, but they have been taught to rebel against last year’s fashions and especially to rebel against the old-fashioned Puritanism and frugality of their parents. They crave traditions and are willing to buy the latest tradition. They want authenticity and will pay for its simulation.

What changed during the sixties, it now seems, were the strategies of consumerism, the ideology by which
business explained its domination of the national life. Now products existed to facilitate our rebellion against the soul-deadening world of products, to put us in touch with our authentic selves, to distinguish us from the mass-produced herd, to express our outrage at the stifling world of economic necessity. (Frank 1997, 229)

Hip consumerism has become the latest and strongest version of consumer culture. Both the critique of consumption and the solution to the problems of consumption are now contained within consumer culture. In other words, consumer culture presents itself as a problem that only more consumption can solve. Advertisements that incorporate ironic attacks on consumer culture are themselves protected from those attacks because they have positioned themselves on the side of the skeptical viewer.

Advertisements that promote rebellion, mock authority, and promise a mass-produced nonconformity are now ubiquitous. For example, one of the main targets of the counterculture’s and of feminists’ critique of consumer culture was the cosmetics industry, which was taken to be the epitome of artificiality and conformity to mass-produced standards of beauty. However, hip consumerism has revamped these commodities as signs of ironic artificiality, defiance, and nonconformity. A case in point, one company, significantly named Urban Decay, offers cosmetics with names like Plague, Demise, Rat, Roach, and Asphyxia.

**New Age Consumerism**

In addition to buying to express nonconformity and rebellion, consumers also buy to express an interest in living a simple life, a concern about the environment, and as a declaration of spirituality. For instance, those who seek the simple life can choose among more than 100 models of sleeping bags. They can peruse the advertisements in *Real Simple*, “the magazine devoted to simplifying your life.” They can buy an SUV to get off-road and closer to nature. They can furnish their home with the latest craze in traditional crafts. They can, if they possess the money, have custom-made, one-of-a-kind clothes fashioned for them out of hand-spun fabric.

We can call this variant of the hip consumer the New Age consumer. A forthcoming article by Sam Binkley discusses the *Whole*
Earth Catalog, one of the most important documents of the change from hip consumption to New Age consumption. This strange mix of a Sears Roebuck catalog and opinionated Consumer Reports put together by dropouts from the counterculture used its lists of commodities to carry the 1960s rebellious spirit into the spiritual environmentalism that characterizes the New Age consumer.

The hip consumer responds to the contradictions of consumer culture through consumption that emphasizes artifice, irony, and nonconformity. The New Age consumer responds to these same contradictions also with consumption, but they prefer commodities that represent a noncommercial and more spiritual life. The New Age consumer prefers boutiques to national chains, gentrified neighborhood centers to shopping malls. However, even the mall-based chain store can be sold to the New Age consumer if it is properly marketed, as Anita Roddick proved when she introduced the environmentally friendly, politically correct chain, The Body Shop.

New Age consumers demonstrate through their consumption that they are earth-friendly, socially responsible, enlightened global citizens in tune with nature. They prefer natural wood, natural fibers, natural ingredients, organic food, and herbal body-care products. All of these are sold as remedies for the problems of consumer culture.

Kimberly Lau provides an interesting case of New Age consumerism in her study of New Age Capitalism (2000). She covers a number of examples including the spread of yoga and macrobiotic diets, but most germane is her examination of the marketing of aromatherapy. In the marketing of aromatherapy, we see many of the attributes of hip consumption that Frank described, but with a New Age twist.

Horst Rechelbacher, the founder of Aveda, introduced aromatherapy to the American public in 1978. Since Aveda's success, others have followed suit, including specialty stores such as The Body Shop, Garden Botanika, and H2O. In addition, noncosmetic but hip retailers such as The Gap, The Limited, Eddie Bauer, Urban Outfitters, Banana Republic, Pier 1 Imports, and The Nature Company have all introduced aromatherapy products. Lau estimates the annual sale of aromatherapy products to be $300 to $500 million, with an annual growth rate of approximately 30 percent (2000, 34).

Lau describes three characteristics of the aromatherapy advertising campaign that appeals to the New Age consumer: (1) it
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is presented as ecofriendly; (2) it is a remedy for the psychic ills of modern civilization; and (3) it is able to function as a hip consumer’s status symbol.

As Lau informs us, “everyone from aromatherapists to essential oil suppliers and aroma researchers praises the earth-friendly nature of aromatherapy, but no one articulates the precise nature of its environmentalism” (2000, 39–40). Finding no evidence for its ecological beneficence, Lau can only surmise the following formula: “The association seems as simple as plants=green=earth-friendly” (2000, 40).

In addition, aromatherapy is associated with ancient and contemporary cultures that are portrayed as unsullied by the problems of modern consumer culture. It is variously associated with the ancient practices of Egypt, Greece, Rome, India, and China. In addition, Aveda advertises that some of its ingredients are obtained from the Yawanawa, who live in the rain forests of western Brazil. Lau sees this identification of aromatherapy with ancient and nonindustrialized cultures as “part of an attempt to counter modernity and the techno-industrial capitalist system it signifies” (2000, 30). In other words, advertising positions this product outside of consumer culture, as an alternative and even an antidote.

Of course, this alternative to consumer culture can only be consumed by those able to afford it. This allows Aveda products, like most hip commodities, to function both as a status symbol and as an antistatus symbol. It represents both the material resources to buy expensive body-care products and a criticism of Western materialism.

Aveda makes available for purchase the idea of participating in cultural critique, of living according to ancient philosophies, of living an alternative lifestyle. . . . Consumption becomes a mode of addressing social, political, and cultural disenchantment, although the very processes enabling consumption are what characterize modernity, itself the cause of the disenchantment being critiqued. (Lau 2000, 133)

Furthermore, all of the New Age commodities discussed by Lau claim to remedy the fragmentation that Daniel Bell, in *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, predicted would destroy consumer culture. Reconnecting mind, body, and spirit is a primary theme of these products. They are all, at least in name, holistic.
Here, too, the contradictions of our consumer culture function as another reason to consume. Not only do these products turn anticonsumption into a reason for more consumption, but it is arguable that they co-opt any real opposition to consumer culture. Each product comes with a tag, an address, a lifestyle. The act of purchase locates the individual within a tribe, and in this way, fashion functions to regulate lifestyles and produce the belief that every consumer choice is a free choice, a way in which individuals invent themselves. Such practices can co-opt self-identifying groups into the consumer cycle, even those who may be politically and ethically opposed to it—for example, those targeted by the new niche markets in anti-fashions, eco-sensitive clothing, and products from recycled materials. (Finkelstein 1995, 232)

Cheesy Consumerism

For those unable to believe any longer in consumer culture’s promises of nostalgic simplicity or ancient spirituality, there is yet another variant of the hip consumer, the “antihip” or the cheesy consumer. The hip consumer responds to the contradictions of consumer culture by stressing artifice and nonconformity. The New Age consumer responds by “buying” into a fantasy of nostalgic simplicity. This new variation, the cheesy consumer, stresses the artifice of the fantasy of nostalgic simplicity.

We see the cheesy sensibility in the popularity of reruns of *Gilligan’s Island* and *The Brady Bunch*. One cable company is running these with faux retro commercials, but we can see such cheesy advertisements throughout our consumer culture. Old Navy seems to specialize in them, and cheese is the motif in Britney Spears’s retro Pepsi commercials. David Letterman and especially his fake-hipster bandleader, Paul Schafer, is the epitome of cheese.

Cheese is a kind of manufactured camp (see chapter 4 for a discussion of camp). However, while camp aficionados must rummage through the near past for marginal figures, cheese is ready-made. Also, while camp has a subversive bite to it, the cheese attitude is simply sarcastic.

Michiko Kakutani (1992) explains the appeal of cheese to the
jaded consumer. According to Kakutani, the current generation is one that “grew up suspicious of sincerity; wary of making emotional, political, or artistic commitments; and whose cynical, defensive mantra is, ‘Hey, I’m cool, you’re cool, and we won’t endanger our coolness by ever admitting to a genuine emotion or serious ambition’” (Cl).

The cheesy consumer wants to believe in families like the Brady Bunch and, of course, all of the consumer products that made them the happy family that they were, but he cannot. Cheese is a way to indulge in the fantasy, but now in a skeptical, ironic mode. Cheesy commercials allow the viewer to both enjoy the fantasy and feel smugly superior to it. In addition, they position the advertiser on the side of the skeptical consumer so that both can smirk at consumer culture even as they indulge in it.

Consumption as an International Social Problem

The hip consumer, the New Age consumer, and the cheesy consumer have all been described previously as primarily American and European phenomena. However, consumer culture has become a global phenomenon and, consequently, a global problem. Here, too, more consumption is offered as a solution to consumer culture.

A global consumer culture is connected to the international flow of products, money, people, information, and services, which has been called globalization. There can be little doubt that the world is becoming increasingly interconnected and that this has enormous cultural implications. It is not only that countries are economically interdependent, but that they are also culturally interdependent. The political, social, and cultural borders that once separated cultures have become permeable. Clearly, there are multiple forces at work in globalization—economic, political, institutional, technological—but undoubtedly the most obvious form that globalization assumes is as a global consumer culture.

Few expressions of globalization are so visible, widespread and pervasive as the worldwide proliferation of internationally traded consumer brands, the global ascendancy of popular cultural icons and artifacts, and the simultaneous communication of events by satellite broadcasts to hundreds of millions of people at a time.
The Consumption of Anticonsumption

on all continents. The most public symbols of globalization consist of Coca-Cola, Madonna and the news on CNN. (Held et al. 1999, 327)

Steger cites as examples of globalization the appearance of Nike sneakers on Amazonian Indians, Texaco baseball caps on sub-Saharan youths, and Chicago Bulls sweatshirts on Palestinians (2002, 36). In such examples, it is easy to see a homogenized—even Americanized—consumer culture spreading throughout the world by creating standardized tastes and desires. And, in fact, this homogenized world is often precisely what the advertising for consumption promises, as in the McDonald’s advertisement, “It’s what everyone around the world keeps saying—It’s MacTime,” or when Coke wants to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony.

Although some see globalization as an Americanized homogeneity, others see it as leading to the creating of heterogeneous, diverse, and plural local cultures. In other words, people in a small American town might be exposed to Japanese movies, African music, and French fashions, and each person in the town can create their own individual and unique lifestyle from these world sources.

The question whether globalization increases cultural homogeneity and sameness by establishing common codes and practices or whether it increases a heterogeneity of newly emerging differences seems now, to many analysts, to have been answered. Globalization does both. Globalization appears to make people more different but in a similar way. It creates a mixed system, where people are homogenized into similar individuals, ethnicities, and nations who want different things. It creates what Roland Robertson has called “glocalization” (1995).

Glocalization

According to Robertson, “globalization is not an all-encompassing process of homogenization but a complex mixture of homogenization and heterogenization” (2001, 462). There is an interpenetration of the global and the local that creates a difference-withinsameness. The local is not opposed to the global, rather it is an aspect of the global. Consequently, the homogeneity of global cultural flows will be matched by the heterogeneity of their reception, appropriation, and response. Everybody is exposed to McDonald’s, Coke, and Levis, but people do different things with them. It is this that characterizes glocalization.
Glocalization is related to “delocalization.” The defining characteristic of our global culture is that relations between people are no longer dependent on a particular location. The distance between people and the borders separating them mean less and less. We now inhabit a new global space along with the local space. The idea of glocalization is that our relation to the local is changed by the global context. Global forces undermine our bond to a fixed local culture, its unquestioned traditions, and stable identities. Through television, the Internet, advertising, trade, and travel, people are more exposed to the world and therefore freer from the constraints of the local.

Not only is delocalization caused by global forces, but people themselves are more mobile and prone to cross borders. Many of a locale’s residents did not grow up in that locality, and these newcomers bring other traditions to this new place. In addition, indigenous locals travel, interact, and return, thereby transforming their cultures. These processes are so prevalent that a number of cities are dominated by cosmopolitan elites and immigrant neighborhoods. Sassen describes these as global cities (1991).

These processes lead to a cultural form that is referred to as “hybridization” (Pieterse 1995). Zwingle describes “sitting in a coffee shop in London drinking Italian espresso served by an Algerian waiter to the strains of the Beach Boys singing ‘I wish they all could be California girls’” (2000, 153). Pieterse describes “Thai boxing by Moroccan girls in Amsterdam, Asian rap in London, Irish bagels, Chinese tacos and Mardi Gras Indians in the United States” (1995, 53). We regularly see these hybrids in music, novels, restaurants, paintings, crafts, and so on. The hybrid form pervades both high and popular culture and even “traditional culture. In fact, much of what we take to be local and traditional is a hybrid. All around the world, we see the re-creation of local rituals for the tourist trade. Glocalization is connected to delocalization through the creation or re-creation of the local traditions in a way that conforms to global forces.

There is a similarity between glocalization and the niche markets created by consumer culture. This should not be a surprise since the very term glocalization began as “one of the main marketing buzzwords of the beginning of the nineties” (Tulloch 1991, 134). Global culture seems to be precisely tracking the trend among consumer goods that marketers have already recognized. Although there are some global brands, one business analyst observed that this “does not mean that there is a global consumer
for companies to target. International cultural differences are by no means disappearing and, in the late twentieth century, individualism is as strong a world force as internationalism. Consumer goods are becoming more, rather than less, focused on the individual" (Fitzgerald 1997, 742). However, the individuals focused on by global marketing are, as one business leader put it, "heteroconsumers": "People who’ve become increasingly alike and indistinct from one another, and yet have simultaneously varied and multiple preferences" (Levitt 1988, 8).

Thus, there is indeed greater heterogeneity, but it is in the context of and, to a large extent, in response to the homogeneity of a consumer culture. What appears to be disorder is really systematic. Global consumer culture creates what Wilk calls "global systems of common difference" (1995). Again, this seems to be recognized by consumer advertising. An AT&T advertisement says, "What makes us all the same is that we’re all different."

**McDonaldization as Heterogeneity and Homogeneity**

George Ritzer (2000) coined the term "McDonaldization" to describe the way in which more and more of our life is being run like a fast food restaurant. Because McDonaldization has become a widely used term for the globalization of consumer culture, it is useful to employ it to examine the interplay of heterogeneity and homogeneity. First, however, it is necessary to clearly define what is meant by McDonaldization. It is not simply the spread of a particular restaurant chain. Instead it is the spread of the processes of efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control, which McDonald’s successfully introduced into consumption (see profile of Ray Kroc, founder of McDonald’s, in chapter 6). Fast food restaurants provide food efficiently rather than providing good food. The fast food restaurant is able to calculate how many hamburgers have been served, how many seconds it takes to fill a cup, the exact profit margin of each sale, and so forth. Each hamburger, no matter when or where it is bought, is predictably the same. In order to achieve this efficiency, calculability, and predictability, people must be controlled. The idea of McDonaldization is that these processes are coming to dominate more economic and cultural sectors as well as spreading globally.

Although McDonaldization refers to much more than the
restaurant chain, it is instructive to begin with a focus on the heterogenizing aspects of McDonald’s itself. We see within the homogeneity of McDonald’s (the vanguard of McDonaldization) four types of heterogeneity.

First, McDonald’s in a non-American setting provides a cheap and easily accessible tourist experience. Stephenson describes the experience of Dutch patrons where a local McDonald’s provides “a kind of instant emigration that occurs the moment one walks through the doors, where Dutch rules rather obviously don’t apply and where there are few adults around to enforce any that might” (1989, 227).

Second, when McDonald’s is accepted as a local institution, it creates a new heterogeneous hybrid locality. The literature is rife with descriptions of tourists to the United States from other countries who are surprised to see a McDonald’s here. Watson’s (1997) collection is full of descriptions of the acceptance of McDonald’s as a local phenomena in East Asian countries. This is indicative not of the power of the local, but of the power of McDonald’s to re-create the local. As Ritzer points out, “Its impact is far greater if it infiltrates a local culture and becomes a part of it than if it remains perceived as an American phenomenon superimposed on a local setting” (2001, 171).

Third, the chain varies its menu to adapt to particular localities. In India, McDonald’s outlets serve Vegetable McNuggets and Maharaja Macs made with mutton. In Turkey, they offer a chilled yogurt drink. In Italy, espresso and cold pasta. Teriyaki burgers are on the menu in Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong (along with red bean sundaes). The main sandwich in the Netherlands is a vegetarian burger; in Norway, it is McLaks (a grilled salmon sandwich); in Germany, frankfurters; in Uruguay, a poached egg hamburger called the McHuevo.

Finally, the process of McDonaldization is adopted by indigenous competitors of McDonald’s to create a local variety of fast food. Ritzer mentions Russkoye Bistro in Russia, Ronghua Chicken and Xiangfei Roast Chicken in China, Mos Burger in Japan, and Uncle Joe’s Hamburger in Korea (2001). Ritzer writes that “it is not the existence of American chains (and other new means of consumption) in other countries that is the most important indicator of the spread of McDonaldization, but rather the existence of indigenous clones of those McDonaldized enterprises” (2001, 170).

We see then that, on the one hand, McDonald’s itself becomes
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more heterogeneous by adapting to the local, and, on the other hand, McDonaldization promotes heterogeneity in the locality by creating a tourist experience, a hybrid local, and by promoting McDonaldized local competitors. Nevertheless, as globalization would predict, along with this increased heterogeneity of product and locality comes an increased homogeneity of process—of calculability, efficiency, predictability, and control.

The Contradictions of Global Consumer Culture

We see in global consumer culture the same contradictions that we outlined previously. Of course, as capitalism has spread, we see also the spread of its contradiction between a calculating, rational, frugal producer and an impulsive, irrational, prodigal consumer. In addition, even though many of these countries don’t have a Protestant tradition or a bourgeois culture, we nevertheless see a contradiction between their traditional ethos and the impulses of a consumer culture. This often takes the form of a generational difference in developing countries.

In each nation, there remains a significant population segment who have lived through underdevelopment, whose collective memories of material deprivation and thrifty ways are still fresh. Their moral/ideological position on savings has made them resistant to the rapid expansion of consumerism. In addition, this group often sees the arrival of consumerist culture as the consequence of the penetration and contamination of traditional cultural practices by “Western,” particularly American, cultures. Thus, the moral debate on consumption has often been characterized as a “generational conflict,” supposedly between the deprived generation who embody thrift as a traditional value and the affluent and fast-spending, “Westernised” generation. (Beng-Huat 2000, 8)

We also see the same contradictory view of the consumer. On the one hand, the spread of consumer culture is driven primarily by the choices made by those who live in the invaded territory. The consumer is the sovereign director of globalizing consumer
culture. On the other hand, as Wilk writes, “it is clear that people are not making completely free choices about goods. They are not merely absorbing foreign goods into their existing modes of consumption, and making free strategic choices in the global marketplace. Third world consumers are subject to various forms of coercion, both economic and ideological” (1994, 81).

These contradictions of global consumer culture are also resolved through the consumption of anticonsumption. Just as in Western culture, others are encouraged to consume in order to represent their belief in anticonsumption traditions, their disdain of advertisers’ attempts to control them or their rebellion.

We certainly see some of the same aspects of hip consumerism in response to the globalization of consumer culture. For example, marketers in Eastern Europe have introduced a new product labeled “Ordinary Laundry Detergent” as a hip response to the heavy promotion of Tide as cleaning “better than ordinary laundry detergent” (Money and Colton 2000, 190). However, most characteristic of the response to the contradictions of global consumption has been what Robertson calls a “willful nostalgia” (1992). Woodruff and Drake report, for example, that “Czech-made” soft drinks promise to relieve the stress of the urban, cosmopolitan life that is associated with such global products as Coke and Pepsi (1998). The cosmetics company Shiseido emphasizes its Japanese origins even outside of Japan and advertises an image of Japanese mystique and exoticism (Schutte and Ciarlante 1998). The makers of French chocolates emphasize a nostalgic “Other” of tropical jungles, but also the craft tradition of hand-made chocolates (Terrio 1996).

We even see this willful nostalgia being used by McDonald’s itself. The McDonald’s in Singapore offers a “kampong” burger. Beng-Huat tells us that “kampong refers to the villages in which most Singaporeans lived prior to being resettled into high-rise public housing estates, a time which is remembered nostalgically as the ‘good old days’ when life was much more relaxed and community more organic than today’s high-stress living in a globalised economy” (2000, 195–196).

Along with these familiar contradictions, we see also the highlighting of a new one, the contradiction outlined previously between heterogeneity and homogeneity. In reaction to the new contradiction, people are encouraged to consume in order to resist a homogenizing globalization, which is usually and most effectively presented as Americanization.
The Consumption of Anti-Americanization

Before we describe the way in which anti-Americanization is used to spur consumption, we should point out that the United States first spurred consumption as a symbol for rebellion rather than as a symbol of homogenous conformity. Schutte and Ciarlante describe Coca-Cola, Levis, and Marlboro as symbols of individualism and freedom (1998, 195). Yoshimi describes American consumer goods as “symbols of ‘emancipation’ and ‘resistance’” (2000, 202). According to Beng-Huat, “American products have been used to express resistance to local repressions” (2000, 16). Humphrey says that Western consumer goods represented “resistance to the regime” in the Soviet Union (1995, 57), and this continued in post-Communist Russia with Chevrolet successfully selling cars to Russians with a “Born in the U.S.A.” campaign (Money and Colton 2000, 189).

Despite the use of images portraying American products as symbols of emancipation and resistance, quite the opposite symbolization has often occurred. This has emerged naturally enough from the contradictions of global consumer culture listed previously. There has been a condemnation of the unbridled consumer both as not rational enough and as not traditional enough (Sacks 1998). Furthermore, the image of the sovereign consumer, which consumer culture introduced, has often been used as the basis for criticizing the manipulated consumer. It was not long before both nations and local entrepreneurs saw the advantage to be gained in portraying globalization, or more usually Americanization, as the enemy. Appadurai notes the benefits of “posing global commoditization (or capitalism, or some other such external enemy) as more real than the threat of its own hegemonic strategies” (1996, 32). Beng-Huat describes the “moral panic” created by the South Korean government and media against an Americanized consumer culture (2000).

Of course, these moral crusades have not diminished consumption in South Korea or in any other culture. Instead, as we will describe later, these antiglobalization attitudes function like the anticonsumption attitudes described in the first part of this chapter. They fuel more consumption. This might be suspected since, as many analysts have noted, the United States is “the home of opposition and resistance to globalization, in spite of the widely held view that globalization is an American project. In
fact, it has by now become appropriate to talk of the globalization of anti-globalism” (Robertson 2001, 459).

**McDonaldization in France**

Let us return again to McDonald’s and look at its reception in France as an exemplary case of the consumption of anti-Americanization. McDonald’s was, for the French, identified with the United States, and the French relation with American culture has been, to say the least, ambiguous. France is well known for having rejected American culture in the 1960s and 1970s, only to embrace it by the mid-1980s (Kuisel 1993). Even though McDonald’s was introduced into France in 1972 in the period of supposed American rejection, it nevertheless benefited from this American association because many saw McDonald’s as a kind of “reverse snobbery” (Fantasia 1995, 227). This view existed even among the upper class, as evidenced by the fact that a haute couture fashion show served a buffet of McDonald’s food during this period.

Along with McDonald’s, there was an accompanying spread of McDonaldization among the French food industry. In the beginning, these French fast food restaurants tried to benefit from the association of fast food with the United States, by using such names as Magic Burger, B’Burger, Manhattan Burger, Katy’s Burger, Love Burger, and Kiss Burger. In addition, their look and food products were copied from the American model. Indeed, Fantasia reports that French-owned hamburger places far outnumbered American-owned ones (1995, 206). More important than the food and the look, the restaurants copied the processes of McDonaldization: its efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control.

Of course, McDonald’s identification with the United States has not been solely to its benefit. The very thing that has made McDonald’s so popular has also made it the target of antiglobalization activists. French McDonald’s have been sites of protest as well as of vandalism and bombing. The case of Jose Bove who destroyed a half-built McDonald’s in protest of a World Trade Organization (WTO) ruling has become a cause célèbre with support from tens of thousands of protestors as well as political leaders (see description of World Trade Organization (WTO) in chapter 6). More recently, those protesting the invasion/liberation of Iraq have burned a Ronald McDonald statue in Ecuador,
smashed McDonald's windows in Paris, and scaled a McDonald's sign in South Korea.

Nevertheless, despite the opposition to McDonald's, McDonaldization has continued apace and increasingly acquired a French twist. French fast food restaurants quickly moved from American food and look to traditional French foods such as croissants and sandwiches on brioche or baguettes. Despite their now identifiable French names, products, and looks, these food outlets follow the same standardized, mechanized, and efficient practices that McDonald's introduced. However, they market themselves as a French (i.e., non-American) fast food. In a minor reverse incursion, a few of these French fast food places (e.g., Pret à Manger) have invaded the United States, drawing upon the French identification with fine food to help sell their McDonaldized products.

More important than this reverse incursion is the fact that the French fast food places have used the rejection of McDonald's and of Americanization to sell their own products. In other words, the rejection of McDonald's has been used to promote the spread of McDonaldization. France provides us with a clear example of the increase in heterogeneity—of products, look, and national identification—along with the increased homogenization of process.

This is not merely an economic phenomena. As Chua Beng-Huat describes in the case of Singapore, the state is deeply involved.

Consumption expansion thus tends to lead to some level of global homogenization of culture among consumers, an effect that gives rise to negative responses to globalisation. As consumer goods are always also cultural goods, expansion of consumption of imported products and services often gives rise to an exaggerated sense of "panic," of cultural "invasion" which, supposedly, if left unchecked will result in the demise of the local culture. Critics, including the state, thus inveigh against specific "foreign" targets, such as "Americanisation" or "Japanisation," and take upon themselves to promote "local" culture as ballast against the "foreign" cultural invasions. The desire of the state to involve itself in such ideological critique is obvious. Homogenisation of culture globally is antithetical to the idea of the "uniqueness" of nationalist sentiments and, therefore, is potentially threatening to
the hold of the nation-state on its citizens. Emphasizing the “national” as “local” differences is in the interests of the nation-state as an act of self-preservation. Hence, existing alongside embracing the arrival of capital is a cultural/moral critique of both the commodification of social life and the “cultural imperialism” of the countries from which the goods originate. (2000, 183–184)

We see a similar effect in the marketing of such soft drinks as Mecca Cola and Qibla Cola, which target the European Muslim community and position themselves as an expression of anti-Americanization (Hundley 2003). The idea is that individuals are to express their contempt for the United States and its associated consumer society through the consumption of products that are produced, packaged, and marketed in a way that is deeply dependent on American consumer culture. In addition, although not so strongly anti-American, the Japanese create a national identity that is presented as distinct from others, especially Americans, and which is tied to what Yoshino (1999) calls a cultural marketplace. Likewise, Foster describes the people of Papau New Guinea as using consumption to create a local identity in opposition to the identity attached to global brands (2002). One final example, Johnston describes an advertisement for a flavored milk drink in New Zealand that is strongly critical of American culture, but which uses a musical rap form to express it (2001). In these and many other cases, the spread of consumer culture is supported by the rejection of consumer culture represented as Americanization.

**Conclusion**

As discussed in the first part of this chapter, we have been encouraged to buy in order to establish our individuality in a mass-produced culture, to express our disgust with consumption by more consumption, to purchase the latest improved traditions. In the context of globalization, the consumption of anticonsumption is given a new twist. Now people are encouraged to buy to express their rejection of homogenized Americanization. Our disgust with the homogenized Americanization of McDonald’s is used to expand the underlying process of McDonaldization. Our disgust with global consumer culture is used to strengthen and spread it.
Far from creating a crisis, the problems of consumer culture have made it more resilient. This is because our dissatisfaction with the culture is expressed through more consumption. Consumption has become our model for dissent, our model for freedom, our model for political activity. All alternatives to consumer culture—the simple life, the spiritual, the traditional, the local—become variant consumer fantasies. Consumption is a social problem and it is offered as its own solution.

Note
1. It is not necessary to invoke ancient and nonindustrialized cultures to position a product outside of consumer culture. Passamai describes how New Age consumers invoke science fiction and fantasy stories to position commodities outside of consumer culture (2002).

References


