

## A (MILD) DEFENSE OF

# LUXURY

*It is only shallow people who do not judge the world by appearances. The mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.*

OSCAR WILDE, *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY*

Human beings like things. We buy things. We exchange things. We steal things. We donate things. We live through things. We call these things “goods,” as in “goods and services.” We do not call them “bads.” The still-going-strong Industrial Revolution produces more and more things not because production is what machines do, and not because of nasty capitalists, but because under it all we are powerfully attracted to the world of stuff. In Armani, on Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills, customers pat the clothes, fondle the fabrics, touch the buttons. The Gap has its merchandise piled high on tables, expressly so that people can feel like guests at a feast. Department store windows, whether on the city street or inside a mall, did not appear magically. We enjoy looking through them to another world. Our love of things is

ARNANI  
EST. 1954

BY

the cause of the Industrial Revolution, not the consequence.

If you want to understand material culture at the beginning of the twenty-first century, you must understand the overwhelming importance of unnecessary material. If you are looking for the one unambiguous result of modern capitalism, of the Industrial Revolution, and of marketing, here it is. In the way we live now, you are not what you make, you are what you consume. And, outside of that which is found on a few aisles in the grocery and hardware stores, most of what you consume is totally unnecessary, yet remarkably well-made.

The most interesting of those superfluous objects belong in a socially constructed and ever-shifting class called luxury. Consuming those objects, objects as rich in meaning as they are low in utility, causes lots of happiness and distress. As well it should. For one can make the argument that until all necessities are had by all, no one should have luxury.

And since the 1980s, the bulk consumers of luxury have not been the wealthy but the middle class, your next-door neighbors and their kids. Luxury spending in the United States has been

growing more than four times as fast as overall spending, and the rest of the West is not far behind. One of the most startling aspects of seeing the refugees streaming from Kosovo was the number of adolescents dressed in Adidas, Nike, and Tommy Hilfiger clothing.

As rapidly as we are moving up to luxury, so luxury is moving down into hitherto common grounds. Just try having a normal cup of coffee. It's bad enough that Starbucks has colonized almost every street corner; just go into the 7-Eleven, the retail leader in fresh-brewed coffee-to-go. Now inching over from lattéland is French Roast, whole-bean gourmet coffee, served in a special vacuum container with a hand pump. It's only a matter of time before the QuikStop starts selling croissants and microbrewed beer.

Almost every set of consumables now has a dessert at the top. This is true not just for expensive products but also for everyday objects. Name the category, no matter how mundane, and you'll find a premium, or better yet, a super-premium brand. In bottled water, there is Evian, advertised as if it were champagne. Cape Cod Potato Chips have risen from the ranks of junk food to the status of gourmet treat, as have Dove Bars. Martha Stewart has a line of Silver Label goods at Kmart, including matelasse coverlets and shams — really, just bed covers — available in silk, linen, crushed velvet, Egyptian cotton sateens, and cashmere. In sneakers, it's Nike, and, well, you know the rest.

You could say that this is not real luxury, but an ersatz variety, and maybe you would be correct. My father would have argued that real luxury is characterized not by shine but by patina; its allure comes from inborn aesthetics, not from glitzy advertising; it is passed from generation to generation and cannot be bought at the mall; and its consumption is private, not conspicuous. His words for modern mass luxury would have included "gauche," "vulgar," "tasteless," and "offensive."

It may be true that the rich have the only two genuine luxury items left: time and high-end philanthropy. But the rest of us are having a go at their stuff, albeit a knockoff to be held only a short time. I can't own a limo, but I can rent one. If I can't fly on the Concorde, I can upgrade to first class with the miles I



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"earn" using my American Express card. I can lease a Lexus.

And high-end consumption promises to do exactly what critics of the stuff have always yearned for, namely, to bring us together. Others may pass judgment on this phenomenon, many may be horrified by the waste and redundancy, but it is why so many of us all over the world are becoming part of what, for lack of a better phrase, is a mass class of upscale consumption. We understand each other not by sharing religion, politics, or ideas. We share branded things and speak the Esperanto of advertising, *luxe populi*.

#### **A TASTE FOR OPULENCE**

If you want to appreciate the function of luxury in modern dream life, observe its function in Hollywood, the dream factory, in the 1990 hit movie *Pretty Woman*, starring Richard Gere and Julia Roberts. This self-conscious Hollywood confection of materialism plays out the high cult Pygmalion myth through the redemptive powers not of art but of consumption. Julia Roberts is made over — from prostitute to patrician — not by reshaping her interior form (the classical myth), or by tweaking the exterior form (*My Fair Lady*), but by buying and displaying branded stuff.

Generations ago, the market for luxury goods consisted of a few people who lived in majestic houses with a complement of servants. They ordered their trunks from Louis Vuitton, their



trousseaus from Christian Dior, their Dom Perignon by the case. Their taste, like their politics, was determined largely by considerations of safeguarding wealth and perpetuating the social conventions that affirmed their sense of superiority. They stayed put. We watched them from afar. We stayed put. They had money to burn; we had to buy coal.

The application of steam, and then electricity, to the engines of production brought a new market of status, an industrial market, one made up of people who essentially bought their way into a bloodline. These were the people who so disturbed Vebler, and from them this new generation of consumer has descended. First, the industrial rich, then the inherited rich, and now the incidentally rich, the accidentally rich, the Dow-10,000 rich. Although they can't afford an apartment on Park Avenue, they have enough disposable income to buy a Vuitton handbag (if not a trunk), a bottle of Dior perfume (if not a flacon).

In traditional societies, affiliation with groups like family, church, job, and ancestry is crucial, but in modern societies like our own, everyone is cut loose. You are

what you can get, and you get what you can get by shopping for it. Shopping is a central self-creative act. As Marcel Duchamp, sly observer of the changing scene, said, "Living is more a question of what one spends than what one makes." And, as in *Pretty Woman*, luxury brands perforce become one of the shoehorns that slide you up into designated spots.

Basil Englis and Michael Solomon, professors of marketing in the School of Business at Rutgers University, wanted to show how tightly college students cluster around this kind of brand knowledge. They drew samples from undergraduate business majors and presented them with 40 cards, each containing a description of different clusters of consumers.

The professors sifted the clusters to make four groups — lifestyles, if you will — representative of undergraduate society: Young Suburbia, Money & Brains, Small Town Downtown, and Middle America. They gathered images of objects from four product categories: automobiles, magazines and newspapers, toiletries, and alcoholic beverages. The students were asked to put the various images together into coherent groups and were also asked to state their current proximity to, or desire to be part of, each group in the future. As might be expected, Money & Brains was the most popular aspirational niche. But less expected was how specific and knowledgeable the students were about the possessions they did not have but knew that members of the cluster needed — and what they

needed to shy away from. Becks not Budweiser; *GQ* not *Sports Illustrated*.

The insight into how commercial stuff fits together was first noted by a late-seventeenth-century essayist, Denis Diderot. In his "Regrets On Parting With My Old Dressing Gown," the French philosopher looks up from his desk and notices his study has been transformed by mysterious forces. It was once crowded, humble, chaotic, and happy. Now it is elegant, organized, and a little grim. What happened? Diderot suspects the cause of the transformation is right before his eyes. It is his new dressing gown. A week after he began to wear the gown, it occurred to him that his shabby desk was not quite up to standard. So he got a shiny new one. Then the tapestry on the wall seemed



*In modern societies, shopping is a central self-creative act. You are what you consume and you get what you consume by shopping for it.*

a little threadbare and new curtains had to be found. Gradually, the entire contents of the study were replaced. Not because he wanted a new study but because he needed a sense of coherence, a sense that nothing was out of place.

In modern marketing terminology, this is called creating a "consumption constellation." No matter what it's called, the pleasure and the pain remain the same. Achieving that sense of completeness is, in that linguistic barbarism, to create a "lifestyle," an emblematic display of coherent brands. Handbags, scarves, sunglasses, T-shirts, shoes, watches, and luggage are all items that can carry the freight of the label in such a way that it can be unloaded by viewers. Designer shops and brands facilitate the process. They help you buy a link into a chain of associations, a chain that also holds other people.

Consumers are often fully aware that they are more interested in consuming aura than objects, sizzle than steak, meaning than material. In fact, if you ask them, they are quite candid in explaining that the Nike swoosh, the Polo pony, the DKNY logo are what they are after. They are not duped. They actively seek and enjoy the status that surrounds the object, especially when they are young.

#### **COMMUNICABLE CONSUMPTION**

The desire for particular objects is not only part of creating a lifestyle, it is contagious, like the flu. That explains sellout



Christmas toys, like Pokemon or Cabbage Patch, why some movies cost more to market than to make, why some restaurants have long lines, and why mutual fund managers all piled into the same dot-com stocks.

In the 1980s, scientists did a series of experiments with ants. Two food sources were placed equidistant from, and on opposite sides of, a nest. The piles were kept equal in size, no matter how much the ants took from each. There was no reason for the ants to prefer one restaurant, so to speak, to the other. Economists would predict that the ants would split the piles evenly, waiting in equidistant lines. Instead, because ants can signal each other as to where food lies, the distribution fluctuated wildly, swinging all the way from an 80:20 ratio to 20:80.

The conclusion: Individuals are social animals who interact with and are influenced by the flock, the tribe, the in-crowd. As they say in advertising, you drink the advertising, not the beer; smoke the commercial, not the cigarette. So, too, in consuming the new luxury, you buy the trend, not the object.

And how do you know the trend? You check what the other ants are doing.

Such shared knowledge is the basis of culture. This insight was, after all, the rationale behind a liberal arts education. John Henry Newman and Matthew Arnold argued for state-supported education in the nineteenth century precisely because cultural literacy meant social cohesion. Not because it was important to know algebraic functions, or Latin etymologies, or what constitutes a sonnet to solve important social problems, but because it is the basis of how to speak to each other, how we develop a bond of shared history and commonality, our cultural capital. In our postmodern world, we have, it seems, exchanged knowledge of history and science for knowledge of products and how such products interlock to form coherent social patterns.

Even academic economists are not immune. Professor Robert Frank tells a story in his book, *Luxury Fever: Why Money Fails to Satisfy in an Era of Excess*. It seems a relative of his bought a red Porsche in France. When the relative returned to California, he found that the German car couldn't be retrofitted to meet the state's rigorous pollution regulations. He offered it to the professor at a fraction of its market value. Writes Frank, "I was sorely tempted. Yet, my small upstate college town has a strong, if usually unstated, social norm against conspicuous consumption. People here are far more likely to drive Volvos

than Jaguars; and although ours is a cold climate, we almost never see anyone wearing a fur coat. At that time, a red Porsche convertible really would have been seen as an in-your-face car in a community like ours. Although I have never thought of myself as someone unusually sensitive to social pressure, I realized that unless I could put a sign on the car that explained how I happened to acquire it, I would never really feel comfortable driving it."

Professor Frank knows exactly what goods to buy and exactly what goods not to buy. He doesn't want to "keep up with the Joneses" or "ditch the Joneses." He wants to fit in with the Joneses. This is a social decision, not a moral, or even an economic one. He has decided *not* to define himself in terms of a



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red Porsche convertible. He wants what his consumption community wants.

It is now also clear why poverty is so debilitating. Not only do the poor miss out on creature comforts, but they also miss out on community meanings. If goods are what carry meaning in this world, then the poor are doubly disenfranchised: They don't have stuff, and they don't have the meanings or affiliations that stuff carries.

#### **HOW LUXURY BECOMES NECESSITY: THE WORK OF ADVERTISING**

Recently, I was invited to New York City to consult with an advertising agency. The company was assembling a video presentation on how well they understood selling luxury products. The agency was trying to convince its client, Volvo, that the agency could reposition an upscale version of the sensible Swedish car as a luxury product. Ford had recently bought Volvo and was trying to brand it as a luxury automobile, to move it from entrée to dessert.

My job, for which I was paid the equivalent of teaching many, many hours of Wordsworth, was to help them think about how to do it. Not how to compose the ad, but how to convince Ford/Volvo that language and image could make Volvo sumptuous. What I found interesting was that the agency people never seemed to question their ability to transform this pumper-

## LET'S GO SHOPPING

nickel of a car into a brioche, to make it a luxury object, an object of yearning, a badge of arrival.

Once production is tied to machines, advertising is not only possible — it's necessary. If your machine is just like mine, then what they produce will be essentially identical, interchangeable items. To separate them, I have to say that my soap, cigarette, or shoe is different from yours. I have to tell a story. As a producer, I make a claim of distinction, although common sense should tell the consumer it will be feckless. Whatever else advertising "does," one thing is certain: It adds meaning to objects, by branding things, by telling a story. Advertising is how we talk about these things, how we imagine them, how we know their value.

This is especially true with top-end products. The higher I go, the more irrational my claim will become. What really separates a Calvin Klein swath of denim from Donna Karan from Levi Straus is the brand. The object as object almost evaporates; the luxury brand remains. I am no longer selling the product, I am selling the concocted distinction, the story. In fact, what we crave may not be objects, but their meaning.

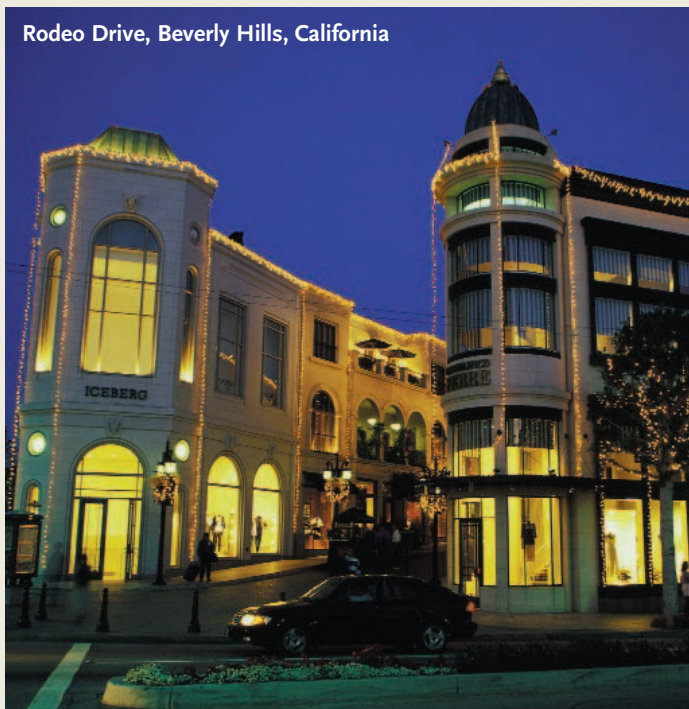
Advertising works not by outright manipulation, but by finding out how people already live; not by forcing consumers to accept material things against their "better judgment," but by getting in the path of that judgment; not by making new myth, but by making the product part of an existing one. The wise advertiser attempts to find out what it is that we are after first, and then fashions a campaign in which to position his product. Only a fool, soon to be bankrupt, attempts to change our patterns of desire. Advertising does not invent desire, nor does it satisfy desire; it expresses desire with the hope of exploiting it. Over and over and over.

Let me illustrate the process with an almost totally ridiculous product: bottled and branded water. If we were rational, this product would not be taking over millions of feet of shelf space. In fact, in taste tests Manhattan water comes out in the top quartile for "good tasting water." Pepsi and Coke both have lines of bottled water, Aquafina and Dasani. All they do is take their water from municipal systems and add mineral additives at the local bottler. That's all they do — other than advertise. Pepsi, which got into the business first, tested Aquafina in Wichita, Kansas, and was amazed to find that customers were not at all upset that the water was local tap water, cleaned up in a bottling plant. Who cares about the source? Drinkers liked the name, the label, the bottle, and the advertising.

In 1999, my daughter Liz, accompanied me on a research expedition to Rodeo Drive — where Julia Roberts did her shopping in *Pretty Woman*. Liz had some telling observations on the episode:

"The most interesting part of the experience was the incredibly seductive nature of the objects themselves. . . . Watching the woman in Armani try on the \$20,000 beaded dress, I was momentarily entranced — and more than slightly jealous. The stuff was just so BEAUTIFUL; and when I looked down at my Old Navy sweater, I couldn't help but feel a bit wanting. . . . In the end, I wanted to leave Rodeo Drive for the same reason I often avoid fashion magazines, not because I don't care about such trivial stuff, but because I DO care. And when I look at these beautiful things, I'm left with an aching feeling of desire, and a slight dissatisfaction with my current life. Luxury is incredibly powerful, and it gets to almost all of us, even when we're told it's meaningless. Luxury 1, Liz 0."

Rodeo Drive, Beverly Hills, California



So if you want to separate your water, you do it not by taste, but by language and imagery. If you want to charge a premium for your product, and if your product is simply H<sub>2</sub>O, then you have to make it into a luxury via language codes. You have to say it has value by *showing* it does. That is why we have a bartender pouring Evian as if it were the makings of a martini; a woman bathing in Evian as if it were a part of pampering the self (and not, one hopes, associating it with leftover bath water — perhaps that is why the bottles are still half-full). In each example, the association is made with luxury in hopes that the brand will be separated from the pack and moved up into the Land of Big Profit.



Now the tricky part is that consumers not only have to be willing to accept this association, but also to display their acceptance by buying the product. Holding Evian in your hand is like waving a wand. You are too special for tap water. This is the desire that marketing can exploit — but not create — by advertising. And if the campaign is successful, your willingness to parade your purchase makes you part of the process, part of the contagion that can push a product upmarket.

Or the reverse. Some years ago, the makers of Paco Rabanne cologne hired adman David Ogilvy, the man behind such brands as Rolls Royce (“at 60 miles an hour the loudest noise is the clock”). Ogilvy devised a brilliant pre-Yuppie campaign in which a young man is alone in the bed on the phone with his just-departed lady love. The copy read, “What is remembered is up to you.” The ad was so powerful that in weeks the cologne was being used by used car salesmen. Just like that, the brand was ruined. The ad and the product went to the wrong audience.

#### **WHAT'S HAPPINESS GOT TO DO WITH IT?**

Now, mind you, this has *nothing* to do with happiness. As Freud famously said of consuming psychotherapy, high-end consumption will not make you happier, only less anxious. Numerous studies show that as society grows richer over time, the average level of happiness — as measured by the percentage of people who rate themselves “happy” or “very happy” in national surveys — doesn’t budge. In fact, sometimes it falls.

Economists have known this for a while. In a 1973 article titled, “Is Growth Obsolete?” Yale economists William Nordhaus and James Tobin pointed out that increasing GDP doesn’t account for such important factors as leisure, household labor, pollution, and traffic jams. In many categories, quality of life may even decline as high-end consumption increases.

On the heels of this study, Richard Easterlin, an economic historian at the University of Southern California, looked at a number of surveys over the years and found no clear trend in Americans’ reported “happiness.” Average happiness rose from the 1940s to the late 1950s, then gradually sank again up to the early 1970s, even as personal income grew sharply. Returning to the subject a few years ago, Easterlin cited an annual U.S. survey that showed no upward trend in the percentage of Americans saying they were “very happy” from 1972 to 1991 — even though per capita income, adjusted for inflation and taxes, rose by one-third.

Even when you move away from material consumption as an index, contradictions remain. Indicators from quality-of-life

groups like Redefining Progress or from lobbying groups like Sustainable Seattle or Livable Tucson from individual cities show that happiness may be beside the point. Some groups highlight legal fees, medical bills, divorce rates, affordable housing, and levels of trust. Others foreground SAT scores, charitable giving, clean-air days, or computing time. But no matter how you slice it, if a group makes an index, the one thing it is sure to show is that there is no correlation between affluence and what they consider happiness. And the disconnect exists across cultures. During the so-called “Asian miracle” from the late 1950s to the late 1980s, real per capita income in Japan soared nearly fivefold, yet average levels of reported satisfaction didn’t change an iota.



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Is consumption a treadmill going nowhere? Perhaps. But at least the treadmill gets more comfortable and more people have more access. In *Pursuing Happiness: American Consumers in the Twentieth Century*, Professor Stanley Lebergott argued that while consumption by the rich has remained relatively steady over the century, the rest of us have had a good go of it. Most Americans walked to work at the start of the century, but by 1990 nearly 90 percent of families had a car. By 1987, all households had one-time luxuries: a refrigerator and a radio. Nearly all had a TV and about three-quarters had a washing machine. Per capita spending on food rose by over three-quarters between 1900 and 1990, with a marked increase in meat consumption. “Wants” became “necessities” because, ironically, the pushing and shoving of other consumers was lowering the price. Your consumption of luxury has made life easier for me.

Professor Lebergott poses a simple question: Would you want to return to 1900? Before you answer you might watch the recent BBC/PBS show called, “1900 House,” in which a modern family tried living like their grandparents and found it was hard, very hard indeed. The idea that it was easy is one of our most cherished luxuries. While being on the treadmill may not provide happiness, not being on the treadmill almost certainly guarantees unhappiness. And discomfort. The problem is not how to get some people off the treadmill, but how to get more people on.



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# THE DISAPPEARANCE OF LUXURY?

As so many luxuries become necessities, and the differences between top-of-the-line luxury items and many mid-range objects almost cease to be observable, the concept of luxury is being drained of meaning. And since meaning is at the center of why we consume luxury goods, some observers of the cultural scene have suggested that public displays of luxury may lose their usefulness in communicating and eventually fade away.

Adam Gopnik, staff writer for *The New Yorker*, divides the twentieth century into distinct styles of public display, which he illustrates by looking at the architecture of art museums. The first stage is pure showoff. Gopnik points to the 1902 Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York City, as an apt example of look-at-me consumption that makes an unambiguous statement: This is industrial-strength wealth. Next, a form of counterdisplay sets in. The 1932 Museum of Modern Art is restrained and almost embarrassed; that the Rockefellers, who footed the bill, were reviled is not happenstance. This is a kind of redemptive luxury: payback for the sins of the father.

Starting in the 1950s, *counter-counterdisplay* is the



Metropolitan Museum of Art, photograph 1937



Museum of Modern Art, photograph 1932

mode, and Frank Lloyd Wright's 1959 Guggenheim is the perfect monument. The Frank Gehry-Thomas Krens Guggenheim in Bilbao, Spain brings us up to date. Here, we have the perfect embodiment of symbolic consumption and sincere extravagance, but we now have to go outside America to see it.

Gopnik's tongue may be in his cheek, but his eye is prescient. Luxury is being removed from the world around us because the only thing out of American reach is the world *outside* America. He points to Sandy Pittman's ultimate leisure-class Mount Everest expedition as the fitting individual analogy. Ms. Pittman had no business on that mountain, and that's just the point. It was elaborate, expensive, dangerous to everyone, and undertaken as an exercise in self-indulgence for all to see. She was, in fact, broadcasting her exploits via cell phone and the Internet. That she almost loses her life, and that others were not so lucky, is exactly the point. This is real serious luxury, not symbolic, but strangely invidious.

## CONCLUSION

*“What’s great about this country is that America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest.” — Andy Warhol, From A to B and Back Again*

Who but fools and hacks have ever come to the defense of modern American luxury? No one, not even the consumers of the stuff, ever *really* defends it. And why should they? The irrationality of overvaluing certain logos, wines, appliances, zip codes, T-shirts, hotel rooms, and the like is insulting to our intelligence. At one level, this kind of luxury is indefensible. The “good life” seems so blatantly unnecessary, especially when millions around the globe are living without the bare necessities. After all, it’s just cake. Empty calories.

Yet, the consumption of high-end goods is rarely impulsive, emotional, or extravagant. Instead, it may more often be thoughtful, clever, and sensible. Modern luxury is insurance against misunderstanding, a momentary stay against panic and confusion. If you can’t tell where you are in life by consulting the Social Register, then check your car nameplate, your zip code, the amount of stainless steel wrapped around your barbecue.

That such “peace of mind” can be bought may seem shallow until you realize that the transformation is dependent *only* on money, a far more equitable currency than the capriciousness of ancestry and the whimsy of gender and birth order. Given a choice between a culture in which birth decides social place or one in which market whimsy decides, I think I prefer the latter.

Yes, luxury is a one-dimensional status and hierarchy marker. Yes, pecuniary emulation is still key for shallow social distinctions and contrived position. And, yes, such positional power is transitory. But it is also strangely democratic and unifying. The Global Village is not quite the City on the Hill, not quite the Emerald City, and certainly not quite what Millennial Utopians had in mind, but it is closer to equitable distribution of rank than any other system man has developed.

In *A Nation of Salesmen*, Earl Shorris, reformed ad man and now contributing editor of *Harper’s*, bemoans the fact that commercialism has drained humanity of its get-up-and-go. “It may be a lack of imagination on my part, but I cannot conceive of a great host of people trudging across all of Europe, willing to fight and die in a crusade on behalf of the videocassette player. Nor does it seem likely to me that anyone would be willing to die on the cross for the suits of Giorgio Armani or the scents of Chanel.” Yet, perhaps mindless materialism is not so bad. Ro-

bust economies have given prospective foot soldiers something better to do — namely, go shopping.

But is it fair? Do some of us suffer inordinately for the excesses of others? What are we going to do when all this stuff we have shopped for becomes junk? What about the environment? Is there a connection between the accumulation of luxury and America’s high rates of murder, violent crime, divorce, and obesity? What are we going to do about the portion of our population that seems mired in poverty?

We have been in this lap of luxury a short time, and it is an often scary and melancholy place. Ours is a world driven not by the caprices of the rich, as was the first Gilded Age, nor by marketers, although they contribute, to be sure. Our world is pri-



*That is why poverty is so debilitating. Not only do the poor miss out on creature comforts, but they also miss out on community meanings.*

marily driven by the often crafty and seemingly irrational desires of the mass class of consumers, many of them young. A Fendi purse, or a Lexus automobile, or a weekend at the Bellagio may be better understood by more people than the plight of the homeless, a Keats ode, or the desecration of the rain forest. Whatever else, the mass-mediated and mass-marketed world of the increasingly powerful Industrial Revolution is drawing us ever closer together. The act of wanting what we don’t need is doing the work of generations of idealists.

Getting and spending have been the most passionate, and often the most imaginative, endeavors of modern life. We have done more than acknowledge that the good life starts with the material life, as the Ancients did. We have made consuming stuff, most of it unnecessary, the dominant prerequisite of organized society. This is dreary and depressing to some, as doubtless it should be. But one should not forget that the often vulgar, sensational, immediate, trashy, wasteful, equitable, sometimes transcendent, and unifying force of consuming is liberating and democratic to many more. \*

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