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The Socio-Spatial Construction of Consumption: a Historical and Contemporary Analysis

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the possibility of a *modern consumption* distinct from discussions of the ‘consumer,’ ‘consumption,’ ‘consumerism’ and the ‘consumer society’ and rejects the possibility of a *universal* or ‘human’ consumption-activity rooted in use that merely varies with space and time. This is done by exploring the roots of these terms in the philosophical anthropology of economic theory, specifically the concept of *homo œconomicus*. The economic inheritance within contemporary accounts of the capitalist consumption-relation is then pursued through a review of the disciplinary approaches to the topic made by historical accounts of ‘consumer culture,’ the study of patterns of use across the social sciences, from psychology, through geography to marketing and anthropology. Finally, the contemporary sociological investigation of ‘consumption’ is critiqued and its broad reliance upon a utilitarian-derived cost/benefit model adapted to incorporate ‘sign-value’ and discussions of postmodernism are rejected.

This prompts the proposal of a ‘postphenomenological’ approach to the study of *modern consumption* and the ‘terrain’ upon which it is available to experience. The bulk of the thesis, chapters three, four and five, are taken up with a review of the contemporary commodity-form using the phenomenological categories of space, time and causality, respectively. This allows a historical perspective to be employed in the analysis of the role of material factors in the constitution of subjective experience and its role within the emergence of *modern consumption*. The theory of *modern consumption* and the socio-spatial terrain upon which it unfolds is developed through the concept of ‘affordance,’ adapted from environmental psychology and a re-definition of ‘possession’ that arises from the inter-relation of *being* and *having*. This allows the rejection of the orthodox models and theories of ‘consumption’ outlined in chapter two. The thesis concludes by advocating an engagement in a ‘playful’ *modern consumption* that engages with the commodity-form as the medium within which contemporary ‘experience’ is transmitted and, which, consequently, forms the of the phenomenal forms of subjective experience derived from the capitalist consumption-relation.

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Along the way children were born, friends and loved ones died. At so many points this work receded into the background, at others it helped me to grasp some aspect of the world that I inhabited when not surrounded by books or typing at a keyboard. In the end, I learned what I should have known at the outset; that the business of sociology is *life*, its discussion and description, its theorisation and critique. Well, the world certainly changed and I changed with it, this text forms some oblique record of that process.

The gestation of any work, especially one as protracted as this, entails its becoming a nodal point, in time and space, of extended networks of people, things and experiences. It is beyond my competence to begin to catalogue the meetings, events, discussions and simple kindnesses which the people and things of this world allowed my participation in during the production of this document. That said, I would like to think that if ever those who knew me during that time stumble upon this text they would recognise something of themselves and their words, actions or thoughts within it.

The mistakes, however, those are mine

**Author's declaration –**

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name \_\_\_ Gordon Hush \_\_\_\_\_

## Introduction: Expressing ‘Consumption’

Don't call this nothing,  
This might be all  
We ever have.  
- *Nothing*, Uncle Tupelo

There may have been a time when one could encapsulate the relationship of reality and play in the harmless antithesis, that life is serious, but art is cheerful. But just as increasing development magnifies the antitheses everywhere, driving asunder into opposition what was uniformly joined in the embryonic state, so too life has also become terrible, fearful and tragic, and it is merely the extension of this – the unavoidable reverse of this state of affairs – if recreation and play become satyr-like, orgiastic and sensually intoxicated.

- Simmel (1997: 260), *Infelices Possidentes! (Unhappy Dwellers)*

### The Context of ‘Use’

Marx, it would appear, was right all along: the investigation of the capitalist mode of production and the forms of social interaction – or ‘sociation’ (Simmel) – which it facilitates does, indeed, begin with an analysis of the commodity, that seemingly ‘trivial’ thing. Consequently, this thesis seeks to account for the historical development and contemporary importance of what is commonly termed ‘consumption,’ that is, the various *uses* to which the commodified products of the capitalist division of labour are put in everyday life. However, rather than investigate accounts of the historical evolution of ‘consumer society’ or the role of ‘consumption’ in the identity politics of ‘consumers,’ this analysis proposes to investigate a definitively *modern consumption* and the ‘terrain’ upon which it makes available historically novel forms of experience to its participants. This requires re-thinking the socio-spatial relationship between people and things, between ‘subjective and objective culture’ (Simmel), and the role of capitalist modernity in profoundly altering the conditions under which the phenomenal forms of subjective experience emerge. Consequently, the historical and material processes through which the forms of ‘lived experience’ (Minkowski, 1970) of capitalist modernity have emerged are seen as crucial to the theorisation of *modern consumption*, its transformation of phenomenal experience and the relationship between *being* and *having*, expressed as ‘possession.’

What emerges is an attempt at a ‘postphenomenological’ (Verbeek, 2005) sociology of the relationship between people and things in which the Cartesian privileging of the human

subject is circumvented through an analysis of the ‘ontological relationship’ of *affordance* forged between ‘organism and environment’ (Costall, 2004). Specifically, this requires that the mutually constitutive relationship between people and things, identified by Verbeek as the basis of a *postphenomenological* approach, be located within a material and historical explanatory framework. Rather than pursuing an account of the psychological motives for ‘consumption’ or the emergence of various social groupings within ‘consumer society,’ this study focuses upon the intersection of the political, economic, social and technological processes that constitute capitalist modernity, and the ‘technical mediation’ (Latour) of experience by the commodity-form. Consequently, the transmission of traditional forms of experience, such as proverbs or fables (Agamben, 1993; 1999), is confounded by the ubiquity of the commodity-form as a medium of experience. However, this *modernisation* of the medium of experience – the objective component of the relation between subjective and objective culture – brings consequences: it alters the phenomenal forms of subjective experience born of the contemporary relationship between *being* and *having*.

### **The Affordance of ‘Consumption’**

The commodity-form – and its ‘special case’ the money-form, or ‘universal equivalent’ (Marx) – is a technology geared towards the *circulation and exchange* of value in tangible form. Dodd (1994) sees the money-form as possessing both a symbolic and a material aspect, and functioning as an ‘informational’ and ‘chronically mediatized’ phenomenon within a network of objects, practices and institutions. The same is true of the commodity-form, regardless of whether it is a product, service, system or experience: both commodity and money-forms are relational phenomena; both *re-present* the relations between (economic) phenomena in abstracted form. The economic juxtaposition of use-value (subjective) and exchange-value (objective) can be supplemented by the ‘representational’ (Buck-Morss, 1993) or ‘staging value’ (Böhme, 2003; 2006) of the commodity-form, which is *inter-subjective* in its constitution. Such an ‘aestheticization of the real’ produced by those who labour ‘to give an appearance to things and people, cities and landscapes, to endow them with an aura, to lend them an atmosphere in ensembles’ ultimately erodes ‘the distinction, so essential to the culture industry theory, between art and kitsch’ (Böhme, 2003: 71-2). It also reinforces the primacy of the relationship between people and things, particularly its *aesthetic* or immaterial dimension.

Böhme’s (2006) discussion of the ‘aesthetic economy’ – techno-centric and borderline determinist as it is – reveals the inadequacy of mainstream sociological studies of ‘consumption,’ ‘consumerism’ or the ‘consumer society.’ Such studies do not address the

historical novelty of contemporary existence, and fail to grasp, interrogate or account for the consequences of the relationship between people and things within capitalist modernity. The underlying utilitarian presuppositions inherited from economic theory deny the possibility of formulating a sociological approach to the capitalist consumption-relation capable of replacing the cost/benefit analysis of a ‘desiring subject’ with an emphasis upon the *experiential* possibilities offered by an engagement with the world. In considering the market as merely the *empty* space within which commodities are presented to ‘consumers’ (who are either acquisitive or duped depending upon theoretical orientation), rather than a complex *terrain* composed of ‘networks’ of human and nonhuman ‘actants’ (Latour) stretching back hundreds of years, the socio-spatial dimension of *modern consumption* is ignored. Likewise, the commodity-form’s role as the medium for communicating ‘experience’ necessitates a re-conceptualisation of contemporary subjectivity and its relationship to temporality, memory and identity, rather than a descent into the perennial debate between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*. Inevitably, then, the changed character of *spatial* and *temporal* experience demands a reappraisal of *causality* as it has traditionally been applied to the pursuit, use and ‘consumption’ of objects, services and experiences. Indeed, in asserting the relation of *mutual constitution* between people and things the concept of causality must be rethought. Instead, it is *affordance*, the relationship between organism and environment, which determines the spatial, temporal and causal possibilities constituted by any situation,

### **Producing *modern consumption***

The rejection of conventional accounts of the sociological investigation of ‘consumption,’ which lies at the heart of this thesis, begins with the critique of economic theory found in Chapter One. Economic theory’s attempts to document and define the nature and role of the capitalist consumption-relation are instructive in that they *re-present* the historical evolution of the commodity-form within the capitalist mode of production. For instance, in pre-classical political economy ownership of valuable objects conferred wealth, since value always assumed *substantial* form, such as gold or precious metals, and was created by either God or nature. However, in classical political economy, epitomised by Smith and Ricardo, the labour expended in manufacture was acknowledged as contributing to the creation of the value of a commodity and, as such, was required to be rewarded for this contribution. While Bentham’s formulation of a ‘hedonic calculus’ allowed the quantification of subjective utility and its expression as price, which, itself, became the basis for the neo-classical theorisation of ‘marginal utility,’ and underpinned the comparative evaluation of ‘consumer’ choices in a world of scarce resources. In turn, this

led to *homo œconomicus*, or economic man, the agent of rational choice in pursuit of maximum utility.

Neo-classical economic theory understood the ‘consumer’ either as a solitary monad in pursuit of maximum utility, calculated through a cost/benefit analysis, or as an abstract and aggregated ideal-type generated by the demand of groups, classes or society at large. ‘Consumer’ choices became the basis for the re-presentation of ‘revealed preferences,’ the psychological manifestation of utilitarian and aesthetic judgements (Gagnier, 2000) between commodities based upon their *relative* or ‘marginal’ utility. Therefore, commodities were understood as the *signs* of taste and discrimination of individual egos, markers of class distinction and an index of civilisation through their embodiment of the doctrine of *progress* (discerned in the exercise of rational thought and its technical deployment). However, this was only possible if economics became a science of words rather than figures, if value was understood to exist as more than simply utility (von Wieser, 1889). Thereafter, economic activity could be considered to incorporate the task of representing social relations and the structuring of interaction, through the explanation of *lifestyle* groupings and *identity* politics discerned in ‘consumer’ choices and ‘consumption’ patterns. In this manner neo-classical economic theory intersected with bourgeois psychology in charting the project(ion) of the self, or ‘personation’ (Seltzer, 1992), through the annexation and manipulation of the contents of the sphere of circulation and exchange.

The ‘consumer’ of marginalist theory began to resemble the figure of the bourgeois *collector* (Stewart, 1998) in that both revealed (constructed) their personal preferences (taste) through the *acquisition* of commodities. The narration of desire (for utility) became the basis of the ‘biographical fiction of the self’ (Ferguson, 1990), while the ‘reification of exchange’ within the ‘mature money-economy’ (Simmel, 1990) *re-presented volition* as causality. The inherent *exchangeability* (Mead, 1901) of the contents of the sphere of circulation and exchange underpinned the commodity-form’s function as a ‘technical mediation’ or ‘translation’ (Latour, 1993; Verbeek, 2005) device, *shifting* goods from the realm of production to that of ‘consumption.’ However, it did not do so in a vacuum:

... the concept of mediation helps to show that technologies actively shape the character of human-world relations. Human contact with reality is always mediated, and technologies offer one possible form of mediation. [However...] any particular mediation can arise only within specific contexts of use and interpretation. Technologies do not control processes of

mediation all by themselves, for the forms of mediation are always context-dependent [...].

- Verbeek, 2005: 11

Both Marx and Keynes insist upon a distinction between *productive* and *final* ‘consumption,’ dependent upon the purpose of the purchase: as the commodity exits the sphere of exchange the question of its *use* arises. Expenditure for *productive* ‘consumption’ must be considered as investment, while expenditure for *final* ‘consumption’ – *consummation* – exhausts or depletes the commodity-object. These two approaches have the merit of not reducing the consumption-relation to ‘consumption’ – the realm of individual desire – and of asserting the ‘totality’ of the capitalist mode of production as a series of social relations (Marx, 1973). However, they do imply that *future* production, either of other commodities or the psychological individual of bourgeois philosophy, is the systemic *raison d’être* of exchange relations. Later Marxist attempts at revising political economy, as part of a ‘sociology of consumption’ or ‘consumer society’ (Clarke, 1982; Fine, 2002; Haug, 1986), or ‘system of provision’ approach (Fine, 1995; 2002; Fine & Leopold, 1993), have sought to unpick the commodification process and the *fetish* it bestows by tracing the origins of goods in the social relations of production and distribution. This allows the ‘consumer’ to act as a reflexive agent who constructs an identity in the intersection of utilitarian, aesthetic and moral considerations expressed as *choice*. It does not question the ‘evolution of the consumer into a master category of collective and individual identity’ (Trentmann, 2006: 2) or the economic infrastructure or discursive framework that maintains this category as the focal point of ‘consumption’ activity.

The *manufacture* of the ‘consumer’ and its role within the practice of ‘consumption’ emerges at the intersection of economic theory – the pursuit of utility in all its forms – and bourgeois psychology – the construction of psychological individuality, or *ego* – as the *teleological* project of identity through *re-presentation*, or ‘personation’ (Seltzer, 1992). However, such a conception of identity is outdated, belonging to the age of neo-classical economics and *grands magasins*, and fails to acknowledge the contemporary relationship between *being* and *having* and the phenomenal forms of subjective experience generated by the interplay between ‘organism and environment’ as *affordance* (Costall, 2004). The extension of the capitalist sphere of circulation and exchange to ever-more aspects of contemporary existence highlights the role of the commodity-form in supplanting traditional forms of the transmission of ‘experience.’ Crucially, in place of the precious

metals discussed by pre-classical political economy, the rent theorised by its successor or the utility calculated by neo-classical marginalists, contemporary theorists now discuss an ‘experience economy’ (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) or an economy based upon *access* to goods and, in particular, *services* (Massumi, 1993; 2003; Rifkin, 2000). In doing so, they highlight the increasing emphasis upon the *immaterial* and ‘experiential’ dimension of the contemporary commodity-form facilitated by the sphere of circulation and exchange within capitalist modernity.

The apparent permeation of contemporary existence by the relations of exchange, rather than simply the money economy, prompts Vattimo (1988) to propose an ‘ontology of the present’ devoid of any nostalgic attempt to recover some, presently absent, form of *authentic* experience. Such ‘nihilism,’ which ‘is the consumption of use-value in exchange-value,’ where ‘Being is completely dissolved in the discoursing of value, in the indefinite transformation of universal experience’ (Vattimo, 1988: 22), signals the dissolution of the humanist concept of *being* within contemporary technologies of exchange and representation, epitomised by the money economy. Here the ‘formlessness’ identified by Simmel (1990: 272) as a fundamental attribute of the money-form finds its correlate within the ‘informational’ and ‘chronically mediatized’ (Dodd, 1994) exchange technologies of contemporary capitalist society. The flows of information and value around the ‘circuits’ of capitalist modernity tend to emphasise the economic premium placed upon novelty and innovation, of the ‘new-ness’ of things, and the role of *nouveauté* within the constitution of subjective experience. The accentuation of the temporal dimension of the commodity-form, as either the *anticipation* of the future delivered into the present (fashion) or a nostalgic evocation of an absent past (heritage), reveals the *present* to be a ‘fictive’ construction born of a narrative of ‘exaggeration’ (Stewart, 1998) and experienced as the representation of *difference*.

The commodity-form constitutes the ‘hinge’ (Massumi, 1993) which allows the interpenetration of subjective and objective culture (Simmel), within it the experience of space and time is re-*presented* as the experience of *difference* – the ‘elsewhere’ and ‘elsewhen’ discussed by Friedberg (1993). The subjective experience of the *present*, born of the relationship of ‘coshaping’ between humanity and the world (Verbeek, 2005), resembles ‘the garden of forking paths’ described by Borges, in that space and time collapse into the subjective experience of the present as it is constituted by *participation*. By the end of the nineteenth century, the utilitarian psychology of economic theory – the

hedonic impulse – harnessed by the rational faculties in the service of identity production could no longer causally explain the subject's actions:

The classical bourgeois world view can be understood as a process of individuation, as the pursuit of pleasure. The pursuit of pleasure is the pursuit of the self; and the self, like the cosmos, is a system of relations tending towards a unique equilibrium. This has long since ceased to be a plausible view of either psyche or cosmos.

– Ferguson, 1990: 199

As a result, *homo oeconomicus*, the homunculus of the 'consumer,' was rendered redundant just as the figure of the 'consumer' was adopted by discourses as varied as law, political theory, marketing and sociology as the basis of an explanation of the particularly *modern* incarnation of 'consumption.'

### **From 'consumption' to *modern consumption***

The marriage of economic theory and humanist psychology, of *homo oeconomicus* and Cartesian subjectivity, filtered through bourgeois property relations ensured the centrality of the 'consumer' and his or her 'consumption' to accounts of contemporary 'consumerism' and the 'consumer society.' This intermingled terminology has reinforced certain assumptions concerning the social, cultural and economic motivations of human actors and their pursuit of status, meaning and pleasure through an engagement with the object world. Equally, different academic disciplines have constructed their investigations of 'consumption' and its affines in strikingly different ways: historical studies went in search of origins; psychologists matched 'rationality assumptions' to personality traits; anthropologists sought to uncover the meaning and significance of artefacts through use; political economists traced 'systems of provision'; geographers charted the spaces formed around 'consumer' habits, such as *shopping*; sociologists sought to discern *society*; while marketers just tried to sell people more things. Chapter Two provides an overview of these disciplinary engagements within the broad context of western European and North American culture, in particular the increasingly metropolitan culture of capitalist modernity and the diffusion of market relations.

The critique of these disciplinary approaches reveals their reliance on an engagement with a universal conception of 'consumption' seen through the lens of the contemporary capitalist consumption-relation. For instance, despite Trentmann having asked 'how and why the consumer has developed as an identifiable subject and object in the modern period' and insisting that any account move beyond the purchase, symbolism or use of

‘things to ask about the *subjectivities* of “the consumer”,’ he still sees an essential cultural activity:

Put simply, all human societies have been engaged in consumption and have purchased, exchanged, gifted or used objects and services, but it has only been in specific contexts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that some (not all) practices of consumption have been connected to a sense of being a ‘consumer,’ as an identity, audience or category of analysis.  
– 2006: 2

Only Campbell (1987) attempted to formulate a definition of ‘modern consumption,’ which will be considered to be analytically distinct from the *modern consumption* discussed in this thesis. However, even Campbell’s attempt to describe the *modernisation* of the consumption-relation falls far short of what is required because of its insistence upon a ‘consumer ethic’ born of the ‘consumer revolution.’

Chapter Two documents a variety of disciplinary approaches to the study of ‘consumption,’ from historical accounts of origins and development to the contemporary formulation offered by disciplines such as psychology, geography, marketing and anthropology, before addressing the ‘sociology of consumption.’ The historical accounts of the genesis of ‘consumption’ offered by the discipline of *consumer studies* centres upon uncovering an original moment, either as a ‘consumer revolution’ (Slater, 1997) or the emergence of a ‘consumer society’ (Campbell, 1987; McKendrick, Brewer & Plumb, 1982; Shamma, 1990, 1993) and its *modernisation* (Trentmann, 2002). Even Fine’s (2006) apparent opposition of ‘consumer’ and ‘consumer culture,’ a veritable *his* and *hers* of ‘consumption,’ fails to avoid an emphasis upon the psychological individual:

At one extreme stands the discipline of economics and its fabled *homo oeconomicus*, rational economic man rarely acknowledged as female. He sets about maximising utility subject to budget [...] A simple, single-minded calculus of pleasure (spending money) and pain (earning it) is presumed to suffice to explain consumption, essentially understood as equivalent to market demand. [While] at the other extreme to economics stands old-time consumer studies. It has been eclectic in method and wide in scope, closely aligned to the study of marketing and advertising and more concerned with the psyche of the consumer and with *her* spending power. Given a radical twist, the sovereign consumer [of economic theory] is deposed and becomes victim to the manipulative hidden persuaders in pursuit of what are deemed to be artificially created, even false needs.  
– Fine, 2006: 291-2

The expansion of exchange-relations saw the ‘consumer’ emerge as the discursive entity mediating the relationship between the subject and the commodified products of the

capitalist division of labour. This ‘trickle-down effect’ (McCracken, 1990; Veblen, 1994; orig. 1899) of ‘consumer goods’ or the ‘democratization of luxury’ (Williams, 1982) has been questioned by those who highlight the seasonal expenditure of agricultural and transient workers (Glennie, 1995), rather than the rational accumulation of the ‘middling classes.’ The spread of a retail network, detailed in Chapter Three, underpinned the capacity of the commodity-form to assume the task of *representing* value and allowed ‘consumers’ to engage in emulative spending and express wealth, power, taste and distinction through the display of commodities.

The desiring ‘consumer’ can be seen as the lodestone of a nascent ‘consumerism’ and ‘consumer society,’ a harbinger of modernity and the ‘mass consumer society’ (Trentmann, 2002, 2006) of contemporary culture. In doing so, alternative forms of exchange – non-modern, non-market forms, such as gift-giving – became the focus of a nostalgic privileging of the archaic that functioned as a fantasy of the ‘real’ and the ‘authentic.’ Essential to historical accounts of the emergence of contemporary ‘consumer society’ was the active involvement of the ‘consumer,’ the desiring subject, inherited from economic theory, who sought both symbolic and material satisfaction in the commodity-form. As a result, contemporary ‘consumption’ appears as the technical refinement of a long-term historical process geared towards offering ‘consumers’ the necessary materials for the construction of biographical narratives.

With its price tag the commodity enters the market. If its substantive quality and individuality create the incentive to buy, for the social evaluation of its worth this is totally unimportant. The commodity has become an abstraction. Once it has escaped from the hands of its producers and is freed from its real particularity, it has ceased to be a product controlled by human beings. It has taken on a ‘phantom-like objectivity’ and leads its own life.

– Marx, cited in Otte Rühle (1928), Buck-Morss, 1993: 245

Unlike the historical accounts of the rise, emergence or evolution of ‘consumption’ the social sciences have focused upon the *use(s)* of the commodity-form by ‘consumers’ after it has entered the sphere of circulation and exchange. The utilisation of the commodity-form within the identity projects of reflexive individuals allowed the attribution of a psychological dimension to the utility-seeking monads of neo-classical economic theory.

This focus upon the meaningful dimension of the commodity-form, its capacity to *signify* difference, has been pursued by psychology as an expression of selfhood, by geographers as a negotiation of social and temporal engagement, by marketing as a means of selling

people more stuff, and by anthropology as the basis of charting the cultural categories that express social relationships in any culture. Social science approaches to ‘consumption’ have proven adept at documenting the relations of ‘co-presence’ between subjects and objects and the possibilities that such relations render possible. For instance, socio-spatial practices, such as shopping, reveal the means by which personal identity is *performed* and provide an arena in which aesthetic, economic and moral decisions are made and communicated to others (Jackson & Thrift, 1995: 213; Miller, 1999; 2002). Further, social science has proven very effective in exploring the symbolic uses of commodities within the life-projects of individuals, groups and social strata and, in doing so, has highlighted the limitations of the concept of ‘final consumption’ inherited from political economy. Specifically, disciplines such as anthropology and marketing distinguish between *use* and utility in the negotiation of meaning, although they do not always avoid reducing sign-value to old-fashioned marginal utility (Carrier, 2006).

However, the bulk of Chapter Two is concerned with a critique of contemporary sociological approaches to the investigation of the capitalist consumption-relation and, specifically, the seemingly uncritical acceptance of the centrality of the ‘consumer’ and its associated identity project. While social science added psychological and socio-spatial meat to the bones of *homo œconomicus*, the ‘consumer’ remained the product of the intersection of bourgeois psychology and utilitarian thought. The subject was considered an active agent who organised the world of inert matter, commodities pressed into use by a desiring self. The Frankfurt School saw the realisation of an *authentic* selfhood stymied by the denigration of experience inherent in the ‘culture industry’ and an ‘ersatz individuality’ as the result of a ‘corrupted’ libidinal economy (Marcuse, 1964, 1973). The manipulation of commodities to manufacture personal identity (Giddens, 1991; Warde, 1994) can involve a degree of ‘risk’ (Beck, 1993) for the subject, as unstable identity formations, contingent upon ‘consumption’ habits and practices, solidify into ‘lifestyles.’ Such frameworks for ensuring ‘ontological security’ (Giddens) echo the sub-cultural strategies discussed by ‘cultural studies’ (Fiske, 1989; Hebdige, 1979; McGuigan, 1992) or attempts at social ‘distinction’ (Bourdieu, 1984) through the manipulation of commodified ‘sign-values’ (Baudrillard).

This thesis rejects the construction of the ‘consumer’ as an active *user* of the passive commodity-form in the pursuit of identity, in favour of an anti-humanist position that echoes Latour’s discussion of ‘hybrid’ phenomena (1993), in which networks of human and non-human actants constitute phenomena that are neither completely ‘natural’

(authentic) nor ‘cultural’ (inauthentic). This sidesteps the post-Hegelian lament concerning the absence of ‘authentic’ *being* and the Debord-inspired complaints concerning the ubiquity of ‘representations’ and the reduction of ‘life’ to *looking*. Instead, the commodity-form is considered to possess both material and immaterial dimensions, both of which are ‘realised’ in the relation of *affordance*. The ‘mutual constitution’ of subject and object born of the relation of ‘coshaping’ (Verbeek, 2005) sees the commodity-form ‘mediate’ (Dant, 1999) social interaction (between all actants). However, the lingering temptation to privilege humans over their material culture, indulged in by Dant, must be resisted and *affordances* viewed as relational phenomena that do not merely *extend* the ‘consuming’ subject but define and transform the individual through the (re-)structuring of the phenomenal forms of subjective experience.

Latour’s (2001) re-discovery of Tarde and his subsequent rejection of a ‘primordial identity’ in favour of a constant process of differentiation of *being* through ‘avidity,’ or *having*, implies that every actant is an ‘unstable aggregate’ defined by the qualities it *possesses*.

Subjectivity, corporeality is no more a property of humans, of individuals, of intentional subjects, than being an outside reality is a property of nature [...]. Subjectivity seems also to be a circulating capacity, something that is partially gained or lost by hooking up to certain bodies of practice.  
– Latour, 1997: 5

Consequently, the continuous transformation of subjectivity through the experience of difference is exacerbated by participation in the contemporary sphere of circulation and exchange. Such a ‘topology’ or *terrain* functions as a medium within which *being* is articulated to *having* not through ‘final consumption,’ but as an *affordance* that re-defines subjective experience. The *relationship* between people and things on the experiential *terrain* formed by the relation between the subject and the medium of the commodity-form is the basis of *modern consumption*: this transmission of experience allows the *differentiation* of the monad, or *actant*, from itself, through the mediation of its relationship to the world under the historical and material conditions of capitalist modernity.

The discursive construction of the ‘consumer’ as *subject-position* by liberal theory denies the equivalence between people and things, *actants*, in favour of the calculation of relative advantage (cost/benefit analysis) by humanity. However, the adoption of a ‘postphenomenological vocabulary for analyzing the mediating role of artifacts’ in which

‘technology codetermines both human subjectivity and the objectivity of the world’ and describes the ‘transformations of the ways in which reality can be present for humans’ (Verbeek, 2005: 195, 196, 197) accords *affordance* a role within the constitution of subjective experience. Specifically, this is the *sensorial* appreciation of aesthetic experience, rather than the *disinterested* experience of beauty, since it involves the transformation of the subject. Or, as Simmel puts it:

All sense interest connects with the perceptible.... Aesthetic judgement, however, connects with the mere image of things, with their appearance and form, regardless of whether they are supported by an apprehendable reality. – Simmel, cited Frisby, 1992: 135

Only in the playful *performance* of identity, as lifestyle, does the ‘consumer’ experience a temporary ‘escape’ (Rojek, 1993) from the utilitarian and teleological psychology upon which *identity* relies. The ‘technical mediation’ (Latour) of the relation between people and things, provided by the commodity-form, here resembles Simmel’s discussion of *sociability* as the play-form of sociation (interaction) as an interruption of ‘reality.’ The transmission of aesthetic and sensory experience, as well as utility, through the relation of *affordance* makes *sociability* into the modification of the subjective experience of ‘possession.’ Here *possession* is not purchase, acquisition or ownership but the re-formulation of the relationship between *being* and *having* and the dissolution of the realist ontology of the ‘consumer.’ Therefore, the ‘subject’ of *modern consumption* begins to resemble the ‘dividual’ in whom ‘becoming-singular [...] exceeds specification’ at the same time as ‘a becoming-generic [...] splinters the form of identity’ (Massumi, 1993: 35).

### **In the Playground**

Chapter Three contributes to a ‘postphenomenological’ sociological approach by addressing the *spatial* dimension of *modern consumption*, aesthetic experience and the relationship between *being* and *having*. At the heart of this investigation lies the concept of *terrain*, distinct from both ‘place’ and ‘space,’ and inseparable from the sphere of circulation and exchange of capitalist modernity. Consequently, the aims of the chapter are threefold: firstly, to define the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption*, by supplementing Simmel’s (1997, [1903]) analysis of ‘space’ with Harvey’s (2001 [1975]) discussion of a capitalist ‘logic of accumulation’; secondly, to trace the historical development of the ‘spaces of consumption’ from eighteenth century arcade, through the department store to the shopping mall and themed environments of today; thirdly, to identify the role played by the terrain of *modern consumption* in the constitution of the phenomenal forms of subjective experience within capitalist modernity. The ‘terrain’ that emerges is a ‘de-

formation' of abstract space as imagined by Newtonian mechanics (Ferguson, 1990; Massumi, 1993), a space 'warped' into a series space-time *events*. These 'events' are the form that experience assumes upon the terrain of *modern consumption*, here the subject *experiences* the world through the 'technical mediation' of the commodity-form as the traversal of boundary or threshold 'events' (Benjamin, 1999; Cacciari, 1993, Massumi, 1993; 2003).

The relationship between contemporary *space* and 'terrain' is understood by supplementing Simmel's fivefold typology of social space (1997, [1903]) with Harvey's (2001 [1975]) discussion of a capitalist 'logic of accumulation.' On this reading, space is characterised by the forms of sociological interaction (*sociation*) it contains; it is the 'spatial expression' of 'a sociological fact' (Simmel) and born of the '*dialectical integration*' (Harvey, 2001) of the spheres of production and 'consumption.' Therefore, the sphere of circulation and exchange is fundamental to the *spatial* experience of the inhabitants of capitalist modernity: the five 'fundamental qualities' of space (Simmel) are de-formed into *commodity-events* through the 'intensification' and 'expansion' of the social relations of the capitalist mode of production (Harvey). This results in an 'expanded plane' of circulation and exchange sustained by the physical landscape of objectified social wealth, public and private buildings, travel infrastructure, factories and retail outlets. Reminiscent of the techniques and processes associated with post-Fordist 'flexible accumulation,' which emphasise cheap labour, service and experience-based commodity production, the (spatial) 'physical conditions of exchange' are 'annihilated' by time (Marx, 1973). The terrain of *modern consumption* emerges as a networked (Latour) infrastructure increasingly devoid of *spatial* barriers to exchange or 'consumption'; epitomised in the 'digital convergence' of 3G 'phones, which provide calls, e-mails, web-browsing, data-transfer, word-processing, music, computer games and photography among other 'services.'

The history of the 'spaces of consumption' began with the retail network of the eighteenth century and ran from 'scotch drapers' through the arcades and the *grand magasin* to the shopping mall and beyond to the themed environments and Urban Entertainment Destinations (UEDs) of today. These material instances of the capitalist sphere of circulation and exchange represented a technical fine-tuning of the mechanism that brought commodities to the attention of prospective 'consumers.' These spaces pioneered and disseminated a number of techniques and strategies aimed at increasing the aesthetic impact of the commodity-form in an attempt to stimulate 'consumer' *desire*. The

department store functioned as a laboratory for the manufacture of aesthetically affective commodity-events geared towards circumventing the cost/benefit analysis of ‘consumers’ and the promotion of irrational pleasures. Immaterial and experiential aspects of the commodity-form were highlighted, such as novelty value, and the ‘*leçons de choses*’ were learned by a ‘mass consumer society’ (Trentmann, 2002). The ‘commodity landscape’ and the events of which it was composed revealed a ‘capitalist production of space’ (Lefebvre) in which goods were no longer the passive recipients of the ‘consumer’ gaze and its calculation of utility.

The history of ‘consumer’ interiors, from the arcades to the contemporary shopping mall asserted the visual dimension of the commodity-form and its centrality to the ‘aesthetic economy’ (Böhme, 2003; 2006). Within this economy the individual commodity-form as a space-time *event* within which the subject participates is fashioned by the ‘aesthetic productivity’ (Simmel) of artisans, designers, window-dressers and advertisers in addition to its physical manufacture. However, with Haussmann’s *modernisation* of urban space and the destruction of pre-modern ‘place’ the effects cultivated within ‘consumer’ interiors were externalised and pressed into the service of the metropolitan municipality.

Haussmann’s Paris echoed the ‘space of consumption’ on a massive scale; here, too, the spatial experience of totality was unavailable to the observer’s rational appreciation or disinterested contemplation and, instead, appeared as a fragmentary phenomenon re-presented through the techniques of distance, abstraction and sublimation. In this the ‘spaces of consumption’ and Haussmann’s Paris prefigured the shopping mall or themed environment of today, in such ‘quintessential postmodern play-space[s]’ (Slater, 1997) the distraction, even misdirection, of visitors is not unheard of.

Analyses of the ‘space(s) of consumption’ have tended to view it as a rationally structured but aesthetically designed environment that has spawned ‘walking rhetorics’ or ‘spatial narratives’ (De Certeau, 1984), or shopping as a form of updated *flânerie* (Falk & Campbell, 1997) rooted in the idea of ‘consumer’ leisure and pleasure. Descriptions of the ‘co-presence’ and ‘intimate encounter’ of ‘consumers’ and commodities engaged in *shopping* usually take as their unit of analysis the experiential space involved, such as the café, department store or shopping mall. However, this approach extends beyond shops to the themed environments of malls (Shields, 1992), NikeTown and Times Square (Hannigan, 1998), airports (Augé, 1999) or Las Vegas (Gottdiener et al, 1999; Ritzer, 2001). Such spaces represent the ‘commodification of space’ through a carefully engineered *theming* of ‘consumer’ experience structured as an ‘extension of advertising’

and its representation of meaning ‘disconnected from use-value’ (Gottdiener). These ‘new means of consumption’ (Ritzer) echo the ‘imagineering’ of Disney, the *faux* nostalgia pedalled by Nike or ‘escape’ from the everyday offered by UEDs (Hannigan, 1998). Accounts of such spaces tend to focus upon the metaphor of tourism and associated experiences, such as heritage sites or events (Rojek, 1993), while tangible objects of manufacture feature as souvenirs.

This implies that the discourses centred upon the ‘consumer’ and the ‘spaces of consumption’ find it difficult to discuss either the *experience* of space or the *spatiality* of experience other than in terms of what is *purchased* – travel, hotel rooms, meals, admission and the postcards sent home. However, the specific nature of the experience appears to escape either description or analysis, precisely because it is intangible despite having been purchased as a commodity-event. When the spatial is experienced in immaterial form – such as tourism – it seems to evade sociological re-presentation, even when spatial metaphors, such as ‘landscape,’ ‘terrain’ and ‘environment’ are utilised. In this, spatial experience resembles Lyotard’s (1992) description of the *postmodern* as the ‘experience of the unrepresentable’ in an attempt to capture aesthetic experience. Rather than reduce the experience of *space* to the ‘consumption’ of differential sign-values, such as that offered by a loft apartment in a formerly industrial area (Zukin, 1982), and the pursuit of ‘distinction’ or social status, it is advisable to consider it a (com)modification of the relationship between *being* and *having*. Thus avoiding the reduction of the sites of human history to a nostalgic evocation of lost authenticity and a prompt for the aspirations of bourgeois ‘consumers.’

Finally, Chapter Three identifies the role of the terrain of *modern consumption* within the relationship of *affordance* generated between people and things and its effect upon ‘possession’ as the relationship between *being* and *having*. In doing so, it exposes the myth of an unmediated referentiality between the sign and its referent, and the *distance* between the two upon which desire is predicated (as overcoming). ‘The spaces of consumption’ provided arenas for the ‘staging’ (Böhme, 2003) of the objects of ‘consumer’ desire as examples of temporal (novelty) and spatial (exotica) difference, which ‘enable[d] spatial differences to be overcome by time’ (Frisby, 1992: 107). In these spaces of the sphere of circulation and exchange the components of the bourgeois identity project participation were available for purchase as the appropriation of alienated objects, elements in a teleological endeavour premised upon the *collection*. Consequently, the quantitative aspects of such spaces were emphasised – they were the *largest* of their kind, they offered

*more* than any similar enterprise (Benjamin, 1999). Within the display areas of these spaces ‘consumer’ existence was represented as *use* underpinned by desire and expressed as tasteful ‘consumption,’ most notably in the utilisation of increasingly lifelike mannequins. This was ‘consumerism’ as ‘still life’ (Seltzer, 1992) or ‘panoramic experience’ (de Caeter, 1993): as *interested*, rather than disinterested, contemplation.

The terrain of *modern consumption*, however, is irreducible to the material ‘spaces of consumption’ and, instead, is the participation in certain behaviours, practices and phenomenological experiences found within the sphere of circulation and exchange. While ‘consumer’ identity relied upon the possibility of overcoming of distance – unmediated referentiality between sign and referent – the subject of *modern consumption* is constantly reformulated through ‘possession’ (the relation between *being* and *having*) born of *affordance*. Consequently, the experience of *spatiality* rather than ‘space’ is paramount, while a focus upon the fluctuating form of the *boundary* or ‘threshold’ allows an appreciation of the ‘spaces of transition’ and the access to ‘elsewhere and elsewhere’ that these confer (Friedberg, 1993). The analytical emancipation of the subject from the socio-spatial confines of ‘consumer’ behaviour and its emphasis upon *use* allows consideration of *spatial* experience and the technologies or apparatuses that facilitate it. This is vital when considering the ‘black-boxing’ (Latour) of contemporary technology, where denotative utility vanishes into interface, and functionality, materiality and form bear no necessary relation to *use*. Consequently, the space-time *event* of the commodity-form, as the transmission of ‘sensorial’ experience (Verbeek, 2005) upon the terrain of *modern consumption*, is an aesthetic rather than merely prosthetic phenomenon. Consequently, it reformulates rather than extends the subject, as ‘space’ is understood as the experience of *spatiality*.

### **Communicating ‘Experience’**

Chapter Four considers the forms of temporal experience available within the terrain of *modern consumption* and their consequences for the phenomenal forms of subjective experience. Specifically, it considers the inability of traditional forms of interaction to communicate ‘experience’ within capitalist modernity and the consequences this has for the figure of the ‘consumer’ when viewed as a *collector* of such experiences. This, in turn, raises the question of whether ‘experience,’ as historically understood, is actually *available* to the inhabitants of contemporary culture, or whether the contemporary commodity-form precludes this (Agamben, 1993). The temporal experience of *difference*, as novelty, and the communication of aesthetic experience by the commodity-form as a space-time *event* is

compared to the interplay of ‘empty‘ and ‘peak moments‘ within the ‘drift‘ (Charney, 1998) of subjective experience. The commodity-form as the locus of ‘excitement‘ (Ferguson, 1990) is revealed as the medium for the transmission of aesthetic and sensorial experience within the de-formation of the sphere of circulation and exchange that is the terrain of *modern consumption*. The concentration of such forms of temporal experience upon the terrain of *modern consumption* is demonstrated through the use of Barber’s (2001) ‘new ethnography‘ of Tokyo, in which the urban fabric is animated both by its inhabitants and also by the technologies that constitute the ‘aesthetic economy‘ (Böhme, 2003, 2006). The ‘hybrid‘ entity (Latour) of the metropolis amalgamates people and things, money and information, within an ‘informational‘ and ‘chronically mediatized‘ terrain that transforms the relation between *being* and *having* and the experience of ‘possession.’

Modernity as the self-conscious interruption of the continuity of tradition fractures the ‘constant authority‘ (Osborne, 1995) by which signs and referents were wedded together, such as the socially cohesive rituals and rites of passage of ‘traditional‘ societies. Participation in such ‘rites of passage‘ was individual, occurred over a period of time and culminated a maturity, that concluded, ultimately, with death. The advent of capitalist modernity, however, saw ‘man‘ (*sic*) ‘deprived of his biography‘ and the capacity to construct a narrative that contained, explained and communicated the experience of being (Agamben, 1993: 13). The number and variety of mass-produced commodities refuted the sustained engagement with the external world, which Agamben deemed necessary for ‘experience‘ in its traditional form: in a sense, there were too many experiences available for them to translate into ‘experience.’ Today experiences are ‘enacted outside the individual‘ and observed ‘with relief‘ (ibid, 14-5). Consequently, when the bourgeois individuals of the eighteenth and nineteenth century engaged with the world, as the basis of ‘experience,’ they did so within the framework of a linear narrative that mirrored the life-course, whether the phenomena confronted arose within everyday life experience or the nascent retail network of industrial capitalism, such as the arcades.

The production of the contents of the world by the capitalist division of labour, however, reduced ‘experience‘ to the experience of an engagement with manufactured phenomena, while the trade networks of imperial Europe privileged the artefacts salvaged from cultures distant in time and space; as modern experience came to mean the experience of *difference*. The ‘consumer‘ as *collector* understood the ‘souvenirs‘ rescued from history as a material memory that linked lost origins to the present and implied a forward movement of history

as ‘progress,’ both personal and societal. The creation of individual identity by nineteenth century ‘consumers,’ therefore, became a project organised around the accumulation, *collection*, of objects imbued with meaning and significance, especially rarity, so as to *narrate* their owner. The communication of discriminating taste and personal distinction through the ‘revealed preferences’ of personal choice relies upon the abbreviation of the market, either through inheritance, ‘sumptuary’ laws or sheer expense. The narration of the individual life project was exacerbated by the advent of mass production and the ‘democratization of luxury’ (Williams, 1982) which, in the finish and visual styling of articles, reduced the ease with which the ‘value’ of a commodity could be ascertained.

The ‘mass consumer society’ of modernity (Trentmann, 2002) was built upon the expansion of the sphere of circulation and exchange and an exponential increase in the number and variety of goods available to the buying public. The experience of temporality within the commodity-form ceased to be an evocation of the historical past and became the participation in the present exemplified by fashionable novelty. In this sense modernity self-consciously ‘interrupted’ traditional life (Osborne, 1995), an interruption that formed the basis of a nostalgic longing for a lost authenticity of experience on behalf of the bourgeoisie (Stewart, 1998). The bourgeois individual engaged in the project of the self looked both backward to a lost Arcadia and forward in anticipation of Utopia (Ferguson, 1990), while the commodity-form, offered an experience of ‘empty homogeneous moments’ (Benjamin) and formlessness (Simmel) inimical to traditional forms of experience. This was the ‘paradox of the modern’ (Benjamin) the impossibility of *experiencing* ‘experience’ as it had been understood. The resulting ‘shock-experience’ (*Erlebnis*) was deferred onto the body and rendered unavailable to consciousness; modern experience, therefore, was necessarily *partial* when measured against its traditional counterpart.

Charney (1998) offered a description of experience on the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption* that had subjective participation in contemporary life represented as ‘drift’ (Charney, 1998). This was a succession of ‘empty moments’ interrupted by ‘peak moments,’ which in their intensity counterpoint the absence of cognitive stimulation that constitutes the rest of existence. In such ‘peak moments’ the self was ‘realised’ in the temporal present, just as the cinematic close-up foreshortens both space and time into a significant event. For Charney, the majority of contemporary ‘experience’ is unavailable to the cognate subject, but *is* registered physiologically; this is the necessary corollary of the ‘peak’ experience and the moments of *identification* it facilitates. In this way the problematic aspect of the

‘paradox of the modern’ (Benjamin) is resolved precisely because the body is *present* to experience, both spatially and temporally: the ‘unexperienced’ dimension of modern experience is the precondition for that which *is* experienced. Contemporary experience, claims Charney, resembles the cinematic mode of spectatorship by functioning as a machinery of serial narration capable of producing sudden and intense aesthetic events. This, in turn, echoes the contemporary commodity-form within which all economic goods share the principle of ‘exchangeability’ (Mead) but are only activated as ‘peak’ moments available to the subject through the relation of *affordance*.

The transmission of modern experience through the medium of the commodity-form occurs within the terrain of *modern consumption* because it is in the relationship of *affordance* that spatial and temporal experience most completely escape their traditional formulation. The *interruption* of tradition by *modern consumption* is premised upon the production of ‘peak moments’ of experience within the episodic narrative ‘serialisation’ of contemporary existence. This results in the ‘decomposition of the bourgeois subject’ and demise of the ‘biographical fiction of the self’ pursued as an identity project in favour of the search for ‘excitement’ (Ferguson, 1990). The manufacture of ‘sudden’ (Bohrer, 1994) moments of intense aesthetic experience counterpointed to the *drift* of ‘empty homogeneous time,’ space and money reveal the commodity-form to be the medium for the ‘transmission’ of a space-time *event*. In this *event* the mutual constitution of subject and object born of *affordance* creates a relation of ‘possession,’ which through the phenomenal forms of subjective experiences modifies the relationship between *being* and *having* expressed as ‘identity.’

The critique of ‘modern experience’ as ‘inexperientable experience’ associated with Agamben, Benjamin and the Frankfurt School-inspired critique of the *in*-authenticity of modern life is seen to derive from their privileging of cognitive over sensorial and aesthetic experience in accordance with a Cartesian ontology. The forms of experience communicated by the contemporary commodity-form are unable to fuel the personal development of the bourgeois ego, as the movement towards totality or perfection, precisely because in their modification of the relationship between subjective and objective culture they *lack* direction, and function much as the rhizome (Deleuze) does, in being governed by context. This form of experience is endemic to the commodity-form, and its dissemination within the sphere of circulation and exchange; however, it is upon the terrain of *modern consumption*, where the traditional forms of the transmission of experience are interrupted, that the subjective experience of temporality is most radically altered.

Barber's (2001) 'new ethnography' of Tokyo offers an empirical account of this transformed *temporality* and the *vertiginous* experiences it induces, which emphasises the temporal transformation of the spatial fabric of the city by the socio-economic practices that constitute the field of *modern consumption*. Tokyo is a space-time event, similar to the contemporary commodity-form itself, in which the material environment merges with the sphere of circulation and exchange (rather than housing its processes) constantly formulating possible 'peak moments' that require a subject to realise themselves in *affordance*. This 'terrain' of *modern consumption* is 'formed' from the accumulated behaviours of its constituent *actants*, a melding of the symbolic and the material, the 'informational' and the 'chronically mediatized' (Dodd, 1994), that comprises a networked phenomenon rather than any definable totality. Upon such a terrain the temporal consistency and coherent spatial boundaries that demarcated the bourgeois subject are *interrupted*, there is neither 'belonging' nor the nostalgic longing to *be* expressed in the desire for traditional experience. The sustained production of 'peak moments,' in which the subject is telescoped into spatial and temporal proximity with the commodity-form (the space-time *event*), highlights the constant re-staging of *affordance* as an aesthetic event, rather than simply a relationship between subject and object. Consequently, the relationship between *being* and *having*, and its *vertiginous* re-formulation of *identification* through aesthetic experience, begins to resemble both 'exaggeration' (Stewart, 1998) and *sociability* (Simmel). Both phenomena turn upon the construction of distance in relation to existing social conventions, rather than spatial or temporal distance, and, as such possess no inherent *telos* other than the signification of difference.

A body doesn't coincide with itself. It's not present to itself. [...] bringing its past up to date in the present, through memory, habit, reflex [...] means you can't even say that a body ever coincides with its affective dimension.  
– Massumi, 2003: 4

These autotelic play-forms offer moments of 'abductive participation' (Massumi, 2003) from the everyday through the 'interruption' of 'drift' by aesthetic experience and the opportunity for the subject to move along 'a horizon of transformation and metamorphosis' (Charney, 1998: 138).

The immersive participation in the contemporary commodity-form obliged the human body to become the repository for the forms of experience that were born of modern culture: the aesthetic and sensorial experience generated in the relation of *affordance* acted

to transform cognitive capacity, as anyone who has ever looked through a microscope or a telescope can testify. In this physiologically-inspired transformation of the relation of *being* and *having*, the notion of a single, stable identity capable of gradual refinement over time (a teleological project) surrendered to its own 'play-form' – *identification*. However, the commodity-form's role as the medium for the transmission of experience within contemporary culture is problematic, since this implies that the range of experiences available tend to vary with income (although not always, obviously). This is particularly so where 'technology' is involved, although the proliferation of mobile telephones in the UK provides an intriguing counter-argument. However, in the main, *access* to experience within the 'aesthetic economy' (Böhme, 2003, 2006) of capitalist modernity is contingent upon access to disposable income (outside of the division of labour) and, so, the 'rites of passage' that previously conferred 'experience' have now become a question of 'rights of passage' and subject to capitalist property relations. Consequently, the access to 'affective moments' (Massumi, 2003) of experience that allow 'identification' are either restricted to the wealthier sections of our society, available through criminal actions or so unusual as to breed suspicion or fear.

### **Never to Return**

Ultimately, Chapter Five argues that the changed character of both *spatial* and *temporal* experience, attributed to *modern consumption* and its terrain in chapters Three and Four, inevitably alters the contemporary experience of *causality*. Therefore, the 'postphenomenological' analysis of *causality* and the terrain of *modern consumption* must be distinguished from that of the traditional narrative of causality within the sphere of circulation and exchange. The distinction turns upon the role of the relationship between *being* and *having* and its consequences for the phenomenal forms of subjective experience. Within the sphere of circulation and exchange subjective desire is traditionally understood as the modification of *being* by *having*, and the appropriation of commodities signifies the linear progression of an identity project towards completion, *progress*. Upon the terrain of *modern consumption* the communication of experience by the commodity-form as space-time event, or *affordance*, *de-forms* the subject by re-formulating the relation between *being* and *having* as 'possession.'

Unlike the teleological production of identity by the bourgeois individual the experience of *identification* by the inhabitant of the terrain of *modern consumption* more closely resembles the autotelic character of play. Play signals a retreat from the world of purposive action; a continual de-formation of the temporal and spatial relations of 'reality' in which

causality resembles the ‘accident-event’ (Massumi, 1993), ‘sudden’ instants of intense aesthetic (Bohrer, 1999) or sensorial experience (Verbeek, 2005) that assume the form of ‘peak’ (Charney, 1998) or ‘affective moments’ (Massumi, 2003). Unlike the empty space of bourgeois subjectivity and its linear temporality, in which identity unfolds, the subjective experience of the inhabitant of the terrain of *modern consumption* ‘mutates’ within the context of the contemporary commodity form. The transmission of experience in the form of the space-time *event of affordance*, formed by the mutual constitution (coshaping) of subject and object, denies the possibility of *desire* as causal phenomenon and frustrates the possibility of an identity carved from the expression of choice. Instead, in the isomorphic relation of *affordance*, as a conjunction of people and things, the interiority and agency claimed by bourgeois psychology for the theory of the individual ‘consumer’ is confounded. Upon the terrain forged between the commodity-form and the phenomenal forms of subjective experience *causality* is experienced as an interruption or deformation of the presently constituted subject – as an ‘accident-event.’

Desire for the completion of the self as the pre-condition for the experience of identity caused the bourgeois individual to seek its refinement through the appropriation of use-values as exchange-values via the sphere of circulation and exchange. The marriage of economic rationality and utilitarian psychology allowed the narration of the life-course to echo the cataloguing of a collection (Stewart, 1998), the imposition of an ordered arrangement upon the fragments or ‘souvenirs’ of a longed for totality, which was *presently* absent. The sphere of circulation and exchange allowed for the re-collection of disparate commodities and experiences to be marshalled through memory to describe the ‘biographical fiction of the self’ (Ferguson, 1990) and underpin the production of identity as an on-going project. In the transformation of each commodity into a souvenir, the material instance of memory, another step was taken towards the re-unification of ‘biology and symbol,’ meaning and materiality,’ and the overcoming of the ‘general alienation’ (Marx) of the subject inherent to capitalist social relations. However, the abstraction, quantification and ‘destruction’ of form attributed to the money-form continually undermined any such attempt, by severing the commodity from its origins in production and re-presenting it as a *sign* upon which individual desire could impress itself. Therefore, ‘consumption’ was the attempt to appropriate use-values from the sphere of exchange as an *extension* (spatial) or progression (temporal) modification of *being* through *having*.

This ‘cyborg’ (Sheller, 2004) or ‘prosthetic’ (Shaviro) logic is premised upon the production of pleasure as the overcoming of the distance constructed between subject and

object as *desire*. Here, the identity project proceeds as an attempt to overcome the absence of traditional experience through an escape from the ‘paramount reality’ (Rojek, 1993) of everyday existence into the ‘elsewhere’ and ‘elsewhen’ of tourism or shopping expeditions. Therefore, the motivation of the ‘consumer’ understood as desire, as the *longing for identity*, ensures that the commodity-signs within the sphere of circulation and exchange are in constant demand, despite the fact that they offer no possibility of overcoming the experiential and existential distance that motivates and structures their ‘consumption.’

Latour’s (1997) description of ‘the social’ as a ‘type of circulation’ composed of myriad over-lapping networks of actants that function as ‘nodes and connections’ represents the most viable sociological attempt to describe the operation of the terrain of *modern consumption*. However, Latour fails to grasp the function and significance of the transmission of modern experience within the commodity-form and the role of *affordance* as the basis for the re-formulation of the relationship between *being* and *having*. It is in *affordance* that the contingency of subjective experience and of the staccato rhythm of *identification* is revealed, and with it the redundancy of the bourgeois project of identity, founded upon a nostalgic longing for that which never was. Upon this ‘terrain’ each space-time *event* of experience is incommensurable – despite the mass (re-)production processes of contemporary capitalism – precisely because it is forged as an *affordance*. Simply put, the ‘subject’ undergoing each affordance-event is individuated to the degree that only a notional concept of ‘species being’ (Darwin) based upon zoological classification underpins the possibility of a comparison of their respective experiences. Life upon the terrain of *modern consumption* consists of the *further* differentiation of the monad from all other monads, despite their shared inhabitation of this topography and participation in the medium of the transmission of experience – the contemporary commodity-form.

The consequences of the playful logic of *modern consumption* is the surrender of the relation between sign and referent, and the project of re-uniting these that underpins the ‘collector’ of commodity-signs, the ‘consumer.’ The construction of the linear narrative progression of biography, either as evolutionary overcoming or as reversible pathway, is predicted upon the nostalgic longing for the recovery of tradition, the restoration of harmonious and pre-capitalist social relations. Such an option is unavailable to the inhabitants of the terrain of *modern consumption*; they are unable to return to yesterday or even the preceding moment, for they always fall ‘away’ in every direction. Each moment, each space-time *event* of experience further distinguishes them from any putative

‘primordial identity’ (Tarde). History as a causal principle, which can actively shape events, is experienced only through the commodity-form as a manifestation of the socio-economic factors that structure the ‘terrain.’ Instead, the aesthetic instant, the relation of *affordance* that through its possession modulates the relation between *being* and *having*, appears *accidental*:

The commodity stands (in) for our existence. The ground(lessness) it stands *on* is the accident in its most general expression – the accident-form, exemplified as downfall, the unqualified or generic founding event. Our generic identity (our subject-form, or humanity) is the generic event (the accident-form); our specific identity (the content of which is our “individuality” or “self”) is the sum total of our purchases. [...] contingency is the form of identity, and identity is determined (given content) through the serial commission of the act of groundless consumption.

– Massumi, 1993: 7

The interruption of traditional forms of experience, the hallmark of modernity, does not just prompt a nostalgic longing – as a one-off catastrophe from which bourgeois culture seeks to recover – it becomes a continuous event, or series of events. It is in this sense that Adorno’s description of the ‘recent past always present[ing] itself as though annihilated by catastrophes’ (letter, cited by Benjamin, 1999: 397) demonstrates the demise of the ‘bourgeois world view’ (Ferguson) with desire as its causal relation.

If the contemporary condition of possibility of being human *is* disequilibrium, continuity and balance are no longer relevant concepts, even when they are subordinated to the notion of catastrophe.

– Massumi, 1993: 30-1

Consequently, the human and its biography gives way to the ‘monsters’ (Haraway) and ‘mutants’ (Baudrillard) that are the nodal points of differentiation at the heart of the terrain of *modern consumption*. Identity as the ‘consumption’ of commodity-signs is sundered from its referent – reality – as the concept of the adventure, as the search for the last vestiges of ‘authentic’ experience, is shredded within the space-time *events* of the terrain of *modern consumption* and its playful transmogrification of the phenomenological forms of subjective experience.

The difficulties in discussing *modern consumption* and the vertiginous assertion of aesthetic and sensorial experience that it suggests underpin the subjective experience of the sphere of circulation and exchange of capitalist modernity are many and various. The fundamental problem is the ‘economistic’ inheritance that has reduced any discussion of the relationship between subjects and objects to a humanist assertion of a bourgeois

concept of identity – people do, things are done to. The attempt to formulate a ‘postphenomenological’ analysis of the capitalist consumption-relation seeks to remedy this by acknowledging the role of ‘stuff’ in the constitution of subjective experience. However, ‘postphenomenology’ and its re-thinking of the categories of experience is not without problems of its own. Interrogating the categories of ‘experience,’ ‘temporality,’ ‘spatiality,’ and ‘causality,’ while attempting to construct a materialist and historical account of changes to the understanding of these very categories is deeply taxing. A reliance upon quotation marks, parentheses and italics as a means of distinguishing between these terms has been unavoidable and I beg the reader’s indulgence in this matter.

## Chapter One: Changing the Subject

What is highly questionable is whether in economics, or in any other branch of social science, if one pays attention to the economic content of a theory as distinct from its analytical framework, any part of the theory can preserve the independence and neutrality claimed (and with some reason) for the formal analysis itself.

Maurice Dobb, *Theories of Value and Distribution since Adam Smith: Ideology and Economic Theory* (1973: 6)

This chapter seeks to review and critique the contribution made to sociological analyses of ‘consumption,’ ‘consumerism’ and ‘consumer society’ by economic theory. Primarily, this means that the description of both production and ‘consumption’ within the capitalist mode of production by economic theory will be treated as a theory of *representation*: that is, as a *re*-presentation of experiential reality, rather than an unmediated and literal description of historical events and processes. Secondly, in reviewing the historical development of economic theory, as a discipline, the different positions it has adopted are seen as rooted in material factors and historical change. Therefore, the tendency towards the increased abstraction of the commodity-form within capitalist modernity is seen to echo the shift from agriculture to industrial manufacture and, latterly, services and experiences within a ‘knowledge’ or ‘information’ economy. Thirdly, the increasing abstraction of *value* within the commodity-form and its separation from its ‘origins’ in the realm of production places an emphasis upon the subjective or phenomenal experience of the individual ‘consumer’ in the explanation of economic action. Within the neoclassical economic orthodoxy *production* appears marginalised, something for which it has been criticised by both historical and contemporary writers (Clark, 1899; Fine, 2002; Keynes, 1936; Marx, 1973; 1976; Veblen, 1994; orig. 1899). This, in turn, necessitates a re-consideration of the concept of the ‘sphere of circulation and exchange,’ derived from classical political economy, and its modification via the concept of the ‘terrain’ of a qualitatively distinct *modern consumption* and the consequences for the phenomenal forms of subjective experience that this affords. The ostensibly free-floating terrain of *modern consumption* appears, at first glance, to possess only a formal connection to the social relations of production. As a result the role of exchange-relations and, in particular, the role of the capitalist money-form is seen as crucial to any critical engagement with the role of *modern consumption* in the constitution of contemporary life.

The seeming separation of production and ‘consumption’ requires the formulation of a twofold approach. Firstly, the apparent autonomy of the realm of ‘consumption’ and the

forms of subjective experience made available there require to be explained and accounted for within the context of the capitalist mode of production and its historical evolution. Secondly, the role of economic theory in explaining and justifying the operation of the capitalist mode of production has led to an 'economic inheritance' by sociological attempts at theorising contemporary forms of 'consumption.' In uncritically accepting the use of terms, such as 'consumer,' 'consumer society' and 'consumerism' from the discourse of economics sociological accounts of 'consumption' presume an a-historical continuity between vastly different historical periods and the social relations that pertained within them. All too often 'consumption' appears as a neutral activity, merely the exit point from the economic realm and the incorporation of the commodity-object into the personal project and biography of the individual. This implies that the commodity-form functions in the same or similar manner today as it did three hundred years ago and fulfils the same role within subjective experience. Patently, this is not the case, as any tourist, web-surfing schoolchild or 'personal shopper' to the stars can testify. Such a view, grounded in the concept of *utility* expressed as function or use, forms the central core of economic theory's bequest to sociological theories of 'consumption.' However, the sociological analysis of *modern consumption* and the forms of phenomenal experience it *affords* the subject are rooted in aesthetic rather than utilitarian experience. Consequently, the inability of economic theory to explain the dynamic relationship between the commodity-form and subjective experience, particularly as it is manifested in the shift from sphere of circulation and exchange to *terrain*, must form the starting point of a sociological analysis of *modern consumption*.

The pre-classical political economy of the Mercantilists and the Physiocrats considered *value* to be stored in material form, as *substance*, and was typified by precious metals or the nutrition provided by foodstuffs. Consequently, value was considered as being created by God or Nature, albeit with the active participation of human labour in the mines or the fields, rather than as an abstract category. Only with the formulation of utilitarian theory, most notably by Bentham, did value acquire an abstract dimension and lend itself to quantitative calculation. Utility theory allowed classical political economists, like Adam Smith or David Ricardo, to formulate the beginnings of a theory of value (Blaug, 1970), which saw that the labour expended in the production of commodities required to be rewarded, even if the origin of value itself lay with God's creation of the world. For the first time price, as a reflection of value, had to encompass the efforts expended in its production, thus allowing trade and industrial manufacture to enter the compass of economic thought. This explicit link between the realm of production and that of

circulation and exchange (consumption) appeared to be severed by the ‘marginalist revolution’ of neo-classical economics, which saw utility reside not in the material form of the commodity – as a potential satisfaction – but in the subjective appraisal of the prospective ‘consumer’ who must choose between differing and competing potential sources of satisfaction depending upon the calculation of the *marginal* utility each would provide. Bentham’s ‘hedonic calculus’ became the metric by which all economic action was to be measured since all individuals were presumed to be in selfish pursuit of maximum utility. Crucially, this allowed *value* to be quantified as price at the intersection of supply and demand

Neo-classical economics extended the classical concept of utility, theorised by Bentham, using it to calculate the differential or *marginal* utility between competing consumption-choices. This incorporation of subjective ‘desire’ – the ‘hedonic calculus’ – into the calculation of *value* allowed price to be quantified, thereby, effectively, freeing the commodity-form from the constraints of the classical cost-of-production thesis. The advent of neo-classical economics and its calculation of marginal utility, based upon the substitutability of similar commodities, breathed life into the figure of the ‘consumer,’ who had formerly been a mere destination for the commodity-form’s utility. These ‘consumers’ could be glimpsed frequenting the nascent retail network of imperial Europe’s fledgling modernity, the bazaars, arcades and *magasins des nouveautés* of Britain (Jevons), Austria (Menger) and France (Walras). In these spaces the elasticity of subjective demand and its aggregation as the market found concrete expression, and the inter-subjective, or *social*, dimension of ‘consumer society’ revealed itself (von Wieser, 1889) in phenomena such as fashion (Simmel, 1997). The ‘pleasures’ promised by commodities were not confined to either the ‘use-values’ deliberately instilled during production or to the subjective calculation of utility based upon a subjective appreciation of these use-values. Instead, the supra-individual (social) qualities of the commodity-form became apparent in the ‘revealed preferences’ of individuals seeking to display their taste and discrimination: the absence of sumptuary laws obliged the commodity-form to assume the burden of *representing* the differences between individuals through their ‘consumption.’ This ‘representational’ (Buck-Morss, 1993) or ‘supra-economic’ (Simmel, 1990) value of the commodity-form allowed it to signify subjective culture through the arrangement of objective culture – ‘consumption goods’ (Jevons) became the hallmark of personal development and societal progress.

The failure of classical political economy to theorise value fully had obliged neo-classical economics to figure it as marginal utility – as the consequence of subjective experience. This marriage of humanism and utilitarian psychology tied self-development as individual identity to the acquisition of goods via the sphere of exchange and circulation, the absence of which could be used to explain the lack of such virtues among the poor, the mad and the primitive. Economic action, therefore, became an index of rationality and reason that was materialised within the commodity-form and its tasteful ‘consumption.’ Membership and participation in ‘consumer society’ appeared, therefore, to consist in the exchange of money for commodities: thereby denying the role of the relations of production or of distribution (wages) in the constitution of the capitalist consumption-relation. Indeed, this formed the basis of Marx’s critique of political economy and its extension in recent times (Fine & Leopold, 1993; Fine, 1995; Fine, 2002) through the ‘system of provision approach.’ Likewise, Keynes identified in the relationship between the spheres of production and ‘consumption’ – and its impact upon the distribution of money-wealth – a key component of ‘aggregate demand’ as an inter-subjective phenomenon capable of impacting the realm of production – as a prompt to *supply*. Keynes, along with the Institutionalist School in the USA, represents an attempt to explain the subjective and objective constraints upon the ‘propensity to consume,’ as money earned, spent or saved, to align desire with demand and disposable income. However, even here the limitations of the ‘economic approach’ are evident in that the centrality of exchange-relations in the transformation of subjectivity hinted at by Simmel (1990), and developed by recent theorists of technology (Latour, 1993; Massumi, 1993; 2003; Vattimo, 1988; Verbeek, 2005), is absent.

The apparent autonomy of the sphere of circulation and exchange allowed the bourgeois subject to pursue its belief in individual *identity* through the construction of a unique self (Ferguson, 1990) from among the ‘fragments’ of capitalist modernity: the commodity-form. The bourgeois subject, recast as *homo oeconomicus*, patrols the sphere of circulation and exchange in search of satisfactions that further refine the personality, through the development of taste and distinction: the commodity-form appropriated through ‘final consumption’ is expressed as material utility (function or physiological gratification) and immaterial significance (meaning or status). In this way the sphere of circulation and exchange is conflated with the money-economy and its socio-spatial settings (from shopping malls to Ebay) and exchange is perceived to be merely the prelude to (final) ‘consumption. The *reification* of exchange within the money-form can be seen to advance beyond the conception held by neo-classical economics, ‘value becomes supra-subjective,

supra-individual, yet without becoming an objective quality and reality of the things themselves' (Simmel, 1990: 42) Here the *value* of an object appears to the ego as a 'demand' for a 'corresponding' value, that is, as an autonomous entity rather than simply a subjective valuation based on desire. The money-form, as a particular technology of exchange that has developed within the capitalist mode of production, underpins the 'general alienation of values' discussed by Marx (1973) and transforms the subjective experience of objective culture – of things, services and experiences. The capitalist money-form as a technology of exchange facilitates an increasingly de-materialised and informational realm that transforms the relationship between subjects and objects, between *being* and *having*:

No ambition, however extravagant, no fantasy, however outlandish, can any longer be dismissed as crazy or impossible. This is the age when you can finally do it all. Suddenly technology has given us powers with which we can manipulate not only external reality – the physical world – but also, and much more portentously, ourselves. You can become whatever you want to be.

- Ed Regis, on 'extropians,' cited, Plunkett & Rossetto, 1996: 2.10

The 'chronically mediatized' form of the modern money-form (Dodd, 1994) upon which such 'techno-futurist' claims are predicated is born of the principle of 'exchangeability' (Mead). Money, as the 'ultimate means' and the 'unifying' point of innumerable sequences of purposes (and possessions) reveals a 'significant relationship to the notion of God' (Simmel, 1990: 236-7), in that it appears to make all things possible.

Money, in its unity of diversity, individuality and contradiction is an abstraction that hovers 'above' that which it contains and, as the means to attainment of goods and services, possesses an apparent autonomy and 'spectral objectivity' (Marx). This bestows upon the 'culture of things' a freedom from the subjective desires of mere 'consumers' - at least as they are conceived of by economic theory. The infinite exchangeability of all things within the medium of the money-economy (Mead) is exacerbated when exchange-value is re-presented as immaterial *information* freed of physical constraint and external causality. Within the ostensible infinity of exchange that constitutes the 'terrain' of *modern consumption* no foundational value survives, as God, the experience of time and space, and the bourgeois subject and its desiring 'self' are relativised (Vattimo, 1988).

The 'new life' of bourgeois culture began to be studied for its 'laws of operation' by men of science, letters and philosophy and the comprehension of the world through the scientific method, therefore, was the *re*-presentation of the world as theoretical abstraction.

Consequently, the ‘independence and neutrality’ of the ‘formal analysis’ mooted by Dobb, above, must be rejected in favour of its interrogation as *representation*, as itself the product of the bourgeois world view. The capacity of material culture, as well as the history of ideas, to impinge upon and shape the ‘scientific’ description of the objective world or the inter-subjective operation of society means that the value-free or ‘objective’ account of disciplines such as economics must be interrogated. The central concern of this chapter is the ways in which the *representations* of economic theory seek to explain all economic activity, but, in particular, ‘consumption’ as the outcome of innate human faculties being made manifest.

The representation of the capitalist market and its medium – the money-form – as a neutral arena and technical mechanism for the exchange and circulation of values is rejected and the capitalist sphere of circulation and exchange is viewed as a historically and culturally specific mode of production that has expanded to span the globe. Otherwise, the ‘consumption’ found within the global economy of contemporary capitalism might be understood as a *liberation* of humanity, the apparatus by virtue of which the material requirements of existence are catered to. This would be to conceive of the abundance of goods, services and experiences made available by contemporary capitalism as answering a *lack* within the human subject – a conceit beloved of bourgeois psychology and capitalist economic theory. The capitalist mode of production must not be viewed as a response to an a-historical aspect – or flaw – in a putative human nature, rather it should be seen as a constitutive element of modern subjectivity and born of a particular historical tradition. This chapter attempts to identify the economic ‘bequest’ that sociological ‘theories of consumption’ inherited from economic theory’s accounts of ‘consumption’ and ‘consumers’ within the capitalist mode of production. The construction of a fundamentally rational and utility-seeking individual as the ideal-type ‘consumer’ emerged in economic theory as a constituent element of the bourgeois world view which capitalism had carried to prominence. The ‘consumer’ of economic theory - *homo æconomicus* – and his or her ‘consumer activity’ tended to be viewed as politically neutral, simply the external manifestation of the rationality and Reason inherent within the subject.

Simmel’s focus upon exchange and its contemporary review by Dodd highlight the active role of the money-form in linking production to circulation and exchange within capitalist economics. The money-form must be viewed as a technological rather than a neutral device; its role is transformative rather than merely passively communicative. The active role accorded the money-form allows the re-theorisation of the relationship between

subject and object in capitalist modernity and their interaction within the sphere of circulation and exchange. The money-form's role as the medium for the managed exchange of values, viewed as a technology, allows the philosophical examination of *Value* (Vattimo, 1988) to be discussed within the realm of exchange (Baudrillard). This, then, allows the critique of economic theory to reveal the disparity between the framework for phenomenological experience, provided by the capitalist mode of production's constituent elements – the division of labour, the commodity form and the mature money economy – and the forms which that phenomenon assumes. Marx's distinction between phenomenological forms and essential relations must now be bridged by recourse to a sociological approach that echoes Simmel's 'sounding depth' in its capacity to conceptually unite that which appears separate. Only in this manner can the analysis of *modern consumption* and the phenomenological forms of subjective experience it affords be accessed by a sociology that has abandoned the individualist preconception of a utilitarian psychology of the 'consumer' and 'consumer activity.'

The analytical distinction between what is termed *modern consumption* and the description of 'consumption', 'the consumer' and 'consumer activity' within the discourse of economic theory provides the basis for a review of sociology accounts of 'consumption' – as distinct from *modern consumption* – in Chapter Two. This distinction is achieved through a review of the historical schools and movements within economic theory and the account of capitalist economic practice that these provide. The post-Renaissance Mercantilist school, with its emphasis upon national autarchy, is succeeded by the Physiocrats, who formulate a model that describes the circulation of goods in terms of the human body. The centrality of the 'physiological' concept to early capitalist economic theory continues with Classical political economy, especially that of Adam Smith. Marx's critique of the classical political economists and their failure to fully comprehend the social nature of production and its consequences for demand – the absence of a comprehensive theory of value – is extended in the attempt by the first generation of Neo-classical political economists to see demand as an epiphenomenon of utilitarian psychology.

Beginning with Simmel, who is influenced by both the 'second generation' of the neo-classical movement and the 'historical' school of Schmoller (see Frisby, 1990), the centrality of the mature money-form within the capitalist mode of production is examined. The generalised exchange of commodities made possible by the money-form bequeaths to the objects of exchange a 'semblance of autonomy' (Marx) not as quantities of use-value, but as representations of subjective desire capable of being realised through exchange.

That is, they appear as representations of exchange-value divorced from the processes of production that brought them to the market.

Commodities appear before their prospective consumers, in the capitalist sphere of exchange and circulation, as free-floating entities whose use-values consist entirely in their perceived utility. This value is represented as the sacrifice of exchange-value (the money price) necessary to conquer the distance between the desiring subject and the desired object. This is what allows Mead (1901), when discussing Simmel's *Philosophy of Money* to assert that the exchangeability of all values within the money-form is their determining characteristic. Here Dodd's discussion of the conjunction of technology, specifically information or mass media technology, and the money-form is pertinent. Dodd's (1994) attempt to formulate a 'postmodern economics' that encapsulates the money-form's 'dual character' – it has both a *material* basis in the exchange of goods and services, and a *symbolic* dimension – leads him to an 'informational' understanding of a 'chronically mediatized' money-form. Dodd's debt to Baudrillard, particularly the Baudrillard of *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, indicates the relationship between *Being* as a philosophical value and 'value' as a category that circulates in exchange. Where previously *Being* was guaranteed by God, as the foundation of all values, that which is never relativised, within the money-form all values are made relative to each other through the quantitative expression of their exchange value.

The privileged role of the sphere of circulation and exchange in explaining *modern consumption* within capitalist modernity is revealed by extending Mead's observation of the exchangeability of all things within the mature money-form to include the consequences for the subject. And this is precisely what economic theory cannot do - economic theory presumes upon the inherent rationality of the actors that it seeks to describe, even if allowing for that rationality to be bounded, partial or susceptible to the temptation of its opposite. Economic theory's axiomatic adherence to the rational pursuit of satisfaction, whether understood as utility in the narrowest sense or not, has bequeathed to the sociology study of 'consumption' the pursuit of accumulated *instances* of 'consumer behaviour' or the task of documenting the process of identity or lifestyle 'construction'. The failure of such approaches is detailed in Chapter Two, for now it is the inadequacies of economic thought that require attention.

The qualitative distinction, insisted upon by Marx as well as his inheritors, is based upon a (productive) incorporation into the on-going process of production of *existing*

commodities, as opposed to a (final) 'consumption' that exhausts the commodity in its use but does not lead *directly* to further production. Effectively, 'final consumption' is the private and individual acquisition of a commodity and is said to involve 'the exit of its values from continuing circulation, its role is no longer defined by the internal logic of capital and its laws' (Fine, 1995). This is problematic in as much as 'final consumption' - as the material exhaustion of the use value(s) of a commodity - would remain a part of the process of the reproduction of both the labour power of the 'consumer' and the system of cultural meaning that informs this process. Fine & Leopold accept that 'final consumption' has a role to play in the reproduction of labour power but reject the positing of *consumption* as merely a relationship between economic agents. What they do not do is extend their analysis of the structural integration of productive and 'final consumption' into an analysis of the forms which final 'consumption' assumes. The focus on the sphere of exchange can often lead to an analysis of *consumption* that concentrates on what Fine & Leopold (1993: 264) call 'the ideological construction of the use value of a commodity,' which they associate with advertising or brand image. The social construction of these use values occurs within the relations of capitalist production, circulation and exchange though this is not always adequately reflected by non-Marxist analyses of *consumption*. For Fine & Leopold (1993: 265-7), the work of Baudrillard epitomises this trend where 'the determination of use value tends to become freed from its material foundations,' leading to a neglect of the object's physical properties.

Once again economic theory is confronted by an apparent disjunction between 'surface phenomena' and 'essential relations' (Marx), between representation and reality. Political economy, even in its revised versions, finds it very difficult to explain the reasons why 'consumer's' want the things they do, other than the assertion of a tautological *need* for them. There is a tendency to assign the 'consumer's' desire for a commodity a readily explicable source, that of 'false need' stimulated by advertising, or want based on social emulation or even, in the case of Bourdieu's 'New Institutionalism' (Gagnier, 2000), a taste built along class lines. None of these approaches can assign definitive and specific reasons as to why 'consumers' desire particular products or commodity services. The revised political economy and its 'system of provision approach' espoused by Fine and Leopold (1993) among others provides an invaluable insight into the product history of any commodity. It allows a complex path to be traced, one that highlights the myriad connections forged between individuals, groups, nations and corporations in the production, distribution and exchange of commodities. What it can not provide is any real insight into the way in which 'consumption,' as a moment in the extended process that is

the capitalist mode of production, is also a highly charged and socially significant form of interaction beyond the moment of purchase. Political economy, classical or revised, remains rooted in an approach based upon the physical as opposed to the representational (social) qualities of the commodity-form.

Fine & Leopold (1993) attempted to correct the absence of an analysis of the 'surface phenomena' of exchange, through an explanation of the system of provision of the commodity-form. This allows a focus on the inter-relationship between production, distribution, exchange and circulation, between the market and the global division of labour and, thereby, to understand 'consumption' as an extended sociology-spatial process. This 'system of provision' approach was reiterated by Fine (1995: 134-9) and developed to encompass the emphasis of classical political economy on the 'social properties that [those] goods command,' while rejecting neo-classical theory's consideration of 'consumption in the abstract across all goods simultaneously.' This ensures an investigation of the 'analytical determinants' rather than simply the 'immediate aspects of consumption' and necessitates an explanation of the motives for acts of 'consumption' rather than an assumption of the 'imperative of variety' associated with the neo-classical theorisation of demand for goods. This attempt to re-impose the categorical distinction between use- and exchange-value, apparently lost in the description of the money-form's operation offered by Simmel, and the problems it faces are addressed by Dodd, in *The Sociology of Money: Economics, Reason and Contemporary Society* (1994). For Dodd, the money-form possesses a 'dual character,' having both a basis in the exchange of goods and services, and a symbolic dimension. As part of his attempt to formulate a 'postmodern economics,' Dodd rejects the 'structuralism' of Habermas' system and the 'functionalism' of Parsons. Instead, Dodd formulates an 'informational' understanding of money, claiming it is redolent of Baudrillard's (1983) description of the 'commodity-sign.' This leads to a 'chronically mediatized' conception of money that promotes forms of sociation that are distinctively modern and reminiscent of the characterisation of (post)modernity given by Vattimo, in *The End of Modernity* (1988).

This, however, far from stripping all sense from the notion of value... instead liberates that notion in all its vertiginous potentiality: only where there is no terminal or interrupting instance of the highest value (God) to block the process may values be displayed in their true nature, namely as possessing the capacity for convertibility and an infinite transformability or processuality.

- Vattimo 1988: 21

### **Pre-Classical Economic Theory:**

The attempt to describe and explain the operation of the world and its inhabitants animates all social science endeavours. For post-Renaissance Europe this required addressing the increasing importance and prevalence of trade (Braudel, 1982), the loosening or dissolution of feudal ties to the land and the aristocracy (Hilton, 1976; Holton, 1985) and the movement towards the formation of the modern nation-state. Where the feudal world had appeared 'static' and unchanging, tied to God's will and its incarnation as the social order, the Renaissance self-consciously embraced the transformations inherent in history by addressing the culture and knowledge of antiquity. Against the 'static' world of the feudal period the *mobility* of the then contemporary era stood out, for the precursors of modern economic thought, the Mercantilists and Physiocrats, the human body and its physiognomy provided a model with which to describe the world, particularly the circulatory system, or Nature itself through the cyclical patterns of the seasons and the inevitability of their return – a concern of the astronomy of the time. A contemporary understanding of this system and its internal dynamics began to be theorised, a theory of society and the relations that pertained between its constituent elements (Ferguson, 1990).

Mercantilism was concerned less with theories of production or 'consumption' than with the accumulation of wealth. It had arisen, as a loose affiliation of theories, at the close of the sixteenth century and held sway until the mid-eighteenth century (Blaug 1970: 10). The basic tenet was the desirability of a favourable balance of trade: expressed as a surplus of production (export) over the level of 'consumption' (import) for both a country and an individual. This would then lead to an accumulation of wealth, which in its turn was to lead to an empowering and safeguarding of the nation and its interests. However, as Blaug (1970: 12) bluntly notes, 'the idea that an export surplus is the index of economic welfare may be described as the basic fallacy that runs through the whole of the mercantilist literature.' This is false since a permanent 'favourable' balance of trade, of exports surpassing imports in money value (especially when such international transactions were conducted in precious metals), resulted in an influx of coin to the domestic realm. This then acted as an inflationary pressure and forced up prices so impoverishing domestic 'consumers' and, in turn, fuelling increased wage-levels, which would then reduce the profit margin on goods sold at home and force up the price of exports, thereby reducing their volume.

The French Physiocrats, with whom Adam Smith's theories of rent and wages shared an affinity (Clarke, 1982: 27-9), believed that it was the social and economic conditions,

experienced as objective entities which regulated behaviour and the forms that economic action took. Smith shared with, or borrowed from, the Physiocrats the notion of capital as 'an advance' that is made up or repaid from the 'yield' of a surplus, although the formula for the calculation of wages used by Smith and the Physiocrats differed markedly (Dobb, 1973: 40). The Physiocratic doctrine opposed Mercantilism as protectionist, believing that wealth resided in the transformative powers of labour and nature. In agriculture, the action of labour upon Nature acted to *multiply* value, thereby creating a surplus that could not be achieved in manufacture or trade, since these forms of economic activity were held merely to *add* or *combine* those elements in which value already consisted. For the first time, wealth is depicted as a social relation, as something more complicated than a mere quantity of valuable commodities. Interestingly, this wealth was thought of as supra-individual, although probably still in terms of the nation rather than the individual, and there is no notion that wealth could translate into a demand for goods and services. Such a theory betrays a lack of an understanding of demand acting as a determinant of the value of a commodity, of the kind seen in political economy.

Marx described the Physiocrats as the 'fathers of modern economics' because they could identify, separately, money and capital. However, they failed to follow this through, theorising this distinction only in terms of 'the simple production process' (Marx, 1973: 328). The definitive text of the Physiocratic School was Quesnay's *Tableau Économique*, published in 1758, in which Asendorf (1993: 8), observes the description of abstract economic processes in terms 'derived from the model of the circulation of blood in the human body.' This he says has the inevitable consequence of limiting the explanatory power of the analogy:

With economic life taken to be a natural process, with only land and soil, but not trade and industry, understood as productive forces, [the Physiocratic school] cannot conceive such an important category as labor, nor the distinction between the natural price and the market price, that is, between use value and exchange value.

The Mercantilists rooted their thought in the accumulation of riches as wealth, reminiscent of the primitive accumulation that Marx saw as a prerequisite for the emergence of a mode of production that relied upon capital: in short, the Mercantilists failed to conceive of the abstract existence of 'value,' which could have been better represented as an activity of the mind rather than the body. The Physiocrats, with whom Adam Smith had such an affinity, were concerned to explain the nature of productivity within a society that was increasingly

coming to be dominated by the market, and this they did by an analysis of capitalist agriculture during the early eighteenth century.

The Enlightenment had bequeathed a 'shared humanity' (Ferguson, 1990), but the portion of the wealth of the world to which each individual, class or nation was deemed entitled remained to be established. This task fell mainly to the new science of political economy. Where Mercantilism saw the wealth of a nation in its riches, its stock of money and its hoard of treasure, Adam Smith had a different opinion as to the location and origins of national wealth. Political economy's stress upon the varying rates of return to the different factors engaged in production, epitomised by Ricardo, makes explicit the centrality of a capitalist division of labour and the increased scale of commodity production which derived from this. Classical political economy differed from previous economic theories in that it conceived of the economy as a mechanism for the production of goods, as an abstract entity subject to laws of operation that could be discerned by rational analysis. Furthermore, what these laws of operation actually governed was the interaction of rational individuals acting in pursuit of their own self-interest. The description of the economy offered by political economy can be seen to be intimately connected to other forms of understanding, especially those that concern themselves with ideas about human motivation and behavioural make-up. Adam Smith prior to formulating his theory of political economy had published *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), which contained the outline of his conception of human nature and the determinant factors of behaviour. The number and variety of these economic agents acted to generate the mechanism that was the early capitalist economy. The economy, however, was not comprised solely of selfish atoms maximising their self-interest; it also included the unintended consequences of these intentional actions and the objective social reality that they constituted (Dobb, 1973: 38-9). The economy was historically grounded and socially segregated rather than a simple aggregate of individuals, as it would become for neo-classical thought. The discussion of 'production' as the labour of *work* can also be usefully distinguished from 'exchange' as the expenditure of effort in *play*, and the absence of productive activity that apparently characterises the latter (Caillois, 2001).

Classical political economy's focus on production was complemented by its attention to the *factors of production* and, notably, on the supply of these factors and its consequent effect upon their price. Through the study and explanation of the dynamic process that comprised supply the workings of the capitalist economy, what Marx would call 'its laws of operation,' emerged. Unlike the Physiocrats, the political economists could distinguish

between *embodied* and *commanded* labour and, therefore, acknowledged a distinction between the price commanded by a commodity in the market and the value of the labour which a commodity embodied as a result of its process of production. This represented the first attempt to engage with value understood as an abstraction, as a distinction between ‘natural’ and ‘market’ price. While both Smith and, particularly, Ricardo had demonstrated an interest in social class and, arguably, ‘consumption’ by examining the rewards offered by production to the social classes involved, their main interest lay in the creation of wealth. Despite this obvious interest in the capitalist production process neither Smith nor Ricardo developed fully-fledged theories of value (Veblen, 1969: 144). Dobb (1973: 32) notes of Ricardo that his theory of profit preceded his theory of value, while Blaug (1970: 42) says of Smith, and specifically his cost-of-production theory, that he had ‘no theory of value whatever.’ It was Marx who first pointed out the shortcomings in the political economists’ conception of value, especially their understanding of exchange-value. Marx focused upon the wage-relation as a social relation rather than simply as a generalised factor of production (cost). This revealed that although the return to labour for its role in production appeared as a ‘surface phenomenon,’ part of the realm of circulation and exchange, it was actually a part of the distributive relations that derived from the social organisation of production. Access to income was largely dictated through the relationship to the means of production; therefore, social class governed ‘consumption.’

### **Classical Political Economy: Smith and Ricardo**

The role of labour within the capitalist mode of production was central to classical political economy. However, the role accorded to the labouring classes by theorists such as Smith and Ricardo is, in retrospect, somewhat limited in that they were restricted to a role within production, rather than acknowledged as ‘consumers’ of anything but corn.

This is the fundamental proposition which forms the basis of the doctrine of the Physiocrats that all non-agricultural labour is unproductive. For the professional economist it is irrefutable.

“This method of adding to one particular object the value of numerous others of as it were heaping up various values in layers on top of one single value, has the result that this value grows to the same extent... The expression ‘addition’ gives a very clear picture of the way in which the price of a manufactured product is formed; this price is only the sum of a number of values which have been consumed, and it is arrived at by adding them together; however, addition is not multiplication.”

-P.-P. Merrier de la Riviere, *L’Ordre Naturel et Essentiel* (1767) in Marx (1973: 298n)

Where the political economists dissent from the Physiocrats is in finding manufacturing to be equally as productive of wealth as agriculture. Blaug's (1970, 41-2) description of Smith's cost-of-production theory is useful here. The value of a commodity is the sum of the normal amounts payable to all the factors used in making it. So, the 'natural price' of an article in the real world is determined by the money costs of production as made up of wages, rents and profits, themselves the 'natural price' of labour, land and capital. This is, simultaneously, a rejection of the reduction of value (or price) to the labour expended in its production, that is, *embodied*, and an acknowledgement that price and value are distinct and also relative. Smith here extends the Physiocratic notion of a 'multiplication' of value from agriculture into manufacturing (implicitly through the division of labour). What this does not allow Smith to do is to offer a theory that can account for the price of productive services.

For Smith 'effectual demand' is the demand for a commodity at its 'natural' or 'long-run equilibrium price.' In order that this price is maintained 'the quantity of every commodity brought to the market naturally suits itself to the effectual demand,' that is, the supply will alter to ensure that the price is maintained. Demand, in political economy, has no influence upon the determination of the 'natural price' of a commodity or, more importantly, upon the factors of production. Classical political economy accepted that labour was a commodity that was sold, exchanged, by the labouring classes in return for their means of subsistence. Instead labour, for political economy, was a factor of production that required to be rewarded for its role in the process of production. The reward or payment of labour was not calculated on the transformative role of labour expended in production, but, rather, upon its belonging to a tripartite relationship that also involved capital and land. On this reading 'demand' has no lasting effect upon either supply or Nature, merely inducing a fluctuation in price that was perceived as a temporary deviation: therefore, demand is *merely* social. So, the value of labour, as with all commodities, was determined by its supply, which would fluctuate around its 'long-run equilibrium price.' The demand for labour by the production process would be answered, in the short term, by the recruitment of the then unemployed, and in the long term by the increased labour population which an increase in real wages – the increased demand for labour had effected – had brought about. Malthus demonstrated the reverse of this thesis when he envisaged poverty and starvation as being the limit-factors on the labour population as a consequence of a decline in demand for their product. Both versions of this thesis prioritised supply over demand and production over 'consumption.'

What political economy, explicitly, did not consider was that labour, as a social class, might have demands which it would make. Demand being based upon apparently natural or social needs was by definition inelastic, leading to Adam Smith's assertion that 'the desire of food is limited in every man by the narrow capacity of the human stomach' (cited Blaug, 1970: 86). Here social or human need is grounded in biology; it is given fixed and bodily limits rather than an expansive or even infinite quality. This was necessary if the supply price of labour, its 'natural' price at which it would reproduce itself, was to be calculated. The assumption of a bodily limit to 'consumption,' governed by the size of the stomach, allowed Smith to formulate his 'unit of social account' as a relation between the money price of corn and silver. In this way the general welfare of a society in general could be judged by calculating the fluctuating price of labour against either the short-term stability of silver or the long-term stability of corn (Blaug, 1970: 53). Such a society, despite these periodic and temporary fluctuations, is relatively static and its general well-being is maintained by the perceived 'disutility' of labour. The subjective experience of the labour process as 'task and toil' (Smith) means that productive labour is a sacrifice of free time in exchange for money. This makes Smith akin to Ricardo, in that 'improving welfare [is] a negative function of human effort per unit of output; or to put it plainly, we are better off if we work less to produce one unit of output' (Blaug, 1970: 53-4). Society, therefore, tends towards the same type of equilibrium as the price of silver or corn because of the 'natural' dis-inclination to work when basic bodily needs, measured by the stomach, are satisfied. Society is forced from its Edenic equilibrium when productive expenditure (work) is not geared towards physiological limits.

This leaves Smith with a very particular distinction between *productive* and *unproductive* labour. Productive labour results in an increase in the stock of vendible goods and so contributes to the national wealth through the production of a surplus, usually in the form of increased capital although it could mean higher profits or wages (disposable income). Unproductive labour, was 'consumption' paid for from revenue, either aristocratic or governmental, and was epitomised by 'menial servants' whose labour is an expense incurred by their masters for a series of services rendered, none of which Smith deemed to act towards the increase of the stock of exchangeable goods, wherein Smith believed the wealth of any nation resided. Smith insisted that productive labour manifested itself in a 'vendible commodity,' possessed of an objective existence, and, therefore, of an exchange value - that it was capable of being (re)sold, as opposed to the unproductive labour involved in 'services' which perished' in the act of their performance. Marx refined this position by conceiving of 'services' as generating surplus value when the labourer was

employed by a capitalist who acted as middle-man. For Marx, it is labour's character as a social relation, its form, rather than its particular content that defines its importance - whenever wage-labour generates a surplus, and so expands the stock of capital it is, for Marx, productive labour.

The purchase of 'unproductive labour' or luxury, usually by government or aristocracy, in the form of 'menial services' (Smith) itself represents a dis-utility of labour, in that it prevents an increase in national wealth – measured in vendible goods. In this Smith's conception of 'unproductive labour' is a precursor of Marx's distinction between *productive* and *final* 'consumption,' where the latter term signals a private utilisation of a commodity. Luxurious or aristocratic 'consumption' (including that of government bureaucracy) has, as its outcome, only its own furtherance, rather than an increase in the division of labour or stocks of material goods, yet despite his condemnation of such 'consumption' Smith never tried 'to formulate any thing properly called a labor theory of value,' either 'commanded' or 'embodied' (Blaug, 1970: 54). Such a theory of commanded or embodied labour would have entailed the commodity having some means of guaranteeing its exchange value, resulting in an objectivist theory of value; this would have been contrary to the explicitly social nature of production and exchange, which political economy laid such stress upon.

Smith theorised the optimum allocation of resources within and between industries; he did not theorise the conditions under which the 'consumer' had access to goods. His belief in the market, especially the price mechanism, as an efficient means of allocating and distributing the goods and wealth created, rested upon capitalist exchange widening the scope of the market and extending the division of labour, so promoting the growth of capital, volume of goods and income distribution. Likewise, Ricardo's theory of Differential Rent, and later profit, is an analysis of the returns owed to the various factors of production. While the Law of Diminishing Returns, which Ricardo develops from Smith's theory of optimum resource allocation, is the first incarnation of a theory of marginal productivity it is formulated as a determinant of the role of supply in production - rather than as an element that will partly determine demand through its effect upon price. This stance derived from Ricardo's theory of Rent in which, due to its fixed (or, at best, extremely inelastic) supply, land was committed to production only when the marginal productivity of its yield would ensure a surplus relative to its cost (rent) as a reward for its role in production. Land is not a 'free gift of nature' as the classical political economists believed but, instead, is a capital good, which entails development and maintenance costs.

Land is a product of past labour, just as machines are: it constitutes a factor of production only in as much as it consists of an inheritance of accumulated effort and improvements bequeathed to the present by the past; it has been produced in its present form through a history of investment. This can at least partly be attributed to the fact that classical political economy sought to analyse agricultural production rather than manufacturing: classical political economy's analysis was of *land* (as a generalised abstraction of place) rather than space and revolved around specific intrinsic qualities such as fertility and yield. Part of the movement from classical to neo-classical political economy is encapsulated in the increased abstraction of place (land) as the particular into space, as the generalised and empty (this will be of consequence in the discussion of the metropolis).

In an analysis of manufacturing land ceases to have any specific input into the production process other than as its spatial location - whose only manifestation as rent revolves around its relative proximity to other enterprises, and which is incurred as a cost of production that, for Marx, exists in the sphere of exchange. The production of land becomes the production of space (a distinctively modern category); it ceases to be either a theological or natural matter and becomes an economic one. Land as an element in the constitution of value begins to assume a functional rather than a substantial significance. In this it is indicative of the wider social and economic changes occurring during this period, value is increasingly conceived of as an abstract social relation rather than a physical object or commodity, and more readily conforms to the description of capitalist 'services' given by Marx in *Grundrisse*. In sacrificing accuracy for convenience of comparison, Ricardo

assumed not only that wages are fixed in terms of wheat but also that they are entirely spent on wheat. All agricultural products are wage goods, and all manufactured products are luxuries never consumed by workers.

- Ibid.

This exclusion of the rural labouring classes from the 'circuits of consumption' is contradicted by a number of historical studies (Glennie 1995; Shamma, 1990, 1993; Weatherill, 1988) that reveal expenditure upon 'luxury' items, often those geared to capitalist self-regulation – such as pocket watches (Thompson, 1967). Classical political economy here fails to align its theory of the supply of the factors of production, which labour was included within, with the actual behaviour of the labouring classes, which manifested itself as a demand for goods other than those necessary for physiological sustenance. This apparent disjunction between physiology and psychology, between bodily limits expressed as *needs* and a desire for a pleasurable *excess* over utility, reveals the labouring classes to be subjects, rather than simply components of a factor of production.

Value was a perennial problem for classical political economy, and Ricardo was heavily criticised for his notion of 'absolute value, and with it the notion of an invariable standard' (Dobb, 1973: 99). Both Dobb and Clarke (1982) stress the need to understand classical political economy within the social and historical conditions of the period. The equating of a capitalist division of labour increasingly premised on industrial rather than agricultural production, allied to the concept of progress, can be seen to reflect the concerns of a nascent bourgeoisie keen to legitimate itself and its wealth. The justification for the market economy derived, in large part, from Liberal political theory, and its discussion of the individual, which in abstract form became the foundation of economic interaction in the market. This explains why classical political economy could not formulate a coherent concept of class. In as much as land, labour and capital were held to exist in a functional, though accidental, relation there could be no investigation of the ownership of private property and its consequences. The individual's emergence as a social form served to mask the social relations that determined the particular form that each individual's socio-economic situation would assume.

The theorisation of the category of Value by classical economics is deficient. Since the labour theory of value did not address the particular social relations of production under which value was created, distributed and consumed it could not hope to portray the concept of value accurately. It is commodity-producing labour which is the measure of value under the capitalist mode of production (Clarke, 1982). This failure to locate the source of value within the social relations surrounding the division of labour allowed them to appear natural. The disjunction between price and value, which Clarke describes as a 'necessary characteristic' of commodity production, is the result of this failure to appreciate the social basis of production. For Clarke (1982: 101), it is only Marx's critique of political economy which establishes 'that value and price are concepts that are both valid, but that are appropriate to the investigation of different social processes which have to be analysed at different levels of abstraction.' What, for Marx, were contradictions inherent to the capitalist mode of production appeared to classical political economy as imperfections. For Clarke, the role of the State, as intermediary between capital and labour, was to act as guarantor of an equitable distribution of the surplus from production among the factors of production. The state apparatus is, then, the tool of the bourgeoisie, administering the political and moral spheres rather than the economic.

### **Neo-Classical Political Economy: the role of demand**

Although, as Dobb (1973: 111-2) notes, not all classical political economists were unaware of the antagonistic relationship between wages and profit that lay at the heart of capitalist relations of production. The pre-cursors of neo-classical economics, such as Senior, had identified such antagonism as being dangerous to the social status quo and it is, perhaps, to such as they that Clarke should direct his ire. The fundamental problem with the explanation of economic activity offered by classical political economy is its failure to engage with 'consumption' in any way. It fails to do so, in part at least, because classical economics believed in the inelasticity of demand, in an absolute standard of value and in the failure to grasp that there might be situations in which human appetites could be stirred beyond that which political economy considered their natural and fixed limits. Neo-classical political economy dispensed with classical political economy's stress upon supply and the conditions that governed it. The focus upon production and the distribution of the surplus generated to the various factors of production, as their reward, which lay at the heart of classical political economy was replaced in neo-classical political economy by an emphasis on exchange value as a subjective measure of the perceived use value of commodities. Various descriptions of the 'Jevonian' or 'Marginalist Revolution' *consumption* here became a distinct moment in the economic cycle. Importantly, it is here in the movement to neo-classical economics that we first see the recognition, albeit implicit, of 'excess' in the sense that Bataille (1991) might use the term. In the focus upon demand rather than supply the expansiveness of desire (the elasticity of demand) comes to the fore.

Within Neo-classical political economy, individual choices as expressions of a desire for utility became the subject matter of economics. This extended to the production process itself, in which the various factors of production were broken down into productive services each possessed of a marginal productivity relative to their cost. The rewarding of the factors of production became a function of their contribution to final utility. Therefore, the pricing of the various productive services is seen as the exchange value of their contribution rather than being linked to the cost of their social and historical generation and reproduction. As Dobb (1973: 35) puts it:

Classically, income distribution (e.g. the wage-profit ratio) was a pre-condition of the formation of relative prices. Per contra, in post-Jevonian and Austrian theory income-distribution is derived as part of the general pricing process...

Labour is denied the privileged role that classical political economy had assigned it, becoming instead one more element of production requiring purchase. Immediately the human element that underpinned the labour theory of value is placed in a new relationship to its products. Labour as *the* transformative operation performed upon raw materials during the production process is no longer a qualitative category but a quantitative phenomenon. Labour now adds (or nominally subtracts), even multiplies (or divides) value, it does not *create* value. As such, the move from classical to neo-classical economics can be seen to prefigure the relativisation of (human) Being into exchange value described by Vattimo (1988).

### **The ‘Marginalist Revolution’**

The essence of the economic problem was to search for the conditions under which given productive services were allocated with optimal results among the competing uses, optimal in the sense of maximizing consumers’ satisfactions. This ruled out consideration of the effects of increases in the quantity and quality of resources, as well as the dynamic expansion of wants, effects that the classical economists had regarded as the sine qua non of improvements in economic welfare.

- Blaug, 1970, 299

The Marginal 'revolution,' which economic theory underwent in the 1860s and '70s, centred on a change in the emphasis of its investigations. By abandoning classical political economy's preoccupation with the constitution of price through the cost of the factors of production, neo-classical political economy effectively re-imagined the world that it sought to investigate. The theory of the 'marginal utility' of the commodity, focused, instead, on the subjective element in the formation of needs and wants, which could then be objectively rendered as the cost or sacrifice deemed equivalent to the utility derived from the commodity. Neo-classical theory also developed new, subjectively oriented methods and procedures, epitomised by Jevons' attempt to give to the new economics a mathematical character. Not only was demand rather than supply to be the determinant factor in the formation of price but the varying levels that demand occupied were to be charted numerically and open to rational calculation. The emphasis on Value's subjective character and its objective manifestation in the money form, and the primacy of exchange, formed the link between the three main theorists of the 'revolution,' Jevons (Britain), Walras (France) and Menger (Austria). The national bases for these theorists will be relevant when in Chapter Three a 'geography of luxury' emerges in the metropolitan modernity of Paris, London and Vienna.

It is a fundamental precept of neo-classical economics that subjective qualities can be rendered objectively, that Value as a rational individual conceives it of can be measured and contained by quantitative means - in this case, the money form. This was elaborated on by Jevons in *Money and the Mechanism of Exchange* (1883); it is the money form's embodiment of standardised units of value in a universally acceptable medium and denomination that facilitates exchange and, therefore, the satiation of needs and wants. It is these functional attributes of the money form, rather than any substantial significance deriving from the material in which it consists, that allow value to coalesce into an exchangeable form and, thus, satiate human wants and needs. The exchange of values, as the exchange of quantities of utility, is the means by which, in modern capitalist societies, pleasures are sought and pains alleviated - at least, insofar as economics is concerned. The subjective appropriation or 'employment' of goods aimed at the maximisation of utility or minimisation of disutility on the basis of a deliberate (rational) calculation of their marginal utility for the individual is the starting point of modern economic analysis. These analyses consider certain things to be axiomatic: that exchange is exchange between equal (free) individuals; that individuals do rationally calculate their self-interest; and that all economic action, all exchanges, are attempts to maximise that self-interest. For Jevons, pleasure and pain, the subjective manifestations of the economic categories of utility and disutility, are feelings possessed of two dimensions - duration and intensity.

Jevons described a decline in intensity of feeling over time in spatial form, specifically that of a linear curve. Such a representation of the subjective state is achieved by defining pleasure as positive and pain as its negative – *as a subtraction from pleasure*. 'Consumer subjectivity' begins at the intersection, or Origin, of the axes, and experiences pleasure (utility) or pain (dis-utility) in quantifiable 'episodes' that trace the displacement of the subject along the axes of the graph, the continuum stretched between pleasure and pain.

The hedonistic conception of man is that of a lightning calculator of pleasure and pains, who oscillates like a homogeneous globule of desire of happiness under the impulse of stimuli that shift him about the area, but leave him intact. He has neither antecedent nor consequent. [...] Self-imposed in elemental space, he spins symmetrically about his own spiritual axis until the parallelogram of forces bears down upon him [...]. When the force of the impact is spent, he comes to a rest, a self-contained globule of desire as before.

– Veblen, (1969: 73-8)

For all his active desire for utility, the ‘consumer’ of neo-classical economic theory appears to be ‘subject’ to the oscillations of the market, moved along the axes of libidinal life by differential amounts of (dis)utility of varying intensity and duration.

In view of these hedonistic impulses the over-riding rationality of the bourgeois ‘consumer’ was fundamental, and the management of the temporal moments between satisfactions was vital. Anticipation of 'future actual feeling and of the intervening time,' form an inverse relation - anticipation increasing as the temporal interval decreases. Upon such anticipation ‘is based all accumulations of stocks of commodity to be consumed at a future time’ (Jevons, 1970: 98). The pleasure or utility to be derived from any commodity was not inherent in that object or experience, utility being a 'circumstance of things' rather than an intrinsic quality or substantial property and 'must be considered as measured by, or even as actually identical with, the addition made to a person’s happiness' (ibid: 105-6). Jevons’ *Law of the Variation of Utility* (ibid: 106-8) discussed the role that market conditions played in the construction of this utility and the marginal satisfactions to be gleaned, since utility tended to decrease over time. The needs of the body appeared to be satisfied relatively easily, unlike those of the mind, which seemed to individuate the subject: 'the more refined our needs become, the less are they capable of satiety. To the desire for articles of taste, science or curiosity, when once excited, there is hardly a limit' (Jevons, 1970: 111). The refined palate is capable of *collecting* ever-more exotic tastes, sensations and experiences, while those on the periphery of bourgeois conceptions of rationality can not conceive of the teleological trajectory necessary for such rarefied pleasures:

The untutored savage, like the child, is wholly occupied with the pleasures and the troubles of the moment; the morrow is dimly felt; the limit of his horizon is but a few days off. The wants of a future year, or of a lifetime are wholly unforeseen.

- Ibid: 99

Jevons, in the preface to his *Theory of Political Economy* (1871), aspires to 'treat economy as a calculus of pleasure and pain,' as ‘a mathematical science.’ And this in turn reveals, through the exchange of equivalents, what Menger (1950: 180) sees as the ‘motive’ of all economic activity, namely, 'the endeavour to ensure the fullest possible satisfaction of...needs.' As the range of needs expanded the requirement for a broader range of economic activity – the division of labour – became evident:

unlike the savage or barbarian, modern economic man's instinctive aversion to labor was offset by his desire for wealth, or, in his sexual economy, his

instinct for immediate gratification was offset by the sublimation of his sexual appetite ("saving" rather than "spending").

- Gagnier, 2000: 97

Quite quickly, it would appear, the satisfaction of needs gave way to the pursuit of an increasingly 'refined' set of wants, by the 1870s – the age of the department store – Jevons thinks it necessary to revise Senior's *Law of Variety* (1836):

The necessities of life are so few and simple that a man is soon satisfied in regard to these, and desires to extend his range of enjoyment. His first object is to vary his food; but there soon arises the desire of variety and elegance in dress; and to this succeeds the desire to build, to ornament and to furnish - tastes which, where they exist, are absolutely insatiable, and seem to increase with every improvement in civilization.

- Jevons 1970: 103, cited in Falk 1994: 110

What begins as a search for *variety* ends up as the quest for *discrimination*. The neo-classical 'creation myth' described two fairly isolated producers each seeking to maximise gain through mutual exchange, which they continue to do until the attainment of a limit-point beyond which one of those involved will no longer esteem the other's goods sufficiently to trade for them (Menger). The logical extension of such an origin is summarised, but more importantly epitomised, by Jevons; while Menger (1950: 187) is prepared to assert that a 'social economy is made up of individual economies.' Barter is inadequate because it relies upon a 'double coincidence' of wants, and does not always or usually operate within a given or objective standard of value (1883: 3-5). This, in turn, makes the exchange of goods through barter difficult due to the difficulty of the subdivision of the object of exchange - simple enough in the case of a bag of corn less so for a tailor made suit (1883: 6-7).

The complexities demanded of the exchange system by a 'consumer' population self-consciously seeking to differentiate themselves through 'consumer activity' led Jevons (1970: 128) to observe that it was pointless to believe that commodities 'commanded' a value. Instead, '[v]alue in exchange expresses nothing but a ratio, and the term should not be used in any other sense.' This conception of value in exchange being expressed as, and only as, a ratio is central to Jevons' formulation of the *Law of Indifference* (1970: 137), which states that 'in the same open market, at any one moment, there cannot be two prices for the same kind of article.' Unless 'extraneous circumstances' act to differentiate identical objects of exchange in some way, thereby creating a ratio of exchange (difference), identical objects will exchange for identical values. While this is a perfectly adequate theoretical explanation it addresses only the instant of exchange rather than the long-term,

assumes that exchange takes place under perfect conditions and that the ‘consumer’ approaches the market free of restraint or compulsion, while possessed of perfect product knowledge.

This, of course, is the reduction of ‘consumption’ to the act of acquisition via economic exchange – the act of *purchase* – and, as such, is an inadequate theorisation, although it has the virtue of highlighting the role of the money-form as the medium that expresses the ratio between subjective desire and the exchange-value (price) of the commodity. In this way subjective desire and the perception of utility are rendered as quantitative phenomena and are reducible to the individual’s particular psychology, while remaining generalisable as part of a de-individualised aggregate of macro-economic demand. Implicit in this conception of consumption-as-purchase (in a money economy) is that ‘consumption’ is based around alienable goods privately possessed. For Menger (1950: 227-8), Value itself had an opportunity cost based on the foregoing of the satisfaction of some other use: this develops from his thesis that in the ur-economy of two individuals engaged in exchange a choice must be made between direct (use) value and indirect (exchange) value. Simmel (1990), more interestingly developed the notion of exchange as the ‘indirect’ use of an object or commodity. This is important to Menger’s description of exchange because through money the economic good is removed from the sphere of exchange, and deprived of its commodity status:

Commodity-character is therefore not only no property of goods but usually only a transitory relationship between goods and economizing individuals. Certain goods are intended by their owners to be exchanged for the goods of other economizing individuals. During their passage, sometimes through several hands, from the possession of the first into the possession of the last owner, we call them ‘commodities,’ but as soon as they have reached their economic destination (that is, as soon as they are in the hands of the ultimate consumer) they obviously cease to be commodities and become "consumption goods" in the narrow sense in which this term is opposed to the concept of "commodity."

- Menger, 1950: 240-1

While Menger anticipates the ‘anthropological turn’ of recent years (see Appadurai, 1986; Miller, 1987), by implying a ‘biography’ of various phases or stages for economic goods his analysis relies upon an equation between ‘purchase’ and ‘use’ and fails examine the ‘purpose’ to which any good is put when it attains ‘consumption good’ status. Value is expressed purely as the marginal utility it is deemed to promise, as the ratio expressing subjective desire measured against price. Unlike the Classical position, labour has only a limited role here – it is only one of several factors of production that must be accounted for

through price. Labour, says Jevons (1970: 187), is a 'determining circumstance' of value, but never its cause. Neither classical political economy, nor its neo-classical successor has proven itself capable of explaining economic activities in any other way than a search for utility: value as anything other than a quantitatively expressed ratio remains opaque.

### **The Second Generation: from von Wieser to Simmel and sociology**

The explanation of social formations is a task that the theory of value is no longer able to achieve with its means. Economic theory is certainly not capable of completely mastering this, rather only a theory of society which takes into account factors other than the merely economic.

- Friedrich von Wieser, *Der Natuerlich Werth* (1889), cited Frisby, (1992:80).

Von Wieser represents what might be called the second generation of neo-classical political economy. In 1903 he succeeded Carl Menger to the Chair of Economics at Vienna University after his *Natural Value* (1893) was published in English, originally having been published in German in 1889. In his preface to this work he states that:

The obscure conception of value is to be made clear; all its manifold forms are to be described; the service of value in economic life is to be analysed; the connection of value with so many other economic phenomena is to be shown; in short, we have to give a philosophy of value which needs words, not numbers.

Here the attempt to advance marginal analysis beyond the 'mathematical character' and its role of a 'calculus of pleasure and pain' first takes shape. Von Wieser betrays an affinity with the attempt to understand economic life from the philosophical and sociological viewpoint, which Simmel presents in his *Philosophy of Money* (first published in German in 1900 and revised in 1907). The focus was upon the impact that economic activity had caused in various spheres of life. This represented a marked change of tone from the earlier generation of theorists who, epitomised by Jevons, saw society as an aggregate of individuals and the economy as the aggregate of all economic actions.

The 'dismal' science of economics shifted its emphasis from production to become a study of 'consumption': the political economy of pleasure. The social construction of wants, as opposed to physiologically-based conceptions of need, emerged as an object of enquiry – taste and the mark of distinction it conferred upon the individual (or society) was now inseparable from an analysis of the world of goods in the age of the 'democratization of luxury' (Williams, 1982). The theorisation of degrees of marginal utility, to which Jevons had given a mathematical and graphic character, was formulated by von Wieser (1893: 7-

10) as Gossen's *Law of the Satiation of Wants*, wherein desire decreases as satisfaction increases to the 'satiation point.' However, von Wieser (1893: 8) also noted the persistence, even the strengthening, of certain wants:

Alongside of the weakening effect which continued satisfaction has upon desire, we find also, in certain circumstances, the opposite tendency; that the desire grows by repetition and exercise, inasmuch as it is thus developed, gets to know itself, its own end and its own means, becomes purified and elevated.

Von Wieser (1893: 9) stressed the need to 'distinguish between the want as a whole and the several feelings of want which are included in it,' the want as a whole 'retains its strength [...] satisfaction does not weaken but rather stimulates it by constantly contributing to its development, and, particularly, by giving rise to a desire for variety. It is otherwise with the separate sensations of the want. These are narrowly limited both in point of time and in point of matter' (1893: 9). For von Wieser, what wealth allows is for the want to develop fully. The rich and their wants are not subject to the same urgency of satisfaction as the poor; instead, their wants can develop a variety of forms, their palate, so to speak, becomes refined over a period of time, their wants becoming more particular as their satisfactions become more numerous.

The cultivation of such wants might appear as 'infinite and subject to no diminution,' but this, says von Wieser (1893: 9-10), is not the case. The example of a collector is used: here the desire to collect grows stronger while the desire for a duplicate, or a repeat experience, is weak. There is, in such an example, no immediately discernible limit-point, no horizon to the development of the general structure of the need. The nature of such wants leads von Wieser (1893: 11) to the relativist observation of 'the contradiction between usefulness and value.' This arises through the grouping of sensations of wants as a 'class of wants,' a typology that allows for the discussion of certain apparently irrational 'consumption habits,' whether in the form of collecting objects or experiences or a predilection for particular commodities in close succession. The tendency for the degree of utility to vary and, importantly, decrease over time as availability of the commodity increases leads to the assertion that: 'All our appetites are capable of satisfaction or satiety sooner or later,' 'that we can have "enough".' Von Wieser, as we shall see, goes on to develop this some years later. While here the bodily *needs* remain bounded (limited), the desires of the mind do not, and, so, become bound up with the 'anticipation' discussed by Jevons and of the 'refinement' or 'development' of the individual as their palates became capable of ever-

greater discernment. The insatiability of bourgeois desire thus ceased to be a physiological matter and became, instead, a different category of want, one born in the mind.

Modern man would henceforth be known by the insatiability of his desires, and Others on the road to modernity needed only to be inspired by envy to desire his desires, to imitate his wants, to be on the road to his progress and his civilization. His nature, insatiability, was henceforth human nature itself. His mode, consumer society, was no longer one stage of human progress but its culmination and end.

- Gagnier 2000: 94

'Progress' from the 'primitive' or natural state could now be measured through 'consumer activity' and the taste it displayed: the absence of taste (discerning consumer preferences) signified either 'the savage' (non-European) or the 'barbarian' (British/European). Both were distinguished by their lack of refinement and continued engagement with the 'physiological' category of 'need' and the inability to pursue by rational means their own development. This absence of bourgeois rationality and the deferred gratification of pleasure signified the failure of *morality* to reign in the passions (Hirschman, 1977), to direct them towards a productive *telos*. Neither the exotic savage nor the impoverished barbarian saw fit to *order* their needs, passions or desires in the manner that economic theory or bourgeois etiquette insisted upon, both seemed innately resistant to the hierarchy of satisfactions that this would require. 'The importance of the entire class is measured by the entire scale of satiation, especially by its highest degree.' Within each class of wants a hierarchy of possible satisfactions is deemed to exist, while each class of wants, itself, is involved in a hierarchy. The example used by von Wieser (1893: 12) is that of food being more important than finery, as a class, though not necessarily in any individual instance. So von Wieser's hierarchy extends from the base needs of the body to the discriminating pleasures of the mind (as types or *forms*) calculated according to their marginal utility.

### **MARGINAL UTILITY**

Whereas Jevons, at least implicitly, had given each and any want a scale of satiation with equivalent increments of utility (rendered graphically), von Wieser (1893: 15) notes that, 'wants have not each an equal but each a peculiar satiation scale.' That is, they cannot be simply, uniformly or democratically compared to, or substituted for, each other. This means that the extension of the scale of marginal utility in the employment of a good towards maximised satisfaction does not result in a greater reduction in satisfaction in other areas: the opportunity cost can not exceed the increased utility gained. Von Wieser (1893: 16-20) again differs from Jevons in his discussion of *anticipation*. For von Wieser (1893: 17), future wants are 'preceded by a psychological reflection, and this reflection is of a

totally different nature from the want itself. It is far finer, more *innerlich*, and, even in the case of purely bodily wants, is always mental. [...] the desiring is different. Instead of a want we have an interest in.' Here, for the first time, there is a movement away from the idea that a want is merely an absence or a lack – there is, instead, the introduction of a non-physical element, an intellectual and moral dimension. That section of society which von Wieser (1893: 17-18) termed 'civilised' may have their 'high-water mark of development' measured by consideration of their economic actions: 'Do most people sacrifice their means for the pleasure of the moment, or do they lay by for future needs?' Hence, profligacy or hedonism is 'this weakness in human nature,' a departure from rational or reasonable behaviour, a lapse in moral fortitude. Immorality and irrationality, thus, become commensurate with a failure to understand or adhere to capitalism's logic of accumulation and investment; it represents a privileging of the use of an object over its (exchange-) value. And yet, such Earthly folly was perfectly understandable in the afterlife:

In Paradise nothing would have value but satisfactions - neither things nor goods. Because there one could have everything, one would not be dependent on anything.

This was, for von Wieser, merely a restatement of neo-classicism's relativist position – that use did not equal value. Rather (1893: 34): 'Value is the form in which utility is calculated, and this renders calculation infinitely more easy.' So the money-form, as the store and denominator of value, appears as the exchange-value of anticipated utility. Any form of expenditure, therefore, represents the sacrifice of that amount of value paid as price for a commodity, and which now cannot be exchanged for any other quantity of utility. The inhabitants of a 'civilised' society (Gagnier, 2000) exercise self-discipline and discernment, as their culture develops materially so they develop taste or an aesthetic disposition, similar to that which they will require in the afterlife.

Thus, both exchange- and use-values are subjectively calculated and vary with circumstance, although there remains an objective sense of exchange-value that derives from the costs involved in production, which is discussed by Frisby (1992: 88) as an objective transactional value (*Verkehrswert*) – and today referred to as the 'China effect'. The primacy of exchange-value over use-value, of price over utility, in such instances is based upon the ease of replacement of the commodity and its perceived utility. In this sense von Wieser can be seen, implicitly, to prefigure Simmel's (1990: 256-7) discussion of the *blasé* attitude. Wherein, 'the more the acquisition is carried out in a mechanical and indifferent way, the more the object appears to be colourless and without interest,' because

the purchase of commodities by such 'an indifferent method effaces their specific value.' The money-price, then, in no way reflects the value which an object may have for an individual or group, it is, instead, the quantitative expression of the sacrifice they will be asked to make in order to procure that object. This leads von Wieser (1893: 58) to give an example:

The beggar and the millionaire eat the same bread and pay the same price for it; the beggar according to the measure of his hunger, and the millionaire according to the same measure - that is, according to the beggar's hunger.

This seems to be trapped at the level of abstraction, of a market in which the beggar and millionaire both frequent the same bakery. While it is true that the cost of the bread measured in its utility to each against its money-price reveals a gross disparity it is more likely that the beggar and the millionaire shop separately and pay, relatively, different prices. The subjects of economics, those who actually congregate in the market, do so not as the Robinsonades envisaged by abstract theory (Marx) but as individuals whose relationship to the market is governed in a very real way by the social relations of production and the asymmetries of wealth which are their result.

### **The Marxist Critique**

Neo-classical political economy, marginal utility theory, gives expression in quantitative form to the level of demand which exists for a commodity at a certain price, from which will be derived a certain level or quantity of utility. The failure of such an economic theory lies in its failure to engage with the world, as it is constituted in 'actuality.' Just as Marx (1973: 83) declared that individual producers 'must be numbered among the unimaginative conceits of the eighteenth-century Robinsonades,' and rejected in favour of socially determined production then so, too, must the anonymous, a-historical and abstract 'consumer' imagined by economic theory. Neo-classical economics falls prey to the same error as its classical predecessor – it fails to acknowledge adequately the social relations within which production and 'consumption' occur. Marginalist economics, unlike its forebearer, does acknowledge the specifically capitalist social relations in which 'consumption' and production take place but it has no place for the other determining factors which comprise the decision-making process that it has termed 'consumption.' The reduction of all economic activity to a cost-benefit analysis is simultaneously the equating of production, circulation and 'consumption.' Each of these *moments* in the economic cycle is made to appear indifferent (Clarke, 1982; Fine & Leopold, 1993; Fine, 1995). Production is rendered as the series of costs incurred by capital in the production and

exchange of goods and profit is measured as one of the alternative uses of capital, based on their marginal productivity. While 'consumption' is the marginal utility measured against the cost or sacrifice for either the 'consumer' or the producing agent.

Needs, of course, are social and vary historically. The increase in the production of goods and services, which the agricultural and industrial revolutions heralded, and which economic theory attempted to explain, can not be satisfactorily accounted for by economics. An increase in the division of labour in production, and its accompanying transformation of the sexual and domestic division of labour, necessarily entails an increase in the division of labour in 'consumption' aimed at the satisfaction of needs and wants. The problem of explaining the transformation of needs and wants which lay at the heart of neo-classical political economy's theory of the individual becomes, instead, for Clarke (1982: 184), an integral part of the fabric of modern capitalist society. 'Capitalist accumulation whose form is the constant overcoming of natural barriers to the satisfaction of human wants, depends on the reproduction of social barriers to that satisfaction. Its content is the reproduction of social relations based on an ever-increasing polarisation between super-abundance and want.'

The neo-classical abandonment of Ricardo's pre-occupation with the role and relevance of distribution has inescapable consequences for the attempt to theorise both production and 'consumption.' Unless distribution is recognised, as it is by Marx in *Grundrisse* (1973: 94-6), as being of determining importance in the relationship between production and 'consumption,' as to the level and form which the latter will assume then any analysis will remain incomplete. The centrality of distribution for the classical economists, as well as for Marx, is underlined by Dobb (1973: 31-2), when he says that the paramount importance accorded to the social and economic conditions which resulted in the emergence of modern class-based society meant that 'Political Economy was a theory of distribution before it was a theory of exchange-value...' The failure of the neo-classical or 'marginalist' school to explain 'consumption' in economic terms is now exposed as a failure to recognise *modern consumption* as a social phenomenon that derives its form and content from the social relations which have shaped its evolution. This point is apparent when considering the inadequacy of neo-classical formulations of needs and wants. The attempt to quantify a level of need distinct from that of a want is reminiscent of the theological problem of how many angels will fit on the head of a pin, it begins with abstract speculation and ends in absurdity.

The 'Marginalists' favoured an emphasis upon demand either as an aggregate total of society or as the expression of the desire or will of a rational, utility-maximising individual who would pursue these ends by the means best calculated to achieve them.

'Consumption' in this model became the purchase of utility, subject to a cost-benefit analysis of the various choices available and the sacrifice that these would entail. The effective 'naturalisation' of market relations (Clarke, 1982), which marginalist analyses presented as a theory of individual action, when generalised across society makes the capitalist mode of production appear less as a complex socio-economic mechanism for the delivery of goods and services (built upon a complex division of labour and the primacy of private property sustained by the political actions of a class and their vested interests) than as a straight-forward and quite accidental, though fortuitous, state of affairs which allow everyone an equal *access* to the market limited only by their disposable income. Contra Marx, for the neo-classical economists, access to 'consumption' was not seen as being related to production, through social class, but was simply dependent upon income earned by virtue of choice of occupation. Marx, in *Grundrisse* (1973), written between 1857-8, and *Capital* (1976, orig. pub 1867), attempted to set matters straight. These two texts stressed the interdependency of production, distribution, circulation and exchange, which the concept of the mode of production necessarily entailed. This placed the relation between the possession of capital and the necessity of selling one's labour at the centre of any investigation of social relations and demonstrated the fundamental inter-relation of production, distribution, circulation and exchange. The market, which, to the neo-classicists, had appeared as merely a technical device for allocation of resources and their exchange, was now exposed as an integral part of the mode of production and of its reproduction over time.

### **Political Economy After Marx**

An updated and revised version of Marxian political economy has sought to critique neo-classical economics and the theories of 'consumers' and 'consumerism' that they underpin (Clarke, 1982; Fine & Leopold, 1993; Fine, 1995). Starting from Marx's discussion of the interconnected 'totality' of production, distribution, exchange and circulation and the social relations of the capitalist mode of production they represent a critique of the liberal political agenda and its equation of market relations with democratic rights, and seek to locate 'consumers' and 'consumption practices' within the wider framework of a global capitalist economy and its 'system of provision' which supplies each commodity and acts upon the form of their 'consumption' (Fine & Leopold, 1993; Fine, 1995).

The 'class blind' analysis offered by neo-classical economics is partly remedied by this revised political economy. However, the apparent autonomy of the sphere of exchange and circulation and the 'commodity fetishism' that it makes possible is best understood by recourse to the writings of Simmel. Here the relationships, which arise under modern conditions of production and 'consumption,' are examined as the relationships between subjects and objects, even when such relations assume the form of relations between objects (including the labour of other subjects). Simmel's analysis, its explication by Poggi (1993) and, especially, Frisby (1988; 1990; 1992) will be of particular relevance the investigation of specific social forms which *modern consumption* takes and the conditions under which it does so. While classical theory's philosophical anthropology held that, after Smith, a man laboured only to fill his belly, and neo-classical theory believed man's (*sic*) desires to be limitless, with wants springing up in the places of satiated needs, both saw labour as the means by which deferred gratification enabled satisfaction. The satisfaction of desires became a Sisyphean task, embarked upon daily, never-ending and always an uphill struggle that was doomed to re-occur. Classical theory saw the social and economic arrangement as historical and mutable, and the outcome of particular factors that were subject to alteration - specifically, the distribution of the economic surplus. Neo-classical economics, by contrast, was less inclined to admit of its historicity and sought to naturalise socio-economic arrangements by shifting 'the analysis of economic phenomena from a methodology based on factors of production and class to one based on the individual' (Gagnier, 2000: 51). The absurdity that characterises marginal utility theorists' conception of 'consumption' and 'consumers' originates in the extreme abstraction of their formulation. Either every individual's 'consumer preferences' are sublimated under the preferences of one, *representative*, 'consumer'; or each 'consumer' represents a microcosmic economy bereft of shared preferences. As Fine (1995: 129), points out this results in:

extraordinarily narrow analytical boundaries, in terms of both the motivational assumptions (confined to self-satisfaction) and the behavioural assumptions (pursued with ruthless efficiency). In effect, rational economic 'man' combines the basest instincts of a selfish beast with the highest forms of commercial calculation.

It is this basis in utilitarian psychology that prevents neo-classical or marginal utility theory from adequately explaining 'consumption' as a process rather than a series of utility maximising choices. Rather, as Frisby (1990: xx-i; 1992: 85-6) in his appraisal of Mead's (1901: 616-9) review of Simmel's *The Philosophy of Money* observes:

...what determines the value of objects is not the impulse to eat or drink or love or get gain, but the relations of exchangeability. From this it follows that the exchangeability is not based upon a like value, but is the source of that like value.

While Mead argues that 'utility or usefulness is a presupposition of all economic activity... it cannot be made the standard of value. ... The standard of value must be found in the objective equations between things that are exchanged in this economic world. This is a statement of interest in view of the futile character of the psychological calculations of the utilitarians, on the one hand, and the Austrian school, on the other.'

The money-form need not possess any intrinsic value; instead, its value is symbolic. Frisby (1992: 85) sees Mead draw a distinction between '“the subjective world of impulse and feeling” that “conditions our desire for objects and an objective world of values” in which things “as distinct from feelings can exist”.' It is in this relationship between objects, abstracted from the subjective world of feeling, that exchangeability becomes 'the essential relation.' Exchangeability is the presupposition of the continuing possibility of exchange: that is, the *functional significance* of the money-form is its defining characteristic. The culmination of both neo-classical economics and Mead's interpretation of Simmel results in 'thing-thing relationships' (Frisby, 1992: 87-8). However, the expression of these relationships could take different forms: for von Wieser they tended toward a subjective conception of value derived from the significance a good held for the individual, thus allowing value to appear as a calculable form of utility. But this does not mean that the price individuals are asked to pay for the good will alter in response to their subjective evaluation: as described in Jevons' *Law of Indifference*.

Simmel's importance for the analysis of both 'consumption' and *modern consumption* lies in his departure from neo-classical orthodoxy, which allowed him to engage with what Marx and his inheritors had filed under 'final consumption.' While his theory of value shares much with the subjective and 'marginalist' assumptions of neo-classical political economy his distinctly sociological analysis points the way forward. Frisby (1992: 89) stresses Simmel's focus on 'the radical consequences of economic exchange relations, the reification of social relations, the shift in focus from individual social action to social interaction (which is exchange) and to its reified form, money exchange...'. Simmel describes how commodities, as values, confront us from the 'intermediate realm' of exchange as *objective* entities. This is what Marx in *Capital* and, especially, *Grundrisse* sets out to examine through an analysis of the 'sphere of circulation and exchange.' This is

the manner in which the commodity-form appears to the inhabitant of capitalist society is a 'mysterious' entity bereft of history (causality) and free of the social relations that underpinned its physical production. Indeed, insofar as the commodity-object is valued 'subjectively' it appears to shed its material dimension and derive its significance and value purely from its relationship to other instances of the commodity-form – as 'thing-thing relationships.'

### **Simmel, Money and the 'sphere of circulation and exchange.'**

In *Grundrisse* (1973: 90), Marx states: 'Production is also immediately consumption. Two fold consumption, subjective and objective.' The 'consumer' of political economy is interpellated within the capitalist mode of production both as the 'choosing' individual and the abstract endpoint of the whole system, as *telos*. The 'consumer' and the act of 'consumption' are, therefore, inseparable from capitalist *production*, and its attendant social relations. So, Marx (1973: 92) can claim that production 'thus produces the object of consumption, the manner of consumption and the motive of consumption. Consumption likewise produces the producer's inclination by beckoning to him as an aim-determining need.' By the same token, *circulation* is either 'a specific moment of exchange' or else 'exchange regarded in its totality.' For Marx (1973: 99), the production of goods involves 'the exchange of activities and abilities' and the 'exchange of products' within the manufacturing process and, thirdly, 'the exchange between dealers,' which is 'itself a producing activity.' Exchange appears apart from production 'only in the final phase where the product is exchanged directly for consumption,' that is, where exchange is privatised and individuated as 'consumer activity' – a prelude to 'consumption.' Production, distribution, exchange and 'consumption' together comprise 'the members of a totality, distinctions within a unity,' – the capitalist mode of production – defined by the 'definite relations between these different moments.' The contemporary understanding of 'consumption' is determined by its relationship to these other 'moments' of the mode of production:

The precondition of commodity circulation is that they be produced as exchange values, not as immediate use values, but as mediated through exchange value. Appropriation through and by means of divestiture [*Entausserung*] and alienation [*Verausserung*] is the fundamental condition. ... Circulation is the movement in which the general alienation appears as general appropriation and general appropriation as general alienation.

- Marx, 1973: 196

For individuals this gives to circulation the appearance of an 'objective interrelation' which then assumes the form of 'an alien social power standing above them.'

Commodities in circulation, immediately prior to their 'consumption,' seem to have little to do with production, appearing as 'the daily traffic of bourgeois life' which 'proceeds on the surface of the bourgeois world, there and there alone does the motion of exchange values, their circulation, proceed in its pure form.' However, this circulation is itself dependent upon the continuing production of new values, *as* commodities, through the conjunction of labour and capital. Circulation is, therefore, a 'mediation' governed by the social relations of production. 'Its immediate being is therefore pure semblance. It is the phenomenon of a process taking place behind it' (Marx, 1973: 255). Through the money-form exchange value appears to have assumed a form that is independent of circulation (what Simmel described as the reification of exchange). In fact this is not the case, only in the motion of circulation does money fulfil its roles, both as measure of exchange value and medium of exchange - money, as a social form, can have no role outside of economic exchange. It is through the possession of money, of exchange value, that the worker enters into the apparently autonomous sphere of circulation in order to satisfy his needs or wants. The satisfaction of needs through the sphere of circulation, described above, is necessarily the 'consumption' of use-values produced by labour-power in the process of production; it is the 'consumption' (*consommation*) of production, and its reproduction.

On the basis of the distinction that Marx (1976) in *Capital* draws between 'productive consumption' and 'final consumption,' Fine & Leopold attempt to reinvigorate the study of 'consumption' by political economy. The separation of *productive* from *final* 'consumption' is necessary to remedy the neo-classical error, which fails to distinguish between the use of commodities in production and 'consumption.' While both forms of 'consumption' are based on the commodity-form they are integrated into the capitalist mode of production in structurally different ways – at different *moments* – and it is this that the neo-classical position fails to appreciate. *Final* 'consumption' occurs upon the exit of the commodity from the realm of circulation. The distinction between 'final consumption' and 'productive consumption' rests on their differing place on the circuit of (re)production: while *productive* 'consumption' is obviously a part of the 'producing activity' Marx describes in *Grundrisse*, *final* 'consumption' as 'the removal of use values from the process of circulation' (Fine & Leopold, 1993: 260) has come to be understood as 'consumption,' as *consommation*, the expenditure or exhaustion of a value. Thus, 'final consumption' involves 'the exit of its values from continuing circulation, its role is no longer defined by the internal logic of capital and its laws.' This is problematic in as much as 'final

consumption' - as the material exhaustion of the use value(s) of a commodity - would remain a part of the process of the reproduction of both the labour power of the 'consumer' and the system of cultural meaning which informs this process. While Fine & Leopold accept that 'final consumption' has a role to play in the reproduction of labour power they reject the positing of 'consumption' as merely a relationship between economic agents. What they do not do is extend their analysis of the structural integration of productive and 'final consumption' into an analysis of the forms which *final* 'consumption' assumes.

While it can be argued (and with some validity) that Simmel examined the 'mature money-form' rather than the role of the capitalist money-form, as a special instance of the commodity-form his analysis remains pertinent. The money-form's reification of exchange, epitomised most fully, firstly, by currency or *fiat* money, which entailed the fiduciary involvement of the State and, secondly, the 'de-materialisation' of money into information (Dodd, 1994) extended the subjective will through the telescoping of steps in the teleological sequence. This subjective freedom was realised through the extension of a money-price to each and every good or service within capitalist modernity: the acquisition and possession of such goods became a means of demonstrating individual freedom, revealing for Simmel a 'mutual dependence between having and being.' Possession, therefore, is not a static or passive condition but an activity (1990: 304), and *possession* of the money-form 'extends' *being*. Simmel saw the individual emerge and develop from the interplay between subject and object, through an engagement with the particular properties or qualities that constitute the object owned by the subject. Possession of the 'colourless' object of money, the form that contains all other objects as possibilities, serves to 'dissolve' the particularities of *being* otherwise conferred by ownership only to reformulate this link between being and having 'on a higher plane' (1990: 321). This is because the possessions of the Ego serve to *extend* it, the money-form extends the ego further and across a wider range of goods, services and experiences than any other object outside of the sphere of alchemy, at least it does so *potentially, virtually*, as possibility (for further discussion see Massumi, 1993; 2003; and Chapter Five of this thesis).

'Possession' for Simmel is not reducible to ownership, instead it is indicated by the subservience of an object to the will of the Ego that possesses it, and *extends* to include the disposal of an object, either in exchange or as a gift: so 'possession' is an expression of *interaction* between the ego and the world around it (1990: 322-4). This *spatialisation* of the ego, its extension into 'possessions,' is most apparent when money allows the acquisition of experiences rather than objects. Money's ability to 'merge' completely with

the purposes of the will or ego allows the emergence of personality types such as the miser or extravagant individual, for these ‘types,’ however, the money-form allows – or *affords* – pleasures that do not depend upon the acquisition of goods or services and the utility that neo-classical economics would suggest as the rationale for their purchase. This leads Simmel (1990: 328) to consider the ‘aesthetic contemplation’ of objects facilitated by the money-form through the removal of the barrier between ‘self’ and ‘object.’

Hence the feeling of liberation which is part of the aesthetic mood, the release from the dull pressure of things, the expansion of the joyful and free self into things, the reality of which usually oppresses it.

– Ibid

The ‘psychological flavour of the enjoyment of merely owning money,’ and the ‘peculiar coalescence, abstraction and anticipation of actual ownership’ afford ‘to consciousness that free scope and ominous self-extension through an unresisting medium, that self-absorption of all possibilities without doing violence or denying reality at all’ (ibid). So, Simmel ties *anticipation* to aesthetic pleasure rather than merely the anticipation of utility in ‘final consumption.’

Nowhere is this more evident than in Simmel’s discussion of the handle of a vase or jug, an object possessed of both utility and aesthetic or formal beauty (1959: 267-275).

Simmel’s discussion of the ‘hand’ as the ‘tool’ of the ‘soul’ is reminiscent of the role he attributes to the money-form in respect of the ego:

... life reaches out beyond the immediate circumference of the body and assimilates the “tool” to itself; or better still, a foreign substance *becomes* a tool in that the soul pulls it into its life, into that zone around it which fulfils its impulses. The distinction being external to the soul and being within it – simultaneously important for the body and of no significance – is, for the things beyond the body, both retained and resolved in a single act by the great motif of the tool in the stream of life that is unified and transcends itself.

– Ibid: 269

Entry into realms that are ‘superpersonal,’ therefore, demands the maintenance of ‘the integrity of our self-centred being’ since such ‘external’ realms are possessed of their own logic and ‘teleology’ (ibid: 274). The intermingling of subjects and objects mentioned here by Simmel anticipates the discussion of the relation between ‘having’ and ‘being’ formulated by Latour in his re-reading of Tarde (2001). It is this way that the mature money-form comes to resemble both God, as the resolution of all contradictions and the locus of causality in contemporary society, and an enormous ‘metaphysical’ mind in which

existence is experienced through the abstraction away from material form that commodification and its pleasures afford. This is why, for Simmel (1990: 389), there can be no sharp distinction between being and owning for this, too, is simply a 'value concept' determined by the perceived proximity to the ego.

Therefore, the 'sale of personal values,' of one's being or self, in exchange for something, most likely cash, implies a diminution or contravention of the ideal of *distinction*, which presupposes the inexchangeability of being.

The distinguished person is the very person who completely reserves his personality. Distinction represents a quite unique combination of senses of differences that are based upon and yet reject any comparison at all.

– Simmel, 1990: 390

Distinction, as an ideal, is, therefore, defined by its opposition to the monetised relation between having and being, distinction runs counters to a money-price and entry into exchange. Distinction is, then, a truly bourgeois concept, the preserve of those who will never be obliged to exchange their being as labour and who enjoy the privilege of purchasing the alienated being of others. The extension of the money-economy to address every aspect of existence, discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, thus reveals the contradiction at the heart of the bourgeois world view: the industrialisation of production and the consequent 'mass consumption' of goods and services, over which they as a class presided, ensured that the 'signs' of distinction were available to all, just as the deluge of etiquette books during the 1840s had made aristocratic manners available to them (Perrot, 1994).

Simmel's demonstration of the link between *being* and *having*, and the aesthetic rather than utilitarian dimension of anticipation that this reveals, highlights the necessity of any sociological theory of 'consumption' possessing a theory of the money-economy as an integral component of the capitalist mode of production, rather than the neutral, technical device envisaged by neo-classical theory. The 'sphere of circulation and exchange' (Marx) of capitalist modernity, therefore, must be seen as the arena within which Marx's distinction between 'productive' and 'final consumption' is achieved and organised – even it is never satisfactorily resolved. Simmel's refusal to describe the *capitalist* money economy thus requires that the theory of exchange relations he proposes be supplemented by a sustained engagement with the capitalist mode of production. Only this can remedy the neo-classical error of reducing society and the economy to an aggregate of utility-seeking individuals in pursuit of purely personal goals. By addressing the money-economy

within the context of capitalist social relations, the distinction between ‘productive’ and ‘final consumption,’ the constraints upon ‘consumption’ (as economic theory has it) are revealed as those deriving from the distribution of the total wealth of society, that is, of social class. Participation in the *modern consumption* of capitalist modernity, the relationship between *being* and *having*, is constrained by *access* to the money-form and the possibilities that Simmel sees it contain. The final economic theory that bears upon the sociological investigation of ‘consumption’ attempts to do just this, and is to be found in the writings of John Maynard Keynes.

### **Keynes and the limits to ‘consumption.’**

Keynes attempted to describe the relationship between the structural integration of productive and final ‘consumption’ within the capitalist economy in *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*. By distinguishing between ‘consumer-purchase’ and ‘investor-purchase’ Keynes explicitly integrates different types of *purchases* into capitalist economic activity, while acknowledging the different functions that these two forms of acquisition have in economic life. As with Marx, Keynes sees ‘consumption’ and production as moments within a cycle or process:

capital is not a self-subsistent entity existing apart from consumption. On the contrary, every weakening in the propensity to consume regarded as a permanent habit must weaken the demand for capital as well as the demand for consumption.

- Keynes (1936: 106)

Equally, the relationship between spending and investment, ‘consumption’ and saving is seen as a linked phenomenon and directly tied to the workings of the economy in general. For Keynes, ‘the consumer’ is always a *reasonable* ‘consumer’ whose ‘propensity to consume’ is always constrained by both subjective and objective factors. Therefore, he proposes a modification to the desiring subject of neo-classical economics:

The fundamental psychological law, upon which we are entitled to depend with great confidence both *a priori* from our knowledge of human nature and from the detailed facts of experience, is that men are disposed, as a rule and on the average, to increase their consumption as their income increases, but not by as much as their increase in their income.

- Keynes 1936 : 96

A careful, even cautious ‘consumer’ replaces Jevons’ hedonist. The subjective constraints upon ‘consumption’ tend towards the prudent - ‘Precaution, Foresight, Calculation, Improvement, Independence, Enterprise, Pride and Avarice’ - while ‘a corresponding list of motives to consumption such as Enjoyment, Short-sightedness, Generosity,

Miscalculation, Ostentation and Extravagance,' appear ever so slightly misguided (Keynes, 1936: 108). Keynes also identifies 4 motives, 'largely analogous to, but not identical with, those actuating individuals,' which Central or Local Government or Business Corporations adhere to - individuals operating as rational enterprises, aware of the need for fiscal prudence. Here, again, we see the assertion of a deferred gratification and sublimation of the drives associated with utilitarian psychology as the means to financial success.

Keynes, writing in the context of the economic depression of the 1930s, was seeking a means to rein in the more unruly elements of capitalist economics, much as the rational individual of bourgeois society marshalled 'his' passions through morality in search of moral, material and aesthetic refinement. The desire for goods, and the utility or pleasure therein, required rational action rather than headlong pursuit and Keynes' contribution to the 'sociology of consumption' is to steer economic theory back towards an appreciation of the factors that govern and constrain 'consumer activity.' The promise of material progress and its equitable distribution, which is implicit in Keynes' formulation, had also run through economic theory since Adam Smith, although in very different ways. Primarily, the 'civilisation' of bourgeois society that was epitomised in the *distinction* of its individuals signalled the attainment of Progress through the technical refinement of the capitalist system and its laws of operation. The role of 'consumption,' at least as economic theory understood its translation into social interaction, was to reveal the tasteful and discriminating interior of bourgeois individuality to the external world – epitomised in the figure of the collector (see Stewart, 1998). Despite the nominal opposition of *distinction* to exchange (particularly as money) mentioned by Simmel, the *modern* individual tied 'being' to 'having' not through the search for maximum utility measured through a physiological register of bodily needs (that gradually refined themselves into wants), but as the display, by a connoisseur, of knowledge – through the display of *signs*.

The key elements of modernity, then, are, first, consumption - not only of time, as in the past, but also of space, [exemplified by imperialist exoticism] - and, second, a kind of individual or self produced by this ability to consume time and space.'  
- Gagnier (2000: 91)

'Consumption,' as theorised by economics, was an act of judgement, the rational exercise of the critical faculty and the absence of such discernment betrayed a lack of social refinement – therefore, the structural limitations upon access to the role of 'consumer,' identified by Keynes, serves as a vital corrective to the discussion of 'consumption'

offered by economic theory. However, the role of class in the discussion of ‘consumption’ and the attempt to theorise *modern consumption* is not limited to the actions of ‘consumers.’ Inhabitants of contemporary society are both ‘consumers’ and producers and it is this dual role that contemporary variations upon Marxism seek to explore.

### **Towards an economic sociology**

In the revised political economy influenced by Marx, especially Clark (1982) Fine (1995; 2002), Fine and Leopold (1993), there is a tendency to see producers who enter the sphere of circulation and exchange to do so at the expense of their role as producers, either through the mystification of the commodification process or the ideological power of ‘commodity fetishism.’ What Fine & Leopold do not offer an analysis of ‘consumption’ firmly rooted in the relations of production that have informed the *system of provision* – the means by which the ‘consumer’ is granted access to the goods and services they wish to purchase. Instead, we find an analysis of ‘consumption’ under *the sign of production*. No credence is given to the relationship between ‘consumer’ and commodity-object (final consumption) other than that such a relationship is necessarily built upon the misleading or exaggerative tendencies of the capitalist advertising and marketing concerns. However, not all ‘consumers’ inhabit the sphere of circulation and exchange, and they do not purchase every commodity that they ‘consume,’ and the properties attributed to the commodity either by the ‘brand image’ or the ‘consumer’ may not conform to Fine & Leopold’s idea of the physical or semiotic properties of the commodity.

For Clarke (1982), Marx’s critique of commodity fetishism is central to his critique of political economy because since commodities are produced for exchange they are produced as ‘values.’ If the social character of the commodity fails to be recognised, its status as a value, then the commodity becomes thing-like and is ‘consumed’ through its appropriation via the money-form. Classical political economy attempted but failed to grasp this, neo-classical economics with its focus on the subjective evaluation of utility could not conceive of it. For both the outcome is that the commodity assumes an independent existence, its production can be understood economically, by both classical and neo-classical political economy, but its ‘consumption’ can not be grasped as a definitively social act - although classical political economy, especially in its updated version, makes an attempt to do so. The problem with this approach, based on the work of Haug (1986), is that this relationship is reduced, at worst, to an indictment of advertising or, at best, an assertion of commodity fetishism. Neither of these options can be said to have nothing to do with the constitution of ‘consumption,’ nor can they in any way be

deemed satisfactory explanations. The admission by von Wieser in 1889 that economic theory could no longer pretend to explain the operation of society and social interaction without consideration of other factors is borne out by this discussion. Only a *sociological* theory of the capitalist consumption-relation can retain any aspirations to the analysis of *modern consumption*: however, economic theory has had a definite influence on the formation of sociological theories of 'consumption' and 'consumer society.'

Fine & Leopold (1993: 46-9) reject contemporary theories of 'consumer society,' believing them to be rooted in economistic presuppositions such as the utility-maximising individual acting through rational calculation, and the failure to develop a theory of 'consumption' that distinguishes between the specific goods and services being 'consumed.' Such an explanation represents, for them, 'the most extreme version of a horizontal theory of consumption.' 'Consumer theory' is reduced to demand theory, with the 'consumer' indistinguishable from the firm. In such theories 'little attention is paid to the necessity for consumer behaviour to take place over time, combining together a number of discrete activities, not least the carrying out of purchases and their consumption, as well as the process of decision-making itself' (Fine & Leopold, 1993: 49). Theories of 'consumer society,' in this way, tend to become theories that examine the purchasing activities of 'consumers,' and so only interrogate 'consumption' at the level of the sphere of circulation and exchange. Simmel's investigation of the mature money economy falls into this category for Fine and Leopold. The motives for purchases, then, become the province of a '*psychology* of consumption' based around a form of 'commodity fetishism' in which 'commodities and individuals are endowed with a variety of properties that motivate or trigger a consumption relation between them' (Fine & Leopold, 1993: 55). Such a psychological approach reduces 'consumption' to the factors involved in the decision making process, operating around an expanded model of rationality which can account for the influence exerted by the emotions and past experience. Psychology's multiplication of the factors bearing upon the decision-making process simply dilutes the potency of the core of rational utility maximisation posited by economic theory. The unsuitability of such theories is highlighted by their inability to explain addiction, habit-forming 'consumption,' or excessive over- or 'under-consumption' other than by recourse to a 'personality trait' or a somewhat spurious 'addictive gene.'

Fine & Leopold (1993: 72) overplay the importance of structural elements to the detriment of the autonomy of social actors when they affirm the importance of not neglecting 'the immanence of trends acting indirectly upon consumption - through mass production and

modes of retailing and distribution.' This euphemistic dismissal of meaningful human action in its interaction with objective culture exposes the economic and productive bias that mars an otherwise excellent contribution to the 'sociology of consumption.' Fine (1995: 139) appreciates that while the level and variety of 'consumption' can no longer be crudely reduced to social class or level of income these factors retain some importance, even distinguishing certain social strata. This would moderate any explanation of 'consumption' through a 'trickle-down' theory, such as that commonly associated with Veblen (1994). While this process may occur in certain instances it is an effect not the cause of 'consumption activity.' This merely reinforces, for Fine & Leopold, the necessity of the 'system of provision' model, which is, essentially, a revised and updated political economy. However, as outlined above, the corrections that such a model provides to economic theory tend to occur at the expense of an ability to explain or analyse the 'daily traffic of bourgeois life' (Marx) precisely because in the rejection of 'exchange-relations' theorists, such as Simmel, or 'psychological' explanations of behaviour they 'throw the baby out with the bathwater.'

### **The Role of Exchange**

The same tension and inadequacy that Dodd (1994) sees in Marx's theory of money and explanation of economic behaviour can be discerned in Fine & Leopold's revision of classical political economy: where the distinction between the use and exchange value carries over into a distinction between the functional and the symbolic. One is instilled during production, the other in circulation and exchange. Although Dodd does not directly address the 'sociology of consumption,' his analysis of the modern money economy, in particular the examination of the circulation and exchange of the money-form as a commodity on the international currency markets, is of relevance to this debate. Money as the tool that facilitates the exchange of values in contemporary capitalist culture is the focus of his investigation. Money as the means by which values may be appropriated is, however, alienating to the extent that this very exchangeability necessitates the demise of the unique, the acquiescence in the quantification of qualities and the affirmation of a money-equivalent for all values. The money form has a dual character; it empowers by virtue of the very property by which it alienates: by offering all values in exchange the money-form negates the possibility of an ultimate value and, so, necessitates that the promise of happiness, of satisfaction, that it holds out is not illusory as some would have us believe but which is, inevitably, temporary.

Dodd (1994: 55-7) argues that if the desire for money rests on its difference from other objects this derives from an abstraction and utility which is definitive of money alone, through its role as the universal medium. Dodd attributes to the money-form a symbolic and a technical function '[...] money has a dual character consisting of a base, relating to real goods and services, and code, relating to symbols' (1994: 62). Failure to appreciate this dual character leads to an over statement of the symbolic function of money at the expense of its role in the attainment and maximisation of utility. Taken to an extreme this would negate the rational pursuit of self-interest that is deemed central to economic theorisations of economic action. Similarly, Dodd (1994: 63) objects to the

contention that money encodes not merely prices but values and norms derived from the function of latent pattern maintenance [since this] relies on the proposition that the economy does not constitute the core or infrastructure of society but is interdependent with three other sub-systems of equal status making up the social system.

This, he claims, is to over emphasise the importance of the symbolic aspect of money as a medium and, in turn, to under emphasise the way in which access to money governs access to goods and services; money may be the universal medium of exchange but its distribution in society is tied to the social relations of the mode of production and the consequent division of labour.

The indeterminacy that Dodd (1994: 81) considers money's 'most essential property' makes a Habermasian distinction between system and lifeworld deeply problematic: since this problematises the assumptions of rationality which economic theory holds so dear. Dodd (1994: 118-9) invokes 'postmodern economics' and their post-Fordist models of production and flexible accumulation (see Harvey, 1989; 2001; Baudrillard, 1981: 1983: 1988: 1990) or 'postmodern commentators' such as Jameson (1991) to account for the role of *information* in the operation of modern economies. Information must be seen to play both a mediating and a constitutive role in the reproduction of monetary networks. This entails an appreciation of role of the media industries in the production and operation of contemporary capitalist society and the economic enterprises it engages in. The financial and entertainment industries both propagate and disseminate the idea of the market, its role as a 'metaphysical entity.' In liberal and neo-liberal philosophy, the 'market is deemed to embody a form of social organization in which the basic imperatives of human nature can be freely expressed, both of themselves and in such a way as to generate an ordered social whole.' The market becomes a means for the organisation, even the repression of the

human passions (Hirschman) and of defining the nature and form of modern freedom (Simmel).

For Dodd (1994: 121), attitudes to money 'are not only inherently reflexive but *chronically mediatized*: not simply filtered through the media industry... but formed through the media, being dependent on and constitutive of this industry as a form of life. It is this development, not "consumerism" as such, which is novel, distinctively postmodern if this terminology must be used, in so far as not merely the objects of consumers' desire but the very concepts of money and markets informing consumer behaviour have become inextricably entwined' [emphasis added]. The 'chronically mediatized' attitudes to money, which Dodd feels may be characteristic of the postmodern era, constitute part of the contemporary incarnation of the relationships between subjects and objects – between *being* and *having*. These technologically-mediated forms of sociation extend the relation of *possession*, as described by Simmel (1990: 321-9), and the transformation of subjective being through its inter-relation with 'objective culture,' and anticipate Vattimo's (1988) discussion of the relation between *being* and 'exchange.' Drawing on Jameson's *Postmodernism*, Dodd (1994: 124) suggests that the media and the market have undergone a 'process of transcoding' in which they come together to form a kind of synthetic unity. This implies that the 'consumption' of media images has 'increasingly been based on their form, the techniques and technology used, as much as their content, what the images portray.' Resulting in 'a set of practices which express the relationship both structurally and, no less importantly, symbolically,' this, in turn, means that 'consumerism' (for Dodd the term is interchangeable with 'consumption') is not only a *monetary* phenomenon, as he says it is for Simmel, but is based upon 'the mediatization of consumption itself.' This emphasis upon the symbolic dimension, the incorporation of the 'sign-value' (Baudrillard), neither denies the role played by the perceived physical properties of the object, image or commodity, nor determines that the pursuit of the perceived gratification is achieved through the adherence to rational principles.

The problem with postmodern accounts of 'consumption' and 'consumer behaviour' is that in their haste to posit a break or rupture between the modern and its successor a version of modernity rooted in the rational and calculating pursuit of utility by economic man who appraises the real, the physical (that is, non-symbolic) aspects of commodities is advanced. This is then juxtaposed with the infiltration or corruption of this world by a virus-like symbolic or semiotic component, the implication is always of the transgression of formerly rigid and distinct boundaries, and *this* is then deemed to be characteristic of the

postmodern. This, of course, is to erroneously project or add-on a symbolic dimension to objects in the belief that such a dimension is not, in actual fact, integral to all cultural objects and practices - including the disposal of income in 'consumption.' Dodd (1994: 130) rejects this 'core rational domain of economic reasoning and action' not on the basis of its being either rational or irrational, but because 'the binary oppositions underpinning economic reasoning are unworkable.' Even allowing for an actor possessing adequate knowledge of a situation there may be no obvious utility-yielding choice. There may be several options which will yield equal satisfactions; or the different options that comprise a choice may be incommensurable – so radically different that any choice between the two would appear arbitrary rather than rational.

A society based around the money-economy generalises, universalises, a certain kind of trust that arises from and relies upon such assumptions of trust between 'transactors,' either individual or corporate. Giddens' (1990) depiction of high modernity in *The Consequences of Modernity* – as the world capitalist economy; the international division of labour; the nation-state system; the world military order – epitomises the descriptions offered by classical sociological theory. The consequences of *modernity* for individuals are an increase in impersonal, monetised contacts with other people, and in the numerical range of these contacts over an increasingly extended, and often abstract, conception of geographical space – what will be examined in Chapter Three as 'terrain.'

Ideas, expectations and symbolic associations play an integral role within, rather than simply being a reflection upon, real economic activity; on the way in which money in fact works in society, on the way it is in fact administered by governments, and on the consequences its operation in fact has right across society [...]. Information is part of that world, which is therefore neither material nor symbolic but something other; an other which cannot be grasped within the language of economics, nor indeed within any language which derives its structure from the dualism of the material and the symbolic, of concepts and the reality which they are supposed to depict.

- Dodd, 1994: 157-8

Unfortunately, Dodd's cultural reading of the processes of purchase and their determining and constitutive elements, only extends to the point of *purchase*. What Dodd fails to fully theorise is that 'consumption' is not merely purchase, it is the relationships that subjects have with objects in modernity. Dodd (1994: 166) contends that 'economic reasoning has no meaning other than as a part of the fiduciary character of economic life,' that it offers no external criterion by which this form of life can be examined. It is rather part of its content, part of the frameworks of meaning and discursive practices chronically implicated

in the reproduction of monetary networks over time. Under these conditions, as everything and everyone enters into exchange and is relativised in the process, the possibility of the unique, distinct, bounded entity is problematised. Neither subject nor object can remain discrete and apart from its surroundings (including the market). The particular qualities that define an object or individual can be separated out from the whole and quantified (priced).

Formlessness and a purely quantitative character are one and the same....  
Therefore, money as such is the most terrible destroyer of form.  
- Simmel, 1990 : 272

The ease of acquisition allowed by the mature money economy in tandem with the capitalist mode of production creates a link between Oscar Wilde's 'Dorian Gray,' - the 'ideal consumer of the nineteenth century' (Gagnier, 2000) – and the contemporary world discussed by Dodd. Today the 'freedom' conferred by the money economy demonstrates the extension of the market to encompass every desire; a traffic in everything and anything:

Modern consumers no longer subscribed to the hierarchy of goods as they pursued markets in everything from music to education to babies to blood, opting for individualism over evolution or progress.  
- Gagnier, 2000: 114

Likewise, Wilde described the cigarette as the perfect commodity because it always leaves one unsatisfied and wanting more (Gagnier, 2000: 122). The cigarette is, thus, like any other 'addictive' commodity or commodity-experience, its finite duration and its 'experiential' character ensure that part of its appeal is that it is never quite enough. 'Possession' of such a commodity, as a relation between *being* and *having*, underscores the role of 'experience' within what will be termed *modern consumption* and the importance of an analytical approach capable of unifying the structural approach of political economy with a description of the phenomenal forms that subjective experience assumes in the sphere of circulation and exchange of capitalist modernity.

The mediation of experience through the money-form, as the manifestation of the sphere of circulation and exchange, including the absence of 'form,' described by Simmel (1990), imply an analysis of the sublime dimension of aesthetic experience. The attempt by nineteenth century empiricists to ground the experience of reality in the sense-data of subjective experience reduced aesthetic judgements to pleasurable personal responses to phenomena. Indeed,

[Alexander] Bain banished everything but pleasure from aesthetics. [While] in *Physiological Aesthetics* (1877) Grant Allen defined the beautiful as that which afforded the maximum of stimulation with the minimum of fatigue or waste, in processes not directly connected with life-serving functions.

- Gagnier 2000: 136

On this reading it is difficult to sustain any qualitative difference between aesthetic objects and the commodities populating the marketplace. The formal separation of art from (everyday) life becomes deeply problematic as the language used to describe the two experiences becomes increasingly similar, predicated upon the same lexicon. The distinction between the beautiful and the sublime is rendered ever-more untenable:

... Bousanquet alludes to the end of Burke's and Woolf's bourgeois beauty, the beauty of order and civility, of the romanticized countryside, of stable hierarchical relations, and predicts the "terrible beauty" (Yeats) of modernity, a beauty that will evoke the feelings of the sublime, the overwhelming of the individual in the face of the larger forces (Woolf's "person disassembled").

- Gagnier, 2000: 144

The subject, of both economic and aesthetic discourse, is confronted by a world whose depiction relies upon new forms of representation. In the social sciences, charged with describing the experience and constitution of everyday life, and, particularly the emergent discipline of *economics* (neo-classical political economics), methodological individualism assumed primacy. Gagnier describes Wilde's retreat into a (high) bourgeois aesthetic that renounced such exchanges, the relativisation of values, as an attempt to delineate a retreat from the everyday world of sensual gratification and its physiological locus. In doing so Gagnier effectively describes the connoisseurial collector, who seeks to stand apart from the world in order to improve his or her view of it – as if before an art-work.

Just as discourses such as aesthetics, economics and philosophy transformed themselves, others, such as sociology, were born. Still others, such as (classical) political economy passed away, replaced by neo-classical thought, which then naturalised itself and its presuppositions by denying its historicity and naming itself Economics. As Gagnier noted, the 'bourgeois beauty, the beauty of order and civility, of the romanticized countryside, of stable hierarchical relations,' dissolved into flux. The previous age, rooted in tradition, was 'disassembled' (Woolf) by an encroaching *modernity* that transformed everything in its path, everything that, in its turn constituted it, and saw 'every thing that is solid melt into air' (Berman). This left economic theory describing the actions of an individual 'consumer' or the aggregate of 'consumers' – society – rather than the *modern consumption* argued for

above. Even Marxist revisions, (Fine, 1995; Fine & Leopold, 1993) to political economy that attempt to unite production, distribution, circulation and exchange to a concept of ‘final consumption’ are of limited explanatory value. The ‘system of provision’ approach endeavours to ‘join the dots’ between those various stages of the capitalist mode of production’s social relations of ‘consumption.’ In this way the ‘fetishism’ of the commodity-form within capitalist society, which grants apparent autonomy to the products of wage-labour, is revealed as part of the system of social relations belonging to the capitalist mode of production.

As worthy an aim as this might be, the sphere of circulation and exchange is not a neutral entity that merely ‘distorts’ reality (through fetishism or ideology) in the process of (re) presenting the commodity-form, it is a vital and active element in the *construction* of the conditions under which the phenomenological forms of subjective experience available within contemporary capitalist culture emerge. The subjective experience of *modern consumption* is revealed as something more complex than the revealed preferences of a utilitarian individual and their occasional susceptibility to irrational actions in the pursuit of pleasure, just as it is irreducible to a consumer dupe who is fooled by the false promises of the fetishised commodity. Instead, the consequences of the sphere of circulation and exchange of *capitalist modernity* incorporate the technological dimension discussed by Dodd, in respect of the money-form, and Vattimo, concerning the nature of contemporary *Being*. The categories used to describe both economic action and subjective motivation by economic theory, whether classical, neoclassical or Marxist, fail to comprehend the role and effect of the sphere of circulation and exchange of capitalist modernity, precisely because this ‘sphere’ and its operations are considered to act upon, but exist independently of, human subjectivity. The sphere of circulation and exchange is thus considered as a glorified advertising arena in which otherwise rational ‘consumers’ are seduced into moments of madness (purchase) or the fetishistic attribution of meaning and significance by an inter-subjective community (lifestyle). Either the ‘consumer’ is ‘fooled’ by the commodity-fetish or the commodity-sign possesses a ‘biography’ and follows a ‘pathway’ derived from the value-judgements of social groups: the former necessitates a rational, usually Marxist, ‘demystification,’ such as that espoused by Haug (1986); while the latter sees the commodity as an increasingly ‘free-floating’ sign within a postmodern ‘consumer economy’ engaged in a project of ‘identity’ construction. Even the anthropological amalgam of these traditions, best represented by Miller (especially 1989, but also 2002) or Dant (1999), simply assert a version of the rational subject standing apart from but interacting with the world of objects, which has been re-named the ‘material culture’ of

contemporary capitalist society. The inadequacy of this economic inheritance and its description of the inter-relationship between the 'culture of things' and the 'culture of human beings' (Simmel), lies at the core of the following chapter.

## Chapter Two: Making it Modern

### *Introduction*

The sociological analysis of the contemporary capitalist consumption-relation requires that the ghost of economic theory – *homo œconomicus* – be exorcised, and with it the related terms of ‘consumer,’ ‘consumerism,’ ‘consumer society’ and, most pernicious of all, ‘consumption.’ This amalgam of economic theory, Cartesian dualism and Newtonian mechanics underpins a ‘bourgeois world view’ (Ferguson, 1990) that sees the human subject as opposed to and separate from the world of objects, resulting in the subjective pursuit of utility being expressed as the *desire* for objects. This discursive arrangement has, as its *telos*, the production of individual identity or ego: the satiation of subjective desire within the sphere of circulation and exchange of the capitalist mode of production. However, this emphasis upon pursuit, purchase and ownership fails to grasp the historical specificity of capitalist modernity and the changed relationship between subjective and objective culture (Simmel, 1990) that this social formation entails. Instead, the focus must be upon *modern consumption* and its ‘terrain’ and the ways in which subjects and objects are mutually constituted in a ‘relational ontology’ (Costall, 2004) of ‘affordance’ (Gibson, 1977; 1986, Dant, 1999) that redefines the relationship between *being* and *having* organised around ‘possession’ (Simmel, 1990, Latour, 2001).

This requires a renunciation of ‘historical’ explanations of ‘consumption’ and ‘consumerism’ which presume an extension of monetised market relations, either gradual (Fine, 1998; Glennie, 1995; McCracken, 1990) or revolutionary (McKendrick et al., 1982), as the basis of the psychological individual pursuit of ‘identity.’ Such a project(ion) of the self reduces ‘consumption’ to the discriminations of ‘taste’ and ‘distinction’ (Bourdieu, 1984), or attempts at manufacturing postmodern ‘identity-positions’ – both of which are merely ‘symbolically’ updated versions of *homo œconomicus*. Here the ‘trickle-down effect’ of a mass market is considered as the basis of ‘consumption’ and ‘consumer’ activities, as socio-spatial practices that describe the teleological pursuit of satisfaction through the sphere of circulation and exchange, whether as shopping (Miller, 1999; 2002), the tactics of the everyday (de Certeau, 1988; Lefebvre, 1991) or ‘ordinary consumption’ (Gronow & Warde, 2001). The ‘consumer’ emerges as a *discursive* figure governing the interaction between social individuals and the capitalist market (Trentmann, 2006), and the commodity-form is reduced to a medium that allows the project(ion) of the self as ‘revealed preferences’ and the transmission of ‘experience’ as *display*. The ‘consumer’ now resembles the *collector* (Stewart, 1998), as someone who ‘produces’ their existence

(and social status) through the accumulation and display of goods that have been charged with narrative (biographical) significance. The ‘consumer’ as *cyborg-collector* ‘progresses’ by attaching commodity objects or experiences to the teleological narrative of *identity*, as a prosthetic extension of subjectivity.

The Frankfurt School saw such a reduction of the autonomous individual express the labour of ‘consumption’ through an ‘ersatz individuality’ born of the forms of ‘shock-experience’ (*Erlebnis*) of modernity and displace the subject of *authentic* ‘historical experience’ (*Erfahrung*). Their marriage of sociological theory and psychoanalysis sought to expose the threat that this pursuit of ‘consumption’ and its ‘irrational’ pleasures posed to the goals of the Enlightenment. The dissolution of historical experience (*Erfahrung*) into shock-experience (*Erlebnis*) and the apparent ‘de-materialisation’ of the commodity-form into a semiotic medium – a ‘system’ of signs (Baudrillard, 1989), exchange or ‘representational’ values (Buck-Morss, 1993) – mirrored the shift from ‘substantial’ to ‘functional’ *significance* in the money-form (Simmel, 1990). The demise of historical *authenticity* and its role in the narration of causality (Stewart, 1998) threatened the bourgeois concept of subjective individuality (Seltzer, 1992) and the concept of unique *identity*. Instead, identity appeared to be ‘produced’ through the manipulation of *meaningful* commodities, or signs in a postmodern version of the ‘consumer society’ thesis. This conflation of *materiality* and *authenticity* allowed ‘reality’ to be lost in the supposed triumph of *immateriality*, *inauthenticity*, or *appearance* and is exemplified by Debord’s lament for the ‘passing’ of things into *representation* or Baudrillard’s (1988) discussion of ‘ecstatic communication.’

Against this postmodernist espousal of the *immaterial* significance of the commodity-sign the anthropological ‘material culture’ approach insisted upon an analysis of the physical constitution object and the cultural forms of its ‘consumption.’ Here the ‘postmodern’ or semiotic focus upon the *significance* of the object (or practice) was seen as inseparable from its material existence – shape, function and form – and the cultural practices it underpinned. Material culture analyses of ‘consumption’ focused upon social habits and their variation in time and space, such as the changes to shopping brought about by supermarkets (Miller, 1999) or the impact of mobile telephones (Dant, 1999). This emphasis upon the ‘socialness’ of goods and services within social interaction re-asserted the political and moral economy within which ‘consumption’ occurs and the commodity-form’s role in the transmission of cultural categories as a framework for the negotiation of

individual action. In this it echoed the ‘politics of consumption’ and ‘vertical’ analysis of the ‘system of provision’ approach (Fine, 1995; 1998; 2006, Fine & Leopold, 1993), which sought to chart the constitution of the sphere of circulation and exchange – and where the emphasis upon the subjective intentions of the ‘consumer,’ as *choice* (utilitarian, moral or political), betray its economic ancestry.

The socio-spatial activities of ‘consumerism’ served to flesh out, psychologically, anthropologically and geographically, the abstraction of the ‘consumer’ through an analysis of a variety of teleological projects – gift-giving (Belk, 1995), shopping (Falk & Campbell, 1997; Miller, 1999; 2001 Thrift, 1994), or eating food. The ‘consumer’s’ pursuit of *goals* – economic, psychological or social – through the *interactive mechanism* of the sphere of circulation and exchange appeared to reveal subjective preferences rendered objectively. Consequently, ‘consumerism,’ as the socio-spatial practices of the ‘consumer’ collapses the distinction between the social and the economic realms and simply provides a cultural context within which an expanded utilitarian individualism is pursued, whether in anthropology (Carrier, 2006; Miller, 1999; 2001), psychology (Lunt & Livingstone, 1992; Lunt, 1995), marketing (Belk, 1995; 1997) or geography (Jackson & Thrift, 1995). The ‘consumer,’ as psychological individual, is *socialised* into ‘consumption,’ where choice functions as the means for the *production* of identity through the activities of ‘consumerism’ and its *meaningful* manipulation of goods and services. This extension of *homo Faber* into the realm of ‘consumption’ is a modification rather than a disavowal of bourgeois liberal humanism and is the premise upon which the postmodern manipulation of ‘meaningful’ commodities occurs.

The postmodern primacy of ‘appearances’ guaranteed by the liberation of the signifier from the signified heralded an ontological relativism and the demise of the bourgeois belief in *progress* and the teleological movement of history central to both the Enlightenment and the critical theory of the Frankfurt School. Subjectivity, as the teleological expression of *being*, ceased to have ‘identity’ as its goal and, instead, became the phenomenal experience of ontological relativism, as *flux*. However, rather than see the sociological analysis of the contemporary capitalist consumption-relation dissolve into postmodern ‘flux’ or a cultural studies-inspired effort at consumerist identity politics some attempt at investigating the framework within which the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption* emerges must be hazarded. Such an analysis must include an appreciation of the historical relationship between the sphere of circulation and exchange of ‘consumption’ and the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption*, which lies at the heart of the experience of capitalist modernity, of

*modernité*. By discarding the traditional bourgeois ontology predicated upon the dialectical relation between subject and object in favour of a non-humanist discussion of elements or ‘actants’ within a network, such as that proposed by Actant-Network-Theory (ANT) and exemplified by Latour, it is possible avoid the descent into a study of ‘interactions’ of more greater or lesser degrees of ‘socialness.’ This avoids both the lament for lost authenticity – alienation – and its attempted overcoming, either through nostalgic longing (Stewart, 1998) or a utopian pursuit of ‘progress’ (Ferguson, 1990).

Instead of viewing the interactions between subjective and objective culture as the result of human intentionality (and its utilitarian presuppositions), the analysis of *modern consumption* focuses upon the *exchange* between subject and the commodity-form as a particular form of ‘sociation’ (Simmel), a specific form of *being* that is contingent upon and shaped by the ‘affordances’ (or *having*) constituted *within* this relationship. Consequently, the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption* resembles a ‘space of circulation’ Latour (1993; 2001) where the *imminence* and *immanence* of the commodity-form resists reduction to a vessel for subjectively sought utility. By failing to become an arena for the appropriation and ownership of particular commodities – subject to the political economy of access (Fine, 1998; Massumi, 2003; Rifkin, 2000) – this ‘terrain’ avoids becoming an element in the *modernisation* of ‘consumer society’ (Stearns, 1997; Trentmann, 2002) and its expansion within the monetised social relations of the trans-national flows of capital. *Modern consumption* offers no role for the ‘consumer’ and its psychological ‘filling-out’ of the abstraction that is *homo œconomicus* through socio-spatial activities such as ‘shopping’ or ‘consumerism’ (Miles, 1998).

The analysis of *modern consumption*, rather than ‘consumption,’ allows a focus upon the *relational* interaction or ‘sociation’ between subject and object (service or experience) and echoes the expanded reading of Gibson’s (1977) concept of ‘affordance’ by ecological psychology (Heft, 2001; Costall, 2004). This insistence upon the investigation of contemporary capitalist ‘consumption’ as a *relational phenomenon* ensures that both the phenomenal forms of subjective experience – ‘lived experience’ (Minkowski, 1970) – and the socio-economic framework, which is the condition of their possibility, are examined. Therefore, it is the *experience* of novelty rather than its *pursuit* (as a temporalised utility) – as *nouveauté* – that is a characteristic of *modern consumption* at both the subjective and the inter-subjective level: either as technological innovations or belated personal discoveries. *Modern consumption* represents the site or nodal point of ‘interchange’ between human and non-human actants, between subjective and objective culture – it expresses the

fluctuating relationship between *being* and *having* (Simmel, 1990) defining the ‘transformation’ of the ‘monad’ through its ‘possession’ of qualities (Latour, 2001) rather than the *ownership* of objects. *Modern consumption* is the monadological expression of difference represents ‘lived experience’ upon the *terrain* of capitalist modernity, an arena in which the commodity-form is subjectively experienced as free of causal relations:

... does not the world of the circulation and exchange of commodities and of money exchange create the same illusions as the aesthetic realm? Does not this sphere acquire an autonomy in which its individual elements achieve a reconciliation? Is there not a parallel between the aesthetic judgement associated with the image, appearance and form of things and the world of circulation and exchange of commodities (with its creation of harmony through a pure function that is indifferent to the reality of all use values)?

– Frisby, 1992: 142

*Modern consumption* as a form of participation in capitalist modernity, as the experience of *modernité*, is the inhabitation of an apparently autonomous ‘aesthetic realm,’ a sublime *terrain* where the ‘representation of limitlessness’ (Simmel, cited Frisby, 1992: 143) denies the ‘consolation of form’ (Lyotard, 1992). The apparent autonomy conferred upon the ‘objective’ world of commodities, as part of the relational phenomenon that is *modern consumption*, implies a ‘terrain’ upon which the phenomenological categories – space, time and causality – that structure subjective experience (*being*) must be understood as derived from the wider social relations of capitalist modernity, specifically the intersection between subjective and objective culture (*having*). Consequently, the inhabitant of the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption* can no longer be conceived of as the ‘citizen consumer’ of liberal political theory but, instead, resembles the *flâneur* in displaying ‘a certain kind of aestheticized sensibility that implies the abdication of political, moral or cognitive control over the world’ (Gluck, 2003: 53; see also Prendergast, 1992).

## **Historical Studies**

Economic theory’s reliance upon a philosophical anthropology grounded in utilitarian psychology (Gagnier, 2000) and the exchange relations of the capitalist mode of production has managed to insinuate itself within a variety of contemporary approaches to ‘consumption’ – even in the work of those who would claim no kinship with the discipline of economics. Historical studies have highlighted the existence of ‘consumer activity’ in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, prior to the advent of industrialisation in both Europe (Schivelbusch, 1993; Thirsk, 1978; Weatherill, 1996) and North America (Main, 1982; Shammass, 1990, 1993). The extension of market relations to provide an ever-

greater range of articles as industrialisation took off during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries has been offered as the dawning of ‘consumer society’ (Campbell, 1987; McKendrick, Brewer & Plumb, 1982), while ‘mass consumer society’ has been located in the late nineteenth century (Fox & Lears, 1983; Fraser, 1981; Stearns, 1997; Trentmann, 2002; 2006). This terminological debate must be clarified if a definition of *modern consumption* distinct from its opposite, but not necessarily historically prior, ‘pre-modern consumption.’

McKendrick et al (1982) claim that the ‘birth’ of the ‘modern consumer’ was located in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century ‘consumer society,’ a thesis developed in Brewer & Porter (1993) and which has at its core the extension of a fashionable and luxurious ‘consumption’ beyond aristocratic court life that ‘trickles down’ first to the ‘middling’ classes and, later, to the agrarian and industrial lower classes (McCracken, 1990). Slater (1997) has refined this thesis, suggesting, in lieu of a ‘consumer revolution,’ and akin to the agrarian and industrial revolutions, a ‘commercial revolution,’ which acknowledges the intertwined development of capitalist production and ‘consumption,’ the extension of international trade, development of the money-form, contract law and the further penetration of life by market relations. However, the degree to which any of these theses, and the description of the relationship between commodities and the inhabitants of the societies that ‘consumed’ them, actually offers a viable explanation of *modern consumption* or its ostensible origin is debatable.

### **That Was Then, This Is Now: The Consumer Revolution Thesis.**

The enormous attention that social scientists and historians have dedicated to the uncovering of the origins of the ‘consumer revolution’ is sufficient to indicate its importance. Any attempt to understand *modern consumption* as ‘modern’ must renounce the all-or-nothing implications of the ‘consumer revolution’ thesis, however it is phrased, lest the ‘sociology of consumption’ become lost in a futile search for origins at the expense of understanding the social, cultural and historical factors which have shaped contemporary ‘consumption’ practices (Kuchta, 1996). The ‘consumer revolution’ thesis, as the extension of greater quantity and variety of goods to an increasing ‘consumer audience,’ fails to engage with the *modern* dimensions of the capitalist consumption-relation and its origins. Further, it denies the complex cultural context against and within which the expansion of ‘the world of goods’ (Douglas & Isherwood, 1979) took place. The rejection of this perception of a ‘linear development’ (de Grazia 1996: 151-3) allows

appreciation of the persistence of socio-spatial patterns and ‘consumption practices’ differentiated by class and gender.

The very notion of ‘consumer society’ itself must be subjected to interrogation, and the convenient gender-stereotyping of men and women’s roles in its constitution, which de Grazia (1996: 2-3) caricatures as ‘Mr. Breadwinner and Mrs. Consumption,’ can themselves be seen to be in need of deconstruction through careful historical analysis. Any movement from feudal to bourgeois society or a ‘mass consumption’ society, while rooted in capitalist exchange networks, must also appreciate the ‘transformation of goods from being relatively static symbols around which hierarchies were ordered to being more directly constitutive of class, social status, and personal identity’ (ibid: 4). The origins of this transformation of the cultural role assigned to the commodity-form cannot be distinguished from the origins of the culture of modernity as an historical epoch, nor can their consequences for the forms of sociation and subjectivity for the present be disregarded. Benjamin’s (1999) archaeology of the Parisian Arcade represents an attempt to link an analysis of ‘consumption’ to a larger investigation of capitalist modernity (Buck-Morss, 1993; Frisby, 1988) and the forms of life that characterised it. Benjamin saw the rise and fall of the *flâneur*, the birth of the department store and the ‘Hausmannisation’ of Paris as part of a larger nineteenth century modernity, epitomised in the ‘democratization of luxury’ (Williams, 1982). The particular history of the Parisian department store, or *grand magasin*, can be contrasted to the British experience (Lancaster, 1995) and compared to the American (Bronner [ed.], 1989). The developments in the design of façades and interiors, which both the Parisian and American stores pioneered, derives directly from the World Exhibitions, or World’s Fairs, which sought to portray the nineteenth century’s progress towards a material utopia through the use of technology in the service of production.

The transformation of the built environment was also, and simultaneously, the transformation of the relationship between the built environment and its inhabitants. The absence of a theoretical conceptualisation of the phenomenological dimension of ‘consumer’ activity within the everyday – as ‘lived experience’ (Minkowski, 1970) – locates the historical analyses of ‘consumption’ altogether too close to the economic presuppositions rejected in the previous chapter – even if *homo oeconomicus* is now clad in ‘meaningful’ apparel. Indeed, the gendered experience of ‘consumers,’ pointedly referenced by De Grazia & Furlough (1996), is among the most easily overlooked facets of the historical evolution of ‘consumption’ and attempts to represent it (Ryan, 1994). The

transformation of the definitions of public space which accompanied the rise of the arcades and the department stores played a vital role in the introduction of women into the public sphere, as workers in the new shopping establishments, as customers, and, on occasion, as thieves (Friedberg 1993, Ryan 1994, Wolff 1985, Abelson 1989). Equally, the relationship between the individuals involved in ‘consumption’ activities and the goods and services they ‘consumed’ was gendered, whether through use or its opposite – prohibition. This occurred across the entire spectrum of modern commodities, from fashion (Perrot, 1994;) to cigarettes (Schivelbusch, 1993) and prostitution (Benjamin, 1999).

### **A Politics of ‘Consumption’?**

McCracken’s attempt to refine McKendrick et al.’s thesis (1982), that Elizabethan England did not experience the fashion cycle associated with *modern consumption*, turns upon his identifying emulative spending (fashion) in this period, which he links to the monarch’s ‘use of expenditure as an instrument of government’ (1990:11). The increase in ‘consumer spending’ on personal goods is seen as the result of an increased attendance at court in an attempt to win the favour of the Queen. Where previously the ‘corporation’ that was the Elizabethan noble family displayed its wealth through symbolic goods possessed of the *patina* of age passed down over generations the store of accumulated wealth was now expended in pursuit of fashionable novelty. Williams (1982) links French 16<sup>th</sup> century aristocratic consumption to Elias’s ‘civilising process’ and the use of material culture, particularly ‘consumer goods’ and fashionable items, in furthering an ideal of civilized ‘manners’, while insisting that ‘consumption’ and civilization are not identical. This manifested as ‘the suppression of aggressive and instinctual behaviour, an increased self-consciousness about the perception of one’s actions by others, and a greater emphasis on politeness, restraint, and refinement as ideals of conduct’ (Williams, 1982: 24).

Williams’ (1982: 26-7) assertion of a link between the items of ‘material culture’ and the political rule by the court of Louis XIV (1638-1715), whom she terms ‘*the Consumer King*,’ marries the manners of the monarch to the daily routines of the king’s body. His *mécanique*, or ‘mechanism,’ was the programmed pattern of his ‘consumption,’ which extended, in turn, into an etiquette that governed the activities of those who attended him. This rigid systematisation of the king’s and his courtiers’s activities was a deliberate attempt to foster an ‘enhancement of political authority’ (ibid: 28) similar to that which McCracken (1990) attributes to Elizabeth I. The Sun King turned courtiers into ‘consumers,’ holding their attention through a series of games and amusements aimed at avoiding *ennui*, the ‘chronic sense of vacuity, frustration, aimlessness and futility’ that

characterised life at court. This ‘demonstrates how a system of consumption can develop its own imperatives, which bear little relation to the attainment of individual happiness or pleasure’ (Williams, 1982: 30), in contrast with the rationale for ‘consumer activity’ posited by economic theory. Here it is possible to identify the modern aspects of ‘consumption’ in the very fact of their departure from economic orthodoxy; it is in the ‘meaningfulness’ of goods and services and their incorporation into what Habermas (1979) would term the ‘lifeworld’ that their importance lies. While the aristocracy consumed ostentatiously in pursuit of political opportunity, the bourgeoisie mixed public display with private economy in an attempt to accumulate an inheritance for their offspring (Williams, 1982: 35-7).

The similarity with the French situation described by Williams (1982) is obvious but, as Glennie (1995) points out, the stress on ‘emulative consumption’ in McKendrick’s (1982) thesis is revised in Barry (1991) and Earle (1989), who both suggest that such ‘consumption,’ as well as its *adaptation*, was common to the seventeenth rather than the eighteenth century. This suggests a depth to the market and a range of commodities available similar to that found in a mass market. However, the constitution of the market is difficult to gauge since durable goods, luxury items and the development of a service economy are easier to trace empirically than commodities such as clothing and housing (Glennie, 1995). ‘Consumption’ of goods by agricultural workers and the seasonal labourers who worked alongside them varied greatly. The incomes of seasonal labourers, reasons Glennie (1995: 173-4), due to their irregularity, had ‘a counter-intuitive effect on consumption,’ prompting purchases of disproportionately expensive status goods, such as pocket watches (Thompson, 1967). The specific patterns of income disposition which de Grazia (1996) notes as varying by gender and class are not accounted for in the type of analysis provided by Campbell (1987): for instance, the proceeds from theft tended to fund the purchase of ‘consumer goods’ (Styles, 1994). In Europe prior to the nineteenth century, particularly in the Dutch economy which benefited from the Agrarian Revolution, the ‘prosperous farmers and tradesman concentrated their growing expenditure on luxury goods such as gold, silver, books, clock and paintings’ (Glennie 1995: 175, citing de Vries 1974, 1975).

Glennie (1995: 177) rejects the tendency for ‘consumption’ to be the focus of discussions of the well-to-do and their self-identity and, instead, follows Prude in noting the importance of clothing for the construction of identity among the poor:

Through clothes, labourers ‘purposefully and self-consciously shaped their appearance...visually asserted their own intentions and identities...to announce their own priorities and purposes...common folk new fashion...palpable evidence that labourers had their own needs and desires’  
- Prude 1991: 126, 154, 155, cited Glennie, 1995: 177.

Glennie insists that ‘widespread cultures of consumption very nearly always preceded mass markets for consumer goods,’ which raises important issues concerning the meanings attributed to ‘consumer goods’ and to the motives for their purchase (1995: 177-8). This seems to lead Glennie towards the belief that it is the ‘novelty’ of a good or category of goods that is their pre-eminent feature in the developing ‘consumer’ economies of the period (ibid: 180). However, all the emerging capitalist economies of the early modern West had to take on board the fact of ‘consumption’ and locate ‘consumer’ activity within their moral and political economies. While Bushman’s (1992) *The Refinement of America* and Barker-Benfield’s (1992) *The Culture of Sensibility* can be seen as continuing the examination, theorised by Elias (1994), of the inter-relationship between the degree of refinement of the inner person and their use and possession of commodities during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

### **Trickle-Down Identities?**

As Glennie has observed, the absence of sufficient historical evidence is an unfortunate hindrance to the investigation of pre-modern ‘consumption patterns’ among those who did not belong to the ‘middling classes.’ It is to the eighteenth century and its middle class ‘consumers’ that historical investigations of ‘consumption’s’ origins have devoted their energies. The demise of the feudal organisation of agricultural land and the emergence of a capitalist agriculture broadened the range of wage-labour activities and the scope of a money economy simultaneously. The reproduction of labour discussed by classical political economy began to assume the form of a ‘consumption of commodities’ of a specifically capitalist kind. During the eighteenth century the ‘world of goods expanded dramatically’ (McCracken, 1990: 16), fashion became well established, sustained by advertising and the application of marketing techniques that targeted the upper-class trend-setters. Through fashion, argues McCracken, ‘aesthetic and stylistic considerations took precedence over utilitarian ones’ and status increasingly revolved around novelty since ‘fashion helped to make consumption a new, more frequent, and taxing activity.’ This meant that the ‘consumer’ had to devote time to purchase and, more importantly, to ‘consumer learning’ (McCracken, 1990: 18-9). Eighteenth century ‘consumers,’ it would appear ‘were becoming semioticians in a new medium, the masters of a new code’ (ibid). However, this suggests that ‘consumers’ prior to the eighteenth century had lived in a

cultural vacuum, because McCracken never inform us what it is that is so distinctive and new about 'consumption' in the eighteenth century that justifies the use of such rhetoric. Drawing on Braudel's (1973) discussion of privacy as an eighteenth century phenomenon, McCracken terms this the advent of 'mass consumption,' and the first period in which those beyond the nobility could participate. The replacement of patina by novelty helped ease social mobility, in as much as it made simpler the attainment of socially desirable goods and the world of goods became 'co-extensive' with social life in which the 'consumer revolution' was a 'structural feature'. This was based upon the accumulation of information surrounding the symbolic importance of the goods that were to be purchased by 'consumers' (McCracken, 1990: 20-2). Again, this points towards the increasingly prominent role that theories of 'material culture' have played both in the description of contemporary 'consumption practices' but, also, in the modification of historical theories of the emergence of 'consumer society' itself.

Campbell (1987) rejects McKendrick's thesis describing an extension in the market during the eighteenth century based on an increase in the number of 'consumers.' Similarly, he doubts that any increase in material wealth would be translated into greater leisure time rather than a demand for more or different 'consumer goods,' as Williams (1982) had noted amongst the French bourgeoisie. In McKendrick's thesis the wealthy indulge themselves in pursuit of 'consumer satisfactions,' of wants and desires in which they are imitated, firstly, by the 'middle ranks' and then, over a period of two centuries, by the lower classes. Whereas social emulation is apparent in many cultures and 'conspicuous consumption' has long been a prerogative of the rich – the extension of these activities to the 'middle' strata of society requires explanation. This explanation is founded on the role of advertising and its relation to the expanded productive capabilities offered by the industrial revolution, particularly the evolution of the advertising and marketing professions and their application by entrepreneurs such as Josiah Wedgwood in the manipulation or creation of desire for goods (McKendrick *et al*, 1982; McCracken, 1990; Richards, 1991). Campbell (1987: 21) considers McKendrick's formulation as inadequate in explaining why it was that advertising suddenly became so effective in its manipulation of the market.

Campbell (1987: 22-3) objects to McKendrick's insistence upon the pre-eminence of fashion stating that, in doing so, 'the origin of the modern fashion pattern' is explained 'in terms of a factor, the conscious manipulation of the market, which it has already been suggested is itself dependent upon the prior existence of the Western European fashion

pattern.’ This account, and those like it, fails to consider the emergence of modern fashion or ‘consumption’ as the outcome of the inter-relationship of the factors which they list as historically relevant.’ Only a transformation in cultural orientation could explain the emergence of a ‘consumer ethic,’ which was directly opposed to the moral asceticism of Protestantism and the utilitarian considerations that emerged from its teachings. It is in light of the emergence of such a ‘consumer ethic’ against the ascetic background of post-Reformation Protestantism that Campbell (1987: 59) notes the centrality of *luxury* to an understanding of ‘modern consumption,’ and of the dual meaning which that term can embody. Firstly, there is the sense which distinguishes luxury from necessity, an excess over the amount required or deemed necessary in some way. This is difficult to define and even harder to defend. Secondly, there is the ‘reference to sensuous or pleasurable experience.’ Luxury is not something that can be accommodated within the framework of classical economics very easily (although see Bataille, 1991 and Berry, 1994 for its discussion).

### **The Market and its Spaces**

Campbell’s (1987) rebuttal of the ‘consumer revolution’ thesis is insufficient, since it, rests upon an a-social theorisation of hedonistic individuals attempting to ‘realise’ the dreams or fantasies of their imaginations. As such it discounts both the relevance of the physical spaces of any ‘consumer revolution’ (the retail spaces in which goods were available to purchase), which have existed, in some form, as long as the principle of economic exchange and the class and gender positions of those involved. Their specific history within the money economy has been detailed in many forms (Benson, 1986; Bronner, 1989; Mui & Mui, 1989; Shields, 1992; Brewer & Porter (eds.), 1993) and will be pursued in greater detail in the next chapter. Contra Campbell, accounts of pre-modern ‘consumption’ have tended to concentrate on the importance of the capital city and the court (Williams, 1982; Perrot, 1994; Adburgham, 1981) and the emulative ‘consumption’ that this stimulated among the nascent bourgeoisie (McKendrick et al, 1982; McCracken, 1990). Beyond these centres of ‘consumer activity,’ scholarly attention has focused on the material culture of a mass market (Shammas 1990, 1993), specifically through probate analysis (Weatherill, 1988). Likewise there was a failure to consider the existence of a network of shops, a regional sphere of circulation and exchange, within which both goods and people circulated. This was premised upon an increase in the volume and variety of goods traded, the development of a nationwide carrier system and the availability of credit that could underpin the relatively slow turnover of stock. ‘Consumer’ demand could increase during this period due to an upturn in real wage levels (Blaug, 1970; Glennie,

1995), an increased division of labour and the widespread introduction of cash wages (Mui & Mui, 1989: 12-4).

The 'consumer goods' purchased by this increased disposable income consisted largely of tea and sugar imported from the colonies and sold to the increasing numbers of the population who inhabited 'the middling ranks' (for a full discussion see Schivelbusch, 1993; Mintz, 1985). The 'circuits of consumption' (Johnson, 1986) that operated during the eighteenth century, were not simply composed of shops in the local towns. On the contrary, there existed a flourishing tradition of hawkers and 'Scotch drapers' who were much resented by their shop-owning competitors (Trentmann, 2002: 11). This resentment was such that the latter part of the eighteenth century saw various attempts to legislate, to limit or outlaw aspects of the hawker's trade, and especially their aggressive sales techniques (Mui & Mui, 1989: 73-9). Despite this often fierce competition the expansion of both trade and population during the eighteenth century, combined with improved transport and communication networks, and increased agricultural and manufactured products ensured that the greater demand for 'consumer goods' could be met. Excise records of the time show a 'considerable expansion in the number and variety of shops' (Mui & Mui, 1989: 291): which lends further credence to the thesis that 'consumers' preceded the 'consumer revolution' (Richards, 1991; Glennie, 1995).

The history of 'consumption,' then, can never be the history of the spaces of the 'consumer revolution,' as imagined by liberal history, and in which the advent of 'consumer society' is simultaneous with, and dependent upon, the widespread extension of market relations or money economy. While acknowledging the centrality of commodity-exchange, the money-exchange and the process of urbanisation, the foundation for any historical analysis of the consumption-relation remains the direct phenomenological experience of the social actors involved. So, the crucial dimension of an analysis of contemporary 'consumption' must be the degree to which it is *modern*, both as the technologically-driven modernisation of the forces of production and, also, as that dimension of the social relations of production and 'consumption' which we experience subjectively, as *modernité*. By rejecting the 'consumer revolution' thesis wherein, over however long a period, a 'consumer society' is born as if it were a natural creature, brought into this world whole but immature, it is possible to argue instead for the on-going history of modernity as the central structuring component of experience. Just as Sayer (1991) rejects the possible existence of class, in the modern sense, before capitalism, so too we can not conceive of *consumption* prior to the

modern period, since it would be lacking those elements and characteristics which are definitive of the experience of *modernité*.

### **Consuming the Modern**

The revolutionary transformations which capitalist production techniques and their attendant division of labour brought to western culture is insufficient to assert that the modern period is definitively so just because it is characterized by radical transformations, as part of an on-going process of modernisation: we must ask what form these transformations have assumed and which aspects of modern culture they have, and have not, transformed? The study of *modern consumption* is also the study of those areas and aspects of society identifiable as being intrinsically related to 'consumption' as part of a larger system, and not simply 'consumer' activity. The distinction between 'consumption,' as a thoroughly *modern*, contemporary set of socio-spatial practices, the unfolding of which, historically, have comprised 'consumer activity' is vital. Unless such a distinction is asserted then the history and pre-history of contemporary society suffer an elision in which neither can be clearly discerned, and all that remains to a would-be 'sociology of consumption' is a history of the consumer-as-purchaser within the on-going development of the market economy. Glennie's (1995: 165) review of historical studies of 'consumption' identifies three features of such accounts.

- i) ...growing per capita consumption of commodities; intensifying production and reorganised distribution systems; increasing social divisions of labour and increasing social mobility (both symbolised by consumer goods); growing individualism in social life; and consumer acquisitiveness tied to fashion and, increasingly advertising.
- ii) ...key transformatory periods, using metaphors of transition...
- iii) ...the conflation of *mass consumption* (the size of the market), *modern consumption* (usually defined in terms of consumption practices), and *mass culture* (systematic manipulation by capital of consumer knowledge through mass media and advertising images).

The general emphasis upon a *moment* of social change located in an identifiable historical moment or period, whereby one social formation gives way to another, is usually formulated upon the extension of exchange relations and their particular form. Such formulations often rely on the basis of the evidence available, certain types of material culture, probate wills (Weatherill, 1988; 1993) or substantial objects made of durable materials, such as wood or metal, which outlast the more fragile ceramics, while the more expensive possessions of the upper-classes often linger because of their manufacture in precious metals (Glennie, 1995: 171-2). There is also a wide geographical disparity in the

types of goods available and their price, which meant that luxury and necessity were defined by location. Entry into ‘the world of goods,’ therefore, varied by space and time, and in relation to the penetration of the sphere of circulation by capitalist relations of production and exchange (Shammas, 1990; 1993).

In addition, the gradual decrease in the price of certain commodities, previously luxuries, meant that they became staples of diet and everyday life, ceasing to be ‘status’ goods pursued as part of a ‘trickle-down’ effect, notably tea, coffee, chocolate and sugar (Mintz, 1985; Schivelbusch, 1993). Glennie sees this decrease in price as leading to an increased use or purchase of such commodities. In a similar way, the market in second or third-hand goods extended the market economy without committing ‘consumers’ to the desire for luxuries – they were simply able to buy more of the same, or similar (1995: 172-4). Hence, this extension of capitalist exchange relations and the goods being exchanged meant that even those without the wherewithal to buy were exposed to the articles available – for some such goods were staples, for others dreamed of future purchases – complicating the symbolic, social and cultural meanings of goods. This added complication to the theorisation of ‘consumption activity’ remains problematic for accounts such as the ‘system of provision’ approach where the emphasis is upon ‘final consumption’ by the purchaser (Fine & Leopold, 1993; Fine, 1995; 2002, 2006), but it has been addressed by ‘material culture’ analyses (Dant, 1999; Miller, 1999). As Glennie observes:

Goods usually had multiple meanings, frequently combining utilitarian, ornamental and private associations, and these meanings connected to notions of identity and social ideology. Divisions between private use and public display were far from clear cut.... Meanings and uses were ascribed to objects as they were incorporated into practices, which might be ritualised or spontaneous, and whose character changed over time.  
– Glennie, 1995: 179

The world of goods gradually acquired the capacity to map social relations, whether as fashion growing up around the increasingly novel goods available for purchase or in the allocation of gender roles (the wife ‘provisioning’ her home) or the evolution of genteel culture around ‘consumer goods’ (Barker-Benfield, 1992; Bushman, 1992; Elias, 1990). The ‘nascent capitalisms’ of the ‘early-modern West’ (Glennie, 1995: 181) experienced the social tensions produced by the symbolic character and capacity of commodities, by their display of an increasingly individuated display of inequalities in wealth. The commodity-form gradually acquired a representational role, and increasingly threatened to move from the symbolic to the semiotic, as the *medium* rather than the particular commodity-objects became its most meaningful aspect.

## Units of Analysis

Those, such as Trentmann (2002; 2006), who argue for a differentiation between ‘mass consumer society,’ emerging in the later nineteenth century, following on from the type of ‘modern consumer society’ outlined above, acknowledge the role of industrialisation: the increased proliferation of commodities in circulation; the further penetration of every aspect of existence by the money economy; the increasingly important part played by fashion and the sheer spectacle of invention and Progress that the commodity-form came to represent. A distinction appears between the former’s focus upon a ‘modern’ desire for commodities and novelties, while the latter sees modern ‘consumer’ society emerging only with mass participation in an economy based upon want not need, abundance rather than scarcity. Such theories argue for the commodification of life across a variety of media. On this reading, ‘mass consumer society’ represents an intersection of capitalism and modernity; it is a ‘post-traditional society’ that raises issues of ‘post-modernism’ and the ‘problem’ of identity (Trentmann, 2002: 2).

Here, obviously, the role of the *grand magasin* (France) or department store (Britain and America) is crucial (although not uncontested, see Glennie, 1995). The extensive literature on this subject (Miller, 1999; Williams, 1982; Laermans, 1993; Lancaster, 1995) and its place in the post-Haussmann modern metropolis (Ryan, 1994; Prendergast, 1992; de Cauter, 1993) represented the department store as a ‘space of consumption,’ the implications of which will be further explored in the next chapter. The extension of the ‘world of goods’ to the mass of the population through distributive mechanisms, such as the department store, is insufficient to argue for a whole new phase of society. While this thesis acknowledges the experience of the extension of the world of goods and the conditions under which a transformation in the relationship between subjective and objective culture occurred (at least implicitly) it does nothing more. However, this strand of historical investigation is important because it allows for discussion of the *spaces* within which the prospective ‘consumers’ and the objects that they hope to ‘consume’ encounter each other.

Stearns (1997) outlined a two-stage model, linking an increased desire for commodities, such as clothing and household items, in early modern Europe to a later, mid-nineteenth century, expansion of ‘consumer activity’ across all classes based around the department store. Trentmann objects to Stearns’ ‘two-interrelated *a priori* ways of viewing the subject: the definition of an acquisitive individualist mentality as the defining feature of modern

consumer behaviour and, since this originated in the West, a view of expansion that looks from the epi-centre (West) outwards' (Trentmann, 2002: 6). Stearns' reliance upon an essentialist view of human need, formulated around subsistence, reveals a yearning for a traditional way of life that appears, at this distance, to be more authentic and rooted in necessary activities and display. As Trentmann points out, it also denies 'consumption' activity that is based in or around *experiences* rather than objects, services rather than goods, and the multiple meanings that such activities assume for the various participants. As a result it falls short of exactly those issues addressed by Miller (2001) when the commodity-form is considered anthropologically, as an embodiment not only of abstract values but also personal feelings, kinship networks and social and inter-subjective relations of work, play and personal identity.

Trentmann (2002: 7) rejects Stearns' thesis as tautological: a sufficiently narrow definition of 'consumerism' leaves itself nothing to describe but the acquisitive actions of a desiring and selfish subject, advocating a wider, comparative assessment encompassing the social and political organisations of other societies, distant in both time and space. While correctly identifying the importance of political and social forms of resistance to 'consumerism' and their role in shaping the contemporary experience of 'consumer society,' Trentmann, in his focus upon the movements that embodied this resistance, fails to identify and define exactly what is being resisted – *consumption* itself. The second criterion for dismissing Stearns is the association of 'dynamic consumption' with modernising Western societies and the absence of such dynamism in 'traditional' Eastern societies. Trentmann contradicts the belief in an acquisitive, selfish 'consumer' in which Stearns has such faith.

The advance of Western Europe might have had much less to do with some originary European revolution of consumerist desire than with other sources, such as access to coal and the exploitation of the New World.  
- Trentmann, 2002: 8

From this, it would appear that the forms of 'consumption' – and their motive force – are intrinsically bound up with socio-economic conditions in an emerging technologically-enabled modernity, rather than some variation on human nature peculiar to Europe at this time and afterwards.

Trentmann attempts to re-integrate historical studies of 'consumption' and 'consumer activity' within the wider field often associated with the social sciences, and the questions

that these address in contemporary society (such as the relationship between ‘consumer’ and ‘citizen’) requires an investigation of the ‘pre-history’ of contemporary society and its relationship to ‘consumption.’ In extending Glennie’s (1995) reservations about the centrality of the *grands magasins*, Trentmann points out that ‘the spread of the department store was not an automatic reaction to urbanisation and industrialisation [...] France was advanced in the first, but not in the latter’ (Trentmann, 2002: 11). This does raise the question as to how the relationship between the sphere of production and the sphere of circulation and exchange was configured, since Trentmann also notes that the rise of the department store was paralleled, in Britain at least, by an increase in the number of travelling salesmen and hawkers. The various mechanisms for the distribution and exchange of capitalist commodities changed both qualitatively (arcades, department stores) and quantitatively (hawkers and costermongers), along class lines: more commodities of increasing variety met more ‘consumers’ in a variety of increasingly diverse socio-spatial situations. This leads Trentmann to urge historical studies to abandon ‘the nation-state as the natural unit of inquiry and instead to compare phenomena across societies, such as the distinct conditions that favoured the emergence of particular retail organisations in some cities but not in others’ (Trentmann, 2002: 11). However, this is to leave the study of ‘consumption,’ nineteenth or twentieth century, ‘consumer’ or ‘mass consumer,’ stuck at the level of systems of provision or as a study of retail forms rather than as an active series of forms of *sociation*.

Trentmann acknowledges the limitations of the conceptual distinction between ‘consumer society’ and ‘mass consumer society,’ since such a social formation was inevitably ‘limited to particular regions and cities as well as to particular classes’ (Trentmann, 2002: 12). This point is most evident when the experience of, and participation in, ‘consumption’ is determined by access to disposable income, although the metropolitan nature of much ‘consumption’ forced an awareness, and often a participation through labour, upon those who could never be called *consumers* – something that Trentmann does not discuss but which is evident from the literature around the department stores (from Zola to Miller or Lancaster). This ‘uneven’ participation might even be considered one of the defining characteristics of *modern consumption*, for it is precisely in the temporally and spatially bounded nature of the experience of ‘consumption,’ rather than solely in the objects themselves, that its modernity lies. Trentmann’s historian’s focus upon the particularities of ‘consumption’ and ‘consumer societies’ in different regions and at different times tends to result in a dual focus. On the one hand, there is an appreciation of the specific experience of time and place; on the other, there is a tendency to produce a unit of analysis

such as the national, the supra-national (European) or intra-national (European and American), which appear capable of encompassing contradiction and often extreme instances of differentiated experience – but which do highlight the role of the state and of international organisations. However, what is lacking is a theoretically coherent framework which, in varying manifestations, is capable of describing characteristics across societies, space and time.

### **The Subjects of Consumption**

Increasingly, historical studies have attempted to address the more ‘culturalist’ implications of recent developments within the social sciences, issues around post-structuralist discussions of meaning, action, gender and identity:

Any serious discussion of consumer society must trace the practices and meanings of consumption as they are woven into social structures and actions that lie beyond the shop counter... [Hence] the ideological valorisation of consumption... reflected in Erika Rappaport’s significant study of shopping in London’s West End.... Instead of commercial exploitation or oppression, Shopping for Pleasure is a story of consumers’ agency. ... an emancipatory activity through which middle-class women defined a new sense of bourgeois feminine identity, carved out new public spaces, and became energised as political actors.

- Trentmann (2002: 18).

Rappaport’s (2000) revision of existing theories of ‘consumer activities’ and motivations, such as Veblen’s ‘conspicuous consumption’ thesis, serves to demonstrate the way in which *consumption* becomes a medium within which social, political and gender issues were both animated and, provisionally at least, resolved. Rappaport’s discussion of the *flâneuse* and her relationship to the magazines of the period extends shopping outwith the confines of the department store, to address ‘the spatial and emotional dimension of consumption beyond the materiality of commodities’ (Trentmann, 2002: 19). In addition to allowing discussion of the *flâneuse*, such an approach creates the opportunity to address other ‘physiognomies’ such as the ‘irrational’ female shoplifter described by Abelson (1989). Such a discussion goes to the heart of contemporary discussions of the ‘consumer’ as *subject*, as individual and citizen, through its address to *governmentality* and the constitution of the self through the act of choice as participant in a liberal democracy (Trentmann, 2002). ‘Consumption,’ in this way, becomes the contested arena between individual rights, collective will and corporate power, exemplified through discussions of the food chain (Schlosser, 2002; Ritzer, 1999). As Trentmann points out, this discussion is directed less at an analysis of what ‘consumption’ is or the historical conditions that ushered in its modern manifestation and, instead, is about ‘the changing meanings and

functions of consumption and how these transformed the politics of space, community, and, eventually, the democratic imagination itself” (Trentmann, 2002: 23). The ‘consumer’ of ‘consumer society’ becomes the locus for a set of democratic rights realised through market relations and the money-form, the exercise of which is represented as individual and collective liberty:

The task ahead is to write histories of consumption, not consumerism. Consumerism, or the lure of material goods for individuals, is only one point on a broad cultural spectrum in which consumption operated in modern and contemporary societies.

- Trentmann, 2002: 31

Trentmann wishes to see the writing of a ‘history of consumption’ that avoids moving from stage to stage, from need to desire (want), and to conceive of this history as a specifically Western experience rather than an account of how humans ‘consume.’ This requires moving beyond analyses of shopping and the market to analyse ‘what sociologists have called “ordinary consumption”, to social services and to systems of public provision’ (Trentmann, 2002: 31). The question becomes: what, if anything, is not *consumption* today? And, how are we to investigate the role of ‘consumption’ in which apparently every aspect of life is governed by and described this terminology (Trentmann, 2006)?

Despite the important evidence that historical studies have contributed to the study of ‘consumption’ and the steps taken, by those such as Trentmann, to marry this evidence to contemporary debates within the social sciences the study of *history*, as an academic discipline and practice, still hinges upon the passing of time, from the past to the present. This linear aspect of historical studies will be addressed, below, in the section discussing the relationship between ‘consumption,’ ‘consumer society’ and postmodernism and their focus upon meaning, action and identity.

### **The Social Sciences**

It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things...I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities.

- Marx, 1976: 165, cited Lee, 2000: xiii

The attempt by the social sciences to circumvent the focus by historical studies upon ‘units of analysis,’ such as the ‘consumer revolution,’ ‘consumer society’ or national studies thereof, entails a concentration upon the actions of individual subjects, either singularly or in groups, and the social relations that provide the context for action. The social sciences

provide the opportunity to investigate ‘consumption’ as a phenomenon born of the capitalist mode of production, but which is not limited to an analysis of its sphere of circulation and exchange to the detriment of the intentional actions of social actors. Unlike the utilitarian psychology that is presumed to animate inhabitants of capitalist society during its nascent modern stage the social sciences provide an opportunity to consider *needs* as being social in character and historically derived. So, both Marx’s ‘Robinsonade’ and Adam Smith’s contention that ‘the desire of food is limited in every man by the narrow capacity of the human stomach’ (cited Blaug, 1970: 86) are revealed as conceptions of an inelasticity of desire (need) that is perceived as *natural* and grounded in the fixed bodily limits of human biology. However, the advent of the ‘marginalist revolution’ of neo-classical political economy saw ‘consumption’ cease to be measured by ‘the vendible stock of goods’ (Adam Smith) and located, instead, in subjective desire manifest through exchange-value (money) sacrificed for satisfaction (price paid). This shift in emphasis, to the subjective calculation of satisfaction measured against the ‘opportunity cost’ of alternative uses of exchange-values and of the ‘marginal utility’ to be derived, put the rational, utility-calculating ‘consumer’ at the heart of economic analysis – and he, *homo oeconomicus*, has never departed.

Likewise, social science has broken with historical studies of the origins of ‘consumer society’ and the beginnings of modern or mass ‘consumerism’ in its engagement with theories of ‘postmodernity’ and the ‘postmodern.’ The lengthy process of the birth and evolution of the ‘consumer society’ (Bauman, 1983; Brewer and Porter, 1993; Campbell, 1987, 1995; McKendrick *et al.*, 1982; Thirsk, 1978) can be juxtaposed with its contemporary manifestation, in terms of the spatial, temporal and subjective forms assumed. The continual maintenance of the sphere of circulation and exchange that underpins the experience of *modern consumption* is revealed as the particular outcome of historical events, social formations, economic imperatives, technological innovations and cultural dispositions – the result of a series of overlapping processes and networks. The ostensible shift in sensibility ushered in by a ‘postmodern consumer culture’ (Bauman, 1999; Featherstone, 1999; Harvey, 1989; Huyssen, 1986) is examined in an attempt to delineate the putative relationship between a ‘postmodernism,’ marked by transformation of the role of information and knowledge within economic and cultural structures (Lyotard, 1984), and the emergence of new psychological formations in response to the changed conditions of contemporary capitalist society – the absences and ruptures of ‘schizophrenia’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Jameson, 1984).

## Psychological Explanations

No reasonable person would give away a value without receiving an equal value in return, and it would be a perverted world in which the desired object attained its value only as a result of the price that had to be paid for it [...] so far as our immediate consciousness is concerned [...] the value that a subject sacrifices can never be greater, in the particular circumstances of the moment, than the value that he receives in return.

- Simmel, 1990

Psychology represents the most coherent and sustained disciplinary engagement with nineteenth century economic theory by the social sciences and it is here that the rational and utilitarian legacy is most clearly evident. The desire to maximise utility, marginal or otherwise, which utilitarian psychology bequeaths to social science analyses of 'consumption activity' causes problems when the 'unit of analysis' ceases to be a discrete individual. The social and historical character of 'needs' outlined above reveals their contingency and freedom from the dictates of reasonable behaviour. The apparent excesses of phenomena as diverse as fashion and addiction are inexplicable when considered as expressions of an immutable rationality, however, when considered within the contingent 'circumstances of the moment' (Simmel) the satisfactions they proffer might well outweigh all others immediately available. Psychological explanations of 'consumption activity' have struggled with the imminent dissolution of rational, law-following *homo oeconomicus* into a fickle, irrational and possibly hedonistic 'consumer' motivated not only by subjective desire (as in neo-classical theory) but also by physiological addiction and social habit. The subjective susceptibility to the stuff of the world reveals the problem of 'normative beliefs' within a 'theory of reasoned action' (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The social and subjective significance of 'consumption-objects,' whether derived through their material form (such as a precious metal), the labour-process (skill), popular taste (fashion) or simple rarity (experience) all conspire to complicate the cost/benefit analysis beloved of the rational actor of economic theory, the explanation of which has been undertaken by psychology. The 'perfect knowledge' of economic actors dissolves into a variety of psychologically perceived, contextualising 'rationality assumptions' (Lunt, 1995), which lend themselves to a psychological 'typology of the consumer' (Lunt & Livingstone, 1992) that is, itself, constructed from the revealed preferences demonstrated through purchasing activity.

The hedonistic 'calculus' of pleasure and pain depicted by Bentham must either bow before the physiological imperative of a heroin high or give way to a 'social economics' (von Wieser, 1889) capable of refining nineteenth century economic theory's rational

individual capable of appreciating the semiotic role and significance of ‘consumption activity’ and its objects (and services). Psychology’s attempts to do so (Katona, 1951; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981) have relied upon the attribution of ‘personality traits’ and psychological dispositions that *extend* the conception of rationality. Lunt (1995) views Katona’s (1951) *Psychological Analysis of Economic Behaviour* as the foundation of such a modern psychological study of ‘consumption activity.’ Within this theory ‘mediating psychological variables’ shape the response to economic stimuli, these responses then allow the study of individual and group behaviour (1995: 240) – effectively, revealed preferences. Almost inevitably, the psychological investigation of economic behaviour, of which ‘consumption’ figures as a subset returns to the theory of the rational individual in pursuit of maximum satisfaction within a framework that forces choice, sacrifice and the calculation of marginal utility. The range of choices and the social factors that underpin individual calculations of utility are never satisfactorily theorised. As a result even psychology’s embrace of ‘the symbolic functions of objects’ (Lunt, 1995: 247) fails to transcend the explanation of ‘consumer activity’ as a series of purchasing decisions that represent the combination of rational calculation of utility and individual preference driven by ‘personality traits.’ This, as with economic theory, denotes a failure to conceptualise the inter-subjective, socio-spatial, definitively *modern* dimensions of contemporary ‘consumption.’

The dynamic relationship between subjects and objects can be seen in the role and operation of the money-form, to which Simmel (1990) attributes the capacity to engender personality types through its transformation – and radical extension – of the teleological chain, its ability to place objects and experiences within reach of the subject. This capability of the money-form to compress the apparent distances contained within the experience of space and time bestows upon the commodity-form the power to transform subjective experience through its *extension*:

Money evenly complies with every directive concerning the object of its expenditure; its extent, the speed with which it is expended or retained. In this manner it affords the Ego the most committed and unreserved manner of expressing itself in an object [...]. All that it is and it has, money surrenders fully to the human will, becoming totally absorbed within it.  
– Simmel, *Philosophie des Geldes*: 436-7, cited Poggi, 1993: 325

This capacity will be explored through the recent insights afforded to the study of *modern consumption* by ecological psychology in the final sections of this chapter. For now, it is sufficient to observe the money-form’s mediation of the relationship between *being* and

*having* and the incorporation of the object-world within the subjective realm. The possibility of the object realm possessing a transformative power over the subjective represents a break with orthodox psychology's explanations of the modern 'consumer' and 'consumer culture' (Livingston, 1998). Having inherited from economic theory the 'empty subjectivity' of *homo oeconomicus* - seemingly devoid of gender yet resolutely male - which is threatened by the emergence of the 'feminine' aspect of mass culture (Huysen, 1986) and the sublime pleasures of 'consumption,' which would ultimately lead to a 'desublimated female desire, free at last of its bonds to maternal reality, [which] could circulate and so create new sources of subjectivity for men and women alike' (Livingston, 1998: 429). Psychological studies of 'consumption' and 'consumer activity' are increasingly confounded by the failure of actors to adhere to the rational pursuit of maximum utility, other than as a 'deviation' that is, to varying degrees, pathological. The deliberate pursuit of *momentary* satisfactions, which more closely resemble 'whim' than 'need,' merely underscores the irrational aspect of *modern consumption* when viewed from the standpoints of economic theory and utilitarian psychology. The social, contextual and inter-subjective dimension of contemporary consumption-relations refutes both the cost-benefit analyses of *homo oeconomicus* and the individualistic presuppositions of the theories of 'consumer society.'

### **Geographies of Space & Time**

Techniques such as 'time geography,' pioneered by Hagerstrand (discussed in Jackson & Thrift, 1995), represent an attempt to avoid the reduction of 'consumption' to the activities of an isolated 'consumer' and the economistic assumptions that this entails. By mapping the temporal routines through which individuals navigate social space it is possible to analytically distinguish between various 'time-allocations,' both for particular individuals and for specific actions undertaken by a variety of individuals. 'Consumer activities' become socially-embedded practices discernible in space and time (Jackson & Thrift, 1995: 213; Miller, 1999; 2001), which allow a circumvention of utilitarian preconceptions, and the psychological flourishes of 'personality traits,' thereby revealing choice to be a social relation, rather than a purely personal preference. This allows time-geography's field of analysis to include 'moments of consumption' where there is no exchange of money for goods or services (direct purchase), such as the enjoyment of images or views, participation in leisure pursuits or watching television, which in escaping quantitative measurement remained 'invisible' to traditional economic theory. This qualitative approach plots 'consumer activity' as a variety of modes or types of interaction, which are limited to neither subjects nor objects (Jackson & Thrift, 1995: 214-5). In this time-

geography anticipates both ANT (Callon, 1994; Latour, 1993) and the recent revival of ecological psychology (Costall, 2004; Dant, 1999; Heft: 2001), which both reject an ‘ontological difference’ between subjects and objects in favour of an ‘ontology of difference’ – a disavowal of Cartesian dualism – underpinned by a *vitalist* conception of ‘monism, self-reproduction and becoming’ common to much recent sociology (Lash, 2006: 2-3). This reconfigured ontological arrangement avoids the reduction of geographical analyses of ‘consumption’ to interrogations of spaces, such as shopping malls, in which certain site-specific activities related to the purchase of objects and services occur. Instead, by linking temporal *moments* with spatial *practices* (Jackson & Thrift, 1995: 210-11) a framework for analysis emerges in which dynamic social relations resemble the ‘networks’ of both Castells (1996) and Latour (*passim*).

Pred (1990; Pred & Watts, 1992) traces the possibility of ‘consumer resistance’ through ‘symbolic discontent’ within the spaces of capitalist modernity. ‘Consumption’ becomes an *event* within the ‘circuits of consumption’ (Johnson, 1986), which, in turn, is related to the circuit of capital and can be conceptualised through a tri-partite analysis: ‘the changing *sites* of consumption; the *chains* that link consumption’s multiple locations; and the *spaces* and *places* of contemporary consumerism’ (Jackson & Thrift, 1995: 206). However, the advantages offered by this conceptualisation and the methodological approach outlined by time-geography, above, must be married to an appreciation of systems of production and distribution (including marketing and advertising) of the kind described by the ‘systems of provision’ approach (Fine & Leopold, 1993; Fine, 1995; 2002) and the historical analyses of commodities’ arrival and incorporation into culture (Mintz, 1985; Schivelbusch, 1993). By connecting the sites, chains, spaces and places of ‘consumption’ with the systems of production, distribution and marketing that bring people into proximity with the goods, services and experiences that make up the capitalist economy the geographical analysis of ‘consumption’ avoids its prior tendency to focus upon systems and production. The ‘unit’ of analysis becomes a socio-spatial practice – *shopping* – and bears an affinity with the material culture approach of a revised anthropology (see Falk & Campbell, 1997, who, in their appendix outline a brief typology of approaches to ‘shopping’). By uniting production, distribution and ‘consumption’ theoretically the recent literature on ‘shopping’ (Falk & Campbell, 1997; Miller, 2001; Shields, 1992) reintroduces a debate around how individuals and groups operate within the ‘circuit of consumption’ and, implicitly, the sphere of circulation and exchange. *Shopping* as a practice links recent anthropological (Miller, 2001) and ‘material culture’ (Dant, 1999, 2002) work with a discussion of the more abstract ‘consumer’ (Keat et al, 1994; Miller & Rose, 1997) and his or her

‘consumerism’ (Lodziak, 2002; Miles, 1998; Sulkunen et al, 1997) and the forms of sociation available in a ‘consumer society.’ ‘Shopping’ becomes the *meaningful* participation within certain socio-spatial practices geared towards specific goals, whether motivated by physiological need, hedonistic desire or status-seeking ‘conspicuous consumption.’

This, in turn, prompts a consideration over the role and meaning of the *objects* that must now be considered within an ‘ontology of difference’ (Lash, 2006), rather than occupying a discrete realm in which they are ‘activated’ purely by purposive human action. While the symbolic dimension of material objects and (immaterial) practices is accepted by virtually every social science discipline (with the possible exception of Lodziak’s (2002) take on ‘the production of consumption’ approach) the particular production and manifestation of this aspect in the culture of capitalist modernity is the province of marketing. Marketing’s centrality to the capitalist mode of production coincided with its accreditation as an academic discipline during the shift from ‘Fordist’ to ‘post-Fordist’ production (Belk, 1995) and the regime of flexible accumulation that accompanied this process. Initially conceived as a psychological interpretation of economic theory, which evolved to incorporate the latent emotional meanings of objects revealed by Dichter’s Freudian-influenced ‘motivation research’ (Belk, 1995: 59), only the recent ‘new consumer research’ (NCR) has comprehensively rejected the utilitarian assumptions of economic psychology and embraced a notion of ‘the social’ that goes beyond the aggregation of individuals. Analyses of ‘consumption’ tend to operate as a functionalist anthropology-lite in which social factors, such as *class*, are granted a ‘reality’ insofar as they determine both desire for and access to specific goods. This reduces ‘consumption activity’ to an extended conception of use that incorporates status – as a varied range of ‘final consumption’ alternatives – either for individuals or groups (lifestyle). Indeed, Belk euphemistically describes ‘the under-consumption of problems of homelessness, poverty and starvation,’ and ‘dysfunctional consumer behaviours,’ such as compulsive buying, gambling, alcoholism, drug-use and prostitution (1995: 67). By allowing commodities a ‘biography’ (Kopytoff, 1986), *marketing* avoids recourse to ‘final consumption’ (Fine & Leopold, 1993) through an acknowledgement of the ‘after-life’ of objects, purchased, found, gifted or inherited and appreciate the psychological attachments that such objects could inspire (Richins & Bloch, 1986). However, marketing theory’s most influential exponent can not avoid reducing the *subject* of ‘consumption’ to a ‘collector’ of objects and experiences, an ‘extended self’ (Belk, 1995: 73) who *evaluates* objects or services within the emotional economy of the bourgeois individual.

### **Extended Use**

Marketing saw the ‘consumer’ seek satisfactions beyond the crudely utilitarian and extend the concept of *use* to include symbolic considerations and, by rejecting the a-historical dictates of physiological need, displays an affinity with the revised political economy of the ‘system of provision’ (Fine & Leopold, 1993; Fine, 1995), which links Marx to the cultural histories of commodities, such as sugar, chocolate or spices (Schivelbusch 1993; Mintz, 1985). The narration of the *biography* of the commodity is comprised of the series of practices that link the social relations of production and distribution within a ‘global’ or post-Fordist economy to the construction of ‘symbolic’ or sign-value within the sphere of circulation and exchange. This redress of the abstraction of ‘virtualism’ (Carrier & Miller, 1998) exposes the social relations and material structures that underpin the ideological representation of the world as a series of ‘consumer’ choices. This description of the commodity-form prior to the moment of ‘final consumption,’ when the commodity leaves the ‘economic’ realm and *re-asserts* its use-value, rather than its exchange-value, overplays the importance of structural elements to the detriment of the autonomy of social actors. The euphemistic dismissal of deliberate strategies, such as marketing, as ‘the immanence of trends acting indirectly upon consumption - through mass production and modes of retailing and distribution’ (Fine & Leopold, 1993: 72), also marginalises the factors that determine the level of involvement in ‘consumption activities,’ such as social class and the possibility of a ‘trickle-down’ effects, such as that commonly associated with Veblen (1994). However, the ‘system of provision’ approach does offer a means to unite the otherwise analytically distinct realms of ‘production’ and ‘circulation and exchange’ within a larger totality. Therefore, the extended concept of *use* allows the circumvention of the utilitarian psychology inherited from economic theory and a surpassing of the ontological distinction between human and non-human. The biographical narration of the commodity-form grants it an apparent autonomy, derived from its inhabitation of the sphere of circulation and exchange, which requires that the socio-spatial analysis of *modern consumption* include both subjects and objects.

### **More or Less Recent Sociologies**

The emphasis upon the extension of market relations by historical studies of ‘consumption’ has been diluted by the social sciences and their emphasis upon the *use* to which the commodity-form is put within contemporary forms of social interaction. However, a sustained analysis of *modern consumption*, as a socio-spatial practice comprising both subjects and objects, *actants* (Latour), within a network that sees ontological distinctions

dissolve into degrees of difference, into *properties*, has not yet emerged. In surrendering the ontological separation between human and non-human the question of human agency and subjective ‘identity’ is thrown into question, as socio-spatial practices – or ways of behaving – can be viewed as the *causes* of social phenomena, or effects. Classical sociology attempted to chart the shift from feudalism to capitalism (see Hilton, 1976; Holton, 1985), from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* (Tonnies), and the onset of modernity and its transformation of experience, and the consequences for the individual. These analyses were based upon the social relations of the mode of production (Marx) and its generation of material surplus understood as *luxury* (Sombart), or the consequences of these for individual development (Weber) or social cohesion (Durkheim). However, perhaps only Tarde and Simmel conceived of truly new ways of analysing the emergence of a definitively *modern* culture – although their shared preoccupation with the metropolis and society as a form of *exchange* may colour this.

### **Psychoanalysis in Reverse**

The consequences of the changes described by the ‘founding fathers’ of sociology continued to preoccupy their successors, notably the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School, Adorno, Horkheimer, Lowenthal, Marcuse and associates such as Walter Benjamin. One such consequence of the shift from traditional to ‘post-traditional’ or *modern* society is the ‘problem’ of the production of an identity, or *self*. Slater (1997) sees modernity as an ‘expert’ culture, which attempts to solve its problems through *technical* knowledge, offered in the case of ‘consumption’ by post-traditional discourses such as advertising or ‘lifestyle’ – effectively, the acquisition of meaningful goods, services and experiences. This, for Adorno, is the basis of ‘non-identity’ thinking, a compensatory activity, organised by the culture industry’s marriage of capitalist commodity culture and bureaucratic or instrumental rationality, which represents the ‘dark side’ of the ‘dialectic of Enlightenment’ (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979). The alienated subject of capitalist modernity attempts to compensate and overcome this alienation through the problematic notion of the satisfaction of ‘false’ needs, created by the *rationalisation* of every aspect of social life. The resulting reification of sociality within an ‘administered world’ results in a *negative* or ‘consumer’ freedom that denies the formulation of a whole or rounded subjectivity (identity) through the fetishistic, alienating and commodified culture of modern capitalism.

The Frankfurt School’s combination of Marxist critique with Freudian psychoanalysis represents an attempt to diagnose and combat the perceived excesses of a capitalist

‘consumer culture’ and its consequences for subjectivity in the face of an apparently overwhelming ‘objective culture.’ Lowenthal’s description of ‘consumer culture’ as ‘psychoanalysis in reverse’ (Slater, 1997: 122) and Marcuse’s critique of the ‘happiness’ available within a ‘consumer culture’ develop the theme of unreal or false satisfactions that produce an ‘ersatz individuality’ in lieu of the conception of individual identity common to Hegelian philosophy, the ‘bourgeois world view’ (Ferguson, 1990) or ‘market individual’ (Seltzer, 1992). The result is that participants in modern ‘consumer culture’ cannot conceive of themselves as individuals (Marcuse, 1964; 1973) or actively resist the restrictions, sublimations and domination enforced by the capitalist division of labour, which results in a ‘corrupted’ libidinal economy incapable of fulfilling the Enlightenment project’s dream of human advancement as individual development. The Frankfurt School’s vision of ‘consumption’ as the endpoint or logical conclusion, the ‘final consumption,’ of commodities precludes the subjective refinement of the self. In this sense the Frankfurt School bridge the gap between the analyses of Marx and those of Bourdieu (1984), in which the ideals of *distinction* can be reduced to a cultural and symbolic capital that the sociologist can read off in ‘consumption’ practices. So, the formal rationality of the ‘culture industry’ ultimately results in an *inauthentic* selfhood that can only be manifested through participation in the commodity culture of modernity. Such thinking remains influential, permeating many varieties of cultural studies (Fiske, 1989; McGuigan, 1992) or acting as the means for a critique of such positions (Lodziak, 2002: 90-1). Indeed, Lodziak’s amalgam of Frankfurt School critique and post-industrial (Gorz, 1982), ‘post-scarcity’ theory in a ‘production of consumption perspective’ continues the lament concerning the ‘passivity’ and acquiescence of a populace that has become *merely* ‘consumers.’

### **The Complications of Identity**

Recent sociological analyses of the capitalist consumption-relation extend beyond the utilitarian inflections of economic theory and the ideological mis-direction of ‘ersatz’ satisfactions or ‘libidinal corruptions’ discussed by the Frankfurt School and their successors. The role of ‘consumer’ has assumed a political dimension as a manifestation of the rights of western citizenship (Miller, 1995; Trentmann, 2006) and the construction of contemporary forms of ‘identity’ (Bauman, 1992; Featherstone, 1991). Nowhere has this tradition been more evident than in the annals of ‘cultural studies,’ whether of a modern or postmodern ilk, where the practises, habits, routines and tactics of ‘consumption’ are presented as the battleground for a resistance to an otherwise hegemonic society (de Certeau, 2002; Fiske, 1989; Hebdige, 1979; McGuigan, 1992). The role of commodity

culture in the *construction* of contemporary identity(-positions) and the production of ‘lived’ experience is informed by a post-Frankfurt School address to mass culture and, in particular, the possibilities made available by mass media technologies – firstly those of the industrial age and, then, the digital. Some, such as Lodziak (2002), reject the resistance and liberation afforded by the commodity-form to a postmodern identity or selfhood, while others, postmodernists and cultural studies theorists alike, see in contemporary ‘consumption’ the possibility of identity or lifestyle *construction*, much as Barthes viewed the *bricoleur*, an active subject manipulating a world of objects, services and experiences as part of a teleological project. Whereas Slater (1997: 127) identifies a French ‘school,’ including Lefebvre, the Situationists and Baudrillard, highlighting the centrality of the experience of *ennui*, *anomie* and reification to life in ‘consumer society.’ For sociology, then, the analysis of the *experiential* dimension of contemporary ‘consumption’ is vital in explaining its relation to capitalist modernity.

If subjectivity is severed from an ‘authentic’ relationship with objective culture, if experience is *mediated* rather than ‘lived,’ through an engagement with commodity-signs rather than commodity-objects then the fears of the Frankfurt School, and their successors, for the possibility of self-realisation appear to be realised. Here contemporary ‘consumption’ is governed by the abstraction and immateriality of the commodity-*sign* and its divorce of desire from its ‘human’ origin in the form of the *fetish*. The opportunities for the construction or development of a ‘self’ are now bounded by the possibilities of the sphere of circulation and exchange, by the commodity-form and its variegated instances (Bauman, 1988). Knowledge of this external ‘limit’ upon the development of the subject allows certain authors (Bauman, 1990; 1992; Giddens, 1991) to see life in ‘post-traditional’ social formations complicating the possibility of producing a stable identity and endangering the ‘ontological security’ (Giddens) this promises. On this reading, identity or selfhood are the products of critical acts of ‘consumption’ understood as *choice*, and which for Bourdieu (1984) can be read off as indicators of social position, rather than ideological deceptions achieved through the *fetish*. This liberal reformulation of traditional humanist conceptions of the ‘self’ can be an anxiety-inducing process (Warde, 1994) – however, the implicit utilitarian rationality underpinning this position is not without its critics (Hush & Rahman, 2000).

The perceived lack of ‘material’ for the production of identity – the bourgeois ego – prompted by the immanent dissipation of value into the commodity-sign tends to be associated with a simultaneous absence of ‘lived’ or *authentic* experience, usually

attributed to the pervasive influence of (contemporary) technology. So the metaphors of the cinema screen (Debord), the computer screen, digital or genetic 'code' (Baudrillard) can be seen as attempts to narrate the apparent disappearance of that which was once 'really' there, but which has now vanished into 2-d or 'information.' The role of the *image*, whether in the 'society of the spectacle' or as the form that value takes when reflected in the 'mirror of production,' is that of absent 'imago,' the evocation of a longed for *mise en scène*. Therefore, the ostensible loss of materiality of the commodity-form and the transubstantiation of *desire* into the wish can be seen to reflect both bourgeois philosophy's deep unease over the constitution of the subject, its identity-positions and the forms that phenomenal experience assumes in capitalist modernity. The 'spectral objectivity' of the commodity (Marx) and the fetish form assumed by the social relations of *modern consumption* merely re-enforce a belief in an increasingly immaterial and inauthentic 'hypostatized world' (Hetherington, 2003) of signs, otherwise known as the sphere of circulation and exchange of capitalist modernity.

The 'alienation' of the subject of capitalist modernity that runs through the Hegelian and Marxian tradition, via the Frankfurt School to Debord, is a lament for the passing of an apparently autonomous individual, itself a product of Cartesian dualism. The 'anxiety' this arouses is an indication of the transformed 'modality' of the subject and the ontological status it previously enjoyed. The consequent 'disintegration' of the unified ego of bourgeois culture, which Ferguson (1990) locates in the latter part of the nineteenth century, coincides with both the 'democratization of luxury' (Williams, 1982) and the rise of fledgling forms of cinematic narration (Charney, 1998; Friedberg, 1993). The fleeting, fortuitous and contingent arrangement of 'things' and people appears to be born of their proximity, and the narration of this spatial and temporal intermingling accompanies the emergence of historically novel strategies for the re-presentation of these experiences. The sphere of circulation and exchange is the pre-condition of the *terrain* of capitalist modernity, home to the socio-spatial relation that is *modern consumption*. The emergence of an increasingly 'affluent society' (Galbraith, 1984 [1959]) and a proliferation of 'technologies' and their affects (McLuhan, *passim*) as the twentieth century progressed can be seen to have played a part in the influential descriptions of 'consumption' by both Debord and Baudrillard without, ultimately, having achieved their aims. However, both theorists, in their break with the prevailing sociological orthodoxies concerning capitalist consumption-relations and the social formation within which these occurred ensured that future analyses could no longer be reduced to a 'fetishistic' desire for commodities by

individuals or the pursuit of satisfaction by alienated individuals within ‘consumer society.’

The ‘immaterial’ information that is re-presented upon cinema, television or computer screens, which circulates on the internet or appears briefly upon advertising hoardings retains, of course, a *material* dimension, however flat they may be. Historically recent technologies have assisted in the de-materialisation, abstraction and transmission (or circulation) of ‘values’ as information or images. This facilitation of *exchange* and the apparent diminution of the realm of production appear to liberate the commodity-form from the constraints under which it was originally manufactured, prior to its entry into the sphere of circulation and exchange. The *terrain* of capitalist modernity can, therefore, be revealed as part of a post-Fordist economy (Harvey, 1989) supported by a ‘globalised’ capitalist division of labour, while *appearing* to its inhabitants to be entirely distinct from such phenomena. *Modern consumption*, as the subtly but infinitely variegated practise that allows inhabitation of the terrain of capitalist modernity is also the means by which *origins* and ‘authenticity’ are lost, necessitating a re-conceptualisation of the relationship between the subject and objective culture.

### **Where is ‘Consumption’?**

Contemporary society, whether modern or postmodern, in engaging in consumption-relations bereft of obvious origins and answering to ostensibly inauthentic needs or wants appears removed from an underlying *reality*. The actions of the inhabitants of contemporary society betray no discernible cause or motive; they escape the rationality bequeathed by economic theory even in the expanded form discussed by the social sciences in general. Any attempt to reduce the *choices* of social actors to the revealed preferences of utilitarian psychology, either as ‘consumerism as a way of life’ (Miles, 1999) or the schizophrenic’s (Jameson, 1984) attempt to navigate a ‘depthless world’ merely re-enforces the absence of a putative link between the subject and the world of objects. Instead, at best, the ‘consumer’ is represented as a tourist, permanently estranged from an underlying, original and authentic reality and the possibility of *identity* that this would confer (see Rojek’s (1993) discussion of Goffman and a ‘paramount reality’). The spatial relationship between ‘production’ and ‘consumption’ and its *arrangement* within both the ‘global economy’ and the socially-stratified neighbourhoods of the western city necessarily informs the ease of access to and frequency of such ‘consumption’ events (unless we understand urban ‘regeneration’ to equate to gentrification). The *terrain* of capitalist modernity, upon which the modern subject engages with contemporary value-

form, allows an analytical re-articulation of ‘consumption’ and ‘production’ through an appreciation of the material structures that support the immaterial exchanges contained within the ‘chronically mediatized’ money-form (Dodd, 1994). The ‘spectral’ agglomeration of commodity-signs of which both ‘consumer’ and postmodern society are ostensibly composed implies a conflation of *being* with *looking*:

The dynamics of capitalist production, alienating in their effects, shift from (i) an alienation of being to having in early capitalism to (ii) an alienation of having to appearing in the late twentieth century (#17). In this respect, mediated rather than lived experience can be said to be all encompassing. The totality of mediated experience, spectacle, becomes the negation of human activity (#27), the isolation of the individual from communal life (pace Tonnies) except through mediated communal life, and the source of a contemplative culture of consumption. Contemplation becomes the only possible activity for the spectator in Debord’ view (#30).

– Hetherington 2003: 18-9

The reduction of authentic or ‘lived’ experience to an ostensibly inauthentic or ‘mediated’ experience is the denial of *embodied* or ‘kinaesthetic’ experience and presents the body as a vessel for consciousness, thus denying the role of both the *emotions* and the *senses*. This is the ‘postmodern’ culture of the ‘consumer society’ in which the *fetish* is reduced to ideological complication or uncomplicated pleasure, rather than being viewed as a social relation with a material component (Hetherington, 2003). This disregard for the material component of any artefact immediately limits the consideration of the range of uses it might *afford* and the forms of sociation under which such uses emerge. As a socio-spatial relation that exists in time the ‘fetish relation’ is an expression of *use* that extends beyond functionality that does not simply disappear when an object enters the realm of exchange:

The carved handle, the beautifully turned bowl, the paint on the walls of a habitat whether a pre-historic cave or a pomo condominium exhibit a recognition of the fetish character of use values as sources of mediation that makes up a society.

- Hetherington, 2003: 35.

The commodity-form retains its material existence, derived from ‘production,’ when entering the *terrain* of capitalist modernity, and does not disappear into the sign-value assigned by a marketing or branding strategy, or the fashionable significance bestowed by a particular ‘consumer’ demographic. However, the fetish character or *relation* must be recognised as a *form*, as a value that ‘affords’ multiple interpretations and possible uses – some overt, others dependent upon context. By avoiding the reduction of contemporary ‘consumption’ practises to an engagement with ‘images’ or immaterial re-presentations of value, and acknowledging the material dimension of the commodity-form – object, service

and experience – it is possible to foreground a theory of *modern consumption*, inseparable from capitalist modernity.

### **Nostalgia for the Impossible**

In denying the existence of a *postmodern* ‘culture of consumption’ it is important to retain an understanding of a shift from the bourgeois era to *modernity* proper, despite both periods comprising part of the history of the capitalist mode of production. The fundamental difference between these two eras is in the role of the concept of identity and its relation to the value-form as it enters the sphere of circulation and exchange. The bourgeois ‘world view’ (Ferguson, 1990) saw the self emerge as the *telos* of a project of identity construction, a developed and refined ego capable of exercising *choice* in relation to the contents of the world. For the ‘postmodern’ sensibility the unified totality of the bourgeois *identity* becomes a problematic concept (Featherstone, 1991; Bauman, 1992 and to a lesser extent 2001; Clarke, 1998; Lyon, 1999; Loudermilk, 2003), as the unique ego ‘fragments’ into a variety of subject-positions, which no longer adhere to the linear narrative of personal biography. However, the dissolution of the bourgeois self, its fragmentation, was not its disappearance but its transformation, and its subsequent failure to remain the site of the accumulation of ‘experience’ across the life course (Agamben, 1993). As a result the ‘project’ of selfhood, the ‘development’ of an identity (Ferguson, 1990), became impossible, prompting Shaviri (1997) to speak, after Deleuze, of a process of ‘identification’ that ‘proceeds by prosthesis. Therefore, the emergence of a ‘postmodern culture’ signalling the return of modernity’s ‘repressed’ (Foster) implies a rupture in the discursive fabric of the modern era and a changed relationship between subjects and objects.

For Lyotard (1984), the break with the ‘*grands narratives*’ of modernity, the discourses that had structured the operation of the world, signal the ‘predominance of technoscience,’ which, rather than simply being ‘the effects of power,’ is an agreement by scientific knowledge and capitalist economics concerning the representation of the world (Lyotard, 1992: 18). This reveals a ‘marriage of Idea and Form’ that ‘define[s] the limit of the concept of the beautiful, that is, the *unpresentable* or, following Kant, *the absence of form*’ (ibid: 20) in contemporary culture. Aesthetically at least, the postmodern is a *moment* in the modern, it is ‘not modernism at its end, but in a nascent state, and this state is recurrent’ (ibid: 22). Modernity, as ‘the retreat of the real’ expressed ‘according to the sublime relationship of the presentable with the conceivable’ is caught in two modes distinguished by their nuance, which ‘often coexist almost indiscernibly in the same piece,

and yet they attest to a *différend* [an incommensurable difference of opinion] within which the fate of thought has, for a long time, been played out – a *différend* between regret and experimentation’ (ibid). So, the modern aesthetic is an aesthetic of the sublime but it is *nostalgic*, invoking the unrepresentable as absent (impossible) content, while its *form* offers consolation and pleasure – as a *longing* for absent content. The ‘postmodern’ aesthetic experience is the opposite of the beautiful form, a sublime overflowing of ‘presentable’ form, it recalls the novelty promised by fashion, rather than a ‘nostalgia for the impossible’ of content. The presentation of the *unrepresentable* becomes a means of objectifying the experience of temporal novelty, *nouveauté* as an *identification* that ‘proceeds by prosthesis,’ never attaining *identity*. This sublime over-flowing of ‘correct form’ (Lyotard) resembles the discussion of ‘radiation’ used by Simmel in describing adornment, through which an ineffable quality is transmitted, quite the opposite of the utilitarian description of ‘desire’ inherited from economic theory and which underpins contemporary accounts of ‘consumer society’ and its inhabitants.

### **The Allure of the Immaterial**

The commodification of *nouveauté* as the presentation of the ‘unrepresentable’ is the temporalisation of form and materiality, and their *subordination*, epitomised in the *logo* of the ‘branded good,’ which distinguishes itself from all other similar goods in this infinitesimal fashion. The seeming primacy of the immaterial aspect or ‘sign-value’ within the contemporary commodity-form reveals an apparent affinity between theories of the ‘postmodern’ and those of ‘consumer culture.’ Both tend to emphasise the subjective ‘participation,’ even immersion, in the experience or *event* of ‘consumption’ and the importance of novelty as temporal difference, as *nouveauté*. Nowhere is this truer than in the service sector, as food (Ritzer, 1999; 2001), tourism (Rojek, 1993; Hannigan, 1998) or ‘themed’ experiences (Gottdiener, 2001), where the commodification of experience can be presented as the ‘aestheticisation’ of life (Featherstone, 1991). Both the ‘marketing’ and the ‘system of provision’ approaches to ‘consumption’ agree that the physical manufacture of the commodity-event is incomplete as it leaves the sphere of ‘production’ and the ‘social life’ of the commodity (Appadurai, 1986) within the sphere of circulation and exchange – the packaging, marketing, display and branding – *finishes* it, prior to ‘final consumption.’ The ‘aesthetic’ labour of certain service sector occupations, the ‘aesthetic productivity’ (Simmel) of those who dress the commodity-form in the garb of an ‘informational’ good, becomes the means of ‘de-differentiating’ one instance of the commodity-form from another – the logic of difference and repetition applied as branding

strategy. The commodity-form becomes the medium for the communication of *nouveauté*, the signification of a social relation (*difference*) as a temporal relation.

Novelty is a quality that is ‘afforded’ as *nouveauté*, whether material or immaterial, part of the ‘bundle of functions’ (Massumi, 2003) that constitute it *as a particular social relation* within the (general) social relation of the commodity-form. The transformation of the phenomenal experience of temporality that accompanies existence upon the *terrain* of capitalist modernity is undergone through participation in *modern consumption*. Within this new and modern temporality there are only the moments of the present, adrift from both past and future, arranged in contingent constellation. As such there is no destination for the bourgeois self, no attainable outcome for the project of identity; neither backwards to an Arcadian idyll, nor forwards to an anticipated utopia. Instead, there are only ‘ways of escape’ (Rojek, 1993) from the present moment – and the moments of the present – the continual exposure to the experience of *nouveauté*, through an immersive participation in the commodity-form of capitalist modernity. For such a culture, *nostalgia*, as a longing for an absent past, is impossible: the bourgeois world view, which had been predicated upon just such a longing (Stewart, 1998), has succumbed to modernity, to *modernité*.

Consequently, the attempt to construct the unique *identity* of a bourgeois self, practiced by figures such as the ‘collector,’ is equally unrealisable since it is not a *modern* concept. Where the ‘collector’ accumulates objects, as fragments of a lost social reality, the inhabitant of modernity pursues experiences, undergoes *modernité*; the bourgeois pursuit of distinction has been replaced by the search for difference (*nouveauté*). As such, seen from a bourgeois perspective contemporary ‘consumers’ are in search of the distractions offered by *kitsch*:

kitsch objects have been designed to satisfy a momentary, suddenly arisen need. They are commemorative and ornamental objects which are useless in themselves; placed on the mantelpiece or shelf, they keep the memory of a ceremonial moment or institution, yet at the same time make it trivial by turning it into an article of daily use (a provincial coat-of-arms reproduced on the handle of a spoon, for example).

– Gronow, 1997: 42-3

Gronow’s debt to Bourdieu’s nostalgic ‘sociology of consumption’ is evident in the description of objects or experiences as ‘trivial’ on the basis that they do not conform to the strategies necessary for the manufacture of *identity*, the manipulation of the object world through the dictates of taste and refinement. Bourdieu’s attempt at an anthropological theory of ‘consumption’ relies upon, as Fowler acknowledges (1994: 149-50, 154), ‘strategies of distinction,’ albeit at the expense of a sustained engagement with

mass culture and media. Bourdieu's emphasis upon the role of *form* in the 'reading' of the meaning and significance of consumer goods, as signs of cultural capital, functions as a critique of Kant's theory of the beautiful and the sublime along class and social lines (Gronow, 1997: 10). 'Consumerism' as the active participation in 'consumer society' is simply a means of production of self, singular or plural (Bourdieu, 1984; Gronow, 1997) – even 'tribal' (Bauman, 1992; Maffesoli, 1991; 1993) – to be deciphered in the revealed preferences of tasteful 'consumption.' *Choice*, as the basis for self-making, reveals a hankering after 'distinction' within a culture of difference that is displayed as taste and pursued through *sociality* (Clarke, 1998; Lury, 1996).

### **At Home We Are Tourists**

Postmodern society's ostensible separation from the modern is characterised by 'play,' parody and a tendency to pastiche, as it distinguishes itself from the 'real' of modernity and the referents that lingered there. However, the end of the bourgeois era does not necessarily imply the emergence of the postmodern, rather something has changed:

Everything that was pending has been finished, and whatever else comes from this point will be part of a supplementary existence, separated from the other one by this moment of lightness, of emptiness, of astonishment and relief.

- Baudrillard, 1990c: 231

This 'supplementary existence' signals the divorce of signs from referents and reveals the necessity of re-thinking contemporary notions of subjectivity within this context. The bourgeois subject, identity as *ego*, can never attain its nostalgic aim, the arrangement of the world in accordance with its desires and the consequent resolution of class conflict through the re-discovery of Arcadia or the building of utopia. Both 'postmodern consumerism' and the 'consumer' of postmodern culture represent attempts to re-found the bourgeois conception of *identity* in contemporary guise, as a *collection* of 'signs' rather than objects (the material products of social relations). Such accounts merely re-describe the bourgeois subject as a 'consumer' of postmodern artefacts (signs without referents) rather than acknowledging the changed historical circumstances that have transformed subjectivity.

The bourgeois subject is

... an ideological structure, a historical form correlative with the commodity form (exchange value) and the object form (use value). The individual is nothing but the subject thought in economic terms, rethought, simplified, and abstracted by the economy. The entire history of consciousness and ethics (all the categories of occidental psycho-metaphysics) is only the history of the political economy of the subject.

This, for Baudrillard (1983c: 25), indicates the absence of landscape to be *re*-presented, reality has now been surrendered to a 'playful' pastiche of itself: it has become *fictione*. 'Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is the "real" country, all of "real" America, which is Disneyland.' The dissipation of 'reality' into the sphere of circulation and exchange, its divorce from historical causes and the realm of production sees the 'radical symbolic insistence' of the contemporary subject 'sublimated in value' through the commodity-form, which is the 'incarnation of the sublime in the economic order' (Baudrillard, 1983b: 207). The subject no longer 'solidifies' into an identity, even when deploying the logic of 'consumerism,' instead the inhabitants of a seemingly limitless 'Disneyland' are immersed in appearances, signs or images, which do not contribute to any teleological project. Such an approach reduces the 'consumer' to the 'consumption' of signs and images, to 'spectacle' or 'code,' and denies sociality, inter-subjective relations and even the concept of 'the social' itself, while *society* lingers only as a reification of exchange.

### **Departing Disneyland**

While Baudrillard was content to explore Disneyland's role in the constitution of an 'astral America' (1989) others advocated a more anthropological approach to the analysis of contemporary culture and its consumption-relations. Defining itself against the abstraction of postmodernism there emerged, during the 1980s, a revised 'anthropological' tradition that emphasised ethnographic accounts of 'consumer activity' and its social relations. Clearly indebted to Durkheim, Mauss and Bataille, as well as the more recent work around 'consumption' as the materialisation of cultural categories (Douglas & Isherwood, 1979; Miller, 1989), the 'material culture' approach combined archaeology with an appreciation of the physical substances and processes that went into the make-up of tangible objects and practices, rather than an insistence upon their meaning and significance. This was an attempt to avoid commodities being seen as inhabiting 'a self-referential system of signifiers' (Campbell, 1995: 103) with no link to the social institutions that inform everyday 'consumption experience,' such as the body (Falk, 1994), the family (Miller, 1995; 1998; 2001; Silverstone, 1992) or particular moral rituals and frameworks. The postmodern assertion of the semiotic over the symbolic, of the sphere of circulation and exchange over that of production, failed to critique the apparent 'de-materialisation' of the commodity-form, its dissolution into units of exchange-value that would be measured subjectively (the ghost of *homo œconomicus*). The material culture approach sought to

unite the meaningful and the material dimensions of the commodity-form within a single analytical framework, to link causes with effects without recourse to a primordial 'symbolic' such as *death* (Baudrillard, 1989 [1976]). This allowed the marriage of analyses of 'everyday life' (Lefebvre, 1991 [1976]; De Certeau, 2002) to the study of the 'world of goods' (Douglas & Isherwood, 1979) and an appreciation of the role played by an engagement with increasingly sophisticated forms of technology and mass media in contemporary capitalist culture. In turn, this encouraged a re-evaluation of the relationship between subjective and objective culture:

[The] material world of man-made things modifies the natural world to provide a material environment as the context in which social interaction takes place. Things, both natural and man-made, are appropriated into human culture in such a way that they re-present the social relations of culture, standing in for other human beings, carrying values, ideas and emotions.... But unlike images, ideas, talk and text, things are not just representations, but also have a physical presence in the world which has material consequences...

- Dant, 1999: 1-2

The resistance to the de-materialisation of the commodity-form within the 'cash-nexus' of the capitalist money-form was also pursued by Miller (1995, [1987]); first as a relationship between material culture and 'mass consumption' and, latterly, in *The Dialectics of Shopping* (2001), where Hegel's theory of 'objectification' was reconciled with the ethnographic specificities of contemporary life. Miller strove to write,

a book about shopping that treats commodities in the way that Mauss treated the gift, as forms that implicate every aspect of social life, such that kinship and political economy are brought together within the same volume.

- 2001: 2

Material culture analyses sought to assert a Durkheim-like concept of society, in which a discernible relationship between structure and agency could be observed in the symbolic uses to which material objects were put. The individual (or group) thus became an 'embedded' entity that both performed and embodied cultural values and categories, which were revealed in the apparently insignificant details of social life.

### **Kula Memories: material culture and mediating value**

Objects possessed of a 'biography' (Kopytoff) assume the status of quasi-subjects, material entities exhibiting a meaningful dimension capable of acting upon the world of human purposes. The commodity-form extends the concept of use to become a medium for the communication of *value* (Dant, 1999: 153), circumventing the utilitarian psychology of

economically-derived analyses in favour of socially constructed routines, habits and practises. The commodity-form objectifies ‘human’ requirements, for instance, through the mobile ‘phone:

The materials, shape and functionality of a particular telephone will locate it within the material culture of a particular time and place but not usually limit those who can use it. Out of date telephones or those from other countries look different but work in recognizably similar ways. The most recent mobile telephones have switches and screens that require new skills but this has not held back the rapid adoption of the ‘mobile’ throughout the world.

–Dant, 1999: 162

The mobile telephone *mediates* across social and spatial distances, embodies a global division of labour in its production and ‘consumption,’ and literally incorporates temporality within its styling. However, the mobile telephone mediates in a manner unacknowledged by Dant, despite his reference to the concept of ‘affordance’ (Gibson, 1986). The ‘mobile’ is a link within a network comprised of other telephones, other users, masts, computer systems, orbital satellites and social protocols (such as ‘texting’ and its linguistic abbreviations). As such, the (mobile) telephone is not just an object that communicates (ostensibly from *anywhere*), but is a means of facilitating socially and historically novel forms of *being*. Dant simply sees the mobile extend opportunities for use, social, temporal or spatial – they ‘mediate,’ they ‘extend or stand in for direct, face-to-face social interaction’ (1999: 172-3) – he does not recognise in this intimate embrace between people and things new ways of being human.

### **Affording ‘Consumption’**

The commodity-form, as ‘object’ or sign,’ combines physical properties and a variety of social meanings or values depending upon its context, both within the realm of production and the sphere of circulation and exchange. An obvious example of this is the case of clothing, which the wearer animates; while prosthetic limbs provide extended functional opportunities to users; and surgical implants, such as respiratory or cardiac devices, extend or preserve life itself. Material culture analyses utilise the concept of ‘affordances’ (Gibson, 1977; 1986) developed by ecological psychology and an *extended* notion of use, which surpasses merely the material and denotative functions of the object, traditionally understood as the outcome of the labour process.

The *affordances* of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes*, either for good or ill. The verb to afford is found in the dictionary, but the noun *affordance* is not... [It] refers to both the

environment and the animal in a way that no existing term does. It implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment.

– Gibson, 1986: 127

This re-combination of subject and object as an ‘inseparable pair’ (Gibson) constituting a ‘process’ that unites both organism and environment attempts to avoid the reification of the physical dimension of existence, as the *location* of ‘affordances.’ However, some such as Heft (2001) or Gaver (1996) lapse into this over-emphasis upon the material, which is then considered to reveal the interior states of actors as *preferences*, in much the same fashion as economic theory – or, for that matter, the culturally contextual analyses of material culture.

Material culture is still human culture; the autonomy of objects is very limited. Things do not have social relations with each other: they are our products and the culture of which they are a part is unequivocally the culture of human society. [...] The system of objects in a modern industrialized society is vastly greater and more complex than that in a pre-industrialized society. Things are important, although not as important as other people, and their importance increases as they become more intertwined with the way we live our social lives.

- Dant, 1999: 200

This insistence upon an active subject at the ‘core’ of any *interaction* who utilises the stuff of the world in multifarious fashions is Cartesian dualism in dilute form, and echoes the bourgeois individual in its desire to mould the material world through its will. Instead, ‘affordances’ should be viewed as *relational phenomena*, the properties not of objects but of the environment, which is comprised of both subjects and objects, thus avoiding the reduction of social life to a series of *interactions*.

Sheller (2003) has applied the concept of *affordances* to the ‘consumption’ of cars, proposing that the marriage of subject and object, of body and technology in an ‘environment’ requires an analysis of ‘feeling’ and the ‘kinaesthetic’ engagement with the world. Subjective experience becomes a series of ‘embodied dispositions’ that vary with time and space depending upon the *affordances* available to the ‘complex hybrid’ of car and occupant. The ‘quasi-biological car’ or ‘cyborg’ *affords* the possibility of new and different forms of experience, unavailable outwith this combination of technology and humanity that allows ‘inhabitation’ of the ‘suspended’ ‘spatio-temporal continuum of “in-between” ’ (2003: 17-9). Likewise, Haldrup & Larsen (2004) investigate the ‘tourist experience’ as a material culture of ‘affordances.’ Again, the overt combination of humanity and technology, subject and object, is prominent in this ‘performance’ of ‘leisured consumption’ and the role of the commodity-form (as an aspect of objective

culture) in enhancing the range of experiences available. *Culture* is seen as a phenomenon comprising both humans and non-humans, which allows the ‘emergent property’ of this relationship – *agency* – to be viewed as a *choreography* of heterogeneous elements that combine to produce effects and affects. However, Haldrup & Larsen (2004: 3) echo both Sheller and Rojek (1993), in his reading of Goffman, when they imply a ‘paramount reality’ that functions as a departure-point for ‘touristic’ experience and the affordance of a *temporary* extension to human faculties:

The ‘dramaturgical landscapes’ of tourism’s material culture comprises physical places, fantasylands and mediaworlds in a single human world of possibilities, of experiments with identities, social roles and relations, and interactions with places.

– 2004: 3

Human experience is ‘mediated’ (Dant, 1999) through such technological interactions, but the subject – as ‘consumer’ – is *affected* only briefly, before returning to ‘normal.’ This tendency to see the ‘cyborg’ expansion in the possibilities or ‘affordances’ offered by the commodity-form as a *temporary* phenomenon, limited by the duration of any particular subject-object interaction, implies that historical novelty is a property of the commodity-form – and a consequence of an industrial or digital ‘revolution’ – rather than the *experience* of a form of sociation.

While acknowledging the role of *affordances*, material culture analyses limit themselves to describing the novel affordances offered to the subject, such as the kinaesthetic dimension of experience. This, however, is to fail to theorise the way in which the contemporary is not ‘extended’ by technology but is, rather, *un-realizable* without it. The failure of material culture analyses is to emphasise the ‘socialness’ (Appadurai (ed), 1986; Riggins, 1994) of *things* as a by-product of human interaction and their accretion as culture. This is particularly true in the case of an engagement with ‘consumer culture,’ which is invariably seen as a ‘particular form of material culture,’ incorporating non-market relations, that has as its hallmark a ‘process of stylization’ resulting in an ‘organization’ of personal and collective identity based upon the maintenance and tourist-like traversal of social and cultural categories that define participation (Lury, 1996).

### **Actants and Assemblages**

Actant-Network-Theory (ANT) seeks to avoid the reduction of the *social* to ‘socialness’ based upon interaction between subjects and objects as ontologically distinct entities. For ANT, the distinction between people and things is irrelevant and misleading in its re-

assertion of the supposed primacy of the human over the non-human and the consequent reification of ‘the social’ as the meaningful *actions* of human beings. Failure to discuss the ‘missing masses’ of contemporary culture – the objects, services, experiences, machinery and operations that comprise the non-human component of modern life – facilitates the reification of (social) interaction as *society*. For ANT there is no society, only ‘the social’: a ‘tiny set of narrow standardised connections which occupies only some of the monads some of the time,’ it is these connections between monads, between networks of actants that constitute social life (Latour, 2001: 8). In rejecting the concept of society as something that congeals in objective culture for the *mediation* of subjective purposes – the limit-point of material culture analyses – ANT, and Latour in particular, deny the possibility of ‘consumer society.’ If ‘the social’ is the totality of interactions occurring within a ‘network’ then the *consumer* interactions of market relations can hardly be considered to determine the character of ‘society.’ Instead, it is the actions of individual actors, and the actants that make these actions possible, which must become the focus of sociological analyses. For Latour, this means a re-discovery of Tarde’s *Sociology & Monadology*, in which ‘any social production having some marked characteristics, be it an industrial good, a verse, a formula, a political idea [...] dreams like Alexander of conquering the world, tries to multiply itself by thousands and millions of copies in every place where there exist human beings’ (Tarde, *Sociologie et Monadologie* p. 96, cited Latour, 2001: 11).

Rather than human agents, objective culture or social structures it is monads, and ‘their efforts to constitute unstable aggregates,’ ‘actants or world building *entelechies*’ (ibid), which serve as the conduit for the ‘super-social’ principle of *imitation*, participation in which is the means of accumulating qualities (Borch, 2005).

To exist is to differ; difference, in one sense, is the substantial side of things, what they have most in common and what makes them most different. One has to start from this difference and to abstain from trying to explain it, especially by starting with identity, as so many persons wrongly do. Because identity is a minimum and, hence, a type of difference, and a very rare type at that, in the same way as rest is a type of movement and the circle a type of ellipse. To begin with some primordial identity implies at the origin a prodigiously unlikely singularity, or else the obscure mystery of one simple being then dividing for no special reason.

– Tarde, *Monadologie et Sociologie* p. 73, cited Latour, 2001: 12

Tarde’s dismissal of a ‘primordial’ unity that differentiates, through *deviation*, from an original identity, in favour of *difference* as the condition of life makes the monad the unique manifestation in space and time of individuated *being* – defined through its qualities, its *having* or *avidity*. This allows Tarde to circumvent a philosophical legacy that

focuses upon *being* and the verb ‘to be,’ in favour of an investigation that starts from the fact of *possession*, of ‘having.’ The ‘universal fact’ (Tarde) of *possession* differentiates monads through their qualities, making specificity or identity *extrinsic*, that is, in no way deriving from essence – thus dissolving the qualitative distinction between human and non-human *being*. A monad is, therefore, an ‘unstable aggregate’ (Latour) of qualities or *possessions* capable of modification through the acquisition of new capacities – through *transformation*. *Subjectivity* is irredeemably relative; it is a *performance* or incarnation of difference at a specific point in time and space. The sphere of circulation and exchange of capitalist modernity is the most obvious means by which new qualities can be *possessed*, however, it is far from the only one. Indeed, one of the virtues of Tarde, and Latour’s re-reading of his work, is the implicit acceptance of the existence and operation of ‘qualities’ that lie outside of formal market relationships, but which, at some point, may well be incorporated (something that theories of the ‘consumer society’ can be considered to struggle with, at best).

On this reading the study of consumption-relations and the study of the social appear to be inseparable, since the ideal *medium* for the ‘communication’ of imitation, claims Borch (2005: 87), is the modern metropolis and its spatial relations. So, for Tarde, Paris was the topographical pinnacle of France, which through the mass media of the day – newspaper, telegraph and railway – ‘exerted[ed] over this vast territory’ a ‘suggestive and imperious fascination’ (Tarde, cited *ibid*). Paris as the concentration of *imitation* becomes the site of the most rapid innovation of contemporary fashions, or ‘inventions,’ from child murders to clothing styles. This leads Tarde to consider the modern metropolitan phenomenon of the crowd, or ‘mob,’ in which the links between imitation and sociality are most evident. The city *communicates* to disparate inhabitants a common purpose, which emerges in the association of the ‘self-organizing power of the crowd,’ a ‘common suggestion’ that ‘spontaneously’ generates ‘the most radical, yet simultaneously the most momentary, manifestation and materialization of sociality in modern society’ (Borch, 2005: 90). The circulation and association of monads in modern metropolitan phenomena, such as the crowd, pre-empt ANT’s intention ‘to [transform] the social from a surface, from a territory, from a province of reality, to a circulation’ (Latour, 1997: 4). ANT was never intended as a theory of the social, but as ‘a theory of space in which the social has become a certain type of circulation’ (*ibid*). This prompts a reconsideration of *what*, not who, inhabits this space of circulation:

Subjectivity, corporeality is no more a property of humans, of individuals, of intentional subjects, than being an outside reality is a property of nature [...]. Subjectivity seems also to be a circulating capacity, something that is partially gained or lost by hooking up to certain bodies of practice.

– Latour, 1997: 5

The ‘extreme sociality’ manifested in crowds is an ‘interspiritual’ (Tarde) or inter-subjective phenomenon, a temporally fleeting and circulating *capacity*, rather than the ‘possession’ of any monad or network of monads. *Imitation* is a social phenomenon capable of being communicated by human and non-human actants alike, as such it recalls Dant’s insistence upon the role of material culture as a *medium* – the perfect example of which is fashion. For ANT this implies the ‘radical indeterminacy of the actor’ (Callon, 1991), since the human actant is merely an element within a vast assemblage of people and things, power-relations, processes and dispositions that have no discrete existence (*being*), but are, rather, realised as temporally unstable aggregates (accumulations of *having*). The social space in which *modern consumption* appears, then, is no more that of the ‘consumer society’ than it is the sphere of circulation and exchange proposed by political economy.

### **Towards a Theory of ‘Terrain’**

ANT’s ‘change in topology’ requires thinking not in the dimensions of Newtonian mechanics but ‘in terms of nodes that have *as many dimensions as they have connections*’ (Latour, 1997b: 2). This helps ‘lift the tyranny of geographers in defining space and offers us a notion which is neither social nor “real” space, but simply associations’ (ibid: 3). The space of ‘the social’ is the totality of those ‘nodes’ or actants that constitute it, they are the ‘stuff out of which socialness is made (Latour & Lemonier, 1994)’ (Latour, 1999: 8). The subjective experience of the human actant becomes central, whether it is that of someone engaged in ‘consumption’ or a windsurfer on a Swiss lake exploring:

the multiplicity of ways of being, he goes from some to many, from boring to alert ones, from a little wind to a fierce gale, from a low intensity to a higher intensity. ...moving into enjoyment, intensity, ways of being, alterations, and if I want to calculate his speed, I can, but I won’t define the depth of his world, the backdrop of all existence....

– Latour, 1996: 2-3

Subjective experience becomes the outcome of a relationship between *transportation* (displacement) and *transformation* (as the production of difference, of metamorphosis). Latour uses the example of a train journey to illustrate this, the apparently effortless *movement* through time and space achieved through *transportation* involves a minimum of *transformation* because of the ‘obedience’ of the environment to the wish expressed

through the purchase of a train ticket. However, if this *transportation* were to be interrupted and some or all of the hitherto unseen actants within the network (and the displacements and mediations they perform) be revealed, then the experience of *transformation* would devolve onto the subject onboard the train. The apparent autonomy of the subject, as passenger, relies upon the transformations *produced* by other actants, as work. A network that produces transportation without displacement now resembles the ‘virtualist’ systems (Carrier & Miller, 1998) in which the *mediation* of experience is seemingly without cause.

So, what Latour and theorists of ANT describes as the space of ‘the social’ is revealed as an effect of hidden or, at least, unapparent causes, it presents itself as a ‘virtual’ system of *effects* within which the subject is immersed. As such, it is best considered as a *terrain* in which the actions of actants, discrete in space and time, coincide, resulting in ‘an event-producing topos’ (Latour, 1996: 13), to the extent that a landscape including a mediaeval castle can become a contemporary tourist destination. The experience of ‘the social’ is, therefore, the experience of ‘effects of isochrony and isotopy, produced by the carefully monitored and heavily institutionalised circulation of objects that remain relatively untransformed through transportation: high speed trains, rulers, standards, canons, weight, constant relations, bullets, ballistic missiles, falling stones, accounts, and various other rods, hands of clocks, gears and structural isomorphies’ (ibid: 17). ANT’s discussion of ‘the social’ as a topology of interactions within which a Tarde-like ‘microsociology’ (Borch, 2005) reveals the processes that constitute experience can now be seen to provide a model for the analysis of *modern consumption* that circumvents the shortcomings of both the ‘consumer society’ thesis and the semiotic soup of ‘postmodern’ society.

### **Life in Traffic**

The sociological analysis of *modern consumption* must not be reduced to the study of the historical expansion of market relations, and the availability of goods and services. Only by abandoning *homo oeconomicus*, even in its expanded ‘psychological’ form, and its aggregation as ‘consumer society,’ is it possible to identify *modern consumption* as a historically and socio-spatially distinct phenomenon born of capitalist modernity. There is no requirement out seek out the *cause* of ‘consumerism’ or ‘consumer society,’ whether in theories of ‘trickle-down’ wealth and desire for variety (McKendrick et al, 1982), or the hedonistic aspirations of individuals (Campbell, 1987) in search of identity (Ferguson, 1990). Nor can ‘consumer activity’ be explained away as a manifestation of the ‘civilising

process' (Elias, 1994) or the interpellation of individuals within the capitalist system, either as historical phenomenon (McCracken, 1990) or the 'dark side' of Enlightenment rationality (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979; Debord, 1999). *Modern consumption* is a socio-spatial relation particular to capitalist modernity, a manifestation of the sphere of circulation and exchange of the capitalist mode of production, although its role and relationship to this have remained woefully under-theorised even by political economists, from Marx to the present day (Clarke, 1982; Fine & Leopold, 1993; Fine, 1995; 2002). The description of the capitalist consumption-relation as the circulation of the commodity-form, as a prelude to its exiting the realm of exchange in 'final consumption,' fails to grasp the subjective import of commodity-objects and the role of the commodity-form in the constitution of contemporary subjectivity (see Vattimo, 1988).

Similarly, Adorno and Horkheimer's fear that the abstraction and reification inherent to the commodity-culture underpinning capitalist 'consumption' threatens the autonomous human subject implies a nostalgic yearning for *authentic* existence defined in opposition to the shock-experience (*Erlebnis*) of the present. The inauthenticity of the immaterial, of exchange privileged over use, found in the 'totalised' culture of commodity-signs or 'representation' described by both Debord and Baudrillard, simply becomes the hallmark of contemporary society and its preoccupation with the signification of *identity*. This logic can be discerned in a 'postmodern culture' that is, effectively, divorced from the historical processes of capitalist modernity, so allowing the negotiation or construction of self to resemble semiotic bricolage. Here postmodernism can be understood as a particular manifestation of the sphere of circulation and exchange of a post-Fordist global economy. However, such analyses rarely, if ever, consider the constitution of the subject under such conditions, or the partial, temporary and contingent forms that such *participation* consists in. The 'totalised' capitalist society feared by the Frankfurt School authors, and sketched by Debord and Baudrillard, is now revealed as resembling a *postmodern* version of 'consumer society' supported by the post-Fordist techniques of 'flexible accumulation' (Harvey, 1989). The de-materialisation of commodities into 'services' and the apparent primacy of 'lifestyle' issues seem to echo the disappearance of 'lived' into 'mediated experience' – as 'representation' (Debord) or 'code' (Baudrillard). Similarly, the expansion in the role and significance of mass media technologies threatens to confirm the 'disappearance' of *life* into discrete experiences made available within global 'flows' of information, an abstract 'economy of signs and spaces' (Lash & Urry) forged by a technological sublime.

The ‘material culture’ approach of anthropology responded to this apparent dematerialisation of commodified objects by re-asserting the seemingly forgotten *material* aspect of both the commodity-form and its embodiment of social relations. Against the dissolution of materiality into an immaterial ‘significance’ the physical objects of contemporary culture assumed the task of incorporating meaning and communicating cultural categories (Dant, 1999; Miller, 1989; 2001). However, this intellectual re-engagement with the material aspect of the commodity-form and its representation of value does not sufficiently revise the postmodern or ‘semiotic’ position and its attendant theory of a ‘consumer society’ composed of individuals making (culturally contextualised) choices about commodity-objects. The emphasis by material culture analyses upon the physical ‘affordances’ (Gibson, 1977; 1986) of the commodity-form relies upon a *desiring* subject at the heart of all social interactions, both inter-subjective and those between subjects and objects. In so doing, the anthropological approach denies a definition of ‘the social’ that extends beyond the inter-subjective and, as a result, is unable to produce an analysis of the *relational* ‘affordances’ offered by the commodity-form. This results in an anthropocentric prioritising of human subjectivity conceived of as *agency* and theorised as ‘consumer choice,’ even while acknowledging the ‘extension’ of the subject through both the material and immaterial aspects of the commodity-form. The shortcomings of the material culture perspective, specifically its prioritising of a reified conception of ‘socialness’ at the expense of a critical theorisation of *the social*, indicates the contribution made to a theory of *modern consumption* by adapting ANT. By highlighting the reciprocal relationship between subjects and objects (actants), ANT extends the analysis of ‘the social’ to the relation between *having* and *being* discussed by both Simmel and Tarde in their writings on the experience of metropolitan modernity.

This consensus regarding the inter-relation between *being* and *having* as the means of both articulating the individual to a ‘network’ actants, beliefs and practices (Latour), and of differentiating the specific individual from other actants inhabiting the *terrain* of ‘the social’ is epitomised in Simmel’s discussion of modern culture and the ‘superfluous’ role of adornment (1997). The body becomes the *site* of aesthetic experience, specifically its sublime aspect – the locus for the *intersection* of subjective and objective culture for the inhabitants of the metropolitan modernity. Simmel describes *adornment* as the ‘radiations’ emanating from the material object that conjure up ‘sensuous attention’ through the ‘enlargement or intensification’ of the ‘sphere’ of the ‘personality.’ The ‘synthesis of the individual’s having and being’ ‘transforms mere possession into sensuous and emphatic perceivability of the individual himself.’ However, this is only true of unusual or *extra-*

ordinary dress, particularly jewellery, which acts as a ‘focal point’ for the visible (re-)presentation of the individual precisely because adornment is *superfluous* and ‘flows over’ the individual. The object of adornment ‘communicates’ (Dant, 1999) or ‘radiates’ (Simmel) the personality, linking it ‘to points which are far removed from its origin’ – the conjunction of body and ‘object’ – and articulates it to ‘a vaster precinct which, in principle, is limitless.’ The subject is now intermingled with the sphere of circulation and exchange, its ‘personality’ *realised* through this particular medium and free of the restraints of ‘necessity’ imposed by the physiological constraints of Cartesian dualism. The subject *extends* itself through the ‘affordances’ it acquires through this participation, revealing the affinity between *being* and *having* in the constitution of *modern consumption*.

The study of *modern consumption* is now revealed as the analysis of the *terrain* of capitalist modernity, rather than the investigation of the sphere of circulation and exchange or a putative ‘consumer society.’ However, the relationship between the ‘spheres’ of exchange and production proposed by political economy must not be discounted, since this relationship allows the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption* to be viewed as a historically novel form of social life within the capitalist mode of production. As such, an account of the relation between the realms of production and ‘consumption’ must also include a study of the forms of phenomenological experience and their consequences for the constitution of subjectivity in contemporary culture. The negotiation of subjective *identification* upon the *terrain* of ‘consumption’ is an immersion in modern experience, *modernité*, rather than an *identity* born of production. The sphere of circulation and exchange is no longer the realm in which ‘fragments’ of a lost totality are to be *re-collected*, the nostalgic desire for an irrecoverable identity, but has become the *terrain* upon which identification is achieved through the pursuit of ‘prosthetic’ experiences or events – of *durations* (Bergson). The subjective experience of *modern consumption* and the forms of phenomenal experience that it facilitates – the non-teleological or ‘playful’ prosthetic transformation of subjectivity – can be opposed to the rational, productive and teleological relations of *work*, and the self-mastery it implies. The conception of the money-form as the *extension* of the subjective will – epitomised by Simmel (1990) – allows theories of ‘consumerism’ and ‘consumer society’ to see in the consumption-relation the possible re-construction of the unified bourgeois ego, as a lifestyle project, through its intersection with the world of goods (Gronow, 1997).

So, *modern consumption* constitutes the subject as an expression of the ontological relation between *being* and *having*, where *possession*, rather than ‘ownership,’ mediates and

governs the appropriation of ‘properties’ that distinguish the individual from both itself (temporally) and other actants (spatially). Both subjects and objects, as actants within a network, can be considered as being involved in a ‘relational ontology’ (Costall, 2004) that determines the ‘affordances’ or qualities they *possess*. The temporalisation of difference (and the experience thereof), as *nouveauté*, and its commodification illuminates the supra-physical affordances available to the human subject in a world of actants and networks. Specifically, by conceiving of affordances as *social relations* rather than physical properties it is possible to see their *affect* as being in no way circumscribed by their physical existence, in much the same manner that semiotic analyses of ‘consumer culture’ saw meaning prioritised over materiality (but without the consequent disregard for material existence):

All sense interest connects with the perceptible.... Aesthetic judgement, however, connects with the mere image of things, with their appearance and form, regardless of whether they are supported by an apprehendable reality.

– Simmel, cited Frisby, 1992: 135

Economic theory sees the commodity-form as the embodiment of (potential) utility moving within the sphere of circulation and exchange allowing the subject-as-consumer to engage in a labour of self-creation. However, attention must be focused on the ‘actants’ inhabiting the terrain of *modern consumption*: here the inter-relation between subjective and objective culture turns upon ‘image,’ ‘appearance’ and ‘form,’ and the ‘affordances’ expressed through this ‘relational ontology’ (Costall). Therefore, the ‘significance’ of any commodity-object is irreducible to either its material manifestation or a subjective calculation of utility and is found, instead, in the phenomenal forms of subjective experience it ‘affords.’ The commodity-form ceases to be the ‘contents’ of either the consumption-relation or an objective reality to be manipulated by a teleological subject.

Gronow (1997: 161-2) comes close to appreciating this in his combination of Lash (1994) and Schulze’s *Die Erlebnisgesellschaft*, when he implies that ‘lifestyle’ can be viewed as an aestheticised cultural pursuit that is *played* or performed. However, in conceiving of play as a departure from a ‘paramount reality’ Gronow views ‘consumption’ as a deviation from an underlying or ‘authentic’ reality or identity. This failure to see in Simmel’s discussion of *sociability* as the ‘play-form’ of sociation – the temporary suspension or circumspection of ‘real’ life – the basis for the analysis of *modern consumption*, hinges upon the conception of *reality* as the point of origin and return. The departure from reality inherent to *play* is deemed to be temporary, a hiatus prior to the resumption of ‘real life,’ or

everyday normality. However, in *modern consumption* the ‘play-form’ (sociability) of modern life (sociation) severs its connection with an underlying reality, and, consequently, becomes the *play-form* of the play-form, possessed of neither teleology nor origin. The perpetual present of the subjective experience of *modern consumption* is the deferral of both past and future, the collapse of the experience of the temporal ‘now’ into the spatial ‘here’ and an accompanying transformation of the understanding of causality. In *modern consumption* the ‘biographical fiction of the self’ (Ferguson, 1990) is denied a reality against which to declare its existence; the absence of a paramount reality means that subjective experience (*Erlebnis*) is divorced from the historical continuum and the linear narrative structuring of experience (*Erfahrung*) that might otherwise ‘organise’ it. The remainder of this thesis investigates the historical evolution of the capitalist mode of production *as* the transformation of the conditions under which the phenomenal forms of subjective experience occur. Chapter Three charts the historical development of the capitalist sphere of circulation and the emergence of the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption*, which makes the transformation of the categories of phenomenal experience – space, time and causality – the key to a sociological critique of the socio-spatial construction of *modern consumption*.

## Chapter Three: The Terrain of *Modern Consumption*

### Introduction

Capitalism has found itself able to attenuate (if not resolve) its internal contradictions for a century, and consequently, in the hundred years since the writing of *Capital*, it has succeeded in achieving 'growth.' We cannot calculate at what price, but we do know the means: by occupying space, by producing a space.

– Henri Lefebvre (1981), *The Survival of Capitalism*.

Space always remains the actually ineffectual form, in whose modifications real energies are manifested, but only in the way that language expresses thought processes, which occur *in* words but not *through* words. [...] The requirement of specific psychological functions for individual historical spatial formations reflects the fact that space in general is only an activity of the mind, only the human way of connecting sensory impulses that are unrelated in themselves into uniform interpretations.

– Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Space*, emphasis in original.

The 'economic inheritance' that placed a psychologically-updated incarnation of *homo oeconomicus* at the heart of the sociological investigation of 'consumption' remains a problem for the analysis of the 'spaces of consumption' – from agora to arcade, department store to shopping mall and theme park. While acknowledging the central role these arenas occupy in any chronological account of the contemporary capitalist consumption-relation the current chapter seeks to consider these 'spaces' or 'sites' of commodity-exchange *other* than as 'stages' in the developmental history of the 'consumer society' and its global expansion. Consequently, the techniques and strategies for highlighting the aesthetic, affective and representational aspects of the commodity-form, which were pioneered in these commercial spaces, are viewed as adhering to a capitalist 'logic of accumulation' (Harvey, 2001) that modifies Simmel's five-fold account of 'space' to produce an analysis of the 'terrain' of *modern consumption*. This 'terrain' emerges as a 'de-formation' of the empty space of Newtonian mechanics (Ferguson, 1990) and appears in the late nineteenth century as a result of the transformation of the built environment and the 'quasi-linguistic' 'rhetoric of commodity-culture' (Richards, 1991) pioneered in the 'spaces of consumption.'

The historical process that saw the emergence of modern 'space' supplant pre-modern *place* during the later nineteenth century, before being 'de-formed' (Ferguson, 1990) into the 'terrain' of *modern consumption*, is traced. The 'spaces of consumption' can no longer be considered merely as material manifestations of the sphere of circulation and exchange

where the techniques for expressing the ‘aesthetic illusion’ of the commodity-form (Haug, 1986) were refined, although such techniques were undoubtedly honed there. The bourgeois subject conceived of ‘consumption’ as a means to further the project(ion) of the ego through the exercise of discriminating choice. The ‘spaces of consumption,’ on this view, were nothing more than archival warehouses in which were contained the raw materials of subjective refinement – a passive landscape of commodities, rather than the ‘active mass’ (Ferguson, 1992) of the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption*. The capitalist ‘production of space’ (Lefebvre) can not be understood as the material basis for ‘lived experience’ (Minkowski, 1970). Instead, the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption*, in its focus upon of the relationship between subjective and objective culture, investigates the *relational ontology* formed between environment and organism (Costall, 2004) is seen to have its origin in the interplay between socio-spatial practices and the capitalist logic of accumulation (Harvey, 2001).

The ‘spaces of consumption’ that have traditionally made up the material component of the capitalist sphere of circulation and exchange should be considered as the ‘spatial expression’ of a ‘sociological fact’ (Simmel, 1997: 143 [1903]), a manifestation of the relation between *being* and *having*, rather than material structures that impose certain socio-spatial practices upon their inhabitants. These spaces or sites *afford* a variety of possible behaviours, from the ‘shopping’ of the law-abiding ‘citizen consumer’ (Trentmann, 2006) to the hanging-out of teenage ‘mallrats’ or the appropriations of nineteenth century thieves (Abelson, 1989) While the historical development of such ‘spaces of consumption’ embodies an extension and concentration of the monetarisation and commodification of human existence, it also ‘affords’ new possibilities for expressing the relationship(s) between subjects and objects. These spaces do not offer solutions to problems of utility, the desire for pleasure or the pursuit of ‘identity’ through the monetary appropriation of goods, services or experiences, as imagined by economic theory. Rather, in the shift from arcade to *magasin des nouveautés*, from *grand magasin* to shopping mall, and beyond to the ‘themed environments’ of ‘postmodern’ cities, epitomised by Disney’s ‘imagineering’ of New York’s Times Square (Hannigan, 1998), these ‘spaces’ reveal an increasing emphasis upon the immaterial and experiential dimension of the interaction between ‘shops’ and ‘shoppers.’

In discussing the emergence of a distinctively modern and *capitalist* ‘space’ the increased circulation of industrially manufactured goods and the access to these conferred by the ‘spaces of consumption’ – as a retail network – through the rational organisation of the

division of labour in both ‘consumption’ and ‘production’ becomes central. Rather than considering these eighteenth and nineteenth century ‘spaces’ as conduits for supplying a greater number, range and variety of commodities to an increasingly sophisticated and discerningly tasteful ‘consumer’ society – as economic theory implies – it makes greater sense to consider these ‘social forms’ (Lancaster, 1995) as spatial sites born of the coalescence of certain ‘representational’ strategies and techniques, which were aimed at enhancing the aesthetic affect of the commodity-form. Therefore, the sociological fact expressed *spatially* (Simmel) is the immanent coalescence of *modern consumption*, as ‘space’ is transformed into *terrain*, through the operation of a ‘dynamic’ logic of ‘capitalist accumulation’ (Harvey, 2001 [1975]). This *logic* necessitates an ‘intensification’ and ‘expansion’ of the social relations of the capitalist mode of production, effectively *commodification*, which *supplements* the five ‘fundamental qualities’ of space identified by Simmel (1997 [1907]). So, the ‘logic’ of capitalist accumulation serves to ‘de-form’ or concentrate the abstract ‘space’ of the market into the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption* and the socio-spatial practices – the ‘forms of sociation’ (Simmel) – which these facilitate, specifically the relationship between subjective and objective culture, between *being* and *having*, between experience and environment.

The sociological investigation of *modern consumption*, therefore, requires an analysis of the historical processes that underpinned the transformation of social space into ‘terrain.’ The ‘empty space’ of Newtonian physics and its geometry gave way to a *terrain* ‘de-formed’ into existence (Ferguson, 1990; Massumi, 1993) and its geography of sociation. Fundamentally, *space* ceases to be the ‘empty’ location of social action and, instead, becomes a constitutive component and dimension of ‘lived experience’; the forms of phenomenal experience afforded to the subject are revealed as being contingent upon the availability and *organisation* of the terrain of *modern consumption*. Upon this terrain *representations* of value rather than ‘real’ objects or experiences *seem* to circulate, made available through the conjunction of, first, industrial (mechanical) and, then, digital technology, and an apparent privileging of exchange-value over use-value. However, the increased role of the immaterial or experiential dimension of the commodity-form (and related forms of sociation) must not be reduced to a nostalgic longing for the physical thing-in-itself. This all too convenient simplification of materiality (use) and immateriality (exchange) threatens to obscure the ‘affordances’ (Gibson, 1977; 1986) expressed by the relationship between objects and subjects, between *being* and *having* that will be explored in subsequent chapters.

Therefore, the shift from ‘spaces of consumption’ to *terrain* reveals the development of the techniques and strategies used to organise waged labour within the foregrounding of the aesthetic dimension of the commodity-form. Likewise, it indicates the need to trace the production and circulation of such commodities and to reveal the manner in which such commodities allowed new, *modern* forms of social interaction and subjective experience to emerge. The refinement of such ‘aesthetic productivity’ (Simmel) and the ‘representational value’ (Buck-Morss, 1993) it underpinned can be discerned in certain ‘exemplary instances’ (Kracauer) of the sphere of circulation and exchange – arcades, department stores, shopping malls and ‘themed environments’ – and their privileging of the *abstract*, rather than straight-forwardly functional, relationship of ‘affordance.’ Of course, in exacerbating the individual and subjective component of the experience of the commodity-form the terrain of *modern consumption* can also be seen as conforming to the logic of capitalist accumulation discussed by Harvey (2001). Here the *expansion* and *intensification* of commodification, facilitated by the conjunction of capital and technology, now addresses each individual as a micro-market (not entirely dissimilar to neo-classical economics). However, this address, or interpellation, is not made upon the basis of utility but through an appeal to the *affective* aspect of existence, to the aesthetic dimension of experience.

The terrain of *modern consumption* is now revealed as resembling description of *the social* as a ‘space’ of ‘circulation’ provided by Actant-Network-Theory (ANT); as a *technology* of (social) experience. The phenomenal forms of subjective experience can now be seen as being linked to the socio-economic forms of capitalist modernity, to paraphrase Marx: they are the surface phenomena that betray essential relations. However, they do not do so in an obvious and unproblematic manner: it is no longer possible to ‘drop a sounding’ (Simmel) that will reveal the *cause* of an effect (event). The emergence of the terrain of *modern consumption*, in large part due to the marriage of the material structures of the sphere of circulation and exchange and the ‘mature money-form’ (Simmel, 1990), necessitates an analysis of the production of *capitalist* ‘space’ or, more accurately, *spatial experience* that is irreducible to the pursuit of utility, however variegated or complex. The structures and socio-spatial practices of *modern consumption* are, therefore, revealed to be the ‘material’ manifestation or accretion of subjective experience, which, in turn, is born of an immersion in and engagement with the ‘logic’ of the capitalist mode of production.

By extending Simmel’s (1997) ‘sociology of space’ through the ‘logic’ of ‘capitalist accumulation’ (Harvey) – as *expansion* and *intensification* addressed to the individual

(even when dealing with groups) – the role of the *boundary* (Simmel, 1997: 170-1 [1903]) is revealed as vital. The *boundary* (natural or social) is no longer simply interrupted by either bridge or door, but has become the spatial expression of a sociological fact: the permeability and mutability of capitalist space and its continual ‘de-formation’ into the terrain of *modern consumption*. Therefore, the history of the ‘spaces of consumption’ – from bazaar to arcade to *grand magasin* and beyond – must be viewed as a manifestation of the *logic of capitalist accumulation*, rather than the technical refinement of the delivery mechanism of capitalist production. Within these ‘spaces’ a new relationship between vision, representation, gender and public space was engineered (Crary, 1995; Friedberg, 1993; Laermans, 1993; Ross, 1991; Zola, 1953; Ryan, 1994), which privileged the socially and historically novel: the commodity-form’s capacity to express *nouveauté* was forged in this crucible of commercial culture. The ‘aesthetic productivity’ (Simmel, 1997) that was the ‘stock in trade’ of such spaces sought to fine-tune the technical and stylistic means of creating aesthetic and affective experience.

Unlike the ‘spaces of consumption’ the terrain of *modern consumption* is not reducible to a boundary capable of quantitative expression (whether in metres or miles) interrupted by ‘doors’ or extended by bridges. Instead, it is a *qualitative* phenomenon possessed of a continually fluctuating ‘boundary’ that is both spatial *and* temporal. Upon this terrain there is no scope for the ‘completion’ of the bourgeois ego through the appropriation of the contents of the world (*shopping*) or the expression of this ego as a stable identity (*consumerism*). While the ‘spaces of consumption’ functioned as archival resources for bourgeois individuals who sought the satiation of *desire* through the pleasurable utility found in ‘collecting’ or shopping, the terrain of *modern consumption* merely provides a momentary crystallisation – as *affordance* – of the relationship between *being* and *having*. It is the spatial dimension of this historical transformation in the relationship between subjective and objective culture, between the physical environment and the phenomenal forms of subjective experience, which this chapter traces.

### **The ‘Production’ of Capitalist Space**

Simmel (1997: 139-163) considered space to possess five ‘fundamental qualities’ through which spatial ‘expression’ was given to the ‘sociological fact’ of human life. These qualities ranged from: firstly, the ‘exclusivity’ that defined, through difference, a space into existence; secondly, the ‘dynamic character’ given by the social interactions that characterise a space; thirdly, the capacity for fixing the contents of social formations through the incorporation of immobile objects into social relations (epitomised by

Parliament or a police station); fourthly, *intervals* that signal difference as distance, expressed either as proximity or separation; and, finally, the *mobility* or dynamic aspect of the ‘contents’ of space that shape subjective experience. The *character* of space and spatial experience, therefore, is a combination of its generic type and its deviation(s) from this, the range of interactions that occur within it, the structures that arise to embody these interactions (and which endure), the negotiation of *distance* either within or between specific spaces, and the phenomenal forms of subjective experience participated in and the actions that arise within individuals and groups in response to these. This *temporalisation* of space and *spatialisation* of time asserts the *relational* nature of subjective experience as the individual consciousness functions as intersection, repository and embodiment of spatial and temporal events.

Such spatial events, which also, obviously, unfold in time, possess a psychological value (Simmel) or ‘intensity’ (Latour) for the participant. Therefore, the forms of interaction or ‘mobility’ displayed by human beings as they traverse space *represent* the embodiment of these values or psychological dispositions. For instance, in discussing ‘the stranger’ Simmel (1950) identifies three ‘sociological consequences’ of his or her ‘wandering’:

- 1) ‘the separation from one’s accustomed milieu,’
- 2) ‘the momentary impressions and encounters held in common,’
- 3) ‘the consciousness of an imminent and definitive separation once more.’

Travellers, in this way, experience a kind of distance from ‘themselves,’ which is actually an *interval* separating them from their everyday social situation, their *milieu*.

Consequently, the standards to which they have habituated themselves in the course of their normal social interactions appear inappropriate in new and different environments. In turn, the inapplicability of ‘everyday’ standards, values or forms of behaviour leave the temporarily ‘rootless’ individual susceptible to suggestion and open to an ‘intimacy or confession’ (Simmel, 1997: 163) otherwise unthinkable.

The stranger, therefore, embodies a spatial estrangement from the everyday and for whom all social interactions will be, most likely, fleeting and unrepeated – hence the otherwise inexplicable openness. Thus, the occupation of *unusual* space becomes the experience of difference – manifested in forms of social interaction – born of the interruption or cessation of the everyday. The manifestation of social space was exemplified for Simmel by the modern metropolis, which resembled:

[...] a web or network of intersecting spheres of the division of labour, distribution, communications, the money economy, commodity exchange, intellectual and cultural circles.  
– Frisby, 1992: 100

However, as Frisby observes (ibid: 100-1), this describes a ‘capital city, the focal point of the money economy,’ rather than an industrial city and its expanding suburbs, and the political and economic claims of those who inhabit them. Simmel’s emphasis upon the ‘space’ of the sphere of circulation and exchange – of both individuals and commodities – revealed the spatial proximity and simultaneous separation of its seemingly autonomous contents. Spatial proximity here betrays its temporal component, the fleeting ‘co-presence’ (Jackson & Thrift, 1995) of disparate entities, each possessed of its own volition.

This stress upon both *distance* and *differentiation* and its characterisation of *particular* spaces echoes Tarde’s (see Borch, 2005) discussion of the ‘primacy’ of Paris over the rest of France because of the nature of the interactions that occur there. Effectively, social space is *produced* through the interactions that it appears to contain and its boundaries become contingent upon the forms of sociation that occur at any point: the *boundary*, and that which it demarcates, represents the expression of a ‘sociological fact.’

[...] the sociological boundary signifies a quite unique interaction, in which what is significant is the interactions woven on either side of the boundary.  
[...] The indeterminacy of boundaries may also be seen in the spatial framework of darkness, in which the narrowness and breadth of the framework merge together to provide scope for fantasy [...].  
– Frisby, 1992: 105

The *boundary* is both a spatial and a temporal event that is defined by the forms of sociation it contains and, as such, it is not necessarily a material structure and is experienced as a subjectively affective phenomenon: for instance, the psychological ‘value’ of darkness. This ‘emancipation from space’ has been attributed to the role of the mature money economy, which in tandem with communication technologies ‘enable spatial differences to be overcome by time’ (Frisby, 1992: 107). This, in turn, echoes the ‘annihilation of space by time’ discussed by Marx and taken up by Harvey (1989; 1999; 2001) as the basis of the ‘capitalist logic of accumulation’ and its *expansion* and *intensification* of the market.

Harvey’s (2001: 239-41) description of economic growth as derived from a *dynamic* process of expansion governed by the ‘capitalist logic of accumulation’ hinges upon three factors. Firstly, the existence of surplus labour and the ‘flexibility’ it imparts to the labour

force; secondly, the supply of raw materials in sufficient quantities, so as to allow the expansion of production; thirdly, a market capable of absorbing an increased supply of goods. The development of the sphere of circulation and exchange, as described by Simmel, is inseparable from these structural considerations within the realm of production. For Harvey, this indicates the *dialectical integration* of the spheres of ‘consumption’ and production, which results in the emergence of a ‘new plane of effective demand’ with an ‘increas[ed] capacity to absorb products’ formed from the ‘complex mix of four overlapping elements’ (2001: 241). Firstly, the extension of the capitalist organisation of production, either into non-capitalist areas or the development of ‘specialist’ services or technologies geared to one specific aspect of existing production. Secondly, product innovation underpinning new ‘wants,’ ‘needs’ or expectations (such as public sector housing for the working class). Thirdly, an expansion of the ‘consumer’ market – although both Marx and Harvey tend to view such an expansion in *population* (spatial) terms, rather than the ‘consumerisation’ of ever-younger individuals (temporal). Fourthly, the *geographic* (as opposed to *spatial*) expansion into new markets – epitomised by ‘globalisation.’

Harvey views the first three ‘elements’ as an ‘*intensification* of social activity, of markets, of people within a particular social structure,’ while the fourth concerns the ‘spatial organisation’ and ‘geographical expansion’ of the accumulation process (ibid: 242). The centrality of spatial *expansion* to the capitalist ‘logic of accumulation’ increases as *intensification* becomes ever more difficult through saturation of existing markets. It is in this manner that capitalism appears to tear down the barriers to its expansion and transgress its apparent boundaries, and the most obvious manifestation of this process is found in the sphere of circulation and exchange and the technological refinement of its capacity to deliver commodities to ‘consumers’ (Harvey, 2001: 242-3). The ‘*constant continuity*’ (Marx) in the transformation of *value*, from the commodity-form into the money-form, occurs at discrete intervals and in separate phases and so ensures the necessity of *credit* to underpin the whole process (spatially and temporally), from production to market and the recouping of value. While the ‘territorial division of labour’ (Marx) expresses the *local* nature of production in certain industries – for instance, the convenience of raw materials – population centres also encourage a *localised* ‘consumption’ of goods produced nearby: increased transport links diminish this geographical fixity, while the *de-localisation* of certain industries and processes free production from its geographical origins, for instance, the production of ‘foreign’ lagers, such as Stella Artois or Red Stripe within the U.K. Such innovations produce a

‘concentration of production and of capital at the same time as it creates an expansion of the market for realization’ (2001: 246). As Harvey states:

Capital thus comes to represent itself in the form of a physical landscape created in its own image, created as use values to enhance the progressive accumulation of capital on an expanding scale. The geographical landscape which fixed and immobile capital comprises is both a crowning glory of past capital development and a prison which inhibits the further progress of accumulation because the very building of this landscape is antithetical to the ‘tearing down of spatial barriers’ and ultimately even to the ‘annihilation of space by time.

- *ibid*: 247

This, however, is to conceive of the capitalist economy delivering goods as discrete *objects*, as tangible phenomena, rather than extending into the realm of services and experiences, as its recent historical development has indicated. The construction of an infrastructure geared towards the delivery of goods, tangible or intangible, implies a concentration of ‘social wealth’ given objective form, such as roads or railways. However, it can also extend to the fibre optic cabling of housing estates for televisual or broadband purposes – the delivery of services and possible experiences, rather than objects. This alteration to the capitalist ‘landscape’ was unforeseen by Marx and is un-discussed by Harvey, and it now serves to concentrate *access* to goods and services – whether located in regional shopping malls or the ‘pipeline’ of fibre optic cabling – upon the terrain of *modern consumption*, which it constructs, as a form of historically novel experience.

However, says Harvey (2001: 257), capitalism’s survival relies upon increased surplus value organised as private profit, therefore, the sphere of circulation and exchange must *expand* (spatially) and *intensify* (subjectively, as wants and needs). Any analysis of the spatial dimension of contemporary society requires an understanding of how ‘the “inner logic” of the capitalist mode of production, abstractly conceived, relates to the concrete realities, the phenomenal forms, of the historical process,’ and takes ‘account of the mediating influence of political, ideological, military and other structures which, although they must be generally organized so as to be coherent with the course of capital accumulation, are not uniquely determined by it’ (2001: 259). Harvey (*ibid*: 264) quotes Marx in *Grundrisse*:

The creation by capital of *absolute surplus value*... is conditional upon an expansion, specifically a constant expansion, of the sphere of circulation... A precondition of production based on capital is therefore *the production of a constantly widening sphere of circulation*. Hence, just as capital has the

tendency on one side to create ever more surplus labour, so it has the complementary tendency to create more points of exchange.

– Marx, 1973: 407-10, emphasis in original citation

This has obvious implications for the geography of the market (*expansion*), by increasing production of existing consumer goods, by disseminating ‘consumer goods’ to a new audience, and by the innovation of the commodity-form and the ‘production’ of new ‘use values’ (*intensification*). ‘Monopoly’ capitalism represents the most effective means to ensure maximum return upon capital investment through a colonisation of the sphere of circulation and exchange. However, such a monopoly, where ‘pure commodification’ pertains, threatens a ‘bland homogeneity’ (2001: 396-7) and the ceding of difference and novelty to standardization. Therefore, the market seeks to position individual commodities in such a manner that a contradiction emerges between *like* commodities: novelty as *difference* in form, function, materiality, etc is required to distinguish a particular commodity. Here Simmel’s attempt to *frame* interactions through the concept of the boundary is useful since, in its emphasis upon shared features – *typicality* – it prioritises a discussion of *form* and the aesthetic dimension of experience (Frisby, 1992: 108).

The relationship between subject and object ‘becomes aesthetic only as a result of increasing *distance*, *abstraction* and *sublimation*’ (Simmel, cited *ibid*) and this extends to the commodification of nature or one’s surroundings:

The aesthetic distance implicit in the framed landscapes of experience in mass tourism are themselves aesthetic, even if merely sublime.

– Frisby, 1992: 109

For Simmel, aesthetic distance is found in nature, the work of art and *also* in the ‘works of human beings,’ *fortuitously* arranged – by which he tends to mean old cities that have arrived at their present arrangement over centuries. Here the apparent fortuity of arrangement is mitigated by a subjective appreciation of the whole or totality that these fragments combine to reveal. As Frisby states, ‘this is the aestheticisation of a feature of modernity – fortuitousness – that transcends the contradictions of modernity’ usually through the avoidance of the historically recent elements of metropolitan life (*ibid*: 110). This confers upon experience a ‘“dream like” character’ which ‘possesses “the ambiguous beauty of the adventure that swims rootlessly in life” ’ (*ibid*), much as the subjective interaction with the sphere of circulation and exchange appears to deny the historical origins of its constituent elements. The distinction between nature, the work of art, the historical city and the modern metropolis appears founded upon the mobility of the

elements that combine to ‘form’ the whole – it is the emphasis on the movement and interaction of these elements that makes the metropolis confront subjective experience as a *dynamic* entity. As such, the aesthetic component of experience is not that of the beautiful but, rather, the sublime. For Frisby, it is ‘one of the tasks of Simmel’s analysis’ (ibid: 111) to *reveal* these forms and oblige them to undergo sociological analysis.

The dynamic aspect of the modern metropolis and its capacity for aesthetic experience, of sublimity, echoes Harvey’s discussion of a *dynamic integration* and an always proliferating productive apparatus and the ‘expanded plane’ of the sphere of circulation and exchange (and its constituent components). The ‘physical landscape’ produced by capitalism is both ‘crowning glory’ and ‘prison,’ and the tearing down of ‘spatial barriers’ is, today, achieved as readily in ‘cyberspace’ as it is by the erection of transmitters and masts to carry wi-fi signals. The modern metropolis – whether contemporary or early twentieth century – is characterized by this circulation of people, money, goods and information and contradicts the ‘illusions of a questionable *Gemeinschaft* existence’ (Frisby, 1992: 112) that underpin a bourgeois nostalgia and longing for an unchanging authenticity of experience (a *real* reality). Instead, interaction in metropolitan space resembles participation within a group, the members of whom are all strangers to each other in some degree, and in which ‘the individual is only the executor of a certain function’ (Simmel, 1950: 317). Therefore, *association* between individuals proceeds upon the basis of ‘psychological anonymity’ and other subjects appear as *objective* phenomena, and relations with such subjects are ‘based exclusively on this objective content, which is neatly factored out of the whole relation’ (ibid: 318).

Just as Baudelaire’s *flâneur* was ‘a prince always in possession of his incognito’ so, too, is the inhabitant of capitalist space where psychological individuation – through the ordering of the contents of the world (possessions) – is threatened by the ubiquity of mass-produced goods and services, by virtue of which the ego might announce itself. Simmel (1950: 335) explicitly links ‘large group dynamics’ with ‘the conditions of a money economy’ and its ‘traffic in economic values.’ Money, claims Simmel, promotes secrecy: firstly, by its ‘compressibility’ or abstraction of value; secondly, this abstraction makes nearly invisible the relations between actors, and; thirdly, its spatial reach and efficacy – and nowhere is this more evident than in the formation of the joint-stock company.

[...] the secret is a form which constantly receives and releases its contents: what originally was manifest becomes secret, and what was once hidden later sheds its concealment.  
– Ibid

Or, as Simmel observed, ‘general affairs [become] ever more public, and individual affairs ever more secret’ (ibid: 336): amongst the hubbub of modern metropolitan existence it is individual psychology rather than economic affairs that is hidden from sight, unless the psychic ‘contents’ of the individual are to be discerned in the habits and garb of ‘the consumer.’ Indeed, it can be argued that in the tasteful display of discriminating choice the inner ‘secret’ of the individual is revealed, while remaining inexplicable: one either has taste or one does not, but its possession is there for all to witness. Thus, alongside secrecy and the secret, the role of adornment and display is crucial to the discussion of capitalist space – as it becomes ‘terrain’ – and the immersion in the socio-spatial practices of *modern consumption*. With the disappearance of the bourgeois individual into the secret realm of psychology, the inhabitant of contemporary capitalism must resort to public (social rather than psychological) assertions of *identity*, through the ‘modifications’ of space by the ‘real energies’ (Simmel, 1997) of subjects: that is, in the behaviours adopted, including the relationship with objective culture epitomised by fashion. The tendency for sociological accounts of ‘consumption’ to reduce this phenomenon to ‘lifestyle’ or ‘subculture,’ rather than to address the ‘laws of imitation’ (Tarde) that seem to govern this process is merely the spatialisation of *homo oeconomicus* and his activities.

### **The ‘spaces of consumption’**

As Marx observes in *Grundrisse* (1973: 524), ‘the creation of the physical conditions of exchange [...] becomes an extraordinary necessity for [capital].’ The expansion of the economic structures that supply goods and services – and the forms of interaction with individuals, groups, classes and communities that this implies – is both geographic and experiential. The combination of the capitalist logic of accumulation and the coalescence of forms of interaction or ‘sociation’ (Simmel) between individuals, or subjective and objective culture, has seen the ‘physical conditions of exchange’ echo the expansion of the capitalist system in that it has sought the ‘annihilation of space by time’ (Marx, 1973). The ‘spaces of consumption’ and the practices they engendered, contained and nurtured appear to have bequeathed an apparent autonomy to the sphere of circulation and exchange in which the commodified products of the capitalist division of labour moved, appeared before ‘consumers’ and were appropriated and absorbed into the ‘life project.’ In fact,

nothing could be further from the truth: the ‘sphere’ of exchange was an inseparable element of the ‘totality’ (Marx) of the capitalist mode of production and the site of a gendered division of labour for both the ‘consumers’ and ‘producers’ of the nineteenth century retail experience, particularly the department store (Laermans, 1993; Miller, 1981; Ryan, 1994). The *production* of ‘consumption’ – and its spaces – mirrored the division of labour found in the factories of the industrial revolution in its rationalisation of complex tasks and the mechanisation of artisan crafts: the guild of shoemakers went the same way as that of the weavers. The ‘logic of capitalist accumulation’ (Harvey) had merely entrenched itself more deeply into the fabric of eighteenth and nineteenth century existence.

### **The Pre-history of Modern Consumption – The Arcades**

Today the arcades of northern Europe are monuments to the history of ‘consumerism,’ relics whose value lies in their antiquity rather than their modernity. These spaces, once described as ‘the original temple of commodity fetishism’ (Benjamin), and whose shop windows and show cases displayed commodities of every kind and promised the distractions of alcohol, gambling, vaudeville and prostitution (Buck-Morss, 1993: 83) now house modernity’s detritus in the form of *andenken*, or souvenirs. Louis Aragon’s description of the arcades in *Paris Peasant* (1980: 28-9) as ‘the true sanctuaries of a cult of the ephemeral, the ghostly landscape of damnable pleasures and professions’ conveys their sepulchral air and their role as a resting place for objects fallen from fashion, produced by dead labour and defunct social relations (Friedberg, 1993: 49).

...the arcade, the primal, even auratic, threshold to the dreamworld of the nineteenth century. Its entrance was a threshold to the waking dream.  
- Frisby, 1988: 210

Benjamin’s (1999) argument that the shopping ‘arcade’ or *passage* signalled the advent and threshold of capitalist modernity and its ‘dreamworld’ (see also Buck-Morss, 1993; Frisby, 1988) acknowledged its spatial concentration of experience within a historically novel architectural form. These arcades, *passages*, or *galleria* (Italy) resembled

[...] interior boulevards, like those they open onto. These passages, a new discovery of industrial luxury, are glass-covered, marble-walled walkways through entire blocks of buildings, the owners of which have joined together to engage in such a venture. Lining both sides of these walkways which receive their light from above are the most elegant of commodity shops, so that such an arcade is a city, a world in miniature.  
- Benjamin, cited Buck-Morss, 1993: 3.

Here, sheltered from the weather, the smell of the city and the sight of the poor, prospective customers strolled in search of distraction or some pleasing item; looking, lingering, but without the requirement to purchase that characterised the shops of the era. The arcade, as architectural form, spread quickly across northern Europe and displayed regional and city-specific variations upon the iron and glass theme, and came to represent participation in the cultural and economic currents of modernity (Giedion, 1975; 1995).

The arcades had existed as monuments to the Parisian haute bourgeoisie's style of life, deliberately flaunting the freedom from work discipline, the leisured use of time in the consideration, purchase and display of commodity objects. However, just as the world in which this class existed began to decline with the full impact of industrialization so, too, did the arcades begin to fall into disuse long before they crumbled physically, replaced by an other, newer incarnation of the sites and spaces of commodity capitalism. The ascension of the department store as the site in which the fetish character of the commodity assumed the quality of the dream meant that it, rather than the arcade, became the home of the commodity-form as phantasmagoria. The intimate scale of the arcades and narrow range of expensive goods, relative to the aspirations to universality of the department stores, marked them as being of their time. The crowd which the *flâneur* had followed in to the arcades had departed for the department store and he followed, prompting Benjamin to remark that in the department store the *flâneur* had found his 'last haunt' (Benjamin V. P. 562, cited Buck-Morss, 1993: 345). In doing so, however, the *flâneur* has managed to remain with us, perpetually present:

The flâneur thus becomes extinct only by exploding into a myriad of forms, the phenomenological characteristics of which, no matter how new they may appear, continue to bear his traces, as ur-form. This is the 'truth' of the flâneur, more visible in his afterlife than in his flourishing.  
- Buck-Morss 1993: 346

The arcades represent the 'spatial manifestation of a sociological fact' (Simmel): the dramatic expansion in the 'world of goods' and the sphere of circulation and exchange born of the division of labour of industrial capitalism, the expansion of European imperial adventure and the 'logic of capitalist accumulation' (Harvey): the threshold of our contemporary modernity. The fact that between 1800 and 1830 seventeen arcades were built in Paris reveals their importance to the economic and social life of the city: their coincidence of architectural form, commercial acumen and entrepreneurial investment made them 'the original temple of commodity fetishism' (Benjamin) and, as such,

landmarks to be sought out by the burgeoning tourist industry of post-Napoleonic Europe (Adburgham, 1981).

Within the arcade, those ‘little cities, microcosms of human activity, taste, desires, temptation’ (Saisselin, 1985: 26), the ‘paradoxical relationship’ between *intérieur* and *extérieur* (Frisby, 1988: 241) was played out. Here the commodity-form existed apart from, and seemingly unconnected to, the system of social relations that underpinned its production and distribution – either those of nature (the stench of the sewers, the weather) or of society (the pleas of the poor, or the threat of revolution). Upon this sheltered landscape composed of commodities – the ‘range of the seeable’ (Saisselin) or the ‘field of the visible’ (Friedberg) – an apparently autonomous ‘aesthetics of buying and selling’ (Saisselin, 1985: 19) was pioneered. Here the bourgeois individual was addressed simultaneously as both *collector* and ‘consumer’ and encouraged to appreciate the commodity-form for the visual and aesthetic impact it manifested. The exemplary participation in such displays by the *flâneur*, the ‘idler’ or ‘lounger’ who spent his day ‘distracted by the spectacle of the city’ (Saisselin, 1985: 24) led, inevitably, to the arcades. The pursuit of his solitary anti-profession – the leisured renunciation of productive labour and work-discipline – allowed Jules Janin to assert, in 1843, that ‘we shall find our man in the *Passage de l’Opera*, at the hour when the rehearsal commences, and there, he sees passing, in every kind of dress, in satin shoes, in slippers down at the heel, and even without any shoes at all, the pretty danseuses, to who glory has not yet held out her hand, filled with laces and cashmere. Lounger! That word implies everything’ (cited, *ibid*). The arcades functioned as arenas for the display of self and commodities, not as a pre-cursor to the postmodern mall, but as a space for the (re-)presentation of bourgeois selfhood.

In this miniature world, comprised of pleasurable distractions and promises of delight, both physiological and psychological, the arcades offered their inhabitants a historically novel form of experience, *nouveauté*. This was why the *flâneur*’s search for sensation and avoidance of modernity’s most terrifying aspect – *boredom* – had been centred upon the arcade, which epitomised the escape from the constraints of productive labour, the duties of the citizen, the bureaucratic administration of existence and the cares of everyday life. Within the arcade – as exemplar of the *modern* sphere of circulation and exchange – the conflation of the commodity-form and individual freedom, both psychological and physiological, was forged for those with the money to pay. The ‘freedom’ found in the public spaces of the metropolis, the tables of the casino or the arms of an arcade prostitute

promised a vertiginous immersion in sublime experience and allowed the ‘modern Tantalus’ to subordinate a quest for happiness to the search for excitement:

The more that life is regulated administratively, the more people must learn waiting. Games of chance have the great attraction of making people free from waiting.

- Benjamin V: 178, cited in Buck-Morss 1993: 104

The juxtaposition of such ‘freedom’ with the constraints of everyday existence revealed the opposition between the uncertain, exciting possibilities of ‘chance’ and its encounters and the statistical modelling of life advanced by scientific rationality (Richards, 1991; Seltzer, 1992, 2002). However, such freedom was available only to those who greeted the commodity-form as its purchaser – those allowed the luxury of choice – rather than those suffered under the exigency of necessity: for instance, in the shape of the ‘mass article’ (Buck-Morss) of the prostitute, Benjamin (1999) discerned the most extreme example of the commodity-form; love for sale.

Friedberg’s (1993) discussion of the ‘curious temporality’ of the arcade emphasises its role as a ‘space of transition’ in common with the galleria, the railway station or the ‘space’ of the promenade; it was a space of pleasure but also one of departure. By epitomising a removal or ‘interval’ (Simmel) removed from the temporal and spatial relations of the everyday the arcades served as a series of ‘elsewheres’ and ‘elsewhens’ (Friedberg). The *passage* represented a route into an *un-real* world, removed from the constraints of the quotidian, populated by ‘strangers,’ wanderers and casual acquaintances (Simmel), exotic objects and novel experiences. This was as true in the heyday of the arcades, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, when they housed the novelties of an emerging modernity as it was when, in their late nineteenth and twentieth century afterlife, they resembled museums filled with the relics of an earlier epoch. Within these ‘curious’ passages the ephemera of an emerging global economy congregated and was displayed to an inquisitive public in search of the exotic. Goods were shown in new, large windows and piled high for inspection – more artfully than in the surrounding shops, but without the strategic address to ‘staging’ that would be the hallmark of the department store.

The demise of the *flâneur*, the arcades and the markets of the poor were bound up with the re-shaping of Paris initiated by ‘Haussmannisation’ and its *modernisation* of the European metropolis: the arrival of city-centre *appartements*, wide boulevards, the *grand magasin* (or department store), urban parks and gardens, a new opera house, the dispersal of the working classes to the ‘red belt’ and the introduction of horse-drawn and steam-driven

transportation testified to the re-ordering of Parisian life with the advent of the Second Empire of Louis Napoleon. Haussmannisation, as the spatial expression of the sociological fact of bourgeois dominance, spelled the end for the mediaeval city (*vieux Paris*), banished the aristocratic indolence of the *flâneur* and dispersed the artisan class that had previously ministered to the aristocracy and the mercantile bourgeoisie. Likewise, this re-ordering of metropolitan space rendered the arcade redundant, not as an evolutionary step that was superseded but as a monument to a previous social formation that was to be overcome in the name of *progress*.

### **Palimpsest, or the ‘Haussmannisation’ of Paris**

Cosmic proportions, monumental solidarity, and panoramic perspectives were the characteristics of the new urban phantasmagoria. All of its aspects – railroad stations, museums, winter gardens, sport palaces, department stores, exhibition halls, boulevards – dwarfed the original arcades and eclipsed them. These once magical ‘fairy grottos’ that had spawned the phantasmagoria went into eclipse: their narrowness appeared stifling, their perspectives claustrophobic, their gaslight too dim.

– Buck-Morss, 1993: 92

The ‘Haussmannisation of Paris was the State sponsored destruction of mediaeval *Vieux Paris* and its replacement with the *urbanism* (Buck-Morss, 1993) of the City of Light, ‘capital of the nineteenth century’ (Benjamin). This process saw *place*, as the gradual accretion of historical ‘experience’ in physical form (as streets, statues and small-scale commercial operations) replaced by modern *space*, which was constituted by the absence of these markers of the historical process, their ‘emptying out’ (Prendergast). Palimpsest refers to the erasure and over-writing of a text, the literal up-dating or modernisation of an object – in this case, Paris in the mid-nineteenth century. Haussmannisation, as the ‘over-writing’ of *vieux Paris*, represented the social, economic and political triumph of the bourgeoisie made manifest in spatial terms. Louis Napoleon and Haussmann sought a rationally planned and administered urban environment designed to produce a populace healthy, both physically and morally, in accordance with the Enlightenment vision of Nature and its prevention of the decay so often associated with city life. The agent of civilisation was to be the boulevard, a ‘tool of social, moral and governmental progress,’ which would open Paris ‘up to air, sun, and green on the one hand and uniform administration on the other’ (Vidler, 1985: 87), in contra-distinction to the medieval labyrinth of *Vieux Paris* and the *Ancien Règime*. Haussmann’s role as the Emperor’s Prefect allowed him the financial and political power to initiate the *systematic* destruction and rebuilding of Paris, as a mechanistic unity of diverse areas or components, each with

distinct functions. This physical and spatial rendering of a confluence of ideas imagined a Paris where urban space was conceived ‘and treated as a totality in which different quarters of the city and different functions had to be brought into relation to each other to form a working whole’ (Harvey, 1985: 75) within the social relations of the capitalist mode of production.

The physical transformation of Paris had two aims: firstly, the destruction of the medieval city, and the potentially antagonistic history and social relations it embodied; secondly, to erect a fitting capital to the Imperial administration and its Enlightenment-inspired doctrine of Progress. The re-organisation of Paris through ‘the rental sorting of land to use’ (Marx) represented an attempt to eradicate the spectre of popular revolt (the proletariat) and to remove the monuments of previous social arrangements (the *ancien regime*), while announcing the political triumph of the bourgeois class. This displacement and forced relocation of both the working classes and the aristocrats of the Right Bank allowed the new public spaces of Haussmann’s Paris to emerge. These were characterised by a systematisation and abstract functionality in which the *social* relations of capitalism became determinant of *spatial* relations, through ‘a long-term management of urban space according to collectivist principles that were quite alien to the privatism of the traditional property owners’ (Prendergast, 1992: 171). Haussmann’s transformation of the spatial arrangements of Paris was, effectively, a manifestation of bourgeois fears and aspirations (Vidler, 1985) designed ‘to produce a coherent and stratified identity for modern Paris [...] essentially a city without surprise’ (Prendergast 1992: 10). However, he actually achieved the opposite: Paris came to exemplify ‘the city as a place of increasing illegibility, in which “surprise” seemed to be the order of the day, and in which “identity,” psychic and social, would come to be perceived as uncertain and problematical’ (ibid).

Imperial power, Enlightenment philosophy and the ‘logic’ of ‘capitalist accumulation’ (Harvey, 2001) had combined to produce in the ‘city of light’ a new, modern *capitalist* metropolitan space that was both a tourist destination and an inspiration to urban planners across the western world. The metropolitan spaces of London, New York, Philadelphia and, above all, Paris functioned as the site of intersecting social, economic, political and cultural networks or webs (Simmel) and the material manifestation of an expanded sphere of circulation and exchange (Marx, 1973; Harvey, 2001). The boulevards that swept through the city linking the financial district around the *Bourse* to the Assembly also ran between the *Bois de Boulogne* and *Les Halles*, circulating labour and commodities, power and pleasure just as blood circulated around the body. These boulevards ran to the new

railway stations that stretched to the sea and the new steamships which transported the goods in the new global economy. This eradication of spatial constraints (national boundaries subsumed by Imperial conquest or rationalised by tariff or free-trade agreements, eaten up by the speed of steam, circumvented by the Suez canal, or vanquished by the telegraph) ensured that Paris, like the other Imperial cities of London, Vienna and, later, Berlin, lay at the heart of a global network of circulation and exchange which, in miniature, it replicated.

The amalgam that was Haussmannisation, its conjunction of capitalism and metropolitan modernity, was founded upon the universalising of the principle of *circulation*: the mobilisation of subjects and objects, information and power and their interaction within the newly constructed spaces of Paris. Just as the longings of bourgeois hearts were expressed in the urban fabric of the city so, too, were the bourgeoisie themselves transformed by the processes that they had unleashed. The Third Republic and Second Empire forged new forms of ‘association’ – social, economic, political and cultural – which served as the tools that shaped life in the modern metropolis. Haussmann and Paris donated land while their commercial partners funded the construction work and, when necessary, credit facilities to the administration or its subsidiary commercial interests. This form of associated or finance capital paid for Haussmann’s army of workers, many of them dispossessed of their own homes by the work they undertook, equipped with pick-axe and plumb-line they participated in ‘an innovation born out of the particular structures of Empire and opposed to the traditional forms of land ownership and use’ (Harvey, 1985: 172). The operations of property speculators and joint-stock corporations *temporalised* modern space through its reformulation, as rents, mortgages and temporary investment.

The best return upon investment came from the *embourgeoisement* of previously run down areas, here new buildings or restored façades allowed increased rents to be charged, forcing out the working class in order to cater for the newly wealthy white-collar middle-classes. The geography of modern Paris came to be dominated by this ‘rental sorting of land to uses’ as city centre locations, proximity to boulevards or rail stations, even department stores increased the value of space. The exodus of the working classes from the city centre was soon mirrored by that of industry, replaced by high-yield ventures such as stock-brokers, banks and finance houses. Paris became ‘a city in which the circulation of capital became the real imperial power’ (Harvey, 1985: 174). The commodity-form and the class which governed its production mingled upon the boulevards and in cafés, congregated in *grands magasins* and promenaded along the *Bois du Boulogne*, while the

poor, the artisans and the emerging urban proletariat were relocated to the outskirts of the city and ferried back into the centre by omnibus, metro or tram as required.

This 'unification of the world through monetization and commodity exchange' (Harvey, 1985: 178) threatened to reduce metropolitan existence to the socio-spatial relations of capitalist modernity. Haussmann had sought to make Paris a community founded upon spectacle, the money-economy, and new metropolitan spaces, in which the transiency of the collective was its defining character, and to focus economic activity around these new forms of sociation. Tourism, cafés, coaches, hotels all existed to service capital and labour in a similar, though distinct, manner to the banking and finance sector, resulting in the redefinition of concepts such as land, place and space. *Anonymity*, or 'secrecy,' ceased to be the preserve of the *flâneur* and became the defining quality of the boulevards, which in their embrace of transience demonstrated a 'new anonymity of time,' so that 'in a very real sense nothing ever happens' (Rice, 1988: 13). By overthrowing the socio-spatial arrangements of the previous era Haussmannisation removed *land* – as physical space – from its role in defining psychological and social identity. 'Land,' as *place*, ceased to determine the geographical and social context of lived experience for the Parisian underclasses, the artisans or *rentier*, and for the aristocracy, to whom land had given not only their names and lineage, but also a physical connection to history. Place, as the materialisation of history and lived experience in artefacts, monuments and lived environment, was sundered from its historical origins and incorporated into the present of metropolitan modernity as *space*.

Haussmannisation emptied 'out the signs of history,' and turned place into space (Prendergast, 1992: 179) by replacing the particular with the general, the specific with the abstract. The monuments, relics and living spaces of previous eras were demolished and the historical transience to which they were testimony was denied: the Left Bank aristocrats of the *ancien regime*, who had weathered the first Napoleon were now defeated by his nephew and his bourgeois supporters from the Right Bank. The physical manifestations of history as process, as a series of social relations subject to change, were torn down and replaced by monuments to the present and its political order. The origins and historical particularity of social 'space' was effaced, as the need for rational and systematic administration of the modern metropolis was made paramount. Whereas the aristocracy had previously derived their identity, title and wealth from the *land* Haussmannisation made speculation in 'space' the source of monetary wealth. The expansion of the sphere of circulation and exchange unleashed by Haussmannisation was

now characterised by the movement of people and things, money and information around the reconstructed Paris, and the cities that learned from its example. In cafés, on boulevards, at the opera or in *the Jardins de Luxembourg* the ‘community of the commodity’ (Prendergast, 1992) took shape. In the bureaucratically sanctioned, privately run spaces of the new ‘*geometrique*’ Paris the rational and edifying rule of the straight line and systematising vision of the world ruled, yet randomness remained, indeed, flourished – and while surprise did not lurk round every corner, as it had threatened to do in *vieux Paris*, uncertainty was everywhere.

Unlike the riches derived from aristocratic estates or pre-industrial mercantile exchange, *modern* wealth was the result of speculation and commodity production. The mobility demanded by the realm of *circulation* means that metropolitan wealth ‘does not fix, root: in ceaseless circulation, it is not a “natural” extension of self, an index of belonging, an “indelible” trace of grounded being, what is “proper” to one in the sense of a “property” that is constitutive of identity and difference; rather - to speak in semiological terms - it is less an index than a sign, and like all signs, shadowed by the arbitrariness and instability that accompany a system of “representation” without secure foundations’ (Prendergast, 1992: 180). The metropolis as the site of the circulation of such ‘wealth’ and the dematerialisation it signifies becomes the terrain of ‘nomads’ (ibid: 182) and the site of a ‘transcendental homelessness’ (Lukaçs). *Identity* is unhinged from the ‘land’ and from the social relations of ‘belonging’ it implies and, instead, is signified by the signs that adorn the metropolitan ‘consumer.’ The bourgeois project of identity production is here revealed as a socio-spatial practice that depended upon the extension of market relations to every aspect of human existence. Therefore, access to and the discriminating enjoyment of the contemporary manifestation of the commodity-form is the means by which the bourgeois individual reveals his or her taste and distinction.

### **The Commodity Landscape**

Paris emerged as the site of metropolitan modernity in the wake of its transformation by Haussmannisation and the bourgeois revolution that this process embodied. This expansion of the sphere of circulation and exchange of the capitalist mode of production, and its transformation of ‘place’ or ‘land’ into a generic and abstract *space*, reveals the pre-history of the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption*. The production of capitalist space within the confines of metropolitan modernity, as the realm of *circulation*, supports Simmel’s (1950: 388) view of exchange, as the objectification of human interaction, the material embodiment of subjective values, such that ‘objective culture’ appears to possess a life of

its own. The capitalist commodity-form assumed the function of signifying values that were not born of the production process – as the medium for the, apparently, objective exchange of (inter-) subjective values, the contemporary commodity-form became a ‘language’ (Simmel) or ‘rhetoric’ (Richards) utilised in contemporary socio-spatial practices. In the form of the department store, or *grand magasin*, the capitalist ‘logic of accumulation’ and its expansion of the sphere of circulation and exchange became an *intensification* of the market, brought about by the combination of monetarised social relations and the technologies of the industrial age.

While the *grands magasins* of Paris seem to epitomise the process of modernisation and its embodiment of metropolitan modernity and the ‘spaces of consumption,’ their origins precede the Prefect of the Seine and the advent of the Second Empire. Crudely put, the department store, as a ‘social form’ (Lancaster, 1995), drew together the disparate elements of retail technology to be found in the emporia, bazaars, arcades and *magasins des nouveautés* of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. However, these truly *modern* spaces represented architectural innovation – from glass atria and display windows to the vast galleries of goods and electric lighting, escalators and lifts – and new possibilities for aesthetic effect bequeathed by these technological advances. Like the arcade before it, the department store was a form that would span Europe and expand to include the northern and eastern states of the fledgling United States during the latter half of the nineteenth century. In doing so, the department store, as a ‘space of consumption,’ contributed to the modernisation of the ‘public sphere’ (Habermas, 1979) in western Europe and north America. Its ‘democratisation of luxury’ (Williams, 1982) ensured the objectification of human interaction through the expansion of capitalist exchange relations and, also, increased access to public space – and so metropolitan modernity in general – for the women of the middle class who, for the first time, could move around the city unchaperoned (Laermans, 1993; Ryan, 1994).

### **The Modernisation of ‘Shopping’: the first department stores**

In 1824, Pierre Parissot opened *La Belle Jardinière* on the *Quai aux Fleurs*, near the Temple market in Paris, where he sold multiple pieces of ‘ready-made’ clothing in fixed sizes. In the absence of mechanized production techniques, he had instigated a rational subdivision of the cutting and preparation of cloth and adopted fixed, marked prices that lowered the costs of production in order to sell work wear to the lower classes, who did not demand the precise fit offered by tailored garments. This rationalization of the production of clothing was born of the requirement by the National Guard for a stockpile of ready-

made uniforms classifiable by size (Perrot, 1994: 53). By the mid-nineteenth century the demands made by increasing urban populations, state institutions, such as the national guard or a nascent civil service, created a mass market for such rationalised production operations, whether in France (Perrot, 1994, Benjamin, 1999) or in Britain (Richards, 1991). Meanwhile, in Newcastle, in the north-east of England, the Grainger Market was completed by 1835. This vast structure comprised four streets, which housed 243 retail units organized into alleys. Built as part of the redevelopment of central Newcastle it was Europe's first planned city-centre development, pre-dating Haussmann's Paris by twenty years (Lancaster, 1995: 8). The 1830's witnessed the opening of Kendal Milne & Co.'s 'The Bazaar' in Manchester with fixed prices, *entrée libre* and regular sales of remaindered stock sold from, by 1849, twenty-three departments.

The department store was a modern edifice which could house the masses (Giedion, 1975; 1995; Friedberg, 1993: 79-80), and was also a cultural phenomenon that represented 'a monument to the bourgeois culture that built it, sustained it, marvelled at it, found its image in it' (Miller, 1981: 3). Within its walls the intermingling of production and 'consumption,' labour and leisure, of the economic and the social took place on an unprecedented scale. This architectural expression of bourgeois modernity with its culture of the citizen-consumer as *collector* soon spread beyond Europe. In the United States of America the cities of the industrial north, especially the eastern seaboard, had, by the second half of the nineteenth century, seen drapers such as A.T. Stewart expand their business such that he was rumoured to be the richest man in New York. By the 1860s Stewart's success had been mirrored to some degree by John Wannamaker in Philadelphia, Filene in Boston, Potter Palmer in Chicago (which would become famous as Marshall Field's), and Rowland Macy, also of New York (Lancaster, 1995).

In Britain, France and America the department store's emergence was linked to the 'consumer' tastes of its largely white-collar, urban middle-class customers (Abelson, 1989; Lancaster, 1995; Miller, 1981). Within this social group there existed significant variations in both income and propensity to spend on 'consumer goods,' dependent upon job security, class position and religious denomination. Department store customers belonged largely to the white-collar class born of the expansion of administrative, commercial and professional services within an expanding capitalist economy (later studied by Kracauer, 1995) in which there was apparent an emerging tendency to utilise 'consumption goods' as markers of social identity and class membership (what we would, today, term 'consumerism'). The role of the commodity in the construction, maintenance

and erosion of social distance became central to the visual assertion of social and psychological identity (Laermans 1993: 80-2). This became all the more important when the department stores began to differentiate their wares on the basis of the social strata from which they drew their customers.

The architectural innovations of the department store revealed the supra-economic dimension to the socio-spatial practice of 'shopping' and the 'consumption' of which it was considered a part. As such, it confounded the orthodoxies of neo-classical political economy – the pursuit of marginal utility by the rational individual – and exposed the contradictions this discourse sought to reconcile – the pursuit of novelty rather than utility. Consequently, the 'shopper' or 'consumer' who inhabited the department store behaved *irrationally* in their disregard for the material construction, functional utility or 'hedonic' capacity offered by the goods sought, unless the desire for the particular item could be understood as the wish for difference, innovation and novelty of experience (*nouveauté*). The department store, therefore, promised the possibility of fulfilment for the bourgeois individual – by supplying the commodity (utility) necessary to complete their ego (identity) – while, simultaneously, dissolving this teleological project within a sublime array of *alternative endings* to the narrative project of selfhood. The desire, longing or nostalgia exhibited by the bourgeois individual, and epitomised in the figure of the collector, could no longer *cathect* with its object and the promise of completion, of totality, which this *cathexis* promised. Instead, the *habitués* of the department store found themselves among the 'representations' (Prendergast) and the 'rhetoric of commodity-culture' (Richards, 1991).

### **Duty & Distraction: Department Stores as Machines for Selling**

The nineteenth century was the age of the machine literally and metaphorically. Machine production revolutionized every aspect of life, including the retail experience for both shopper and shop assistant. Industrial production undermined the system of social relations that existed between artisan production and small-scale retail outlets leading to an increased rationalization of production, distribution and exchange. The extension of rational technology in the form of an increased division of labour altered the relationship between sales staff and the goods they sold. Staff could be paid fixed wages, hired and fired (as relatively unskilled and, therefore, plentiful labour) more frequently, and paid on a commission basis to induce greater sales. The specialisation inherent in the increased division of labour of the developing retail sector extended to the new field of window dressing and shop layout. The 1850s saw window dressing flourish in London and

‘dressers’ recognised as a distinct occupation, while the commercial utilisation of plate glass windows in Paris and the department stores of American cities after 1840 engendered a similar professionalisation of the practice (Adburgham, 1981: 96-8). This points to the increased importance of the visual presentation of the commodity form, of the display of individual commodities within particular settings and the production of these shopfloor settings as ‘spectacular’ or theatrical social spaces. The French *grand magasin* and the British and American department store symbolised the impact of industrial practices and machine production: both were metropolitan and primarily catered to the newly created urban middle-class white-collar bureaucratic and professional; both benefited from this increased customer base’s rise in income; the nascent global market fostered by innovations in transportation and refrigeration; the improvements in the industrial manufacturing process (Laermans, 1993: 80); as well as the emergent tendency to utilise ‘consumption’ of goods to define social identity and class membership (‘consumerism’).

The most telling description of these commercial operations is their description as ‘machines for selling.’ Zola invokes the metaphor of the machine to describe such shops, he characterised his fictional department store, *Au Bonheur des Dames*, as ‘a machine working at high pressure, the impetus of which seemed to reach to the very displays themselves. They were no longer the cold shop windows of the morning; now they seemed to be warmed, and to be vibrating with the bustle inside’ (Zola, 1953: 21). This machine appeared capable of animating lifeless objects and arousing human passions, seeming to feed from the human movement it induced.

[...] these passions of the street were giving life to the materials: the laces seemed to be shivering, then subsiding again [...]; the very pieces of cloth, thick and square, were breathing, exuding a whiff of temptation, while the overcoats were drawing themselves up even more on the lay-figures, who themselves were acquiring souls, and the huge velvet coat was billowing out, supple and warm, as if on shoulders of flesh and blood, with heaving breast and quivering hips.

- Ibid

Life itself appears to extend to include the previously inanimate through a *mechanics* of exchange that governs the flow of a Newtonian ‘force’ (Ferguson, 1990; Seltzer, 1992): people and things, ‘consumers,’ commodities and employees were subordinated to rules of operation, laws and timetables that governed their movements. This motive force was not be understood in terms of subjective desire but as the operation of larger, social and ‘statistical’ principles and adhered to a ‘meticulous division of labour, a super-imposition of several hierarchical levels of command, and a systematisation of the entire work process

[and] commitment to a production principle based on quantity and economy of costs and to a consumption principle based on self indulgence' (Miller, 1981: 4).

### **Infinity at hand: Department Stores & the sublime**

Architecturally the *grands magasins* were very imposing, externally and internally. Zola describes them 'as an endless vista' which could appear 'gilded with light like a town, with its monuments, its squares, its streets,' in which customers and even staff could lose themselves (1953: 10). Skeletons built of iron and glass allowed interiors to be hollowed out to reveal spaces composed of light and air, and so echo the boulevards of Haussmann's Paris. Often the iron girders of the frame supported splendid façades, which announced the luxury which the shopper should expect to find within. New York's A.T. Stewart's 'Marble Dry Goods Palace' opened in 1846 clad in specially imported Italian marble in order that it should attract its wealthy and fashionable clientele. Ferguson (1992: 29) identifies two distinctive aspects of the department store. Firstly, their 'fundamental character' is 'sheer size: it is overwhelmingly extensive' so that it 'strove to represent itself as an entire world, self-sufficient and abundant. The consumer need go nowhere else, she (less often he) could wander aimlessly in an "Adam-less Eden" drawn from one part of the store to another by the spectacle of the commodity itself, by its endless variety and its infinite capacity to replenish itself.' The department store here reveals its affinity with both the internal arrangement and architectural form of the world exhibitions, and the description of the Parisian arcades in an 1852 guidebook, which exhorted visitors to

[think] of the arcades as interior boulevards, like those they open onto. These passages, a new discovery of industrial luxury, are glass-covered, marble-walled walkways through entire blocks of buildings, the owners of which have joined together to engage in such a venture. Lining both sides of these walkways which receive their light from above are the most elegant of commodity shops, so that such an arcade is a city, a world in miniature.

- cited, Buck-Morss, 1993: 3.

The second feature identified by Ferguson (1992: 29) was the techniques of display of the commodity-form and the consequent experience of the space by the 'consumer.' The windows were 'larger, better lit and fuller of merchandise' than the preceding *magasins des nouveautés*, and these windows demonstrated an 'infinite variety of attractively displayed goods' that caught Freud's eye during his first visit to Paris... (Ibid).

Architecturally imposing and 'overwhelmingly extensive' in size and scale this 'social form' (Lancaster, 1995) bore the stamp of modernity in its hosting of an 'infinite variety' coupled to the sheer number of identical goods that mass production allowed. In the

department store the sphere of circulation and exchange found physical expression, just as the expansion in 'objective culture' had found its expression in the halls of the world exhibitions (Benjamin, 1993; De Caeter, 1993) international trade fairs (Simmel) and the new public arena it constituted.

### **The Ladies' Delight**

Department stores as 'public spaces' were the arenas in which women moved most freely in the society of Second Empire France and Victorian Britain and the role these commercial spaces played in the transformation of the public perception of femininity and the female role in society cannot be underestimated (Nava, 1997; Showalter, 1998; Walkowitz, 1992; Wilson, 1985). However, the precise effects and the causes attributable are a matter of considerable debate. While Friedberg (1993) sees the department store as a vital component in the production of an urban, modern female subjectivity, which she terms the 'flâneuse' after the male *flâneur*, Wolff (1990) denies the possibility of such a subjective position arguing that the experience of 'modernity' is a definitively male experience. This debate complicates the possibility of a coherent and unified account of the experience of modernity as anything other than a gradual accumulation of fragmentary and partial accounts which detail the experiences of particular groups over a period of time. To depart from the acceptance of the partial nature of historical truth would be to adopt a position that relied too heavily on a common-sense understanding of human action and, ultimately, to have recourse to notions of nature which are no more than class and gender bias rethought as ideology.

The analysis of women and their role in the modern metropolis provided by Ryan (1994) builds upon Wolff's thesis: that the explanation of modernity within social theory has been achieved at the expense of an account of the female experience. This is due to the desire by the nineteenth century middle-class male to position his female kinfolk beyond the 'disordered' public world in an ordered and circumscribed private realm. It was 'the assumption of the biologically constituted differences of the sexes' that determined 'the propriety of gender-differentiated behaviour, the necessity of the sexual division of labor and [...] the regulation and control of the movement of women in the city' (Ryan, 1994: 44). In large part, the respectability derived from the 'invisibility' of female members of the family was the means by which these women ensured the upkeep of their sexual reputation. In France the distinction between the '*fille publique*' (the woman of the streets) and the '*femme honnête*' (the respectable married woman) bore directly on this question of visibility (Friedberg, 1993: 36). Although, for working-class women this problem did not

arise. The importance of working-class women's income within the household necessitated that they inhabit a 'niche in the emerging urban capitalist order' by virtue of their relationship to the production process (Ryan, 1994: 55). For Ross, the rendering of the department store by Zola demonstrates its 'becoming the permissible public space for women's social interchange, replacing in a sense both the church and salon' (1991: xv). These are, of course, the spaces of social interaction through which specifically middle-class women moved beyond the domestic realm, the working class were either invisible or irrelevant. The middle-class woman's relationship with production only emerged in its final stage, as private or domestic 'consumption.' The department store was a machine for selling and it sold to *Woman*: here woman was a queen (Zola), and a devotee at a temple where she was 'both goddess and worshipper,' who sought distraction and found the commodity-form in all its new-found brilliance (Ross, 1991: xv).

The omnipotence inferred by terms such as 'queen' and 'goddess' is simultaneously undermined by woman's role as *worshipper*; this queen is addressed by objects rather than by subjects. Women were seen as credulous creatures, manipulable by the cold-hearted men who owned and staffed these stores (Ross, 1991; Laermans, 1993). Zola's Mouret somewhat poetically attributed his immense success to 'the exploitation of Woman.' The weakness of women resembled that of children (Abelson, 1989: 151), without the rational carapace of masculinity their 'weak flesh' yielded to the desires deliberately cultivated by store owners and they found themselves overcome, enslaved by the 'extravagances of fashion.' The simple act of purchase became fraught with danger and the daily excursion to provision the home became a battle with temptation. The origins of the tendency to temptation were, of course, biological. Women's menstruation and its effects, real or imagined, made their reason susceptible to bodily forces, such as biology and nature. This in-built frailty, manifest as susceptibility to outside influence, could be clearly seen in operation in the department store. The techniques of display and arrangement of commodities, the increasing aestheticisation of their design, the importance of the commodity-form in structuring the visual manifestation of social distance and difference would all play a part in the development in modern, wealthy women of the later nineteenth century of a mania for objects. This passion for possession that swamped women's reason ceased to be a crime and became a disease of the mind (Perrot, 1994; Saisselin, 1985) – physiological weakness manifested as psychological frailty.

Woman's 'natural' occupation, shopping as the provisioning of the home, assumed a pathological aspect. As participation in the commodity economy became an increasingly

important marker of social status so it assumed ever greater prominence as an indicator of female accomplishment among the middle-classes. Skilful advertising campaigns announced the modern, progressive aspect of bought goods as against the traditional, homemade and apparently inferior alternative. Values such as prudence and thrift gave way to extravagance as the department store prompted desires for all manner of goods, while beyond the store walls advertising campaigns in newspapers and periodicals, billboards and flyers conspired with the window displays which decorated the sides of city streets until virtually all public space was nothing more than a landscape of commodities (Abelson, 1989). The inhabitants of this landscape, female shoppers, with their all too delicate sensibilities began to exhibit some disturbing characteristics. While it had always been accepted that the poor would steal out of a necessity that remained criminal and immoral, the rash of department store thefts during the closing decades of the nineteenth century was explicable only through recourse to a psychological and medical explanation of woman's biology. The frequency with which wealthy and otherwise respectable women were caught shoplifting (Abelson 1989, Perrot 1994) led to the evolution of '*kleptomania*' as a medical condition in which a 'distempered imagination' caused people (women) to act in a manner they would otherwise refrain from. Women as a consequence of their biology were assumed to have, at times, a weakened rationality and, as such, a diminished responsibility for their actions (Abelson, 1989: 180-5).

At the heart of the commercial understanding of woman's psychology lay a contradiction. Women as 'good mothers' and 'good housekeepers' had a responsibility to seek out quality goods at low prices, as '*knowing* consumers'; and yet, simultaneously, they were perceived as being susceptible to seduction either by men or by objects due to their impulsive natures – their actions being governed by emotion rather than reason. 'Keen, cold-blooded males encouraged women to be what they were supposed to be, that is, "irrational," "childlike" and "thoughtless" human beings' (Laermans, 1993: 95-6). Ross (1991) discerns in Zola's *oeuvre* the characterization of women as being overly susceptible to persuasion of one sort or another, and that this proclivity for unreflective action usually occurs *en masse*, whether in a department store or a crowd scene. Furthermore, in the writings of Gustave Le Bon and Gabriel Tarde these female crowds became potentially violent hordes fuelled by a desire that had escaped rational. This, says Felski (1995: 73), is the response of an autonomous and rational masculinity that felt itself to be under threat and which, as a result, sought to demonise that which it feared. The crowd, then, as undifferentiated mass, as an entity capable of overcoming individuality of thought and action becomes antithetical to the autonomous, rational subject privileged by western thought.

Felski (1995: 77-80) goes on to argue, after Campbell (1987), that modern consumption is born of an 'insatiable longing' for 'imaginary gratifications' which, being imaginary, can never be satisfied merely transformed into repeated demands for novelty. The novelty does not reside in the tangible or physical properties of the particular commodity objects but with 'the symbolic meanings and generalized aura of desirability with which the object-as-commodity is invested' (1995: 78). Therefore, modernity as a desire-laden culture of objects threatens the discourse of rational and autonomous masculinity normally associated with artistic production that manifested itself as a disinterested appreciation, similar to Kantian aesthetics. Instead, what emerges is a never-ending process of *cathexis* between subject and object, and this process is not capable of subordination to the will but, instead, appears *superordinate* – in this way mass culture threatens to make irrational and hysterical 'consumers' of us all, mass culture as a feminine culture (Huysens, 1986).

### **For Your Pleasure: Department Stores as Playgrounds for the Eye**

While purchase was the ostensible end of a shopping trip it was by no means its sole dimension: the department store invited the shopper to stroll, over several floors, through a landscape both composed of and populated by commodities, it 'turned buying into a special and irresistible occasion. Dazzling and sensuous, the *Bon Marché* became a permanent fair, an institution, a fantasy world, a spectacle of extra-ordinary proportions, so that going to the store became an event and an adventure' (Miller, 1981: 167). 'Shopping' was understood to be as much a pleasurable leisure activity as it was the provisioning of a household: visual and tactile awareness was highlighted, surprise and novelty became essential structuring elements of the shopping experience (Wilson, 1985: 152). The layout of the stores themselves, not only their contents, changed frequently, items appeared in unexpected places, entire departments relocated overnight (mentioned by Zola's Mouret and still practiced by Marks and Spencer's). Commodities had their use or 'consumption' *staged* using luxurious sets reminiscent of theatres, or ensembles of mannequins (Laermans, 1993: 91; Miller, 1981).

While American stores sought to display goods in a European context, European stores played upon images of the exotic derived from nineteenth century notions of Orientalism and empire (Friedberg, 1993; Miller, 1981). However, it was just as likely that the displays of goods were designed so as to resemble nothing at all or, at least, nothing that was instantly recognizable as being of this Earth. For Williams (1982: 71) this meant 'anything

that expresses distance from the ordinary,' while for Talmeyr (cited by Williams, *ibid*: 72), the *grands magasins* possessed the 'unique merit, that nothing like them has been seen anywhere, that they resemble nothing! They are absurd? [...] This is also true! But their quality is precisely to be absurd, in an order of ideas where it is logical to be so, and where the only absurdity as a result is to wish to be reasonable.' The 'department stores transformed merchandise into a permanent spectacle, into a show-like theatre of commodities' (Laermans, 1993: 92) a tendency that continued into the twentieth century (Firat & Dholakia, 1998).

Amidst the splendid décor the customer wandered through aisle upon aisle of desirable objects, carried along by the throng around them (rather than individual volition). When a respite was required, sustenance craved or a task arose that might necessitate leaving the store this, too, was catered for. Macy's of New York provided writing tables and newspapers, and in 1879 opened a lunchroom, while Wannamaker's in Philadelphia possessed its own art gallery, a refreshment bar, a post office and from 1892 onwards displayed paintings from the Parisian salons (Laermans, 1993). In Chicago, Marshall Field's store offered everything from glove cleaning to photographic portraiture and spectacle-grinding. Parisian stores habitually stocked their writing rooms with the newspapers and periodicals of the day, notepaper, pens and ink used by the customers while their children were served grenadine by staff (Perrot, 1994: 61). These 'public services' were another part of the department store's arsenal aimed at denying the necessity of the outside world, the trumpeting of the store as the 'universal provider' as William Whitely of London had insisted (Lancaster, 1995: 21).

In 1897 Baum founded *Show Window*, dedicated to in-store display and considered indispensable by Gordon Selfridge. Then, in 1900, he published *The Art of Decorating Show Windows and Dry Goods Interiors* (Leach, 1989: 109-110). The first two decades of the twentieth century saw the "trimmer" replaced by the "displayman", and in-store display developed into a small department within the store's operation that could employ up to fifty people. The Americans were also first to introduce full-bodied mannequins, replete with heads, arms, hair and facial expressions, which could now assume 'lifelike' poses. This transformation in the representation of the then contemporary female form included the introduction of lifelike female mannequins into the new, larger shop windows, which broke with the tradition of 'female statuary' (Leach, 1989: 112-113). Women were now associated with individual luxury as often as they were with domestic chores, with participation in the new public space either as individuals or as representations produced

by new photographic techniques and deployed in advertising (Bowlby, 2002; Ewen, 1988; Friedberg, 1993).

Why doesn't the show window hold instead of a display – a play? A stage play. Where Mr Hat and Miss Glove are partners. The window a veritable peepshow stage. Let the street be your auditorium with its ever-changing audience. Has nobody tried to conceive plays for merchandise?

– Frederick Kiesler, cited Krauss, 2003: 125

Here the display of the commodity-form hints at the 'sex appeal of the inorganic' (Benjamin) but it is questionable whether the fusion of the animate with the inanimate – of actor and actant – ended at the store door. Instead, Kiesler, an ex-Bauhaus tutor, sought to apply the aesthetic techniques of the Expressionist *avant garde* to window displays. Minimal displays bathed in dramatic lighting effects bestowed upon commodities an importance and impact upon the imagination. The ultimate end of this process was to *associate* the goods displayed with other things and feelings, notably glamour, sensuality, luxury and stardom (Leach, 1989: 116). In the end display windows became the settings for fairy tales in which the commodity featured, visions of an alternative to the reality that the 'consumer' inhabited everyday, visions of an alternative the 'consumer' might somehow come to inhabit someday – a prospective 'elsewhere' and 'elsewhen' (Friedberg, 1993). Between 1895 and 1925 an American revolution in the 'atmospherics' of interiors took place. Goods were placed in ensembles, encouraging various purchases, the popular items along with the elevators and escalators were found at the back of the store or on the upper floors, necessitating the customer to move through the goods carefully arranged *en route*. The goods themselves were bathed in bright lights and backed by mirrors, even located within specially constructed interiors. The department stores themselves were under constant redecoration, often by classically trained artists well versed in the effects of colour. Architects, such as the one time Austrian Secessionist Joseph Urban, applied their belief in the ameliorative powers of aesthetically designed spaces to the construction of commercial interiors (Leach, 1989: 119-23), while Kiesler's assertion that 'asymmetry is dynamic' signalled an attempt to breathe life itself into the dead labour of commodities.

In the absence of affordable transportation, the views of 'elsewhere' and 'elsewhen' offered by the department store interiors were, for many, the only opportunity to experience such sights (Friedberg, 1993). These 'mythical worlds, each of equal value' resembled the theatre and the movies in that 'they saturated commodities and commodity environments with new meanings and excitements' and, in so doing, 'transported' customers into spaces unlike anything they might inhabit in the course of the everyday

(Leach, 1989: 127). This emergent aesthetic eroded the dichotomies which for so long had structured American public life: ‘luxury and necessity, artificial and natural, night and day, male and female, the expression of desire and decoration produced a radiant sensual center at the heart of American cities, attracting thousands of people who were drawn not only to commodities but also to the sensual, fluid and radiant density of the center itself’ (Leach, 1989: 132).

Just as the size of the buildings and the opulence of the façades created an immediate impression, so, too, were the interiors calculated to the same effect. The wealth and luxury signalled by the architecture had to be instilled in *every* commodity offered for sale, no matter its size or price. This process began outwith the store itself, in the mind of the ‘consumer.’ Metropolitan modernity in the nineteenth century was contemporaneous with the rise in the production of news-sheets, journals and periodicals and their appropriation by an expanding urban middle-class (Laermans, 1993; Richards, 1991). These publications were funded, in part, by the advertising of the expanding department stores, whose competition engendered innovations in the form, deploying ‘appealing catchwords, constantly repeated slogans, fictitious dialogues, unusual arrangements of type, zig-zag layouts etc’ (Richards, 1991). Adverts utilised innovations in chromolithography to make larger and more colourful posters, while postcards allowed attractive images of commodities to traverse the bureaucratic spaces of the postal network and travel far beyond their point of origin.

The interiors of the department stores appeared to be a constantly re-formulated landscape of historical and cultural fragments, whether decorative or commodified, and confronted the ‘consumer’ as *nouveauté*. Here ‘dazzling decorations, architectural adornments, fairyland lighting and, first and foremost, a sophisticated display of mostly fashionable merchandise’ (Laermans, 1993: 91) ensured that the department store most closely resembled Aladdin’s cave. This fairy-tale space, removed from everyday experience, turned ‘shopping’ into an *adventure* (Simmel) within which the ‘consumer’ was immersed.

Commodities are not arranged in a passive landscape upon which the discriminating searchlight of the ego might be turned to illuminate just those items best adapted to the “wants” of each particular customer. They constitute, rather, an active mass which overwhelms the ego, absorbs and transforms the observer, arousing in her completely new sensations.

- Ferguson 1992: 30

This 'active mass' of goods and services acted directly upon the inhabitant(s) of such spaces and, through the manufacture of 'new sensations,' reveals the affective impact of objective culture upon subjective experience. The citizen-consumer and his or her connoisseurial pursuit of discrete objects and experiences, elements in the identity-building project of the bourgeois ego, could no longer impose the distance of *desire* between subject and object – upon which appraisal and valuation depended. Consequently, the bourgeois ego, as *collector* of objects and experiences, and the teleological project(ion) of self were *interrupted* as the phenomenal forms of subjective experience – space, time and causality – were modified or, more accurately, *modernised*.

The department stores of the late nineteenth century gave spatial expression to the conjunction of the economic logic of capitalist accumulation and the aspirations of bourgeois culture and so engineered the communication of *nouveauté* through the medium of the commodity-form. However, in doing so, the *relational ontology* formed between environment and organism (Costall, 2004) transformed the relationship of 'distance' and qualitative distinction between subjective and objective culture. Rather than these 'cathedrals of commerce' (Zola, 1953), and their 'dreamworlds' (Williams, 1982) of mass culture being the highpoint of bourgeois culture and its project of the self, the department store was, instead, its high-water mark, after which this 'world view' would unravel and fragment. The metropolitan department store, as a 'social form' of late nineteenth century modernity, represented a coalescence of routines, regimes, representations and spatial practices: within these edifices shaped from iron and glass and pulsing with the power of electricity commodities acquired an aesthetic and affective dimension that they had previously lacked. The massive capital investment in buildings, labour, technique and technological innovation was directed towards the promotion of the *immaterial* aspect of the commodity-form and its insinuation into the life project of individuals and the phenomenal forms of subjective experience.

### **The (Spatial) Construction of Social Meaning**

A phantasmagoria of politics had its source in the world expositions no less than a phantasmagoria of merchandise, wherein industry and technology were presented as mythic powers capable of producing out of themselves a future world of peace, class harmony and abundance. The message of the world exhibitions as fairylands was the promise of social progress for the masses without revolution.

– Buck-Morss, 1993: 86.

The ‘promise of social progress’ was the realisation of the bourgeois world view in the forms of the built environment, whether as department store or metropolis. Within such spatial environments the confluence of ‘scopic regimes’ and representational practices forged within the arcades, department stores or boulevards were intended as the basis of new social arrangements. These, however, were not purely commercial in origin: the *re*-presentation of the objective world offered by the panorama, the ‘collections’ of museums and the narration of ‘progress’ by the World Exhibitions also conspired to teach the *leçon de choses* and the new relationship between subjective and objective culture that this ‘lesson’ signalled and sustained. In the public spaces of metropolitan modernity – epitomised by Paris after Haussmann – the traces of ‘historical experience,’ accumulated over centuries, had been swept away: the physical evidence of previous societal formations were dismantled, removed and replaced by monuments to the present and its political organisation, the emblem of which was the *circulation* of goods and people, information and money. Here the phantasmagoria of the bourgeois imagination were made material; in the panoramas of the late eighteenth century (Crary, 1995; Friedberg, 1993; Sternberger, 1977), the world exhibitions that swept Europe and North America after 1851 (Benjamin, 1999; Buck-Morss, 1993; Giedion, 1995) and the department stores of every major city in Europe and North America social relations assumed the form of *representations*.

Phantasmagorias, panoramas, dioramas – devices that concealed their machinery – were dependent on the relative immobility of their spectators, who enjoyed the illusion of the presence of virtual figures. These apparatuses produced an illusion of unmediated referentiality.

– Friedberg, 1993: 23

Unlike the arcades or department stores, such technologies relied upon a static observer and facilitated a belief in the ‘unmediated referentiality’ between the world and its representation. However, the history of the ‘spaces of consumption’ is testimony to the increased *mobilisation* of the bourgeois ‘consumer’ and the emergence of a series of socio-spatial practices centred upon bodily immersion in purpose-built environments. These environments, from arcade to department store and shopping mall, emphasised the role of *re-presentation*: that is, the increasingly *mediated* referentiality of world and representation as the result of an increased abstraction of experience. This re-negotiation of the relation between subjective and objective culture pioneered within the commercial and leisure spaces of late nineteenth century metropolitan modernity was, in fact, everywhere, albeit to varying degrees. Indeed, Crary (1995) sees a historically novel ‘perceptual paradigm’ emerge, rooted in *discontinuity* and available to experience through a ‘physiological optics’ and ‘subjectivity of vision,’ which distinguished the nineteenth century re-

presentation of ‘reality’ from its seventeenth and eighteenth century predecessors (i.e., the stasis of the *camera obscura*). Likewise, Friedberg’s (1993) discussion of the historical development of the ‘mobilized’ and ‘virtualized’ gaze – a form of ‘imaginary *flânerie*’ – in which the body ‘is a fiction, a site for departure and return,’ emphasises the immersive *experience* of spectatorship.

### **The Spaces of (Re-)Presentation**

The *re*-presentation of the world – as *representation* – through the arrangement of the ‘fragments’ of objective culture, particularly the ‘world of goods,’ no longer signalled the *totality* of the ‘collection’ (Stewart, 1998). Instead, where the *staging* of history had previously sought to portray an underlying narrative – *progress* – the *representation* of nineteenth century culture was now characterised by variety, difference and novelty. The bodily immersion in the ‘imaginary *flânerie*’ of a ‘mobilized’ and ‘virtualized’ subjectivity (Friedberg, 1993) and its ‘physiological optics’ (Crary, 1995) meant that the individual experience of metropolitan modernity became a very public affair, further complicating the relationship distinction between *intérieur* and *extérieur* (Frisby, 1988). The technologies of representation made available by industrial capitalism as part of a series of socio-spatial practices further transformed the phenomenal forms of subjective experience through the increasing abstraction of the category of value. The mediation of the relationship between subjective and objective culture through the *representations* that constituted the ‘rhetoric of commodity-culture’ (Richards, 1991) forged a ‘beachhead’ upon the ‘terrain of the self’ (ibid) by utilising the ‘representational value’ (Buck-Morss, 1993) of the commodity-form.

The ‘spaces of consumption’ of nineteenth century modernity, commercial interiors and public spaces, reveal the coalescence of certain traits that coloured subjective experience through their organisation of objective culture. The stress upon the visual form and arrangement of goods, of their display in shop windows and use in personal adornment and their ‘metonymic’ endowment with certain meaningful but immaterial qualities all served to highlight the ‘representational’ quality of the commodity-form. Likewise, the deployment of these artfully engineered strategies by ‘users’ or ‘consumers’ in the service of a consumerist project of *identity* served to disseminate these across social strata. However, the ‘constructions’ attempted occurred within a specific socio-historic context – that of the political triumph of the bourgeoisie and the economic ascendancy of its industrial and financial elements. The ‘spaces of consumption’ became arenas for the *display* of political and economic power translated into a ‘narrative’ effect: the story of *progress* and the rise of ‘civilisation’ (Elias). Within these spaces the temporal flow was

reconstituted, no longer did the past flow through the present toward the future in an uncomplicated fashion. Instead, the empty and ‘timeless’ conception of space derived from Newtonian mechanics was *de*-formed into the dynamic *field* of ‘space-time’ (De Caeter, 1993; Ferguson, 1990; Kern, 1984) as described by quantum physics: the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption*.

*Space* as the ‘vessel of people and things (and their organisation) was ‘de-formed’ into *terrain*, an ‘active mass’ (Ferguson, 1992) constituted from its components. Upon this ‘terrain’ the ontological relationship between subjective and objective culture, between organism and environment, departed from the model of Cartesian dualism, epitomised by the ‘collector’ who ‘narrates’ the order of the word (in miniature) through the *collection*. Newtonian space had been the backdrop for the events of the panorama, Enlightenment curiosity cabinets and shops that were browsed by shoppers – in short, the locus for dis-interested contemplation that Kant assigns to aesthetic experience, particularly that of the beautiful. Upon the terrain of *modern consumption*, however, the subject no longer surveys a panoramic landscape composed of discrete objects conjoined for aesthetic effect. Instead, the observing subject is, itself, an active ‘ingredient’ in this intoxicating mix (as can be seen from Abelson’s (1989) account of female thievery). Space ceased to be a neutral and affect-less phenomenon that simply provided the location for events. Rather, ‘space’ became a component of a *relational* terrain that emerged from the interplay of (inter)subjective and objective culture and the possible *relational* ‘affordances’ (Costall, 2004) that arise within the ontological relationship between organism and environment.

### **From Space to Terrain**

The ‘spaces of consumption’ had been Newtonian, organised around a rational subject empirically observing and evaluating their contents – born of the same philosophical anthropology as *homo aeconomicus* – in accordance with the *panoramic* ‘landscape’ of the bourgeois world view and the ‘consumerism’ it implied. However, the commercial refinement of techniques aimed at enhancing aesthetic experience of the commodity-form, its *affect*, meant that the subject – the putative ‘consumer’ – could no longer stand apart from and observe the ‘spaces’ they inhabited. ‘Lived experience’ (Minkowski, 1970), as the phenomenal forms of subjective experience, was now demonstrably inseparable from the material factors that constituted its apparent ‘context.’ For the ‘spaces of consumption’ this meant that the *here-and-now* of everyday experience and its juxtaposition to the ‘elsewhere’ and ‘elsewhen’ (Friedberg) promised by the department store could no longer be conceived of as an ‘either/or’ proposition. On the contrary, this was now a relational

‘narrative’ of departure and return. The ‘beachhead’ upon the ‘terrain of the self’ forged by the ‘rhetoric of commodity-culture’ (Richards, 1991) can now be viewed as evidence of the demise of the bourgeois world view and its conception of the ‘alienated’ subject, qualitatively apart from the world around it.

Instead, the ‘rhetoric’ produced by the commercial culture of late nineteenth century metropolitan modernity must be seen as part of the *relational* interweaving of people and things, experiences and practices, that constituted the terrain of *modern consumption*. Here the ‘space-time’ of subjectivity is born of the physiological immersion within the ‘active’ (Ferguson) socio-spatial environment of metropolitan modernity and its stress upon affective intensity. Consequently, the terrain of *modern consumption* – as a socio-spatial phenomenon – is both the historical outcome of the logic of capitalist accumulation (from arcade to department store, shopping mall and internet) and a relational experience born of the meaningful ‘affordances’ that exist between subjective and objective culture, between organism and environment. This terrain, therefore, constantly re-inscribes the sociological experience of the *boundary*, and the subjective relation of *distance* and *differentiation*. This ‘quite unique interaction, in which what is significant is the interactions woven on either side of the boundary’ (Frisby, 1992: 105), stresses the particular (and contingent) organization of ‘space-time’: that is, its *contents*, or ‘affordances.’

The *boundary* should no longer be considered a purely *spatial* phenomenon, rather it is a ‘space-time’ event that is defined by the forms of sociation it contains, and is possessed of both a material and an immaterial component that are experienced as a subjectively affective phenomenon. The affective terrain of *modern consumption* is the continuous (re-)generation of the ‘boundary experience’ within the context of metropolitan modernity, where a ‘continuous and un-definable *overcoming*’ and ‘radical uprooting’ of the metropolis occurs, leading to an ‘uprooting from the place (as a place of dwelling) connected to dwelling’ (Cacciari, 1993: 199).

It is as though the city were transformed into a chance of the road, a context of routes, a labyrinth without center, an absurd labyrinth. [...] the uprooting significance of this explosive radiating of the city. [...] the Metropolis appears as the great metaphor of the calculating intellect devoid of all ends, whose *Nervenleben* (life of the nerves) is immersed in the succession of equi-valent cases. The architecture ‘without qualities’ of the Metropolis – a conscious image of fulfilled nihilism – excludes the characteristic of the place; in its project, every place is equi-valent in universal circulation, in exchange. Space and time are arithmetically measurable, detachable, and reconstructible.

The historical transformation of the built environment has resulted in the modern metropolis being considered as the site of the experience of alienation and ‘transcendental homelessness’ (Lukaçs), defined against a bourgeois conception of an ‘authentic’ or ‘concrete’ historical experience (*Erfahrung*) accumulated as *tradition*.

The boulevards, parks, triumphal arches, department stores and winter gardens of Haussmann’s Paris, which set the pattern for modern metropolitan ‘space,’ were purchased at the expense of a historically constituted *place* born of tradition. In these arenas dedicated to the ‘community of the commodity’ (Prendergast) the empty and uniform ‘Newtonian’ space was filled with new forms of bourgeois interaction. Modern forms of administration (Weber), financial association (Harvey, 1985; 1989) and disciplinary control of the populace (Foucault, 1995; Seltzer, 1992) emerged to animate these lifeless ‘*geometrique*’ spaces (Baudrillard, 1989; De Cauter, 1993; Ferguson, 1990). In denying historical contiguity the nascent industrial bourgeoisie sought to monumentalise their political and economic ascendancy: in *spaces* emptied of the signs of historical process (place) this class prophesied the end of the teleological pursuit of *identity*, individual and societal. Within these ‘spaces of consumption’ would be found the objects required for the realisation of the bourgeois subject; the individual ego refined through the exercise of discriminating taste. In denying both tradition and revolution these spaces appeared to Benjamin to signal ‘(t)ransiency without progress, a relentless pursuit of “novelty”,’ not ‘progress’ but its ‘direct counter-part,’ – ‘Modernity, the time of Hell’ (Benjamin, 1999; Buck-Morss, 1993; Frisby, 1992: 181).

The conjunction of metropolitan modernity and the capitalist ‘logic’ of accumulation that led to the terrain of *modern consumption* signalled the end of the bourgeois world view, its faith in progress and the pursuit of happiness through the rational and utilitarian calculations of *homo æconomicus*. Just as the spatial distinction between *extérieur* and *intérieur* disappeared with the ‘spaces of consumption’ so, too, did the ontological distinction between subject and object – and with it went the secret interior ‘space’ of the psychological individual to be discerned in the exterior arrangement of tasteful commodities. The ‘lesson of things,’ first gleaned in the arrangements of objects in nineteenth century exhibitions and ‘dreamworlds’ have become an intrinsic part of the contemporary commodity-form, the ‘rhetoric’ and representational value of any commodity-object is now part of the mass media ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption*. The

‘spaces of consumption’ had threatened to become rooms without roofs, but the terrain of *modern consumption* has surrendered its walls (and with them the bridges and doors discussed by Simmel) in favour of the fluctuating form of the *boundary*.

### **The Subjective *Space* of ‘Consumerism’**

In the ‘spaces of consumption’ the autonomous subject of bourgeois philosophy had been schooled in the socio-spatial practices of ‘consumerism,’ the doctrine of progress and had sought ‘the pleasures of mastery over an artificially constructed world, the pleasure of an immersion in a world not present’ Friedberg (1993: 28); a world composed of possibilities in accordance with the will. Both space and time were organised around bourgeois desire as a ‘distance’ to be overcome, either by the money-form (Simmel, 1990) or scientific rationality (Ferguson, 1990), the media for the realisation of a ‘longed for’ (Stewart, 1998) *identity*, or totality. The role of the arcade, the department store, and the shopping mall or internet store was the annihilation of spatial distance through its *temporalisation* (Marx) in accordance with the capitalist logic of accumulation (Harvey, 2001). However, this is still to consider contemporary modernity within the conceptual framework of the ‘bourgeois world view’ and its associated terminology of ‘consumer,’ ‘consumerism’ and ‘consumption’ as the means to realise the project of identity (*ego*). To do so would be to forego the opportunity to re-evaluate the role of the human being, the phenomenal forms of subjective life and the ontological framework.

Upon the terrain of *modern consumption* at the heart of metropolitan modernity, however, the autonomous subject-as-consumer ceased to exercise dominion over the world of objects. Instead, in the ‘quasi-linguistic’ ‘rhetoric of commodity culture’ (Richards, 1991) such a conception of the subject had found its dissolution, as it failed to provide an Archimedean point from which to survey the objective world (history). In *modern consumption* the subject is obliged to assume *relational* form, as a locus for the coalescence of various ‘informational’ *flows* (see Dodd, 1994; Massumi, 1993; 2003) rather than Newtonian exchanges of ‘force.’ Consequently, the bourgeois project of *identity*, which underpins ‘consumerism,’ is antagonistic to the experience of the terrain of *modern consumption*. It is the technologies and practices of aesthetic affect, pioneered in the ‘spaces of consumption,’ which ultimately gave rise to such a *terrain*: ‘*la leçon de choses*’ had promulgated a stress upon appearance and the visible form of objects as the basis for the communication of ‘novel experience’ (*nouveauté*) through its embodiment in the commodity-form.

The structures that had housed this historical process had emerged alongside the discourse of ‘shopping,’ home to the socio-spatial practices that supported the bourgeois project(ion) of *self* and the pursuit of *identity* through the discriminating exercise of taste and distinction (‘lifestyle’). Here the bourgeois ego is its own *cause*, generating the ‘self’ through the appropriation and manipulation of commodity-objects on the basis of their semiotic content (meaning). The ‘theological problem’ of the commodity-form, its embodiment of the metaphysical category of ‘value,’ tackled in the world exhibitions (Richards, 1991) highlights the ‘representational value’ (Buck-Morss) of the commodity-form in the negotiation of such an identity project. The construction of the ego through the management of the world of goods and services is taken up by Seltzer (1992) in his discussion of the literary *re*-presentation of subjectivity, and the stylistic shift from shift from Realism to Naturalism. The ‘possessive individualism’ of the bourgeois self, born of ‘market culture,’ was focused upon the project(ion) of the ego through the artefacts of ‘consumer culture.’ The ego ‘managed’ the externalised *re*-presentation of ‘self’ by utilising the world of goods found in the new commercial spaces of metropolitan modernity.

The conversion of the masses into human beings (the mass production of individuals in mass culture) here links the desire for personhood with the demand for consumption and the demand for consumption with the demand for culture itself.

– Seltzer, 1992: 129

Realism depicted this attempt at ‘self-resemblance’ through a display of subjective autonomy revealed by the appropriation and management of the objective world. This described the management of the ‘interface of vision and embodiment figured as a violent exchange [...] between the body and the machine’ (1992: 106) and a ‘making conspicuous of the body’ through the *material* modification of the ‘consumer *body-in-the-abstract*’ (1992: 63)

Seltzer’s analysis of American Naturalist fiction discerns the replacement of an individualist ‘consumerism’ by a Foucauldian ‘disciplinary practice’ and the depiction of a culture in which events, actions and persons are reduced to ‘sheer physicality or materiality,’ while ‘bodies, individuals and the “natural” itself’ are abstracted into statistical or diagrammatic representation. This ‘dematerialized materialism’ or, after Stephen Crane, ‘transcendental Realism’ (1992: 14) describes the dissolution of the *self-generating* ‘possessive individualism [of] market culture’ and the emergence of ‘*dividualism*’: the comprehension of the body as the *spatialised* site of a series of ‘paths

and crossings' or 'relays' between subjective and objective culture – a point of *interchange* rather than the *ur-sprang* of the autonomous individual. Consequently, the *soi-distant* or secret psychic *place* (rather than space) of the ego disappeared within the 'disciplinary individualism' of 'machine culture' and its discursive formulation of an *equivalence* between person and personation. The *disciplinary* individual inhabits 'a double process of abstraction and embodiment' that sees the body become the locus for a 'field of practices' best understood through 'case histories of bodies, sexualities and populations' (1992: 43). Instead of the Realist 'prosthetic' extension of the subjective will, through the appropriation of the 'world of goods,' the Naturalist position reveals the 'intimate correlation,' the 'miscegenation' of body and machine. This combination of subjective and objective culture saw the *leçon de choses* incorporated within the 'disciplinary practices' of modern subjectivity and captured in the representations of Naturalist fiction. This effacement of the distinction between interior and exterior, echoed the transformation of 'public' space, particularly the 'spaces of consumption,' made material by Haussmann.

The marriage of the capitalist 'logic of accumulation' (Harvey) and bourgeois 'enlightenment' philosophy was expressed in the transformation of the built environment that underpinned the emergence of modern metropolitan space. Here the commercial refinement of strategies for emphasising the aesthetic impact of the commodity-form (representational value) at the expense of a denotative functional utility came to resemble a process of formal and visual *evolution*. However, the economic imperatives that fuelled this 'evolution' should not be disregarded; in the apparent naturalisation of 'consumer society' a historical transformation began, the consequences of which are still being experienced today. The historically novel relationship between subjective and objective culture heralded by the advent of metropolitan modernity ensured the demise of the 'bourgeois world view' (Ferguson) and its theory of the psychological individual. The 'lived experience' (Minkowski) of metropolitan modernity and its associated ontological framework necessitates a sociological engagement with the phenomenal forms of subjective experience and the 'terrain' upon which this distinctively modern *form* of experience occurs.

### **Contemporary 'consumption'**

Today's conjunction of metropolitan modernity and the contemporary capitalist mode of production appears far removed from the arcades, department stores and world exhibitions of the nineteenth century, and equally distant from the re-organisation of Paris orchestrated

by Haussmann and Louis Napoleon in conjunction with the financial and industrial factions of the bourgeoisie. In a world where city streets possess ‘Global’ video stores, twenty-four hour shops and ‘metro’ supermarkets the ubiquity and easy attainability of the commodity-form seems to make the ‘spaces of consumption,’ described above, appear anachronistic, even fantastic. As commodification has coloured ever-more aspects of everyday existence the pursuit of particular commodities in specialised locations threatens to become ludicrous, unless it occurs in the vast clearing-houses of Ikea, Wal-Mart, Amazon or E-Bay. In an era of catalogue shopping, telephone banking and keyboard clicks the ‘spaces of consumption’ seem to be *everywhere* and *everywhen* while offering everything imaginable, their previous exotic allure rendered *blasé* by ubiquity. The vanquishing of ‘distance’ performed by the arcades, department stores and exhibitions – in tandem with a logic of capitalist accumulation that sought the ‘annihilation of space through time’ (Marx) – on behalf of their patrons is now a mere fact of existence with, for instance, cuisines of innumerable cultures available to your door.

Today much is made of ‘consumer choice,’ the range of goods, services and experiences available to the moneyed classes, and yet more is made of the ever-more unlikely, increasingly novel and straight-forwardly improbable *forms* that such ‘consumer’ choices assume. Mail order brides, antiquarian relics and virtual components for on-line gaming experiences vie with trips to Disneyland to consort with over-sized cartoon characters, ‘romantic’ getaways to African safaris or the soon-to-be-available ‘space tourism’ reached from the north of Scotland as potential purchases in a world where the fantastic threatens to become prosaic. In contemporary culture the existence of virtually any commodified object, service or experience is not in doubt, only *access* to it remains to be negotiated, whether temporally, spatially or financially. The sphere of circulation and exchange discussed by political economy has become a debate about *distribution* and the means by which customers and commodities are conjoined. In a world of ‘consumers’ and their rights *access* to the commodity-form threatens to become the precondition of a whole and healthy existence, a belief that contemporary capitalist organisations are in no hurry to challenge. The twentieth century’s contribution to the history of the ‘spaces of consumption’ was the shopping mall, which sought to gather an array of prospective ‘consumers’ under one roof through a marriage of economic acumen, cheaper prices and greater choice, and bourgeois nostalgia for the high-street of yesteryear.

For the twentieth century the final transformation from the ‘spaces of consumption’ into the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption* occurred with the proliferation of the shopping mall.

In the twenty-first century the omni-presence of what Gronow & Warde term 'ordinary consumption' has helped to focus attention upon the fleeting and experiential practices more often associated with tourism. Recent discussions of contemporary 'consumption' practices have highlighted the *un-real* aspects of 'consumer' behaviour and its motivations. 'Consumption' is now discussed as comprising its 'ordinary' component – dealt with at Boots, the local Spar or car boot sale – and an altogether more exotic element, which involves visits to heritage sites, murder-mystery weekends (Rojek, 1993), 'fantasy city' tourism or visiting an 'urban entertainment destination' (Hannigan, 1998). They move forward in time to the shopping malls of today (Bauman, 1992; Ferguson, 1992; Lehtonen & Maenpaa, 1997; Shields, 1991; 1992) to the 'non-spaces' of 'supermodernity' (Augé, 1999) and the postmodern playgrounds of Disneyworld and Las Vegas (Gottdiener, 1997; Ritzer, 2001), beyond physical space itself into the virtual terrain of cyberculture (Luke, 1999; Sassen, 1999).

### **The Shopping Mall, Fantasy Cities and other Non-Spaces**

The shopping malls of the second half of the twentieth century were, coincidentally, interior *extérieurs* and did possess roofs. Just like the arcades of two hundred years before these were privately owned spaces and seemingly open to all who wished to walk down their wide aisles, but as with the *passages* some visitors were more welcome than others. The 'disciplinary' control of bodies in public spaces was nothing new (Foucault, 1995; Seltzer, 1992; 2002) but the emergence of 'the mall' as 'the quintessential postmodern play-space' Slater (1997: 192) required the rationalisation of labour and services, concentrations of capital and public/private partnerships that far exceeded those of Haussmann's municipal programme. It took post-Fordism, the restructuring of the global economy, in conjunction with a larger 'postmodern transformation' of the city, shifting the emphasis from industrial production to service and entertainment based consumption, to usher in the era of the malls (Slater, 1997: 202). In their origin malls were an American phenomenon, beginning in Southdale, Arizona in 1954 and developing throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. Judt (1998: 317-26) sees the changing retail environment of Europe and the U. S. as resulting from a re-negotiation of the relationship between the city centre and its suburbs and governed by patterns of car ownership. The greater mobility offered by the automobile had to be traded against traffic jams and the search for parking, never mind the spectatorial pleasures discussed by Friedberg (1993). Malls set out to lure customers prepared to 'browse' rather than simply shop, enticing them with the 'perfect' range of shops under one roof that the gradual accumulation of 'mainstreet' could not match (Judt, 1998: 333-6).

Shopping malls, importantly, cater to more than shoppers and house a variety of socio-spatial practices, which, although they may have their roots in the flâneur strolling through the arcade, have evolved into contemporary forms of behaviour and become the object of academic study. The ‘time-geography’ outlined in the previous chapter stresses the varying modes or forms of interaction between subjects and objects (Jackson & Thrift, 1995: 214-5) and the socio-economic surroundings within which interaction occurs. This has led studies of ‘consumption,’ especially those of Shields (1992), to focus on the socio-spatial context and their further relation to economic and historical forces in the formation of the socio-spatial practices of ‘consumers.’ As a result the relationship between time and space, of movement, understood as the speed at which sociation occurs emerges as a determinate element in the forms of social interaction. Jackson & Thrift characterise such forms of interaction as involving ‘co-presence,’ yet which are not ‘intimate’ and which, consequently, possess the character of ‘the *encounter* rather than the planned meeting’ (1995: 215, emphasis added). The ‘profoundly ecological’ nature of time-geography is aimed at registering the ‘momentary thereness’ of ‘interrelated presences and absences’ (Hagerstrand). Equally, Falk & Campbell (1997) draw upon De Certeau’s (1984) concept of ‘walking rhetorics’ to engage with the socio-spatial practices associated with contemporary consumption, particularly shopping (1997: 9), such forms of participation implying a link with the visual habits of the *flâneur*. As an interior *extérieur* the shopping mall, as a *social form*, abrogates a variety of socio-spatial practices that might otherwise exist beyond it, on the street or in the city centre (Falk & Campbell, 1997: 10).

Alongside the shopping mall other social spaces of the sphere of circulation and exchange of capitalist modernity were developing. The post-Fordist restructuring of the global economy (Harvey, 1989) combined with a ‘postmodern urban condition’ (Dear, 2000) to facilitate the emergence of the ‘fantasy city’ (Hannigan, 1998), reached through the ‘non-place’ of supermodernity, the airport (Augé, 1999). These new modern metropolitan locations, New York, Las Vegas, Los Angeles or London, were the destinations of choice for up-market tourists indulging in short ‘city-break’ excursions hoping to soak up the atmosphere of an exotic location in a few days without the disruption caused by a prolonged absence of the creature comforts that city-living bestowed. And, in order to reach these locations the ‘postmodern’ tourist was obliged to tarry a while in the *non-place* of the international airport having travelled hundreds, possibly thousands, of miles to occupy a structure more or less exactly like the one just vacated. These portals between ‘elsewheres’ and ‘elsewhens’ are the result of the same systematising and rationality as the

department store and the shopping mall, and are identical to the rational framework that underpins the irrational and spectacular appearance of the ‘themed environment’ (Gottdiener, 1997) or the ‘new means of consumption’ (Ritzer, 2001). These elaborately constructed aestheticised spaces, epitomised by ‘lifestyle’ stores such as NikeTown, employ the ‘principle of the phantasmagoria’ to overwhelm the occupants of the sites and spaces of modern consumption (Leach, 1999: 44). Spectacle exists to compensate for the alienation and boredom endured in work, consumption and production are, as Marx asserted, moments in the same totality, as a result:

... distraction as a form of leisure-time entertainment becomes the complement of a working day filled with meaningless repetition. [...] Distraction becomes a form of business.  
– Leach, 1999: 77

Leach here echoes Simmel’s (1997) *Infelices Possidentes* (Unhappy Dwellers), those metropolitans seduced through the eye by the city’s splendour and sensual distraction into a state of being in which life has ‘become terrible, fearful and tragic’ and ‘recreation and play [are] become satyr-like, orgiastic and sensually intoxicated’ (ibid: 260). From the earliest arcades through the panoramas and world exhibitions and along the boulevards to the department store, arriving in the shopping malls, themed environments and non-places of post-modern urbanism or a supermodernity that has eviscerated the historical markers of place, the participants in ‘modern consumption’ have occupied specifically designed spaces aimed at denying the ‘rationality’ of need and utility, and fuelling the fires of desire and fantasy.

### **From Space to Time: the adventure in the playground**

The concluding section of this chapter outlines Simmel’s (1997) contribution to a sociology of space as the analysis of the forms of social interaction which colour and characterise the phenomenal experience of the spatial, effectively defining it into existence: ‘space in general is only an activity of the mind, only the human way of connecting sensory impulses that are unrelated in themselves into uniform interpretations’ (1997: 138). Therefore, the investigation and description of modern consumption becomes the analysis of the *experience* of sites and spaces of the sphere of circulation and exchange by their inhabitants.

### **The Commodity Landscape**

From the department store and its ‘pre-history’ in the arcades, or *passages*, and the World Exhibitions to the nascent metropolitan modernity of Haussmann’s Paris and on to the

shopping malls of the contemporary world, the *spatiality* of ‘consumption’ is fundamental to its description and analysis. The historical emergence of the ‘objective realm’ and the sphere of circulation and exchange, which were demonstrably absent from accounts of ‘consumption’ in the previous chapter, are at the heart of *modern* ‘consumption’ practices. The sites and spaces of this ‘realm’ or ‘sphere’ themselves contribute to its apparent autonomy and its unification through the money-form as the seemingly ceaseless flow of the exchange of values. In contemporary culture the sphere of circulation and exchange seems to extend itself into every aspect of existence, facilitating colonisation by the commodity-form of the ‘terrain’ of the modern self (Richards, 1991) as well as the ‘networks of power’ (Sassen, 1999) of digital space. Where Benjamin saw the inhabitants of modernity surrounded by phantasmagoria in the ‘dreamworlds’ (Williams) of ‘consumption’ it is now a staple trope of science fiction to have the commodity-form invade the dream-space of sleeping or day-dreaming individuals. ‘Consumption’ throughout the modern period has encompassed ‘otherness,’ exoticism and tourism, at its heart has been the promise of an exotic alternative that can be understood temporally as novelty, *nouveauté*, (even when that novelty is premised upon the experience of antiquity), and spatially as a distance from the mundane, a removal from the everyday. The ‘elsewhere’ and ‘elsewhen’ that Friedberg (1993) attributes to the virtual and mobile subjectivity of the (post)modern spectator is the inheritor of this modern tradition. The spatialisation of History, in the panoramas and world exhibitions, and its re-presentation as novelty in the form of commodity-signs communicating *progress* (De Caeter, 1993) demarcates an attempt to embody novelty, to present the *unpresentable* (Agamben, 1993; 1999; Lyotard, 1992). The same logic and rhetoric underpins the task of representation undertaken by commodity-signs within the contemporary landscape.

### **Going to the Mall?**

By describing modern consumption through the spatial metaphors of ‘landscape,’ ‘terrain’ and environment it is possible to avoid the distinction between interior and exterior, *intérieur* and *extérieur*, that has characterised much of the literature, allowing discussion of extensity without depth that captures the ‘depthless surface’ of postmodern culture and its ‘simulations.’ The positing of a physical boundary demarcating ‘spaces of consumption’ from spaces that are *not* those of consumption would be to deny the active participation of human agents within the course of their own lives, surrendering them to the determinist exigencies of spatial phenomena. Instead, the constraints upon forms of sociation and interaction are more likely to derive from the private owners of these quasi-public spaces or from their employees. Miles (1998: 59-64) sees in shopping malls a problem of control,

the privatisation of the spaces of previously public activities such as economic exchange that can be traced back to the Greek *agora*, and of the homogeneity that accompanies control expressed as rationalisation in the Weberian sense. The problem of control becomes the problem of articulating an individualism through which one can discern a personal identity. The resulting consumerism, while appearing to provide some form of ‘escape’ from ‘real life’ does not, largely because consumerism is such a fundamental facet of this ‘real life.’ Miles’ example is Disneyland/Disney World, which has been ‘imagineered’ to instantaneously remove its inhabitants from the real world, thereby giving its ‘consumers’ exactly what they appear to seek: escapism. By problematising reality such spaces offer a ready solution in the form of participation in their *illusion*, thus satisfying a ‘desire to consume the inauthentic in an increasingly simulated world’ (ibid: 64-6). Through such controlled illusionistic power, says Corrigan (1997: 181), ‘contemporary urban space [is] made safe for postmodernism’ through the abolition of classification and hierarchical distinction – once again the commodity-form becomes both medium and marker of social distinction, linking, through the human body and its experience of the spaces of consumption, *being* and *having*.

The experience of the spaces of consumption, physiological and psychological, demands that its analysis approach ‘shopping both as practice and as physical sites’ involving ‘a double perspective; one which, on the one hand, thematizes shopping in its “original” economic role, and, on the other, places shopping in the broader context of public behaviour and public places. The former perspective ... [recalls] the variety of shopping practices and sites which existed before the contemporary shopping centres and malls... The latter perspective should thematize the “genealogy of the (urban) public space”... especially... recent changes which have led to the contemporary shopping sites’ (Falk & Campbell, 1997: 10). Developing this, Falk (1994: 177) attempts to situate the ‘visual dimensions of shopping’ within the wider urban experience of public, usually leisure, spaces through an analysis of the different scopic registers (Lacan) and regimes (Metz) that such ‘street scenes’ support. The street is ‘not only a linear space of transportation’ but a ‘complex of dynamic spatiality... constituted as an *experience* through the movement of the body and eyes of the passers-by: the *flâneurs*...’ The street functions as an ‘experiential space’ facilitating a variety of ‘walking rhetorics’ (De Certeau, 1984) that function as ‘spatial narratives’ distinguishing between public and private spaces and the appropriate bodily and scopic behaviours. This leads Falk to theorise ‘recreational shopping’ (1994: 178-182) in which purchase has a ‘marginal role’ as ‘mere potentiality’ facilitating ‘other experiential dimensions of shopping’ and the pleasures that they offer –

such ‘shopping sites,’ department stores or shopping malls, actually offering a leisured relief from the ‘(over)stimulated urban milieu’ (1994: 183). Falk’s analysis implies a shopping for use, and utility, outlined earlier and its location *within* these ‘spaces of consumption,’ however, just as the *flâneur* met his end in the department store so, too, does such a set of shopping practices and their scopic equivalents cease to be defined by a particular bounded conception of space. Modern consumption has been liberated from three-dimensionality and possesses as many dimensions as it has ‘connections’ (Latour, 1996). The ‘space of consumption,’ the sphere of circulation and exchange, does not exist solely in ‘real’ space but also in the abstraction of technology and information and the ‘subjective apparatuses’ (Guattari, 1995) of its inhabitants.

Ritzer (2001: 189) approximates this in his discussion of the ‘new means of consumption,’ displaying a debt to Debord, Vaneigem and the Situationist critique of the ‘spectacle’ in labelling shopping malls ‘distribution factories’ serving the ‘heightened unity of the spectacle,’ through which the ‘spectacle’ is ‘building its own society within the walls of [such] shopping malls and other new means of consumption.’ The ‘new means of consumption’ (drawn from Marx, *Capital* Vol. II) represent ‘the evolving integration and rationalization of the spectacle’ – these [s]hopping malls, cybermalls, superstores and theme parks, among others, compete as elements of the dominant fraction of the spectacle’ (ibid: 190). Ritzer also sees the separation of certain spaces and sites of ‘consumption’ as important, citing cruise-ships and Las Vegas casinos (2001: 184) and links this to Disney’s theme parks and, more intriguingly, Celebration, the Disney sponsored and ‘imagineered’ town in Florida (discussed by Ross, 2000). In doing so Ritzer points up an interesting contradiction: just as the information superhighway, world-wide-web and wireless telecommunications revolution promise to link everyone and everything in a ‘connected’ world built upon the ceaseless flow of information certain spaces seem to deny such integration, and remain *soi-distant*, even as they draw upon these very technologies for their existence and form. Ritzer’s post-war chronology of the ‘new means of consumption’ (2001: 108) ties spaces such as McDonald’s franchises, shopping malls, cruise ships and casinos, ‘Eatertainment’ venues such as the Hard Rock café, theme parks and television shopping networks together through technological innovation. Such sites and spaces appear to be integral elements within the same system (arguably, the society of the spectacle), joined through information processing technologies such as the money-form (Dodd, 1994; Simmel, 1990), credit cards (Ritzer, 1995) and increased global mobility. The spectacle, then, is erected upon a very rational technological edifice and at its heart is a certain enchantment or distraction of its inhabitants as they ‘visit’ its spaces.

### **Themed Spaces...**

While locating ‘the total commodification of interior space during the 1920s and ‘30s’ Gottdiener sees this process extend itself to environments, both interior and exterior, after WWII (1997: 141). From restaurants themed by nationality or region to Las Vegas casinos and their hotels, from the Mall of America by way of Disneyland to late-twentieth century airports Gottdiener discerns the ‘theming of America’ and, by extension, the world as the coming-together of two processes: firstly, the construction of material environments within which people interact; and, secondly, these spaces being themed through the use of signs, symbols and motifs made meaningful by their role within popular culture. The ‘symbolic content’ of such spaces colours the user’s experience, usually pleasurably, over and above the specific activities participated in (ibid: 4-5). The emergence of such spaces throughout the late-twentieth century Gottdiener attributes to mass advertising and market segmentation in the service of semiotic consumption (ibid: 9-10). Just as ‘store environments... are but an extension of television, magazine, and newspaper advertising,’ so ‘the creation of themed environments as the envelope of commercial activity helps resolve the central economic concern regarding the link between commercial venues and our themed culture that is supersaturated by symbols or images’ (ibid: 70). Themes are marketing appeals that ‘connote’ something to the ‘consumer’ beyond the denotative function of the space they are occupying and the specific activity being undertaken, often for the purpose of entertainment but such environments, crucially says Gottdiener, are ‘*simulations* of substantive symbols’ and ‘*fundamentally* disconnected from the use-value of the commodities with which they are associated’ (ibid: 75-6).

Gottdiener plainly sees such decorative excess over function as extraneous, a superfluity that misleads or distracts ‘the consumer’ through its disregard, or marginalising, of the denotative function of the commodity and its utility. The description of the world’s largest shopping environment (ibid: 85), *The Mall of America*, outside Minneapolis, Minnesota centres upon its size (4 million square feet), the variety of shopping (400 shops) and entertainment options available, from eateries (45) to nightclubs and a theme park recalls the department stores as described by Ferguson (1992) and Benjamin (1999) more readily than it does the metropolitan airport with which Gottdiener compares it (1997: 91). While both rely upon a mass market and the technological innovations of the late-twentieth century for the use and operation of their interior spaces the shopping mall and airport remain distinct entities – although Disney did advise United Airlines on the design of their Chicago terminal (ibid: 93). Airports and shopping malls are similar in their highly

rationalised, systematic division of labour and the services that this delivers process enormous numbers of ‘transactions’ daily, both architectural forms centre upon service and retail operations housed in publicly used but, usually, privately owned or operated interior spaces utilising a language or ‘rhetoric’ based upon easy, direct and mass communication. Gottdiener (ibid: 99-100) distinguishes between malls and casinos because the former prioritises commerce and merchandising over entertainment while the latter promotes its ‘ludic’ and ‘entertainment spaces, with merchandising as a secondary function’ with the ‘fantasy themes’ connoted by the décor invoking exotic ‘elsewheres’ from Pharaoh’s Egypt to the Wild West of ‘Glitter Gulch’ in the same manner as the nineteenth century department store had Africa or the Orient (Friedberg, 1993).

These themed playgrounds are fun:

They entertain. In addition, they provide visitors with definite and enjoyable contrasts to their daily lives. Much of this experience is the result of re-creating an urban-style environment in a safe and nonthreatening but also very commercial atmosphere. The theme park as developed by Disney and others also offers people sharp contrasts with the constraints, regimentation, and normative burdens of their everyday existence. [...], and even mouse ears can be worn without suspicious reactions from others.  
– Gottdiener, 1997: 114

Participation in these spaces assumes the form of an ‘event’ or adventure (Simmel, 1959), nostalgically evoking a childhood innocence and freedom from care, an escape from adulthood through commercially facilitated play. Inhabitants of such spaces are transported ‘over the rainbow,’ to a series of ‘elsewheres’ and elsewhens’ that allow the enjoyment of the ‘othering’ of oneself, experientially, temporally and spatially – an other ‘self’ free from and ‘beyond’ anxiety.

### **... and non-spaces**

Beyond the seemingly hermetically-sealed environs of the shopping mall and themed playgrounds lie the streets of the major metropolitan areas that such spaces always approximate lying, as they do, within easy reach of their prospective inhabitants. And, just as the boulevards existed in symbiotic relationship with the *grands magasin*, so, too, do today’s pedestrian arenas exist alongside the mall. At the heart of this relationship is the ‘tourist experience,’ an increasingly prominent aspect of modern life linked to ‘consumer activity’ (Lash & Urry, 1994; MacCannell, 1976; 1992; Rojek, 1985; 1993; Urry, 1990;) from its earliest origins (Shields, 1991) and sharing a technologically enhanced evolution (Schivelbusch, 1987; 1995) that extends as far as an imagined ‘America’ (Baudrillard,

1989) and ‘hyper-reality’ (Eco, 1986). The modern metropolis as tourist destination is described by Hannigan as a postmodern ‘fantasy city,’ an ‘urban entertainment destination’ rooted in ‘tourism, sports, culture and entertainment’ (1998: 2). Themed, branded, open twenty-four/seven, modular (offering the same chains as other UEDs), solipsistic (in its separation from the larger urban or metropolitan fabric) and ‘postmodern’ in its use of simulation, virtual reality and ‘spectacle’ and often favouring renovated urban fabric, such metropolitan spaces resemble theme parks and malls as closely as they do cities (ibid: 6-7). Expensive to inhabit even for short city-breaks these ‘fantasy cities’ resemble postmodern playgrounds for up-market ‘consumers’ inhabiting a global economy. They emerged from former industrial strongholds, such as Philadelphia, Boston and Baltimore, and their formula has been adapted for European cities such as Glasgow, London’s Docklands and Bilbao: a mix of public and private investment centred around post-industrial enterprises, often artistic, cultural or sporting, and followed by renewal of derelict industrial buildings, either refurbishment or gentrification resulting in the relocation of the existing inhabitants unable to afford the new rents (Hannigan, 1998; Zukin, 1982; 1987; 1995).

In 1996, in New York, Nike opened the first of its NikeTown stores. Built on the site of a former European-style department store, *Galleries Lafayette*, this innovation in retail space symbolised the continual evolution of the shopping space in western culture. The convergence of shopping and entertainment in ‘lifestyle stores,’ such as NikeTown or, more recently, Donna Karan, continues and extends the spectacular element at the heart of modernity. Nineteenth century department stores were ‘cathedrals of commerce,’ which evolved to become the shopping mall and the early decades of the new millennium will be coloured by the relationship between the spaces of ‘experiential retailing’ and the brand names that build and operate them. New York’s NikeTown is located within a *faux* reconstructed gymnasium from the American 1930s or ‘40s. The interior is ‘a high-tech cross between a store, a museum and a media experience’ (Hannigan, 1998). Using short films ‘celebrating the spirit of sports’ and banks of video screens showing scores and sporting information the visitor feels themselves at the heart of a dramatic environment, constantly assailed by events as they unfold.

The museum aspect is represented by scattered exhibitions, showcases displaying sports trophies and memorabilia and a Nike shoe museum with 400 pairs of shoes which have been gathered over the years. The retail element of the store is muted: one can buy Nike products at Nike Town but the store exists primarily to promote brand recognition.

NikeTown finds its echo in every site purpose built for the contemplation of commodities and their ‘consumers.’ Just like the theme pub or sports bar, commodity-signs characterise such spaces, authenticate and legitimate them by implying a longevity and durability that people can and should put their faith in through the act of purchase, through their involvement in the sphere of consumption. Equally, the products sold in such flagship retail environments must be loss making (loss leaders), but it is not surplus-value that is at stake in such spaces. The notion that the consumption of goods and services is based upon the rational calculation of needs and their most efficient satisfaction, a dubious premise at best, is here given the lie. Rather, these spaces are about the experiences that the ‘consumer’s’ presence affords: they are destinations, sights to be seen, rides to be taken and thrills to be sought. The ‘lifestyle’ stores of major branded goods are spaces of consumption within the sphere of circulation and exchange that offer up the experience of modern consumption distilled to its essence – they offer up the possibility of a vertiginous thrill made possible by the cybernetic amalgam of man and machine in technological harmony. If as Friedberg (1993) believes the ‘virtual’ and ‘mobilized’ spectator is the *subject* of modern consumption then the mode of *transport* adopted is neither car nor plane, it is not escalator nor rollercoaster it is the ‘apparatus of subjectification’ made possible by the technologically enhanced physiology of modernity and the occupation by this body of certain spaces within the physical manifestation of the sphere of circulation and exchange of capitalist modernity.

### **Conclusion: Back to Our Endless Lives**

The historical and material processes that have deformed space into the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption* have also played their part in transforming the subjective experience of capitalist modernity. The phenomenological forms of subjective experience, spatiality, temporality and causality, have transformed the relationship between people and objects, between *actants* (Latour). The *spatialisation* of time and *temporalisation* of space can be considered part of the production of a specifically modern and capitalist space in which the concept of physical boundaries or thresholds has become ever-harder to fathom as they have assumed immaterial form.

The uninterrupted transformations of materials as well as energies brings everything into relationship with everything else and make one cosmos out of all the individual elements. On the other hand, however, the objects remain banished in the merciless separation of space; no particle of matter can share its space with another and a real unity of the diverse does not exist in spatial terms.

- Simmel, *Bridge and Door* ([1903], 1997: 170-1)

The *production* of a capitalist conception of space (Harvey) has been the ‘deformation’ of Newtonian ideal or empty space, which has been described sociologically by Simmel. The marriage of ‘space’ and capitalist modernity and its logic of ‘accumulation’ must be understood as the outcome of a series of historical processes, aesthetic strategies and economic planning. It has become a space of ‘circulation’ in which subjects and objects combine in differentiated ways, across time and space. Consequently the subjective experience is that of space-time in which values circulate as if freed from their origins in production, signs distinct from their referents.

When one sees Las Vegas at dusk rise whole from the desert in the radiance of advertising, and return to the desert when dawn breaks, one sees that advertising is not what brightens or decorates the walls: it is what effaces the walls, effaces the streets, the facades and all the architecture, effaces any support and any depth, and that it is this liquidation, this reabsorption of everything into the surface ... that plunges us into this stupefied, hyperreal euphoria that we would not exchange for anything else, and that is the empty and inescapable form of seduction.

- Baudrillard, *Absolute Advertising, Ground-Zero Advertising in Simulacra and Simulation*, (1994: 91-92), cited Leach 1999: 70

Baudrillard highlights the aesthetic dimension to capitalist modernity and the manner in which the experience of *modern consumption* is best understood as the foregrounding of the aesthetic dimension of subjective experience, as pioneered within the department stores and developed on high streets, advertising hoardings, TV sets and in shopping malls around the world. Upon the terrain of *modern consumption* the psychological calculations of utility imputed to the ‘consumer’ by economic theory are exposed as inadequate. Instead, the collapse of the bourgeois world view, its dissolution through its spatial and temporal deformation, has transformed the subjective formulation of being; the subject has become a ‘site’ for the *possibility* of experience. Consequently, the concept of space and the language utilised in the description of spatial experience inherited from bourgeois culture have failed to describe the ‘modernisation’ of subjective experience precisely because of the inherent economic logic of capitalist space and the interactions it has ‘housed.’

The production of the experience of *modern consumption* within capitalist modernity requires for its analysis a sociology that acknowledges the role of historical process and the participation of both human actors and inhuman actants in their mutually defining networks (Latour). Such ‘collective apparatuses of subjectification’ describe certain

‘fundamental paths/voices [voie/voix]’ (Guattari, 1995: 18) and invoke particular historical lineages that extend to:

the invention of new materials and energies, new machines for crystallizing time and, finally, to new biological technologies. It is not a question of infrastructures that directly condition collective subjectivity, but of components essential for a given setup to take consistency in space and time as a function of technical, scientific and artistic transformations.  
– Ibid: 21

By extending Latour’s theories of ANT into the individual psyche through the ‘collective apparatuses of subjectification’ it is possible to efface the metaphysical distinction between subject and object, interior and exterior that so exercised Baudrillard through the 1980s (most notably in *Fatal Strategies*, (1990a) in English). It also becomes possible to include among the ‘apparatuses’ invoked by Guattari the role of the sites and spaces of modern consumption and the practices located within these. In this way the distinction between the subjective, inner, space and the objective, outer, space fails and the boundary or limit-point that the human body has historically represented is overcome. Subjectivity is, therefore, rooted in the experience of space as is the experience of temporal duration, which will be examined in the next chapter.

## Chapter Four: New Times

Playland is a country whose inhabitants are busy celebrating rituals, and manipulating objects and sacred words, whose sense and purpose they have, however, forgotten. And we should not be amazed if, through this oblivion [...], they free the sacred, too, from its link with the calendar and with the cyclical rhythm of time that it sanctions, thereby entering another dimension of time, where the hours go by in a flash and the days are changeless.

– Agamben, 1993: 70

### Introduction

Accompanying the transformation in spatial experience born of capitalist modernity and its socio-economic structures was a similar ‘revolution’ in the experience of temporality.

Inevitably this complicated the understanding of the *modern* subject and the formulation of the ‘biographical fiction of the self’ and its teleological project of improvement (Ferguson, 1990). Alongside the rational, utility-calculating ‘consumer’ forged from the marriage of economic theory and Enlightenment philosophy there appeared a ‘playful’ subject, given to caprice and seemingly free from an internalised desire for self-improvement. This chapter charts the emergence and dissemination of the behaviours associated with this new subject of *modern consumption* and, in particular, the foregrounding of aesthetic experience, rather than economic calculation or utilitarian urges, as the motive for social engagement and participation in the capitalist consumption-relation. Crucially, this requires a consideration of the historically novel strategies capable of narrating subjective experience that emerged with the onset of capitalist modernity, especially the fate of ‘experience’ as it had previously been understood.

‘Modernity,’ as a self-conscious break with the idea of the past, implied either new, modern phenomena to be experienced, or a ‘modern’ form of experiencing, in addition to – and possibly born of – the novel experiences afforded by the technology of the age. Therefore, modernity, as an interruption of continuity and tradition, appeared to sever the historical link to both the *forms* of experiencing available to inhabitants of an earlier era and formulate new *contents* for modern form(s) of experience. For many this was a deleterious eventuality and prompted a distinction between historically concrete and authentic experience (*Erfahrung*) and an individuated and inauthentic shock-experience (*Erlebnis*), which persists to the present day. Indeed, for Benjamin, this was the ‘paradox of modern experience,’ which rendered ‘experience’ *inexperientible* by leaving it inaccessible to conscious recollection and imprinting it upon the body, in a form of physiological register that could only be recovered indirectly, accidentally or through

oblique strategies (such as psychoanalysis). The nostalgic impulse at the core of this longing for ‘authentic’ experience, somehow denied to the inhabitants of capitalist modernity, is revealed as a – literally – backward-looking response, more usefully understood as a means to sell luxury goods to wealthy clientele in search of ‘the real’ (which, all too often, is located amidst the poverty and deprivation of others).

Rather than re-assert such nostalgic conceptions of authentic or ‘real’ experience, to be recovered by the privileged classes, this chapter seeks to outline an alternative conception of subjective experience made available to those obliged to inhabit the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption*. Here the failure of the bourgeois ego – despite the ideological efforts expended in promoting its participation in contemporary capitalism as ‘consumer’ – necessitates a re-consideration of the contemporary subject and the forms of phenomenological experience afforded by the commodity-form within capitalist modernity. This process begins with the rejection of the Germanic bifurcation of experience into a ‘historical’ and a modern, or an authentic and an in-authentic, formulation. Instead the multifarious *forms* of experience and their incorporation into the ‘subject’ of *modern consumption* must be traced, both the process of their historical emergence and their consequences for the comprehension of contemporary capitalist modernity. Specifically, this requires an analysis of the forms of temporal experience and their role in the constitution of the modern subject as these forms are tempered, mediated and ‘afforded’ by an inescapable entanglement with the capitalist commodity-form.

Modernity and the experience of the modern, *modernité*, emerge in contradistinction to previous eras:

Modernity is a form of historical time which valorizes the new as the product of a constantly self-negating temporal dynamic. [...] which] by producing the old as remorselessly as it produces the new, and in equal measure, it provokes forms of traditionalism the temporal logic of which is quite different from that of tradition as conventionally received. Both traditionalism and reaction are distinctively modern forms.

– Osborne 1995: xii

The temporal dimension of modern experience arises within the relation between the subject and the objects of *modern consumption*, thereby revealing the role of the commodity-form in the constitution of *modernité*. The previous chapter dispelled the notion that the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption* was a landscape composed of passive and inert objects, commodities, which were only animated by the desire of ‘consumers.’

Instead, this ‘terrain’ is a fungible and dynamic topography, a surface upon which space and time cease to be distinct and more closely resemble the *space-time* described by quantum physics (Ferguson, 1990), and which implicates the observing subject in the events under observation. Therefore, the production of modernity, as the interruption, of tradition and continuity, is also the means by which its experience, as *modernité*, is born of discontinuity, of hiatus and caesura.

This leads Charney (1998) to reject the conception of time as an empty form, denuded of its contents (the material of experience), and, therefore, the medium through which the *absence* of experience is ‘experienced.’ In place of the convenient antinomy of *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* Charney posits the idea of ‘drift’ interrupted by ‘peak moments’ of aesthetic experience understood as ‘self-awareness.’ Crucially, this formulation circumvents the either/or logic of polar opposites, such as those that underpin the ‘paradox of the modern,’ because it is the juxtaposition of the seemingly ‘empty’ drift that is the precondition of the convulsive moment of attention and involvement. Subjective experience, therefore, most closely resembles the narrative forms of cinema and the technique of montage, where meaning is produced through the juxtaposition of elements which produce and communicate difference. Such an appreciation of the ‘narrative’ form in which phenomenological experience arises within contemporary culture, when freed from the material constraint of the cinematic apparatus and its linear (teleological) mechanical operation, allows a re-consideration of the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption* as the space-time topography upon which *modernité* occurs.

The temporal ‘experience’ of *modern consumption*, therefore, is that of discontinuous ‘peak’ moments, delineated against a background of seemingly empty subjective ‘drift,’ upon a ‘terrain’ composed of commodity-events that can only arise or occur when *triggered* by the participation of the subject. Rather than the teleological project of the bourgeois subject and its logic of personal improvement or ‘progress,’ the experience of the subject of *modern consumption* appears ‘playful,’ even arbitrary, and born of the limitless possibilities of engagement with the commodity-form. In this respect, the ‘experience’ of *modern consumption*, as a moment of concentrated attention and awareness, comes to resemble modern conceptions of the sublime:

[...] the moment of encounter [for]ges a sublime moment in which the subject would be transported by intense evanescent feeling. The sublime moment generally occurs as the ‘spark’ produced by an unexpected moment of encounter; the unexpectedness heightens both

the intensity and the ephemerality of the sublime response. Stumbling [...] across an unanticipated configuration of elements, the subject is without warning seized by acute feeling that fleetingly removes him or her from the drift of daily experience.

– Charney, 1998: 109

Such a ‘moment of encounter’ arises not from the rational and utility-maximising cost/benefit analyses of the ‘consumer,’ attempting to compare like to like, but, instead, emerges from the ‘co-presence’ of the subject and the object of its attentions, from their mutual participation and constitution of an ‘event.’ The event, however, is always and resolutely *unpredictable*, just as it is always imminent, immanent and potential – because its precondition, the commodity-form, is everywhere. Importantly, the ‘event’ or encounter, as a form of experience, is neither authentic nor inauthentic, it is *immersive* and transformative, inasmuch as it modifies or alters the subject. This reveals the explanatory power of the term *modern consumption* and the paucity of ‘consumer theory,’ which imagines commodities as props for the staging of identity (see Seltzer, 1992). *Modern consumption*, by accepting the dynamic nature of the consumption-event and its power to *modify* the individual, its key temporal and narrative aspect, links *being* to *having* even if the majority of ‘encounters’ remain unrecognised, at the level of ‘drift,’ and unavailable to consciousness (in the manner of ‘shock-experience’).

*Modern consumption*, then, can be considered to consist of both ‘drift’ and ‘peak moments’ (Charney) but the encounters upon which these are predicated are, themselves, reliant upon the ubiquity of the commodity-form in contemporary culture. The commodity-form comes to serve as the medium for the transmission of ‘experience’ as well as its precondition. The relationship between *being* and *having*, which constitutes the subject, arises under the material conditions and historical circumstances of contemporary culture and the capitalist mode of production. Massumi (1993; 2003) has investigated the consequences of this state of affairs in his discussion of the ‘accident-event’ and the ‘landscape of fear.’ Here discursive concepts and conventions – the understanding of ‘human’ or ‘individual’ – overlap with the material conditions of contemporary capitalism to structure ‘affective experience’ and its consequences for the subject and the formulation of identity. Within this framework, ‘being’ is reconsidered, as *becoming*, and the notion of a stable self or identity that characterised earlier social formations, such as post-Enlightenment bourgeois culture, is rendered untenable. Patently, then, for Massumi, there can be no teleological project of the self, no ‘consumer’ lifestyle to be constructed in the manner posited by sociological theories of ‘consumption.’

Rather, for Massumi (1993), the subject-position and capitalist commodity-relation are ‘isomorphic’ and the *dividual*, rather than individual, emerges as the form of ‘being-singular’ within contemporary capitalism, while, at the same time, this form is uncommon (it is not shared by others), it is the experience of singularity *in extremis*.

The product, ultimately, is us. We are in-formed by capitalist powers of production. Our whole life becomes a ‘capitalist tool’ – our vitality, our affective capacities. [...] our life potentials are indistinguishable from capitalist forces of production. [...] the ‘subsumption of life’ under capitalism.

– Massumi, 2003: 12

Consequently, ‘the individual’ as understood by social, economic and political theory is rendered redundant; it has been undone by contemporary social, economic and technological conditions. In its place there emerges a *species* possessed of ‘only one living specimen’ produced through the ‘double movement’ of *simulation* and *fabulation*’ and underpinned by participation in the contemporary capitalist consumption-relation. Consequently, Massumi’s conception of being-as-*becoming* is revealed as resembling the relation between *being* and *having*, which, this thesis argues, lies at the heart of contemporary forms of subjectivity. The contemporary subject, the inhabitant of the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption*, is constituted by a ‘hinged’ relation (Massumi) between *being* and *having* and the experience of its temporal dimension is as ‘becoming,’ as a dynamic unfolding and constant transformation (rather than the rational, linear and teleological pursuit of a stable ‘identity’).

The role of the commodity-form within this process is vital and usually over-looked (because it is perceived as the location of desirable objects, which may or not be fetishised, that will simply be chosen by ‘consumers’). Instead, the commodity-form must be understood as a *constituent* element in the ‘encounter’ between human subject and commodified object (service or experience), without the commodity-form – in its current, *modern* formulation – there would no ‘encounter’ of the kind described by Charney, no possibility of ‘sublime’ experience and no modification of the relation between *being* and *having*. The commodity-form, as the site of the communication of the experience of novelty, *nouveauté*, and of the experience of contemporary capitalist modernity, as *modernité*, possesses an ‘affective potential’ (Massumi, 2003) that directly contributes to the phenomenological forms of subjective experience, including the experience of temporality. Therefore, this chapter seeks to demonstrate the historical, material and technological processes that have brought this to pass and to determine the consequences

of these processes through an analysis of the forms of experience *afforded* to inhabitants of the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption*.

### **Considering *modernité***

*Modernité*, as the experience of modernity, is the experience of temporality defined in opposition to an apparent continuity, it is the phenomenological experience of *rupture*, defined in the conjunction of space and time. Thus, modernity is the experience of *space-time* understood as the opposite of all other, alternative temporal or social formations, whether those of Antiquity visited in the tours organised by Thomas Cook, bourgeois Enlightenment or the exotic ‘other’ colonised in the name of imperialism or global capitalism. *Modernité* was the experience of ‘fragments’ and was epitomised by the fleeting, fortuitous and contingent nature of metropolitan experience (Baudelaire) and expressed through technological modernisation and a variety of aesthetic modernisms (Frisby, 1988; Kern, 1983). Speed and instantaneity, the hallmarks of metropolitan modernity and its phenomenological experience, assumed the form of ‘suddenness’ (Bohrer, 1994), the interruption of historical or narrative continuity already identified at a societal level. *Modernité*’s phenomenological distance from all other social formations and their organisation of experience (Osborne, 1995), such as the rituals associated with ‘primitive’ society that allow the comprehension of duration, transition and the passage of both group and individual history (Elias, 1992: 8-11), is the absence or interruption of tradition and traditional forms of experience (*Erfahrung*). This, claim Fritzsche (2002) and Stewart (1998), manifests as *nostalgia* for the past, for ‘nature’ and a pre-lapsarian nominalism, in the face of the contingency of *modernité*. Modernity’s self-conscious immersion in a ‘new time,’ or *neue zeit* (Koselleck) that, bereft of *telos*, is experienced as an eternal present in which each moment possesses no more significance than any other – except in its quantitative determination as duration and intensity (Agamben, 1993; Deleuze, 1991). Bourgeois culture replaced the circular and directionless concept of time possessed by classical Antiquity and the linear temporality of Christianity – that ran from Creation to Apocalypse – with the logic of development, of *Progress*. Modernity now threatened such a temporal schema, and the experience of ‘time’ became that of an interior duration, a subjective phenomenon apparently distinct from the external world.

The modern concept of time is ‘a secularisation of rectilinear, irreversible Christian time,’ divorced from its eschatological concerns in which the ‘representation of time as homogeneous, rectilinear and empty derive[d] from the experience of manufacturing work and is sanctioned by modern mechanics,’ and leads to the ‘experience of dead time

abstracted from experience, which characterizes life in modern cities and factories' and its emphasis upon the empty, homogeneous instant (Agamben, 1993: 93-6). History had once implied Salvation or Utopia, some form of Progress towards a *telos*, however, Agamben sees, in modernity's eternal present, a movement away from the sacred world of 'myth' and ritual, towards one in which 'play' becomes the pre-eminent mode of experience: 'In play, man frees himself from sacred time and "forgets" it in human time' (1993: 70). *Forgetting*, as the absence of historical memory, is the inhabitation of a world without philosophical 'foundations' (Nietzsche) or '*grands narratives*' (Lyotard, 1984, 1992), a world composed of the experience of the present. Modernity's apparent break with 'history' and tradition in the late nineteenth century saw the emergence of 'a sociology of modes of experiencing modernity' that allowed the modern to co-exist alongside the traditional or older forms of social organisation. Frisby (1988: 13) observes that Tönnies' distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* was not exclusive; rather 'that *Gesellschaft* "is only a transitional and superficial phenomenon" which one goes into "as into a *strange country*".'

### **Paradoxical Modernity**

For most theories of modernity and 'consumption,' the experience of 'playland' is that of a world in which the *rites de passage* are replaced by the 'empty, homogeneous moment' (Benjamin): the experience of modernity as a 'qualitative category' (Adorno), as *modernité*. The stroller on the boulevard, Benjamin's 'modern Tantalus,' is free to patrol this 'sphere,' the 'autonomous' realm engendered by the money-form, where all experiences – gambling, purchasing a prostitute, *flânerie* or shopping in the *grands magasins* – are defined by their *intensity* and *duration* as pleasure (*Erlebnis*), rather than the 'experience' that they confer as a contribution towards maturity and its companion, death (*Erfahrung*). *Experience* is fragmented into the 'shock-experience' of modern metropolitan existence its intensity and duration registering upon the body (kinaesthesia) and rendered unavailable to conscious recollection or communication (Abbas, 1988; Agamben, 1993; Benjamin, 1999). The world of *modern consumption*, as a 'playland,' complicates the possibility of memory and, consequently, identity and the narration of experience: duration and intensity, boredom and excitement become the *quanta* and *qualia* of experience.

The 'paradox of the modern,' the impossibility of 'experience' in its traditional forms, and the translation of the phenomenological forms of subjective experience into the 'inexperientible' (Agamben, 1993) means that it is registered physiologically (Abbas,

1988; Agamben, 1993; Benjamin, 1999; Hetherington, 2003) and is ‘participated’ in as ‘drift’ (Charney, 1998). In a culture whose ‘eternal present’ is removed from the *progress* of linear history there can only be temporal intervals of varying duration, these *events*, episodes or ‘adventures’ (Simmel) are the correlate of the ‘peak’ or ‘de-familiarizing’ moment juxtaposed to the experience of the ‘empty moments’ of the ‘drift’ of subjective experience (Charney). In the playgrounds of modernity, apotheosised in Tokyo (Barber, 2001), it is bodily, rather than cognitive sensation, which is the locus of experience. This ‘shock-experience’ serves as the predicate for a phenomenological study of contemporary culture and the centrality of the consumption-relation to any account of modernity. The eye ceases to be *the* conduit for modern experience (as impression) and, instead, becomes part of a kinaesthetic canvas upon which *vertiginous* experience impacts. *Modern consumption* requires a phenomenology that can incorporate the *inexperiencibility* of modern ‘experience,’ specifically its failure to be absorbed within the teleological narrative of biography.

### **From ritual to work, rest and play**

Time is now currency: it is not passed but spent.

– Thompson, 1967: 61

The emergence, refinement and subsequent spread of the clockwork mechanism and its adoption by the productive enterprises of industrial capitalism facilitated an irredeemable quantification and abstraction of the labour process that helped shift productive activity from the ‘task’ oriented work patterns of the ‘natural’ rhythms’ of agrarian or non-industrial societies to the ‘work-discipline’ of industrial manufacture and the development of the wage-relation. It was no longer labour or even labour-power that was offered in exchange but labour-time: time was abstracted, commodified and offered for sale. The control over time that its money price afforded was the vital spark which fuelled the ‘consumer revolution’ beloved by sociologists and historians of ‘consumption.’

Agricultural labourers who ‘irrationally’ traded disproportionate amounts of a season’s wages to purchase pocketwatches as markers of status (Thompson, 1967: 63-9; Glennie, 1995) simply echoed their more fortunate employers, who purchased mantle clocks, in incorporating the regularity of ‘clock-time’ into the personal rhythms of the everyday.

The emergence of the ‘age of the clock’ unified previously distinct practices within an advanced division of labour, incorporating specialist tasks into the synchronisation demanded by the factory system and its machine-governed work rhythms, and minimising

interruptions due to the vagaries of Nature. The rationalisation and regularity of both the opportunities for employment and the tasks that comprised paid-labour sat at odds with the culture of artisan production and the seasonal fairs and religious holidays that had previously been observed. The gradual process that was capitalist industrialisation was an uneven and contested progression that sought to impose an increasingly formalised system of constraints and procedures upon those that fell within its ambit. The clock became an agent, or ‘actant’ (Latour), in the promulgation of capitalist relations and their attendant disciplinary practices and an opportunity for non-utilitarian expenditure, an example of the seemingly ill-considered freedom that the wage-relation conferred upon its adherents. Time and work-discipline are, therefore, of necessity, linked whether in the spread of capitalist industrial work practices (Thompson) or the role of schools, prisons and hospitals in the ‘disciplining’ of bodies within the civic spaces of the emerging public sphere (Ferguson, 1990).

The literal incorporation of the labouring classes into the regimen of industrial capitalist society was neither uncontested nor uniform, nor was it a purely economic series of events. The refining of the techniques of organisation of the division of labour accompanied, at each step, an appreciation by those involved of what was at stake, forms of resistance and the rewards for participation (Thompson, 1972). The adoption of watches and clocks as indicators of status and social rank by the capitalist proletariat indicates that they were happy to enjoy the fruits of their waged-labour long before Henry Ford made this his explicit aim.

The first generation of factory workers were taught by their masters the importance of time; the second generation formed their short-time committees in the ten-hour movement; the third generation struck for overtime or time-and-a-half. They had accepted the categories of their employers and learned to fight back within them. They had learned their lesson, that time is money, only too well.

– Thompson, 1967: 86

The distribution of the surplus created by the division of labour and the freedom to enjoy this surplus as desired has always rendered a discussion of ‘consumption’ political. Time, in becoming a commodity, is acknowledged as a scarce resource possessed of an opportunity cost. For, just as ‘clock-time’ signalled the adherence to a particular bodily regime, both in and out of the workplace, so, too, it announced a capacity to quantify both one’s own labour and the labour of others that appeared in the form of commodities. The sacrifice of time in production allowed its expenditure in ‘consumption’ (Cross, 1993), the money-form’s role as a store of value guaranteed this (Simmel, 1990), and the extension of

the money-form to include in its embrace every aspect of life allowed the relationship between time and value to permeate existence.

By the 1830s and 1840s it was commonly observed that the English industrial worker was marked off from his fellow Irish worker, not by a greater capacity for hard work, but by his regularity, his methodical paying-out of energy, and perhaps also by a repression, not of enjoyments, but of the capacity to relax in the old uninhibited ways.  
– Thompson, 1967: 91

Here the habits and rhythms of ‘nature’ enshrined by centuries of non-capitalist work routines and centred upon the ‘tasks’ at hand, whether communal or singular, and usually seasonal in their ordering are replaced by the particular physical and psychic demands of industrial capitalism and its work-discipline. Prolonged exposure to the temporal patterns of the machine engendered an awareness of the responses required, particularly by the owners of those machines: Saint Monday was neither revered by machinery, nor by its masters.

### **A New Nature**

Time became a resource to be commodified and so, too, did Nature, which had ceased to be the regulative principle and governing metaphor conceived of by the Physiocrats. Nature was now being ‘de-differentiated’ into raw materials possessed of a marginal utility and opportunity cost. In this, time echoed the abstraction of labour in the wage-relation as it was emptied of its specific properties through its reification in money-exchange. The reduction of such qualitative differences to their quantitative expression (price) was facilitated by the contemporary conception of time as ‘empty’ and ‘homogeneous’ that can be seen in both Newton (Ferguson, 1990) and Benjamin. Capitalist modernity is better understood as the experience of space-time ‘deformed’ by its contents into specific commodity-experiences. Capitalist industrialisation and the mass production of commodities for the colonisation of the sphere of circulation and exchange centres upon *nouveauté* and the deliverance it affords from the boredom of ‘empty time’ – whether the deferred gratification of the ‘consumer’ or the ‘work-discipline’ imposed upon the producer:

Endless waiting thus makes the finality of fate seem appealing. Boredom, however, is not escaped easily. It threatens the gambler, the drug user, the flâneur, and the dandy who appear to choose their own fate freely no less than the externally compelled workers at their machines who cannot.  
– Buck-Morss, 1993: 104-5

In denying Progress or *eschaton*, modern time becomes a series of ‘empty, homogeneous instants,’ a collection of moments qualitatively distinguished from each other only by virtue of the quantitative degree of difference. Modernity becomes for Benjamin a time of Hellish repetition epitomised in the figure of Sisyphus. On the one hand, history has been denuded of purpose or endpoint, and, on the other, every moment is defined only by its relative novelty rather than any overarching significance or purpose. Modernity can thus be characterised as ‘nihilistic’ and Benjamin as an inheritor of Nietzsche’s critique of modern life as ‘impoverished’ or ‘dis-encharnted’ (Weber), where life becomes the participation in a series of meaningless routines or rituals denuded of any mystical consequence (Frisby, 1988: 35-6). Thus, for Benjamin, we are condemned to inhabit modernity and the *modern* ‘consumption’ that is erected upon the framework of capitalist production and exchange is the sentence to be served – the punishment is not the absence of liberty, however, but its purposeless surfeit, experienced as ‘the phantasmagoria of modernity ... [in] the calamity of humdrum existence’ (Benjamin, cited Frisby, 1988: 37).

What is calamitous in the *experience* of modernity is its impossibility (Abbas, 1988; Agamben, 1993; Benjamin, 1968). Agamben sees Benjamin demonstrate that experience, is ‘no longer available to us.’ Modern man has ‘been deprived of his biography’: the capacity to construct a narrative that contains, explains and communicates the experience of *being* (1993: 13). Benjamin (1968) saw this as originating in the ‘catastrophe’ of WWI, where the ‘tiny, fragile human body’ is confronted by technological warfare and the mechanised production of death. Agamben, on the other hand, sees the ‘destruction of experience’ as existing at the level of the everyday; every aspect of modern existence seems remote from individuals and their experience:

Neither the cloud of tear gas slowly dispersing between the buildings of the city centre, nor the rapid blasts of gunfire from who knows where; nor queuing up at a business counter, nor visiting the Land of Cockayne at the supermarket, nor those eternal moments of dumb promiscuity among strangers in lifts and buses. Modern man makes his way home in the evening wearied by a jumble of events, but however entertaining or tedious, unusual or commonplace, harrowing or pleasurable they are, none of them will have become experience.

– 1993: 14

Previously it was the mundane and the everyday that was the province of experience such that the excessive or unusual events that were the basis of seemingly fantastical tales resided there because they could not be contained within the realm of experience. In modernity the truths that are to be searched for and communicated do not lie within this

realm but beyond it; rather ‘it is the character of the present time that all authority is founded upon what cannot be experienced, and nobody would be inclined to accept the validity of an authority whose sole claim to legitimation was experience’ (ibid).

In certain activities, such as drug addiction, it becomes possible to withdraw from the world so completely as to ‘discard’ all experience (Agamben, 1993: 16). The contents of personal experience cease to have a significance or value other than the expression of difference: the value of things is expressed by money-price or the quantitative determinations of science. Certainty, says Agamben (1993: 17-8), is ‘incompatible’ with experience understood as the qualitative modification or refinement of the individual through the accumulation of knowledge over time, and its transmission between individuals and across generations. Therefore, the slogan that replaces the maxim and the proverb is ‘the proverb of humankind to whom experience is lost’ (ibid: 14). The causal indeterminacy revealed by quantum mechanics here coincides with the threat to ‘affective intensity’ discussed by Massumi (1993; 2003): as the Cartesian subject threatens to disintegrate. The inhabitant of modernity no longer understands the world in terms of need or even desire, he or she no longer knows what they ‘require’ – only that existence, as presently configured, is unendurable.

### **Experiencing the New**

For Agamben, the legend of the Holy Grail presents an opportunity to distinguish the consequences of ‘experience’ in the contemporary world. The Grail quest represents the search for the situation in which the unification of experience and knowledge is possible, as *truth*. The quest is therefore a pre-modern form because of the promise of truth it contains: unlike the modern world, where experiences are always available but their value (since they do not allow access to truth) is debatable; while the experience of ‘truth’ tends towards personal revelation and cannot be communicated to others, since they have not undergone the experience (not unlike psychoanalysis). In modernity, only the *adventure* holds out the promise of ‘experience’ because it ‘goes by the extraordinary and the exotic (in opposition to the familiar and the commonplace)’ (1993: 29). So, it is spatial or temporal distance from the everyday that stamps events with sufficient novelty that they attain the character of ‘experience.’ Within the adventure the individual might yet attain some facet of unique experience different to and distinct from the normative description provided by the law-like generalities of scientific knowledge (and everyday life).

This apparent ‘loss of experience,’ its capacity to escape the psyche and consciousness was understood as a consequence of modernity, as a separation from Nature and an Arcadian past caused by the interruption of ‘tradition society’ by modernity. Its loss could be attributed to the French Revolution of 1789 Fritzsche (2002), or to the advent of industrialisation (the Arts & Crafts movement) or mass production of commodities and the consequences of this (the Frankfurt School). However, the nostalgic longing for an absent form of experience was itself symptomatic of *modernité*, since it is ‘the act of memory’ that creates the ‘gap between resemblance and identity’ (Stewart, 1998: 145). Only the belief in the absence of experience could prompt attempts at its recovery and the distinction between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*.

For the secular tradition of psychology this revealed ‘the crisis of the modern concept of experience – experience found on the Cartesian subject – [and] at its most salient in the idea of the unconscious’ (Agamben, 1993: 41). Indeed, the failure of such ‘unconscious experiences’ to constitute a ‘subjective experience’ is explained by its inability to be available to self-consciousness, hence the need for approaches, such as psychoanalysis, that could *re-present* the ‘lost’ dimension of experience to consciousness. For Agamben, the poetry of Baudelaire exemplified the attempt to ‘decipher the features of a new experience’ (ibid), one that was not necessarily available to self-conscious reflection. In the poet’s engagement with the world of commodities, ‘*maquillage* – the supremely inexperienceable’ (Agamben, 1993: 41), the *nouveauté* that underpinned the experience of capitalist modernity was revealed. In Baudelaire’s poetry

[...], the search for the ‘new’ does not appear as the search for a new object of experience; instead, it implies an eclipse and a suspension of experience. [...] Estrangement, which removes from the most commonplace objects their power to be experienced, thus becomes the exemplary procedure of a poetic project which aims to make of the Inexperienceable the new ‘*lieu commun*’, humanity’s new experience. In this sense the *Fleurs du Mal* are proverbs of the inexperienceable.  
– 1993: 41-2

The concept of *distance* had underpinned the desire of the bourgeois subject for the objects of its attention – distance was there to be overcome, and this lent it its ‘magic’ (Benjamin) or ‘attraction’ (Simmel). The role of the market had been to provide a mechanism for the manifestation and overcoming of a ‘consumer’ desire based upon the distance between the subject and object, and the technical means to this end was the money-form. The goods desired by the bourgeois subject, themselves, represented a means to the overcoming of an other form of distance; by conforming to the logic of *self* ‘improvement’ the acquisition of

these artefacts and experiences allowed a belief in the ‘civilising process’ of bourgeois capitalism (the recovery of the wisdom of the Ancients and the scientific promise of Utopia).

However, as Agamben’s reading of Baudelaire makes clear, the satisfactions sought in this process of civilised ‘consumption’ are rendered impossible precisely because the ‘experiences’ they are believed to embody are *inexperientible*. The annexation of the contents of the world, via the market, is insufficient to support the teleological project of selfhood, the refinement of the individual ego, because the objects that constitute the contents of the world have been *estranged* from their causal origins. The bourgeois project of self-improvement is confounded because the means of attaining ‘experience’ is denied to them, just as ‘their power to be experienced’ is denied to the objects themselves (Agamben, 1993: 42). This disjunction, between the formal promise of a means for the attainment of experience and the impossibility of that attainment also appears in Lyotard’s discussion (1984; 1992) of the realm of aesthetic representation and its relation to the ‘postmodern.’ Here the concept of the ‘unpresentable’ bespeaks a ‘sublime relationship of the presentable with the conceivable’ in which two modes of representation ‘often coexist almost indiscernibly in the same piece, and yet they attest to a *différend* [an incommensurable difference of opinion] within which the fate of thought has, for a long time, been played out – a *différend* between regret and experimentation’ (Lyotard, 1992: 20).

Lyotard’s modern aesthetic is an aesthetic of the sublime but it is nostalgic, invoking the unpresentable as absent *content* while its *form* offers consolation and pleasure. The postmodern aesthetic becomes ‘that which in the modern invokes the unpresentable in presentation itself, which refuses the consolation of correct forms, refuses the consensus of taste permitting a common experience of nostalgia for the impossible, and inquires into new presentations – not to take pleasure in them but to better produce the feeling that there is something unpresentable’ (ibid: 22-3). In this it is reminiscent of the failure of ‘tasteful consumption,’ epitomised by the civilising effects of the *leçons de choses*, to conjure a form of shared ‘experience’ that amounted to anything more than Hausmann’s *fete impériale*.

### **Narrating Experience**

The Enlightenment belief in *Progress* signalled an orientation towards the future that implied never-ending innovation as the pre-condition of material improvement (Utopia),

the technological mastery of nature paralleled by a corresponding refinement of ‘civilised’ values. The movement from past to present to future possessed a logic of improvement, a ‘temporal matrix’ possessed of three distinct characteristics: firstly, the valorisation of the present over the past, wherein it is ‘possible for an event to change its identity according to its shifting status in the advance of history as a whole’; secondly, an open, indeterminate future characterised by its transcendence of the present, as it becomes the past; thirdly, the disappearance of the ‘present’ into a moment caught between the shifting past and an indeterminate future, ‘the present as the identity of duration and eternity’ – a perpetual flux (Osborne, 1995: 14). Modernity became ‘the product, in the instance of each utterance, of an act of historical self-definition through *differentiation*, *identification* and *projection*, which transcends the order of chronology in the construction of a meaningful present’ (ibid).

The experience of modernity thus became the experience of the new, of *nouveauté*: with the degree of novelty indicating the progress or development of any particular society or individual. Modernity, on this reading, was a movement *towards* a definite but undescribed *telos*, or as a movement away from its origin. It is within this context that Osborne sees modernity and tradition as intertwined but competing ‘forms of historical consciousness’ and, after Benjamin, consider ‘modernity [as] in principle a *destruction* of tradition: [which] involves the inauguration new forms of historical consciousness, of necessity’ (1995: 115). Modernity defines itself as the present against the past and as the contemporary against the traditional – in an act of negation. Tradition as the maintenance of continuity prioritises the past over both the present and the future, determining both. However, ‘the continuity of tradition requires a constant exercise of authority’ (1995: 130) in order that it transmit itself into the future and be preserved, possibly in material form or through the assumption of styles deemed ‘classic.’

For Benjamin tradition is the *preservation* of cultural experience, a form of memory, and part of a political and cultural project in which the collector, necessarily, plays a vital and committed role. Modernity’s ‘destructive’ interruption of tradition denies these traditional forms the power to communicate ‘authentic’ historical experience (*Erfahrung*) into the future (our present) and implies an act of *forgetting*. Knowledge of the experience of the past is lost to the present, its absence acknowledged by a nostalgic evocation of tradition as the dialectic other of modernity. Benjamin’s (1968) exploration of this, in *The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov* [1934], builds to a description of a present in which the forms for the transmission (communicability) of experience are ‘dying out’

(Benjamin). Tradition is seen to fail, to be interrupted, leading to ‘a crisis in the communication of experience (*Erfahrung*), in memory...in the very possibility of historical experience’ (Osborne, 1995: 135). Epitomised by the catastrophe of WWI the ‘youth’ of the present generation are alienated from the experience of previous generations and inhabit a present that appears divorced from the past against which it asserts its existence. For the inhabitants of modernity, *modernité* means the ‘paradox of the modern’ the *inexperiencibility* of the forms that experience had previously assumed – and history, as the locus of time-honoured notions of identity, is felt as an absence.

The novel as the record of bourgeois subjectivity offered a ‘biographical model of closure,’ which fractured ‘once the lives of individuals become increasingly dependent upon the mediations of impersonal social forms, the logics of which remain opaque’ (Osborne, 1995: 136).

The contradictions of modern life do not stop with the division between subject and object; subjectivity is itself fragmented, each ‘sphere’ threatening the self with its own impossible vision of the world. The synthesizing power of reason has somehow evaporated from everything human; pored out of the self and into the world of ‘real,’ objective relations, into the commodity form, and into the scientific conception of nature. The human subject, thus ‘liberated’ from its constraint, finds itself in a world of unlimited inner freedom.

– Ferguson, 1992: 209

The money-form and the objective culture it facilitated (Simmel, 1990) acted as material factors that transformed subjective experience: reason no longer inhabited the subjective sphere, marshalling its interaction with objective world, instead it served as a reified framework for existence in which individual subjective experience unfolded. The seemingly solid forms of understanding, knowledge and expression offered by traditional society came to be described as ‘information,’ analogous to an ‘economy of abbreviation, both semantic and temporal: it must be readily intelligible, immediately plausible, and most important of all – corresponding to the interruptive, amnesiac temporality of shock – it “lives” only at “the moment in which it is new” ’ (Benjamin, cited Osborne, 1995: 136).

Benjamin considered the ‘collector’ as a figure of resistance and saw in his utilisation of the bourgeois *intérieur* a retreat from the ‘the social space of modernity’ (Abbas, 1988) and the domain of *Erlebnis*. Such interiors assumed ‘the character of fortification’ in their resistance to the transience of the world without; there existence itself was encased (Frisby, 1988, 245-8). The *intérieur* was where the collector succumbed to ‘the sex-appeal of the

inorganic,' while, simultaneously, attempting to strip objects of their commodity-character and to restate their particularity and their contemplation, as *art*. This attempt to re-insert objects back into a historical process, to prevent their descent into 'information, relied upon a connoisseur's knowledge of tradition and its role in production. For Benjamin, the 'consumer' was opposed to the collector, since the former merely understood the commodity as *information* and the production process as a validation of origins under the sign of authorship (Barthes, 1978; Foucault, 1970b). The commodity's appearance as 'information' echoed the use of language by 'the poet [who] for the first time faces language the way the buyer faces the commodity on the open market. He has lost his familiarity with the process of its production [...].'" In this quotation on language, "production" refers of course to *sign production*.... There is nothing urgent enough to require the *coining* of words; it is simply a matter of choosing among words that are already there in accordance with the poet's taste. A "literature without an object," a *poésie pure*, now appears, to find its culmination in Mallarmé' (Abbas, 1988: 221).

The activity of the collector – a politicised *appreciation* – appeared to deny the 'reduction' to information, to a phenomenon of the real of circulation and exchange, of the artefact. However, historically, the figure of the collector emerges contemporaneous with the mass production of goods and their appearance in the 'spaces of consumption' discussed in the previous chapter. It is the retreat from these 'social space[s] of modernity' (Abbas) – the department store or the museum – that allowed contemplation of their individual qualities, rather than their degree of difference:

The more specific the classification [...] the more the heterogeneity of things becomes manifest. The collector is confronted by fragments which are impossible to arrange into any conceptual or temporal order. Cultural history is unwittingly revealed as a history of ruin, randomness, and disorder.

- Abbas, 1988: 222.

The simultaneous existence of an ever-increasing range and variety of objects and experiences alongside their ever-diminishing significance for the modern subject (Agamben) meant that the collector represented a backward-looking, even nostalgic, tradition. For Benjamin, the collector is a politically charged figure whose actions are not solely derived from the pursuit of personal pleasure and who in the act of collecting opposes the dynamic of modernity that separates commodified objects from their 'pre-history' and origin: the collector thus seeks to 'serve life' (Abbas, 1988: 223).

The collector assumed a transcendent, totalising and panoramic perspective (de Cauter, 1993; Stewart, 1998) regarding the ‘fragments of modernity’ (Frisby), and attempted to re-insert artefacts back into tradition, and so avoid a merely ‘antiquarian history’ (Nietzsche) born of an accumulation of objects or facts. The collector’s recovery of those objects, facts and moments that had failed to be included within the official, canonised and transmitted history (ibid: 224) represented an act of commemoration aimed at circumventing the ‘paradox of the modern’ (modern experience’s failure to afford experience of modernity). For Benjamin, this was inspired by Bergson’s investigation of *mémoire pure* (or Proust’s *mémoire involontaire*) and the relationship between memory and experience. In the endeavour to reveal those aspects of experience that were unavailable to the *operation* of (conscious) memory, Benjamin adapted Freud’s concept ‘shock defense’ from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to ‘psychologize and also to historicize Proust’s concept of involuntary memory’ (Abbas, 1988: 227).

This allowed the distinction between two categories of ‘experience’ – *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* – the former was available for conscious recollection, while the latter registered upon the body, physiologically, but not psychologically, *beyond* conscious recollection. The importance of writers such as Baudelaire and Proust for Benjamin lay in their ability to bring into the light of day the contents of memory (experience) and *communicate* these through artistic form, as image, as narrative. The collector and the storyteller are therefore linked in their *narration* of culture, epitomised for Benjamin by Edward Fuchs and Nikolai Leskov respectively. The task of such writers was to communicate experience in such a manner that resisted the reification of the social relations of the present and to re-insert such experiences into a historical tradition. The objects produced by writers, artists or collectors do not submit entirely to abstraction, to novelty: just like the *chiffonier* these writers recovered the detritus of modern culture and pressed it into (re)use.

[...] the contrast between the [modern] mode of information and the mode of storytelling is analogous to the contrast between consciousness and memory: information is shot through with explanation and does not survive the moment when it is new, while the story arouses astonishment and thoughtfulness and is open to interpretation and renewal.

– Abbas, 1988: 232

In *forms*, such as the story or the collected object, the possibility exists for experience to survive the ‘moment,’ rather than become information. This assertion of qualitative difference, against ‘information’ as the formal equivalence of everything, opposes the experience of a continuous succession of moments differentiated only in their form and

degree of difference, *nouveauté*. The reduction to a quantitative expression of difference (utility) between objects is the ‘de-differentiation’ of experiences (Lash & Urry, 1994; Rojek, 1993) and asserts failure of traditional forms of experience, prompting a nostalgic yearning for the products of traditional social relations as the location of ‘authentic experience.’

However, Abbas (1988), by agreeing with Agamben that language is the repository of subjectivity, and that consciousness is effectively spoken, sees the possibility of transcending the dissolution of subjectivity into an infinite series of moments. Language exists as ‘a more or less synchronic differential structure – but it is a synchronic structure *with a memory*. In the folds of its differences, traces of real experience are preserved,’ and as such allow a ‘sense’ of experience (1988: 235). Language (and the image) allow the representation of the world (mimesis) and, therefore, its re-telling: the ‘collector’ is engaged in a textual politics of interrogation, critique and transmission. Whether the ‘memory’ of *authentic* experience that language affords is sufficient to provide anything more than a nostalgic awareness of ‘absence’ and the need for historical redemption remains open to question.

### **Vertiginous experience**

Each generation experiences the fashions of the one preceding it as the most radical antiaphrodisiac imaginable. In this judgment it is not so far off the mark as might be supposed. Every fashion is to some extent a bitter satire on love; in every fashion, perversities are suggested by the most ruthless means. Every fashion stands in opposition to the organic. Every fashion couples the living body to the inorganic world. To the living, fashion defends the rights of the corpse. The fetishism that succumbs to the sex appeal of the inorganic is its vital nerve.

- Benjamin, 1999: 79

The assumption, by the commodity-form, of the task of narrating temporality, the passing of time, is evident within the concept of fashion. Equally evident, however, is the implicit threat that all time, all *temporality*, might be reduced to the commodified items of any particular era. In the absence of a panoramic viewpoint from which to narrate historical events, or the maintenance of cultural rites and rituals to serve as markers of time’s passing, both history and biography appear complicated, even compromised. Modernity as a self-conscious interruption of continuity and opposition to tradition imperils the concept of ‘history’ understood as causal factor, prompting Osborne to term modernity ‘a form of forgetting’ (1995: 137). The overt historicism of Benjamin’s collector, therefore, provides

a *specific* response to the experience of *modernité* and the failure of tradition (Osborne, 1995: 139). However, historicism, as an expression of appropriateness echoes the collector's critique of the present, even as it betrays its class position and allegiance. The periodicising of historicism abstracts historical events and social relations into styles: fashion self-consciously does the same.

In this way fashion becomes a means of narrating the moments that chart the movement from *then* to *now*. Modernity's exorcising of tradition, or its hiving-off of such traditions from their origins through their *modernisation*, undermines such 'rites of passage' even as they linger on anachronistically in contemporary culture (think of the traditional Scottish wedding with kilts, invented in the nineteenth century by a culture seeking Romantic escape from industrialisation). 'Souvenirs' from the past, national, ethnic or individual – often collected – now form the core elements of the narrative of self – biography – that defines phenomenological experience. Attainment of twenty-one years no longer sees adulthood conferred by the 'key to the door' but a party much like the one that greeted eighteen years and will mark thirty, forty or sixty-five. Biography is now divided quantitatively rather than qualitatively, the 'de-differentiation' (Lash & Urry, 1994) of individual existence, when compared to the 'authentic' experience of societies distant in time and space, seems to infer an impoverishment:

[...] In modern life, these transitions are becoming ever more unrecognizable and impossible to experience. We have grown very poor in threshold experiences. Falling asleep is perhaps the only such experience that remains to us. (But together with this, there is also waking up).  
– Benjamin, 1999: 494

The surging of experience over every threshold that previously marked the stages of life is evidence of the changed material and temporal structures that pertain upon the 'terrain' of *modern consumption*. Additionally, the 'decomposition' of the bourgeois subject and the demise of the 'biographical fiction of the self' is the failure of the relation of *desire* expressed as the pursuit of pleasure (Ferguson) to deliver 'experience.'

It is in this sense that the commodity-form is deemed to empty out the qualities of the objects, services and experiences of which it is comprised and re-present them as quantities of utility, so 'destroying' their particular form (Simmel). This is a consequence of the development of the mature money-form and the generalised relations of exchange that it

ushers in (Mead): any specific instance of the commodity-form starts to look very like any other, one more 'event' of purchase and 'consumption.' This is what prompts Simmel's discussion of both the *blasé* and the cynical individual, for whom objects tend to interchangeable. This is the reduction of 'language' to a synchronic, rather than a diachronic, structure (discussed by Abbas) and the loss of the 'folds' of memory. The 'emptying out' of the relationship between subjects and objects, imputed to the money-form, is the denial or destruction of 'real' experience, *Erfahrung*, as it has historically been conceived.

Barber's discussion of Tokyo shopping district, Shibuya and its 'presiding deity,' Hello Kitty, 'the terminally innocuous red-and-white cat that endlessly holds one paw up in blithe greeting' (2001: 29), demonstrates this process. Here the 'hieroglyph' (Marx) of the commodity absorbs language, images and logos within a new pseudo-linguistic experience (see also Richards, 1991), where entities such as Hello Kitty endorse 'everything – and every human existence and act – without exception' (2001: 31). Such ubiquity reduces the elements of language – words, phrases and proverbs – to components of the brand experience, divorces them from their historical origins, in an attempt to codify difference in a short-hand manner for easy visual assimilation. English or French words juxtaposed alongside Japanese *Kanji*, arranged for immediacy and effect, leaving grammatical coherence behind: effectively, language is hollowed out and allowed to float free of any referent and subordinated to the imperative of 'consumption.' Such 'foreign' words are represented as graphic elements in the construction and communication of the value of a commodity-experience. The commodity-form assumes a new temporal rhythm, a momentary pulse of 'information' directed at the distracted attention of a passing, prospective, 'consumer,' as language is conscripted into the presentation of novelty and production of *nouveauté*, as a means of signify difference, of individuating commodity-events.

Language assumes a literal 'shop-window quality' in which its 'aesthetic productivity' (Simmel) is its only defining feature: under such conditions 'experience' can be considered as reduced to *inexperience* communicating a fleeting 'glimpse' of utility to the 'consumer.' Consequently, the commodity-form ceases to be a bearer of 'experience,' considered in the historical sense, since its capacity to encapsulate the diachronic element of life is diminished in favour of its aesthetic impact. The commodity-form presents itself as a series of *instants* or *events* in which a brief 'participation' is afforded to the 'consumer,'

however, unless these ‘events’ form the basis of ‘peak moments’ (Charney, 1998) they are destined to escape memory and avoid communication.

### **This is not an Exit**

Within the sphere of circulation and exchange the commodity-form provides a series of narrative-events that do not subscribe to the accepted view of use and utility, as inherited from a critical tradition that owes a great debt to bourgeois philosophy and capitalist economic theory. Instead, the communication of ‘experience’ is no longer accessible by the conscious subject; rather, it impacts upon the body as an aesthetic phenomenon or event. The parapraxes in which Freud saw traces of experience resurface are now only indexical reminders of the body and its corporeal participation in existence. Upon the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption* the urban fabric seems alive, with the digitally animated walls of buildings projecting hoardings and adverts.

The technological innovations in communication media underpin the space-time of ‘terrain,’ in an ‘era in which, thanks to the use of new means of communication (especially, television), everything tends to flatten out at the level of contemporaneity and simultaneity, thus producing a de-historicization of experience’ (Vattimo, 1988: 10). The demise of spatial and temporal distance in an all-embracing simultaneity is the loss of the ‘point’ outside space and time, beloved of Archimedes, Descartes, Bentham and Newton: it is the loss of the subject set apart from the object.

[...] nihilism is the consumption of use-value in exchange-value.  
Nihilism does not mean that Being is in the power of the subject; rather,  
it means that Being is completely dissolved in the discoursing of value,  
in the indefinite transformation of universal experience.  
- Vattimo, 1988: 22

*Being*, is now no longer considered distinct from the world it inhabits – and expressed through ‘possession,’ as *being* and *having*.

The constant transmogrification of the body and its meaning is an acceptance of its paradoxical irrelevance and centrality: the body is the locus of subjective experience, the screen upon which experience (*Erlebnis*) registers and so it is ‘flattened’ (Vattimo) and made depthless, while, at the same time, it is subject to increasingly microscopic regimes of maintenance and refinement as Pilates, free-weights or the Atkins diet. The body itself, while maintaining its materiality (or emphasising it) simultaneously abstracts (becomes

*ecstatic*) and ceases to be stage upon which commodities can be ‘arranged’ (Baudrillard). The ‘forced extraversion of all interiority’ combined with the ‘forced introjection of all exteriority’ implied by the ecstasy of communication leads Baudrillard (1988: 26-7) towards a new pathology of the present. In place of hysteria, the ‘pathology of the exacerbated staging of the subject’ and paranoia, as ‘the pathology of organization,’ there arises, today, ‘a new form of schizophrenia – with the emergence of an immanent promiscuity and the perpetual interconnection of all information and communication networks.’ In their place comes a ‘terror’ born of ‘an over-proximity of all things, a foul promiscuity of all things which beleaguer and penetrate him’ crossing the physiological boundary of his body. Such a schizophrenic cannot ‘produce himself as a mirror’ (subject), instead he or she is subjected to ‘an absolute proximity’ and ‘instantaneousness with things,’ which denies the ‘limits’ needed to found a conventional experience of *self*.

### **Identifying Selves**

Whether the unhinging of the self from the body in the form of ‘drift’ (Charney, 1998) or the ‘decomposition’ of the self in the impossibility of its realisation (Ferguson, 1990) the ‘experience’ of modernity is that of an ‘empty present.’ For Charney cinematic narrative forms are crucial to the comprehension and representation of ‘the general condition of subjective experience in the loss of presence’ (1998: 7) of contemporary culture. Cinema represents a technology dealing in ‘moments, fragments and absent presents’; upon time’s passing and the narration of this movement as a series of durations.

[Cinema combined...] an ontology of representation and an epistemology of drift. The absence of tangible present moments gave rise to a culture of re-presentation in which experience was always already lost, accessible only through retrospective textualization. Re-presentation as a mode of experience took the form of drift, which transfigured empty presence into a new modern epistemology. Drift aimed to re-present the experience of vacancy, the lived sensation of empty moments, the consequence and corollary of empty moments.  
– 1998: 7-8

Drift describes the experience of temporality in which there appears to be no *telos* or directionality, experience that appears divorced from the contextual factors that would previously have been held to produce it. Drift is both ontology and epistemology: as the experience of the absence of causality and a ‘modern means of grasping experience – both by failing to grasp it and by acknowledging the inescapability of that failure’ (Charney, 1998: 19-20). The failure of the mind to capture and inhabit the present moment, to apprehend it fully, saw the experience of the ‘present’ passed off onto the body, and the

present experienced corporeally rather than cognitively. For Charney, this allows the circumvention of the mind-body duality, drift as a form of experience denies the distinction between sensual and cognitive experience. The body is not a site for the experience of the present, of the temporal flow in its totality (as he accuses Husserl, Heidegger and Bergson of believing), instead:

Between presence and non-presence, between body and mind, between the strictly positive and the strictly negative – between any rigid polarity – drift intervenes.

Drift is the experience of the empty present, the empty present rendered as experience.

Drift is how the empty present makes itself felt.

To you.

Drift is as close as you can get to feeling the empty present.

– 1998: 24

Charney traces the representation of the ‘present moment’ from eighteenth-century painting to the multiple perspectives of Cubism – away from contemplation toward an immersion that is felt as much as considered, and which, in turn, leads to the articulation of ‘a privileged moment that could acknowledge the impossibility of a privileged moment’ (1998: 37). This focus upon the *moment*, its duration and intensity, was a concern shared by post-Kantian aesthetics and neo-classical economics, both Walter Pater and the inheritors of the ‘marginalist revolution’ (Gagnier, 2000):

The moment provided a means to conceive of a pleasure so intense that it tapers off as soon as it is first felt. [...] This momentary bliss resembles traditional conceptions of the sublime; but beginning with Pater [...] the sublime moment was redefined for modernity as fully fleeting and fully physiological, a conception of pleasure that eventually played in Roland Barthes’s poststructuralist theories of pleasure.

– Charney, 1998: 43

The moment as a temporal event is defined against the temporal flow of which it is nominally part and in this it echoes Bohrer’s (1994) formulation of the ‘sudden’ as the temporal form in which the aesthetic event occurs. The *sudden* moment appears divorced from causality, it is unforeseen, and, as such, it is the appearance of novelty, because it is removed from all the events against which it is now defined. In its unfamiliarity it frames ‘a peak instant of insight, marked off from drift’ born of ‘its dialectical relation to the familiar’ which ‘waned and soon evaporates once the momentary shock of this disruption is felt’ (Charney, 1998: 43-4). The cinematic close-up epitomises this apparently instantaneous elevation from the background to the foreground of an otherwise unremarkable detail and the brevity of the moment.

Breton's description of 'convulsive beauty' and the cinematic close-up were both a modern technological manifestation of *excitement*, moments of 'attraction' that announce themselves within the aesthetic totality were now written into the fabric of modern experience, the charged counterpoint to the drift that surrounded and defined them (Charney, 1998: 47). The cinematic re-presentation of the world assigned correspondences and causality but it did so in an optical dimension, in 'a space unconsciously interwoven' (Benjamin, cited Buck-Morss, 1993: 267). The snapshot and the close-up both employ a technological mechanism to fragment and thereby arrest experience by denying the social relations that are the context of the moment, which meant that for Kracauer they were the mirror of a society which also sought to deny these historical factors (Frisby, 1988: 155-7).

Modernity's origin in the interruption of tradition and the consequent loss of the forms of transmission of experience that traditional societies utilised, the 'aura' or 'story' (Benjamin), sees these very forms enter modernity as *fragments* of an earlier age. These techniques for concentrating attention – Charney's 'peak' moments – are absorbed into the lexicon of technological apparatuses, into the mass media, and lent their significance by their intensity and duration - by their interruption of the flow of events, their *shock-value*.

The intensity of feeling that defines shock placed emphatic brackets around the heightened moment in which shock is felt. If our lives consist of a series of moments that pass away before we can recognize and acknowledge them, the moment of shock returns to our sensation and perception, and after these to our consciousness, the immediacy of the present moment even as it inexorably slips away. Shock jolts the modern subject into tangible reawareness of the presence of the present.  
– Charney, 1998: 48

Stewart's discussion of the souvenir now begins to resemble the material form assigned to 'peak moments' that are recalled from the past rather than experienced in the present, increasingly, however, it is the photograph that 'captures' memory. The photograph with its dissemination of 'a cheap loathing for history' (Baudelaire) assumed the task of capturing 'peak' moments from personal biography, *technologically*. The human 'storyteller' is replaced by an assemblage of *techniques* given objective form – the camera – and to it 'a different nature speaks [...] than to the naked eye' (Benjamin, cited Buck-Morss, 1993: 267). Technology assumes the task of recording and transmitting the 'moment' in the form of *re-presentation*, a temporal event 'saved' from dissolution.

However, the evanescent temporality of the event is not simply recorded by technology, it is also produced by it. The ‘emphatic moment’ of (self-)awareness, of presence in the present, is defined against its absence, against ‘drift.’ The exciting potential of the *moment*, its acute tension, was, in itself a sought after engagement, whether it was the possibility of an erotic dalliance glimpsed in the eyes of a passing woman (Baudelaire) or the gambler, modern descendent of the *flâneur* (Benjamin), who haunted the gaming tables as his precursor had the arcades: in search of *novelty*, *possibility* and *distraction*. The formal emptiness of the card-game echoes the ‘emptiness’ of modern life, each moment determined by its specific contents – by the deformation into ‘space-time’ (Ferguson) and its events. Benjamin’s ‘modern Tantalus’ transforms

[...] the arcades into a casino, a gambling hall where he places the red, blue, and yellow chips of emotion on women, on a face that appears suddenly – will it return to his gaze? – or a silent mouth – will it speak to him? That which looks out at the gambler from every number on the green cloth – happiness – here winks to him out of every woman’s body, as the chimera of sexuality: as his type.  
- Benjamin, cited Buck-Morss (1993: 103)

In the exchange of money, especially in gambling, the present is tinged with the future, with possibility, with *excitement*. Conversely, purchase is the sacrifice of all other future (alternative) uses of the money-form, the sacrifice of all other exchanges in return for a desired and pre-calculated utility. Gambling, however, provides a *moment* in which future possibilities can be apprehended without necessarily being comprehended. This is its *ecstatic* potential; it encompasses the infinite variety of future consumption-events it might fund. What the camera or souvenir seeks to preserve or recover the wager seeks to tempt into being, the *emphatic* or ‘peak’ moment in which the self can experience itself. The gambler asks God for what the photographer captures – a moment removed from all others, a residuum.

The possibility of manufacturing and undergoing a moment of ‘lived experience’ is also dramatised in Stanislavsky’s ‘method’ of acting, since rather than rehearsing or revisiting the ‘moment’ the actor seeks to inhabit it, re-presenting it anew in each performance. The production of these ‘present moments’ is the outcome of a selection process that aims to produce a character through a regime of psychic and physiological routines of discipline, concentration, observation, breathing and gesture aimed at presenting a ‘self’ for public ‘consumption.’ Echoing Foucault’s ‘technologies’ for the production a self through habits and practices, and Seltzer’s (1992) ‘staging’ of the self as ‘personation’ through commodities, Stanislavsky’s method generates ‘peak’ or ‘emphatic’ moments in similar

fashion to those created by the ‘close-up’ of the camera and often in tandem. ‘In the ideal Stanislavskian performance, the actor will seem to be a person living and discovering each moment freshly, as if for the first time’ (Charney, 1998: 59). Actor and character merge in ‘an endeavor of identification,’ (ibid) rather than the production of an identity that is fixed and immutable.

The narrative continuity (identity) implied in the linear organisation of temporal experience and the qualitative distinctions between the phases and periods (thresholds) of biographical narrative no longer culminate in maturity (Agamben). Instead the *rites de passages* of capitalist modernity, accessed through the commodity-form, bear no relation to biological age or social role: e.g. bungee jumping, drug use or social network site membership.

In the moment arises the notion of groundless repetition, of re-presentations shorn of an originary present. It is not that we cannot conceive re-presentation because the present can no longer exist; rather, we can conceive nothing but re-presentations. We can no longer sustain any distinction between presence and re-presentation, because presence is always already a re-presentation of a vanished presence. The present and the re-present are the same thing.

– Charney, 1998: 63

The production of the aesthetic experience of ‘selfhood,’ as a moment of self-objectification, highlights the non-linear temporality of the endeavour: the ‘sudden’ interruption of drift allows the apprehension of a totality that is not always comprehended. Such ‘shock is not a matter of ever more eccentric new eccentricities,’ but the ‘result of contents of consciousness that have not yet been processed’ (Bohrer, 1994: 78). Such *abrupt* ‘experiences’ are inexplicable and *playful* modifications of the subject: they possess no teleological value and are *unreasonable* in that they have no obvious causality, and so reside in *appearances* (ibid: 120-1). The ‘sudden moment’ is not grasped rationally as a utilitarian value, by the faculty of intellectual understanding, but as an aesthetic phenomenon. Defined by their aesthetic impact and *apparently* free of causal origins, such ‘sudden’ moments resemble the *play-form* of social interaction, sociability (Simmel); they appear *accidental* and fleeting, the basis of an experience of *identification*, rather than the building blocks of ‘identity.’

### **Making up Stories**

The centrality of narrative techniques and generic conventions to the structuring of experience will be explored further in Chapter Five. However, such an ordering and

filtration of phenomenological experience indicates the ways in which modernity, as a cultural formation, is fundamental to the forms of subjectivity implied in *modernité* and *modern consumption*. Charney's observation of a 'cinematic spectatorship before the apparatus' implies the existence of cultural and aesthetic technologies, such as those pioneered in the department store, geared towards a 'serialisation' of experience. The 'mobilised subjectivity' (Friedberg, 1993) of the inhabitants of capitalist modernity, with its production of 'elsewhere' and 'elsewhen,' registered the episodic structuring of experience as a series of aesthetic events that 'lie at the heart of the phenomenology of Modernity' (Rojek, 1993: 216). The displacement of the 'excess,' of those 'contents of consciousness that have not yet been processed' (Bohrer), onto the body revealed a *kinaesthetics* in which *modernité* assumed two forms: firstly, structured experience, the outcome of adherence to rules, demands or concentration, which became *attention*; and, secondly, unstructured experience, free from such demands, this was *distraction*, and, like the contiguity of boredom and excitement (Benjamin) these are complementary and mutually-defining forms of narrating experience.

The apparatuses in which the generation, direction and refinement of 'attention' were objectified, in the techniques of industrial machinery, placed the deliberate manufacture of physiological and psychological disorientation, vertiginous experience, at the heart of the modern form of attention – *excitement*. The spatial organisation of the fairground or amusement park machinery produced an accompanying *intensity* of experience disseminated across a variety of machinic opportunities for 'pleasurable torture.' For Caillois (2001: 26), this surpassed 'mere distraction, corresponding as it does more to a spasm than an entertainment.' The 'seeds, snares, and lures of vertigo' were found in these playgrounds. In this 'world of excited and noisy throngs, a debauch of colour and light, of ceaseless and exhausting motion to the point of satiety,' the proliferation of exciting, unusual and immersive experiences acquired their significance through their juxtaposition to the everyday.

This vertiginous removal from the quotidian is a carefully designed and staged effect, a series of events that overwhelm reason and rationality and address the body directly as sensation, producing 'many related forms of fascination designed to disorient, mislead, and stimulate confusion, anxiety, nausea, and momentary terror, quickly transformed into laughter [...] a sudden transition from physical disorder to ineffable relief' (Caillois, 2001: 134). The 'spaces of consumption,' inhabited by the 'mobilised subject' (Friedberg, 1993) of a 'cybernetic culture' (De Caeter, 1993), utilised industrial technology to engineer peak

moments of shock experience possessed of a vertiginous intensity. Consequently, contra-Benjamin, modernity is not charged moments pregnant with possibility but, rather, the ‘empty moments’ that define these into existence: *distraction* rather than *attention*, epitomised by the entertainment technology of the cinema, prompted ‘the rise of representation; the body as the center of perception, sensation, attention, and mobility; and the interplay between the momentary and the continuous, figured through peaks and valleys as the structure of motion and attention.’

Modernity’s welter of stimulation made attention more crucial yet less feasible. In maneuvering through hazards and distractions, the modern subject’s forward motion was predicated on attention as a linear focus that carved a path through time and space. Attention was in this sense visual: it describes those sensations or events on which we choose to fix our gaze, leaving others on the edge.

- Charney (1998: 82)

The visual organisation of distracted attention was at the heart of *modern consumption’s* amalgam of pleasure and technology (Crary, 1995; Friedberg, 1993; Seltzer, 1992), which sought to ‘discipline’ the metropolitan body and its experiences (Foucault, 1970b; 1995; Massumi, 1993). The ‘author-function’ (Foucault, 1970b) was utilised as a means of *organising* experience, both as producer – the ‘imagineers’ of Walt Disney – and ‘recipient, or consumer’ and sought to refute the possibility of reverie.

The erosion of the *threshold* between *intérieur* and *extérieur* by the ‘spaces of consumption’ produced a space-time environment of distracted attention in which ‘drift’ was corralled into ‘consumer’ experiences, regardless of whether these were offered for sale or not. In the absence of *flânerie*, the individual is *subjected* to interpellation as a ‘consumer’ within the sphere of circulation and exchange, from the department stores to the shopping malls and their successors, such as Times Square.

The experience of *modern consumption* is arranged kinaesthetically and exemplified in cinema, the ‘demon child of the overstimulated modern environment’ using techniques such as parallel-editing and the close-up to define and structure a ‘new form of attention [...] the link between the structural form of fragmentation and the perceptual and experiential form of attention’ (Charney, 1998: 85-6). *Modern consumption* arises from the interplay of peak and drift and only resolves itself into ‘consumption’ when the subject is interpellated as a ‘consumer.’

## Sublime Tourism

[...] the moment of encounter [forges] a sublime moment in which the subject would be transported by intense evanescent feeling. [...] produced by an unexpected moment of encounter [...] Stumbling [...] across an unanticipated configuration of elements, the subject is without warning seized by acute feeling that fleetingly removes him or her from the drift of daily experience.  
– Charney, 1998: 109

The commodification of experience, especially temporal experience as *nouveauté*, echoes in economic form the sublime moment of aesthetic experience and provides an opportunity for an episodic removal from everyday temporal experience, such as the adventure (Simmel) and the tourist experience (Rojek, 1993). The ‘inexplicability’ of such moments, the ‘eccentricity’ of experience (Bohrer), causes them to resist comprehension – with only those phenomena that can be recalled by conscious memory made available to the subject. The commodification of goods and experiences and the attendant emphasis upon *nouveauté* renders experience ‘less’ memorable, in the same way that Simmel sees it prompt a *blasé* attitude and cynicism. In this way commodified experience ceases to serve as a prompt to maturity and the acquisition of experience in the sense described by Agamben (1993).

So, knowledge of the self ceases to be the result of the teleological production of identity and becomes, instead, the experience of a series of apparently sublime *moments* of self-identification (Charney, 1998: 109; Seltzer, 1992). The techniques of cinematic production now provide a vocabulary for the ‘manufacture’ of the experience of self, rooted in the temporal experience of difference. Here Charney’s (1998) description of cinematic spectatorship echoes Marx description of the commodity-form within the sphere of circulation in that representation is a *re*-presentation, and ‘reality’ as either origin or referent is divorced from ‘pure semblance. [...] the phenomenon of a process taking place behind it’ (Marx, 1973: 255). In both cases there is technological mediation that ‘frames’ this process, either the cinematic apparatus or the capitalist money-form, since both allow *images* of value to circulate and create the juxtapositions that allow sublime moments of self-awareness.

Cinema’s annihilation of space within time echoes the wider experience of modernity by prising objects free from the historical processes that produced them. The drama of the edit or the close-up replicates the focus of the gelled light of a department store window (see Kiesler, 1993); the carefully crafted scene echoes the artfully-arranged tableaux of the

window-dresser. Cinema could use its ‘kino-eye’ (Vertov) in the search for a truth revealed by the camera or it could revel in its exploration of the visual possibilities of representation and offer ‘a hedonistic immersion in the present tense of experience’ (Charney, 1998: 127). Only in the self-objectifying moment is that immersion overcome:

Through vertical montage, the viewer can appropriate momentary constellations of meaning as anchors in the film’s drifting mobility. Eisenstein’s theory ultimately suggested that cinema reflected the loss of presence by destabilizing a fixed center and by replacing it with a spectatorial drift that exploited putative moments as both the result of the collisions of montage and the sites of ‘vertical’ meaning.  
– 1998: 131

Therefore, narrative progression, the subjective experience of temporality, proceeds via the principle of montage, in which the juxtaposition (combination of two images or events generates a third). Therefore, the subject does not extend itself ‘spatially’ – proceed by prosthesis (Shaviro, 1997) – but re-formulates itself in space-time. In the language of Latour (2001) the ‘monad’ is re-(*de*)fined by the changing relation between *being* and *having* as the moments of experience change the material of its constitution. The subject, therefore, experiences itself as a ‘self’ only under certain conditions – either the ideological interpellation required by ‘consumerism’, or the fleeting manifestation offered by the technological sublime of capitalist modernity. The subjective experience of *self* is, effectively, a *re*-presentation afforded as the subject moves ‘along a horizon of transformation and metamorphosis’ (Charney, 1998: 138) in which the ‘totality’ of *identity* is only ever glimpsed.

### **The Accident-Event**

For Massumi (1993) this intersection of subjective experience and capitalist commodity-form reveals the role of the ‘accident-event (and its avoidance)’ within contemporary culture. Under contemporary capitalism the relationship between the subject-form and commodity-form, is the hinged mechanism by which the ‘specific identity’ of individual ‘consumers’ emerges from their latent, ‘generic’ identity as human beings. The ‘hinge-commodity’ secures phenomenological experience in a present-tense that is constructed (wedged) between time-gone and time-to-come; the commodity-form, and its individual incarnations come to embody time. Not unlike Charney, Massumi sees the subjective response to such a ‘landscape’ or terrain as banality mixed with excitement, moments of biographical clarity in which the ‘self’ swims into view as de-familiarised instants that betray the absence of selfhood from everyday existence. In such moments the body is

made 'real' to itself again, it retreats from the 'field of immanence' and ceases *momentarily* to be virtual (discursively implied), merely the locus of potentiality.

Subjective experience is shaped by involvement with the commodity-form and 'being,' as *becoming*, is determined by the interplay of emotion and character as the response to the *determinations* of life by the power mechanisms and commodity relations of the 'uninhabitable landscape of fear.' In a later discussion, Massumi (2003) is keen to avoid a deterministic reduction of subjective experience to the consequences of socio-economic conditions and the prevailing power-relations. He describes the 'affective possibilities' of the moment and the 'potential' or possibilities afforded by participation in social interaction and, particularly, the commodity-form. Thus, 'affective intensity,' by linking the mind and body through the experience of *being*, becomes the means by which the body's movement from one unit of temporal duration to another becomes the embodied experience of transition and all its (virtual) possibilities.

A body doesn't coincide with itself. It's not present to itself. [...] bringing its past up to date in the present, through memory, habit, reflex [...] means you can't even say that a body ever coincides with its affective dimension. It is selecting from it, extracting and actualising certain potentials from it. [Affect, broadly, is] what remains of the potential after each or every thing a body says or does – as a perpetual bodily remainder. [...] this perpetual remainder is an excess. [...] a reserve of potential or newness or creativity that is experienced alongside every actual production of meaning in language or in any performance of a useful function – vaguely but directly experienced, as something more [...]  
– Massumi, 2003: 4

Reminiscent of both Charney on 'drift' and Pater's formulation of the sublime (Gagnier, 2000: 144-5), the bodily immersion in the experience of the present is expressed as the *realisation* of what had been potential and its affect upon the body and subjective experience. Therefore, experience is *irreducible* to the activities participated in and, contra-consumerism, there is no means to purchase experience directly – only an engagement or participation that affords the possibility of experience. For Pater this translates into a discriminating taste, akin to the economic theory of the period, in which judgement underpins an *aesthetics of experience*, which is capable of modifying the subject rather than 'returning to zero,' by satiating needs or wants in accordance with economic theory. Instead, the body is stolen away in 'abduction' (borrowed from C. S. Peirce), an immersion in the moment – 'the passing awareness of being at a threshold' – a

physiological register of experience that becomes part of a process of *becoming* (Massumi, 2003: 5).

The abstraction, re-presentation and communication of experience is also the precondition of ‘singularities of experience’ that in their ‘affective movements’ (intensity) convey the plenitude within which the individual is (virtually) immersed. Experience is thus given *form* in order that it can be consciously understood, narrated and communicated, while its aesthetic form contributes to the ‘affective potential’ that it may possess – its capacity to generate a moment of self-awareness within the subject. Simmel, in discussing sociability as the play-form of sociation, sees the adherence to certain rules (or formal properties) as necessary for the pleasure derived from the ‘departure’ from reality this allows. ‘Abductive participation’ as the phenomenal form of ‘experiencing the eventfulness and uniqueness of every situation,’ of ‘navigating movement’ (transition), ‘surfing the situation’ rather than ‘commanding or programming it’ (Massumi, 2003: 7), resembles Simmel’s account of sociability, which ‘in its pure form has no ulterior end, no content, and no result outside itself [...]’ (1997: 255).

The ‘affective connection’ and ‘abductive participation’ offered in such moments leads Massumi to reformulate the relations of power between the individual and society as ‘a politics of belonging instead of a politics of identity, of correlated emergence’ rather than ‘separate domains of interest attracting [...] or colliding in predictable ways.’ In describing a disciplinary power that ‘produces not so much repressions as regularities’ (Massumi, 2003: 9), which (in)forms the production of experience, of individuals Massumi could be talking about ‘consumerism’ as a means for individuals to ‘personate’ themselves in the manner described by Seltzer. The *staging* of self is rooted in (and routed through) ‘exciting’ experiences and ‘experienced’ as an ‘aesthetics of consumption’ (Seltzer, 1992). The discourse of ‘consumerism’ and its teleological project of identity-building, through the annexation of commodities by the individual, relies upon the commodity-form delivering an amount of experience equivalent to its quantitative expression – its *price*. Therefore, within a consumerist discourse the purchase of an experience is assumed to equate to the incorporation of that experience within the identity-project as a contribution to the formation of a unique ego.

Therefore, even the most radical, oppositional or unusual activity can be recuperated by the discourse of ‘consumerism’ and offered in exchange as a commodity, in the form of an *event* or ‘shock-experience.’ This is especially the case in a ‘network’ economy that tends

towards the immaterial and the experiential, and in which commodities are often *assemblages* of various copyrights and intellectual property purchased (hired) for the ‘bundle of functions’ they embody. In this sense, interaction ‘experiences’ rather than objects are purchased, as ‘ways of affecting and being affected,’ for their *re*-presentation of ‘use-value’ and its possible incorporation into a *lifestyle* project. In this way, the ‘affective possibilities’ of any object or experience are reduced to the service they perform within the production of identity, rather than understood as the incremental re-formulation of the relationship between *being* and *having* (Latour, 2001).

Consequently, the ‘traditional’ distinction between *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis* can be viewed as a nostalgic conception born of the conjunction of bourgeois philosophy and utilitarian psychology found in capitalist economic theory. The dialectical distinction necessary to describe contemporary forms of engagement with the capitalist consumption-relation are founded *not* in conceptions of utility but in the subjective forms of phenomenological experience, particularly in the experience of temporality. The on-going attempt at the colonisation of subjective experience by the ‘space-time’ of the capitalist sphere of circulation and exchange has produced a ‘terrain’ upon which *either* the teleological narrative project of the self, as ‘identity,’ *or* the dynamic constellation of the relation between *being* and *having* coalesces as *identification*. The search for a stable ‘consumer identity’ proceeds ‘by prosthesis’ (Shaviro, 1997), by the annexation of quantities of utility expressed as the qualities of objects, services and experiences. However, the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption* born of the generalised relations of exchangeability (Mead) and the *informational* and ‘chronically mediatized’ money-form (Dodd, 1994) retains the promise and the possibility of unquantifiable *qualia* possessed by ‘experience.’ Indeed, *Wikipedia*’s succinct description of *qualia* as the ‘properties of sensory experience’ emphasises this.

The seeming ubiquity of the ‘capitalized accident-form’ has rendered ‘virtual’ and immanent the stable boundaries and thresholds previously used in the demarcation of self, identity and subjective experience (Massumi, 1993: 27). The traversing of these is now recognised *retrospectively*, the rites and rituals that once narrated biography have been commodified – as potential experiences – that can only be ‘experienced’ after they have been ‘consumed,’ that is, once they have been subsumed within the project of ‘consumer identity’ and lifestyle. Only then can a conjunction of the commodity experience and the biographical event be subjectively grasped – otherwise the celebration of a birthday is merely a clutch of screaming children being driven around Glasgow city centre in a stretch limousine; or a hen-night hanging out of a converted fire-engine being chauffeured by a

scantly clad ‘fireman’ – just one more possible commodity-event available to anyone. This interplay between the commodity-form, as generalised exchange, and the generic human being, understood as ‘consumer,’ represents a site of production – governed by immaterial practices – prisons without walls and factories without gates.

What emerges with the project of consumer-as-identity is a set of disciplinary practices and technologies, ‘check mechanisms’ (Deleuze), which structure ‘experience’ through the *access* (Rifkin, 2000) conferred, rather than limited, by the admixture of monetary wealth, class position and the asymmetries of power operating within contemporary society: it is *empowerment*. In lieu of traditional *rites of passage* twenty-first century capitalism power confers *rights* of passage – of movement as the means to ‘access’ variegated forms of experience. This is the ‘virtualization’ of the boundary or threshold (Massumi, 1993: 28) as a series of ‘local rigidifications’ that serve to delineate and demarcate the range of possible experiences within the ‘consumer’ model of identity. This occurs precisely because this model seeks to identify such commercially attained ‘experience’ with the shock-experience provided by capitalism (*Erlebnis*) given the impossibility of authentic experience under such socio-economic conditions (*Erfahrung*).

### **New Life: Conclusion**

‘Consumption’ as the ‘essence’ of a modernity built upon the refinement of the self through the exercise of discriminating taste and judgement (Gagnier, 2000) represented the subordination of aesthetic experience to utilitarian considerations. The differentiation of the individual through *personal* distinction was that aspect of the bourgeois project of selfhood that was co-opted within the discourse of ‘consumerism.’ This relied upon the narration of personal biography as the pursuit of commercially produced goods – commodities – and a nostalgic evocation of a world and a conception of humanity that had existed prior to these social arrangements. The ‘consumer’ is the inhabitation of a discursive position founded in the complicated arrangement of time past with time to come, of a longing for what was but is no longer, a desire for this past based solely on its perceived absence. The ‘consumer’ longs for the overthrow of the socio-economic conditions that oblige s/he to live as a ‘consumer’ without realising that this is only impossible because these Arcadian or Utopian conditions have never prevailed (and so have never ‘gone away’).

Consequently, contemporary formulations of the self, as ‘consumer,’ retain the conception of the individual as a biographical project that ‘proceeds by prosthesis’ (Shaviro), through

the annexation of commodity-experiences via the market as the means to narrate biography; to conceptualise the subjective experience of temporality. The consumer-self is a discursive and disciplinary phenomenon achieved through the ‘exercise’ of *personnation*, the presenting of the ‘self’ to the subject (Seltzer, 1992) as the outcome of effort expended and commodities ‘consumed.’ The subject-self, therefore, is a discursive position that has emerged in conjunction with and simultaneously to the capitalist production, distribution, circulation and exchange of goods. However, it is not simply a reductive and deterministic consequence of commodity-exchange and the relations of production and exchange, human beings, after all, make their own history but not under the conditions of their own choosing (Marx).

It is useful to consider Massumi’s formulation and development of both the constraints and the ‘affective possibilities’ that emerge and co-exist with the social and economic relations of contemporary capitalism. If the teleological narrative of the consumer-self, identity as outcome of ‘consumption,’ is seen as an inadequate formulation then an alternative analytical device must be advanced. If the individual is considered as ‘a checkpoint trigger and a co-producer of surplus-values of flow,’ the ‘consumer’ is merely one possible subject-position, while the relations of power that operate within contemporary capitalism can be viewed as ‘manipulating [the] affective dimension rather than dictating proper or normal behaviour (Massumi, 2003: 14). In this way the ‘disciplinary power’ of Foucault proliferates even as it evaporates, assuming less material forms that simultaneously confirm and confound, ‘imitate and invent’ (Tarde), forms of behaviour and modes of experiencing.

The daily regimens of production and ‘consumption’ merge in the ‘biographical fiction of the self’ (Ferguson, 1990) epitomised in the hygienic routines of the gym (Bauman, 2001: 9-29) and their associated endorphin rush. It is in this sense that the ‘consumer’ is a narrative project under constant revision, it is a teleological pursuit composed of an apparently never-ending series of commercially attained and commodified events, or durations, the goal of which is ‘identity.’ The consumer-self is, therefore, a discursive device aimed at engineering a *formal* response to the threat represented by the myriad instances of the commodity-form and the possibilities it comprises. The production of the ‘consumer’ as self-identity allows the maintenance of a stable, if impermanent, subjective formation capable of engaging with the ‘representation of *limitlessness*’ through the ‘super-added thought of its own totality’ (Kant, cited Frisby, 1992: 143). In doing so, it reveals its origins in the nostalgic desire for the forms of experience it considers absent.

If, on the other hand, this reduction of the possibilities of *becoming* to the ‘local rigidifications’ (Massumi) of ‘consumer identity’ is rejected in favour of a description of the subject of capitalist modernity as the *possible* site for constant change and modification, then *modern consumption* seems a more appropriate term. Here the ‘isomorphic’ relationship between the contemporary subject-position and the capitalist commodity-form ensures that subjective experience emerges from a dynamic and ceaseless process of interaction of ‘becoming,’ the relationship between *being* and *having*. Here *identification* replaces ‘identity,’ a process of perpetual transformation and complex temporal logic. The ‘hinged’ relation between subject and commodity-form (Massumi, 1993) underpins the experience of ‘elsewhere and elsewhere’ (Friedberg, 1993) based upon the ‘virtuality’ of the subject in relation to the possibilities presented by the commodity-form. The concept of the human individual as a specific identity is taken to an extreme, in which each human being moves from a being-specific to a multiple *becoming-singular* of the specific’: each subject is not only a ‘different’ individual but also a different *type* of individual.

Consequently, the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption* is composed of and experienced by a collectivity that is increasingly internally differentiated, a ‘changing constellation’ of ‘singularized members,’ each a ‘species’ of which there is ‘only one living specimen’ (Massumi, 1993: 33). Such an extreme formulation of subjective difference is diametrically opposed to the presumption of *shared* experience that underpins theories of the bourgeois self and the construction of ‘consumer identity’ through the pursuit of lifestyle projects. ‘Consumerism’ presumes that since we can all buy identical mass-produced goods we can all share (access) the same experiences, at the same time that it produces social differentiation through operation of individual, but necessarily never *unique*, taste.

If simulation is the concrete irruption of a singular creature, fabulation is the abstraction of its example – an example exemplifying nothing (other than singularity).

– Massumi, 1993: 34

Movements of simulation (the activation of the pure copy, of the copy as such: deviation) and fabulation (the emission of the pure example, the exemplary as such: attraction) are two indissociable, mutually supporting aspects of becoming.

– Ibid

This first movement is ‘simulation’ the production of a ‘copy without a model’ (the individual as conceived of by Humanism); the second is ‘*fabulation*,’ the ‘production of a model without a copy’ (the ‘singularly mutated’). *Simulation* is a ‘becoming-singular’ and becoming-singular is ‘becoming a species of one,’ so ‘simulation can be thought of as the birth of a monster’ (Haraway): monstration.

The dynamic that fuels this unpicking of the stable ‘consumer’ identity is the particular temporality of *modern consumption* born of the ‘isomorphic’ relation between subject and commodity-form. What Massumi terms ‘unlimited potential: virtuality unbound’ (1993: 33) is exactly the proliferation of possibility, of experience *in potentia*, which is constituted by the inter-relation of subject and commodity-form (and which the subject-position of ‘consumer’ seeks to deny). Therefore, the *encounter* or co-presence of subject and commodity-form is the means by which temporal experience is generated ‘suddenly’ (Bohrer) and momentarily, as a succession of durations, which as *durées* (Bergson) are qualitative and incommensurable phenomena (Deleuze, 1991). The dynamic temporal logic revealed in Massumi’s discussion of the relation between subject-position and commodity-form echoes Charney’s description of the ‘dialectical relation’ between ‘drift,’ as the familiar, and a ‘peak moment’ of self-awareness (Charney).

The “individual” or actualised capitalist subject is the spark ignited, at the buying site/being site, by the friction between the generic and specific conditions of consuming existence [...] Becoming is a cascade of simulations and fabulations that overflows buying. The individual is fundamentally without purchase. It is a becoming-singular that exceeds specification, conjoined with a becoming-generic that splinters the form of identity.

– Massumi, 1993: 35

However, this process of *cascading* ‘becoming’ threatens to dissolve the nostalgic longing that underpins the bourgeois sense of self, and its desire for completion through the ‘consumption’ of *authentic* ‘experience,’ by exacerbating the temporal dislocation between past, present and future. In formulating subjective experience at the intersection of *being* and *having* as the expression of a mutated singularity (unique *becoming*), the concept of *modern consumption* appears to undermine the concept of shared experience. If this is the case, then the problem of memory, individual and collective, and its conscious recollection seems to dissipate and become an unconscious set of ‘contents’ that may or not be accessible for recollection.

It is this apparent ‘decay of memory’ (Klein, 1997: 13) that produces the games of ‘Playland’ (Agamben, 1993), played by those who have forgotten the rituals of traditional society, but whose ability to (re)produce themselves is not in doubt. For Klein (1997: 305-11), ‘the alienation of memory’ makes capitalist modernity into a repository for ‘impressions’ that underpin an unattainable ideal – that of an uncomplicated relationship with reality, its representation and comprehension. The revolutionary task of Benjamin’s collector is now revealed as simply a radical expression of bourgeois nostalgia, a hankering after a world that never was, imagined as the world (somehow) to come. Massumi recognises the implications of this state of affairs when he asserts:

Yearning is the becoming-for-itself of the subject whose being-in-itself was bought. It is not an emotion (the content of a specific identity) nor even an affect (the inherence of an emotion in the body), but free-floating affectivity: uncontained ability to affect and be affected. Yearning is a tendency without end; it is unexpiring, unself-consuming. It is a supplementarity of paradoxical movements, a kind of excess that is neither identified nor calculated, even fleetingly, let alone purchased or accumulated – that can be only embodied.  
– Massumi, 1993: 35-6

‘Yearning’ appears here as pure potential, ‘free-floating affectivity,’ the phenomenological capacity for experience – the being-of-becoming – and the failure of the capitalist consumption-relation to reduce experience to a physiological capacity or emotional state. *Yearning* represents a contradiction in the capitalist ‘regime of subjectification’ (Guattari, 1995) precisely because it *affords* the ‘incarnation of singularizing excess’ (Massumi), a surpassing of the capitalist ontology. The temporal dynamic to which human beings are *subject* on the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption*, understood as the constant re-iteration of the movement from *simulation* to *fabulation*, describes the possibility of *becoming* ‘un-human’ and so failing to be interpellated within the ideological and material structures of ‘consumerism.’

In this way the temporal dynamic of capitalist modernity can be seen as having given birth to the subjective expression of a nostalgic longing and its attendant desire for completion, through the recovery of ‘authentic’ experience or the construction of new forms of ‘real’ experience. However, capitalist modernity also contained within it the ‘seeds, snares, and lures of vertigo’ (Caillois, 2001), the hallmarks of Massumi’s ‘yearning,’ and the antithesis of bourgeois nostalgia. Crucially, what is revealed is the appearance of this temporal dynamic within both the material and technological structures of capitalist modernity and its manifestation within the phenomenal forms of subjective experience: truly, the human

subject and the capitalist commodity-relation are ‘hinged,’ although not exactly in the manner described by Massumi (1993). Capitalist modernity ‘brought forth’ (in a quasi-Heidegger-ian manner) both the subject-position of ‘consumer’ and the ‘subject’ of *modern consumption*; the former as a traditional/progressive political position, the latter as a *transgressive* ‘failure’ of the former.

For both manifestations of the subject-position within capitalist modernity the relationship of past, present and future was central to the phenomenological forms of subjective experience and to the transmission of this experience in narrative form. The temporal logic of modernity, experienced as *modernité*, was ‘afforded’ by the apparent break with history (for instance, Fritzsche, 2002) or its nostalgic evocation (Stewart, 1998) while, simultaneously, that same modernity offered a surfeit of commodity objects, services and experiences. This juxtaposition of the absence of ‘real’ experience and the ubiquity of ‘consumption’ opportunities, facilitated by the mature money-form and mass-production, either signalled the failure of Enlightenment values and the Progress they had embodied, or it entailed the need to re-think what being ‘human’ would mean in capitalist modernity. The spatial experience of *distance*, which was transformed by department stores, railways, steamships and paper money, mirrored the temporal experience of ‘distance, which was transformed by concepts such as *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, telecommunications and widespread access to purchasing power (credit).

The space-time ‘terrain’ of modernity does not resemble the traditional landscape or its panoramic representation; it does not correspond to a nostalgic evocation of *reality* defined by Adamic nominalism and the mapping of sign to referent. Consequently, the possibility of *mis*-representation emerges, of a spatial or temporal *distance* between the thing-in-itself and its *re*-presentation in narrative form (since it is absent and inaccessible to experience). Contemporary modernity, therefore, seems to embody an excess over reality, an inauthenticity or surfeit in which a *surpassing* of ‘reality’ is counterbalanced by an ‘unconditional presentness’ (Simmel, 1997 [1911]). In modernity, the ‘present’ is both unavoidable and understood as somehow unavailable to subjective experience. Nostalgic desire for ‘authentic’ experience, the *yearning* for an unquantifiable experience of being and the interplay of ‘drift’ and ‘peak moments’ are now revealed as arising from the *temporality* of modernity. Further, because of this contradictory temporal logic, of proximity and unattainability, experience is inexplicable within the usual causal framework: it is ‘sudden,’ unpredictable and pregnant with ‘affective possibilities’ (Massumi, 2003), more akin to ‘play’ than the structured experience of work. It is to the

role of *play* as the means of comprehending causality within capitalist modernity and its consequences for the phenomenological forms of subjective experience that the following chapter addresses itself.

## Chapter Five – PROFANE PLAY

*Property is exchanged, but no goods are produced....* Nothing has been harvested or manufactured, no masterpiece has been created, no capital has accrued. Play is an occasion of pure waste: waste of time, energy, ingenuity, skill, and often of money for the purchase of gambling equipment or eventually to pay for the establishment.

- Caillois, 2001: 5-6

### Introduction

Sociological explanations of ‘consumption’ have tended to extend analyses born of the realm of production to the sphere of circulation and exchange, notably the abstraction and generalisation of *homo oeconomicus* to explain the ‘consumer,’ ‘consumer activity’ or ‘consumer society.’ The failure to comprehend the qualitative transformation that occurs when the sphere of circulation and exchange morphs into the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption* has meant an inability to appreciate the accompanying shift in the forms of phenomenological experience available to the subject. The historical and material processes that comprise this alteration in the nature of experience possess a spatial (Chapter Three) and a temporal (Chapter Four) aspect. In addition to the emergence of this distinctly *modern* form of phenomenal experience (*modernité*) of space and time there emerges an associated and complementary change in the subjective appreciation of causality. The ‘events’ that occur upon the terrain of *modern consumption* appear causally inexplicable within the confines of the rationality of the bourgeois world view, more closely echoing the description of ‘strangeness’ offered by quantum mechanics (Ferguson, 1990). In place of the Newtonian physics of universally applicable laws, which explained the operation of empirical ‘reality,’ it is the *concentration* of affect in the ‘event’ and its subjective observation that appears to ‘describe’ experience. This circumvention of temporal progression (history) and spatial proximity (thermodynamic force) render the contents of subjective experience ‘sudden’ (Bohrer) and mysterious. *Modern consumption* and its terrain appear to exist independent of the temporal, spatial and causal relations which previously constituted ‘reality.’ This seeming ‘irrationality’ of *modern consumption* is what removes it from the realm of production and its teleology, re-presenting it as a ‘playful’ phenomenon.

This chapter argues that *modern consumption* must be viewed as the ‘play-form’ of the capitalist consumption-relation, which emerges under certain material and historical conditions, and defies the rational and utilitarian analyses inspired by the philosophical anthropology of economic theory. The economic emphasis upon the subject as ‘consumer’

and *user* of utility is rejected and the attendant belief in ‘consumer demand,’ derived from these assumptions, as the *cause* of consumption-activity is refuted. Instead, *modern consumption* is seen as floating ‘free’ of a putative reality, born of the social relations of production, and rooted in a purely aesthetic engagement with the products, services and experiences contained within the contemporary capitalist commodity-form. *Modern consumption*, therefore, is closer to *fiction* than to ‘fact’ and defined against a normative view of reality. Consequently, participation in *modern consumption* implies a removal from the spatial, temporal and causal relations of such a reality and prompts the formulation of a vocabulary capable of expressing the subjective experience of such a phenomenon.

A conjunction or affinity between capitalist modernity, as social formation, and the subject of *modern consumption* is asserted on the basis that both share an ‘organising principle.’ Specifically, modernity is defined as the interruption of the continuity and tradition that, tautologically, it interrupts: modernity is created through its suspension of its historical antecedent. Modernity considered as the *interruption* of historically prior forms of spatial, temporal and causal experience is seen to complicate the representation, narration and communication of subjective experience. In doing so the *nouveauté* and *modernité* discussed in the previous chapter can be linked to the transformation in spatial experience described in Chapter Three and extended into the analysis of causality found in the current chapter.

The bourgeois belief that history had been denuded of its teleological progress while contemporary society was ‘out of Nature’ (Burke) and removed from the tradition and continuity that had underpinned the forward movement of history prompted a nostalgic longing for what was ‘absent.’ This resulted in the bifurcation of experience, as *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* as a response to the perceived alienation of the bourgeois ego. However, this nostalgia did provide a means of ‘staging’ the ‘magic of distance’ and articulating the causal logic of bourgeois identity – desire as the *cause* of self-development and psychological refinement with the measure of progress attained revealed in the preferences of ‘consumer’ choice. This commodity-based staging of the self, its ‘personation’ (Seltzer, 1992), allowed the social stratification of desire as the display of taste and distinction. Commodities served as representations, as *re*-presentations of inner experience, through their production of a ‘mirror-image’ of the self (Baudrillard, 1988). However, such strategies of self-representation were inherited from a pre-industrial era prior to the mass-productions of goods, the ‘democratization of luxury’ (Williams, 1982)

in the department stores and the generalisation of exchange through the commodity-form and its special case, the mature money-form. Under these material conditions, which emerged with metropolitan modernity, and the technological innovations in mass media and transportation the capacity for stratifying social class through the medium of goods and services became problematic, as Simmel observes in his discussion of fashion. Quantitative profusion, ease of attainment, replacement or alternative satisfaction made it very difficult to have personal choice as the motor of self-development.

Again, the *use* of commodities by ‘consumers’ in pursuit of utility, as the means of displaying self-development, was confounded by the role of the *multiple* and its popularity – often precisely because of what it was deemed to signify. Fashion operated on the principle that commodities were re-presentations of social values, *images*, and that certain objects were of greater value (socially, economically, etc) than others because of this. Individual commodities became *ratios* (Mead), expressions of the relative value of certain things, rather than the economic form assumed by certain desirable properties bestowed in production. Consequently, the staging of the self, its *personation*, was complicated because Value in the sphere of circulation and exchange was no longer guaranteed by its origins in production. The commodity-form and its contents appeared to be free of this link to their origins, their relative value defined by conditions within the sphere of circulation and exchange. Necessarily this complicated the staging of bourgeois self-development and the construction of a stable identity built upon the exercise of reason and rational calculation.

Ferguson (1990) sees this ‘decomposition’ of the bourgeois ego lead to ‘dread,’ while Vattimo (1988) sees ‘nihilism’ accompany the relativisation of the bourgeois self within exchange. This refutation of the causal motive of identity left the formation of the self subject to external factors, social economic or technological. Seltzer (1992) sees a shift from the ‘market individual’ of bourgeois culture to a ‘disciplinary individual’ *caused* by discursive phenomena rather than internal, psychological ones. Psychological identity, self-awareness, more closely resembled a process of ‘managing’ experience in an attempt to generate moments of selfhood. Charney (1998) extends this position by terming such self-awareness contingent upon favourable conditions and, therefore, entirely beyond individual control (no matter how intensely desired). Charney sees a new form of ‘distracted’ experience emerge within modernity, which he describes in cinematic terms, as ‘drift’ punctuated by ‘peak moments’ of intense or focused attention. These ‘peak

moments' afford the subject an experience of self because they *re-present* the present to the individual and thereby highlight their relative rarity.

Arguably the nostalgic longing for authentic experience (*Erfahrung*) is a debased form of this peak moment, an opportunity to articulate the experience of selfhood through its absence rather than an intense experience of its present-ness. Certainly, this would explain the desire to recover a form of experience that would allow a re-assertion of the bourgeois conception of the ego and its sense of self. This return to the 'biographical fiction of the self' (Ferguson, 1990) and its identity of self within the 'realm of consumption' would represent, for many Marxist theorists, the correct interpretation of 'final consumption' (Fine & Leopold, 1993; Fine, 1995). By re-connecting the realm of production with the sphere of circulation and exchange 'consumption' would re-acquire 'causation.' This rehearses the discussion of 'quotation' by Stewart (1998), which utilises earlier periods through their quotation, thereby spanning the temporal distance, as a means of valuing the 'fragments of modernity' (Frisby).

The task of the *re-collection* of such fragments – or quotations – of the past fell to the *collector* (Benjamin), who sought to circumvent the shock-experience of capitalist modernity by re-inserting artefacts back into their context of origin – of re-connecting 'consumption' with production. This 'cataloguing' of the products of the past in the present reveals a politics of (re-)presentation in which the 'panoramic perspective' (de Cauter, 1993) would allow the comprehension of a totality, a formal appreciation, of the artefact. This, in turn, would allow a reversal of the fragmentation (interruption) of the continuity of (the social relations of) tradition and the alienation that is deemed to derive from the advent of capitalist modernity:

The precondition of commodity circulation is that they be produced as exchange values, not as immediate use values, but as mediated through exchange value. Appropriation through and by means of divestiture [*Entausserung*] and alienation [*Verausserung*] is the fundamental condition. ... Circulation is the movement in which the general alienation appears as general appropriation and general appropriation as general alienation.

– Marx (1973: 196)

This interruption of previously existing social relations – *modernité* – and the severing of the link between signs and their referents (between commodities and their production) was accomplished through the technical mediation of the capitalist money-form, the reification of exchange.

The experience of modernity, *modernité*, was itself distinct from that of previous social formations (for instance, Simmel discusses the emergence of the *blasé* attitude) in that the commodity-form assumed a greater role within subjective experience and social life. Commodity-objects could no longer be considered neutral artefacts possessed of varying degrees of utility, instead, the commodity-form was a means of accessing experience and a medium of its narration and communication. Stewart's (1998) discussion of the 'miniature' and the 'toy' is instructive here because it highlights the way in which commodity-objects were freighted with social significance and *re-presentational* value, which, in turn had consequences for temporal, spatial and causal experience. In constructing the ideological and linguistic *operations* or exaggerations of 'toys' and 'miniatures' a relation of distance is generated that transforms the object, shifts it along a different axis. In these operations the spatial determination of form (size) occurs in such a way that function, as *utility*, is altered. Objects re-presented as either toys or miniatures are translated into 'signs' whose referents are the working originals. For instance, the relation between a working pistol and a toy gun, the 'toy' echoes the original but at a distance, the form may be identical but the function and utility are 'shifted.'

The toy and the miniature are aesthetic representations, they re-present a formal echo of use and function that has been transformed (most obviously in scale). As such, they offer a shift or translation from the 'real' world of working artefacts, measured as a distance *from* denotative function and production, and into the domain of 'play,' of re-presentation, circulation and exchange. *Play*, therefore, is a shift, translation or 'exaggeration' of certain properties of an object or objects, it requires their re-imagining through the *interruption* of the relationship of sign and referent forged within the concept of 'production for use.' The objects of 'play' no longer conform to their 'natural' or 'real' purpose, their function has changed, because in their *translation* they have severed the link to their own origins at the level of function and scale, while retaining it at a formal or representational level. Therefore, the *use* to which such objects are put is defined by their context.

The world of play is one of constant labile transformation characterised by a vertiginous immersion and 'excitement' that means that the 'self can not locate itself' (Ferguson, 1990). The activities of play are autotelic, rather than teleological, they belong to an 'un-real' world, insofar as they as they are freed from their origins in production and the specification of function and utility engrained there through the labour of production. Instead, the 'toys' of play resemble the contents of the sphere of circulation and exchange

in that their temporal duration, spatial organisation and ‘sudden’ (Bohrer) causality appear to have nothing to do with the social relations that brought them into existence. The events of the playworld echo the ‘peak moments’ of self-awareness described by Charney and derive their significance from the distance and difference from the world of quotidian ‘reality.’ However, just as play has rules then, so, too, do ‘peak moments’ possess an internal structure and narrative form that allows them to communicate experience to their participants. In this sense they are *fictive* rather than false (un-real is still a relation to the real) and these conventions allow them to be recognised, entered into and understood.

Significantly the generation of such ‘playful’ interludes within the sphere of circulation and exchange, as commodities, and the translation to the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption* that this implies, is fundamentally *unpredictable*. The prospective ‘consumer’ can never know in advance precisely *which* event, moment or interaction will allow the immersive participation and vertiginous revelation of ‘self-awareness.’ That said these ‘abductive’ moments (Massumi, 2003) are the products of the capitalist division of labour and the result of disciplinary techniques and technologies harnessed to the imperative of surplus value. In this sense, such moments resemble the experience of gambling: they are unpredictable, pregnant with potential reward (aesthetic sensation and its purchase), an immersive ‘abduction’ from the everyday, and entirely mutable but repetitive (every ‘hand’ played is formally identical but constituted differently).

Gambling is a hand-to-hand encounter with Fate... The stake is money, in other words, immediate, infinite possibilities.... Perhaps the next card turned, the ball now rolling, [...]. Yes, that little bouncing ball holds within it acres of good land and roofs of slate with sculpted chimneys [...]; it contains treasures of art, marvels of taste, jewels of price, the most exquisite bodies in all the world, nay! [...] The fascination of danger is at the bottom of all great passions. There is no fullness of pleasure unless the precipice is near. It is the mingling of terror with delight that intoxicates....  
- Anatole France, cited by Benjamin, 1999: 498

The discontinuous temporality of *modern consumption* means that the future is always in doubt, satisfaction is never guaranteed, and despite the implicit promises of mass production formal repetition still affords differentiated experience. Consequently, prediction or *causation* is never assured, it is always only statistically *probable*. Therefore, the search for meaningful moments of ‘peak’ attention, or self-awareness, defined against the ‘de-differentiated’ (Lash & Urry) experience of ‘drift’ means that the bourgeois concept of identity, as a stable self or ego, must give way to an extended process of *identification*. So, contemporary subjective experience is dis-continuous, non-linear,

autotelic and internally differentiated in the manner of ‘play.’ In this the experience of the subject repeats the formulation of modernity given by Baudelaire – as fleeting, fortuitous and contingent. The socio-spatial phenomenon of *modern consumption* constitutes a ‘terrain’ upon which both the quantitative and spatial *concentration* of exchange relations and a qualitative and temporal *intensification* of the subjective experience of these relations emerged.

The phenomenal forms of subjective experience, the temporal, spatial and causal relations of *modernité*, generate the ‘abductive participation’ (Massumi) in *modern consumption* as an apparent flight from ‘reality,’ the vertiginous immersion in a ‘peak’ moment of self-awareness is predicated upon this removal from drift. However, unlike the ‘quotation,’ which presumes a *paramount* reality that produced the quotation, which can be referred to, *modern consumption* does not rely upon such a temporal, spatial or causal antecedent. The experience of *modern consumption* is only generated in the *de-form-ation* of the here-and-now, it is a relation of simultaneity, rather than linearity (either spatially or temporally) and its own *cause* is unknowable. Therefore, modernity’s relationship to earlier or geographically separate social formations is echoed in subjective experience, it is *interruption*, a falling away or falling into a re-presentation of experience predicated upon the articulation of *difference*, rather than linear distance.

For Massumi the constant re-formulation of being, the ‘becoming of being,’ is a ‘cascade’ generated by the double movement of ‘simulation’ and ‘fabulation,’ which propels or dislocates the ‘dividual’ (as against the *individual*) beyond or through the position of ‘identity.’ This constant deviation from identity as the experience of difference is reminiscent of Vattimo describing how ‘Being’ is ‘dissolved in the discoursing of value’ (1988: 22) and the concept of a stable identity, inherited from bourgeois psychology, is revealed as untenable, other than as a nostalgic retreat into the reassurances of ‘consumerism.’ Both Massumi and Vattimo describe the material processes of the sphere of circulation and exchange in capitalist modernity, a realm within which either the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption* or the discourse of ‘consumerism’ will predominate at any moment within the subjective experience of any individual. In the ‘consumption’ of ‘consumer society’ a nostalgic longing for the bourgeois ego and the identity upon which it is premised, for the unification of ‘biology and symbol’ (Stewart, 1998) prevails. Where the immersion in the ‘abductive participation’ and ‘affective potentialities’ (Massumi, 2003) of *modern consumption* hold sway the phenomenal forms of subjective experience

allow *becoming* to overflow ‘being’ and the deformation of the subject – as *identification*, not identity – occurs.

Costall (2004) re-works Gibson’s (1977; 1986) theory of *affordance* to describe an ‘ontological relationship’ born of the relation between organism and environment that explains why the *uses* of any object, commodity or not, can never be instilled during production. In this spatio-temporal relationship the affordances offered by the conjunction of subject and object, user and artefact, are defined by the situation rather than form, function, materiality or subjective volition (although all of these will have a bearing upon the variety of uses *afforded*). It is possible to link the dynamic differentiation of the subject from itself, developed by Massumi, and the *relational* interaction between animal and organism, discussed by Costall and ecological psychology, through the concept of ‘possession,’ itself adapted from Simmel (1990). ‘Possession,’ in this sense, distinct from purchase or a utilitarian concept of *use* is the relation between the subject, *being*, and the object and its qualities (*having*), expressed as *affordance*. In this way, the relation of affordance constructed between the subject and the commodity-object modifies ‘being’ through the re-formulation of *possession*.

Crucially, ‘the mediating role of artifacts’ (Verbeek, 2005) as the ‘co-determination’ of the world is not a neutral process since these artefacts emerge as part of capitalist modernity. The ‘transformations of the ways in which reality can be present for humans’ (ibid: 197) are historically specific and the role of the contemporary commodity-form should not be underestimated. The commodity-form within capitalist modernity allows the ‘technical mediation’ (Latour) of the relation between people and things; it provides the medium within which the juxtaposition of ‘drift’ and ‘peak moments’ of self-awareness exists, through the seemingly arbitrary co-location of the de-differentiated form and the intense sensorial appreciation of aesthetic experience offered by a ‘peak moment.’ Therefore, the *interruption* of ‘drift,’ as the intense aesthetic experience of ‘self,’ emerges from the *affordance* of subjective experience of ‘possession,’ which further differentiates the subject from its previous temporal and spatial incarnation: this differentiation is apprehended but never comprehended, it is experientially undergone but its *cause* is never apparent (indeed, it can only be understood at the level of principle, never at the level of specific instant).

The *deformation* of the subject, as its spatial, temporal and volitional ‘movement away’ from ‘itself,’ and into an unspecified ‘elsewhere’ and ‘elsewhen’ (Friedberg, 1993) is triggered, or not, by this relation to the commodity-form, the experience of the

contemporary consumption-relation. However, this is neither an ‘escape’ nor the experience of being a postmodern ‘émigré from the present’ (Rojek, 1993), since both positions presume either a paramount reality (after Schutz) or an underlying *present* to which a return is always, at least theoretically, possible. Indeed, in terms of the ‘sociological project’ it is easier to consider *modern consumption*, as outlined in this thesis, as the ‘play’ form of ‘consumption’ as bequeathed by economic theory. In this it resembles Simmel’s discussion of ‘sociability’ as the play-form of sociation (social interaction), an equally autotelic form of interaction and one that is removed from a discussion of the ‘contents’ of experience. *Modern consumption* echoes sociability in its emphasis upon aesthetic, rather than utilitarian, concerns and the subsequent ‘departure from reality’ and the necessity of producing a stable identity. The playful logic of ‘abductive participation’ and ‘affective potentiality’ generated by *affordance shifts* or modifies the subject through the reformulation of the relation between *being* and *having* expressed through ‘possession.’ Therefore, the ‘subject’ of *modern consumption* begins to resemble the ‘dividual’ in whom ‘becoming-singular [...] exceeds specification’ at the same time as ‘a becoming-generic [...] splinters the form of identity’ (Massumi, 1993: 35).

The immersion of the subject within ‘objective culture’ (Simmel) requires a reconceptualisation of the relation between ‘being and having’ (Latour, 2001, see also Simmel, 1990), in which *possession* replaces acquisition – the accumulation of objects as a collection (identity). The playful inhabitant of the anti-landscape of capitalist modernity is *subject* to the same alchemical transformation as the non-human ‘actants,’ in place of identity a logic of *identification* born of the labile metamorphosis of *play* predominates. The bourgeois ‘self’ is now consigned to history as a subject-position that is untenable within contemporary culture, the re-unification of ‘biology and symbol,’ as *identity* relies upon a ‘reality’ that is inaccessible to the dwellers of a fictive domain. The ‘self’ of bourgeois thought is now merely a spectre that haunts the present, its teleological project unrealisable. The superseding of *identity* by *identification* and the consequent demise of the *telos* of the bourgeois self spelled the end for the narration of the life-course of the unified ego, its *biography*. Where once memory allowed the recollection and hierarchical ordering of the events of experience (biography) now, in the absence of an immediate account of causality, there is only a multiplicity of events the meaning of which alters from moment to moment, an infinite number of variations upon a theme.

### **Modern Play: the kingdom of misrule**

Play as the opposite of work and the antithesis of its productive teleology is neither limited to human beings nor the modern era, since both animals and ‘primitive’ cultures play – as did the Greeks of antiquity (Huizinga, 1955 [1938]). However, the opposition between work and play, between productive and un-productive labour, between the rational pursuit of utility and the expenditure of energy in irrational enjoyment is, itself, a formulation of the modern era. Huizinga, for instance, sees *play* originate in the ‘sacred sphere,’ and extend itself into the everyday through ritual activity:

The rite or “ritual act” represents a cosmic happening, an event in the natural process. The word “represents,” however, does not cover the exact meaning of the act, at least not in its looser, modern connotation; for here “representation” is really *identification*, the mystic repetition or *re-presentation* of the event. The rite produces the effect which is then not so much *shown figuratively* as *actually reproduced* in the action. The function of the rite, therefore, is far from being merely imitative; it causes the worshippers to participate in the sacred happening itself. As the Greeks would say, “it is *methectic* rather than *mimetic*.” It is a “helping-out of the action.”

– 1955: 14-5, emphasis in original.

For the ‘modern’ world of bourgeois society *play* characterised the absence of the rule of reason and the exercise of rational judgement in the pursuit of purposeful and productive ends, usually figured as utility. Work, training and education functioned as both the visible sign of such rationality and the means to instil or refine it. Hence children were educated, ‘primitives’ were trained (civilised), and the working class were employed. Only in this fashion could ‘self-development’ be assured against the profitless dissipation of expenditure, luxury and *un-productive* ‘consumption.’ Play, as the exaggeration and labile transformation of ‘reality’ through imaginative rather than physical labour offered an ‘escape’ that would later be appropriated by the technology of capitalist modernity, and epitomised by its tourist industry (Rojek, 1985; 1993). Thus, Ferguson sees in play an echo of the ‘physiological anarchy’ of *fun*, the antithesis of the instrumental rationality of bourgeois society; while Rojek sees the rise of organised sporting activity in nineteenth century Britain as a similar attempt to divert play’s revolutionary approach to the organisation of reality, lest it leak over into political rebellion. Play as the antithesis to work or productive enterprise recalls earlier times and alternative social formations that adhered to different value-systems. As a ‘dis-interested’ or *autotelic* activity play has no end or *telos*; it exists only for itself: in disdaining to act upon the world in deliberate fashion play and the ‘play-space’ within which it unfolds more closely resemble a ‘fiction’ than reality.

Play, in its widest sense, is non-utilitarian and opposed to the strictures of ‘civilisation’ (Huizinga): it represents subjective freedom. Play, however, has *rules*. It retains an internal structure and coherence that facilitates participation and distinguishes play-activity from all other ‘everyday’ or productive activities. Indeed, it is the voluntary adherence to play’s rules which transports the ‘players’ into the ‘space-time’ of the play-world. Play in annexing or circumscribing the contents of the ‘real’ world to which it is opposed through the ‘rules of the game,’ re-instates a nominally causally comprehensible world. In play, says Caillois (2001: 8): ‘Rules themselves create fictions.’ Play’s rules, like the rites and rituals of the sacred sphere, distinguish it from ‘everyday’ reality, while simultaneously relying upon that reality as *referent*. Modern play, therefore, is the recovery of that which has been excluded from or suppressed by bourgeois society; modern play may no longer connect humanity to the Gods as part of the sacred sphere (Huizinga), but it does offer the opportunity to re-shape or circumscribe reality:

In play all things become possible – or rather, nothing has yet become impossible. The ‘object world,’ variously differentiated as the toys effortlessly conjured into being by the momentary exigencies of a game, is dissolved and re-formed without limit. Play treats the ‘objective’ characteristics of the world as the paraphernalia of fun.

- Ferguson, 1990: 12

The marginalisation of play, as the province of the young, and its commodification, as leisure, highlight its ability to transport the individual out of or beyond ‘reality’ for a limited time. It is exactly this capacity that saw bourgeois culture in its ascendancy re-assign play to the immature (individually or culturally), the insane or a decadent aristocracy, none of whom could be looked to as models of developed or modern rationality. Play’s gift of transport was sacred (as myth) and later dangerous (as the absence of reason) but it would eventually come signify an ‘escape’ (Rojek, 1993) to an ‘elsewhere’ or ‘elsewhen’ (Friedberg, 1993) achieved through the ‘consumption’ of the commodity-form.

Play, as an activity and a way of ‘being’ in the world marks out a ‘play world’ or ‘play space’ (Huizinga) to be inhabited – it necessitates a distance from the world of everyday reality and the productive rationality that holds sway there. The inhabitation of the *space* of play and its logic implies participation, likewise, in a ‘temporality’ of play. For Stewart (1998), this causes a relocation to the ‘infinite time of reverie’: a time of ‘consumption,’ as

exchange and circulation, rather than production. Play, even when dependent upon the *rules* of the game, is always irreducible to ‘reality’:

The structure of play and reality are often identical, but the respective activities that they subsume are not reducible to each other in time or place. They always take place in domains that are incompatible.  
– Caillois, 2001: 64

In the time and space of *play* the world of objects bends to the will of the subject, *absolutely*, or, at least, within the prescription of the ‘rules of the game.’ In the fantasy of play matter becomes malleable and the causes of its metamorphosis are the demands made upon it by subjective desire or its temporary manifestation, the *wish*. In play the correspondence between materiality and utility, between substance and function dissolves – just as the ‘chronically mediatized’ modern money-form circulates as information. This is the rule that holds in the ‘fictive’ world of play – a realm where no mere *law* can remain inviolate.

### **Toys and Small Things: the keys to the kingdom**

Access to the realm of play is facilitated by the toy, that object which has ‘left behind’ its function in order to serve as a transportation device: for instance, the police telephone box that serves as Doctor Who’s Tardis or the wardrobe that allows children access to Narnia (which can not be reached deliberately). Play’s ‘disregard for the objective characteristics of the world’ (Ferguson, 1990) threatens to make toys of any and every object, regardless of its formal properties: tales of children’s preference for wrapping paper rather than the toys it contained are more than apocrypha. In play the ‘toy’ is first and foremost an object torn from reality and integrated into the ‘second reality’ (Caillois) of the play-world. The *toy* is the object that navigates between the worlds of science and fantasy; between the world of production where causality is apparent and results in predictable outcomes, and the world of ‘consumption’ in which things circulate or exchange but where nothing is ‘harvested,’ ‘manufactured’ or ‘created’ (Caillois, 2001: 5-6). This passage between worlds is simply more easily facilitated (and comprehended by adults) when the toy is recognisable as a copy or model deriving from an ‘original’ in the ‘real’ world.

The child’s toy stands at the intersection of play and reality and represents a relation of distance. The role of the toy can be expressed spatially, in this manner, because it is a scale model of a real object (even a putatively real object if we include the Millennium Falcon). The toy is then an unreal inhabitant of a reality that it metonymically announces but can never, metaphorically, represent. This makes it the ideal training tool with which to

introduce the immature ‘player’ to the habits of the real world of adults, toys become training implements and aid in the disciplining of the body (Foucault). The key to this undertaking is found in the spatial relation of size and the *distance* that it signifies: the reduced object ‘speaking’ to the smaller version of humanity through a diminution in scale and an increase in signification (Stewart, 1998). The miniature introduces a

[...] divergent relation between meaning and materiality: the problem of describing the miniature. [Which] in its exaggeration of interiority and its relation to the space and time of the individual perceiving subject, threatens the infinity of description without hierarchization, a world whose anteriority is always absolute, and whose profound interiority is therefore always unrecoverable. Hence for us the miniature appears as a metaphor for all books and all bodies.

– Ibid: 44

The miniature exists as a realistic re-presentation, but it is not ‘real,’ just as the toy ‘works’ (lights flash and sounds are emitted) but it does not function in the same way as that which it so closely resembles in all but size. The toy as a miniature is a cultural relation predicated upon a distance from ‘reality’ or ‘nature,’ it answers to *human* needs, desires or wants rather than the laws of physics or evolution (Stewart, 1998). In the miniaturisation process the world of ‘reality’ is abstracted and, obviously, reduced in order that it can be manipulated. Nowhere is this more evident than in the case of dolls, long the playthings of aristocratic adults before they passed into the hands of children.

In the mechanical toy, Stewart (1998: 57) sees ‘the possibility of a self-invoking fiction which exists independent of human signifying processes,’ as an abstraction and a shrinkage of the ‘real’ world. As such, the toy represents a means for the entry into ‘fantasy’ and an escape from reality – the world of purposive action and productive enterprise (work). In this surrender of utilitarian potential the miniature becomes ‘cultural,’ doubly so in the case of the industrial miniature:

In the miniature railroad we have a reduction of scale and a corresponding increase in detail and significance, and we are able to transcend the mechanical as well as the natural that forms its context. In the further miniaturization of the table-top train set, we have an access to simultaneity and transcendence completed. Correspondingly, the natural has moved from the forest to the individual trees of the park to the synthetic trees, barn, cows, and farmers of the train set’s landscape.

– Ibid: 58-9

Here miniaturisation is a relation of *exaggeration*, a ‘distance’ from the real expressed spatially through size, and for Stewart this distance represents a distance from the relations

of production that pertain in ‘reality.’ The toy is the means by which entry to an alternative space-time continuum, or other world, is affected. It is through the ‘toy’ that the relation and *distance* between play or the game and reality can be traced, because in contemporary society the absolute distinction between reality and play (as the falling away of the former during the latter) is never entirely accomplished. The relation of signification that Stewart sees as exaggeration is an abstraction from ‘reality’ considered *spatially* – and can be realised in the miniature or the gigantic. In the realm of play an object sheds its denotative function and, consequently, that object’s utility for the *play world* or *space* can no longer be defined in terms of its materiality or its properties – in the removal from the world of purposes and rationality a distance is created that is no longer the distance upon which bourgeois desire was predicated.

### **The Threat of Play**

The fundamentally *disruptive* power of play, its capacity to *interrupt* reality threatens the bourgeois subject, its world and the object-relations upon which it is founded. However, play does not simply threaten *this* ‘world’ it threatens *all* worlds: play undermines the ontological primacy of the ‘paramount reality’ (Goffman) against which all other worlds are defined as fictional (and therefore unreal or less-real), dissolving the ‘text’ into a ‘tissue of quotations’ (Barthes). The quintessential relativism of play exposes and undermines the privileged position accorded to *authenticity* in order to allow nostalgia to function: in this respect it echoes Osborne’s (1995) description of a modernity continually re-founding itself in its declaration of opposition to and recovery of tradition (discussed in Chapter Four). Again, as Barthes points out, there is no ‘degree zero’ of language, there is no privileged position outside of the text upon which the commentator can assume in order to produce a *neutral* evaluation of a text. The possibilities for observation implied in the panorama (de Cauter, 1993; Sternberger, 1977), the World Exhibition (Benjamin, ), the panopticon (Foucault, 1991) or the collection (Stewart, 1998) are revealed as operations of power exercised in the construction of a viewpoint, an authorial transcendence. It is this that play disrupts when it reveals there is no one *world* upon which to gaze and that nothing is definitive, merely defined.

Historically, if *Reason* as the inherent possession of the ‘ideal-type’ bourgeois subject could be glimpsed and grasped in the external world, it was visually coded in the landscape of commodities, a landscape that was as carefully tended as any picturesque intervention into the wilds of nature or department store ‘show window.’ In this way, Reason abridged the sublime terror contained in nature and *also* the technological sublime that industrial

capitalism threatened to unleash. The perfect bourgeois ‘consumer’ was, then, the developed individual who could exercise discriminating reason in the guise of *taste*. Mastery of the passions revealed the judgement required to ascertain and satisfy the needs of the individual, needs which were measured against the scale of the body; either the ‘stomach’ (Adam Smith) or the capacity for pleasure (Jevons). Thus *homo æconomicus* exercises taste as marginal utility when engaging in the bourgeois project of self-creation through the ordering of the world. The money-form at first appeared to be the perfect tool for the expression of this desire. However, its ‘levelling effect’ and capacity to ‘destroy’ form (Simmel) allowed the emergence of a rational framework within which the bourgeois ego would dissolve, and with it would go the ‘objects’ stored in its collections and upon which the *transcendence* of the world was premised.

### **The Construction of Distance**

When discussing the ‘power of money’ Marx notes that its ‘universal property’ – exchange value – allows it to ‘make contradictions embrace.’ The money-form, as a tool, can conquer distance by extending the reach of the subject, appropriating not only objects but emotions and opportunities, even effacing the ugliness of the male face through the purchase of female beauty. Where Marx discusses prostitution, today we might consider cosmetic surgery, but money is still the vital ingredient. This is because money, in conjunction with the commodity-form, alienates and abstracts certain properties from their original location – either in space (trade) or time (labour-power). The money-form allows the conquest of time and space, of *distance*, and in the service of pleasure the conquest of distance is the transportation of the individual (or their senses or emotions) from the mundanity of the everyday to other, alternative realms, whether in the department store, the holiday trip or cinematic spectatorship. Both money and play possess the ability to effect such transportations and the transformations in experience which accompany them. The attraction or charm of distance, which money-purchase collapses, was the means by which desire was previously figured, usually as the utility conceived of and attained by the sacrifice of its price (alternative uses). However, whereas entry to the ‘playworld’ (Huizinga) is attained through the separation of the ‘player’ from reality and its concerns, *modern consumption* relies upon the objective framework of capitalist exchange relations to allow the world to fall away. The relative ease of purchase of even the rarest and most expensive goods or experiences saw Simmel consider cynicism and the blasé attitude as outcomes of the mature money economy. When this is combined with the productive power of contemporary capitalism and the sublime array of commodities it affords, then

the traditional notion of *desire* (as distance to be overcome) and its role in the constitution of the bourgeois subject is rendered problematic.

*Modern consumption* mirrors 'play' in making the boundary or threshold a qualitative rather than a quantitative phenomenon, in rendering it as an experience that is not defined by the physics of *reality*. The exotic lurks around every corner and is always, immediately available, neither space nor time separate the subject from the object of their desire (wish). From e-bay to the PS2, historical relics or alternative versions of past, present and future are available for increasingly immersive (virtual) participation. The departure from reality achieved by crossing the ontological threshold into the 'un-real' playworld of *modern consumption* has been commodified as the experience of 'fictive worlds' (Stewart), world exhibitions (Benjamin, 1999; de Cauter, 1993), cinematic spectatorship (Friedberg, 1993) and, obviously, tourism. The pursuit of novel experiences as a response to the perceived homogeneity of the quotidian has a long history, especially amongst the wealthy or aristocratic strata of society. However, it is with the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie that this was formalised in enterprises such as Thomas Cook's tours in the mid-nineteenth century; its industrialisation occurred with the mass participation of the working classes, for example, in 'wakes weeks' holidays to Blackpool. Benjamin, in the *Arcades Project* (1999: 77), cites Simmel discussing and comparing fashion to trips taken by the bourgeoisie in the late-nineteenth century:

The accent of attractions builds from their substantial center to their inception and their end. This begins with the most trifling symptoms, such as the ... switch from a cigar to a cigarette; it is fully manifest in the passion for traveling, which, with its strong accentuations of departure and arrival, sets the life of the year vibrating as fully as possible in several short periods. The ... tempo of modern life bespeaks not only the yearning for quick changes in the qualitative content of life, but also the force of the formal attraction of the boundary – of an inception and end.

While the attractions of novelty are apparent so, too, are those of the *boundary* and the sense of closure or finitude that it affords, the imposition of an endpoint to experiences makes their duration observable, even poignant. Reality as the location of everyday experience – what Stewart terms 'lived experience' – is defined by its opposite. By crossing a threshold or boundary novelty of experience, *nouveauté*, is attainable and the promise of escape is from the obligations, routines and limitations of the everyday is revealed. The attractions of *modern consumption* and the capitalist commodity culture that underpins it are born of the *alterity* which commodity-experiences contain and promise participation in.

## The Aesthetic Dimension of Existence

The production of distance within the sphere of circulation and exchange of capitalist modernity can be juxtaposed to the role of distance (as desire) associated with the bourgeois society and world view that preceded it. An 'aesthetics of experience' can be observed, preoccupied with the 'problem' of representing experience, which is now being explicitly commodified, appears. Gagnier (2000: 135-7) describes a late nineteenth century emphasis upon pleasurable stimulation as the basis for an aesthetics centred upon the body. Such phenomenal or 'lived' experience can either provide an empirical veracity, the *true* experience of the world, or signal a surrender to pleasurable excess that prevents comprehension of a 'deeper' reality. The epistemological question of how the world was to be understood extended from science to economics and art. In a footnote, Ferguson quotes Nietzsche in *The Gay Science*:

We operate only with things that do not exist: lines, planes, bodies, atoms, divisible time spans, divisible spaces. How should explanations be possible at all when we first turn everything into an *image*, our image! It will do to consider science as an attempt to humanise things as faithfully as possible: as we describe ourselves more and more precisely... in truth we are confronted by a continuum out of which we isolate a couple of pieces... The suddenness with which many effects stand out misleads us; actually, it is sudden only for us. In this moment of suddenness there is an infinite number of processes that elude us.

- 1990: 216n 72, ellipses in the original citation.

Access to a 'primordial' reality or an *authentic* realm of being – to a *real world* – becomes at best impossible and at worst a conceit. The phantasmagorical allure of the commodity fetish certainly seemed to appeal to an irrational and libidinal economy of excess rather than the utilitarian considerations of political economy or its critics, such as Marx. Indeed, Marx's discussion of the relationship between 'essential relations' and 'phenomenal forms' of the capitalist mode of production focused upon just this issue, which is central to the analysis of *modern consumption*. The role and importance of individual phenomenological experience must be analysed in light of the structural relations that order and (in)form that experience. Only in this way can the meaningful actions of individuals be grasped as anything other than the selfish pursuit of utility, pleasure or identity (including lifestyle) and be seen as the predominant means of participation in contemporary culture.

The 'magic' or 'attraction' of distance, upon which bourgeois desire is predicated, is a nostalgic longing for a return to the paradisiac social relations of an era now lost and the *authentic* experience to be found there. For Stewart, this leads to an opposition between an

increasingly technologically-mediated and mechanically or digitally produced sphere of images and a physiologically rooted sphere of face-to-face and personal interaction because in such face-to-face interaction (communication) a definitively social set of actions, gossiping, flirting, joking and introducing people exist that ‘maintain, manipulate, and transform the ongoing social reality from which such individual genres have arisen’ (1998: 16).

### **Authenticity and Abstraction**

The ‘culture of things’ emerges when the bourgeois world of the sovereign or ‘market’ individual is eroded, when the human subject no longer presides over reality in an uncomplicated fashion. The ontological transformation narrated by Vattimo (1988) centres upon the primacy of exchange and the incorporation of the subject within its ambit. This occurs in two ways: firstly, the apparent loss of historicity, of *provenance*, which signals the complication of a notion of authenticity; secondly, the ‘de-materialisation’ of the commodity-form in which exchange, and the calculation of utility, are focused upon ‘experiences’ contained within the commodity-event rather than the object’s material properties. This second aspect can be termed the ‘sign-value’ (Baudrillard), ‘representational’ (Buck-Morss) or ‘staging value’ (Bohme) of the commodity. The capitalist money-form and the social relations of the mode of production underpin the emergence of the ‘culture of things’ as a ‘culture of human beings’ (Simmel) through the abstraction that the commodity-relation manifests, thereby ‘divesting’ both subjects *and* objects of their specific or unique qualities and rendering them *generic*, differentiated only by degree, with their specificity expressed quantitatively, through price.

Money ‘infinitezes’ space. It allows all existing commodities to enter into relations of exchange. It is indifferent to the physical limitations of space. In the place of the qualitatively differentiated human ‘space’ it constructs an ideal, empty extension through which can pass every possible commodity. Money, therefore, ‘is the absolutely alienable commodity, because it is all other commodities divested of their shape’ [Marx]. Labour power, on the other hand, has a special relation to time. It similarly divests human time of all its ‘irrational’ qualities and substitutes for it an absolutely uniform duration, an infinite extension containing all possible interactions.

– Ferguson, 1990: 161

This abstraction confers upon the commodity-form an apparent autonomy (Marx) while severing ‘biology’ from ‘symbol’ (Stewart, 1998), matter and materiality from meaning, through the divorce of personal biography (understood as the *cause* of the coalescence of subjectivity, as the self or unified ego) from the kinaesthetic forms of phenomenal

experience. Thus, *being* slips its anchor (the bourgeois formulation of the self) and enters the realm of exchange alongside the products of the body's labour(-power) – the commodity-form. The money-form is the mediation that facilitates the equation of subject and object, the arrangement of the subject *as* object, here differentiated as the apparently infinite series of possibilities that makes itself (virtually or potentially) available. These 'virtual' possibilities extend beyond objective culture to humanity itself, specifically the figure of woman: 'Love for the prostitute is the apotheosis of empathy with the commodity,' says Benjamin (1999: 511), and cites Delvau referring to the *lorettes* of Montmartre, 'They are not women – they are nights' (ibid: 496). Women become events to be participated in rather than people with whom intimacy is desired. The purchase of these 'nights' is the means by which they are removed from the biographies of the individuals concerned, both buyers and sellers, just as in gambling each hand, or *coup*, is separate in space and time from those that precede or succeed it: history is present only in the barest of traces, money left to wager, cards not dealt from the pack. Each time the game begins it starts *anew*, the experience of gambling resembles that of the adventure described by Simmel (1950): a bounded episode removed from the events and moments that surround it, distanced from the everyday. 'The lack of consequences that defines the character of the isolated experience <Erlebnis> found drastic expression in gambling' (Benjamin, 1999: 512).

The same is true of the inorganic realm, where money sheds its substantial significance and is abstracted into information, as the coloured chips used to make wagers in casinos. The transubstantiation of the money-form allows value to circulate free of the conditions under which it was produced, as an abstract event within an a-historical present, from which history, tradition and biography are absent and akin to the 'ecstasy of communication' discussed by Baudrillard. Modernity possesses no transcendental referential guarantee and so the 'free play' of signifiers, to acknowledge Agamben's (1993: 73-4) re-working of Levi-Strauss, 'transforms [historical] structures into events' breaking the putatively organic connection between past and present. This is what leads Agamben to assert that just as 'modern man has been deprived of his biography, his experience has been likewise expropriated' (1993: 13). However, rather than seeking an explanation for this in historical ruptures, such as the French Revolution of 1789 (Fritzsche) or the catastrophe of WW I (Benjamin), Agamben considers it a consequence of the ubiquity of 'events' available to modern subjects, events sufficiently lacking in quality and consequence that they can not be 'translated' into experience. It is the apparent 'banality' of the events of quotidian existence that distinguish them from 'experience' and 'divorces' them from not just

knowledge but, importantly, *authority*, since all such events are more or less comparable, *equivalent*.

The qualitative differentiation/quantitative de-differentiation of moments and the *events* that they constitute ensures that an identity, a totality (collection), founded in experience can never be realized. Instead, the experience of the present is the experience of a variety of ‘alternatives’, of ‘ways of escape’ (Rojek) from that very present – the extension of the principle of difference to temporality. Such transport to ‘elsewhere’ and ‘elsewhen’ (Friedberg), which was previously found in the exotic removal of the department store and its tableaux, is now more readily discernible in the theme parks, shopping malls, city breaks and budget flights of the contemporary sphere of circulation and exchange of capitalist modernity. This leads Rojek to reconsider Schutz’ appropriation of William James’ psychology for a sociological ethnomethodology in which the concept of a ‘momentary émigré’ from the present through participation in certain ‘action places’ allows a possible circumvention of the mundane reality of ‘lived experience’. By disavowing the pivotal role of a ‘paramount reality’ against which the ‘multiple lifeworlds’ of each alienated individual can be measured as a deviation by degree it is possible to see, as Rojek does in Baudrillard’s discussion of Disneyland, a postmodern space, with no ‘world’ location or ‘action place’ as any less real or *more* imaginary than any other. Disneyland, the West Edmonton Mall and the twin hearts of downtown Tokyo, Shibuya and Shinjuku, are all ideologically and materially constructed entities in which the ‘time-space compressions’ that Harvey (1989) associates with postmodernity and post-Fordist flexible accumulation can be seen as descended from the department stores of metropolitan modernity. Mead’s insistence that the economic realm is governed by the ‘essential reality’ of *exchangeability*, which includes subjectivity, sees subjective causality (the will) and economic causality become indistinguishable in the money-form. As such, this ‘collapsed’ causality becomes the means by which the traversal of the space and time of the *terrain of modern consumption* is achieved in the absence of the bourgeois subject and its causal principle (the biographical self). The transport or escape to an *elsewhere* or *elsewhen* is thereby reduced to the instantaneous reflex of the will, the acquisition of an ‘event’ (material commodity or not) through the money-form.

In making causality *instantaneous* money transforms the attainment of objects and experiences, and re-aligns the relation between *being* and *having*. Exchange ceases to be about the utility that goods or experiences impart and, instead, relates to the ‘objective fact’ (Simmel) of *possession*. Possession, however, is now imminent and immanent;

possession is a *potential* power and, as such, implicates the future in the present. The money-form allows the degree of uncertainty in the future to be minimised and controlled through the relation of possession, through its reduction of the teleological steps to the act of purchase – money, therefore, expands the reach of subjectivity across an entire spectrum, spatialising it by rendering it homogenous.

In money, the mind has created a form of the greatest scope which, operating as pure energy, increasingly separates the poles of the mind, the more unified it represents itself – that is, as mere money, which rejects every specific determinateness.

– Simmel, 1990: 246

The de-differentiation of individual instances of the commodity-form, the rejection of ‘determinateness,’ recalls the description of the empty moments of ‘drift’ and their abstract relation to place, locality and history, and the specific or defining characteristics of any particular group. Massumi’s characterisation of the individuality of contemporary subjectivity, which is manifest in the crossing of boundaries – spatialisations of temporality – recalls the participation in the commodity-event discussed above, and echoes Rojek’s revival of the ‘momentary émigré’ who escapes the reality of the present moment. Rojek’s émigré not only flees ‘reality’ but also, in continually doing so, becomes a constant émigré, or stranger, to the abstract and generic formulation of the human.

The apparent autonomy and objective character of ‘events’ on this terrain are registered, subjectively, as interactions – or *possible* interactions – with the commodity-form. As was noted earlier, ‘possession’ now describes a relation (both actual and potential) between *being* and *having*. The future is therefore contained entirely within the *present* –and for Massumi, at least, this is the promise made by adverts for contemporary commodities. The imminent and immanent commodity-event demarcates its *virtual* existence, as a possibility or *avoidance* – and attains objective form in the selling of insurance policy and, to a lesser extent, pensions and investments. The money-form allows the extension of the subjective will into the future in an attempt to shape the imminent and immanent present, while the individual remains in the here-and-now. The act of purchase, by objectifying immaterial exchange-values, *realises* the otherwise abstract, contingent and virtual. Thus, Massumi, deliberately or not, merely extends Simmel’s analysis of the role of the money-form in miserdom, extravagance, cynicism and the blasé attitude by assigning to it an active role in the form and constitution of contemporary subjectivity. For instance, the blasé individual desires ‘the attractions of life’ that his blasé-ness denies. From this contradiction,

[...] there emerges the craving today for excitement, for extreme impressions, for the greatest speed in its change – [the attempt] to meet the dangers or sufferings in a situation by the quantitative exaggeration of its content.

– Simmel, 1990: 257

Here Simmel concurs with Stewart that *exaggeration* is the social relation that bestows significance, it causes an interruption between the sign and its origins in production.

### **Nostalgia and its Souvenirs**

Nostalgia is a sadness without an object [...] Nostalgia, like any form of narrative, is always ideological: the past it seeks has never existed except as narrative, and hence, always absent, that past continually threatens to reproduce itself as a felt lack. [...] nostalgia wears a distinctly utopian face, a face that turns towards a future-past, a past which has only ideological reality.

– Stewart, 1998: 23

Bourgeois society had to ‘forget’ its historical predecessor and its world view (*happiness*) in order to assert its own validity and refute its transience and simultaneously assert its own *progress* and *development* (Ferguson, 1990). This creates a distance that allows the contemplation of tradition and its idyllic unification of ‘biology and symbol’ expressed as a nostalgic desire (Stewart). Nostalgia seeks a lived space where there is no ‘crisis of the sign, emerging between signifier and signified, between the material nature of the former and the abstract and historical nature of the latter, as well as within the mediated reality between written and spoken language’ (Stewart, 1998: 23). The separation between the thing and its representation, whether linguistic or visual, can be viewed as analogous to the distinction between an ostensibly immutable use-value and the negotiated (interpreted) exchange-value of an object or experience. When this is translated into the discourse around ‘consumption’ the debate within political economy that centred upon the ‘natural price’ of seemingly immutable use values – corn to replenish the body and the substantial significance of silver for storing value – can be seen as a staging of exactly this ‘confusion’ (see also Bohrer’s (1994) discussion of the double and the *unheimlich* in eighteenth century German romantic literature).

This accords with the assertion by Baudrillard that there is no longer any ‘drama of alienation’ from the body, only the ‘ecstasy of communication’ that is the hallmark of the terrain of circulation and exchange. Bourgeois nostalgia is prompted by the intuition of *in*-authenticity when ‘experience’ is perceived as dis-continuous with the understanding of

self – which is threatened by the loss of origins, real or imagined, and the denial of the possibility of a unique identity. The concept of ‘self’ falls victim to the phenomenon of ‘de-differentiation’ more normally associated with the commodity-form and the types of utility it affords. For Stewart, this arises through predominance of exchange-relations within the capitalist mode of production and elicits a counter-strategy based upon the accumulation of unique objects (collection) and the (re)construction of a putative reality through *detail*. Thus, the present submits to the (nostalgic) evocation of the past – as the locus of authentic experience (authored by God) where sign and referent were *identical* – and its cataloguing (Stewart, 1998: 27-8). The distaste for the antiquarian (mis)use of history espoused by Nietzsche stems from this refusal to acknowledge the conditions which bourgeois economic supremacy had unleashed upon the world and re-appears in Benjamin’s discussion of the retreat into the *intérieur*. The ‘happiness’ that Ferguson sees suppressed as the pre-condition of the emergence of bourgeois ‘pleasure’ is now sought after through the actions of the collector, or, more accurately, the act of *recollection* of what has been ‘lost.’

Everything seems out of nature.  
– Edmund Burke, *Reflections of the Revolution in France*, cited  
Fritzsche (2002).

Fritzsche, meanwhile, sees modernity (inaugurated by the events of 1789) as the absence of tradition and the *distance* from ‘home’ and ‘nature’ as recalled by bourgeois culture. The *lack* of an identity between bourgeois culture and its putative origins or ‘initial conditions’ becomes the distance upon which nostalgic desire is predicated: experience of market society becomes the experience of inauthenticity, the relativisation of values, of *Value*, which has its conclusion in the discussion of exchange by Vattimo (1988; 1993). This effort to re-present (literally) the past by a process of material accumulation is the attempt to overcome temporal distance (history) through spatial representation, epitomised in the museum, and to *re-unite* ‘biology and the symbol’ in the future, through the department store.

Bourgeois nostalgia came to focus upon the absence of ‘lived experience,’ the ‘experience’ of a relation of *distance* from the space and time of authentic historical experience (*Erfahrung*) and its pre-lapsarian social relations. The bourgeois project, in this sense, was the recovery of harmonious society: an Enlightenment inheritance evident in many of the philanthropic responses to the perceived excesses of nineteenth capitalism, ranging from Robert Owen’s New Lanark (Scotland) and New Harmony (U.S.A.) to the Arts and Craft

movement's archaeology of mediaeval England's craft industries. Reality, *real life*, as the guarantor of 'lived experience' – as the *identity* between events and their meaning or significance – was seen by eighteenth and early nineteenth century bourgeois society as irredeemably lost to the past. Life was, in Burke's sense, 'unnatural' and experienced at a distance or remove. The metropolitan life and mass consumption of nineteenth century modernity signified this rupture, while simultaneously offering the technological means of its overcoming. This would be achieved through the escape from capitalism's division of labour – which threatened the intellect (Adam Smith) – into an Arcadian past or utopian future; to the virgin lands of the new world or the resolution of class conflict through the manufacture of a land of plenty in Europe and the consequent democratisation of luxury that this would afford.

Bourgeois nostalgia for the 'nature' or 'home' which had been lost, whether in the events of 1789 (Fritzsche) or the development of a seemingly autonomous sphere of circulation and exchange (Stewart, 1998), corresponds to the 'rupture' of tradition, and the continuity of temporality, which Osborne sees as fundamental to the concept of modernity as historical epoch. In place of this rupture lay the accumulation of detail – the catalogue – the quantitative resolution of a qualitative problematic, through recourse to narrative strategies of desire and progress, of personal and social development. The means to narrate continuity in the face of discontinuity represented an attempt to re-found 'lived experience' through the apparent reconstruction of that which was deemed absent: collection became the act of *(re)collection*. Tradition, as the accumulation and re-integration of fragments under the 'sign' of the whole becomes the assertion of *memory* as historical force, as organizing and narrative principle: the narration of continuity, of biography, personal or social. Fritzsche asserts that nostalgia 'haunts' or 'stalks' modernity as its double since he views the Revolution of 1789 as the founding rupture that transforms the aristocratic and bourgeois subject, imbuing it with a nostalgic longing for 'home' and 'nature.' The money-form's 'levelling effect' and the de-differentiation of the commodity-form, through the pre-dominance of formal equality in capitalist-exchange, ensures that the 'play of difference' between matter and meaning precludes the re-unification, as *totality*, upon which nostalgia is premised. This echoes Benjamin's reading of Proust's discussion of recollection, and its distinction between voluntary and involuntary memory:

And so it is with our own past. It is a labor in vain to attempt to recapture it: all the efforts of our intellect must prove futile. The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm of, beyond the reach, of intellect, in some material object ... which we do not suspect. And as for that object, it

depends on chance whether we come upon it or not before we ourselves die.

– Proust, cited in Benjamin, 1999: 403

Therefore, the ‘machinery of narration’ came, increasingly, to deal with ‘irretrievable loss; disconnection from remembered lifeworlds; exhaustion of tradition; a fugitive, fleeting experience of the present; and an often ominous anticipation of the future’ (Fritzsche, 2002: 6). The bourgeoisie presided over a world from which they felt alienated, and this absence was perceived as temporality. Capitalist modernity floats free of the historical events that helped usher it into being, it is severed from history (as *Nature*), as the transcendent referent that underpins and guarantees meaning and produces a stable, hierarchically ordered system of language and experience. The commodity-culture of capitalist modernity can now be seen as antithetical to nostalgia, in its historical sense, as a bourgeois longing for an authenticity of experience rooted in previous social formations. Seltzer (1992) sees in the shift from Realist to Naturalist fiction, and their respective depictions of selfhood, an attempt at ‘personation’ – a ‘staging’ of the subject as a coherent self and *agent*. The change from ‘market’ to ‘disciplinary’ society marking a change in the context within which subjectivity is organised and experienced. The dissolution of the bourgeois subject and the totality it represented – the unified ego – served to sever phenomenological experience from the events that produced it (history as biography) and, consequently, threatened the agency of the individual by denying the autonomy of the subject in a world of objects.

In this way the experience of modernity, *modernité*, fuses with the constituent elements of the terrain of *modern consumption* and appears divorced from the social relations that form the infrastructure that allows its operation: the machinery and cabling that facilitate digital networks or the labour that supports transport systems, such as railway engineers, motorway service station personnel or air traffic control operations. The inter-relation between people and things discussed by Latour under the rubric of ‘actant-network theory’ represents one such attempt to forge a sociological re-unification of subjective *experience* and the vast network of goods, services, labour, knowledge, structures and habits that facilitate the forms which experience assumes for the contemporary subject. Here, what threatens to disappear or ‘melt’ into the sphere of *exchange* (signs) is re-examined in an attempt to uncover its material existence.

The nostalgic remembrance of an uncomplicated (*less mediated*) past based upon physical proximity suggests that the differing *temporalities* bound up in *modern consumption* – the

temporality of production, the temporality of inclusion in experiences and events (such as the narrative of a film) and the temporality of ‘consumer’ participation – are conflated (see also Latour, 1996). What these lead to, says Stewart, are ‘generic conventions’ used to structure narratives of both unfolding and ‘consumption’ – for instance, the writing and reading of a book. So, it becomes possible to view the self-referential and parodic activities of various ‘postmodern’ pursuits, most obviously cinema, as the ‘playful’ representation of an absent reality:

[...] it is the very productivity and self-referentiality of these cinematic signs, their absolute erasure of a physical referent, that renders their excessiveness tolerable for an audience.  
- (1998:11)

Here representation is sundered from re-presentation, as a denotative signification is foregone, in the irredeemable separation of the referent from the sign – and the dissolution of nostalgia as a causal relation within the ‘free-play’ of signs. The distance upon which bourgeois desire had been predicated (and which could be overcome, at least theoretically) is now replaced by an ideological act of signification – *exaggeration*. Any distance now constructed is produced in the removal from reality (as the system of referents), as an innovation that ‘exaggerates’ this notion of distance through a stylistic or generic differentiation. This corresponds to Simmel’s insistence upon the primarily visual impact of the fantastic or overtly stylized presentation of objects – whether Italian landscapes, the applied arts or the ‘Scottish boys.’

Representation is no longer the unproblematic re-presentation of reality, however, neither is it merely the *abstraction* of the referent as the sign, nor is it the *abstraction* of labour-power in the commodity. Instead, this ‘dematerialisation’ is the effacement of the origin upon which distance could be presumed, it is the abandonment of the contents of reality and their representation as mere *form* or *appearance*, and the entry into the sphere of both circulation and exchange *and* the sublime economy of aesthetic experience. The absence of ‘origin’ is signified as a displacement that is given form as generic and conventional innovation (play), as the commodity-event. A bourgeois nostalgia for the experience of the authentic, which has somehow escaped the commodification process of capitalist modernity, manifests itself in the circumvention of abstraction (inauthenticity): as the plethora of backpackers seeking to avoid the ‘beaten track’ and discover the *real* America, India or China and engage in face-to-face encounters with the ‘real’ inhabitants of those cultures such ‘travel’ is revealed as simply a nostalgic expedition into their own culture’s fantasies of authentic experience. The commodification of history as heritage and other

cultures as the promise of authentic experience is well documented (Rojek, 1993; Urry, 1990; MacCannell 1976; 1992), as is the seeming distaste for the apparent inauthenticity of hyper-reality and its institutions – whether Disneyland or Michael Jackson – variously observed (Baudrillard, 1989; Eco, 1986; Augé, 1999).

The revelation of reality through its *re*-presentation (documentation) presumes a relation of identity between matter (referent) and language (sign) that, when missing, can be rebuilt, whether in the individual self seeking ‘fulfilment,’ the cartographer or the collector seeking specimens that exemplify the type, the genre. *Representation*, on the other hand, is the ‘play’ of difference:

The utilitarian vision of an ordinary language perfectly mapped upon the material needs of the everyday is a vision of language before the Fall: speaking from the heart or from nature as the vox populi is mythically able to do.

– Stewart, 1998: 17

For the bourgeoisie tradition was the absent guarantor of this identity. However, the impossibility of a ‘degree zero’ of language (Barthes) is the simultaneous impossibility of tradition and its authority in capitalist modernity – unless it is imposed as a totalitarian project. Tradition as the presence in the present of an authentic past, whether as Arts and Craft antique, literary canon or *mot juste*, is the attempt to assert identity, to undo the transience of history and force it to submit to wilful organisation: antiquarian heritage or utopian progress. The purpose of the quotation, claims Stewart, is to invoke the past, as traditional authority, and so legitimate the projects of the present, whether radical or reactionary (for Benjamin quotations were ‘robbers’ stealing the convictions of the reader). Sociability, as discussed by Simmel, relies upon the *grounding* of the quotation by ‘reality,’ producing an aesthetic phenomenon without collapsing into an ‘empty symbol’ or *stylisation* when the connection to the everyday is severed.

Unlike quotation, fiction’s ‘reframing’ of the world is an ‘imaginary repetition’ of ‘reality’ rather than a direct reference, it is a mutually defining relation of difference: as such fiction cannot be ‘secondary’ or ‘auxiliary’ to reality. Fiction unfolds ‘in a world simultaneous to and “outside” everyday life’ and so ‘interrupts the narrativity, the linearity of that life’ (Stewart, 1998: 21). Fiction both draws from ‘reality’ and lends to it many of the conventions and narrative techniques that inform experience, particularly the narrating of ‘personal-experience’ through its *genrefication* as biography. The narrating of the individual life-history relies upon generic conventions such as character, incident and

action, since it is through these narrative devices that the momentary ‘emigration’ from the ‘present’ is structured *as experience*. In this way the de-differentiation of everyday reality is opposed through an ‘escape’ (Rojek) from its spatial and temporal structure, into the ‘elsewhere’ and ‘elsewhen’ of a spatially anterior and temporally simultaneous ‘world’ – that of *play*. ‘Play,’ therefore, assumes a relationship to the everyday world of ‘reality’ that is analogous to fiction or, more accurately, the *fictive* and shares similar narrative and generic conventions, which structure the experiential involvement of the individual. When these structuring conventions intersect with the remains of personal ‘biography’ (after the dissolution of bourgeois selfhood) they can be seen to resemble the ‘personation’ that is the response to the ‘thrill and panic of agency’ and its attempted performance (Seltzer, 1992; see also Seltzer’s discussion of the non-person, 2002).

The intuition of the absence of authentic experience of identity – Ferguson deems it an impossibility – produces the nostalgic desire or *longing* (Stewart) for the ‘remembered’ past, now lost. This, of course, is not a memory but an attempt at *(re)collection*, the production in the present of a *putatively real past* opposed to a present coloured by transience: it is *fictive*. What can not be directly experienced (lived) is *remembered*, memory is *narrated*. Kracauer (1995: 129-140) sees the occupant of the ‘empty space’ of the present as a bourgeois individual who experiences the absence of the ‘absolute,’ the possessor of a ‘soul’ that has liberated itself from God, theology and tradition until ‘in the age of materialism and capitalism, it becomes ever more atomized and increasingly degenerates into an arbitrary chance construct.’

This ‘exile from the religious sphere’ induces the *horror vacui*, the fear of emptiness, which individuals must endure whilst they *await* a salvation that they will not seek and are unable to embrace.

In the most recent past, people have been forced to experience their own insignificance – as well as that of others – all too persistently for them to believe in the sovereign power of any one individual. It is precisely this sovereign power, however, which is the premise of the bourgeois literature produced during the years preceding the war.

- 1995: 101-2

So, it is the lives of politicians, rather than poets, which allow transmission of ‘historical experience’ through the biographical account of the events of the age – rather than the ‘sensualism’ (Valéry) of the subject. There exists in the lives of ‘great men’ the possibility of asserting once more the ‘market individual,’ against the ‘disciplinary individual’

(Seltzer), who represents the statistical forces that deny the unique personality. This attempt to reconnect individual experience with historical process, as understanding, is the last vestige of the nostalgic desire to re-unite materiality (reality) and meaning (language), and so produce an identity between history and its 'lived experience.' Indeed, Kracauer sees the producers of such biographies seeking a 'bourgeois hinterland' in a tactical avoidance of their real situation, caused by 'world events'. Thus, biography is the last throw of the dice for bourgeois identity, the attempt to reconcile the self and *lived experience*.

### **Lived Experience**

The expropriation from 'reality' found in the 'toy' and the 'miniature' (Stewart) is echoed in Baudrillard's (1988) discussion of 'ecstatic' forms, especially contemporary architecture. The 'obscenity of the real,' its production of 'architecture and the creation of super-objects such as Beaubourg, Les Halles or La Villette – which are literally advertising monuments (or anti-monuments)...' is a 'demonstration of the operation of culture, of the cultural operation of the commodity and that of the masses in movement.' Urban architecture has become 'huge screens upon which moving atoms, particles and molecules are refracted' where 'public' space has been 'replaced by a gigantic circulation, ventilation, and ephemeral connecting space' (Baudrillard, 1988: 19-20).

*We no longer partake of the drama of alienation, but are in the ecstasy of communication.*

– Baudrillard, 1988: 22

Alienation is unavailable to 'experience' because the material conditions that underpin it do not coagulate upon the 'terrain' of *modern consumption*. Thus, for Stewart, the sphere of circulation and exchange of the commodity-form is the antithesis of lived experience, so the terrain of *modern consumption* represents an un-real arena in which a form of 'life' is played out in which face-to-face interaction, in all its guises, is absent. Upon this terrain both the Arcadian past and the utopian future are unavailable and individual experience operates under the guiding principle of *exaggeration*, an ideological form structured through generic narrative conventions that no longer retain physiological experience as its referent. The life course of the individual is seen as having been divorced from that which in other societal formations, distant in space or time, traditionally assured the direction of time's arrow. Here Rojek's discussion of Goffman reveals the problematic notion of a 'paramount reality,' any departure from which is a merely temporary aberration and capable of recovery. If the concept of a 'paramount reality' and its physiological frame is

surrendered then the subject has no promontory from which to ‘gaze’ upon the world of representations. The panoramic gaze of the bourgeois subject-self collapses in the ‘obscurity’ of *modern consumption* and the ‘ecstasy’ of the ‘death of experience’ (de Cauter, 1993), making problematic the figure of the collector and the possibility of collection as an act of ‘quotation’ of tradition, other than as a conservative gesture in the face of rupture and upheaval (Agamben, 1999).

### **Souvenirs**

The souvenir is the spatio-temporal embodiment of bourgeois desire, of nostalgic longing for the reconciliation of sign and referent and the ‘totality’ of experience that this would imply. The satiation of this nostalgic longing had been predicated upon participation in the world of goods, as the logic of personal (subjective) development and mastery of the object world – whether in the department store or the collection. As Ferguson (1990: 194) observes, the ‘pursuit of pleasure has nothing to do with sensuous gratification,’ but is rather, the ‘mechanism of individuation; the principle by which the self emerges from the flux of consciousness.’ The souvenir, for bourgeois culture, was the object-form that had promised to overcome the longing for *authentic* social relations and the harmony that they signified. The abstraction inherent in the commodification process ‘empties out’ the contents of the object, relieving it of its burden of significance and its relationship with a referent – thereby divorcing it from an ‘authentic’ social formation and the *function* that it had performed there in the service of lived experience.

The bourgeois souvenir can be distinguished from a historical relic – a piece of the ‘true cross’ or a ruined city of antiquity – since such an object belongs unequivocally to the past, to alternative social formations and cultures. The bourgeois souvenir is a nostalgic totem of a longed for social formation or historical era. The souvenir signals the *distance* between past and present, between the interior constructed by the collector for the ‘idealization of objects’ and the ‘impossibility of a private life’ in the modern metropolis after Louis Philippe (Benjamin, 1999: 19-20). However, the ‘transmission’ of culture or tradition implied by the quotation or collectible object (souvenir) is complicated by the loss of the ‘alienation value’ (Agamben), which previously defined such artefacts and the activities they underpinned. Therefore, the ‘non-traditional’ culture of bourgeois society is characterised by the attempt to span or overcome the ‘distance’ between the authentic and unmediated past and its experience in the present, or what Agamben (1999: 107) terms the ‘act of transmission and the thing transmitted.’ So, what bourgeois society seeks to *transmit* is ‘culture,’ a culture whose hallmark is ‘alienation value’ and which signals the

non-identity of origin and experience. In the case of the souvenir the distance of alienation value is given objective form that parallels Stewart's (1998) discussion of the toy and the miniature, where the identity between use and exchange, materiality and meaning, form and function, is transformed.

The spatial reduction of the original to the miniature signals the removal of utility and function, the shift from the 'time of production to the time of consumption,' from 'the domain of the *gift*, where exchange is abstracted to the level of social relations and away from the level of materials and processes' (Stewart, 1998: 144). By moving beyond use the souvenir enters onto the terrain of the sphere of circulation and exchange, it shifts to the playworld of the *elsewhere* and *elsewhen*, as a literalisation of distance – as a *sign*. In this way the souvenir re-presents nostalgic desire and assigns it a role in the constitution of the bourgeois subject – as the means of bridging distance. The failure of society's memory, its act of *recollection*, is the denial of unification, of identity between sign and referent – the resulting distance becomes the precondition of nostalgic desire. The coagulation of nostalgic desire in the form of the souvenir is the cathexis of the subject with the object world, in an age founded upon an unbridgeable gap between the two. Thus, nostalgic longing is intrinsic to the bourgeois subject both as a means of self-production and individuation through the manipulation of the object realm. In this case the souvenir – as the objective form of temporal distance (history) – has assumed primacy.

### **The Dissolution of Desire**

For the nostalgic to reach his or her goal of closing the gap between resemblance and identity, *lived* experience would have to take place, the erasure of the gap between sign and signified, an experience which would cancel out the desire that is nostalgia's reason for existence.

- Stewart, 1998: 145

The bourgeois project of selfhood, to which nostalgic desire and its evocation in the form of the souvenir was so central, however, was doomed to failure. The attempt to *realise* the self relied upon memory marshalling, *recollecting*, events and experiences in such a way as to afford to the ego a unity that appeared entirely untenable:

Pleasure is a relation of desire, a movement towards the completion of the self. But the self is infinitely extendable, so the object world continually takes on more attractions. It is a movement which cannot be completed. We cannot find, in pleasure, the cessation of desire.

- Ferguson, 1990: 205

An infinite world composed of an infinite array of objects and experiences did not bode well for the bourgeois self, the standardisation of experience divorced from traditional authority, and undermined the hierarchical ordering of ‘meaningful experience.’

The pursuit of pleasure, or virtue, or faith, is conceivable as the search for selfhood. It is to discover ourselves in the object world that we act with an underlying consistency of motive. When this process of self-discovery becomes undermined by the intuition of the nothingness that lies at its end, then we become filled with dread.

– Ferguson, 1990

The sphere of circulation and exchange in capitalist modernity is the (im)material manifestation of the impossibility of bourgeois selfhood and *authentic* experience. The money-form as the medium for the generalisation of the absolute relativity of all values within this sphere acts to ‘dissolve’ the desiring self, to reveal the practical impossibility of its attainment through the relativisation of *Being* into exchange Vattimo (1988). The translation of an identity-position into a relation of identification, from the bourgeois to the contemporary era, sees the relativisation of all values, even that of the self and the *agency* that had previously been considered its hallmark (Seltzer, 1992).

The bourgeois subject attempted to marshal the contents of memory into a coherent biography of selfhood, just as the collector organised the elements of the collection into a narrative that explained historical events: both were acts of (re)collection aimed at producing an identity between causal factors and their effects, signs and referents, matter and meaning. The ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption* constructs the experience of *intensity* through the relation of ‘exaggeration’: whether it is bungee-jumping from ever-higher points or travelling to ever-more remote or dangerous locations. Equally, the inverse of this is the purchase of an insurance policy that quantifies the risk involved as a premium to be paid, where novelty, contingency and difference are reduced to number and rendered as price. The (accident-) event (and its avoidance) becomes, on the one hand, the locus of *excitement* and an intensity of ‘lived experience,’ and on the other, a quantifiable probability proffered for mass subscription. In this way, ‘authentic experience’ as the subjective experience of particular or extreme phenomena, removed from the everyday, is commodified, and so abstracted, formalized and reproduced, as an ‘event’ available to all who wish to participate – there are several ‘extreme sports’ TV channels catering to exactly this situation.

Subjective experience ceases to be unique and identification rather than identity becomes the means by which biographical events are valued by the individual – as a narrative device for the negotiation of temporal ‘events.’ Both Simmel (1990: 278) and Agamben (1993: 17-9) conclude, but by different routes, that the traditional concept of experience founded upon the unique individual is lost, traded for mathematical exactitude and machinic reproducibility. The demise of the taste and discrimination of the bourgeois individual sees novelty, rather than beauty, become the order of the day:

Beauty is a kind of corpse. Novelty, intensity, strangeness, – in a word all the values of surprise have supplanted it. Crude excitement is the ruling mistress of contemporary minds; and the actual purpose of any work is to tear us from the contemplative state, [...]. People [seek] the most unstable and immediate characteristics of the psychic and sensitive life. The unconscious, the irrational, the temporary which are, [...], denials or negations of the intentional and sustained forms of mental activity, [...]. One hardly ever sees any more a product of the desire for perfection.  
– Valéry, 1964: 111

The ‘autonomy’ of the bourgeois subject as ‘producer’ had relied upon the perceived inner unity (totality) of its character as the motive force or cause of its conduct (the revealed preferences of economic theory). However, this unity dissolves into fragments capable of an apparently limitless number of re-combinations as subjective experience extends itself throughout space and time.

Perfection as the *telos* of development underpinned the ethos of self-mastery and bourgeois discrimination through the denial of fripperies (the critique of aristocratic luxury) or play (the province of fools, children and savages). This was productive labour as the (re)making of both world and self. The demise of the bourgeois world view in the face of modernity’s mass culture produced nostalgic desire. For the inhabitants of the mass commodity-culture of a technologically-enabled modernity the ‘biographical fiction of the self’ was an increasingly inapplicable concept. Instead, argues Vattimo (1988: 22-3), there emerges a ‘nihilism’ of the subject, in which ‘Being is completely dissolved in the discoursing of value, in the indefinite transformation of universal experience.’ Any lingering desire for a ‘self’ or ‘Being’ that resides solely in the subject must be seen as a nostalgic and retrogressive delusion. Technology functions, for Vattimo, as the ‘chronically mediatized’ money-form does for Dodd (1994), in dissolving the apparent immutability of *being* into a ‘value’ which circulates within networks (both technological and financial) of information and exchange.

In the world of immersion, authorship is no longer the transmission of experience, but rather the construction of utterly personal experiences.

– Laurel, 1996: 1.06

All values, even those of Being itself, sacred to the secular scientific culture underpinning the bourgeois world view, are dissolved into representations within a larger network – or *terrain*.

### **Unattainable Beauty**

The ‘heroic’ manifestation of subjective distance from the world of objects allowed the author, artist or collector – through the exercise of critical judgement – to forge the ‘magic of distance’ (Benjamin). However, the ‘democratization of luxury’ (Williams) epitomised by the ‘mass consumption’ of the department store, produced a reification of exchange, uniting disparate objects, experiences and values, within the ‘mediating instance’ (Simmel) of the money-form and a ‘culture of things.’ Here no thing and no-one stood apart or distant from the world – with the exception of the art-object.

the essence of the work of art... is to be a totality for itself, to require no relationship to an external entity, to weave each of its threads back once more to its focal point. In so far as the work of art is that which otherwise only *the world as a whole* or the soul can be: a *unity* out of individual elements – it encloses itself as *a world for itself* against all that exists external to it.

– Simmel, cited Frisby, 1992: 140, emphasis in original.

The reification of exchange in the money-form bestowed upon the specific instances of exchange (acquisition) a ‘spectral objectivity’ (Marx), which became ‘“the embodiment of a pure function” – they play with values just as the aesthetic judgement “exercises functions... purely formally” ’ (Frisby, 1990: 142). The autonomy of the aesthetic realm of image, appearance and form parallels that of the sphere of circulation and exchange, in which economic values are given form as images of value circulate, divorced from their utilitarian contents begins to emerge. This, in turn, leads Frisby to consider the distinction made by Kant, in *The Critique of Judgement*, between the beautiful and the sublime.

The beautiful... is a question of the form of the object, and thus consists in limitation, whereas the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else its presence provokes, a representation of *limitlessness*, yet with a super-added thought of its own totality. Accordingly the beautiful seems to be regarded as a presentation of an indeterminate concept of understanding, the sublime as a presentation of an indeterminate concept of reason. Hence the delight is in the former case coupled with the representation of *Quality*, but in this case with that of *Quantity*.

– Kant, cited Frisby, 1992: 143

Frisby poses the question of whether what Simmel says of the *beautiful*, in respect of art (formal limitation), can be discerned in the relation of the *sublime* to the sphere of circulation and exchange. No longer tied to the material object (form, materiality and function) the experience of the sublime resembles both the labile transformations of ‘play’ and the ‘spectral objectivity’ of the monetised commodity-form – in none of these instances is the *cause* of the aesthetic experiences discernible or available to understanding.

Aesthetic experience appears to Simmel to offer the possibility of ‘liberation’ and ‘release from the dull pressure of things, the expansion of the joyful and free self into things, the reality of which usually oppresses it’ (Frisby, 1992: 144). The ‘autonomous movement of things,’ regardless of the intercession of human beings, which it had been the task of modern art to represent, emphasised the distance between subjects and objects. The liberation of the contents of the world from the utilitarian purposes that had ostensibly underscored their production signalled their escape from use, through the distance of abstraction, and their representation as aesthetic values.

The more remote for the species is the utility of the object that first created an interest and a value and is now forgotten, the purer is the aesthetic satisfaction derived from the mere form and appearance of the object.

– Simmel, cited Frisby, 1992: 146

The escape from *origins* (utility, materiality and function), in this sense, marks the entry into the aesthetic sphere where adornment and ornamentation are to be found, not least in the ‘applied arts’ where general use or ‘plurality’ heralded the technical refinement of *style* and ‘stylisation.’ The aesthetic sphere as the realm beyond *use* – of autonomous objects divorced from human purposes – recalls the ‘freedom’ from function of the toy. Here the world is no longer composed of referents supporting a system of signifiers and is, instead, simply the ‘free play’ of these signifiers and their infinite possible signifieds.

While, previously, the picturesque had served to contain the sublime terror of nature through the *production* of the landscape, this is no longer tenable:

Just as in ‘The Philosophy of Landscape’ Simmel virtually declares that the metropolitan ‘cityscape’ (Benjamin) cannot be a landscape, so in the museum devoted to the display of work of art (that are themselves framed) the totality is itself incapable of being ‘framed.’

– Frisby, 1992: 147

Metropolitan existence is rooted in a technological rather than a natural sublime, or rather technology is indivisible from nature in the manner once advanced by bourgeois science. The myriad competing impressions and stimuli that comprise metropolitan life now resemble Simmel's description of aesthetic experience as '*the mere image of things, [...] their appearance and form*, regardless of whether or not they are borne by a graspable reality' (cited Frisby, 1992: 136). Metropolitan experience is, then, governed by two aspects, quantitative profusion – the sheer number of objects and experiences encountered – and, the *qualitative* momentary. Metropolitan experience can therefore be found in concentrated form in the museum, gallery, World Exhibition or department store, since the possibility of totality, of a frame for existence and experience, and the consequent ordering and evaluation of the world that such distinctions make possible, is feasible only when experience is represented spatially rather than temporally. This is the logic of the collection as discussed by Stewart (1998), where the identity and therefore the meaning and value of an object relies upon its relation with the referent, which it signifies, remaining unchanged.

By dis-articulating the sign from its referent the commodity is 'liberated' from reality and the material, spatial and historical constraints that shaped its production (cause): the 'initial conditions' that pertained at its origin no longer inform the role and meaning of the commodity-event. On the fictive terrain of the playworld the material object slips the bonds of physical form, it is liberated into a realm where its circulation and exchange is governed not by causal laws but by the labile possibilities and playful transformation of its *significance*. The value of the commodity-sign is now dependent upon the absence of its referent (the origin as production history). Utility as proposed by economic theory is a redundant concept because it is rooted in a hierarchy of needs and wants that are superfluous in a world ruled not by formal limitation (beauty) but sheer profusion, the representation of a sublime limitlessness. In place of the appreciation of beauty, the evaluation of objects by subjects is the experience of *being* as exchange, as ratio. Therefore, the aesthetic pleasure that underpins the bourgeois theory of self as unique identity and its 'perfectibility' dissolves in the face of the relativisation of 'Value' found in the money-form and the sublime transformation of *play*. Ferguson sees this as a shift within the internal organisation of the bourgeois psyche:

Excitement, an internally decomposed state within which the 'self' cannot locate itself, is the enjoyment of modernity and the modern form of enjoyment. It is inherently unpredictable and related to the 'object world' in an arbitrary fashion. [...] In an excited state, the psyche no longer 'knows itself' and manages to throw off every pretension to seriousness.

The psyche now resembles the commodity-sign in that it is alienated not just from the conditions of its origins (the possibility of nostalgia) but also from the possibility of the *recovery* of this previous (ego) state. The imminent decomposition or fragmentation of the bourgeois self in the face of the commodity-culture of capitalist modernity can also be seen in Seltzer's (1992: 18) discussion of the 'thrill and panic of agency, at once extended and suspended' heralded by the increasing extension of technology into every sphere of life.

### **Simmel, sociability and play**

The aesthetic dimension of life for Simmel, found in his discussion of Kant, lies in the *form* which things assume, the formal representation of the contents as 'the mere image of things,' 'their appearance.' The aesthetic dimension is contrasted with the *reality* of existence, in 'the lightness and freedom of *play*,' in its formal appearance rather than the 'reality-contents of life' (cited Frisby, 1992: 136). The *formal* unification of diverse, even contradictory fragments in the aesthetic totality parallels the relation between the individual and the supra-individual (the universal), a subjective valuation appearing to the subject as possibly shared through its being rooted in a 'universal' value.

Simmel posits that 'the feeling with respect to art of being released from every detail and one-sidedness of existence perhaps emerges out of the fact that a boundlessness of the individual element, as emanating from a central point and on which the work of art rests, is brought to life in us, and indeed *not with the confusion of fortuitous associations but rather, in each case, in typical and meaningful forms of relations, attractions and connections of conceptions.*'

– Frisby, (quoting Simmel), italics in original citation, 1992: 137.

As Frisby observes, this 'somewhat abstract formulation acquires a concrete form in Simmel's discussion of sociability (*Geselligkeit*) as the play form of society (*Gesellschaft*), as a form of sociation unburdened by any specific content' (ibid).

Simmel's attempt to discern the aesthetic dimension to every type of 'sociation' leads him to an analysis of formal similarity expressed in 'the fact that in every play or artistic activity there is contained a common element not affected by their differences in content' (1949: 254). In sociability even the individual personality must be restrained in order to facilitate interaction with others – the bourgeois ideal of a fully realized individual ego, the personality, must be suspended and accorded a formal role rather than allow unrestrained selfhood. The rules that shape sociability are, therefore, restraints that rein in a subject,

unlike the money-form that extends the subjective will through its use a tool for abbreviating the steps in the sequence of causality/attainment.

Sociability, as the abstract form of social interaction, ‘distils, as it were, out of the realities of social life the pure essence of association, of the associative process as a value and a satisfaction. [...] all sociability, even the purely spontaneous, if it is to have meaning and stability, lays [...] great value on form, on good form’ (1949: 255). And sociability, like play, has as its essence ‘that it makes up its substance from numerous fundamental forms of serious relationships among men, a substance, however, spared the frictional relations of real life; but out of its formal relations to real life, [it...] takes on a symbolically playing fullness of life and a significance which a superficial rationalism always seeks only in the content’ (ibid). So,

Sociability is, then, the play-form of association and is related to the content-determined concreteness of association as art is related to reality. [...] Since sociability in its pure form has no ulterior end, no content, and no result outside itself, it is oriented completely about personalities.  
– 1949: 255

This abstraction away from the material position of the participants and the subsequent presumption of equality, ‘is a game in which one “acts” as though all were equal [...] This is just as far from being a lie as is play or art in all their departures from reality’ (1949: 257). Here the social world of bourgeois interaction echoes the formal exchange of economic sphere, in which actors and commodities meet in formal equality for the purposes of exchange. In the social sphere, in the apparent autonomy of sociable exchange, this is not a ‘lie’ but it might be considered a fiction. Governed by ‘the immediate play of its forms’ the ‘sociological play-form’ becomes a ‘social game’ that ‘is played not only *in* a society as its outward bearer but that *with* the society actually “society” is played’ (1949: 258). Such interactions (and coquetry is another) have no end other than their perpetuation and enjoyment, since to bring them to a conclusion, to accord them purpose, would cause them to cease and return the participants to reality. When straightforward pursuit or infatuation intervenes then such interaction between the sexes ceases to be a form of sociability in the particular sense defined by Simmel.

It lacks that free interaction and equivalence of the elements which is the fundamental condition of sociability. [...] Coquetry...has left behind the reality of erotic desire, of consent or denial, and becomes a play of shadow pictures.  
– 1949: 258

By abandoning telos sociability echoes the ‘freedom’ from purpose of *play*, sociability becomes something to be practiced and accomplished, capable of refinement through an ever-greater understanding of and adherence to its rules. The perfect moment of ‘sociability’ is that the *geo* is subordinated (or subsumed):

... in which the subjectively individual as well as the objectively substantive have dissolved themselves completely in the service of pure sociability.’  
- (1949: 259-60).

Participation in this rule-governed activity resembles, says Simmel, artistic practice and a *distance* from the concerns, values and activities of the everyday world, signals the departure from ‘reality’ and entry into the aesthetic sphere. However, in leaving the reality of everyday life sociability, like artistic endeavour, risks being cut off from the conditions that produce it, reducing it to an empty re-presentation.

All sociability is but a symbol of life, [...]; but even so, a symbol of *life*, whose likeness it only so far alters as is required by the distance from it gained in the play, exactly as also the freest and most fantastic art, the furthest from all reality, nourishes itself from a deep and true relation to reality, if it is not to be empty and lying. If sociability cuts off completely the threads which bind it to real life and out of which it spins its admittedly stylized web, it turns from play to empty farce, to a lifeless schematization proud of its woodenness.  
– 1949: 261

The aesthetic dimension is premised upon its distance from the everyday, its elevation to an other sphere, such that it is the *distance* from the everyday that bestows upon the aesthetic its affect. In this way the aesthetic object is freed of its denotative function and the qualities represented by or contained within its material properties – just as the toy is. However, if the aesthetic object is not to be ‘reduced’ to the status of a toy it must not be cut-off entirely from the reality that bore it. Typically,

[...] if we weld certain elements taken from the whole of being into a realm of their own, which is governed by its own laws and not by those of the whole, this realm, if completely cut off from the life of the whole, can display in its inner realization an empty nature suspended in the air; but then, often altered only by imponderables, precisely in this state of removal from all immediate reality, its deeper nature can appear more completely, more integrated and meaningful, than any attempt to comprehend it realistically and without taking distance. According as the former or the latter experience predominates, will one’s own life, running its own course according to its own norms, be a formal, meaningless dead thing – or a symbolic play, in whose aesthetic charm all the finest and most highly sublimated dynamics of social existence and its riches are gathered.

– Simmel, 1949: 261

The severing of the connection between the ‘life’ of an object and ‘reality.’ and the subsequent denial of the possibility of commenting upon reality, of ‘comprehending’ it, recalls the process of the commodity-form and its alienation from the conditions of its production as it enters the sphere of circulation and exchange. The ‘artistic play’ created by reality ‘as from a distance’ is the hallmark of a world divided ontologically between subjects and objects (see the discussion of Dant, 1999 in Chapter Two), it is the world of the ‘sovereign’ or ‘market individual’ (Seltzer, 1992) and not as Simmel feared ‘the culture of human beings’ as the ‘culture of things.’

### **Staccato**

The failure of biographical narrative as a means to explain participation in the world mirrors Agamben’s (1999) description of the difficulties facing the transmission of aesthetic experience in contemporary culture. The loss of ‘history,’ as the biographical narration of individual and group, deprives humanity of its ‘reference points.’ Such a failure of ‘transmission’ of experience leaves the individual

wedged between, on the one hand, a past that incessantly accumulates behind him and oppresses him with the multiplicity of its now-indecipherable contents, and on the other hand a future that he does not yet possess and that does not throw any light on his struggle with the past.  
- 1999: 108

The interruption of ‘traditional’ temporality produces an ‘accumulated culture [that] has lost its living meaning.’

Suspended in the void between old and new, past and future, man is projected into time as into something alien that incessantly eludes him and still drags him forward, but without allowing him to find his ground in it.  
- Ibid

The constant caesura of meaning, from moment to moment, is the catastrophe of narration, the subjective experience of which is best described as vertigo – the dizzying feeling undergone when the physical immersion of the body in an event or experience deprives the sensory faculties of an external reference point that would facilitate orientation.

Where economic theory had postulated a utility-maximising, if occasionally fickle, psychological individual and the various versions of cultural studies, from Bourdieu (1984) to Dant (1999) envisage a modern-day Prometheus shaping the stuff of the world in accordance with a subjective desire for identity. *Modern consumption*, by contrast, must be

seen as the contemporary medium for inter-subjective association in the absence of the Cartesian distinction between subject and object, which has previously served as the ‘referent’ for the experience of signification or meaning. The ‘dissolution’ of the subject into the momentary instances of identification, the coalescence of subjectivity in association with ‘object culture’ – as ratio – betrays the absence of any utilitarian, libidinal or psychological *a priori*. The bourgeois subject is now a historical anachronism that lingers as a disembodied spectre that stalks contemporary commodity culture, it is now a stylised abstraction that exists in the absence of the conditions that prevailed at its origin and presided over its historical production. The bourgeois subject, previously imagined as the ‘origin’ of the twin axes of ‘consumption activity’ and its mathematical representation, is now only a notional point of departure from which subjective identification is always ‘in retreat.’

### **Here There Be Monsters (Mutants and Machines)**

The nostalgic attempt to re-found selfhood through the manipulation of the object world described by Seltzer (1992) must now be replaced by the constant ‘deformation’ (Ferguson) of subjectivity as it continuously re-combines and re-forms at the intersection of *generic* and *specific* identity through the interstitial action of a commodity ‘hinge’ (Massumi, 1993). This conjunction of materiality and meaning, is the condition of phenomenological experience in the post-bourgeois era. This is why Seltzer’s description, borrowed from Foucault, of the supplanting of the ‘market’ individual by the its ‘disciplinary’ successor stresses the (re)-production of the individual by factors that arise outside of the subject and its traditional limit-point – the body. Indeed, the self and its ‘vessel’ are now *acted* upon by external factors that exceed those previously accepted – class, historical events, even genetics. The power of contemporary ‘discursive systems’ to (mis-)shape the subject, to produce identifications, signals the end of the humanist conception of self-mastery that underpinned the bourgeois formulation of individual identity. *Modern consumption*, therefore, becomes the means by which the absence of the factors previously held to produce identity is negotiated and, as such, is the antithesis of a ‘cultural studies’ approach that valorises individual choice (critical ‘consumerism’) as the basis for a politics of identity and a fantasy of resistance (see Hebdige, 1979; Fiske, 1989). The human body in contemporary capitalist commodity culture is the point of intersection between subjective and objective culture, and this intersection or point of exchange is not a battleground to be fought over according to historically inherited rules concerning the production of a self via the mastery of inherent drives. Rather, the body has become the site of the intersection of subject and consumption-relations and the *register* for the

constant de-formation of subjective identity – as identification – through the operation of discursive power.

‘Phenomenological’ or ‘lived experience’ now performs the simultaneous and contradictory function that Stewart (1988) accords it in the form of the *quotation*: it is both more ‘real’ than its mediated counterpart, but it is also absent – and upon this absence rests its authority, the authority of the real over the false, the authentic over the fake. However, Stewart’s analysis does not account for the transformed role of the body outlined above, or for the radically different comprehension of causality that holds sway in capitalist modernity. Therefore, the body as the ostensible location of authentic or ‘lived’ experience that is received phenomenologically (un-mediated) is itself a fantasy or *fiction* born of the bourgeois era. On this argument the body simply serves as the physical manifestation of and simultaneous connection to a ‘paramount reality’ (Rojek) from which excursions into un-reality can be organised, in cars, glass-bottomed boats, roller coaster cars or fancy dress costumes. The Archimedean point from which the bourgeois subject surveyed (surveilled) the landscape of the world has dissolved into the simultaneity of space-time. The disordered subject of contemporary capitalist modernity sits at the centre of a ‘globalised’ world and enjoys an immersion in the greatest concentration of material wealth, possible opportunity and technological innovation the planet has ever seen. This disordered subject neither simply disintegrates completely, nor lapses into schizophrenic multiplicity, precisely because of the framework within which it operates. The contemporary arrangement of technology, global finance, information networks and militarized personnel maintains the framework within which modernity is experienced, not as a historical epoch or distinctive set of socio-spatial relations but as a qualitative category (Adorno) – as the intersection of subjective and objective culture.

In foregoing *reality*, paramount or otherwise, capitalist modernity establishes a fictive domain, the terrain of *modern consumption*, where, in place of scientific laws it is the ‘rules [that] create fictions’ (Caillois) which link causes to effects. In liberating subjective experience from the framework of tradition and its narrative conventions, *modern consumption* de-natures the relationship between psyche and physiology that had previously underpinned humanist thought, from philosophy to economics and psychology. ‘Human beings’ no longer inhabit the terrain of *modern consumption*: they have been supplanted by the ‘potential mutants’ of Baudrillard or the ‘cyborgs’ of a technologically-enabled ‘machinic culture’ (de Caeter). Modernity has estranged ‘humanity’ from the social relations of the bourgeois era that brought it to pre-eminence and sought to

universalise it. *Modern consumption* necessitates a reconfiguring of subjective and objective culture, with Agamben (1999: 110) proposing a ‘melancholy’ successor to Benjamin’s ‘angel of history’ imagines a topography strewn with objects which ‘have lost the significance that their daily usefulness endowed them with,’ instead they are ‘charged with a potential for alienation that transforms them into the cipher for something endlessly elusive.’ In modernity, objects no longer possess the ‘*promesse de bonheur*,’ the capacity to satisfy subjective desire, whether understood as psychological lack, bodily need or spiritually and morally edifying experience. The modern object is unable to ‘communicate’ the past (tradition), either as aesthetic experience or the narration of its own production. In this Ferguson’s concept of ‘excitement’ intersects with the principle of ‘de-differentiation’ of the commodity-form (Lash & Urry) and Massumi’s theorisation of *fear* as the ‘if’ and ‘but’ of the ‘accident-event (and its avoidance).’ *Modern consumption*, therefore, is the engagement with the temporal present under the conditions of modernity, it is the phenomenological form of experience available in a world divorced from its past and unable to form a vision of its future – previously the defining attributes of Cartesian humanity.

## **Conclusion**

Capitalist modernity’s liberation of the present from both past and future is the simultaneous production and maintenance of the playworld of *modern consumption*, which the ‘post-human’ subject of a non-bourgeois culture inhabits. The sociological analyses of this *modernité* will not be achieved using the intellectual assumptions of previous social formations. The study of *modern consumption* requires the abandonment of outmoded concepts and the ontology from which they derive. Specifically, the phenomenological categories of time, space and causality must be re-thought in order to appreciate the transformed relation between subjective and objective culture and the subsequent experience of the logic of *identification* in contrast to the pursuit of identity as *telos*. ‘Consumption’ has seemingly been dis-articulated from its own *cause* – production – and comes to resemble the description of play, ‘as an occasion of pure waste,’ offered by Caillois (2001), in which exchange occurs as an apparently autonomous activity. The absence of production as the origin and defining moment implies a transformation in the apparent nature of the object (or service), usually figured in terms of functionality. That is, the object or service ceases to be defined by the specific qualities instilled within the production process and its function shifts, undergoes metamorphoses, in accordance with the role it is accorded within the sphere of circulation and exchange of capitalist modernity.

Production no longer depends – or appears no longer to depend – upon a voluntaristic commitment on the part of all those whose activities are in fact required for its daily reconstruction. Demanding no more than passive assent it persists rather from neglect than from sedulous activity. It is as if the goal of mechanical efficiency (the reciprocal interdependence of rationality and production) had been achieved once and for all, releasing the subject into a new ‘liberated’ existence outside of all exterior necessity.

- Ferguson, 1990: 47-8

Just as subjective desire is ‘liberated’ by the operation of the mature money-form (Simmel) so, too, is the commodity-form freed of its earthly bonds assuming a ‘metaphysical subtlety’ (Marx) as it escapes the realm of production for the terrain of *modern consumption*. In doing so it acquires a ‘semblance of autonomy’ as the commodity-form ceases to be a ‘definite social relation between men [...] and assumes [...] the fantastic form of a relation between things.’ The commodity-form echoes the *toy* in its malleability and susceptibility to metamorphosis, its ‘function’ and ‘utility’ now determined by the interaction of the subjective will and the ‘particular circumstances of the moment’ (Simmel). No longer is the calculation of value the prerogative of the rational subject informed by a ‘cost of production’ theory borrowed from political economy. The money-form and the ‘difference engine’ of capitalist production are just as likely to conspire in the availability of ‘loss leaders’ and habit-forming fashions as they are a bargain to be stumbled over – an extension to the ever-present temporality of contemporary ‘consumption’ activities underpins *modernité* rather than discrete needs.

The liberation from history (origins) enjoyed by both subject and object is the manifestation of being-in-exchange, as the ‘daily traffic of bourgeois life’ (Marx). The commodity-form is experienced as ‘effect,’ ‘appearance’ or *event*, as an aesthetic phenomenon in its ostensible transcendence of its determinate contents. However, as Frisby’s reading of Simmel infers, it is not the realm of the beautiful to which the commodity-form speaks in its transmission of aesthetic experience, but that of the sublime. The widespread availability of goods and services made possible by the marriage of an advanced division of labour and technologies of mass (re)production facilitates a ‘cybernetic culture’ (de Cauter, 1993) in which the subject experiences the life-course not as a teleological project, but as a series of discrete moments or ‘instantaneous’ events. The ‘contents’ of experience are, in this fashion, are incomprehensible within the rational causal framework formulated as a bourgeois self precisely because they are commodity-events rather than ‘objects’ *per se*. Commodity-events are the subjective interaction with the objective dimension of capitalist modernity mediated by the sphere of circulation and

exchange: as such the ‘contents’ of the world are recognisable in their alienation from tradition (as in the case of the souvenir or collectible) but no longer reveal through their *cause* (production) a relation to the past (history and origin) and the project of ‘identity’ built upon it. The present, thus, appears as a constellation of moments, an endless firmament of entities moving in splendid isolation through adherence to laws or rules incomprehensible to the naked eye. The events of experience appear to be autonomous, floating free of the forces – social, economic or historical – that have produced them.

The terrain of *modern consumption* should, therefore, be considered as an *anti-landscape*, a topography irreducible to its physical constituents, rational processes and financial frameworks, where in the absence of laws of operation of the ‘system of the world’ (Ferguson), there are now only the rules of the game. So the ‘suddenness’ mentioned by Nietzsche becomes ‘the sign of discontinuity and non-identity,’ of an interruption to ‘reality’ understood in temporal terms as the ‘aesthetic boundary’ of the ‘pure event of perception’ (Bohrer, 1994: vii-viii). The *sudden* is the ‘denatured’ moment that stands apart from the process that brought it into being, contradicting historical continuity – in this way it is modernity in miniature – the fragment freed from its relation to the totality, leaving only cognitive apprehension rather than rational comprehension. Appearance, image or representation can no longer be taken to mirror ‘reality’: aesthetic experience is not unproblematically *true* (liable only to ideological trickery or incomplete knowledge) and *incommensurable* with anything other than itself. Thus, the aesthetic experience derived from any particular ‘commodity-event’ has little or nothing to do with the (economistic) conception of utility that derives from material factors or the socialised labour of its production: instead, it exists as a possible (virtual) event that is *realised* in ‘contradistinction’ (Mead) to all other possible events. The value of any such event derives from its *incommensurability*, its aesthetic effect, and, if it is ‘technological,’ the future possibilities it contains, affords or promises (Massumi).

The ‘events’ of *modern consumption* are now no longer even un-natural – the basis of bourgeois nostalgia – they are simply *strange* and redolent of ‘chaos’:

Where classical mechanics had explained a change in state through the application of force upon a body, a ‘physics of contact,’ resulting in an exchange similar to that of the market, quantum mechanics simply revealed how fundamentally *strange* were the unseen relations that governed the operation of the observable world.

– Ferguson, 1990: 229-30

*Identity* as the relation between cause and effect, between the thing and its *self*, has been superseded: and the dream of their reconciliation has become redundant. Identification is the acceptance of the continual deformation of the subject within the immersive experience of the social relations of capitalist modernity. This generates a *grammar* for the experience of the ‘fictive’ terrain of capitalist modernity and governs the ‘transportation’ or *émigré-ation* from reality that authors such as Rojek see as the hallmark of modern life, the repeated inhabitation of a fleeting ‘elsewhere’ or ‘elsewhen’ (Friedberg, 1993). Reality, as conventionally understood, becomes merely the nominal point of departure, of *de-formation*, from which a further excursion onto the terrain of *modern consumption* is facilitated. Reality is no longer *paramount* because it is no longer real, in the sense that it is the location of referents for the signs that exist within the sphere of circulation and exchange. Phenomenological experience, which occurs in the absence of *reality*, is structured by the grammatical operation of the rules of the ‘fictive,’ rather than the laws of science or the desires of the psychological ego: *modern consumption* is the ‘absence of experience’ (Agamben), the inhabitation of *Playland*. *Playland* as the un-real terrain of *modern consumption* is a topography of (non)experience the prominent features of which are the ‘accident-event (and its avoidance),’ boredom, novelty (*nouveauté*), which generate the ‘excitement’ discussed by Ferguson through the ‘contradistinction’ (Mead) generated by their simultaneous inclusion within the mature money-form.

However, as was previously noted, the capitalist money-form and the attendant commodification process results in the ‘de-differentiation’ of qualities, their formal equivalence expressed purely as a quantitative declension. This places *possibility* at the heart of the commodity-experience, ‘excitement’ is juxtaposed to boredom as the promise of *nouveauté* and *modern consumption* is inseparable from the unpredictability of the encounter with the commodity-form, and the possibility of ‘joy’ therein. The location of the unpredictable pleasures of possibility and its pursuit were previously the department store, carnival, bourse or gambling parlour. Today sees the entire terrain of *modern consumption* bedecked with opportunities to seek the embrace of chance, whether in the retail units of a shopping mall, its themed restaurants or the offices of an insurance firm supplying mortgages, pensions or life cover. In each of these ‘spaces’ the immaterial possibilities of the *future* are given form in the present through the commodification of chance by capitalist enterprise – as the ‘accident-event (and its avoidance)’ (Massumi). The temporal form given to the present’s anticipation of the future is indistinguishable from the nineteenth century gambler’s search for ‘wealth without labour,’ either in the

bourse or at the gaming table; it is simply rendered 'instantaneous' in terms of both cause and duration.

The possible 'de-differentiation' of every moment or commodity-event becomes the credo under which *modern consumption* unfolds, whether for the *flâneur*, the 'modern Tantalus' of the boulevard, or the gambler who sought

... the communion with number, in which money and riches, absolved from every earthen weight, have come to him from the fates  
– Benjamin, 1999: 489-90

In this manner the money-form facilitates travel in time as readily as it does space, by allowing the future to flow into the present just as the distant becomes near in the era of capitalist globalisation.

Gambling, like the insurance industry and the capitalist money-form itself provide a *form* for the apprehension of 'the protean world of possibility' (Ferguson, 1990: 243), realised as *events*. What distinguishes the money-form, as the special instance of the commodity-form, is that it contains, *virtually*, all possible 'events' in which the subjective will can be realised.

The indeterminacy relations, the deep unpredictability of matter, the failure of strict causality, the irreducible 'weirdness' of the quantum world could only be grasped if we supposed that prior to its termination in an observable 'event,' the fundamental constituents of nature existed in their own peculiar play world; both 'here' and 'there,' both 'now' and 'then,' only relinquishing the freedom of inherent possibilities when forced to do so by the experimenter's conscious probing. [...] The mathematical formalism of probability theory introduces 'something standing in the middle between the idea of an event and the actual event.' It is a 'strange kind of physical reality just in the middle between possibility and reality' [Heisenberg].  
– Ferguson, 1990: 237

In this world of exciting 'events' the self, as the unified ego, has its biographical narrative dissolved into a seemingly random succession of moments. The rules that govern this sphere allow the functioning of the fictions that populate the playworld and create the contemporary 'self' as an organizing principle for experience (in its generic sense) and allows the formation of an 'identity-position' that is unique to the individual.

The 'dispersal of the ego' within the money-form (Ferguson, 1990) is a dissolution into the near-numberless possibilities contained there and the generation of an 'inner freedom'

(Simmel) of the subject to navigate these moments of opportunity, characterised as excitement, boredom, novelty or mere potential. The ‘choices’ of *modern consumption* become trajectories within the ‘field’ of the money-form, which contains all possible manifestations of the commodity-form as future-events that are realised in the present as events or their negative, the ‘avoidance’ of the event. This is the playful logic of *possession* rather than the calculating logic of accumulation, it is the subordination of the claims of causality and identity to the free-play of effects experienced as events.

Objects are, and remain, something for themselves which resists their complete integration into the sphere of the self and allows the most passionate ownership to end in dissatisfaction. The possession of money is free of this hidden contradiction that exists in all other kinds of possession. [...] It is only money that we own completely and without reservations; it is only money that merges completely into the function we assign to it.  
- Simmel, 1990: 327-8

The money-form as the *reification* of exchange asserts the functional significance of the commodity-form over its substantial or material dimension. The sphere of circulation and exchange is the domain in which this phenomenon allows the disintegration of its bourgeois predecessor and the subject is dispersed as *Being* enters fully into exchange (Vattimo). Inhabitation of the terrain of *modern consumption* sees the subject participate in the potentialities of the ‘chronically mediatized’ money-form (such as e-bay or a global investment fund) and deny the ‘Newtonian’ physics of production. Instead, the experience of *modern consumption* accords with the indeterminacies of quantum mechanics and its ‘playful’ conception of causality. Just as Ferguson (1990) sees money as a ‘quantum phenomenon’ capable of making ‘reality’ both ‘hypothetical and provisional’ so, too, is the experience of the commodity-form. Money as the spatial and temporal locus of imminent and immanent pleasure becomes the ‘ideal commodity,’ replacing the cigarette avowed by Oscar Wilde (Gagnier, 2000). The momentary ‘cathexis’ between subject and object in the commodity-event escapes rational accounting due to its lack of temporal causality (production), there is simply the fleeting and fortuitous *instant* within which subjective existence, *being*, is once more re-formulated as *event*.

## Thesis Conclusion: The Invention of Habit

...the laws of memory are subject to the more general laws of habit. Habit is a compromise effected between the individual and his environment [...] the guarantee of a dull inviolability, the lightning-conductor of his existence. [...] Breathing is habit. Life is habit. Or rather life is a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals [...] The creation of the world did not take place once and for all time, but takes place every day.

– Samuel Beckett, in *Proust*, 1931

The distinction between ‘consumption’ as part of a project of individual identity project and the terrain of *modern consumption* as the means by which access to the forms of contemporary experience is made possible is fundamental to this thesis. At its core lies the rejection of the assumptions of economic rationality, utility maximisation and psychological desire for identity deemed to be the birthright of the inhabitants of contemporary culture. This conjunction of utilitarian psychology and bourgeois nostalgia for a pre-lapsarian past underpins the vast concentrations of energy, wealth and productive labour around the globe harnessed by the social relations of capitalist production. In the commodified products of the contemporary amalgam of labour, capital and technology are found the ostensible prompts to further ‘consumption,’ to greater indulgence and the formulations of desire deemed fundamental to the production of self and the maintenance of psychological and social identity. The need to question a narrative that ties humanity so obviously to a socio-economic system capable of creating environmental disaster on an irreversible scale has never been greater – even sociological theory can play a part. Indeed, the role played by this thesis is achieved by exposing the utilitarian suppositions of economic rationality to sociological critique and, in turn, pursuing the manifestations of this economic inheritance across the social sciences and their disciplinary approach to the study of ‘consumption.’

This allows the ejection of the figure of the ‘consumer’ the discursive construct that stands at the heart of contemporary discussions of the capitalist consumption-relation and the limits of what may be done in its name. Consequently, the bourgeois individual whose *desire* for utility and identity was conjoined in the pursuit of biographical selfhood, the manifestations of taste, distinction and lifestyle may be rejected as inadequate. In its place an altogether different version of humanity may be proposed, one rooted in the experience of *individuation* rather than the construction of ‘identity.’ However, the contours of such a novel figure must be discerned and the forms of experience that shape his or her existence require to be investigated and accounted for. This is the reason behind the

‘postphenomenological’ approach borrowed from Verbeek (2005). By addressing the phenomenological categories of *space*, *time* and *causality* (and, implicitly, materiality through the engagement with the commodity-form) it is possible to begin to map the inhabitant of the terrain of *modern consumption* and the manner in which they live through an emphasis upon the *use(s)* to which they put the objects and experiences that share their world.

Indeed, this concept of sharing the world with the non-human *actants* who make up the ‘missing masses’ of any theory of society (Latour, 1992) is fundamental to this thesis. In adapting the relationship of *affordance* from its origins in anthropology and its more recent development within environmental psychology (Costall, 2004), it is possible to consider the dependence upon the material world by patterns of contemporary interaction, but also by the operation of subjectivity itself. The relation of ‘mutual constitution’ or ‘coshaping’ proposed by Verbeek in the context of technology allows an acknowledgement of the contingent nature of human experience, its reliance upon the objective dimension of existence for the experience of the subjective. However, neither the discussion of actants, affordance or ‘coshaping’ has emerged from an analysis of the capitalist consumption-relation or been applied within an examination of the material and historical factors that colour its contemporary manifestation. This is why chapters three, four and five are themed as they are, to provide the historical perspective capable of discerning the development of *modern consumption* as a historical process, rather than a convenient juxtaposition to the ‘consumption’ discussed in chapters one and two. Further, by using the relationship between actants – human and non-human alike – to develop a sociological application of affordance that is actively *generated* by the relationship of ‘coshaping’ it is possible to analyse the phenomenal forms of subjective experience available to the participants upon the socio-spatial terrain of *modern consumption*.

In applying ‘affordance’ as a tool of sociological and historical research the opportunity to focus upon forms of interaction, experiences facilitated and habits or behaviours adopted or adapted, rather than the desiring behaviour of psychological individuals, arises. Such an opportunity is crucial if the logic of ‘consumer culture’ and the (re-)presentation of identity as the externalisation of subjective experience are to be avoided. Instead, the commodity-form as the medium for the transmission of modern experience invites a re-consideration of the limits and possibilities of human subjectivity within social relations of the current global division of labour. The commodity-form, as *technology* of experience, becomes the means by which the *mediation* of space-time *events*, the relation of affordance forged

between subjective and objective culture, is made available to contemporary humanity (with all the limitations upon access and, so, experience that this implies). However, in rejecting the concept of personal development through the refinement of individual taste, in accordance with prevailing norms, a tantalising possibility does emerge – a very limited, very specific freedom to *be* oneself, if only because the individuation at the heart of *modern consumption* makes this unavoidable. The relationship between *being* and *having* expressed as ‘possession’ is one of *becoming*:

Although becoming in this context extends certain movements begun in capitalism, is in many ways an extension of capitalism, the two paths part in the end. [...]. Becoming is a cascade of simulations and fabulations that overflows buying. The individual is fundamentally without purchase. It is a becoming-singular that exceeds specification, conjoined with a becoming-generic that splinters the form of identity.

- Massumi, 1993: 35

The production of ‘monsters’ (Haraway) and ‘mutants’ (Baudrillard) made possible by the collapse of the humanist orthodoxy under the weight of the socio-economic conditions it helped nurture makes a fitting counter to liberal admonishments urging ‘fair trade’ or ‘moral’ and ‘ethical consumerism.’ Rather, in the inexorable logic of the dialectical interplay of ‘fabulation’ and ‘simulation’ (Massumi, 1993) all manner of wondrous creatures are born, and they are born of their own experiences rather than the desire to press into service the commodified labour of others.

The ‘playland’ experienced by the inhabitants of the ‘terrain’ of *modern consumption* offers no possibility of escape; there is no revolution on the horizon (although scarce resources are only getting scarcer). However, humanity, that agglomeration of species possessed of only one specimen must not retreat into a bourgeois nostalgia and dream of other, better days when ‘things were better’ (or, at least, not so bad), nor must we seek to flee, neither exotic locations nor mountain fastnesses will provide succour. Instead the path lies before us, never behind, only by refusing to capitulate to a ‘consumerist’ ideology and its culture of consolation, of relative advantage and comparative financial well-being will the future present itself to us. In the ‘yearning’ for experience and subjective transformation that expresses the surfeit of ‘becoming’ over *being* there exist unlimited opportunities to *de-form* the subject, to continually differ from our ‘selves’ as we refuse to settle for a *self* purchased over counters, from catalogues and via the click of the mouse at a web store. It is in the *uses* of things and the uses that things make of us that the future lies. It really is all about the commodity, Marx was right.

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