Andrew Szasz, *Shopping Our Way to Safety: How we Changed from Protecting the Environment to Protecting Ourselves* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

In his characterization of modern "risk society," Ulrich Beck declared that "it is not something external but itself that society encounters in the hazards that convulse it; and the reigning paralysis can only be overcome in so far as society apprehends the hazards as signposts to its own history, and to its corrigibility." (Beck 1992: 159) Beck's admonishment is echoed, if dimly, in sociologist Andrew Szasz's *Shopping Our Way to Safety*, which explores the characteristic response of contemporary Americans to environmental hazards: consumption. Szasz's dark vision of the futile, self-defeating paradox at the heart of green consumerism is compelling, even if his analysis of the sociological factors behind it lack conceptual heft.

In a sense, this book examines the opposite phenomenon of Szasz's earlier, well-received *Ecopopulism*, which traced the emergence of a new and vital social movement known as environmental justice out of the anti-toxics campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s. In *Shopping Our Way to Safety*, Szasz documents a kind of "anti-social" movement of many middle-class and wealthy Americans who, in seeking to purchase protection from environmental hazards, have tried to construct an "inverted quarantine" in which to insulate themselves (4-8). Szasz contends that the desire to counteract the threats of polluted air, water and food through individual consumption practices creates a series of unintended negative environmental and social consequences, including a retreat from collective action. Rather grimly, Szasz concludes that the "political anesthesia" induced by the false security of the inverted quarantine will ultimately result in the increasingly socially unequal exposure to environmental hazards over the short term, and ever-worsening environmental conditions in the longer term.

The presentation of the argument is somewhat curious. Szasz launches his description of the environmental "inverted quarantine" by suggesting its analog in two historical cases: the fallout shelter panic of 1961 and the longer-term process of suburbanization. These examples, he contends, illustrate the (peculiarly?) American propensity to seek protection from risk not in collective action, but in individualized consumption and lifestyle choices. Only about 100 pages into the book does the discussion turn to the current trend of "assembling a personal commodity bubble for one's body" (99). Szasz then offers an awkwardly organized analysis of consumption patterns around drinking, eating and breathing aimed at minimizing exposures to environmental risks. This section reads a bit like an extended special issue of *Consumer Reports*, as it scrutinizes the safety and quality claims of "inverted quarantine" products from bottled water to organic food to all-natural mattresses.

The book's main contention, contained in the final two chapters, is that the practice of purchasing inverted quarantine products (whatever their merits as

commodities) undercuts political support for reform. Szasz points to polling data showing high public concern for environmental quality, yet the relatively low salience of environmental issues on the political stage. If people believe that buying bottled water or eating organic foods (if they can afford it) will protect them from harmful contaminants, they will be less likely to support the social and economic costs of seemingly uncertain collective action to reduce contaminants in the environment (which would benefit all). Thus, the resort to personal consumption as a strategy for protecting oneself from environmental hazards, he suggests, has dire consequences for the future of collective action on important problems such as climate change. This argument seems solid enough, on its face, but as Szasz himself recognizes, it probably only partly accounts for the disconnect between (North) Americans' expressed values and concerns about the environment and the weak public policy in this realm. We might also test Szasz's argument with reference to other inverted quarantine issues. For instance, have the rising perceived and experienced threats to personal safety and security, and the increasing commodification of security (from home alarms to guns to private security services), led to any diminishment of the salience of this issue on the political stage?

Although the concept of the "inverted quarantine" is an interesting one, the analytical reach of this work is limited. Szasz engages little with the literature on commodification and the "social life of things"; he seemingly takes for granted the 'meaning' of these goods for their purveyors and consumers alike. An engagement with theories of commodity fetishism would help deepen our understanding of how these consumer products become 'naturalized' representations of safety, security and environmental quality, while simultaneously obscuring their counterintuitive material origins and impacts.

Similarly, Szasz's discussion of environmental hazard perception would benefit from a more thorough consideration of 'risk'. Beck, for instance, talks about 'modern' risks (such as toxic chemicals) as technologically produced, often invisible and distributed across populations and space (as opposed to 'point sources'), and apprehended statistically through epidemiology, yet paradoxically as phenomena perceived and experienced by our individual minds and bodies. Such risks defy traditional technical controls and institutional responses. This new perception and understanding of environmental hazards is very different from the toxic waste dumps opposed by environmental justice activists, or even the nuclear radiation fears that spurred the fallout shelter panic of 1961 documented early in the book. Szasz does not effectively address the question of the scales at which these types of risks are characterized and understood – the 'body burden' of toxics accumulating in modern bodies, for instance, or the global dispersion and atmospheric deposition of contaminants – and the relationship between these types of risk and the inverted quarantine response.

Still, *Shopping Our Way to Safety* will interest readers interested in the political ramifications of green consumption. At its best, Szasz's account of the limits

of the "inverted quarantine" response to the environmental crisis holds the mirror up to the face of consumer society so that it may, as Beck suggests, encounter in its own image "the hazards that confront it." Whether Szasz's intervention aids society in overcoming the 'reigning paralysis' (or as he refers to it in chapter seven, "political anesthesia") remains unclear.

Arn Keeling
Memorial University of Newfoundland

William F. Ruddiman, *Plows, Plagues & Petroleum: How Humans Took Control of Climate* (Princeton,NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Climate is unstable: for the past 900,000 years, based on varying orbital parameters, the earth has fluctuated between glacial and inter-glacial cycles. These truths have served as the foundation of much current debate over the human role in global climate change. If the climate fluctuates on its own can we really attribute recent global warming to human activities? The growing consensus within the scientific community—and, it seems, in public and political circles as well—is that human-induced emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere since the Industrial Revolution have indeed contributed to the warming of the planet, which has resulted in the dramatic collapse of major Antarctic ice shelves, more potent storms, and rising water levels. The proliferation of greenhouse gases, the argument goes, is the product of the increasing human dependence upon fossil fuels—and predominantly coal and oil—which began in earnest in the western world in the eighteenth century. The modern production and consumption of energy has yielded the climate crisis. But here's a riddle: if the earth's climate is supposed to be unstable, then why has the Holocene's climate remained strikingly stable for the last 10,000 years?

This is the puzzle that William F. Ruddiman confronts in *Plows, Plagues, and Petroleum: How Humans Took Control of Climate*. Ruddiman, an earth scientist and Professor Emeritus at the University of Virginia, argues that the last 10,000 years marks a break from the standard pattern. While this argument might seem to let humans off the hook for climate change, Ruddiman points to the rise of agriculture as the point at which more greenhouse gases entered the atmosphere and temperatures began to steady themselves. Drawing on his earlier work on the 'early anthropogenic hypothesis,' Ruddiman links global warming trends and climate stability to a much earlier period of human environmental activity. As early humans transformed from hunter-gatherers to agricultural societies, sedentary living and farming practices yielded a larger population and required the clearing of more lands. Deforestation precipitated increases in carbon dioxide accumulation and the rise of animal husbandry, combined with the creation of artificial wetlands to grow rice, produced greater quantities of methane. Ruddiman carefully tracks