Carried Away

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Carried Away

The Invention of Modern Shopping

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1 The Haunted Superstore

Safeway, Lewes, East Sussex, 1995.

Saturday, 21 September 1996; IKEA, Purley Way, South London

It is late in the afternoon and the lines of wide carts loaded up with flatpacks of future furniture stretch back from the row of checkouts. Back and back, right into the warehouse section, they bump up against the people still trying to pick out their own cardboard packages and happily oblivious, as yet, to the fate in store for them.

But gradually the news is getting through. The computers are down; all the purchase transactions are having to be done manually. The prospect of a handwritten receipt from IKEA seems quaintly unreal. Nobody, nothing moves, forwards or backwards. Nobody protests. Nobody seems to be talking to anyone else, passing the time in complaint or chat. We all stand sullenly by our carts, keeping our places, half-heartedly trying to decode the announcements. And nobody walks out, back through the store or out past the checkouts, leaving their cart behind.

We just can't leave now. These carts bear the tangible results of an afternoon's hard work. It may have been fun at the time, but now the prospect of going home empty-booted obliterates that from view. If we let go of the goods, we would have nothing to show for all this time and effort. And we are attached to these things already. This big brown box contains what a joyous, newly verbal two-year-old, still trailing clouds of consumerly innocence, is already proudly calling 'my IKEA bed'. Here we are, voluntarily trapped inside a store that we are unable to leave. Why did we come here in the first place? What is keeping us here? Is our behaviour perverse, a stubborn refusal to give up? Or is it calmly rational, suffering the short-term frustrations and making the best of a bad situation? In this IKEA world there isn't much to choose between the two, or much to choose at all.

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The checkout come to a dead halt is a long-standing nightmare for retailers. For decades, self-service stores of all kinds have sought to ease what they recognize as that difficult moment when customers finally emerge from the dreamier delights of trolley-filling to reach the point of purchase. There, reality intrudes in the form of the monetary transaction, and the trance of the aisles is broken by a slow line at the checkout. For supermarkets, barcode technology was the godsend of the 1980s; but shut down the computers, and chaos – slow despondency – is come again.

IKEA with the computers down might be a comic vision of a late twentieth-century nightmare. We are familiar with tales of shopping as exploitation, addiction, false allure. As we wait, the frame for pondering the experience is already there for us: the store that you can't get out of as a microcosm of this consumer world, where shopping is endless and always, everywhere the same. One IKEA is much like another, each as reproducibly 'Swedish' as the next, from Leeds to Groningen and from Paris to New Jersey. For critics of over-consumption, the over-stark contrast between movement and stoppage, dream and reality, that the stores seek to parry is ever present – not the avoidable contingency or the dreaded emergency, but the staple metaphor of shopping as hellish confinement.

Consumer culture lends itself to images of unconscious imprisonment. The deluded are unaware that their desires are for worthless or superfluous things, or that they are shaped – if not entirely created – by the skills and tricks of advertising and other forms of presentation. They do not know that there is a better and freer world than the shopping world in which they find themselves; for them it has no exit, nor do they seek one.

Opposite dark pictures like these stand their mirror images: shopping as freedom of choice, pleasure, material progress. Instead of confinement, darkness, hidden controls, shopping in its positive guise appears as sheer heaven or, more prosaically, as the proud symbol of modern mobility. People are no longer

restricted to their traditional horizons, whether geographical, social or psychological; consumer choice epitomizes their liberty to move away from old constrictions, to indulge the freedom of new desires and demands and to take on different identities as they wish. This is also the dream world of shopping's own self-images, its beautiful stores and its glossy advertisements, where people's desires are treated as forever open to change and fulfilment.

This book is about some of the strange shopping histories that lie behind the ironies of that peculiar IKEA afternoon, when all the options of shopping were jammed as immobility and impasse but the customers could not bring themselves to leave.

Supermarket, anywhere, around 1999

Here you are in the middle of the things. You are half-way through your list. You steer your way smoothly up and down, putting out your hand to take something at intervals, and placing it in your trolley. You know what you want, what it looks like, whereabouts it will be. You see different categories of product, differences between labels and brands and sizes that enable you to home in quickly on what you are seeking. This, not that. When you have finished, the seventeen items you have expertly selected from among the twenty thousand or so different possibilities are checked through one by one. A job has been efficiently done.

Here you are in the middle of the things. You have been here for quite a while. Twenty minutes, maybe half an hour. You came in to get something for tonight and thought you might as well stock up a bit while you were here. Everywhere around you are colours, letters, figures, pictures, all made to attract you. This and that. There is always something new or something on offer. If something appeals, you'll pick it up, perhaps put it back. But your mind is not really on what you're buying or looking at; you're thinking of other things. You will be here for some time, and eventually you will depart, with the same seventeen things.

What is the difference between the two? None, from the point of view of the receipt, which lists everything both shoppers buy in all-informing detail. To all supermarket intents and purposes, they are one and the same person; and maybe they are. In another life, on another day, the first shopper might easily slip into becoming the second; and the second, when pressed, might find herself or himself acting like the first.

The first shopper thinks of herself as in control, taking what she wants and only what she wants. The second shopper sees herself as comfortably susceptible to all the attractions of the place. The first shopper knows about the second and regards her with a certain affectionate scorn. The second shopper knows about the first and thinks she is missing out on the pleasure of shopping. Both, as well, partly share the other's opinion of them. And the first would also confess that she gets a certain pleasure out of her efficiency, while the second would declare that she also uses the time in the supermarket productively, unwinding the rest of her day as she drifts. Both, at times, when in a particular frame of mind, become the other one. The first is sometimes waylaid by a striking new product, while the second rushes urgently past, blind to everything but the two or three things she came in for.

Both, in one way, are figments or manufactures of the marketing imagination. Once upon a time, in the 1960s, it was principally the second shopper who featured, and she was dim and dazed, a childlike housewife passively picking up brightly coloured things she had no thought to resist. Nowadays the shopper is viewed positively, as the rational planner who knows what she wants and competently makes her selection. The upgraded version of the second shopper, meanwhile, is no longer seen as necessarily stupid, but as someone who simply enjoys what others regard as a chore. These characters, and others too, and mixes of all of them, have filtered into shopping consciousness, to become the cartoon versions or templates of how we regard our own behaviour. Like the products sur-

rounding us, images of shoppers supply the background to the way that we experience and talk about whatever it might be that we are doing when we shop.

Some may see themselves as more involved or more detached than others, and certainly there is every possible gradation of difference between people's individual consumerly practices and ways of thinking. For what it's worth, shopping seems to be a part of everyday life in which people positively enjoy discussing their own peculiarities, as well as other people's, and often with much more subtlety than is shown by official psychologists of consumer behaviour seeking to make predictable sense of shopping. But even when people identify themselves as non-shoppers, or anti-consumers, there is no getting away from the surrounding wash of consumerly ways of representing human choices and feelings, in which we are all immersed.

On the one hand, there is a semi-technical language, derived from the big academic business of consumer psychology, that has entered everyone's vocabulary for describing or experiencing their own behaviour. Solemnly or ironically or both, with a knowing mixture of mastery and susceptibility, we refer to 'loss-leaders' and describe our 'impulse purchases' or avoidance of them. Marketing language may also be applied more widely. The 'sell-by date', heralded as an important breakthrough for food retailing in the early 1970s, moved out of the store in the 1990s to be used in relation to anything passé; now the expression has probably passed its own. We can speak the marketing language, we know what is being done to us; but this same language also shapes our understanding.

On the other hand, arguments about shopping and consumption involve much more than the situations in which actual buying takes place. Thirty or forty years ago, the phrase 'consumer society' usually suggested a deluded, essentially female population: the unresisting victims of manipulative advertising and vulgar, alluring displays. The implication might have been that too much of their life was shopping; but

the consumers of 'consumer society' were not represented as being anything other than shoppers. Now, in a remarkable rhetorical turnabout, the consumer has been elevated to a status of exemplary good sense in areas extending far beyond shopping itself, with the name implying not a situation of vulnerability or delusion but quite the contrary. The consumer has ceased to be seen as part of a jellyishly susceptible mass, having become instead an individual endowed with rights of which, by implication, his or her previous incarnations had been deprived. She (or he) is no longer a fool, but the model of modern individuality, the one who, as patient or passenger or parent, demands and gets the deal to which, implicitly, she was always entitled but that she was never granted before.

In the course of this process, the consumer has lost her sex. 'He or she' is rhetorically removed from the picture of real shopping, where men and women remain readily distinguishable. In terms of perceptions of shopping (and women), the shift is crucial. Ceasing to be seen as passive, exploited and dim, the consumer has ceased to be seen as female.

The department store and the supermarket

Though it wouldn't be obvious from a glance at the customers in IKEA today, the history of shopping is largely a history of women, who have overwhelmingly been the principal shoppers both in reality and in the multifarious representations of shopping. This history began to gather momentum in the middle of the nineteenth century, when department stores entered the world. Their splendid new buildings and permanent exhibitions of lovely new things brought middle-class women into town to engage in what was historically a new activity: a day's shopping. They were places of leisure and luxury, offering women the image of a life that they could then, in fantasy if not in substance, take home with them. So after the frustrations of IKEA, and before we embark upon the intricacies of the supermarket's many small histories, let us dwell for a moment in the

more leisurely spaces of its principal predecessor as a revolutionary new idea in shopping.

The department store offered an experience of aristocratic grandeur to every woman customer. There, she could act the queen and be treated like royalty. Department stores flattered women into seeing themselves as part of a beautiful environment; they fostered a sense of perpetual and limitless desire for things, in a kind of socialized abandonment. Loosened longings blended and unfixed existing social differences: new shopping instincts made no distinction of class, just as anyone might look like a lady.

In the nineteenth century was the department store; in the twentieth century was the supermarket. Department-store shopping was leisured, middle-class, metropolitan. Supermarkets and self-service, the great retailing innovations of the twentieth century, came from the opposite directions. Instead of luxury, they offered functionality and standard products; instead of the pleasures of being served, consumers could congratulate themselves on saving money by doing the work themselves. Food shopping was associated with necessity and routine, whereas department stores had promoted a sense of goods that engendered new desires and possibilities, out of the ordinary. It was the difference between going shopping – an open-ended, pleasurable, perhaps transgressive experience – and doing the shopping, a regular task to be done with the minimum expenditure of time, labour and money.

But in many ways, department stores and supermarkets belong together. Both are large-scale institutions, selling a vast range of goods under one roof and making use of modern marketing principles of rapid turnover and low profit margins. Both rely on economies of scale through their large selling areas, and through direct buying in bulk from producers or manufacturers. Both were taken, when they first appeared on the scene, as emblematic of contemporary developments not only in marketing, but in social life more generally: cities and leisure in one case, suburbs and cars in the other.

Both came to be represented in terms of magic and enchantment, seen as either pleasurable or insidious. Department stores, and supermarkets in their later developments, dazzled with their lighting and displays of goods – so beautiful, or so much. Like the supermarket, the department store presented a new kind of indoor retailing space, which was *open*, with goods on display for looking at, and with no sense that customers had to come in with a definite intention to buy. Both were thought to produce in their female customers states of mind removed from the normal: the collective ecstasy of the nineteenth-century crowd of women in front of an array of heavenly new fabrics, or the hypnotic trance of the 1950s housewife numbed by the muzak as she glides along the aisles.

Yet the differences between the two kinds of store count far more than the similarities in their respective mythologies. First, in what they sell. The department store offered everything and anything, though with a concentration on clothes and furnishings. The supermarket is associated with something the department store did not always sell: food. Whereas the department stores were represented as bringing the glamour of fashion to the middle classes, supermarkets brought cheap food to 'the masses'. In one case, luxury items are offered to a class aspiring to an image of affluence and a sex aspiring to an image of beauty; in the other, necessities are made available to all.

The department store is European; the supermarket is American. The association in the first case is false, in the sense that department stores appeared in the United States at more or less the same time as in Paris or London or Berlin. In the second case, it's right; but the contrast functions to reinforce other distinctions. The department store is considered to be feminine, frivolous, French and fashionable; in its Parisian form, it is one of the emblems of nineteenth-century modernity for Walter Benjamin's retrospect in the first part of the twentieth. The supermarket, massive and materialistic, figures as an American invention subsequently exported to Europe; and it was.

The department store was called (by Emile Zola) 'the cathedral

of modern commerce';[1] it was also a 'palace' for the middle classes. As a cathedral, it took over from religion; it had its consecrated building, and its own rituals and festive seasons in the form of designated times for sales and events in relation to particular themes and product groups: linens, toys, oriental rugs; autumn and spring fashions; winter and summer sales. The plain checkout visible at the end of each supermarket aisle hardly offers itself as an altar, though the uproar in the early 1990s in England about Sunday opening may suggest that the weekly shopping trip is indeed in some sense a symbolic replacement for the traditional family ritual.

As a palace, the department store offered a spectacle of opulence accessible to anyone who cared to enter and participate in an image of the aristocratic life. In the first American supermarkets, the show was less a planned or beautiful display than a performance or stunt. This was later to appear as a markedly dirty trick. In the 1960s, at the height of consumerist protests against exploitation by the big food corporations, the supermarket took on dramatically negative appearances, as a 'jungle' or 'trap', both giving titles to influential books of the period.[2] The images imply primitive aggression but also a space of confusion or imprisonment from which you cannot escape. Where the department store invites you in, the supermarket grabs you and won't let you out.

The differences between the images of the two kinds of store are today much less clear than they were. Supermarkets sell many kinds of product apart from food. Like department stores in their heyday, they try to present themselves as places for comfortably spending some time, with refreshments and rest rooms provided. Not the least remarkable feature of IKEA is that it seems to combine, in almost parodically differentiated sequence, the two forms of shopping, in history and experience. It is both department store and supermarket, both leisure and work, the one and then the other as though in artificial textbook separation.

First you walk through the suggestive displays of room set-

tings and pause, looking to your eyes' content, trying out the chairs and pulling open the chests of drawers. There is no buying or selling here; this is shopping as possibility – the sight and feel of things, the embedding of desires and plans. After passing through all the different areas – ending, in true 1990s fashion, with the designer office furniture – you come to the café, where you can stop to gather your strength for the second part. Next, to ease the transition, an area of kitchen goods, plants, bed linen: a conventional, bright, self-service space with lots of small things you can pick up and put on your cart. Then the warehouse area where you find the boxes that contain whatever big-ticket items you have chosen from the room displays earlier on. It is for you to locate them, transport them home, and put them together; by doing the jobs yourself, you are saving costs on distribution and labour. This last lap reminds you in all its functional bareness that IKEA is giving you the best of both worlds, the leisurely indulgence of shopping and then the money-saving minimalism of the work and time you put in yourself.

These two versions of modern shopping, as labour or leisure, the pleasurable or the functional, are installed as co-present orientations in the minds of shoppers, as much as in the layout and self-presentation of shops themselves. At IKEA on that unusual afternoon, it was easy enough for once to pinpoint a moment when shopping shifted its meaning decisively from enjoyment to imposition. But much of the strangeness of shopping and consuming can come from the difficulty of knowing, experientially or otherwise, the difference between shopping's delights and its demands.

Division Street, Manhattan, 1929

The French writer Paul Morand, strolling in midtown Manhattan one evening in 1929, finds himself in a part of the Garment District for which he was not prepared:

> No-one had mentioned Division Street to me. I went

> along it by chance. Imagine a ghost-dance put on in the middle of a deserted street, in winter. Not a soul left; the city cleaned up as though by machine guns or a plague; and one after another, hundreds of small shops violently lit up with electricity, peopled with stiff and smiling dummies dressed in the most violent manner and throwing themselves this strange party. There are outfits for workers there and outfits for Park Avenue, copies of Worth and five-dollar dresses intended for the Saturday night dance; all backgrounds are mixed up, all the social classes disappear in this instant ready-made luxury for all.[3]

In this passage, different images of modern shopping meet in the night, and clash. In one way, Morand points to a familiar story of the social extension of fashion. Clothes that look like aristocratic originals are now available alongside recognizably lower-class things, so that the 'quality' ceases to be immediately distinguishable. The windows show the mixing of the classes not as a condescension from higher to lower, luxury reaching down and blending in the middle, but as a juxtaposition of two extremes, which thereby lose their distance. The cheap dress for the working girl is there in the same street as the copy of the Worth designer gown. The light of modernity shines out in the new magic of electricity, presenting a fairy-tale show of fashion for all.

Behind this picture, though, is another image, of strangeness and vague aggression, spectres of the night. Morand finds himself off the map, the only survivor in a world in which everyone has been killed by attacks of war or illness, the people replaced by a new population of dead-alive dummies, whose perfect self-containment destroys his own. There is something 'violent' in the artificial lighting and the look of the clothes. The mannequins leer with a life of their own, making the shop window alien and unfamiliar. The spectacle lacks all recognizable order, abolishing ancient class differences with a luxury that is incongruously 'instant': it takes no time and is not connected to a past or a future.

The shop window is cast ambiguously in two roles. It is a performance, a dance or a party, manifestly put on and surreal; and it is also an indication of something beyond itself – a change in the mores of fashion and society. Morand is not himself there as a potential shopper but as one who contemplates the signs of another shopping world as he looks into and beyond it. He is an outsider – to the glass, to the mannequins, to the street, to New York – and he has no interest in the window's objects in their normal mode, as showing things that a passer-by might wish to stop and buy. He is at a distance from the scene, and it is this position that gives him the perspective of a commentator on a social phenomenon: he is not a casual window-shopper. But he is affected by the picture that he sees, as something that haunts and threatens and assaults. He is alone with window displays that have taken on a disturbing life quite independent of their original function of advertising their merchandise.

Paul Morand visited New York just before the Wall Street Crash of 1929, and a year or two before the first American supermarkets came 'crashing' into the world, as the headlines put it at the time. Though Division Street may have taken him aback, he had no idea what was around the corner, as self-service retailing became the arena for the next great social change in shopping. As a result, the ghosts of shopping have changed, appearing differently to us now if we should ever look back to glimpse them in the shadows of the supermarket aisles.

The coming of the supermarket modified the image of earlier kinds of shopping. In the later twentieth century, the department store can be romanticized in the slow-motion time of a shopping that is no more, as opposed to a supermarket world that is brash, impersonal, routine. Published in 1993, Madeleine St John's novel *The Women in Black* sets its comedy of new beginnings and happy endings in a Sydney department store of the 1950s. Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time* (1987) begins with a child's abduction in a London supermarket, but later drifts

back to a memory, two generations before, of a courtship across the counter in a provincial department store. Where the supermarket can be the scene of urban aggression, the department store acquires a kind of childhood innocence of simple, old-fashioned pleasures and values. In McEwan's novel, the department store is in another, simpler world from a contemporary nightmare, and the two are kept separate in time and space and in the novel itself.

That seemingly familiar present space of the supermarket has its doubles and disturbances. And though we may be perfectly lucid about the cons and the contradictions, we rarely think twice, or even once, about our supermarket selves, so oddly adapted to choosing and refusing, seeing and disbelieving, desiring and ignoring, listing and drifting. This book looks at some of the smaller and larger stories that surround the invention of self-service shopping, attempting to recover a sense of the peculiarity of supermarkets and the selves they have made or imagined for their customers. Pre-war debates about how to attract the elusive customer with beautiful packages and shop-window displays are revived, alongside angry post-war polemics about the supermarket's exploitation of 'mindless' female consumers. Abandoned gondolas and forgotten shoppers are dusted off and brought back into view. Spectres and dreams of shoppers and supermarkets past emerge once more, to cast a different light on our current arguments about shopping.

Speculations about the survival of shopping's history and its proper or possible forms of evidence are not new. But none is so striking, perhaps, as this anticipation of a posthumous shopping life and private life by Frank Pick, Vice-Chairman of London Passenger Transport, in 1936:

> When the writer . . . goes to his tailor or shoemaker or outfitter he leaves behind him a curious record; – the size of his collar, or his shoes, or his vest, the dimensions of his clothes and shirts, with a history of change over the

> years which is illustrated graphically, if not altogether flatteringly, in the diagrams of this book. His choice or taste again is preserved, for a snippet of every cloth he buys for coat or shirt or pyjama is methodically stuck in the record which, from a survey, should show whether that choice or taste had grown more cultivated or had followed the vagaries of fashion. His rise in fortune or the reverse is revealed by the prices paid. One can picture some imaginative author building up a life history, detective-wise, out of these scanty indications which might be a foretaste of the skill of the recording angel in that last day of judgement.[4]

You were what you wore – but no more. Today, the 'imaginative author' might do some detective work with computerized records of expenditure, but the textural idiosyncrasies would be absent. The writer would probably wear ready-made garments and patronize different shops; there would be no bodily history, no tangible 'snippets' to make up 'a history of change over the years'.

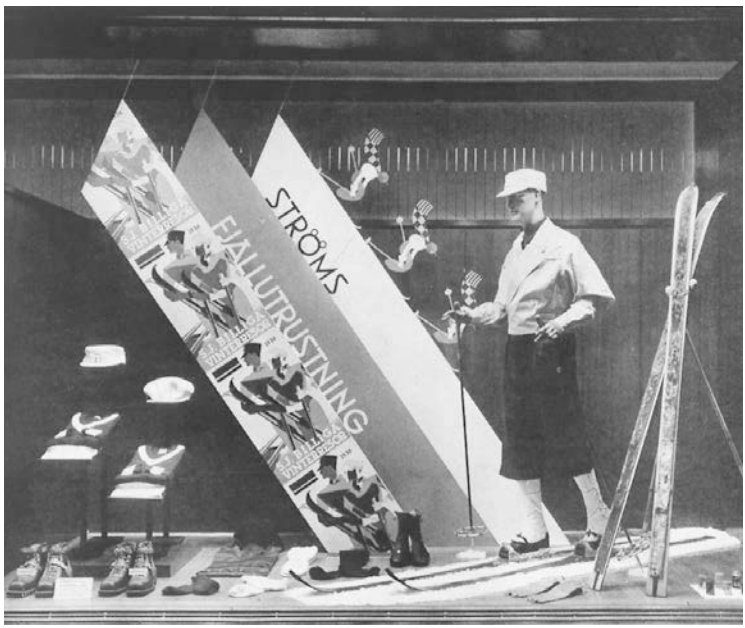
Pick is introducing *The Home Market*, a book of social statistics for use by advertisers; he hopes that, beyond its immediate uses, it will fulfil the same memorial and historical functions as the clothing records. He regards it as 'a happy circumstance that this by-product of advertisement is to be saved and published in this convenient form, for how many facts about the market are lost for want of a similar care and appreciation?'[5]

I have come across my own shopping corpses and relics in many different places – in the trade literature of old marketing books and magazines, and in imaginative literature and critical writing from the United States, Britain and France. Mostly, the trade books are themselves discarded and forgotten, lying unread in university libraries or picked up in second-hand bookshops here and there. They are not considered valuable items for anyone. For contemporary business studies, for the most part, old salesmanship and marketing literature is simply regarded as out of date; only the libraries with the storage space

or the copyright obligation have kept it available. And as far as buyers go, older versions of subjects like consumer psychology and retailing practices only slip into the realms of the currently purchasable when they verge on the arty: illustrated 1950s books on window display will cost you dear, but a manual on salesmanship a hundred years old can be yours for a dollar. And this remains true despite the surge of academic interest recently in the history of consumer culture, which has been one of the enabling backgrounds to the writing of this book.

Across the different languages, cultures and periods of this shopping history, I have sought to point out some of the continuities and connections, and to tell a few forgotten stories. But I have also tried to keep sight of the other image of modern shopping that Morand saw in the windows of Division Street – something unfamiliar and unsettling, not nearly as simple or uniform as custom has made it seem.

2 The Mobile Shopper



'Any window given over to the specialized display of a single item of merchandise – particularly sporting merchandise – is important enough to be worthy of a good deal of attention to be given to its planning. This example reflects some obvious care taken over the design and construction of the central decorative unit and the small cutout figures. The properties are helpful, and the whole display is well arranged, even though it actually shows a relatively small amount of merchandise for its large area.'

From *Display for the Man's Shop*, *Style for Men*, The National Trade Press, 1938.

In a fictional diary published in 1913, there is a passage that could claim to be the last word in shopping:

> I did however make numerous purchases in the little shops of Florence. Shirts, walking sticks, items for travel, leather goods, luxury stationery. The whole lot is displayed on the tables and armchairs of my two sitting rooms. (I have, at the Carlton, a suite with ten windows overlooking the Arno, dining room, smoking room, bathroom as big as the bedroom; the number of staff has been doubled, on my floor.)
>
> Spent the afternoon and the evening undoing these parcels, pouncing, scissors in hand, on the strings, sending the papers flying around on to the carpets, intoxicating myself with the smell of newness on all these finely made things, sometimes kissing them, and dancing for joy in the cluttered apartment. I don't think I will ever tire of buying luxury articles – with me it has the force of a vocation. I am reminded of the welcome I used to give my toys, those great big cases painted blue, all full of the latest new things from Paris and Nuremberg, which would reach me around the middle of summer, in December, there, where we lived. Those toys that my father caused to come for me from another hemisphere, where Christmas was celebrated in the snow. I haven't changed.
>
> In a day or two I'll share all of it out among the hotel staff.[1]

To connoisseurs of the literature of shopping, this might well come as something of a revelation or an epiphany. Here it is, the very shoppingness of shopping, the consummation of consumption – in one of their aspects, at least.

But let us first disentangle some of the elements of the phenomenon. The 'numerous purchases' of luxury objects are bought for the sheer pleasure of buying them, at that moment, at that time. As objects, they have no connection with a plan or a need that prompts their acquisition, and no connection with either a future use or a future life: they are simply going to be given away. The moments of buying and of unwrapping together make the whole pleasure of shopping. They take place between two different kinds of semi-anonymous urban space: the shop and the hotel room. In the shop, the buyer can put on different identities in public, according to how she presents herself, or what she buys. The hotel room, a private enclosure, is itself available for purchase. Here the guest can act out parts for himself, become his own temporary person of no fixed abode or self.

Consumption is at once ecstasy and waste: not just the packages but also the things they contain are for throwing out or passing on, but meanwhile there are exorbitant private pleasures to be got from sniffing and seeing and touching. This multi-sensual enjoyment is linked to memories of childhood and Christmas, themselves associated with a fabulously simple global economy in which all the toys of one hemisphere are sent for the especial gratification of one child in the other. Childhood was assuredly a time when you had it all, and when the whole world was made for you. Consuming now is a way of getting out childish things again, only to toss them away once more, playfully all the while.

A few pages on, the narrator tells of a 'nouvelle crise de boutiquisme', a 'new boutiquing crisis', and complains that the French language has no equivalent for the English word 'shopping' (p. 104). And now let me say something about the identity of this unusual narrator. He – for it is a he – is the creation of another he, Valéry Larbaud, the French writer who among other things was an early promoter and translator of the writings of James Joyce. The *Journal intime* is purportedly written by one A. O. ('Archie') Barnabooth, the richest man in the

world. American though he is, Barnabooth's name was invented when Larbaud visited London in 1902; it is supposed to be a combination of Barnes – as in, town on the south side of the Thames – and Boot's, the chain of chemists. For what it's worth, on this visit an aristocratic friend of Larbaud's allegedly went one step further than the fictional Barnabooth by hurling money out of the window.[2]

The situation of the diary is that Barnabooth has sold off all his property – houses and estates, also a yacht and an enormous automobile called Vorace, presumably the original gas-guzzler. He is spending his time travelling round Europe, the pure tourist-consumer, wondering what to do with his life, and engaging in prolonged exchanges with slightly older male friends from European countries that he meets up with. These encounters are always ostensibly by chance – one turns up in Italy in Vorace, which he has bought; another steps into an adjoining train carriage in a province of Russia; the first one again spots him in front of a shop window in Bond Street – and so on. But they have the effect of making Europe seem like a giant hotel lounge where the same few people are always somewhere in the vicinity, at the same time as the world figures for all of them as a map of possible roads and railways, at once miniature and infinite, on which they are free to move wherever they like from one moment to the next. At the end, having toyed with the idea of settling in London, Archie decides for no apparent reason to accept an invitation to return to the South American country where he was brought up, and the diary of itinerance and speculation comes to a close.

Throughout the book, shopping sprees are related to the narrator's situation as one who has divested himself deliberately of his property. He sees himself as a 'free man' now that he no longer suffers from the burden of his *propriété immobilière*, his immobile property (p. 88) – in other words the things that stay where they are, like land and houses. Property, especially as it figures in discussions with the Europeans whose families have held landed estates for generations, is like a physical burden

carrying the further weight of its many obligations; to be free of one is to be free of the other. Shopping figures as the antithesis of property in this sense, in that it represents a pure mobility of selves and objects. One moment you are this, have this; the next you move on. In this slide from the compulsory to the compulsive, there are no duties, no continuities, no consequences and no history, only a succession of shopping instants.

In one way it is like living the life of pure fashion. For the moment when fashion is fashion, it has no past and no future. The 'latest' fashion, *la dernière mode*, is also the 'last': for now, there could be no other. The gratuitousness of the things that shopping buys – the disjunction of buying from needing or wanting its objects – is parodied here in the way that Barnabooth doesn't just have no particular use for what he has bought, he almost immediately gets rid of it. The desire is simply *to shop*, not to shop *for* anything in particular.

Because of this narrative premise – the hero not just as a wanderer, but as ultra-rich millionaire who has given up his fixed property, his 'immobiles' – Barnabooth can come to personify a series of oppositions between new and old worlds, new and old wealth: America and Europe; tradition and modernity; stability and mobility; the absence of change and perpetual change. The journal is scattered with records of self-conscious discussions about modern times and modern literature and ideas between Barnabooth and his European friends, one of whom is a bona fide breakaway French landed aristocrat, whereas Barnabooth, when he gave up his goods, was – like the name of his yacht – a *parvenu* with no heritage. There is a part of him that wants, or at least has wanted, to buy himself a Scottish title and found a dynasty, just as another part wants to marry a working-class girl and thereby, as he sees it, make amends to the people for his wealth (he all but does this with a dancer from a small town in England whom he gets as far as proposing to in Italy, only to discover that she is in the pay of his unofficial minder). Oh, and Barnabooth also aspires to be a writer.

So despite his repudiation of the burden of his property,

some of Barnabooth's desires are for kinds of identity that entail the maintenance or the making of roots and establishments. As such they figure as alternatives to more modern, discontinuous, urban forms of existence, but in a way they have themselves become modern in that they appear now as one of a range of lifestyle options. Roots, stability, continuity can be positively chosen or returned to, just like being a poet or a tourist or a café-goer. Yet at the same time there is a sense in which one identity, more than others, will be definitely decided for, settled on and settled in; the story ends, deliberately, at the point at which such a conclusion seems to have been made. There will be no more roaming, no more writing; or at least, a new and different way of life will be sought in the self-parodying form of the return as rich politico to the country of his birth. The friends Archie runs into have one by one reached their own peace of mind or place (these are equally far-fetched: in one case, conducting a massacre to restore order in a Russian province; in another, opting for chemistry among a selection of eccentric hobbies, when his work has been taken up seriously by university researchers).

Archie, who is all of twenty-three, has a strong sense of ageing as a process of growth and development: he is always comparing himself with how he was six years ago, or imagining how naive he must seem to his friends that many years older. But it is when he is back for a moment with a woman he came across several years before, Gertie Hansker, that he has a sudden fear of stasis, of *not* having changed:

> The same ancient hour was sounding in me in the middle of the same disillusioned sadness; all my readings, my travels, my conversations, the ideas exchanged and received, all that had left me the same. Despite everything that has traversed it, despite the holiday fairs, the village has remained the same, where the same poor old houses are situated miserably opposite one another, on the empty square. (p. 242)

Not changing – lack of development – is unequivocally negative here, and the comparison is with the village, the premodern dwelling place par excellence. In its case continuity is identified with monotony – 'despite the holiday fairs'. There is a fear of not really becoming modern, of not really leaving the village, which remains the underlying reality, in spite of frantic efforts to do so. The next sentence switches back from the life of the place to the life of the individual:

> And in fact I set about constructing a theory; I divided people into two classes: those who are capable of development and those who are incapable of it. I was in the first class and Gertie in the second. I saw her immobile and I thought I was advancing . . . (pp. 242–3)

Whereupon he slips away that night, in fear of the threatened immobility.

The comparison with the monotonous village suggests that this valorization of personal development, and corresponding rejection of unchangingness, is meant as a consciously modern way of thinking about the stages of a human life. In its parodied form here, the point is reinforced by the contrast with what is imagined as the woman's opposite disposition. To remain the same, to stay put, is to be stuck, or fixed, or blocked, or sad, or just boring.

In the Barnabooth diary, the absolute personal mobility epitomized by shopping sprees is represented as an extreme, fabulous condition. At this time, the capacity to move between different identities was a mark of the freedom of the exceptional man or (occasionally) woman – dandy, artist, millionaire. Such mobility conflicted with the norm of a settled, given self. Barnabooth's extreme form of infantile, hedonistic shopping aligns him with near-contemporary fictional characters like Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray – fictional men living in a charmed world outside the constraints of normal existence and defined by its being at the loose end of a continuum from duty to dissolution.