

Part II

Living here

Green distinctions: the performance of identity among environmental activists¹

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Introduction

With increasing media attention to 'the environment', a dominant representation of environmental activism is of spectacular and often confrontational events in the public sphere. Many studies of social movements, tending primarily to focus on political protest, follow this preoccupation with the most visible and dramatic manifestations of contemporary environmentalism. Although some scholars are interested in analysing the 'non-political' dimensions of social movements like environmentalism, this interest is often circumscribed by the extent to which 'the cultural' can be used to explain 'the political', which remains for most theorists the proper concern of social movement research.

Environmentalism is a political force and high-profile environmental controversies are important objects of study. But environmentalism is also about the everyday. Some activists might occasionally participate in media-friendly stunts, but as part of their green campaigns most activists also issue press releases, write letters, organize town centre stalls, and attend public inquiries. And beyond these public performances exists a less visible world of continuous action. All social movements are sustained by 'submerged networks' (Melucci, 1985, 1989), and within the submerged networks of 'the green movement' activists organize and attend meetings, study a whole range of environmentally relevant texts, and grapple with the development of green cultural practice. This sphere of everyday life is an important, and frequently overlooked, part of contemporary environmentalism. Material culture is a hugely significant constitutive component of this sphere of 'the everyday'. Particular objects, and particular ways of living with the material world, are vital to the production and reproduction of both the everyday lives of environmental activists and environmentalism as a whole.

This chapter explores the importance of materialities to the performance of identity. It argues that distinctive and distinguished green lifestyles depend on the material objects environmental activists tend to live with and without. Further, it argues that activists' material relations are themselves performative of distinctive green lifestyles. The case of environmental activists provides a clear demonstration of the wider significance of materialities to the performance

of identity, a significance which remains relatively unexplored within contemporary social science.

How does one earn 'green distinction', the markings of a green identity? This chapter argues that among environmental activists green distinction is not earned through the rational articulation of green perspectives or the correct espousal of green political ideology, so much as through the embodied performance of appropriate green identity. Through following the logic of their habitus, playing according to green cultural codes, activists perform an identity which earns them distinctively green distinction.² It should be clear that by performance I do not mean the occasional and ephemeral staging of an ordinarily hidden identity, but rather the ongoing, repeated and routinized enactment of the green cultural codes promoted by the discourses of contemporary environmentalism, which brings forth a distinctive way of life. The green identities of environmental activists are, in other words, performed throughout everyday life.

The setting

My ethnographic research, comprising participant-observation alongside a set of focus groups and a series of individual interviews, was centred on the green networks of Lancaster, England. Situated in a relatively remote and rural part of the north-west, between the sands of Morecambe Bay and the moors of the Forest of Bowland, the city is close to the upland National Parks of the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales. With good road and rail links, and near to some of Britain's most prized landscapes, Lancaster's location makes it something of a 'gateway' to important areas of outdoor recreation.

Lancaster's population of around 50,000 includes very significant numbers of students, who come to study at its two institutes of higher education. The city's green networks are comprised almost entirely of people who originally came to the city to study, and who decided to remain once their formal education was complete. These green networks are unusually vibrant. Since Lancaster University's foundation in 1964, the city has developed a reputation as a centre for new social movement politics (Bagguley *et al.*, 1990), and in recent years this reputation has become distinctively greened. There has been longstanding and very effective opposition to proposed road and housing developments, occasional 'radical' environmental protest events such as Reclaim the Streets and Critical Mass, and prominent campaigns by local members of national environmental organizations such as Friends of the Earth and Transport 2000. Currently, the area also has the highest number of elected Green Party councillors in the country.

There are visible signs of the city's green distinction. Most obviously, close to the city centre is a 'green complex', comprising three important spaces: a vegetarian wholefood workers' co-operative; a vegetarian café, the favourite informal meeting place of environmental activists; and a basement office, currently housing a 'radical' environmental project and the site for various activist initia-

tives over the years. Beyond this 'green complex', a short distance across town lies a thriving community centre which is the site of many 'green meetings', both the formal, planned meetings of specific groups and campaigns, and the informal and often unplanned meetings of the city's environmental activists. These signs of an 'alternative culture' can be found in other British city centres; in Lancaster, however, such places act as important supports to a green community larger than would be expected from the city's relatively small size.³

The activists

My fieldwork concentrated on post-1960s expressions of environmentalism. The label 'environmental activist' therefore includes people aligning themselves with well-known if relatively 'new' environmental organizations such as Friends of the Earth and the Green Party, as well as people more resistant to organizational labels and, whilst identifying with groups such as Reclaim the Streets and Earth First!, tending to form loose and ephemeral networks around specific direct actions. The category 'environmental activist' thus conflates important differences in the forms of politics practised by individuals. Broadly, the 'reformists' tend to recognize and work within existing political structures, while the 'radicals' tend ordinarily and deliberately to bypass the established political system, and instead favour 'direct action'.

These different styles of environmental activism are performed by, and performative of, different material assemblages, and result in distinctive green lifestyles. At the 'radical' extreme, for example, activists often favour highly mobile and 'close-to-nature' modes of dwelling, such as yurts and benders. 'Radical' activists also sometimes embody a 'counter-cultural' ethos through transgressive styles of dress and hair. At the other extreme, the lifestyles of some 'reformists' differ in remarkably few ostensive ways from the lifestyles of people beyond the boundaries of green culture.

At one point in the research process a group of locally-based activists engaged in fierce (and predominantly 'online') debate around the reformulation of the traditional 'reformist'/'radical' split according to the dress codes of 'fleece' and 'khaki'. Beyond acting as visible boundary markers, and contributing to the constitution of collective identities, these two broad styles of dress are powerfully symbolic of different predispositions to the 'natural world': among 'reformists' the wearing of 'fleece' fabrics (as well as walking boots and hi-tech waterproofs) signals an ever-present orientation to the outdoors, a willingness to be out in, engage with, but ultimately move through 'nature'; among 'radicals' the wearing of khaki (and many layers of more 'natural' fabrics) symbolizes a desire to dwell more permanently, and perhaps even to make a home, in 'the natural world'; to merge in an embodied way, and become one, with 'nature'.

Whether primarily 'radical' or 'reformist' in orientation, activists tend to be educated to at least degree level. Activists with the strongest green identities tend

to be in their late-20s or 30s, to be childless, and to be committed to activism as 'a way of life', either surviving without much paid work or finding ways of getting paid to be an activist. Many other activists, not such central actors in the local green networks, are employed in health, education and social welfare professions, and maintain their green political commitments alongside career and parenthood. If people tend to enter green networks in search of sociality among like-minded others, they tend eventually to reduce their involvements, and sometimes altogether leave these networks as a result of growing commitments to family and work (see Klatch, 2000). This does not mean the pursuit of a green lifestyle is a passing fad; but it does mean that for many people the phase of group-based political activism which forcefully contributes to the greening of lifestyle tends to be of limited duration.

What unites activists is a willingness to perform environmental commitment in public. Activists seek to demonstrate their understandings to and impress their concerns upon others (Barry, 1999). Whether they do so rumbustiously or quietly, these activists are in their different ways responding to, and acting on behalf of, a variety of 'natures under threat'. Typically, activists' concerns include: the planet and its people; confronting the relentless spread of capitalism, consumerism and related ills such as 'climate chaos'; a geographically proximate and intimately known 'local nature', jeopardized by roads, urban sprawl and polluting factories; and their own bodies, bombarded by an increasingly complex cocktail of chemicals with highly uncertain consequences.

The greening of distinction

People in affluent societies are experiencing weakening identification with, and corresponding loss of commitment to, a whole range of institutions around which strong identities were once built (Bauman, 1993, 1995). Ties to locality, class, work, religion, politics and family which once structured a person's orientation to the world, are all now in various states of flux and rupture. In contrast to the more prescribed collective identities of the past, today's search for social solidarity and sense of belonging tends increasingly to revolve around lifestyles, with their shared values, interests and commitments (Hetherington, 1998; Maffesoli, 1996). Environmentalism is an important recipient of this contemporary search for new forms of community.

In the high consumption societies at least, environmentalism tends to be a class-based politics. In line with previous studies (Berglund, 1998; Cotgrove and Duff, 1980; Eckersley, 1989; Jasper, 1997; Lichterman, 1996), Lancaster's environmental activists, almost without exception, belong to the educated fractions of what is often called 'the new middle class' (Butler and Savage, 1995). Yet, like other 'new social movements', environmentalism seems to be values-led, and to lack clear class interests. In other words, environmentalism is 'of a class' but not 'for a class' (Offe, 1985). Environmentalism is a critique of the untrammelled pursuit of economic growth, and challenges the hegemony of material affluence

and conspicuous consumption as routes to distinction. Environmental activists, in questioning the value of economic capital, seek to promote new versions of legitimate taste, prioritizing the earning of what might be called 'green capital'.

'Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make' (Bourdieu, 1984: 6). Bourdieu's analysis of lifestyles in 1960s France can be applied to the green lifestyles developed among environmental activists in Britain today. In particular, Bourdieu's descriptions of the lifestyles of 'the intellectuals', those high in cultural capital and low in economic capital, seem apposite. Environmental activists distinguish themselves by the 'austerity of elective restriction', the 'self-imposed constraint' of 'asceticism', which is one strategy through which the dominated fractions of the dominant class demonstrate their freedom from 'brutish necessity' on the one hand and profligate 'luxury' on the other, and assert the distinctive power of their cultural capital. This provides them with a means of seeing the world differently, and of playing according to a different set of rules to everyone else (Bourdieu, 1984: 254–5).

Lifestyle practices form around shared tastes. Taste is 'the product of the conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence [and so] unites all those who are the product of similar conditions while distinguishing them from all others' (Bourdieu, 1984: 56). Those with approximately equivalent levels of cultural and economic capital share a habitus, which is productive of values, tastes and practices cohering into a distinctive lifestyle (Bourdieu, 1984: 260). For me, one of the great achievements of Bourdieu's work, *Distinction*, is the way it so persuasively demonstrates that lifestyle, 'a systematic commitment which orients and organizes the most diverse practices' (1984: 55–6, 172–4), is inherently cultural. In other words, particular lifestyles depend for their organization on specific spaces, times, and—the focus here—materialities.

Environmental activists lead distinctive ways of life. Typically, activists practise vegetarianism, favour organic and locally-grown foods (often growing it themselves), and move around locally on foot or by bicycle; they also tend to live without either a car or television, and they strive to reduce their dependence on 'wage labour'. In some of the ethnographic descriptions which pepper *Distinction* Bourdieu could be talking about contemporary British environmental activists. Activists' 'leisure pursuits' are oriented to the 'culturally most legitimate and economically cheapest practices' (Bourdieu, 1984: 267), such as walking and cycling, and a taste for 'natural, wild nature' (Bourdieu, 1984: 220). Activists values, tastes and practices cohere into what might be called 'ascetic lifestyles' (Savage *et al.*, 1992: ch 6).

Identity performance and the assemblage of green lifestyle

Without strong ascribed identities, individuals must make choices about the kind of person they will become (Melucci, 1996a). With evermore 'options' for the investment of identity, people must learn to belong to a culture; the active

construction of lifestyle becomes a personal responsibility. Like the ethnographer approaching the culture as an object of study, would-be environmentalists enter, negotiate and develop competence within an initially strange cultural world. Over time, immersion within a shared world produces appropriate forms of performance and competence in culturally specific behaviours and understandings, what Melucci (1996b) calls 'cultural codes' and what Bourdieu (1984) terms 'a scheme of perception and appreciation'. Gradually the person learns to belong, to feel 'at home' (on the progressive internalization of the forces structuring any field of action, and the consequent development of the accomplished actor, or 'player', see Bourdieu, 1990, 1998).

The green cultural world, or habitus, is productive of green performances. These green performances are enacted according to a continuously made and remade set of green cultural codes, which regulate 'appropriate' behaviour. These codes, similar to norms, are the encapsulation of behaviours appropriate to the green cultural world. They are neither so rigid, mechanical and determining as rules, nor so free and voluntaristic as options.

Here, it might be helpful to distinguish between what I am calling 'green codes' on the one hand, and 'green scripts' on the other. **Scripts are more settled narratives to which activists must conform, whereas codes are specific behaviours which can be breached so long as they are made to fit a relevant script.** Put differently, green scripts are comprised of green codes which are widely and routinely recognized, if not always faithfully adhered to. Thus, for example, shopping in a supermarket is a breach of green cultural codes, but by placing this behaviour in context, and appealing to mitigating circumstances, such as 'lack of time', the 'need for economy', or 'the requirements of non-green others (children, guests)', supermarket shopping can still conform to a green script. Here, supermarket shopping is done 'guiltily', with the appropriate awareness that it is not 'good, green' practice. Similarly, 'moving to the country', in order to lead a 'greener' lifestyle involving greater self-sufficiency in food and more intimate, embodied contact with 'the natural world' is a green script to which many activists aspire; it is also one which, it is commonly recognized, almost inevitably leads to the breaking of the green code of carlessness. The breaking of green cultural codes depletes green capital, but the deviation from green scripts spoils green identity. Thus, provided performances conform to a settled green cultural script, they are able to negotiate and manipulate specific green cultural codes.

Operating ordinarily as implicit and embodied principles, green cultural codes are most noticeable when broken (see Butler, 1990; 1993). For example, arriving at a green meeting by car and dressed in business attire would constitute a 'misperformance' of appropriate green cultural codes. As a breach of the expected performance script of arrival on foot or by bicycle, in casual (even 'scruffy') dress, it would be highly conspicuous. The boundaries of the green cultural world are also transgressed and rendered visible through 'overperformances' of appropriate behaviour. For example, to scold someone for using a disposable tissue rather than a washable handkerchief constitutes, for the major-

ity of activists, an overperformance of green cultural codes. Such a rebuke treats a code as a rule, and stretches too far both the appropriate 'purity' of a green identity and the appropriate external monitoring of 'personal' practices.

Reiterative performance of distinctive cultural practices, emanating from a particular habitus, produces hexis, an embodied orientation to the world which is visible to the eye: a certain gait and bodily disposition above and beyond particular styles of dress, modes of mobility, and forms of speech. Here performance has become unconscious, behaviour learned to the point that it takes on an inevitability. That 'radical' and 'reformist' environmentalists ordinarily occupy different habitus, which converge only occasionally, becomes evident in the discomfort that each sometimes feels in the others' cultural spaces. At such times, ordinarily unconscious performance is rendered conscious, as the activist becomes aware of their inability to know 'how to proceed'. Self-consciousness and discomfort emerges with the awareness that one does not know the cultural codes, and thus does not know how to perform appropriately in the setting. This results in the feeling of clumsiness, the opposite of the hexis of Bourdieu's accomplished player, in command of the rules of the game.

Discomfort can emerge over something so seemingly trivial as 'milk'. Faced with a choice of 'milk', whether at a green meeting or when shopping, the activist confronts a choice of identity. There is no one 'right milk', and 'milk' correspondingly becomes a site around which identities are distinguished and performed. How should one buy one's milk? Should it be delivered to the door, lugged home from the supermarket, or fetched from the corner-shop? From where can organic milk be bought? Is the best milk container made of glass, plastic or reinforced cardboard? How can one best ensure one's milk is produced locally? Ought one to abstain from the consumption of animal milk entirely, and choose soya 'milk' instead? What if the only soya 'milk' available is non-organic, and potentially genetically modified? Given the impossibility of satisfying all these criteria simultaneously, which ones ought to be privileged when making milk-drinking decisions? Which elements of the diverse 'milk economy' should be supported, and why? Through their choice of 'milk' activists perform and are performed by their positioning within green networks.

Different kinds of relationship to milk are appropriate in different green networks. However trivial the dilemmas surrounding milk consumption might seem, minor differences in favoured milk-purchasing behaviour signal important differences in activist lifestyle; like many other mundane elements of daily life, milk preference performs the cultural affiliations of its drinker. Committed vegans might buy soya milk irrespective of its geographical origins (and even its genetic 'contamination'); devout localists might privilege geographical origin above all else; activists seeking to support organic production sometimes buy milk from supermarkets, where other activists would not tread. Many activists perform concern for all these positions, and either shift preferences across contexts, or remain ambivalent.

Here, it is precisely that elevation to a political status of mundane lifestyle practices among activists which increases their symbolic power and importance

as indicators of belonging to different habitus, as markers of inter-cultural and intra-cultural boundaries, and as performances of identity. The remainder of this chapter demonstrates the significance of materialities to the performance of green identity and the earning of green distinction more generally. What, in other words, is the role of material culture in the performance of activists' identities and their green distinction?

The role of materialities in the performance of identity

Recent years have witnessed increasing possibilities for performing green cultural codes, and therefore assembling a green lifestyle, whilst shopping. It is within the realm of 'routine provisioning' (Miller, 1998), and especially food shopping, that such greening processes are most advanced. The range of 'environmentally-friendly' food products available in the market-place has expanded enormously; indeed, more generally, a 'pre-fix' dominated food culture is on the rise. With evermore 'fairly-traded' and 'organic' goods to choose from, 'green shopping' has never been easier. Food is hugely important to the performance of green identity among environmental activists. Whether through its display on open kitchen shelving or through its sharing with other activists in green times and places, food is a significant ingredient of green distinction.

The undisputed site for 'green shopping' in Lancaster is the city's wholefood workers' co-op. As a co-operatively run, small-scale retailer, sensitive to issues of social and environmental justice, this shop fits with, and is constitutive of, green cultural codes. Places of consumption are part of the act of consumption. Not merely sites where shopping takes place, they are an integral part of the shopping experience (Shields, 1992; Uusitalo, 1998). The shop embodies the values, tastes and practices of the city's green networks; its interior is dominated by wood, and signs of the co-op's politics are evident in the contents of the magazine racks, and the posters, leaflets and notices adorning its walls. The strict ethical screening procedures enforced by the co-op ensure that purchases made there conform to green cultural codes. Shopping here, and only here, therefore eliminates the possibility of transgressing from a green lifestyle. This is a shop where impulse-buying can be conducted, safe in the knowledge that everything sold fits with (heterogeneous and contested, but nevertheless bounded) green cultural codes; food is organic and ethically-sourced, ethically suspect brands are absent and packaging is minimal. In this shop, then, people buy their way into green identities; their purchases form part of the assemblage of a distinctive green lifestyle.

Of course, activists do not always want to be restricted to 'the wholesome', and they sometimes shop elsewhere. Perhaps increasingly, given the proliferation of 'the exotic' (Bell and Valentine, 1997), activists must negotiate the constant possibility of slipping into 'ordinary shopping' practices. Although the absence of the car from everyday life puts some temptations out of reach, many of Lancaster's activists find the allure of supermarket shopping difficult to resist.

During the period of my research one activist made a 'new year's resolution' not to shop at supermarkets, which three years later he says he has kept to. Other activists, though, must live uncomfortably with the signs of their 'green infringements', their kitchen shelves revealing their seductions to fellow green cultural members. This exposes the precarious nature of a green identity, which needs constantly to be remade through appropriate performance in order to maintain its credibility to both self and others.

People literally eat their way into identity positions. Like food shopping, the eating of some foods and the refusal of others powerfully communicates lifestyle (Beardsworth and Keil, 1997; Gronow, 1997; Warde, 1997). Green cultural codes surrounding food are especially important, not only because green food choices are proliferating but also because green socialities often include food. Food and sociality come together particularly forcefully, to produce distinctively green performances of identity, in Lancaster's two key green 'meeting and eating' places, the vegetarian café and the green-inclined community centre. These places are where activists most often meet to perform and re-create their green selves, and provide sites for the earning of green capital.⁴ Because of the centrality of eating and drinking to green encounters in these places, food values are often made explicit and centred in conversations taking place there.

Green distinctions and identities are also routinely performed outside these 'sites of social centrality' (Hetherington, 1998), during less public food events. Here, green cultural codes are assembled into particular styles of cooking and dining. The form of a 'Jacob's Join', for example, in which each diner provides a dish to be shared amongst the others, is a ritual re-enactment of the collective, participatory and democratic principles favoured within green networks. Also at such occasions, raw ingredients, preferably home-grown and organic, are concocted into a vegetarian dish. In this way, the dietary boundaries, cooking styles and gustatory preferences which flow from the codes implicit in the green networks are produced, recognized and reinforced. Diners are bound together into a symbolic community with shared values at its heart.

The 'Jacob's Join' is the ordinary form of food event within Lancaster's green networks but on one social occasion, a 'harvest supper' which brought together local activists from different environmental groups, the green cultural codes surrounding food were rendered particularly explicit. Everyone contributed a dish towards the communal meal, and had been told by the organizer beforehand that at least one ingredient of their offering should be home-grown. Before the meal began, each person briefly introduced, and recounted the history of, their contribution. The comfort of diners whose dishes conformed closely to the relevant green codes was matched by the awkwardness and apologising of diners who had less successfully incorporated home-grown or local organic food into their contributions.

The distinctive materialities of environmental activists extend beyond the realm of food, and two objects play particularly important roles in producing activists' green lifestyles. Especially within high consumption societies, but increasingly globally, the spectacular rise of car and television ownership since

the end of the second world war has had a revolutionary impact on people's daily lives. Indeed, possession and use of the TV and car has become constitutive of a meaningful sense of civic participation, of what it means to be a modern subject (Urry, 2000). But it is the very absence of the car and TV from activists' everyday lives which facilitates their performance of appropriate green identities, and their assemblage of distinctively green lifestyles. The maintenance of a spatially close world of interaction is hugely enabled by the absence of the car and TV. The absence of TV from the everyday lives of environmental activists ensures the release of leisure time for the multiple socialities characteristic of close-knit green networks. The absence of the car is similarly massively consequential, and it is the car's absence on which I want now to focus.⁵

The car is important as a conspicuous object of non-consumption among environmental activists. Its absence demonstrates belonging to the elective green lifestyle community. Nearly all of Lancaster's activists live without a car; as one prominent activist in the local Green Party bluntly put it, 'I've never owned a car and I never will' (fieldnotes, May 2000). These activists move around by bike, on foot and—for longer journeys—by train and, less frequently, bus. Under exceptional circumstances some might take a taxi, but in the normal course of everyday life, at the local level, core activists rely almost exclusively on cycling and walking.

Among environmental activists in green places, talk often turns to the politics of transport, and the car is a common target of anger. Sometimes this distaste is general, with activists expressing hostility to the social and environmental effects of 'car culture'. At other times talk is much more personal, based on activists' direct and negative experiences as pedestrians and cyclists. Such talk continuously constructs car driving as a polluting practice, and thus maintains the status of the car as a pollutant of green lifestyles. It produces car ownership and use as one of the most powerful markers of the boundary between 'green' and 'ungreen'. It is the absence of car ownership among activists which makes this talk possible.

Absence of the car produces effects across the entirety of everyday life, and leads to distinctive socialities, spatialities and temporalities. Carlessness promotes spatially constrained socialities, ensuring that a handful of green meeting places are frequented by almost all activists. The performance of walking and cycling, the mobility practices considered typical of, and so constitutive of, activists' green lifestyles, is promoted by carlessness. The spatialities imposed by these 'green mobilities' promotes the face-to-face interactions of 'chance encounters', which keep activists in 'the thick of things'. Carless activists tend to produce, through their everyday geographies, a spatially tight sense of 'the local'. This 'local' encompasses residential locations relatively close to city centre amenities (including the hubs of public transport, and especially the train station); and it includes the close-to-home 'natural world'. Put briefly, in keeping life local the car's absence promotes the continued performance of green cultural codes.

An activists' credibility is jeopardized, and their level of green capital eroded, by car ownership. Failing to conform to one of the strongest green cultural

codes, and with green identity consequently threatened, activists need to justify their car use. One participant in a focus group of Green Party activists said:

‘I really worry that people think I’m a hypocrite for having a car, but I always consider whether I need to travel and if I do, the best way to do it. And so I can justify myself having a car . . . And in your own life you can do trade-offs . . . say you use your car, it’s more convenient to use your car but you could have used the train, so as a trade-off, instead of changing your bed whenever you change it, just say for argument’s sake once a week, then you change it once a fortnight, so that you save on your washing, your energy use. So you can do trade-offs in your own life, to try and make yourself feel less guilty’.

Here, although the green cultural code of carlessness is broken, an acceptably green cultural script is followed—the person appeals to responsible use, and a willingness to ‘trade-off’ their car use against enlightened ecological practice in other spheres of everyday life. Other activists recognize their increasing seduction by the car, and are aware of the potential consequences. During a focus group comprised of ‘radical activists’, for example, one person said:

‘I used to be really adamantly against car use, but occasionally now for work I need a car and I’ve got access to a car, which I never used to have, so I find myself occasionally using it when I don’t really have to, I could cycle to Morecambe in the rain if I really wanted to, but sometimes I take the car . . . so I do feel like I’m becoming less radical, or less consistent’.

Given the symbolic significance of abstinence from the car to activists’ own understandings of a green lifestyle, and given the vital role of such absence in performing activists’ everyday geographies, increasing car use is interpreted, by both self and others, as signalling lapsed cultural membership. Activists who are in the process of leaving central locations within green networks tend to search out compromise positions, between their previously complete renunciation of the car and their drift towards absolutely non-green car ownership. As the structuring force of the cultural codes operative within green networks diminishes, people become more inclined to borrow or hire cars, to organize car-sharing arrangements, or to buy a (small, second-hand, fuel-efficient) car and then—perhaps in a final salve to their green conscience—convert it to run on liquified petroleum gas. The green cultural codes are successively broken, and the green cultural script of attention to ‘sustainable mobility’ stretched to its limit. If this limit is finally breached, the ‘unapologetically ungreen’ motorist, underperforming a symbolically central green cultural code, departs the green world; their performances are no longer structured by the activists’ habitus, and from a green scheme of perception and appreciation, they become inept.

Although environmental activists shun the car, an important distinction emerges around their favourite vehicles. For some, the bicycle is the vehicle of choice, whilst for others it is the van. The bicycle is homologous with an orientation to, and concern for, ‘the local’, and also with the desire to get out into, but ultimately move through, ‘the natural world’. As a relatively simple, cheap

and non-polluting technology, it is deeply symbolic of the search for sustainability. Locally, activists use their bicycles to sustain spatially close-knit networks; extra-locally their bicycles are an important resource in the performance of active, distinctive leisure identities. In conjunction with the train and ferry (and sometimes the plane), the bicycle enables the performance of 'green holidays'. The van is homologous with a more nomadic way of life; it is simultaneously visibly distinctive and provides a degree of privacy and security; and it is a vehicle which permits the combination and blurring of mobility and dwelling; here the quest is less for environmental sustainability, more the living out of an alternative and at times politically antagonistic and controversial way of life (see Hetherington, 2000).

Conclusions

Environmental activists distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make between themselves and non-activists. Activists also make distinctions between their own lifestyles and the lifestyles of other activists. These distinctions are performed. And these performances produce and reproduce the boundaries of, and within, the green cultural world. In this chapter I have specifically tried to show that distinctive green cultural codes, and the environmental identities they produce and reproduce, are performed materially. Through their distinctive materialities, environmental activists continuously perform their adherence to, and are enabled to maintain participation in, the green cultural world. Materialities are crucially involved in shaping the everyday lives of environmental activists. More generally, particular objects and the material assemblages of which they form part are crucial to the performance of identity.

Performances of green identity do not, of course, remain static over time. At a general level, new forms of distinction emerge. New kinds of food become available in organic and fairly-traded varieties; sometimes such food is found more cheaply in places which generate dilemmas of identity, such as supermarkets. The production of fresh controversies politicizes new realms of everyday life, so that, for example, a growing awareness of the potentially harmful effects of carpets on health prompts the decision to expel them from the house. At the individual level, the everyday lives of activists are not static, and their commitments and convictions tend inevitably to shift over time. Initial hostility to the computer, internet and email gradually gives way to a recognition of their usefulness to a political life, and a process of incorporation into a green lifestyle. Changes in personal circumstance which tend often to mark movement across the lifecourse, such as the demands of parenthood and career, can 'squeeze out' commitments to environmental activism, if not to a green lifestyle. Although many activists maintain lifestyles which juggle activism with other commitments, activists' environmental identities can also fade, or become 'professionalized'.

Do the distinctive lifestyles developed among environmental activists have broader relevance to the search for sustainability? Activists' green lifestyles tend

to be highly participatory and locally-based, and to involve a different, and I think more environmentally sensitive, orientation to the material world. These lifestyles are enabled by the absence of key material objects, such as the TV and car, together with the presence of other material goods, such as the bicycle and computer. They are also enabled by places such as vegetarian cafes, wholefood co-operatives and community centres where activists can act out their green identities. And these lifestyles are enabled by occasions, whether a monthly green group meeting, an annual green festival, a collective meal, or a sporadic 'day of action', when performing a green identity becomes particularly appropriate.

So what precisely can the lives of environmental activists tell us about routes to the greening of behaviour more generally? I think one implication of this research is particularly important for debates around the making of a 'sustainable culture'. Until now, policies aiming to promote sustainability have tended to rely on the provision of information and education, with the goal of producing 'green citizens'. But this research suggests that it is perhaps the materialities, as well as the spatialities and temporalities, upon which the lifestyle performances of environmental activists depend which ought to be extended in the search for sustainability.

Correspondingly, we need to devise what might be called a 'new, green architecture'. This architecture would be assembled from multiple materialities, times and spaces which call forth green practices. It would be an architecture productive of the performance of green cultural codes and broader green cultural scripts. Although each component of such a green architecture might by itself seem rather insignificant, as a whole such an architecture could enable the assemblage of a specifically green identity, which could be carried with the person and which would result in the production of a coherent green lifestyle. Rather than aiming to produce 'sustainable citizens', therefore, it is perhaps the making of 'sustainable performances' which should take centre-stage.

Identities cannot be 'grounded' but the conditions for their performance can be instituted. A green identity is not an essence, and owes its appearance of solidity to the regular, routine performance of green cultural practice. The most centrally involved environmental activists are continuously constituted and reconstituted as green subjects; they reiteratively perform green identity and internalize the resources necessary for the assemblage of green lifestyles. So I am arguing that we ought to think more about the provision of materials, times and spaces which might afford the performance of a green identity. And I am also arguing that we need a new green architecture. The wider adoption of green lifestyles depends on the extension of the green architecture on which the green performances of environmental activists currently depend.

Notes

- 1 Many thanks to Wallace Heim, Sue Holden and Bronislaw Szerszynski for their invaluable help with this chapter.

- 2 I take the concept of 'habitus' from the work of Pierre Bourdieu, who uses it to explain class reproduction in his epic ethnography of twentieth century French society (see Bourdieu, 1984: 101, 172–3). By speaking of 'the habitus of environmental activists' I mean the cultural space within which activists' green codes are produced and developed, where those codes become habitual and embodied, and where activists' green scripts are established and sedimented. This habitus is where specifically green kinds of performance become taken-for-granted, and out of which distinctively green lifestyles emerge.
- 3 How typical is the strength of 'the environmental movement' in Lancaster? Within Britain, Lancaster's relatively small size, combined with its geographical location and the presence of a large population of students and, more especially, ex-students, has undoubtedly contributed to its relative 'greening'. But environmentalism is thriving in many other places, from big cities (such as Manchester) to smaller cities (such as Oxford and Brighton) to small towns (such as Totnes, Devon). Presumably, throughout high consumption societies a generally dispersed environmentalism tends to establish strongholds in particular places, which become known as green centres of 'alternative living'.
- 4 Another important type of site for the performance of green identity is represented by places for the performance of highly valued green practices, such as tending the allotment and garden, and moving through 'the great outdoors'; here activists engage in what John Urry terms 'face-to-place' interactions, and variously dig, pedal, climb and walk their way into green identities (Urry, 2002).
- 5 In Britain, the car and the infrastructures co-constituted with the car have been the focus of much recent environmental protest. Protest events such as Reclaim the Streets and Critical Mass have sought to bring the system of automobility temporarily to a halt (Carlsson, 2002; Jordan, 1998); a whole series of longer-term, site-based road protests has attempted to obstruct state road building programmes (Merrick, 1996; Wall, 1999; Welsh and McLeish, 1996); and direct action against major transnational corporations, such as Shell and Esso, aims to challenge practices of the oil industry perceived as ecologically devastating and socially immoral. This recent phase of environmental politics has elevated the car's status, in Britain at least, to the most highly contested object of contemporary material culture.

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