

particularly its economic form, that modernity has caused cultural devastation and social alienation, has made the very idea of community and true society a nostalgic memory or utopian dream. And it is in this light that consumer culture comes to be seen not as individual liberation but as anomie, not as social progress but rather as pathology.

## 3

## Consumption versus Culture

### Introduction: post-traditional society

For the liberal wing of modernity, enlightened men and heroic consumers emerge from the dismantling of traditional society. On the other hand, for the critic of modernity – whether reactionary or radical, and generally a confused amalgam of both – this process of social deregulation produces anarchy, alienation and the debasement of all values. Modern commerce, democracy and enlightenment dissolve the social bonds and values that previously held society together and gave the individual a place within it. In their place, the forces of liberal modernization leave mere material self-interest and economic calculation, neither of which is able to provide new values which could secure either social stability or individual identity.

'Culture' was one of the crucial terms through which anti-liberal forces counted the cost of modernity. 'Consumer culture', in this perspective, is merely an ersatz, artificial, mass-manufactured and pretty poor substitute for the world we have lost in post-traditional society. In fact, it is the antithesis and enemy of culture. In it individual choice and desire triumph over abiding social values and obligations; the whims of the present take precedence over the truth embodied in history, tradition and continuity; needs, values and goods are manufactured and calculated in relation to profit rather than arising organically from authentic individual or communal life. Above all, consumerism represents the triumph of economic value over all other kinds and sources of social worth. Everything can be bought and sold. Everything has its price.

'Consumer culture', therefore, is a contradiction in terms for much of modern western thought. The phrase comes to us dripping with irony, for the very term 'culture' was designed to signify all that has been destroyed by the world which produced the consumer. The aim of this chapter, then,

is to explore 'consumer culture' as an oxymoron: two incompatible terms locked together by modernity. We need first to explore the opposition between the ideal of culture and the utilitarian, post-traditional, commercial world. At the heart of this opposition are arguments about the nature of need; whereas liberalism linked the deregulation of desire to individual freedom and economic growth, proponents of culture as an ideal argued that material prosperity without a binding framework of social values produces unrelenting dissatisfaction (or false satisfactions), as well as a tyranny of 'false' society (in the form of fashion, envy, conformism, mass culture) over depthless and disoriented 'free' individuals. Finally, the sense that consumer culture is part of a crisis of social deregulation emerges most clearly as a crisis over identity: in the deregulated pluralism of modernity, identity is neither ascribed nor fixed by a stable social order but must be chosen or constructed by individuals. Consumer culture exemplifies this situation of choice and simultaneously exploits and intensifies the cultural deficits of modernity.

### Culture, ideal and debased

#### *Culture as a social ideal*

Culture can be thought of as either ordinary or ideal: it can be, on the one hand, a way of describing the meaningful character of the life of a collectivity or, on the other hand, a more rarefied sphere of valued cultural objects (art and literature, thought and philosophy), as well as of the values embodied both in those objects and in the elites that produce or appreciate them (aristocracies of blood and status, of the mind, of the spirit). The continuing power of Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society* (1985) comes from showing how these two notions of culture are profoundly and historically bound up with each other as ways of thinking about and responding to modern society. He demonstrates that even in the most rarefied aesthetic concepts of culture (high culture, art), we are dealing with a form of social thought.

The idea of culture as part of the 'culture and society tradition', Williams argues, is a social ideal, a model of social values and processes which constitutes a 'court of appeal', a tribunal before which everyday life in the modern world must bow for judgement. Firstly, proponents of culture in the 'higher' sense believe that the higher values they find there *should* be the values that govern everyday life, should be embodied in the material order of society: the concept of culture is a critique and evaluation of

everyday life in the modern world. Secondly, there is an argument that in the pre-modern world these *were* the social values that governed everyday life, or that they will be in a post-bourgeois world: it is only in the modern world that these values are chased out of everyday life and can subsist only in rarefied social spaces, in culture as a preserved heritage. The very existence of (high) culture as a separate sphere is a standing indictment of the diremptions of modern life and of its spiritual and human bankruptcy. Finally, culture as a social ideal *must* fulfil a social function; it must provide or at least preserve those ideals of community, self-hood, 'the good' and so on by which social order may be maintained or critiqued in the name of a better order.

The concept of culture is after values that arise within the way of life of a people, which give that people solidarity and identity and which authoritatively judge what is good or bad, real or false, not only in art but in everyday life. To use the terms of the previous chapter, it is culture that should provide *substantive* values. These values, it is generally argued, were once given by the traditional social order but, in the transition to modernity, were destroyed by reason, by the money economy and by political democracy. Culture in this respect is a profoundly anti-modern concept and specifically an attack on the formal rationality of Enlightenment, liberalism and utilitarianism. As we have seen, liberal society is in principle and more importantly in practice indifferent to the substantive nature of individual desires and cultural values. Both are left to the preferences of individuals in the present, and these preferences are beyond social control or judgement: modernity releases individuals from communal surveillance by the local community and status order into the anonymity and 'licence' of the city, the free labour market, the destabilized status order. Liberal modernity deifies reason, which may govern how people pursue their interests but is unable to say anything socially or morally authoritative about what interests they *should* pursue. But if values are matters of mere individual preferences mediated solely by money, how can society hold together, and how can we distinguish between good and bad social values? Indeed, as we have seen, liberalism to a certain extent denies the very idea of society as such, of a collectivity possessing a moral authority over its members.

Liberal-utilitarianism may believe that contractual relationships, entered into voluntarily by people rationally pursuing their own interests, provide an adequate technical basis for coordinating social action. The idea of 'culture' articulates the belief that they are not a sufficient basis for social solidarity. Solidarity requires a framework of meaning and morals which stands above the individual. The absence of such a framework in modern life obsesses social thought throughout the modern period and may even be – as Turner (1987) argues – the central problem which constitutes it. Besides

the terms 'culture' and 'commerce', a wide variety of contrasting terms have been used to define the same crisis: culture versus civilization, status versus contract, mechanical versus organic solidarity, community versus association, praxis versus labour, use value versus exchange value. In each case the first term marks a form of moral-cultural regulation, which is replaced by the co-ordination of individual actions through impersonal mechanisms such as the market, law and the technical division of labour. These oppositions all arise from 'a nostalgic science of society, since implicitly it is forced to identify with the past as a source of values for the critique of the present' (Turner 1987: 237). What Turner says of social thought, many authors (for example, Marcuse 1964, 1972; Bell 1979) extend to the entire project of modern art and philosophy:

the higher culture of the West . . . was a pre-technological culture . . . derived from the experience of a world which no longer exists. . . . It was feudal not only because of its confinement to privileged minorities, not only because of its inherent romantic element . . . , but also because its authentic works expressed a conscious, methodical alienation from the entire sphere of business and industry, and from its calculable and profitable order (Marcuse 1964: 58).

The culture and society tradition arises in opposition to modern commercial society, attacking its formal rationality, materialism and egoism and the cultural banality and emptiness of its great gods 'self-interest' and 'utility'. These can generate wealth, but not value. The sources to which the concept of culture has traditionally looked for real value mark it out as deeply connected to romanticism. As we shall explore further in the next chapter, the liberal enlightenment appears to treat the entire world as comprising mere objects that are to be owned, used, calculated, amassed in the pursuit of self-interest. Romanticism and the concept of culture argue that there are things larger than the individual – community, nation, race, nature, spirit, the ideal of art – which alone can produce those values that will render the individual authentic, real. These are the true 'sources of the self' (Taylor 1989), and they can be neither produced nor sustained through self-interested reason: their proper medium is (variably) history, feeling, sensibility, emotion, the unconscious.

To take a crucial example, one of the dominant metaphors of culture as a social ideal is organicism. Williams (1976) notes that the word 'culture' itself derives from metaphors of organic processes (cultivating, growing, nurturing). It only becomes a reified concept and an abstract noun at the historical point at which critics believe that this process is no longer present in the everyday life of industrial civilization. At this point, culture only exists as a thing, as artefacts (art) that are preserved and nurtured (cultivated) by intellectual, moral and social elites outside and uncontaminated by everyday life.

Organicism implies wholeness, naturalness and integration. Modernity is about alienation, mechanism, analytical and social separation. If we take the traditionalist route, F. R. Leavis provides a good example in his notion of 'organic community'. Firstly, this is a pre-industrial culture, the culture of village and craft civilization, in which social and natural relations produced 'an art of life, a way of living, ordered and patterned, involving the social arts, codes of intercourse and a responsive adjustment, growing out of immemorial experience, to the natural environment and the rhythm of the year' (Leavis and Thompson 1933: 3). Organic community presumes, firstly, the natural relation of man to nature embodied in craft rather than mechanized manufacture, agriculture rather than industry. The pastoral, the opposition between country and city, is crucial to this imagery. Organicism here also implies a low level of technical division of labour. Secondly, the organic community is a social whole. It is a place of immediate, face-to-face communication within a world where everyone knows one other and their social place. It is a world of unproblematic identity because it is a world of durable social order and values. Organic community is not the liberal aggregation of individuals into a mass, but a community as an actual entity, a living thing. Thirdly, the organic community is organic because it is based in continuity over time: it is ruled by tradition, not individual choice or will. In social terms, this links the ideal of culture to romantic celebrations of nation and ethnicity, in which language and folk culture, or national character, become the bearers of the truth and authenticity of the community, transmitted down the generations from time immemorial.

Against the neo-liberal slogan that 'There is no such thing as society; only individuals and their families', we might cite Burke's romantic conservative rendition of organic community, as epitomized in the link between culture and the state:

The state ought not to be considered nothing better than a partnership agreement in a trade of pepper and coffee, calico or tobacco, or some other such low concern, to be taken up for a little temporary interest, and to be dissolved by the fancy of the parties. It is to be looked on with other reverence; because it is not a partnership in things subservient only to the gross animal existence of a temporary and perishable nature. It is a partnership in all science, a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born (Williams 1985: 29).

It is important to recognize here that the ideal of culture is not just a stand taken by reactionary defenders of feudal obligations and *ancien régime* regulation; it can also be a defence of popular rights and popular culture

against the encroachments of liberal deregulation and bourgeois power, one in which aristocracy and lower orders form an unholy alliance. E. P. Thompson (1971, 1975, 1978) has given us the fullest picture of the extent to which 'the making of the English working class' and resistance to capitalist exploitation was focused around the defence of traditional rights against economic 'freedom'. A classic example is the notion of a 'moral economy'. This involved an assertion of moral values rooted in tradition and community against economic deregulation (for example, 'just price' versus free market prices). Richard Hoggart's *Uses of Literacy* (1977 (1957)) similarly defends the traditional values of working-class communities as resources of resistance to a commodity culture ruled purely by profit.

#### *Status, commerce and corruption*

That 'organic community' whose passing prompted the idea of 'culture' was traditional society, and its loss was significantly experienced through the notion of consumer culture. The most obvious point about traditional society (though it can be unduly exaggerated) is that it was considered a fixed order: it saw itself as largely unchanging and with an obligation not to change. This is often encapsulated through the idea of the 'great chain of being' (Lovejoy 1936), that *every* thing in the universe had an ascribed place or status, ranked in a continuous line from the lowliest creature to God himself. The chain embraced the whole social order, giving all people not merely a fixed status, but also one that was theologically anchored in a cosmic order and socially anchored in 'blood and soil', birth and land. What later comes to be seen as culture – the values that legitimately regulate a community – was earlier seen as naturally or divinely ordained.

Consumption in traditional society was regulated in relation to status: both are juridically fixed in relation to each other. This takes the form of, for example, sumptuary laws, codified from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, followed by the Waltham Black Acts of 1723, which seek the regulation of food (for example the king's deer), clothing (particularly guild insignia, uniforms and livery) and shelter (housing and mobility). These are all designed to preserve an agrarian society by preventing social and geographical mobility. The divine basis of both status and appropriate consumption is made explicit. 'Until the nineteenth century it was customary for sumptuary laws to be read from the pulpit in every church at least once a year – a daunting task, since ordinances regarding dress alone often ran more than one hundred duodecimo pages. Until the Reformation the legislation against luxury enacted by secular European governments was administered by ecclesiastical courts' (Sekora 1977: 61).

In this world, as Sekora argues, luxury – defined as consumption not just above one's basic needs but above one's station – is a form of sin, rebellion and insubordination against the proper order of the world, and represents moral, spiritual and political corruption, as well as a form of madness in that men become ruled by passion rather than by reason. 'Reason will approve of just so much of them [dress, furnishings, housing] as is requisite for the Distinction of Rank, and the keeping up of that Subordination, which is absolutely necessary to Government.' (John Dennis, 1724, cited in Sekora 1977: 80)

From the late seventeenth century, there is a major revival of discussion of the 'great chain of being', attempts to revive and enforce sumptuary legislation, and (as documented by Sekora) obsessive debate about the nature of 'luxury' (for an alternative account of luxury, see Berry 1994). All three are consciously conservative attempts to buttress the old order in response to the same problem: the patterning of society by cosmic order is being undermined by the power of the money economy which allows people to gain access to goods, positions and social standing purely on the basis of their ability to purchase them, rather than on their right to them based on ascribed status. This is in many respects the fundamental argument of 'culture' against modernity, that legitimacy is conferred by economic power rather than by tradition, birth or breeding. It is money that dissolves the old order.

The gross insubordination of luxurious consumption was clearly related by its opponents to the rise of a money economy, the 'cash nexus', and to new sources of wealth. In Britain, these issues come to the fore in response to the 'financial revolution' of 1688–1756 and the general rise of trade and commerce in the same period. The former, which involves such new institutions as taxes, credit, public funds, stock-jobbing and a paid standing army, seems a final public replacement of feudal dues and obligations with monetary values and contracts. This is vividly dramatized through, among other things, the attacks of the Tory traditionalist followers of Bolingbroke against the new 'moneyed men' of Walpole's Whigs. As Bolingbroke himself put it: 'The power of money as the world is now constituted is real power' (Sekora 1977: 70). The central charge is corruption: social order, political office, social relations, authority are now all regulated by monetary exchange, can be bought and sold and are now rooted not in the traditional soil but in the impersonal market. The same period also sees major debates on 'movable wealth' as opposed to the landed variety; commercial capital, like today's multinational financial instruments, knows no loyalty to (let alone regulation by) organic ties to monarch, nation or people and so corrupts the social order. The cash nexus goes beyond corruption to produce *madness*. For example, the South Sea Bubble scandal crystallized the new money mania in the absence of regulation by either tradition or reason. Dabydeen's (1987)

analysis of Hogarth's work shows that the new money economy evoked images of sexual, personal, racial and political disorder and insanity, all sins of luxury. Fielding even argues, in 1751, that it is luxury not poverty that has caused 'the late increase of Robbers': crime is a result of the mobility, idleness and insolence occasioned by prosperity and increased aspirations – a theme pursued by today's conservative traditionalists.

Crucially, luxury as a form of insubordination is identified in terms of emulation, the 'aping of one's betters'. It concerns socially illegitimate claims on culture and lifestyle. New money can buy the marks of status which formerly were tied to birth, breeding and blood. New money buys landed estates, it can wear the clothes of court and 'society', it can indulge in the leisure pursuits of the aristocracy. Few images are as telling as those that arise around Bath in Smollett and Austen. For example, in *Humphrey Clinker* (1771) a character describes a ball at which he was 'extremely diverted' to see

the Master of the Ceremonies leading, with great solemnity . . . an antiquated Abigail, dressed in her lady's cast-clothes; whom he (I suppose) mistook for some countess just arrived at the Bath. The ball was opened by a Scotch lord, with a mulatto heiress from St Christopher's; and the gay colonel Tinsel danced all the evening with the daughter of an eminent tinman from the Borough of Southwark. Yesterday morning, at the Pump-room, I saw a broken-winded Wapping landlady squeeze through a circle of peers, to salute her brandy-merchant . . . and a paralytic attorney of Shoe-lane, in shuffling up to the bar, kicked the shins of the chancellor of England . . . (Smollett 1985: 78–9).

In a sense, the problem of commerce and consumption is that status itself becomes a consumer good: it can be bought.

'Culture', it could be said then, begins as the battlecry of landed Tories against the new Whig plutocracy, and it is heard above a fray about the proper sources of social legitimacy. Culture comes to be defined as precisely that which money cannot buy: birth, breeding, legitimacy. We can see this in many common meanings of 'culture' in the sense of art. It is defined increasingly by its distance from commerce and manufacture. Culture is not consumed (however much the opera-going bourgeoisie may pay for its tickets), but is rather appreciated by a cultured audience; art is not manufactured, it is *created*. True culture cannot be bought, mediated or ruled by money because it was *defined* that way. But if 'true culture' retreats to higher ground as the tide of commerce floods its banks, consumer culture wallows in its mud, an abomination thrown up from its depths. It is culture that can be bought by anyone with the cash; and it is culture that is produced to be sold. Consumer culture is, by definition, illegitimate; moreover, defined as 'luxury', it is the expression in everyday life of the triumph of economic over social value.

### Mass culture

The popularity of consumer culture – its being 'of the people' – is central to the idea of consumer culture as non-culture or debased culture. The domination of economic value over society, the spread of purchasing power to ever 'lower' sectors of the population, the deregulation of all traditional constraints over consumption (free choice) and finally the centrality of democracy and equality as modern values – all of these empower non-accredited tastes and desires. Those who are said to make up mass culture are the same people who are seen as consumers: women, children and the elderly, the working classes, youth, ethnic minorities. Ironically, the same people who (as we saw in the last chapter) are excluded from the liberal domain of 'the rational individual' are also excluded from the romantic domain of 'the cultured individual'.

Hence a litany of complaints that modern consumers constitute a market for cheap thrills, a market which – through their mass purchasing power and democratic voice – reorients cultural production and social values around the base and common. Leavis, for example, argues that mass culture involves a 'psychological Gresham's Law' (1930: 7) whereby bad tastes drive out the good – the taste for culture that represents the cumulative learning of the 'race' and which 'makes you a better person' (5) by allowing one 'to profit by the finest human experience of the past' (5). Mass-consumed culture, in the form of advertising, film, newspapers, formula fiction and radio, 'all offer satisfaction at the lowest level, and inculcate the choosing of the most immediate pleasures, got with the least effort' (Leavis and Thompson 1933: 3); for in order to sustain mass production, firms must 'give the public what it wants', 'appeal to the lowest common denominator' and so on. Hoggart charts the impact of similar developments on the decline of 'authentic' working-class culture when confronted with 'this regular, increasing, and almost unvaried diet of sensation without commitment', which 'is surely likely to help render its consumers less capable of responding openly and responsibly to life, is likely to induce an underlying sense of purposeless in existence outside the limited range of a few immediate appetites' (Hoggart 1977 (1957): 246). He portrays mass consumer culture as an escalating addiction, whose hooks involve the appeal to baser instincts and gratifications. Why read a difficult novel (i.e. a culturally valued one) when advertising 'offers and encourages cultural experiences based on brevity, simplification, bittiness and a short attention span? As T. S. Eliott characteristically remarked, modern advertising represents 'the influence of masses of men by any means except through their intelligence' (Williams 1985: 227).

Many mass-culture theorists can be derided as reactionary and elitist. Many should be, especially those like Nietzsche, Ortega or Pound whose

contempt for the 'masses' is not incompatible with a desire to purify them as a *Volk*. However, in so far as culture is a social ideal, it also forms part of a *social* explanation of the debasement of the individual through social forces, rather than merely an account of the triumph of the modern horde. Leavis at least clearly relates the decline of culture less to the evil of the masses than to that of the industrial order which profits by pandering to their untutored tastes. "Civilisation" and "culture" are coming to be antithetical terms' according to Leavis (1930: 26) very largely because culture is now industrially mass-produced in the form of consumer goods for profitable sale: industrialization has 'turned out to involve standardisation and levelling-down outside the realm of mere material goods' (Leavis and Thompson, 1933: 3). Indeed, corporations now take on the 'status and function of a public national organ', for it is they who, through advertising and marketing, define the needs and values of the community (Leavis and Thompson 1933: 30-1). Culture in all its senses, as way of life and as art, is artificially produced and ignorantly consumed because it is detached from organic life. As Denys Thompson put it later: 'The selves we are are to a great extent the product of our social contacts. It may be that these social contacts are being replaced by a synthetic substance that exists only in the media' (Thompson 1964: 16).

Following a parallel train of thought, Adorno and Horkheimer (1979) famously decided to abandon the term 'mass culture', which appears to blame the debasement of culture on the masses, and to replace it with 'the culture industry', which places the blame firmly on the power of rationalized institutions to produce mass culture, and to reduce individuals to members of a mass. For both conservative and Marxist mass-cultural theory, liberal society, which purports to liberate individuals from social authority, actually by this very process leaves them disorganized, disoriented, anomic and isolated. Far from being free and autonomous, they are defenceless against new forms of modern power. Culture is said to be absent in the sense that there is a lack of moral order embodied in everyday experience and social relations. For both Leavis and Adorno, this moral order retreats, in the modern world, into an ever more restricted and rarefied aesthetic realm of authentic values (for Leavis, a realm of authentic and trained 'response' to 'life'; for Adorno, a realm of authentically critical, 'non-identity' thinking based on substantive rather than formal rationality).

Both think through the isolation of the individual in sociological terms. These terms are various: disappearance of community and face-to-face relations, the rupture of tradition by the decline of status, the weakening of the authority of family and particularly of the father (especially in Adorno and in Lasch), the decline (or cooption by power) of the voluntary associations of civil society such as religion, trade unions, political parties

and the media. This is buttressed by the general privatization of life under capitalism and the isolation of individuals on the basis of both the division of labour and economic competition. All of this is particularly clear in images of mass media consumption: the isolated couch potato is glued to the box in a relationship of passivity and absorption unmodulated by any face-to-face social relations.

A modern world based on pure individual self-interest ironically leaves the individual in a chronically weak condition. Without a binding collective culture, without solidarity, the individual – isolated, adrift on tides of momentary desires – is open to manipulation and the most subtle forms of unfreedom. Moreover, modernity, based on a massive assault on forms of collective or corporate regulation, ironically throws up new forms of collective and corporate control: bureaucratic state institutions, multinational corporations, the mass media, technocracy. Hence, for example, advertising looms very large in this literature as a model of modern unfreedom. Ostensibly the very epitome of capitalist competition, advertising both presents itself and is attacked as a dominating, even scientific, power which organizes individuals into masses. This is most clearly stated in the myth of the 'hidden persuaders'. Vance Packard's argument (1977) was that advertising possessed scientific psychological technologies which, through knowledge of their unconscious desires and motivations, could compel individuals to act against their wills, buying whatever the advertiser wished them to. The individual confronts these forms of power directly, without mediation by collective values or relations. The individualism of competition leads to the destruction of the individual (and of free competition). Packard himself is writing in the journalistic muckraking tradition of American progressivism, a form of populism which spoke out of fears very similar to the culture and society tradition (and fascism): the 'little man' (particularly the middle classes) is being squeezed between, on the one hand, the proletarian and immigrant mob gathered by industrialization, urbanization and the destruction of traditional order, and, on the other hand, the power of modern corporatism. Consumer culture threatens to slide these good people into the arms of the masses. We might compare Packard's conspiracy theories with Leavis's earlier worry (1930: 12) about the 'unprecedented use of applied psychology' whereby advertising is becoming an 'exact' process (he cites J. B. Watson's application of behaviourism to advertising). Leavis hopes that through (literary) education we might 'train up a public that, fully aware of the buttons that are being pressed, would smile at the idea of responding automatically'. Leavis believes that in this industrial civilization formal education must replace the organic defence against such manufactured influences which would once have been provided by the walls of the organic community. The psychological power of advertising only works where the

individual has been expelled from these walls and is wandering, lost and alone, in the modern world.

### Affluence and disorder

The idea of culture as a critical social ideal, then, asks questions about the debasement of values under modern conditions. But it does so less in the manner of the aesthete than that of a concerned humanist liberal like Mill or Arnold, for whom the opposite of culture is not bad art but social anarchy and individual anomie. For the basic question posed by the tradition of culture is this: Can there be a society, such as liberal commercial and consumer society is meant to exemplify, based purely on formal rationality and utilitarian individualism? The answer to that question, in turn, involves looking at just what the pursuit of self-interest means on the ground, in everyday life and cultural experience. What happens to the *needs* of the individual in a deregulated and affluent society?

#### *Durkheim: need and anomie*

It was Durkheim who most stoutly asserted, against utilitarian individualism, the necessary moral and cultural authority of 'society'. Durkheim was notoriously sanguine that modernity *will* produce a cultural basis for legitimate solidarity, but argued that utilitarianism as a way of life cannot provide it. This accounts for the pathology of western society in its transitional phase from one cultural basis to another that has yet to emerge properly.

The modern division of labour, Durkheim argues, has produced an astonishing density of relations of *functional* interdependence between individuals. However, whereas utilitarianism assumed that this would automatically produce social coordination on the basis of each individual pursuing his or her self-interest (as in Smith's 'hidden hand' of the market), Durkheim argues that binding moral commitments are required even for the orderly honouring of self-interested contracts. Markets themselves, as contemporary economic sociology now agrees, requires moral bonds such as 'trust', a sense of 'just price' and so on (see, for example, DiMaggio 1990; Dore 1983; Etzioni 1988; Gambetta 1989; Granovetter 1985; Hodgson 1988; Hodgson and Screpanti 1991; Kahneman et al. 1987; Lane 1991; Swedberg 1987; Thompson et al. 1991; Zukin and DiMaggio 1990). Premodern society solidified itself through the cultural coherence afforded by the *conscience collective* (an analysis clearly compatible with the idea of embeddedness).

Modernity, too, will ultimately promote a 'cult of the individual' that comprises not only the pursuit of interest but also a substantive moral concern for the value, dignity and rights of individual humans. That is to say, both solidarity and social coordination depend on substantive, not just formal, bonds that can be understood as cultural in character, or which will translate the cultural cohesion of the premodern world into the socio-economic conditions of the modern. While Durkheim's formulation locates modern solidarity at the level of the individual, it also presupposes the individual's recognition of the idea of society as a regulative moral ideal. The pathology of contemporary modernity is attributed to its transitional state, to the existence of a 'forced division of labour' which denies human value through inequalities of power and wealth. For Durkheim, class conflict, for example, is a standing refutation of utilitarianism: where social relations are ruled by contract alone moral solidarity cannot establish itself.

Economic progress, Durkheim writes, 'has consisted mainly of freeing industrial relations from all regulation. Until very recent it was the function of a whole system of moral forces to exert this discipline (1987: 254).' These forces included both religion and systems of guilds and corporations, primary traditionalist targets of the liberal bourgeoisie. They have now lost their moral power and can no longer set commanding social aims: 'the amoral character of economic life amounts to a public danger'. Into this moral gap flows the formal utilitarian rationality:

nations are supposed to have as their only or principal objective the achievement of industrial prosperity . . . industry, instead of continuing to be regarded as a means to an end which transcends it, has become the supreme end for individuals and society. But then appetites thus awakened are freed from any limiting authority. By sanctifying these appetites, so to speak, this deification of material well-being has placed them above all human law. . . . From the top to the bottom of the scale, covetous desires are aroused without it being known where they might level out (Thompson, 1985: 111).

Thus the pursuit of interest as an end in itself is registered quite significantly in the sphere of consumption, for social deregulation appears in everyday life in the form of anomie: 'One no longer knows what is fair, what are legitimate claims and hopes, and which are excessive. As a result, there is nothing to which one does not aspire. . . . Appetites no longer accept limits to behaviour, since public opinion cannot restrain them' (110).

Indeed, Durkheim puts forward one of the grounding themes of the critique of consumer culture: in premodern societies, economic scarcity went hand in hand with social regulation to limit the range of human wants and needs. Modern deregulation and industrial productivity let loose human desires which are in principle insatiable:

Human nature in itself cannot set invariable limits to our needs. Consequently, in so far as it is left to the individual alone, these needs are unlimited. Without reference to any external regulating influence our capacity for sensation is a bottomless abyss that nothing can satisfy. But, then, if nothing external manages to restrict this capacity, it can only be a source of torment to itself. Unlimited desires are insatiable by definition, and insatiability is rightly considered a pathological symptom. . . . Society alone can perform this moderating role . . . for it is the only moral power superior to the individual (109).

But society is precisely what liberalism reduces to individuals. In everyday life, the expansion of individual need unconstrained by the moral authority of culture or society is a source of personality disturbance and of the profound confusion of modernity: 'crises of prosperity', like those of poverty, are equally 'disturbances of the collective order' (109). Given the context of Durkheim's discussion, we can even say that it leads to suicide (for a comparison of the sociology of suicide and of consumption, see Warde 1994b).

Durkheim was very far from alone in these concerns, as Cross (1993), Miller (1981) and Williams (1982), for example, demonstrate in the case of France (see, for example, Horowitz (1985) and Fox and Lears (1983) for related American debates). Miller's account of moral concerns about women shoppers at the mid-nineteenth century department stores is particularly apropos: going to the Bon Marché, the female shopper escapes the moral surveillance of patriarchal home and community and enters the unregulated space of the city streets, urban crowd and the store itself, a place of unregulated, indeed hyper-stimulated, fantasy, desire and insatiable need. Moral panics arose about women, addicted to shopping, abandoning husbands and children. This pathology of desire was medicalized from mid-century onwards through the notion of 'kleptomania', which was unsurprisingly classified as a form of hysteria – a disease of the womb – and therefore as a sexual disorder. Just as in Hogarth's time, it is feared that the freedom of the money economy leads directly to the madness of lust through the loss of moral regulation.

Durkheim's analysis foregrounds another long-running theme: if needs are not limited by moral order, then nothing can satisfy them. However affluent the economy, however much it produces, it will always produce frustration, unhappiness and dissatisfaction because its unlimited production of goods is so intimately tied to the unlimited production of needs. Whereas proponents of commercial society identify happiness with prosperity, its critics see it as a 'joyless economy' (Scitovsky 1976, 1986; see also Hirsch (1976); Lansley (1994); Leiss (1976); and chapter 6 below). In the absence of a coherent cultural formation to map out for the individual a legitimated and limited agenda of needs, values and commanding social aims, insatiable

need 'can only be a source of torment to itself'. Above all, instead of being able to assess their satisfactions in relation to a desired way of life, consumers are obsessed by *relative* wealth, happiness, satisfaction – with keeping up with the Joneses. This is a quantitative calculation whose substantive content is immaterial – we must keep up with the Joneses whatever they happen to be buying or earning this month. It is also a case of ever shifting goal posts in which every level of satisfaction reached instantly turns into a new experience of dissatisfaction as one's neighbours eventually catch up. Finally, many of these concerns increasingly focus on questions about the ecological limits to insatiable need. Is it the case that the enervating spiral of expanded needs and expanded production will meet its nemesis in the depletion of natural resources and the pollution of the environment?

#### *Rousseau: need and inauthenticity*

Modern need is insatiable because it is no longer fixed either by nature or by the traditional social order. Whereas culture might subordinate need to higher values, consumer culture dreams up ever more needs and enslaves people to a vicious circle of unceasing need feeding off perpetual dissatisfaction. Deregulated society, then, far from providing a moral framework for meaningful individual and collective life, now exercises a deep form of corruption and compulsion over its disoriented members.

The most profound and influential attack on the pathology of affluence and deregulated need stems from Rousseau, for whom the problem of need, corruption and social progress was central. Rousseau, famously, reverses the central terms of the entire liberal tradition. This tradition, from Hobbes onwards, argues that men's needs are *naturally* insatiable: needs, wants and 'luxury' cannot be distinguished in the state of nature. The urgency of individual desire – greed really – is in fact the engine of progress. Hobbes was probably the first to equate the absence of desire not with virtue but with personal and social death ('felicity' does not consist 'in the repose of a mind satisfied. For there is no such *finis ultimus*, utmost aim, nor *summum bonum*, greatest good, as is spoken of in the books of the old moral philosophers. Nor can a man any more live, whose desires are at an end, than he, whose senses and imaginations are at a stand. Felicity is a continual progress of the desire, from one object to another . . . ' (Hobbes 1972 (1651): 121; also see Xenos (1989: 4)). However, he also argues at great length that unlimited needs are the basis of violence, of the 'war of all against all' and of the nasty, brutish and short lives led *in the state of nature*. Social contract theory equates the formation of civil society and the state with the creation of regulatory frameworks in which men can safely pursue their desires, though not with

the regulation of desire itself. Civil society and the state therefore come into existence *in response to* the naturally unlimited desires of individuals and the violence this produces in the state of nature.

Rousseau completely inverts this argument. The man of unlimited greed whom Hobbes is describing is not man in a state of nature but rather man as he has been produced by modern society (Rousseau 1984 (1755): 92, 98–9). For Rousseau, insatiable needs are a product of society, above all of social inequality institutionalized through property rights (the cherished foundation of *equality* for liberalism), and they are both a means and an end for social domination. Rousseau argues this through a distinction between real needs and social needs: 'it is easy to see that all our labors are directed upon two objects only, namely, the commodities of life for oneself, and consideration on the part of others' ('Discourse on inequality', quoted in Hirschman (1977: 109)). Man in the state of nature is characterized by *amour de soi*, 'self-love', a proper regard for one's own interests, in which people act on the basis of finite, real needs. In this state, the abundance of nature and the limits of need complement each other. No man is hungry, both because all he wants are berries, and because nature provides enough of these to pick easily off the bush. (Compare Sahlins's (1974) 'original affluent society'.)

It is human *association* and specifically the comparison with others that brings about an awareness of inequality and thus a motive for competition. Desire becomes associated with possession. There is a social pressure to *have*, as opposed to *enjoy*, the pleasures of the earth. The increasing refinement and sophistication of desire proceeds in a vicious spiral with the development of social competition. The healthy, because limited and therefore satisfiable *amour de soi*, is replaced by the unending pathology of *amour-propre*, desire for 'consideration on the part of others'. Needs are no longer anchored in nature but are linked to the approval and admiration of others, and therefore have no limit. Liberalism promised autonomy – needs and interests defined by individuals for themselves. It actually delivers heteronomy – man's needs are determined by the fashions, opinions and scrutiny of society, or (to use a phrase we will explore later) he becomes 'other-determined'. 'Behold man, who was formerly free and independent, diminished as a consequence of a multitude of new wants into subjection, one might say, to the whole of nature and especially to his fellow men . . . ' (Rousseau 1984 (1755): 119). Rousseauian solutions to the problem of needs in modern society therefore revolve around the restraint of both need and culture (see for example Talmon's (1986 (1952)) discussion of Babeuf, for 'the real world has its limits; the imaginary world is infinite. Unable to enlarge the one, let us restrict the other' (cited in Xenos 1989: 26).

In some respects, Rousseau is utterly opposed to the culture and society tradition from which we started. Whereas for that tradition *high* culture is

a refuge for the higher values chased out of everyday lived culture by industrial civilization, Rousseau sees *all* forms of culture as based in luxury, artificial refinement and social emulation. Firstly, it is imagination which 'extends for us the measure of the possible . . . and which consequently excites and nourishes the desires by the hope of satisfying them' (cited in Xenos 1989: 25); hence Rousseau's famous desire to ban the theatre (Sennett 1977). Secondly, culture represents not only the falsity of society but also its special tool for enslaving men. Princes desire the spread

of taste for the arts and for superfluities . . . For, besides fostering the spiritual pettiness so appropriate to slavery, they know well that the needs that people create for themselves are like chains binding them. . . . The sciences, letters, and arts . . . wind garlands of flowers around the iron chains that bind [the people], stifle in them the feeling of the original liberty for which they seemed to have been born, make them love their slavery, and turn them into what is called civilized people (quoted in Williams 1982: 43).

Thirdly, Rousseau's attack on culture partly targets aristocratic consumption, which is divorced from enjoyment and used cynically to exercise power in court society and over the upper bourgeoisie and salons, both of whom ape chateaux manners (Williams 1982: 33). Whereas the ideal of culture tends to laud aristocracies of taste, intelligence or birth, castigating both popular coarseness and bourgeois materialism, Rousseau appears as the defender of bourgeois propriety, soberness and restraint against luxury, which he defines in terms of aristocratic corruption.

As we have seen, Sekora argues that eighteenth-century conservatives regarded luxury as a vice of the poor and middle classes, who strive above their station; the aristocracy have a culturally legitimate right, through their breeding and status superiority, to refined and excessive consumption. By the nineteenth century, luxury was redefined: it was now the vice of an aristocracy with too much money and idleness. Working-class consumption then came to be seen as akin to aristocratic luxury, and often allied with it (drinking, gambling, horses, boxing and so on are debauched entertainments of both upper and lower classes (see Cunningham 1980)). On the other hand, middle-class consumption above basic needs had been relabelled as 'comforts' (Appleby 1993: 168) and 'conveniences' (a favourite word of Smith's) and is quite respectable: a happy mean between necessity and luxury. Rousseau, attacking the vices of aristocratic luxury, might be seen as an early advocate of bourgeois sobriety. Laclos's vision of Rousseau's hell, *Les liaisons dangereuses*, clearly attacks the way in which society, exemplified in aristocratic debauchery, alienates humans from all natural feeling.

Despite these oppositions, Rousseau and the tradition of culture take their places side by side within romantic attacks on consumer culture and liberal

society because they are both concerned with the authenticity of human values and human being, an authenticity they associate with an organic society (based, respectively, in nature and tradition) which is ruptured by the material abundance and individualistic, competitive basis of modern society. We can appreciate just how completely Rousseau reversed the terms of liberal-utilitarianism by looking more closely at the way in which he, as opposed to Smith and Hume, evaluates the relation between 'society' and 'insatiable need' (see Berry 1994; Ignatieff 1984; Xenos 1989).

For Smith (and Hume) limitation to basic needs is neither morally nor economically good:

the whole industry of human life is employed not in procuring the supply of our three humble necessities, food, cloaths, and lodging, but in procuring the conveniences of it according to the nicety and delicacy of our taste. To improve and multiply the materials which are the principal objects of our necessities, gives occasion to all the variety of the arts (Smith, in Xenos 1989: 11).

Progress in both culture and civilization depends on the expansion of desire. This argument goes back to Hobbes, as we have seen, to debates in the 1690s concerning the importation of luxury goods (see especially Appleby 1993), and above all to Mandeville. 'Luxury' may be relabelled as 'conveniences' of life, but the central point for Smith is that the arts are both product and catalyst in a virtuous circle with commerce. The arts produce desire; greater material prosperity enhances the arts.

The basis of this virtuous circle is not a desire for utilities which, being related to the needs of the body, are finite. Rather,

it is chiefly from [the] regard to the sentiments of mankind that we pursue riches and avoid poverty. . . . From whence . . . arises the emulation which runs through all the different ranks of men and what are the advantages which we propose by that great purpose of human life which we call *bettering our condition*? To be observed, to be attended to, to be taken notice of with sympathy, complacency, and appreciation, are all the advantages which we can propose to derive from it. It is the vanity, not the ease or the pleasure, which interests us (from *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, in Hirschman 1977: 108).

*Amour-propre*, social competition, the imagined needs produced by culture and human association – these are not, as for Rousseau, a new form of slavery, or simply a spur to keep us on the treadmill of economic growth. They are necessary to the general advancement of human civilization. Indeed, as Hume puts it, 'perhaps the chief advantage which arises from a commerce with strangers' is not economic exchange but the cultural intercourse through which we are exposed to new possibilities, new needs. 'Commerce with strangers' 'rouses men from their indolence; and presenting the gayer

and more opulent part of the nation with objects of luxury, which they never before dreamed of, raises in them a desire of a more splendid way of life than what their ancestors enjoyed' (cited in Xenos 1989: 11–12).

But Hume and Smith go much further, than this, in the very opposite direction to Rousseau: 'consideration on the part of others' is not a form of moral corruption but the very basis of morality and social solidarity, and the basis of emulation is to a very large extent an innate human desire for aesthetic pleasure, a drive to culture. Their arguments are based on the notion of 'sympathies': it is through the human imaginative capacity to place ourselves in the position of the other, and to view self and other 'from the standpoint of a "spectator", a hypothetical Other embodying the values and customs of a given society' (Xenos 1989: 14) that we can see, and desire and aspire to, the satisfactions which various goods (forms of wealth) can offer. Yet this capacity for sympathy is also the basis of all moral behaviour and social solidarity. The *Theory of Moral Sentiments* gives Smith the moral psychology which allows the competitive individualistic world of *The Wealth of Nations* to hold together. Thus, whereas from Bentham onwards solidarity and economic growth arise automatically from the isolated hedonic calculus of monadic individuals, Smith and Hume still anchor both morality and self-interest itself in an innately *social* sentiment, a desire to be approved of by others.

For Rousseau, as we have seen, emulation does not represent social solidarity but social tyranny and artificiality: 'The savage man lives within himself; social man lives always outside himself; he knows how to live only in the opinion of others, it is, so to speak from their judgement alone that he derives the sense of his own existence' (Rousseau 1984 (1755): 136). Human authenticity resides in natural feeling and sensibility; man's innate moral sentiment is 'pathos' and compassion (hence the Rousseauian 'cult of sensibility' displayed its authenticity by shedding tears (Campbell 1989; Schama 1989: 145–62; Todd 1986). Emulation replaces that authenticity with mere appearances: with the rise of society, 'to be and to appear became two entirely different things, and from this distinction arose ostentatious display, deceitful cunning, and all the vices that follow in their train' (Rousseau 1984 (1755): 119).

#### *Tocqueville: need and political freedom*

The idea of 'the consumer' conjoins the ideas of 'freedom' and 'desire'. These terms were traditionally opposites. For example, in both classical philosophy and in neo-classical revivals during the eighteenth century (neo-Stoicism, civic humanism), desire makes slaves out of men because passion

destroys reason. Moreover, national and civic freedom, like individual freedom, can only be guaranteed by the good government provided by men free from material want or greed. Desire spelled out a vertiginous descent into corruption and slavery.

In the formation of responses to consumer culture, the themes of civic humanism and neo-stoicism were crucial (see Burchill 1991; Hirschman 1977; Pocock 1975, 1985). The argument here is about the relation between private and public virtues, echoing Aristotle's distinction between *oikos* (the domestic economy) and the public virtues of the citizen: if the good life is a life ruled by reason rather than desire, the public good too depends on a clarity of mind derived from the restraint of desire (self-mastery). The citizen is concerned with the public good rather than with private gain (though this depends on being wealthy enough in property, slaves or women to be free of personal need and greed). As Hirschman (1977) argues, while early arguments for capitalism held that commerce (the pursuit of private gain) promoted peaceful interdependence, there is also an early and mounting concern that it will also erode civic virtue. Even Hume and Smith – despite all we have said about them so far – share this very old-fashioned worry: private wealth and luxurious living, accomplished through commercial prosperity, may corrupt the virile, martial strength on which the defence of that prosperity ultimately depends. One 'bad effect of commerce is that it sinks the courage of mankind, and tends to extinguish martial spirit . . . By having their minds constantly employed on the arts of luxury, they grow effeminate and dastardly' (Smith, in Hirschman 1977: 105). The association of luxury with a decline in military virility is no doubt part of the general association of consumer culture with feminization.

This whole line of thought is most powerfully transmitted through Tocqueville, whose work has been particularly influential in American critiques of consumer culture, particularly those discussed below. Summarizing his life's work in 1856, in the foreword to his history of the French Revolution, he writes:

For in a community in which the ties of family, of caste, of class, and craft fraternities no longer exist people are far too much disposed to think exclusively of their own interests, to become self-seekers practicing a narrow individualism and caring nothing for the public good. Far from trying to counteract such tendencies despotism encourages them, depriving the governed of any sense of solidarity and interdependence; of good-neighborly feelings and a desire to further the welfare of the community at large. It immures them, so to speak, each in his private life . . . (de Tocqueville 1955 (1856): xiii).

Tocqueville believes in freedom, but in a very different sort from the personal liberty of liberalism, in a freedom that promotes solidarity through

social intercourse in a rather Durkheimian way, by making men aware of their common interests and thus 'lifting men's minds above mere mammon worship and the petty personal worries which crop up in the course of everyday life, and of making them aware at every moment that they belong each and all to a vaster entity, above and around them – their native land.' Individualistic equality, embodied in the pursuit of private gain, inevitably undermines itself and turns to despotism when, obsessed with private desires, men turn over the reins of power, and with it their freedom, to political professionals. Despotism (and Tocqueville is concerned with the corrupt sham of the French second empire under Louis Napoleon) arises when men abandon the public sphere for private wealth; the greatest weapon of despotism is the further encouragement of desire, greed, luxury and consumption.

### The self in consumer culture

Thus consumer culture, which to liberalism seemed to be exemplary of individual autonomy, comes to stand for all sorts of slavery: to desire and insatiable needs, to social scrutiny and competition, to political as well as cultural despotism and tyranny. Liberation from social restraint really means the loss of natural feeling and of stable social values and therefore the weakening, disorientation and subjugation of the individual. Society comes to dominate the individual, not least through the material world of objects and interests, which are now essential not merely for meeting needs but for being or finding a self. For the tradition of 'culture', consumer culture is part of a loss of the self brought about by modernity rather than an efficient way of satisfying the needs of autonomous selves. It is precisely this loss of self in a post-traditional world, a society without a culture, that informs many of the most influential twentieth-century accounts of consumer culture.

### The post-traditional self

'Post-traditional society', to which the idea of culture is a response, is marked by pluralization. In place of a secure order of values and social positions there is a bewildering variety and fluidity of values, roles, authorities, symbolic resources and social encounters out of which an individual's social identity must be produced and maintained. Giddens (1991: 84) usefully summarizes this in four themes. Firstly, modernity is a post-traditional order in which fixed identities are neither ascribed nor unambiguously indicated.

Increasingly unanchored in tradition, religion, law etc., identity can only emerge from choice. Secondly, modernity involves a 'pluralization of lifeworlds' in which each individual has to negotiate multiple and contradictory identities as they traverse different public and private spheres, each with their different roles, norms etc. Thirdly, modernity replaces traditional authority with 'methodological doubt' (rather than the 'certainty of reason' for which it had originally hoped). Truth is contextual; authority and expertise are provisional. Finally, modernity places 'mediated experience' at the centre of social life. Through commerce, the city, the mobility of travel and communications, through the mass media, ever more 'lifeworlds' are made visible to us, become possible choices of identity. Through marketing and advertising, and their commercialization of mediated experience, this plurality of modern life is directly translated into consumer choices.

We can add a fifth theme, commercialization itself. The modern dynamic of pluralization is intensified by subordinating culture to economic ends. On the one hand, consumption is regulated by purchasing power rather than socio-cultural rights and privileges, thus allowing a great fluidity in the use of goods to construct identities and lifestyles; on the other hand, cultural values and meanings are ever renewable resources for economic competition as advertising indicates every day.

Modernity, then, involves the vertiginous production, display and interaction of myriad possible ways of life, none of which has indisputable cultural authority or value. It is a recipe for identity-crisis on a mass scale. There are no naturally or divinely ordained social places and individual selves. Individuals must, by force of circumstances, choose, construct, maintain, interpret, negotiate, display who they are to be or be seen as, using a bewildering variety of material and symbolic resources. A range of recent authors such as Giddens (1991), Bauman (1983, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1993) and Beck (1992) place consumer culture in this context, charting the implications of the destruction of the traditional order for the process of character-formation, for identity and for the nature of intimacy and authenticity (see also Warde's (1994a, 1994b) reviews of this literature). They also link to a range of authors whom we shall review in the next sections.

The contrast with liberalism is, as ever, instructive. For liberalism, choice is a hard-won freedom, wrested from the social order. For the works under discussion here, choice is a requirement and compulsion, something we are forced into by the absence of a stable social order. 'We have no choice but to choose' (Giddens, 1991: 81) because no identities are unproblematically assigned to us. Moreover, liberalism assumes the existence of coherent individuals who make choices, individuals who know their needs and pursue them rationally. Yet coherent identity seems to be precisely the main *problem* of modern existence and is itself something to be chosen and achieved. We

have already seen this issue posed by Foucault and Rose (whose work converges in some respects with these authors): liberal society appears as a social space which requires and produces a 'choosing self', rather than one in which a naturally choosing self is liberated.

The characterization of modernity as mass identity crisis connects with consumer culture in several major ways. Firstly, the metaphor of individual choice dominates our sense of the social. Social action and structure are increasingly understood in terms of individual choices undertaken in relation to the needs of, or *for*, a self. Modern identity is best understood through the image of consumption. We choose a self-identity from the shop-window of the pluralized social world; actions, experiences and objects are all reflexively encountered as part of the need to construct and maintain self-identity. Secondly, identity itself can be seen as a saleable commodity. Self is not an inner sense of authenticity but rather a calculable condition of social survival and success. We have to produce and 'sell' an identity to various social markets in order to have intimate relationships, social standing, jobs and careers. Thirdly, the resources – both material and symbolic – through which we produce and sustain identities increasingly take the form of consumer goods and activities through which we construct appearances and organize leisure time and social encounters. Conversely, the quest for identity in post-traditional anomie is arguably the greatest market of all, or the motivation which underlies all markets: marketing, at least, assumes that we want goods primarily for the meaningful or desirable identities with which they might endow us. Consumerism simultaneously exploits mass identity crisis by proffering its goods as solutions to the problems of identity, and in the process intensifies it by offering ever more plural values and ways of being. Consumer culture lives and breeds in the cultural deficits of modernity.

That the self must be a project is dictated to us by a pluralized world and must be pursued within that pluralized world. This entails a high level of anxiety and risk. In terms of consumer culture, there is high anxiety because every choice seems to implicate the self: all acts of purchase or consumption, clothing, eating, tourism, entertainment, 'are decisions not only about how to act but who to be' (Warde 1994b: 81). The things I consume in some sense *express* my identity, my values, tastes, social membership and so on. But if I have to choose my identity and means of expression, I am involved in 'qualitatively new types of personal risk ... the risk of the chosen and changed personal identity' (Beck 1992: 131). Consumer culture (particularly typified in the form of advertising) increases the individual's experience of risk and anxiety by offering ever more choice and images of different identities and by increasing the sense of social risk involved in making the 'wrong choice'. This is particularly unjust as consumer culture also speeds

clean  
dirty

up and dislocates, through the fashion system, planned social obsolescence and so on, any sense of what a 'right choice' might be today as opposed to last week or next week. Again, this is an extension of general modern developments in which modernity 'confronts the individual with a complex diversity of choices and, because it is non-foundational, at the same time offers little help as to which options should be selected' (Giddens, 1991: 80). Post-traditional society is non-foundational both cognitively (through methodological doubt and relativism) and socio-culturally (its values are not perceived to be anchored in an organic social world).

In theorizing pluralization and identity crisis, two terms keep appearing: 'expertise' and 'lifestyle'. Both denote features of modern life which manage, assuage, and organize anxieties about modern identity and at the same time can be used to exploit and intensify them. Despite its 'methodological doubt' in relation to all forms of knowledge, modernity is an expert culture. As in Weber and the Frankfurt School, modernity approaches all problems, including those of identity, as technical matters to be solved by technical means. Consumer culture 'technicizes' the project of the self by treating all problems as solvable through various commodities (Bauman 1990: 200-5). Firstly, commodity culture creates and solves problems in the production and maintenance of the self: for example, cosmetics advertising divides the woman's face into a series of 'problems' (bags under the eyes, thin lips, no cheek bones . . .) each of which can be 'cured' by a commodity, and all of which are depicted as 'essential' to a socially desirable (and even ethically responsible) self. Secondly, the entire idea of the self as a project involves forms of expertise and ignorance which are addressed by commodities: hence, these writers, as well as Rose and authors like Sennett, Lasch and Bell, whom we shall consider in a moment, focus continually on the rise of self-help books, courses and programmes, the proliferation of therapies and a 'therapeutic culture', and recipes for developing self-esteem, assertiveness or whatever other values seem necessary for carrying out the project of the self. These offer 'authoritative' guidance. The skills required to construct a self are themselves sold in the form of commodities (cf. Lears 1983). Thirdly, consumer culture offers extensive guidance on the relation between the expanding domain of meaningful consumer goods, services and experiences and the project of maintaining a self. This comes in the form, for example, of consumer magazines and consumerist editorials in more general magazines, but also in the form of advertising itself. For authors such as Marchand (1986), Leiss, Kline and Jhally (1986) and Schudson (1981, 1984) advertising provides 'maps of modernity', authoritative (if unstable) 'discourses through and about objects' which allow us to orientate ourselves to the social meanings of things in a commercial world. Advertising thus replaces

traditional authorities about such meanings (e.g. religion and custom) with a modern information system.

All these aspects of expertise connect up the project of the self with commodity exchange. Lifestyle can also be seen as a way in which the pluralism of post-traditional identity is managed by individuals and exploited (or organized) by commerce:

Lifestyles are routinised practices, the routines incorporated into habits of dress, eating, modes of acting and favoured milieus for encountering others; but the routines followed are reflexively open to change in the light of the mobile nature of self-identity. Each of the small decisions a person makes every day . . . contributes to such routines. All such choices (as well as larger and more consequential ones) are decisions not only about how to act but who to be. The more post-traditional the settings in which an individual moves, the more lifestyle concerns the very core of self-identity, its making and remaking (Giddens 1991: 81).

Lifestyle orders things into a certain unity, reducing the plurality of choice and affording 'a continuing sense of "ontological security" that connects options in a more or less ordered pattern' (81). The way in which these authors connect this patterning to the commercial system is fairly conventional and relates to depictions of Fordism and post-Fordism (see chapter 7). Social reproduction is transferred from traditional culture (which is seen as a brake on modernization) to the market for goods and labour. The notion of individual wants becomes central to the whole system, and standardized consumption patterns become central to economic growth and stability. They reduce risk for the individual, but also for the corporation (which has to face market competition on the basis of unpredictable effective demand) and for the state (which has to balance productivity, political order and consumption for stable growth). 'The project of the self becomes translated into one of the possession of desired goods and the pursuit of artificially framed styles of life . . . The consumption of ever-novel goods becomes in some part a substitute for the genuine development of self' (Giddens, 1991: 198).

Lifestyle is different both from the traditional status orders it replaces and from modern structural divisions (such as class, gender and ethnicity) in at least two crucial respects. Firstly, lifestyle tends to indicate a purely 'cultural' pattern: it is made of signs, representations, media and is as mutable and unstable as they are. Secondly, one can in theory switch from one lifestyle to another in the move from one shop-window, TV channel, supermarket shelf and so on to another. The instability of the modern self is thus partly understood as an aspect of the instability of modern forms of social membership. Bauman (1990), for example, employs Maffesoli's concept of

neo-tribalism (see also Boorstin's (1962, 1973) notion of 'consumption communities'): lifestyle groupings and patterns do not reflect communities with well-policed social gates, with obligations to long-term commitment or to extensive social learning processes. Moreover, lifestyle groups are 'elective communities', memberships which we choose rather than have ascribed or allocated to us. Social membership is reduced to identities one puts on and takes off at whim, a transience which moves us beyond even the solidarity of subculture to 'the supermarket of style' (Polhemus 1994). Identity is literally skin deep. (It is interesting to note the current fascination with tattooing and body-piercing. Especially when related to subculture, they involve etching onto the body permanent signs of identities and memberships that are essentially transitory or even faddish.)

#### *The 'other-directed' self*

In modernity, the individual casts off from traditional society only to be cast adrift in a turbulent sea of sociability without a paddle or an anchor. A dominant modern concern is that, lacking a coherent self and authoritative cultural values, lacking character and depth, the individual is determined by society in the most trivial sense: individuals conform to the expectations of their immediate social surroundings, accept the authority of transient public opinion, media, advertising, peer groups, the Joneses. 'Americans', claimed Riesman, 'have always sought [the good opinion of others] and have had to seek it in an unstable market where quotations on the self could change without the price-pegging of a caste system or an aristocracy' (Riesman 1961: xx). The further worry is, as Sennett (1977) argues, that consumer culture has developed, along with modernity, from simple social emulation and conformism, in which individuals used goods for social advancement and security, to a far more dangerous condition (narcissism), in which they seek their *real* selves in their consumption, appearance and social performances.

The key terms of this issue were laid out as early as the 1750s, as we have seen. For Hume and Smith, seeing oneself through the eyes of the other is the basis both of our moral sense and of economic and cultural progress. Conviviality does not imply social conformism but autonomy and dynamism. For Rousseau, on the other hand, the other-regarding self is inauthentic and enslaved by social expectations. The society to which he or she seeks to conform is itself artificial. Certainly the idea that the modern self is constructed in its immediate social circumstances – rather than from authentic internal or transcendental sources of selfhood – runs clear through modern thought from this period through to twentieth-century social and psychological theory, especially in America and often in close connection

with theorizing consumer culture. Thus, for example, symbolic interactionism (Mead, Cooley, Goffman) emphasizes a self that is constructed by adopting and internalizing the point of view of (significant) others, a 'looking-glass self', a 'performative self' in a 'dramaturgical' social world, and indeed an 'over-socialized self'. In a related vein, 'role-theory' and Parsonian sociology in the mid-century see the pluralism of modern society in terms of individuals having to conform to roles and role expectations, institutionally or structurally defined positions with norms of required behaviour and belief attached to them. Ewen (1976: 34–8) notes that Floyd Allport's notion of 'the social self' ('My idea of myself is rather my own idea of my neighbor's view of me') was ideologically useful to vanguard American advertisers of the 1920s. Whether or not they directly applied his social psychology, similar thinking seems to inform advertising copy which runs, 'You will be amazed to find how many times in one day people glance at your nails. At each glance a judgment is made . . .': if their self is immediately social, then fear of social disapproval will bring consumers to market. Similarly, J. B. Watson, doyen of the kind of behaviourist psychology that reduced 'conformity' to 'conditioning', to a pure stimulus-response relation of self to environment, left academia for advertising in 1922, proclaiming the latter to be the effective modern replacement for family, religion and other traditional socializing agencies.

The clearest and most popular explorer of this theme was David Riesman. His sociological concern in *The Lonely Crowd* was in line with the structural-functionalism of his day – the question of how social order is established at the level of the individual by socializing them into roles, the role being the point at which systemic order and individual personality must meet, and meet happily. Riesman proffers a typology of modes of achieving social conformity. In traditional society, kinship relations and the sanction of *shame* (the bad opinion of a close and immediate community) ensures the individual's external behavioural conformity to a fixed social order.

By the age of liberal capitalism, however, this order has splintered into plurality and 'too many novel situations are presented, situations which a code cannot encompass in advance. Consequently the problem of personal choice, solved in the earlier period . . . by channeling choice through rigid social organization, . . . is solved by channeling choice through a rigid though highly individualized character' (Riesman 1961: 15). Hence an 'inner-directed' character type emerges: 'The source of direction for the individual is "inner"' (15) in the sense that, early in childhood, parents implant internally maintained norms which can govern choice and behaviour throughout life. Bad behaviour incurs the sanction of *guilt*.

'Other-directed' personalities emerge in a world that looks rather like the post-Fordist world (see chapter 7). The world is more plural and we

encounter more of these pluralities through the media and social mobility. In the worlds of work and bureaucracy, social mobility 'depends less on what one is and what one does than on what others think of one – and how competent one is in manipulating others and being oneself manipulated' (45). In the world of work (and Riesman is writing in the same vein here as Whyte (1957) and Mills (1951)) '*the product now in demand is neither a staple nor a machine: it is a personality*' (46). To maintain a career one must market one's personality through the same kind of 'product differentiation' that characterizes commodities. Socialization is now directed not towards maintaining inner standards but towards developing 'an exceptional sensitivity to the actions and wishes of others' (22) so that the individual can be 'at home everywhere and nowhere, capable of a rapid if sometimes superficial intimacy and response to everyone' (25). Instead of being sanctioned by guilt, the other-directed character is driven by 'a diffuse *anxiety*' about measuring up to the transitory expectations of others. Where the 'control equipment' of the inner-directed personality is like a 'gyroscope', that of the other-directed is more like 'radar' (25).

With this kind of sensitivity and anxiety, the individual is obsessed with preferences, tastes, appearances, norms. In dealing with this kind of world, 'safety consists . . . in mastering a battery of consumer preferences and the mode of their expression . . . The proper mode of expression requires feeling out with skill and sensitivity the probable tastes of the others and then swapping mutual likes and dislikes to maneuver intimacy' (73). The self becomes dominated by fashion since 'to escape the danger of a conviction for being different from the "others" requires that one can be different – in look and talk and manner – from *oneself* as one was yesterday' (75). This has always been true, but now fashion has spread through all classes, and has speeded up in time. The possibilities are readily grasped by commodity producers able to 'accelerate swings of fashion as well as to differentiate goods by very minute gradients' (75). This endless splitting of marginal distinctions requires consumers to possess vast amounts of information and a capacity to make the most minute distinctions, which is precisely what the other-directed character is built upon: 'narcissism with respect to minor differences' (Freud, cited in Riesman 1961: 46).

Significantly, in his introduction to the second (1961) edition of *The Lonely Crowd*, Riesman insists that the book's aim – appearances notwithstanding – was not to condemn other-direction, and he is indeed sympathetic to both consumerism and popular culture. In an almost postmodernist sense he praises the 'considerateness, sensitivity and tolerance that are among the positive qualities of other-direction' (xxi) and which are due to 'a general tendency, facilitated by education, by mobility, by the mass media, toward an enlargement of the circles of empathy beyond one's clan,

beyond even one's class, sometimes beyond one's country as well' (xxi) – an argument that we have seen stretch back to Montesquieu or Hume's praise of commerce. Moreover, Riesman argues that *all* the character types he is describing are modes of ensuring conformity. The other-directed character is no more 'conformist' than any other, and has its own mode of being autonomous. In fact, 'other-directed autonomy' looks very like contemporary notions of reflexivity, for it 'depends . . . upon the success of [the individual's] effort to recognize and respect his own feelings, his own potentialities, his own limitations' (259).

### *The cult of the self*

Paradoxically, the other-directed self of post-traditional society, perpetually hanging on everyone else's good opinion, is at the same time *self-obsessed*. At the limit point – 'narcissism' – other people and social relations are perceived only in terms of their implications for maintaining a coherent self-identity. In a post-traditional society, attention to immediate social expectations is the nearest equivalent available to that erstwhile social solidarity or 'culture' on which having a coherent identity depends.

For Giddens (1991), the instability of identity in the post-traditional world demands that we be inescapably involved in a '*reflexive* project of the self': this project is reflexive because it involves unremitting self-monitoring, self-scrutiny, planning and ordering of all elements of our lives, appearances and performances in order to marshal them into a coherent narrative called 'the self'. We have to interpret the past and plan the future in relation to an identity we are attempting to constitute in a particularly immediate and transient social present.

Consumerism is central to *this self-obsession*. This is partly because we not only have to choose a self, but (as Foucault's line of argument also indicates) have to constitute ourselves as a self who chooses, a consumer. One implication of this is that we are deemed personally responsible for every aspect of ourselves: we could always choose to *do something* about our appearance, health, manners. At the same time, everything we do has implications for the self, implications that we obsessively monitor; wearing this, eating that, looking like this are all read as reflections of the self (see, for example, Finkelstein 1991). As a result, all aspects of our existence are monitored and scrutinized as objects of instrumental calculation in the creation of the self, and the self is itself as much a thing one must produce as a person that one is. And consumer industries stand ready with things one can buy in order to address all these technical problems in the production of ourselves. Moreover, advertising and the media routinely offer aspirational

narratives of the self – images of lifestyles, goods, advice – with which the viewer can identify. Most crucially, much like Foucault's ethical technologies, they offer up the very idea of the self as a narrative form, something to be constructed through individual choice and effort.

The modern relation to the body has provided a well-worked example of this (see, for example, Featherstone 1991a, 1991b; Gaines and Herzog 1990; O'Neill 1985; Shilling 1993; Turner 1985). The state of the body is seen as a reflection of the state of its owner, who is responsible for it and could refashion it. The body can be taken as a reflection of the self *because* it can and should be treated as something to be worked upon, and generally worked upon using commodities, for example intensively regulated, self-disciplined, scrutinized through diets, fitness regimes, fashion, self-help books and advice, in order to produce it as a commodity. Overweight, slovenliness and even unfashionability, for example, are now *moral* disorders; even acute illnesses such as cancer reflect on the inadequacy of the self (Coward 1989; Sontag 1983), and indeed of its consumption. One gets ill because one has consumed the wrong (unnatural) things or failed to consume the correct ('natural') ones: self, body, goods and environment constitute a system of *moral* choice.

The crucial point about this intense conjuncture of self-obsession and consumerism is not that it produces superficial social conformity, but the very opposite: unfortunately we are *not* simply keeping up external appearances. As Riesman points out, inner-directed characters were concerned with maintaining respectability, decorum and esteem through external appearances. The other-directed person is original in that this conformity reaches deeply into the *internal* life: 'The other-directed person wants to be loved rather than esteemed.' (1961: xx) The game has become deadly serious because the consumer's very soul is at stake in the management of consumerist conformity for, 'though he has his eye very much on the Joneses, [he] aims to keep up with them not so much in external details as in the quality of his inner experience' (24).

For Giddens, and to a great extent Riesman, the reflexive project of the self and its commodification constitute modern normality, however undesirable in certain respects. For others it is a pathological condition: narcissism. The idea of narcissism clearly connects modern self-obsession to the weakness of the self in the post-traditional society and indicates how consumer culture can both intensify and exploit this dynamic. Narcissism does not mean self love, as in its everyday usage, but close to the opposite. It stems from an inadequate sense of the self and its boundaries. Freud postulates a 'primary narcissism' in which the new-born exists in an amorphous world, unable to distinguish 'self' as source of need from 'other' (parents, carers) as source of gratification. Lacan theorized this as the 'imaginary', a 'condition in which

we lack any defined centre of self, in which what "self" we have seems to pass into objects, and objects into it, in a ceaseless closed exchange' (Eagleton 1983).

In Freud, this imaginary unity breaks up → and the sense of a self distinct from others begins to emerge – when needs are not gratified and the infant becomes aware of itself as dependent, thus also arousing fears of abandonment, incompleteness, ungratified need. Narcissism as a pathology (secondary narcissism) occurs when the infant attempts to annul the pain of disappointed object love (frustration, lack of gratification), and its 'rage against those who do not respond immediately to its needs', attempting 'to re-establish earlier relationships by creating in his fantasies an omnipotent mother or father who merges with images of his own self' (Lasch, 1979: 36). That is to say, the individual fails to acknowledge the autonomy of others (parents, people and objects) as satisfiers of need. The narcissist is utterly self-absorbed, obsessed with the relation of every person and event to his own needs, unable, as Sennett puts it, to understand 'what belongs within the domain of the self and self-gratification and what belongs outside it' (1977: 9). The narcissist is driven by a desire for endless gratification, experience, and impulse, but with no possibility of any commitment; for any object, human or other, is desired not for its own sake but as part of the dialectic of a self strung out between omnipotence and impotence. And no object – human or other – has any real existence independent of the narcissist's fragile ego. Identifying the self alternately with 'grandiose objects' and with inner emptiness, the narcissist is 'neurotically dependent on others, especially for the maintenance of self-esteem, yet possesses insufficient autonomy to be able to communicate effectively with them . . .' (Giddens 1991: 178).

Lacan's version develops along a different route but to the same conclusion. The infant, existing without a self in the undifferentiated world of the imaginary, sees its image in a mirror. This image shows the child as 'unified', a discrete and integral object, and thus an autonomous and whole being. This image is pleasing: the child both identifies with it as an (ideal) image of the self, yet also recognizes that it is not-I, is something alien and outside. 'As the child grows up, it will continue to make such imaginary identifications with objects, and this is how its ego will be built up. For Lacan, the ego is just this narcissistic process whereby we bolster up a fictive sense of unitary selfhood by finding something in the world with which we can identify' (Eagleton, 1983). The self is only perceived and loved from an external vantage point, through a gaze, as an object with an imaginary unity; and, for Lacan, all desire is related to the denial or confirmation of this precarious selfhood: 'narcissism envelops the forms of desire' and renders all need and desire insatiable because they are all overwhelmed by the need for one's self to be loved. Lacan, according to Harland (1987: 41) associates

this kind of desire directly with consumerism: 'For western culture puts a special emphasis upon individuality and selfhood, and derives therefrom a special dynamism and drivenness. What could be more conducive to expansion and achievement and aggression than a kind of desire that nothing can ever truly satisfy?'

For Lasch and Sennett, narcissism is the pathology at the heart of a consumer society in which the boundaries between the private and the public world – like the narcissist's boundaries between the self and the other, inside and outside – are dangerously blurred. In Lasch's more conventional analysis, the public world is able to invade the private through consumerism and other forms of power because of the decline of organic bases for a strong self (above all, the decline of the patriarchal family). Consumerist concern with the self and consumerist promises of the ability to produce a desirable self merely disguise the total powerlessness of individuals and the invasion of their private world by 'forces of organized domination' to the extent that 'personal life has almost ceased to exist' (Lasch 1979: 30), and what there is is dominated by 'murderous competition for goods and position'. Capitalism, Lasch argues apropos of de Sade (1979: 69), reduces individuals to interchangeable objects that relate to each other as pure objects (things that can potentially gratify the needs of the self). In the resulting social anarchy there is nothing left but the pursuit of pleasure, but pleasure which is pure aggression. He concludes, much like Durkheim (or Rousseau), that:

In a society that has reduced reason to mere calculation, reason can impose no limits on the pursuit of pleasure – on the immediate gratification of every desire no matter how perverse, insane, criminal, or merely immoral. For the standards that would condemn crime or cruelty derive from religion, compassion, or the kind of reason that rejects purely instrumental applications; and none of these outmoded forms of thought or feeling has any logical place in a society based on commodity production.

Sennett, on the other hand, is concerned that the obsession with the private self has taken over the public world. Rather in the vein of Riesman, he argues that the 'performative self', conformism and the pressures of social expectation are hardly new developments. At the birth of modernity and consumerism, the eighteenth-century (male) member of the bourgeois public sphere was certainly expected to perform through emulative consumption, adoption of fashionable manners, expressions and activities and so on. Figures like Smith and Hume identify the self with the ego, with the ability to carry out sociable performances in public, rather than with the content of those performances. The content could be playful, arbitrary, whimsical, inconsistent – it did not need to be authentic. He was *not* expected to believe that this public behaviour expressed, or even should express, his

true self: it was a performance, and a performance carried out 'at a distance from the self'. Private and public behaviour did not call each other into question and need not coincide; they were separate issues. 'Seeming' and 'being' could live in comfortable discordance. For Sennett, it is a combination of forces – romanticism, the sanctification of bourgeois privacy and respectability, religious control over public ethics – that produces the fundamental problems of modern consumer culture, that we must really be what we seem and must appear as we really are. We must, in a word, be sincere or authentic. In the words of mid-century sociology, role-distance must be overcome by assimilating self to social role. This is a difficult or impossible task in a pluralist world and one that requires increasingly intrusive strategies for making a self which is fragmented across the social world cohere into a single, authentic story, and one accurately reflected through one's appearance back to that social world. At the very least, the demand for authenticity, launched by romanticism, entails that in everyday life we are scrutinized not only for our fashionability but also for our consistency (as a mark of our truth). The task is insupportable and unjust.

#### The romantic self

Romanticism, like the ideal of culture, addresses the cultural deficits of modernity, but does so through a desire for organic and integral forms of being. Performance 'at a distance from the self', a knowing split between being and seeming, was precisely what Rousseau would not suffer; it represented for him a state of inauthenticity and enslavement to social pressures. Yet, Sennett argues, it was precisely the romantic insistence that we really be what we seem, that we merge private and public, inside and outside, that makes us obsessed with the self and prey to a consumerism which constantly vaunts promises of a coherent, authentic and valued self.

In fact, romanticism and the ideal of culture have a double and ironic relation to consumer culture. On the one hand, the romantic view of culture is a critique of the material civilization which produces consumers. On the other hand, consumer culture – like the elite culture which supposedly opposes it – constantly promises precisely those values that romanticism believes were destroyed by civilization. As Colin Campbell (1989) points out, we can see this in most advertising. It is about feeling, imaginative desiring and longing, rather than reason; it is about collective values, social acceptability and identity as much as about individual choice; it tends to hide mechanism and manufacture, rather showing its products either as immaculate conceptions or as linked to a mythical history (Williamson 1978, 1979); it deploys images of the exotic, the natural, the surreal and the unconscious

rather than empirical facts or rational arguments. As Raymond Williams (1980: 185) said, it is not 'sensibly materialist' but profoundly idealist, offering emotional and spiritual rather than utilitarian gratifications.

It is as if romanticism and culture, rather than rationalism and utility, furnished the language of modern consumption; a language meant to critique the cultural deficits of modernity was adopted to fill them, inauthentically. This is largely Campbell's argument: modern consumerist hedonism, as he defines it, is not about the satisfaction of need (which limits the experience of pleasure) but about the pursuit of the experience of pleasure for its own sake. This is associated with a focus on the intensification of emotional experiences, which are understood as located in the internal world of the self. In modern hedonism emotions are stimulated, incited, made into an obsession, through the use of imagination, the production of 'longing' and imaginative dissatisfaction, along the model of the day-dream. The basic motivation of modern consumers is a 'longing to experience in reality those pleasures created and enjoyed in the imagination, a longing which results in the ceaseless consumption of novelty' (Campbell 1989: 205). (There are affinities with the narcissistic personality's thirst for experiences to fill out the empty internal world of the self.)

Campbell traces this modern hedonistic ethic back to a 'romantic ethic' which has its roots in the same social classes and the same period (the middling orders of early modernity) as the Protestant ethic. If one follows the story of the Protestant ethic beyond the early seventeenth century, where Weber left it, one finds, Campbell argues, that it splits between the rationalistic Calvinist strain and a Pietism which fostered the stimulation, examination and above all the display of certain powerful emotions (for example melancholy, sympathy and benevolence, self-pity) which developed into the cult of sensibility and then romanticism. This focus on the emotions also created a link between aesthetic and moral aspects of the self. The capacity to react with strong emotions to artistic beauty or to the sublime and the picturesque in nature is a mark of moral worth, a theme we have already encountered in Hume's and Smith's grounding of morality in the imaginative capacity of 'sympathy'. The display of emotional capacities has the same status in the romantic ethic as the calling and wealth have in the Protestant ethic: a mark of moral election.

Nineteenth-century romanticism continues the association of moral worth with emotion, passion, imagination, the ideal as opposed to the factual, and above all with the self ('the Romantic is one who discovers himself as centre' (184)), not with the conscious ego of the utilitarian individual but rather with the unconscious and natural forces within the individual that constitute the authentic sources of the self. This set of valuations opposes both the emotionally restrained, calculating and status-driven consumption of the

aristocracy and the self-interested hedonic calculus of utilitarianism. In the process:

The romantic ideal of character, together with its associated theory of moral renewal through art, functioned to stimulate and legitimate that form of autonomous, self-illusory hedonism which underlies modern consumer behaviour. . . . The romantic world-view provided the highest possible motives with which to justify day-dreaming, longing and the rejection of reality, together with the pursuit of originality in life and art; and by so doing, enabled pleasure to be ranked above comfort, counteracting both traditionalistic and utilitarian restraints on desire (201).

If Campbell is right, then 'culture' and 'consumer culture' are less opposed and more deeply connected than either thinks: they are connected through the romantic concern to make up for the deficits of modernity by revaluing the emotional, aesthetic and spiritual notions of the self which have no place in a utilitarian society. For many of the authors discussed here, however, it is a cure which renders the disease ever more chronic.

#### *Culture versus society*

It might be useful to conclude by looking at Daniel Bell's *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1979). In Bell's argument culture and consumer culture are openly complicit in late capitalism and both are profoundly dysfunctional, not so much for the individual as for the social order itself: ideals of 'culture' fill in the cultural deficits of modernity but in a way that undermines the society itself. Bourgeois society, he argues, has two cultural sources. The first, the puritan work ethic, was distinctly functional: it provided a 'transcendental ethic' (21) otherwise missing from the utilitarian world, which held the unlimited and open-ended nature of economic self-interest and needs in check by emphasizing not just work but also 'the formation of *character* (sobriety, probity, work as a calling)' (81), and by subordinating the individual to the authority of society.

However, the second cultural source, familiar from our discussions of liberal-utilitarianism, 'was a secular Hobbesianism, a radical individualism which saw man as unlimited in his appetite, which was restrained in politics by a sovereign but ran fully free in economics and culture' (81). The Protestant ethic has been ravaged by mass consumption, was 'sundered from bourgeois society' and persists into the modern world only in the form of 'the crabbed, small-town mentality' obsessed with respectability. It was, instead, 'the secular Hobbesianism [which] fed the mainsprings of modernity, the ravenous hunger for unlimited experience' (21). However, hedonistic

individualism cannot provide the 'transcendental ties' that arose in the work ethic; 'society fails to provide some set of "ultimate meanings" in its character structure, work, and culture' (21).

In place of 'ultimate meanings', there is now only an explosion of individual desire and self-obsession, fed by and feeding into mass consumption and gradually moving beyond matters of manners and taste to affect social structure. For mass consumption brings to everyday life something implicit in liberalism (secular Hobbesianism) and developed through romanticism: a cult of the hedonistic self, individuals defined through their desires. Modern culture takes an essentially anti-bourgeois form from early in its history in the sense that it attacks the Puritan ethic as repressive and personally stifling. The axial principle of modern culture is not restraint but rather 'the expression and remaking of the "self" in order to achieve self-realization and self-fulfilment. And in its search, there is a denial of any limits or boundaries to experience. It is a reaching out for all experience; nothing is forbidden, all is to be explored' (13). This theme dominates modernist artistic culture, is evident in the use of Freud to argue that unhappiness results from self-control and the repression of instinctual gratification, and enters everyday life through popular culture which is built around hedonism and a 'fun morality'. 'Whereas gratification of forbidden impulses traditionally aroused guilt, failure to have fun now lowers one's self-esteem' (Wolfenstein, quoted in Bell, 1979: 71).

Most authors pursuing these themes are concerned to show that this hedonistic culture is dysfunctional for the individual (it feeds off their modern insecurity) but functional for the system (it produces insatiable consumers). Bell, on the other hand, argues that it is dysfunctional for the system itself: culture and consumer culture undermine the economy and polity, for there is now a fatal contradiction 'between a social structure that is organized fundamentally in terms of roles and specialization, and a culture which is concerned with the enhancement and fulfillment of the self and the "whole" person' (14). In more lurid terms, 'In the 1950s and the 1960s, the cult of the Orgasm succeeded the cult of Mammon as the basic passion of American life' (70).

### Conclusion

We have been looking at one of the most powerful and enduring themes in the study of consumer culture, an attempt to understand it as a social pathology intrinsically bound up with modernity. Modernity dismantles a stable social order which provides fixed values and identities, reducing the

social to the individual, the transcendental to the calculated, the rational, the material. In these conditions, it is argued, the individual's boundaries, sources of meaning, social relations and needs become blurred and uncertain. This is the context of consumer culture: it floods modernity with a torrent of values, meanings, selves and others, both filling in the cultural deficits of the modern world and constantly intensifying and exploiting them. Underlying such a perspective is an ineradicable nostalgia or lamentation: consumer culture can never replace the world we have lost, or provide us with selves we can trust, or offer a culture in which we can be truly at home. Consumer culture comes to epitomize a sense that the sources upon which modernity draws for selves, values and solidarity are somehow wrong from the start.