

CONTENTS

<i>List of Tables and Figures</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Introduction</i>	xi

CHAPTER 1 CONSUMING TALES 1

Learning objectives	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Two tales of consumption	2
1.3 Norbert Elias: the civilizing process	9
1.4 Discussion of Elias's civilizing process	16
1.5 Postmodernism and the neo-tribes: return to community?	18
1.6 Discussion of postmodernism and the neo-tribes	22
1.7 Applicability to other cultures	25
1.8 Chapter summary	26
End-of-chapter review questions	27
References and further reading	27
Notes	27

CHAPTER 2 CONSUMING SPACE AND TIME 29

Learning objectives	29
2.1 Introduction	29
2.2 Consumption: space and time	30
2.3 The place of community versus the space of society	30
2.4 Max Weber: modernity as rational ordering of space	32
2.5 Karl Marx: melting modernity	56
2.6 Discussion	72
2.7 Conclusion	73
2.8 Chapter summary	74
2.9 Case study: Down on the old factory farm	74
End-of-chapter review questions	77
References and further reading	77
Notes	79

CONSUMING BEHAVIOUR

CHAPTER 3	CONSUMING POWER	81
	Learning objectives	81
	3.1 Introduction	81
	3.2 Sovereign power	82
	3.3 Disciplinary power	121
	3.4 Chapter summary	129
	3.5 Case study: Global resistance – turning the heat up	129
	End-of-chapter review questions	130
	References and further reading	130
	Notes	134
CHAPTER 4	CONSUMING NEEDS AND VALUES	137
	Learning objectives	137
	4.1 Introduction	137
	4.2 Forms of exchange	138
	4.3 The issue of needs in commodity exchange	147
	4.4 Consuming values	161
	4.5 Chapter summary	174
	4.6 Case study: What’s in a community?	175
	End-of-chapter review questions	178
	References and further reading	178
	Notes	180
CHAPTER 5	SEMIOTICS: CONSUMING MEANING	181
	Learning objectives	181
	5.1 Introduction	181
	5.2 The semiological tradition of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913)	184
	5.3 Are other sign systems like language?	189
	5.4 How do products come to generate meaning?	195
	5.5 Structuralism	198
	5.6 The semiotics of C.S. Peirce (1839–1914)	209
	5.7 Signs: identity and difference	212
	5.8 Signs can tell the truth and . . . signs can lie	213
	5.9 The scope of semiotic research in marketing	218
	5.10 Chapter summary	219
	5.11 Case study: Ways to get laid	219
	5.12 Case study: Marketing the past – Norkunas’s study of tourist sites in Monterey	220
	End-of-chapter review questions	222
	References and further reading	222
	Notes	223
CHAPTER 6	CONSUMPTION AND IDENTITY	225
	Learning objectives	225
	6.1 Introduction	225

CONTENTS

6.2	Inside-out approaches to identity	227
6.3	Outside-in approaches to identity	236
6.4	Psychoanalytic theory: in-between approaches to identity	249
6.5	The extension of self	265
6.6	Constraint or freedom? Identity and fashion	269
6.7	Chapter summary	271
6.8	Case study: Hot Topic	272
	End-of-chapter review questions	273
	References and further reading	274
	Notes	275

CHAPTER 7 THE CONSUMING BODY 276

	Learning objectives	276
7.1	Introduction	276
7.2	Falk: identity and the body	278
7.3	Transition to the disciplined body	280
7.4	Modern identity	283
7.5	Bodily strategies: self-protection – self-fulfilment – self-expression	285
7.6	Self-fulfilment	292
7.7	Self-expression	293
7.8	Chapter summary	300
7.9	Case study: Just how beautiful is big?	300
	End-of-chapter review questions	301
	References and further reading	301
	Notes	303

CHAPTER 8 CONSUMING 'DISORDERS' 304

	Learning objectives	304
8.1	Introduction	304
8.2	Starvation disorders: anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa	305
8.3	Explanations of anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa	306
8.4	A discursive 'Foucauldian' interpretation of anorexia	323
8.5	Summary on eating disorders	331
8.6	Obesity	333
8.7	Summary on obesity	341
8.8	Case study: Now eat this! Olestra, the fat-free fat	341
	End-of-chapter review questions	343
	References and further reading	343
	Notes	345

CHAPTER 9 CONSUMING BRANDS 347

	Learning objectives	347
9.1	Introduction	347

CONSUMING BEHAVIOUR

9.2	Brand values	348
9.3	Managerial discourses of brands	354
9.4	Popular brand discourses	361
9.5	Discourse and brand identity	366
9.6	And finally – a word of caution	370
9.7	Chapter summary	371
9.8	Case study: Barr's Irn-Bru	371
	End-of-chapter review questions	374
	References and further reading	374
	Notes	375

CHAPTER 10 CONSUMING ADDICTION **376**

	Learning objectives	376
10.1	Introduction	376
10.2	What are drugs?	377
10.3	Drugs and society	378
10.4	Drugs and popular culture	381
10.5	Legal issues	383
10.6	Consuming addiction	390
10.7	Chapter summary	407
10.8	Case study: Scotland Against Drugs	408
	End-of-chapter review questions	414
	References and further reading	414
	Notes	416

INDEX **417**

1

CONSUMING TALES

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To address the question of the extent to which current conceptions of consumer society are unprecedented
- To situate discussion of current consumption practices within different historical narratives
- To build an awareness that narratives involving 'real' historical changes do not unfold neatly in linear and orderly sequences
- To introduce the reader to accounts of the rise of consumer societies in Europe and in the USA
- To acquaint the reader with contemporary debates surrounding the state of postmodernism

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided into five parts. Following an introductory section which considers what consumption is and how it has been conceptualized by academics from a variety of disciplines, the aims and rationale of the module are outlined. The second part of the chapter contains brief descriptions of the contents of the module. Part three traces the growing importance of consumption in people's lives, asking questions such as: Did this happen suddenly or has this been the result of a more sudden transition? This question is addressed first by considering two stories of the development of consumer society in Europe and the USA. The first story is fashioned after the argument put forward by Grant McCracken who discusses the rise of a consumer society involving sixteenth-century English nobility and who traces subsequent more inclusive developments in France and Britain in later centuries. The second story is drawn from the work of Stuart Ewen and is based on the emerging consumer society of the USA in the 1920s. This is followed by a brief comparison of the similarities and differences between the two stories. In the fourth part the discussion is expanded to take into

CONSUMING BEHAVIOUR

account the work of Norbert Elias and of Pasi Falk. Elias's work is important for two reasons: first, because it provides another place from which to view the particular characteristics of the modern self; second, because it forms a benchmark for comparison with other theories. While Norbert Elias focuses on the changing role of manners in the civilization process, Falk explicitly places consumption at the centre of his explanation. The final part of the chapter is devoted to a brief discussion of the ideas of Michel Maffesoli who, along with many others, asserts that Western society has changed fundamentally in recent years and that we are living in a new form of society – in the postmodern age.

1.2 TWO TALES OF CONSUMPTION

Is the phenomenon of consumer society a recent irruption in the lives of billions of people or can this be traced as part of a more continuous development through the ages of human existence? These questions are considered in the following stories which explore the roots of today's global consumer society.

Several authors note that the idea of a consumer society is not new, but that our current consumer society is part of a more or less continuous development which has spanned centuries. For example Mukerji (1983) discusses the emergence of a form of consumer society in sixteenth-century Europe. In order to explore the role of consumption in everyday life, it is useful to consider the historical significance of another term, **narcissism**, which has a similar provenance to that of consumption. For example Reuben Fine (1986) asks of narcissism (self-love) whether this is a new phenomenon to describe the 'me' generation or whether narcissism has developed as a concept through the ages? Fine explores the reasons why the term 'narcissism' is generally used pejoratively as a term of opprobrium in contemporary culture, by exploring its use in its original context, in ancient Greece. His investigations led him to conclude that narcissism could not be tolerated in ancient Greece because it expressed an extreme form of individualism which conflicted with the demands of the State for docile and obedient citizens. From this view any form of self-involvement such as narcissism (or its opposite as expressed in self-hatred) is considered to be inimical with respect to the maintenance of social order. Fine notes that while a succession of rulers from the Roman emperor Nero onwards used the word 'narcissistic' as a means of labelling those who were enemies of the State, they could be and were as narcissistic as they liked in terms of their own lifestyles. However Fine charts a progression of events by which the narcissism of the ruling class has been supplanted by that of the common man. He suggests that this has been so since the nineteenth century.

'Today we call it the sense of identity, or self-image. It resulted from the overthrow of absolutism and the recognition of the significance of the individual.'

[1986: 22]

To my mind there are important links between narcissism and consumption. For example one explanation of narcissism is as a form of consumption of the self by its image. Like narcissism, consumption is often referred to pejoratively through terms such as excess, self-indulgence, hedonism and decadence. The recent rise of consumer society in Europe during the 1950s and 1960s was also regarded pejoratively by many social commentators as a form of decadence which would destroy all civilized values. Modern consumers are narcissists to the extent that consumption is regarded as a frivolous individual activity opposed to the solidarity which is created through 'honest' work. In addition, the typical consumer is thought of as an individual who achieves a form of identity through consumption. Of course narcissism and consumption are equal partners at the feast, as the lavish displays of opulence and self-indulgence from the time of Nero to that of the 'Sun King', Louis XV of France, attest.

1.2.1 Tale 1: Consumption in Europe – from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century

For many generations it was only those who ruled who could enjoy the fruits of consumption. For example when Grant McCracken (1990) discusses the spectacular 'consumer boom' which took place in sixteenth-century England, this 'boom' included at most a few thousand people. The 'boom' was instigated and perpetuated by Queen Elizabeth I of England as a means of subjugating her nobility and aggrandizing herself. As McCracken observes:

'In the last quarter of the sixteenth century, a spectacular consumer boom occurred. The noblemen of Elizabethan England began to spend with a new enthusiasm, on a new scale. In the process they dramatically transformed their world of goods and the nature of Western consumption. They rebuilt their country seats to a new and grander standard, and they began to assume the additional expense of a London residence. They changed their patterns of hospitality as well, vastly accelerating its ceremonial character and costs. Elizabethan noblemen entertained one another, their subordinates, and occasionally their monarch at ruinous expense.'

[1990: 11]

According to McCracken this ruinous round of expenditure changed the nature of the Elizabethan family and locality. Prior to this, the noble was considered to be the caretaker or curator of the family. As such, he was expected to purchase items corporately with the long-term interests of the family in mind. The prime consideration in buying goods was thus for their **patina**, that quality which indicated that what was purchased would not only last, but would become increasingly valuable in creating honour and respect for succeeding generations. Much of the expenditure of a nobleman was spent locally, to the benefit of the local community. McCracken argues that the pattern of value surrounding this corporate, generational expenditure was destroyed by the fierce social competition of the Elizabethan era. In

CONSUMING BEHAVIOUR

the face of such competition the value of 'patina' or the worth of goods for succeeding generations was forgotten and replaced by the idea of 'fashion', or the demand for novelty. Second, the local character of expenditure was replaced as the nobles sought to better one another through ostentatious displays in London, to the detriment of local communities. Third, as the result of this explosion of consumption, nobles developed tastes that were quite different from those of their subordinates. McCracken suggests that these changes resulted in a move away from family consumption to individual consumption, from generational value to fashion, and a dissolution of the close social relations between nobles and local communities. He notes that this shift had particular effects:

'Noblemen now looked to a pan-European level of consumption, while their subordinates looked on with astonishment at their new tastes and excesses. Sometimes disdainful of superordinate consumption, subordinates nevertheless followed this behaviour with care. Thus were they primed for a round of consumer excess that would begin a century later.' [1990: 16]

The next major wave of consumption which came in the eighteenth century was a product of the explosive growth of markets in both time and space. This consumer revolution was the 'missing half' of the Industrial Revolution. While most commentators focused on the huge changes in production during this period, these changes could not have come about without a commensurate change in tastes and preferences. As McCracken notes, this time the 'subordinate classes, which in the sixteenth century could only watch in horrified fascination as the nobility cultivated a new scale and new tastes in their consumption, could now become participants in this consumption' (1990: 17). It was during this period that enterprising industrialists such as Josiah Wedgwood took advantage of the increasingly **emulative** character of consumption, whereby the subordinate classes seek to imitate the superordinate classes. Wedgwood sought to infiltrate his goods into the lifestyles of the upper classes in the hope that the demand for these would thereby trickle down to the lower classes. This was a time when the world of goods expanded dramatically to include new opportunities for the purchase of furniture, pottery, silver, cutlery, gardens, pets and fabric in addition to the frequency with which goods were bought. By this time the purchase for the self instead of for the family was well established, as was the growth of obsolescence through fashion change. McCracken notes that the intensity of consumption was raised to such a pitch in the eighteenth century, that some observers claimed an 'epidemical madness' had taken hold of England (1990: 17). This was also a time for the development of marketing devices such as fashion plates, fashion magazines and the fashion doll.

McCracken claims that in contrast to the eighteenth century, there was no consumer boom in the nineteenth, but rather that by then the transformation which had begun in the sixteenth century had become a social fact, so that by the nineteenth century consumption and society were inextricably linked in a process of continual change. Developments such as the department store and the emergence of new consumer 'lifestyles' were major features of this

period. Turning to discuss the development of consumption in nineteenth-century (postrevolutionary) France, McCracken notes that even 'though the nobles were supposedly banished during the Revolutionary period, their way of life lived on, as it was aspired to by the bourgeoisie'. During this period other lifestyles emerged to challenge this style. One such lifestyle was that of the 'dandy', which was promoted by Beau Brummel, who sought to create a new elite on 'good taste', rather than 'breeding'.

1.2.2 Tale 2: US consumption in the 1920s

In contrast to the previous story, this story is based on developments in the USA during the 1920s. Stuart Ewen studied the role played by modern advertising in the construction of mass consumption in the USA during the 1920s. The name which he gives to the rise of mass consumption is **consumerism**:

'Consumerism, the mass participation in the values of the mass-industrial market, thus emerged in the 1920s not as a smooth progression from earlier and less "developed" patterns of consumption, but rather as an aggressive device of corporate survival.' [1976: 54]

Ewen does not share in the idea of the smooth development of patterns of consumption described above by McCracken. Instead the creation of a mass consumer culture is explained as being part of an ongoing development of **social control**. This began in the early stages of industrial development, at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the field of production, when labourers became subjected to new disciplines, including the observance of the mechanical 'clock time' of the factory and the machine-like character of the assembly line. This reached its heights in the mass production assembly-line processes developed by the Ford motor company, and the universalization of such practices in what Ewen calls the 'Fordizing' of American industry. However such controls invited powerful and potentially revolutionary forms of worker resistance. As a consequence of this resistance, management introduced new and softer forms of control, including welfare programmes, industrial democracy and community-based initiatives. Such developments also helped forestall a looming crisis of overproduction by creating the means for newly affluent workers to participate as equals in the 'democracy' of the marketplace. The invitation to workers to partake in the 'freedom' of the marketplace removed the potential threat of worker revolution by distracting workers' attention from the stultifying and monotonous conditions of the workplace and onto the anxieties and opportunities offered by the construction of a 'self' in the marketplace. Ewen notes that workers were not passive but actively demanded access to the new world of goods, a demand which was in perfect accord with the requirements of capital.

Ewen argues that some businessmen spotted in the marketplace an opportunity for extending the relatively narrow range of control in the workplace,

CONSUMING BEHAVIOUR

to control over the entire social realm by becoming **captains of consciousness** through mass advertising. He argues that modern advertising must be seen as a direct response to the needs of mass industrial capitalism. By transforming the notion of (the working) 'class' into (the consuming) 'mass', business hoped to create an 'individual' who could locate his needs and frustrations in terms of the consumption of goods rather than the quality and content of his life (work). Advertising became the means for efficiently creating consumers and as a way of homogeneously controlling the consumption of the product. In creating consumers, the admen welcomed the work of psychologists such as Floyd Henry Allport (see note i). Allport contributed not only the notion of attitude to consumer behaviour, but also theorized consumer identity as the 'social self'. The idea of the **social self** may be summed up in his saying that; 'our consciousness of ourselves is largely a reflection of the consciousness which others have of us . . . My idea of myself is rather my own idea of my neighbour's view of me' (see note ii). According to Ewen, this view of the self as being 'the object of continual and harsh social scrutiny' was to form the basis for much of the advertising from the 1920s onwards. The shift to a focus away from the functional characteristics of the product and onto the anxieties of the 'social' self of the consumer is extremely important in understanding advertising's role in getting people to consume and keeping them consuming. As an antidote to the guilt of the social self, advertising offered up a commodity self which presented a ready-made solution to each of the problem zones identified:

'Each portion of the body was to be viewed critically, as a potential bauble in a successful assemblage. Woodbury's soap was offered as a perfect treatment for the "newly important face of Smart Today"; another product promised to keep teeth white: "a flashing smile is worth more than a good sized bank account, It wins friends." After she has used Caro Coconut Oil Shampoo, a dashing gentleman informs the lady, "I'm crazy about your hair. *It's* the most beautiful of any here tonight".'

[1976: 47].

Ewen describes how advertising was used in the USA as a form of 'civilizing' influence, particularly with respect to immigrant groups. It promoted new values based on the use of consumer goods as a means for expressing a unique 'American' identity, based on the 'facts of the marketplace', while simultaneously discouraging traditional values and lifestyles. For example the advertising agency Louis N. Hammerling played a leading role in selling advertising to the foreign language immigrant press which it also compromised by forcing editors to accept unpaid editorial and news material pushing 'American' values, as well as ads. The traditional homespun practices of immigrant women which used few resources were especially targeted as being 'UnAmerican'.

With the advent of consumer society, Ewen argues that the very idea of the family became modelled according to the demands of business. This involved a shift from a tight-knit, collective and largely self-reliant group, to a 'loosely articulated group' which was more a collection of individuals than a consuming unit. Advertising also affected roles within the family; for

CONSUMING TALES

example in elevating women to the status of 'purchasing managers' for the household, men's role was divested of all social authority, except insofar as their wages underwrote family consumption. However, in pushing consumer goods into the home, advertisers were aware that the traditional role of women had to be subverted. For example bread-making in the home was seen as the greatest impediment to progress confronted by the biscuit industry. Looking at the 1920s, Ewen argues that the feminist demand for freedom and equality for women was appropriated into the jargon of consumerism. Advertisers cleverly traded off women's aspirations for more freedom by linking this concept with the desire for and use of consumer goods. The public relations genius Edward Bernays devised a cunning campaign which joined commodities to women's liberation by focusing on the rights of women to smoke in public. The campaign itself featured women who took direct action by smoking in public. Campaign publicity indicated that in this context cigarettes were 'torches of freedom' for women who demanded the right to smoke in public. Consumer goods were also promoted as being time-saving devices which would free women from household drudgery. However advertisers were also careful to point out that although women were powerful in buying, they must play a secondary role to men, in the position of quartermaster rather than as general of the mutual organization that was marriage (see note iii). According to Ewen it was clear that the directive power behind this was really industry and that the woman was little more than a factory operative or, as Christine Frederick put it, 'the woman is no longer a cook, she is a can-opener.' Additionally advertising idealized youth. The important productive role of youth, coupled with the pleasure-seeking conception of youth, called for the child as a representative of a desirable reality. Advertising was also targeted directly at children. Where ads were not directly targeted at the young, they often spoke for the young against parental values. Non-consuming parents were chided as not properly looking after their offspring – promotion of the general attitude that 'youth' was a good thing, of 'filiarchy', rule by the young. Ewen reads into this the creation of youth as an industrial ideal, destructive of patriarchal authority. Corporations which demanded youth now sold it through their products; youth became a commodity.

1.2.3 Discussion of the two tales

The above two tales of consumption diverge in certain important respects. Most obviously they site their narratives in different places and periods. A more important distinction is that the first tale describes the rise of consumption as a centuries-old process whereby different groups become gradually incorporated into consumption at each successive stage of development. To begin with, this includes only the richest nobles; two centuries later we can speak of the consummatory emancipation of the 'lower' classes (who were still extremely rich). To this extent we might consider Stuart Ewen's account of the development of consumer society in the USA in the 1920s as another

CONSUMING BEHAVIOUR

logical phase in the spread of the 'good life', or as Reuben Fine would put it as part of the 'narcissism of the common man', which came later to other countries (for example to the UK in the early 1950s; Ireland in the late 1950s), while others are still waiting at the door. On the other hand in describing the sudden onset of consumerism in the 1920s, Ewen considers this to be a rupture or sharp break with what came before.

Both stories discuss the onset of consumer society as being largely coercive in nature. For example in the first story, McCracken discusses how Elizabeth I found the stimulation of a ruinous competitive consumption among her nobles to be a highly effective means for controlling them. Anyone who did not spend huge amounts in impressing others faced social oblivion. Ewen also talks of the creation of an arena of consumption as a means for one class (capitalists) to control another class (workers) by displacing attention from exploitation at work towards the satisfactions that could be gained in the marketplace. The captains of industry thus became captains of consciousness, to the extent that advertising was employed simultaneously as a device to focus attention on how commodities could help armour the self against social criticism and in derogating any form of traditional practice that militated against the use of commodities in the marketplace. In this sense Ewen places much more power in the hands of marketers, who seem to be able to mould and to influence consumers, than does McCracken.

Both stories differ with respect to their moral content. The first tale regards consumption cautiously but generally as a 'good thing', as something which, by increasing the power of the individual, in parallel with the rise of democracy, liberates the 'common man' from the constricting demands of communities and the arbitrary power of despots. On the other hand the second tale promotes the view that consumerism represents a false system of values, which strips people away from their traditional communities. This is sanctioned in the interests of the powerful and insinuated into the minds of consumers by the consciousness industry, which centres on the endless creation and recreation of the 'social self'; a self, which plagued by uncertainty and self-doubt, turns increasingly to the world of commodities for (never to be reached) solace and fulfilment.

Despite their differences, both stories agree on certain points. One is the growing significance of consumption in the lives of more people over time. Second, both agree that consumption is linked to individualization. For example, in the first tale, we are told that as the result of highly competitive consumption, the Elizabethan noble begins to detach himself from the tight circle of obligations that bound him to his family, where his duty lay in contributing to the 'patina' of the family, and to his community, as the ultimate source of his honour. Ewen talks of the ways in which the family became moulded to the demands of industry, how people came to be addressed as and to think of themselves primarily as individuals.

Both stories illuminate certain aspects of the consumption experience which will become central aspects of this text, involving how terms such as 'community', 'individualism', 'fulfilment' and 'doubt' relate to

CONSUMING TALES

consumption. However these stories are lacking in several important respects, which are addressed in the next section where more accounts of consumption are told.

Taken together the two stories above describe the development of consumer societies through distinct historical periods in particular societies. In the first story we discussed an early form of consumer society which was restricted to the queen and her nobles in sixteenth-century England; there then followed a new period in the eighteenth century, which involved a greater number of people. However it was not until much later, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, that commentators began to mention that England was becoming a mass consumer society. While the US consumer society originated much later than in England, it developed faster to the extent that the development of mass consumer culture in England was partly brought about as the result of the importation of styled mass-produced products from Italy and the USA.

The important point to note from the above is that the development of the consumer society unfolds within distinct periods of time. The first phase is during the rise of the feudal monarchy; a second takes place in some European countries at the time of the Industrial Revolution; much more recently there is the development of the mass consumer society as a primary mode of economic and social organization around the world. Now it is time to consider the development of consumer society within a broader scheme which covers the unfolding process of civilization itself. The following discussion focuses mainly on the development of European society from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment.

1.3 NORBERT ELIAS: THE CIVILIZING PROCESS

Norbert Elias sought to explore the origins of the modes of behaviour which are now considered to be typical of modern Western civilization (see note iv). Elias was influenced by the work of Freud to the extent that he uses terms such as 'id', 'ego' and 'superego' in discussing the civilizing process. He was also interested in considering how these features of the human psyche developed and changed as society itself, as bound by the relationships between people, changed. To put this more formally, his investigation required the study of **psychogenetic** processes (involving the structure of personality; how for example the partition between id, ego, and superego is formed over time), within the context of a **sociogenetic** explanation (involving changes to the structure of society over time). For Elias one cannot understand the psychological makeup of the individual independently of the sociogenesis of his or her 'civilization'.

Elias's (1994) research is organized into two major works, *The History of Manners* and *State Formation and Civilization*. In these books, Elias traces developments in European history from the decline of the Roman empire and the resurgence of tribal societies between the third and the eighth

CONSUMING BEHAVIOUR

centuries, to the very gradual consolidation of society by means of feudal court systems of the sixteenth century and later the court systems of the absolute monarchs of the eighteenth century. While Elias did find a pattern in the development of civilized behaviour, this was uneven, slow and characterized by constant reversals. For example he found that modes of conduct which were characteristic of tenth-century France were still to be found in isolated areas at the time of the French Revolution, which took place early in the nineteenth century. To sum up this change, Elias contends that passions that were impulsively and often violently expressed in earlier times became subject to constraint by being internally contained in later times. The basis for social order changed from the exercise of external violence to that of internal self-discipline conditioned by feelings of shame at one's own conduct and embarrassment at the conduct of others; the nature of conflict itself changed from external conflict with others to conflict within the human psyche. Furthermore, the social perception of the body and the expression of bodily functions changed fundamentally as part of this slow transition.

From the above it is apparent that the system of relations which existed between people in the Middle Ages was quite different from that which operates today. The example of road traffic described below illustrates the central points of the transition from a 'primitive' to a 'civilized' society in Europe (see note v):

'One should think of the country roads of a simple warrior society with a barter economy, uneven, unmetalled, exposed to damage from wind and rain. With few exceptions, there is very little traffic; the main danger here which man represents for other men is an attack by soldiers or thieves. When people look around them, scanning the trees and hills or the road itself, they do so primarily because they must be prepared for armed attack, and only secondarily because they have to avoid collision. Life on the main roads of this society demands a constant readiness to fight, and free play of the emotions in defence of one's life or possessions from physical attack. Traffic on the main roads of a big city in a complex society of our time demands a quite different moulding of the psychological apparatus. Here the danger of physical attack is minimal. Cars are rushing in all directions; pedestrians and cyclists are trying to thread their way through the mêlée of cars; policemen stand at the main crossroads to regulate the traffic with varying success. But this external control is founded on the assumption that every individual is himself regulating his behaviour with the utmost exactitude in accordance with the necessities of this network. The chief danger that people here represent for others results from someone in this bustle losing his self-control. A constant and highly differentiated regulation of one's own behaviour is needed for the individual to steer his way through the traffic. If the strain of such constant self-control becomes too much for an individual, this is enough to put himself and others in mortal danger.'

[1994: 446]

The above quote illustrates the complex set of changes which have taken place in society; they characterize a shift from an orientation towards the external world which is fearful and violent to one which is controlled by the 'self-steering' individual.

1.3.1 Life in the Middle Ages

People living in the tenth century lived with the awareness of constant danger from both human and natural enemies. Aggressiveness was openly prized. War was the normal state of affairs for most of the population which was organized into groups of armed bands; it occurred at many different levels, from large-scale warfare to family feuds and vendettas. Warriors took great pleasure in killing and in torturing others, which was a socially permitted pleasure. As prisoners were regarded as a drain on resources in times when food was scarce, they were either killed or sent back home so mutilated that they could no longer go to war or work. With a few exceptions of those women who chose to emulate men, the role of women was difficult in this warrior society; women were regarded as the property of the warrior class, useful for procreation and enjoyment but little else. In contrast in modern 'civilized' societies, the control of force is centralized in the hands of the State; consequently, the use of physical violence by individual citizens is regarded as being unacceptable. Instead, individuals must control and regulate those emotions which found free expression by people who lived in the tenth century.

By today's standards of conditioning, many of the relationships and practices of medieval times would appear to be embarrassing or at least unattractive to the more modern sensibility. To illustrate this point, Elias quotes from the *Diversoria* (1523) where the scholar Erasmus describes a scene in a typical German inn of the time where some eighty or ninety people from all kinds of social positions are seated together:

'Garlic smells and other bad odours arise. People spit everywhere. Someone is cleaning his boots on the table. Then the meal is brought in. Everyone dips his bread in the general dish, bites the bread, and dips it in again. The place is dirty and the wine is bad. And if one asks for a better wine, the innkeeper replies: I have put up enough nobles and counts. If it does not suit you, look for other quarters.'

The stranger to the country has a particularly difficult time. The others stare at him fixedly as if he were a fabulous animal from Africa. Moreover, these people acknowledge as human beings only the nobles of their own country.

The room is overheated; everyone is sweating and steaming and wiping himself. There are doubtless many among them who have some hidden disease.'

[1994: 57/8]

Many diseases were not so hidden. Most people were infested with lice and frequently passed worms, some through the ears and eyes as well as through the more traditional routes. The most appalling disabilities were also openly displayed. During the Middle Ages people lived in and for the present and expressed their emotions spontaneously; everything was out in the open; people publicly practised and spoke of activities such as urinating, farting, defecating or sexual encounters; legitimate and illegitimate children were raised together, with no hint of secrecy or shame. Elias reminds us that in addition to aggression and brutality there was much gaiety and joy during this period which was characterized by an intensity, openness and lack of

CONSUMING BEHAVIOUR

constraint of human behaviour that most modern 'civilized' people today would find shocking.

1.3.2 The transition

Elias notes that much of what was considered to be normal and to cause pleasure during the period from the tenth to the sixteenth century would cause revulsion today. He seeks to explain why in contrast to this, citizens are nowadays expected to show a very high degree of self-control. The spontaneous outpouring of emotions characteristic of the Middle Ages has been suppressed and as a result a wall has been built between one body and another so that people nowadays avoid contact with the mere approach of something which has been in contact with the mouth or hands of someone else, and are embarrassed at the mere sight of the bodily functions of others or even of their mention and feel shame when our own bodily functions are exposed to the gaze of others. How did this happen?

1.3.3 Development of 'court' society

In his research Elias found that the change in what he calls 'drive-control' (as represented by the control of the id by the ego under the influence of the superego) conduct is very closely related to the growing interweaving and interdependence of people over the ages. During the tenth century the vast majority of the population still lived in localities defined by independent tribal bands, which later shaped themselves into feudal and manorial units. The economy was based largely on barter; money was mistrusted and was solely used as a form of commerce with outsiders, who were generally viewed with suspicion. There was little mixing between different classes; the warrior elite generally held the impoverished peasantry in contempt. However, towards the end of the Middle Ages, during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, new forms of consolidation emerged as some warriors gradually gained predominance over others across a more extended area. The residences or 'courts' of these new rulers became a focus for the concentration of armed forces, for a new band of administrators (the forerunners of the bourgeois class) and also became the homes of musicians and other entertainers who could attest to the prestige of the ruler. The development of the courts, which required a degree of interdependence between different groups of people, led to the demand for greater restraint of emotions and the exercise of foresight in exploring the consequences of actions. Elias says that:

'Here, for the first time in secular society, a large number of people, including men, lived together in constant close contact in a hierarchical structure, under the eyes of the central person, the territorial lord. This fact alone enforced a certain restraint on all dependants. An abundance of unwarlike administrative and clerical work

CONSUMING TALES

had to be done. All this created a somewhat more peaceful atmosphere. As happens whenever men renounce physical violence, the social importance of women increased.' [1994: 326]

Within the strictly hierarchical and restricted court circle, and encouraged above all by the presence of the lady, who was the wife of the lord or ruler, more peaceful forms of conduct become obligatory. While knights or troubadours (musicians) could act with brutal violence towards their own wives, or women of lower rank, they were expected to act delicately with respect to those above them in rank, and particularly with respect to the lady of the territorial lord. The demand for stricter control of impulses and emotions was thus first imposed by those of high rank on their social inferiors. To begin with, restraint on the expression of desires was imposed only when in the company of others. For example one author admonishes people not to pare their nails or fall asleep or expose themselves by not being properly attired 'except among people before whom one is not ashamed' (1994: 114). First it becomes a distasteful offence to show oneself exposed before those of higher or equal rank. With inferiors such behaviour could be seen to be a sign of benevolence. Over many centuries as society became more equal, so such behaviour came to be seen to cause general offence.

Elias notes that the development of the court as a centre for the concentration of armed force and as an administrative and commercial centre benefited some rulers more than others and in particular the king. The courts were at the centre of a money economy which grew primarily as the result of taxation but also with respect to the need to buy things which could not be produced locally. This increased the relative power of the king over other nobles as other high lords or chieftains of the time were paid either in barter or in fixed rents while the king's taxes were paid in monetary form. With the increased power of the king or queen, more of the nobility were forced to rely on his or her financial support and so the court of the king grew larger. In this process a very important development took place whereby these nobles were transformed from being a class of knights to being a class of courtiers. Elias sums up the process in the quote below:

'The closer the web of interdependence becomes in which the individual is enmeshed with the advancing division of functions, the larger the social spaces over which this network extends and which become integrated into functional or institutional units – the more threatened is the social existence of the individual who gives way to spontaneous impulses and emotions, the greater is the social advantage of those able to moderate their affects¹, and the more strongly is each individual from an early age to take account of the effects of his own or other people's actions on a whole series of links in the social chain. The moderation of spontaneous emotions, the tempering of affects, the extension of mental space beyond the moment into past and future, the habit of connecting events in terms of chains of cause and effect – all these are different aspects of the same transformation of conduct which necessarily takes place as the result of the

¹ Affect: another word to describe 'emotion'.

CONSUMING BEHAVIOUR

monopolization of physical violence, and the lengthening of the chains of social action and interdependence. It is a “civilizing” change in behaviour.’ [1994: 448]

However Elias suggests that despite this capacity for the self to reflect on action, this was not equivalent to the modern superego or conscience. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the process of differentiation of functions and the increasing interdependence of a larger number of classes accelerated. As the money supply increased more quickly the wealth of the aristocracy declined more sharply. At the same time the aristocracy in France began to be challenged by a new pressure from the new bourgeois class whose members emerged initially to become scribes, counsellors and tax administrators for the king and as merchants in the newly expanding towns. This effectively initiated the class system, with the court nobility representing the ‘upper class’ who strove to differentiate themselves from usurpation by the bourgeoisie.

1.3.4 Psychologization and rationalization

Elias states that not only within the Western civilizing process, but within every major civilizing process, the transition of warriors to courtiers is one of the most decisive transactions (1994: 467). For those knights who became courtiers during the course of the sixteenth century, the rules of life took on a new meaning and the entire personality gradually changed. The spontaneous resort to physical violence which had been used to resolve disputes in earlier times was not appropriate in the context of the concentrated central power of court society. However competition among the nobles at court for rank and for favour was intense. Individual nobles gained rank by associating themselves with others of higher rank. As the fortunes of these favoured nobles frequently changed, there was a constant vigilance and struggle for favour. Plotting and intrigue came to the fore as did the tendency for people to mask and suppress their true feelings. Vigilant self-control and perpetual observation of others became extremely important for the maintenance of one’s social position. Elias argues that in the transition from knights to courtiers the entire personality of the nobility changed as nobles were transformed from being warrior knights to being dependent courtiers.

By the term **psychologization**, Elias refers to the fact that within court society a ‘psychological’ view developed as a person’s social position demanded vigilant self-control and careful observation and analysis of one’s own behaviour and of that of others in terms of a complex series of motives and causal connections. Conflict, which could previously have been expressed in terms of direct action, gradually became a matter of internal reflection and calculation. Elias detects this process occurring also in the increased demand for books during this time, as the skills needed to read a book demand a well-defined ability to transform and regulate the emotional drives. The reading of books allows a person to play out in fantasy those tensions which hitherto would have found release in the resort to direct violence.

Rationalization is similar to the concept of calculation. Where a knight might seek to further his ends by resorting to impulsive and violent action, the courtier sought to work primarily through reason to influence those in a powerful position. As opposed to the knight, the courtier had to use foresight in calculating how to achieve his ends. To Elias this 'courtly rationality' played an even more important role than the urban-commercial rationality and foresight instilled by functions in the trade network in the development of the eighteenth-century 'Enlightenment'.

1.3.5 Shame and embarrassment

For Elias shame and repugnance (embarrassment) played an equal role to those of psychologization and rationalization in moulding the behaviour of the new class of courtiers. **Shame** is a form of conflict, not with someone outside, such as social opinion, but with something within the person's own personality, a part of himself that represents social opinion. In feeling shame as a conflict within his own personality a person fears the loss of the love or respect of others to which he attaches value. Shame is associated with the breach of social constraints. Elias argues that feelings of shame emerge more clearly with every spurt of the civilizing process and finally predominate over other fears – particularly the physical fear of others. As the shame which a person can experience in monitoring his own actions increases, so does the capacity for **embarrassment** or repugnance at the behaviour of others.

For Elias, the development of a more psychological inner reflection and rationalization in the courtier is linked to the heightened capacity to feel shame and embarrassment. This is because each of these requires more differentiated foresight and the development of a long-term view. These become necessary in court society so that larger groups of people may preserve their social existence in an increasingly differentiated society where the restraint of emotions is called for and where the direct expression of physical violence is no longer an option. Elias also sees in the development of rationalization and the intensification of shame, a growing differentiation between id, ego and superego, whereby the role played by the ego in regulating self control is advanced considerably (1994: 493/4). The same is true of embarrassment, which is defined as 'displeasure or anxiety which arises when another person threatens to breach, or breaches, society's prohibitions represented by one's super-ego.' (1994: 495).

1.3.6 The development of manners

The compulsion for self-control increased as courts grew ever larger and chains of dependence between courtiers became more dense with the increasing division of functions. As people became more integrated and the contrasts between noble and bourgeois classes diminished, so the greater

CONSUMING BEHAVIOUR

was the sensitivity to changes, shades or nuances of conduct and the more finely attuned people became to minute gestures.

1.3.7 Distinction: growth of the class system

Elias notes that one key difference between the knight and the courtier was the contempt with which the latter viewed those of a lower rank, particularly the bourgeoisie. He explains this as the result of a tension between the noble courtiers, who had been progressively impoverished and were dependent upon the king for support, and the rising bourgeoisie, who threatened to take their position. Such tensions were apparent from the beginnings of the emergence of the bourgeois class. Faced with competition from the bourgeoisie, the courtiers could only infrequently resort to physical violence, which resulted in a strong inner tension in the members of the threatened upper class. The fears of the aristocracy instead manifested themselves in a general revulsion of anything which 'smells bourgeois', which was associated with vulgarity. Courtiers modified their speech, gestures, social amusements and manners in a bid to distinguish themselves from this pressure from below. However as courtiers actively sought to distance themselves from the 'vulgar' bourgeoisie, so many of the bourgeoisie sought to emulate the practices of the courtiers to be seen to become the same as them. As one and then another of the 'distinctive' courtier styles was adopted by the bourgeois, so each style progressively failed to perform its function as the basis for distinction between the two groups and so new styles were developed. Again and again as a result of this emulation, styles which were once considered to be 'refined' became regarded as being 'vulgar' as they were taken up by the bourgeoisie.

1.4 DISCUSSION OF ELIAS'S CIVILIZING PROCESS

The contribution of Norbert Elias is summarized here and is linked to the work of other authors.

- *Elias's Influence*: First, the similarity of Elias's work to authors including Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu and Pasi Falk, whose work is discussed in subsequent chapters, should be noted.
- *Relation to McCracken (1990) and Ewen (1976)*: Second, Elias's work illuminates important aspects of the two stories which were described earlier. For example we can locate Grant McCracken's (1990) study of the court society of Queen Elizabeth I of England as an example of developments which took place in an early court society. Developments within Elizabeth's court, involving a greater dependency among the nobles for the Queen's favour and the growing individualization and distinctiveness of the Elizabethan nobility, were not unique, but formed an early high-point of a progressive pattern towards the establishment of formal court

societies across Europe. Elias's work also has implications for what Stuart Ewen claims in relation to the development of the 'social self' and the role of advertising. It is clear that the idea of a 'social self' as evidenced by the ability to experience shame and embarrassment and to monitor closely and in minute detail the behaviour of others in addition to one's own, existed well before the twentieth century. While advertising may have played on the existence of this social self, this form of self had existed for many years beforehand.

- *Significance: Bodily Discipline and Control:* Third, the main themes to which Elias refers are, if true, of the utmost significance for any discussion of developments in contemporary consumer societies. He describes in great detail the curbing of the emotions in favour of rationality and foresight and the trend towards the development of a self which is contained, the individual self. Emotions which had previously been expressed spontaneously and openly were now contained and acted out within the individual psyche. This was facilitated by the increased attention to books, whereby acts could be played out in the imagination of the reader rather than in real life. Elias's discussion of the change whereby the body is no longer disciplined by the application of external force but to a much greater extent by a more powerful self-discipline based on shame and embarrassment is a subject which has been addressed by Foucault (1978) among others. It can be argued that in contemporary society the body is subjected to a much more differentiated range of disciplines than was the case during the period discussed by Elias, including crash diets, slimnastics, gymnastics, aerobics, swingnastics, muscle toning, deep toning, tanning, strip-waxing, various forms of 'cosmetic' plastic surgery including rhinoplasty, breast enlargement and cellulite reduction, to name a few.
- *The Civilizing Process:* Perhaps the most forceful point made by Elias is the manner by which all forms of natural bodily functions and their descriptions, including urinating, defecating, scratching, copulating, passing worms and self-exposure, which were treated as more or less normal parts of everyday life in medieval times, are progressively hidden behind the scenes, first from the gaze of those who are considered inferior in status to the self and then as differences between classes become more refined, virtually completely removed from the social scene. What is striking here is the huge degree of control or self-discipline required to enforce such a rein on the emotions. This is more striking when one considers that the distance in behaviour and in psychical structure between children and adults increases in the course of the civilizing process. Elias thus likens the medieval character to that of a child. In learning how to be competent and self-disciplined adults in today's society, Elias argues they must experience and absorb, in a few short years, the progressive civilizing disciplines of hundreds of years.
- *Uneven Development:* Elias's thesis is that, despite differences in the patterns of development between countries, one can discern a glacial mainstream of movement towards civilization. To draw upon the glacial

CONSUMING BEHAVIOUR

metaphor, while the ice of civilization sometimes retreats, the mainstream of movement over centuries is in one direction. Within this general movement each country develops structural characteristics of its own which correspond to the different social structures and the specific ways in which the emotions are regulated. For example he argues that in comparison with France, England had a short courtly absolutist phase. The English nobility and bourgeois classes struck a form of alliance much earlier than in France; however the amalgamation of upper- and middle-class behaviour took place over a longer period than in France. In contrast to England and France, Germany was decentralized and relatively poor following the Thirty Years War. Compared to the others, Germany had a long period of absolutism, exercised through a few small courts. Here, too, differences between bourgeoisie and nobility were much more pronounced. Elias argues that the army played a huge role in moulding the German population, as compared say with England where it played a relatively weak role. In the former the bourgeoisie became habituated to a strong external state authority, resulting in a 'command-obedience' relation to self-control, as opposed to the form of 'teamwork' which evolved in England. Elias argues that England's role as a colonial power aided the development of a differentiated form of 'self-steering' or self-control.

In discussing the contribution of Norbert Elias we can see how the modern self-disciplined individual self emerges hesitantly from the court society of the later medieval period. The modern self is primarily a rational individual who is expert in controlling and containing a range of emotions. Or is he or she? In the next section we discuss the rather controversial contribution by Michel Maffesoli, a postmodernist, who claims that this is not at all the case, but that in recent years the entire process has gone into reverse.

1.5 POSTMODERNISM AND THE NEO-TRIBES: RETURN TO COMMUNITY?

The trends described by Elias towards **psychologism**, **rationalism** and an **individualism** which derives from feelings of shame and embarrassment, are cornerstones of what is called **modernism**, a process which has characterized European thought since the days of the Enlightenment and which has spread throughout the world. Modernism celebrates rationalism over the emotions, the mind over the body and science over superstition. For example the French Revolutionaries were fired with enthusiasm to get rid of anything that seemed irrational and re-ordered administrative districts and even the streets of Paris along strictly rational lines. Similarly, scientists have been concerned to dispel myth and illusion and to found a rational basis for the discussion of physical and social phenomena. While modernity has been reflected on by many authors as a fundamentally progressive movement, a growing number of critics became concerned about what they considered to be the insidious power of the modern machine to penetrate every aspect of

CONSUMING TALES

life and consciousness. Paradoxically in this age which was supposedly the supreme age of the individual, dominated by *homo economicus*, there was an accompanying fear of incorporation, of being swallowed whole by what was outside the self. This was reflected in a number of popular films and books which appeared during the course of the twentieth century, for example Charlie Chaplin's film *Modern Times*, George Orwell's book (and film) *1984* and in the film *The Stepford Wives*.

So is the rational, isolated individual the exemplar of contemporary society? In *The Time of the Tribes* (1996), Michael Maffesoli argues that, at present, another fundamental change in society is underway, a change in which Elias's gradual progress towards civilization goes into reverse and where solitary individuals become assimilated into a huge network of amorphous but interlacing groups: the neo-tribes:

'Two centuries of autonomy, separation and frantic individualism have led us to believe that these are natural states of the world, and that if there is any evolution left it is towards an ever-accentuating perfection of these ideals. Therefore, we are particularly struck today by observing the persistent and imperious need to be 'en reliance', to be bound together, which is manifested in the unproductive expenditure and bodily game of consuming together. It is in this sense that I speak of tribalism, which is a way of being that favours fusion, or perhaps even emotional confusion.'

Maffesoli (1997: 32)

Maffesoli's argument is that people living presently in 'advanced' consumer societies are not the rational, isolated, self-disciplined individuals which Elias's conclusion suggests would be typical of people today. Instead Maffesoli contends that people are joined together by powerful emotional bonds and are 'connected' through a variety of diffuse and fleeting encounters, from those which bind together people who live in city neighbourhoods and ghettos, to those swarms of consumers who populate city-centre high-streets and shopping malls, to the temporary crowds which lie on crowded beaches, or constitute the television audiences for mass media spectacles such as 'Live-Aid', the marriage of Charles and Diana, and Diana's funeral, to the nebulous groups which populate USENET, mobile telephone networks and the virtual communities of the Internet. In this view cities are not spaces where individuals freed from the constraints of community can make rational relationships, but are themselves communities which are constructed out of a multiplicity of small enclaves and interdependencies, where people are bound together by proximity and some form of 'emotional glue' (see note vi). This 'glue' comprises some form of affectual sharing; for example affection may be based upon cultural pursuits, sexual tastes, clothing, habits, religion, intellectual pursuits and politics, to name but a few.

Maffesoli suggests that the current transformation signals much more than the reconnection of one individual to another. He argues that just as individuals are becoming connected to one another, so the connection is not just between people but is also experienced as a form of connection within the person and in particular with respect to the body. During the modern age, the body had been perceived to be separate and distinct from the mind

CONSUMING BEHAVIOUR

which disciplined and ruled over it. Maffesoli suggests that the current age is associated with a re-integration of body and mind. As a result, he claims that the present concern in consumer societies for appearance and for adorning and working on the body is by no means superficial. He argues that as the individual body is the foundation of the social body, so the frivolity of the new consumer society and its fascination with bodily concerns, such as fashion, design, eating and drinking and anything that expresses the cult of the body, are fundamental to this reconstructed sense of community. He also argues that what is predominant in present society, what ties people together, is aesthetic experience, the ability to feel emotion together, to share the same ambience.

Why has this transformation taken place? In Maffesoli's radical interpretation, the growing individualism, rationalization and abstraction of everyday life in present-day society has reached such a level that these forces have collapsed inwards on themselves. He draws upon the analogy of a 'black hole' to explain this. The political sphere is likened to a black hole, where a star collapses under the pressure of its own mass and thereby gives birth to another space. Likewise the political system has become so abstract and disconnected from the everyday concerns of ordinary people that the existing political universe is collapsing and a new space is being created. Political parties respond by focusing on the message, on image and on stirring the passions rather than reason. Furthermore, high-level politics is overrationalized and exhausted. The citizenry on the other hand are more concerned with concrete street-level issues which they personally care about. The old 'party' politics was too abstract and rational and now its politicians are using marketing tools to seek to regain their constituency. The public space which forms the forum for traditional party politics is dying and as it dies a new space is created for 'community' politics. There are many examples of such communities including the various networks and affinity and interest groups or neighbourhood groups that go to make up what he calls the 'megalopolisses'. Other groups coalesce around the shared sentiment created by issues which to them are of pressing concern, whether this be animal welfare, destruction of the environment or genetically modified foods and organs. Such communities do not require physical proximity for the establishment of a community 'neighbourhood'. Rather, existing technologies such as the mass media, which are also becoming more localized in relation to local television and radio, can unite people through their access to a common experience. It has also been argued that the Internet and in particular the Web, are enabling the creation of such groups. In addition to differentiation and localism in the political sphere, Maffesoli suggests that another response to feelings of detachment from the abstract public sphere is for people to invest their energies in a range of other activities such as physical pleasure, hedonism and the body.

Within the new tribes, solidarity is derived from an emotional commitment or shared sentiment, the aesthetic, a form of fellow feeling, however fleeting this might be. Examples of such shared sentiment include the 'Band-Aid' phenomenon of the late 1980s which mobilized the collective emotions

CONSUMING TALES

of millions of people across the Western world in support of long-term relief for famine-hit countries such as Ethiopia. Maffesoli attributes an importance to the media in constructing solidarity by circulating images which, he suggests, are the equivalent of icons, in that they enable members of the tribe to identify with the image (for example whether this is Michael Jackson or Coca-Cola) and through it with one another. He suggests that advertising addresses 'target' audiences, which he calls tribes, with such images and that the 'tribes' respond by 'recognizing' themselves in such images by using and wearing the products and services advertized (1996: 138).

According to Maffesoli, the crowds of people who watch such television spectacles and participate in events are bound together by shared sentiment. The metropolitan tribes are bound together by means of local membership, the neighbourhood and mechanisms of solidarity which create the whole. The vitality of these tribes springs from **proxemics**, 'being close' to others through sharing the same space and a common sentiment; for example skateboarding, a shared love of 'nature', or owning the same car. The linkage of these and the very fact of being introduced and chatting produce a sense of community. Maffesoli notes that traditional communities are tied together by means not only of an intellectual knowledge but also of a **connaissance**, a feeling knowledge, which forms part of the 'palaver'. It is not impossible that with technological developments the growth in urban tribes has encouraged a 'computerized palaver' (see for example the newly emergent 'palaver' used by British youth in 'texting'), a ritual which is similar to those of traditional communities. Rather than the computer disconnecting us from reality, Maffesoli argues that the networked computer is much closer to the concept of oral conversation than is the relatively isolated activity of reading a book and that because of this the computerized society will develop new forms of relationship and community.

Maffesoli further argues that the growth of mass media with its tendency to excavate alternative points of view, has led to the disintegration of universal bourgeois values. This fragmentation of values has helped recreate an oral traditional culture. By presenting images of life, a political event, or the life of a star can take on mythic proportions. The media reaffirm the feeling of belonging to a larger group or getting outside of oneself, of allowing the expression of a common emotion, which causes people to recognize themselves in communion with others. He believes that even buildings which have linked access to cable television will perhaps experience values not far removed from those which guided the clans or tribes of traditional societies.

Thus while some lament the end of all collective values and the withdrawal into the self, Maffesoli's hypothesis is that a new and evolving trend can be found within the growth of small groups and existential networks. This represents a sort of tribalism which is based at the same time on the spirit of religion and on localism, as instanced by proxemics and nature. What has been responsible for such developments? Maffesoli attributes a lot of influence to technology and the mass media such as computer networks and cable television.

What are the implications of what Maffesoli is saying for what has gone

CONSUMING BEHAVIOUR

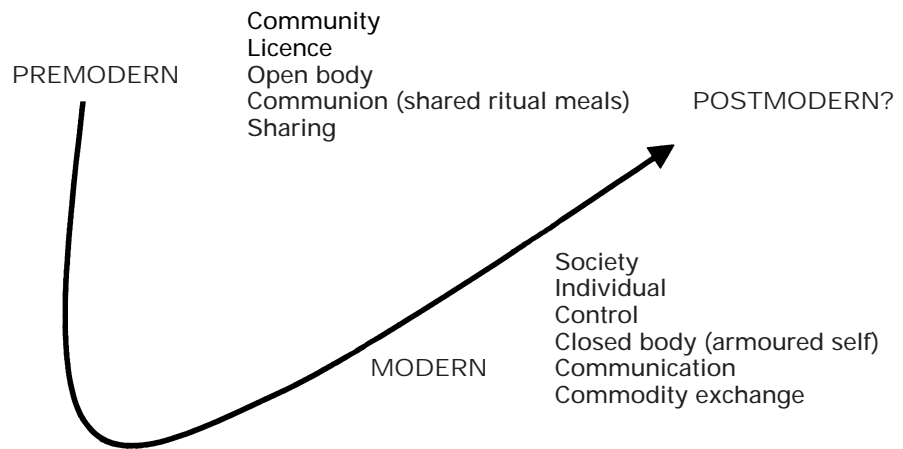


Figure 1.1 A scheme for the movement from premodernity to modernity and postmodernity

before? Unlike Norbert Elias who provided the backing of a detailed empirical study, Maffesoli tends to make generalizations which are not supported by anything other than the argument which he weaves. This does not mean that we should reject Maffesoli's argument, but rather that this should be checked in line with the available data from other sources.

To summarize, Maffesoli disputes the idea that contemporary consumer societies are characterized by the collapse of collective ideals and increasing levels of rationalism, individualism and constraint of the emotions. Instead he argues that such societies are in fact seething with examples of social configurations which go beyond individualism, being composed of crowds of people and showing the rebirth of tribalism through the neo-tribes, which consist of a mass patchwork of small local entities. The glue which holds such tribes together is the aesthetic of emotional 'fellow feeling'. Maffesoli argues that *homo economicus*, the self-contained individual, is dead or at least mortally wounded, as the forces which shape society turn back from a focus on the creation of isolated individuals towards a focus on the aesthetic and the re-birth of community. Maffesoli is thus arguing that contemporary society manifests a return to societal characteristics which are reminiscent of the Middle Ages. This is summed up figuratively in Figure 1.1.

1.6 DISCUSSION OF POSTMODERNISM AND THE NEO-TRIBES

Is there evidence that the general direction of change in consumer societies is towards the reaffirmation of community bonded by the spirit of 'fellow-feeling', as Maffesoli suggests, or does the evidence suggest the contrary? In this discussion we consider the results of some empirical research and some theoretical contributions in order to seek answers to these questions.

Secondly, if it does seem that a change is underway, then what changes in society (sociogenetic factors) might help explain the change in the psychogenetic makeup of individuals?

The European Values Study Group conducted a series of studies which have measured the changes in European and other Western values in 1981 and in 1990 (see note vii). One of the central hypotheses of the study was that as countries advance economically, the values of their populations shift in the direction of individualization. The process of individualization refers to the growing autonomy of individuals in developing their own values and norms, free from the constraint of tradition. From our previous discussion, this is common sense in that one would expect that where community is powerful, community norms will prevail. One would also expect to see an increased liberalization of lifestyles in Western societies, particularly within the domains of religion, morality, sexuality and areas of life such as leisure time, where personal choice is to be expected. At the same time, the authors of the study expected to find that the value orientations of Western societies are converging. Value convergence might be predicted in view of the growing social, economic and political convergence between societies, and trends towards more cosmopolitan ideas and lifestyles through the global influence of modern media should provide signs of the process of global convergence, in short the world as a 'global village'.

With respect to religious values, the researchers found that society in the 1990s was more individualized and secularized than it had been in the 1950s, but that these changes had occurred well before the 1980s. They also found that economic individualism increased in most countries during the 1980s, although only marginally. Cultural individualism (based on the extent to which people expressed respect for authority and a willingness to follow instructions) increased, principally in regard to decreased respect for authority. Also confidence in democratic institutions declined, particularly in the USA. While it was hypothesized that sustained individualism would also imply an increase in tolerance, in contrast tolerance declined during the 1980s. It was hypothesized that with increasing individualism, the level of political interest would rise, as individualism implies self-reliance on the part of citizens which, in turn, might cause an interest in politics as well as political participation to increase. The results of the study supported this hypothesis suggesting that the level of political interest rose as did the proneness to protest by means of direct action, including petitions, boycotts, demonstrations, unofficial strikes and occupations. The authors also hypothesized that they would find a shift in concern from one's own material well-being to a concern with issues related to quality of life. They called this term **postmaterialism** to reflect the idea that people nowadays may be moving away from an emphasis on consumer goods as being related to happiness and wellbeing.

The authors of the report found that contrary to their expectations, the hypothesis which suggested a decreasing importance of social class in predicting a person's left-right political orientation was not supported. A summary of some of the key results is shown in Table 1.1. The data in the

CONSUMING BEHAVIOUR

Table 1.1 Development of economic and cultural individualism, confidence in democratic and authoritative institutions, and tolerance towards ethnic groups and deviant behaviour

Country	Individualism		Confidence		Tolerance	
	Economic	Cultural	Democracy	Authority	Ethnic	Deviance
USA	0.04	0.19	-1.21	-1.00	-0.06	-0.05
Canada	0.04	0.20	-0.21	-0.45	-0.3	-0.4
West Germany	0.15	0.02	-0.13	-0.48	0.14	0.01
France	0.23	-0.11	0.04	-0.35	-0.24	-0.20
Great Britain	0.04	0.10	-0.16	-0.65	0.05	-0.01
Spain	0.11	0.08	-0.40	-0.87	-0.08	-0.04

Source: Adapted from Table 4.1, page 76, of Chapter 4, 'Political Culture: Patterns of Political Orientations and Behaviour' in Ester *et al.* (eds), *The Individualizing Society: Value Change in Europe and North-America*, by Andries van den Broek and Felix Heunks, 1994.

table summarize those differences in mean scores for the two studies in 1990 and 1980. For example this means that in the USA, the mean score for economic individualism increased by 0.04 during the period, while that for confidence in democratic institutions decreased by -1.21.

From the table there are a number of differences between countries. One might also conjecture that the authors would have found some high differences between regions within a country, which they did not test for. The authors felt that, despite such differences, the hypotheses for a 'sustained process of individualization were largely confirmed' (Ester *et al.*, 1994: 95). However, some were clearly refuted; for example there were no signs of increased tolerance nor of political fragmentation. In a further section of the report, the authors found that they could not conclude that modernization is a process by which traditional values are uniformly replaced by individualized values in all domains of behaviour.

What bearing does the above have for the positions of Elias and Maffesoli? It extends some comfort to each explanation. The findings may be interpreted in line with Maffesoli by drawing on the findings that faith in democratic institutions has decreased, but political interest and critique have increased and action based on unconventional politics is increasing. While the authors of the European values survey interpret this to mean a rise in individualism, Maffesoli could quite legitimately claim that the rise in road protests, marches and other such unconventional political activity requires as a first instance a form of group formation and emotional bonding that gives birth to the 'neo-tribes' which organize such activities. The survey also found strong support for environmental issues, with approval ratings of up to 98 per cent. However, the authors comment that while the environment may form the basis for much talk, the membership of environmental organizations can be tiny. For example approval for ecology and nature protection in Portugal was 98 per cent, but active participation was 1 per cent. Membership in some other countries was equally small, but varied considerably and constituted up to 10 per cent in the USA and 23 per cent in the

Netherlands. Such groups require a large degree of 'grass roots' organization and may be interpreted in line with Maffesoli's argument for the existence of 'neo-tribes'. With respect to the above, the rise of individualism and of the 'new tribes' are not necessarily mutually exclusive. As traditional ties of community and tradition give way in some areas to an increased individualism, so new forms of association are found. However, the report also indicates that older formations of group influence have not been lessened, as evidenced by the finding that people are less tolerant and by the continued importance of social class.

How does this fit in with Norbert Elias's account of the 'civilizing process', which was discussed earlier? You may remember that Elias describes the internalization of external controls together with progressive emotional restraint and individualization.

Elias has in fact slightly shifted his explanation about the onward progress of civilization to take into account developments which have taken place in European society since the 1960s. Elias agrees that during this period the tight regulation of emotional controls by individuals began to relax and people in Western countries began to explore aspects of their emotions which had previously been forbidden. He considers such developments, which were associated with the middle class, to be related to a new and more calculating hedonism. This calculation is summarized by describing it as a form of 'controlled de-control' of the emotions. This is evidenced by a whole range of behaviours; the idolization of images of youth expressed in theme parks, the exploration of emotions by means of the growth of a 'therapeutic culture', and the current craze for extreme sports which promise perfectly safe, 'near-death' experiences.

1.7

APPLICABILITY TO OTHER CULTURES

How applicable is all of this to those who were born and raised in cultures other than that of the European which is described here? Undoubtedly much of the material discussed here is specific to the experience of being 'European'. As such it is useful to a specific non-European experience to the extent that it provides a point of contrast to developments which have taken place in that country and within that culture. On the other hand, it might be argued that similar changes are occurring in different countries around the world. So perhaps we can close this section by asking some questions which you may consider with respect to a specific non-European culture. Are traditional communities disappearing? Are there apparently contradictory signs of increasing individualization coupled with new forms of association, similar to those of the 'neo-tribes'. Do people generally exert a high degree of control over their bodily expressions? Are people currently experimenting with forms of bodily expression in that culture? If the answers to most of the above questions is 'yes', then the issues which have been discussed here are of relevance to that culture.

1.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter focused on different accounts of the rise of consumer society. The first account detects in the mass consumer society a mass democracy and instances the 'narcissism of the common man' as the end point of a constant progressive movement which has its roots in ancient times. Whereas this narcissism could only be afforded by the ruling few until comparatively recent times, it is now open to the masses.

The second account focused on the development of a mass consumer society in the USA during the 1920s. This account countered the first one to the extent that consumer society was described as a repressive apparatus which planted anxieties in the individual and which created an insidious cycle of work and spend for the majority of the population.

The third account focused on the research carried out by Norbert Elias. This stressed the importance of realizing how different modern individuals are with respect to a whole range of behaviours, including systems of 'manners' and control. Elias's work helps us understand that the exercise of tight self-discipline, of constant vigilance over the behaviour of the self and of others may be traced back several hundreds of years in Europe. Elias's work, while itself not perfect, applies a corrective to the earlier accounts. First, if we are to speak of 'progress' in society, such progress takes hundreds of years to develop itself into a sustained pattern. Second, it introduces the important concepts of rationalization, control and discipline into the explanation of current consuming behaviour.

At first it seems as if the contribution by Maffesoli has overturned Elias's carefully researched conclusions. This is because Maffesoli argues that, in place of a society of disciplined individuals, consumer societies are made up of a myriad of expressive new group formations, whether these be shoppers, television viewers or anti-road protestors. Such groups are held together by aesthetic emotional ties of 'fellow feeling'. However more recent work suggests that there is evidence that Western society is undergoing a period of transition and that forms of experimentation including 'controlled de-control' are signs of this.

END-OF-CHAPTER REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is meant by 'patina'? How might patina be distinguished from 'fashion'?
2. What is meant by the following terms: 'Gemeinschaft' and 'Gesellschaft'?
3. Are the terms 'premodern' – 'pre-industrial', 'postmodern' – 'postindustrial' equivalent?
4. What are the distinguishing features of the premodern, modern and postmodern eras?
5. To what extent can we blame advertising for an anxious 'social self' which constantly scrutinizes its own appearance and behaviour and that of others?
6. Summarize Elias's (1994) main conclusions. To what extent are his conclusions borne out by more recent theories and evidence?

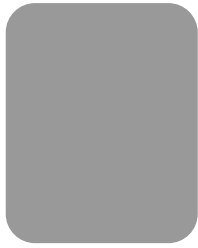
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CONSUMING BEHAVIOUR

NOTES

- i It is fascinating to note how many 'objective' social scientists were recruited to work on behalf of the military machine and in industry. For example John B. Watson, founder of modern behavioural psychology, was a proponent of transferring psychological development away from the traditional areas of socialization, such as the family, and for making the 'realities' of commercial life the basis for child-rearing. According to Ewen, Watson 'labelled all but the "gratifications" of the marketplace as perverse and psychologically and socially damaging' (1976: 83).
- ii Source: Ewen (1976: 34).
- iii Source: Ewen (1976: 171). Quotation attributed to Christine Frederick.
- iv This discussion is based largely on the 1994 English translation of *The Civilizing Process*, translated by Edmund Jephcott.
- v Elias is very careful to use the word 'civilization' in a non-judgemental way. Each society represents a patterning of social relations which presents opportunities for the patterning of the psychological apparatus and of social conduct that are different from all other societies.
- vi Among other things Maffesoli was fascinated by the study carried out by Milgram (1967) which showed that with the help of five or six relayers, one could establish contact between two people living in opposite corners of the United States. Maffesoli suggests that such communication was rendered possible because each individual formed part of a micro-milieu, which was connected to other milieux. Links included bars, churches and university laboratories, each linked to the others in a complex network.
- vii The first study, which included 26 countries, was the largest comparative research project ever carried out. The second wave of the study, which was carried out in 1990, included almost all of the countries in Europe, the USA and Canada.



INDEX

- About-Face 290, 291
Acid House culture 382–3
actualizers 244
adaptation 231
addiction 376–416
 behavioural explanations 393–7
 and compulsion 391–3
 psychoanalytic explanations 398–407
 rational economic explanation 397–8
Adidas 368
Adler, A. 318
adolescence 257, 321–2
adult 258
advertising 6, 65, 100, 353
 and body images 287–92
 cigarettes 385–9, 404–6
 genre in 206
 narcissistic ego 264–5
 structuralist analyses 201–5, 207–9
 subliminal 100–2
 use of metaphor and metonymy 191–4
 and women 7, 45–6, 115–17
aesthetics 167–8
affluence 149
Agassi, A. 214
aggression 11
Aitken, P.P. 389
alcohol 381
alienable objects 143
Allen, D.E. 359
Allport, F.H. 6
amphetamines 379–80, 384
amygdala 228
anal stage 252, 256
animal experiments 378–9, 392, 394
annihilation of space through time 57,
 59–60, 62, 73
anorexia nervosa (AN) 305–33
 discursive interpretation 323–31,
 332–3
 explanations of 306–22, 331–3
anthropology 151–3, 156–8
anti-consumerism 44, 45, 47–8, 383
 sovereign power 90–1
anti-drugs campaigns 389–90, 408–13
anti-globalization movement 120,
 129–30
anti-style 212
anti-trust 98–9
anxiety 69–70
appetite, disciplining of 281–3
aspirational groups 246–7, 363
attributions 359
augmented brand 355–6
authenticity 215–16, 265
autonomic nervous system 227
autonomy 256
AutoTrader 193, 211–12
avoidance groups 246–7, 363
AVP 316–17

Bachrach, P. 107–8
badge, brand as 368
Baratz, M.S. 107–8
Barclays Bank 89
Barr's Irn-Bru 371–3
Bartels, J. 92
barter 141
Barthes, R. 189, 199
Bartky, S. 126–7

INDEX

- Baudrillard, J. 36, 90, 171
false needs 158–60
simulation 216–18
system of objects 190–1
- Bauman, Z. 35, 69–70, 103, 104, 126
peak experiences 172–4
- Beck, U. 107
- Becker, G.S. 397–8
- behaviourism 393–7
- Belk, R. 146
- Berman, M. 56–7
- Bilderberg group 112
- binary oppositions 187, 202, 203–4, 326–8
- biological determinism 392
- biology
and identity 227–36
obesity 337–8
starvation disorders 312–17, 332, 333
- bitter experience 174
- black youth culture 51, 169
- Blue Grass 182–3
- Blumberg, P. 165
- body 276–303
bodily strategies 285–300
civilizing process 11–12, 17
commodification 320
fitness 126–7, 293–4
future bodies 298–300
identity and 278–85
images and eating disorders 307–10
and mind 19–20
modern identity 283–5
self-control/self-discipline 17, 280–3, 327, 330
self-expression 293–300
self-fulfilment 292–3
self-protection 286–92
thinness 287–8, 300–1, 324–5
- body-building 294
- body mass index (BMI) 334
- body piercing 368–9
- Bond, J. 101
- Boorstin, D. 217–18
- Bordo, S. 336
- Bouchard, T. 232
- Bourdieu, P. 30–1, 152–3, 170, 281
and distinction 237–9
- bourgeoisie 16, 238
- boycotts 89
- boyish body 325
- brain 227–31
- brand communities 176–7, 365
- brand development 356–8, 370
- brand equity 349–50
- brand extension 358
- brand failure 350
- brand image 355–6
- brand leverage 349–50
- brand persona 356–61
- brand subcultures 364–5
- brands 347–75
brand values 348–54
discourse and brand identity 366–70
global 42–4
'growing' 358
managerial discourses 354–61
popular brand discourses 361–6
tribal icons 66–7
- Branson, R. 195
- Brennan, T. 63, 265
- bricolage 200–1
- Briscoe, J. 295–6
- bulimia nervosa (BN) 305–22, 331–3
explanations 306–22, 331–3
- bureaucracy 37–8, 124–5
- Burroughs, W. 391
- Bush, G. 217
- butter 202–4
- Caillois, P. 261
- calculability 38
- Calvinism 33–7
- capital
cultural 170, 238–41
economic 170, 238–9
social and personal 398
turnover time of capital 60
- capitalism
exercise of power 110–11
spirit of 33–5
- Carson, C. 182–3
- 'Cartesian' dualism 325–8
- celebrity system 218
- Chanel 195–6

- change 56–72
- children 259
- cigarette advertising 388–9
- China 54–5
- cigarettes *see* smoking
- circuit of production 118–19
- civilizing process 9–18, 25
- class system *see* social class
- cleanliness 163
- clothing 189–90
- Coca-Cola 53, 166–7, 371–2
- Coca-colonization 53–4
- cocaine 379, 380, 383–4
- Coleridge, S.T. 391
- collusion 98–9
- commodities 159–60
- fetishism of 57–9, 72–3, 119
 - marker goods 151–3, 282–3
 - symbolic and diabolic devices 268
- see also* objects; products
- commodity exchange 141–7
- needs 147–61
- community 176–8
- brand communities 176–7, 365
 - commodity exchange and 143–4
 - decline of 32, 54–5, 278–9, 283–5, 291
 - gift exchange 139–41, 160
 - place of community vs space of society 30–2
 - postmodernism and neo-tribes 18–25
 - primitive eating community 32, 278–9, 283–5, 291
 - and society 269–70, 283–5
- Community Organising Foundation (COF) 49–50
- compensatory power 108
- competition 84–6
- free between individuals 98–9
- compulsion 391–3
- concealment 58, 102
- condign power 108
- conditional power 109
- conformity 106, 171
- confusion marketing 101
- connaissance 21
- connotation 199–200
- consensus 91
- consequentialism 84
- consumer goods *see* commodities; products
- consumer society 1–28
- civilizing process 9–18
 - Europe from Middle Ages to eighteenth century 3–5, 7–9
 - postmodernism and neo-tribes 18–25
 - US in 1920s 5–9
- consumerism 5
- consumers
- involvement and brands 354–61
 - rationality 85, 102–5
 - time-squeezed lifestyle 67–72
- control
- civilizing process 10–16, 17
 - internalization of 236, 286–7
 - McDonaldization 38
 - self-control *see* self-control/self-discipline
 - social control 5–7
- controlled de-control 25
- convenience 161–3
- conversation 285
- Cooley, C. 247–8
- core brand 355
- Cornelissen, J. 358
- corpus callosum 227
- cosmetic surgery 295–8
- cost-benefit analysis 146–7
- Coupland, D. 153
- court society 12–16, 18, 170
- Cova, B. 66
- credit 36
- criminals 51–2
- crises
- and the ego 255–8
 - identity crisis 254, 258
- Cross, G. 69
- Crowther, C. 318, 319
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. 265–8
- cultural capital 170, 238–41
- cultural consolidation 254–5
- cultural individualism 23, 24
- culture 25
- aesthetics 167–8
 - brand subcultures 364–5

INDEX

- culture (*cont.*):
 needs and 151–3, 156–8
 popular 167–8, 381–3
 signs and identity 212–13
currency, products as 197
customer, as moral object 93–4
- Dahl, S. 300
Dare, C. 318, 319
DDT 87–8
DEATH™ cigarettes 387–8
death drive (Thanatos) 249, 402–7
deceit 391
deception 102, 165
 signs and 213–18
decision processes
 gift exchange and commodity exchange 146–7
 organizational 99–100
deficit 352–3, 354
democratic institutions 23, 24
Deneuve, C. 196, 199–200
denotation 199–200
dependence 143–4
Desmond, J. 193–4
despair 258
development
 and eating disorders 319–2
 Erikson 255–8
 Freud 251–3
 Lacan 261–4
dexfenfluramine 338, 339
diabolic devices 268
diachronic 187
diet
 disciplining of appetite 281–3
 and eating disorders 310–11
 and obesity 340–1
difference 183
 identity and 212–13, 255
 meaning as 186–7
differentiation 268
direct action 47, 88–91
disaffected consumers 44, 45, 46–7, 362–3
discipline
 body 17, 280–3, 327, 330
 disciplinary power 121–29
 self-discipline *see* self-control/self-discipline
discourse
 account of discipline 122–8
 and brand identity 366–70
 interpretation of anorexia 322–31, 332–3
 managerial discourses of brands 354–61
 popular brand discourses 361–6
disembeddedness 32, 70
Disney Corporation 41–2
displacement 250–1
distinction 152–3, 237–9
distortion 114–17
division of labour 35
Douglas, M. 157–8, 212–13
Drucker, P. 95
drugs 376–416
 anti-drugs campaigns 389–90, 408–13
 associations 378–81
 defining 377–8
 explanations for addiction 390–407
 legal issues 383–90
 and popular culture 381–3
 and society 378–81
Duesenberry, J.S. 152
Dukakis presidential campaign 217
duty, consumption as 35–7
- early childhood 256
eating 327–8
eating community 32, 278–9, 283–5, 291
eating disorders *see* anorexia nervosa;
 bulimia nervosa; obesity
Eco, U. 208, 213, 215
economic approaches to needs 148–9
economic capital 170, 238–9
economic individualism 23, 24
efficiency 38
 and convenience 161–3
ego 113, 249–50, 253–65
 narcissistic 253, 260–5
 realist 253–60
ego-identity 254–5
egoism 84
election campaigns 217–18
electronic herd 59–60
Elias, N. 33, 113, 121, 218

INDEX

- body 276–7, 278–9, 280
- civilizing process 9–18, 25
- Elliott, R. 395–6, 397, 402
- embarrassment 15
- embeddedness 31
- Emme, L. 300
- emotions 17, 25
- empowerment 328–9
- empty self 283–5, 402
- emulation 4
- endorphin 379
- England 3–4, 9, 18, 32
- Englis, B.G. 246–7
- enlightened self interest 86–7, 93
- Enough* 90–1
- environment
 - concern for natural environment 24–5
 - costs of global trade to 63
 - firms' attempts to control the consumption environment 100–2
- Environmental Defence Fund (EDF) 88
- EPA 52
- Erikson, E. 254–60
- Eros (life principle) 249, 402–4
- erotogenic zones 251
- Esso 351–2
- esteem 169
- Europe
 - civilizing process 9–18
 - consumption from Middle Ages to eighteenth century 3–5, 7–9
 - early descriptions of anorexia nervosa 323–4
- European Values Study Group 23–4
- Ewen, S. 5–7, 17, 45–6
- exaggeration principle 294
- examination 124
- exchange 32
 - forms of 138–47
 - needs and commodity exchange 147–61
- exchange value 148–9
- excluded identities 44, 45, 48–50
- exhaustive common denominator (ECD) 202, 204
- externalities 94
- Extropians 299
- extroversion 233–5
- Eysenck, H.J. 233–5
- Faber, R. 395, 396
- Falk, P. 54, 277, 278, 352, 353
 - community and self 32, 278, 279, 283–6, 291
- false needs 115, 158–60
- family 6–7
- farming 74–7
- fashion 4, 64, 65–7
 - identity and 269–71
- fasting 323–4
- fat 328
- fat-free fat 339, 341–3
- fear of fatness 306–7
 - see also* obesity
- Featherstone, M. 287
- femininity, 'perfect' 325
- fenfluramine 337–8, 339
- fetishism of commodities 57–9, 72–3, 119
- Fidelity Brokerage Services 192
- Fine, R. 2
- firms *see* organizations
- fitness
 - health and 126–7, 293–4
 - organizations 127–8
- fluoxetine (Prozac) 315, 338, 384
- folk-tales 205–6
- Fonda, J. 127, 297
- food 328
 - social marker 282–3
- food industry 338–9, 341–3
- Fordism 37–8
- formal rationality 32–56
- Formula One motor racing 386
- Foucault, M. 277–8, 380
 - discursive account of discipline 122–8
 - 'Foucauldian' interpretation of anorexia 323–31, 332–3
- Fournier, S. 359–60
- France 5, 12–16, 18, 170, 238–9
- fraudulence 390–1
- Fredriksson, C. 52
- freedom 269–71
- Freud, S. 113, 380, 383

INDEX

- Freud, S. (*cont.*):
 cigarette addiction 402–3
 and psychoanalysis 249–53
Friedman, M. 84–5
Friedman, T. 59
Fromm, E. 114, 399–400, 401–2
'functional' signifier 239–40
fundamentalism 47, 174
- Galbraith, J.K.
 needs 148–9, 153–5, 158
 power 108–12
games 248, 256–7
Ganetz, H. 65–6
Garner, D.M. 311
gender
 anorexia and discursive production of 324–5
 and socialization 320–1
generativity 258
genetic inheritance 231–3, 337
genetic mutation 231, 392
genre 205–7
Gergen, K.J. 402
Germany 18
Giddens, A. 55–6, 70, 207
gift communities 139–41, 160
gift exchange 138–41
 comparison with commodity exchange 142–7
global space, rationalization of 40–4
globalization
 anti-globalization movement 120, 129–30
 of identity 52–5
 insecurity and risk 60–3
Goffman, E. 115–16
going with the flow 65–7
Grafton-Small, R. 145
Green, D.C. 85
Green Revolution 74–5
Grogan, S. 293, 309
Grönroos, C. 96
guilt 256–7
Guinness 355–6
Gulia, M. 176, 177–8
Gummesson, E. 96
habitus 237–9
Hall, S. 117, 118
Halmi, K.A. 306, 310–11
handkerchiefs 280–1
happiness 69–70
Harré, R. 294
Harris, P. 358
Harvey, D. 32–3, 56, 60, 62–4
Hastings, G.B. 388
'having' mode 399–400
Hawkes, T. 198
Hayek, F. von 84–5
hazards 104, 105
 see also risk
health 126–7, 293–4, 340
health inequalities 49
health warning, on cigarettes 385
Hebdige, D. 167–8, 212, 245–6, 364–5
hedonism 85
Hemingway, M. 196
Henke, L.L. 388
heroin 379
heroin chic 288
Hetzl, P. 218–19, 270, 271
hippocampus 228
Hirschman, E.C. 292–3
Hobbes, T. 82
Holt, D. 239–41
hormones 229–31
Hornbacher, M. 305
Horton, W. 217
hostility 212–13
Hot Topic 272–3
hunger 150
hunger-strikes 318–22
Hyde, L. 140–1, 143–5
hydraulic model of motivation 113
hyper-reality 215–18
hyperspace 62
hypochondria 324
hypothalamus 227
 eating disorders 313–17
hysteria 324
- iconic signs 210–12
id 113, 249–50, 252–3
ideal woman 287–8

- idealism 240–1
 identifier, brand as 368–70
 identity 225–75
 anorexia, power and 328–9
 and the body 278–85
 brand identity 366–70
 consumption-related identities 44–52
 creation of individual identities 247–8
 extension of self 265–8
 and fashion 269–71
 globalization of 52–5
 inside-out approaches 226, 227–36
 modern identity 283–5
 outside-in approaches 226, 236–48
 psychoanalytic theory 226–7, 249–65
 signs, difference and 212–13
 identity confusion 257
 identity crisis 254, 258
 ideology 132–20
 Ikerd, J. 75, 76, 77
 images 72
 brand image 355–6
 and eating disorders 307–10, 325
 metaphor and metonymy in advertising 193–4
 narcissistic ego 261, 262–4, 265
 self-protection and the body 286–92
 imaginary order (stage) 261, 262–4
 inalienable objects 143
 independence 143–4
 indexic signs 210–12
 individualism
 and decline of community 32, 54–5, 278–9, 283–5, 291
 discourse of 329–30
 growth in 23–5
 individuals
 in brand discourse 365–6, 367
 creation of individual identities 247–8
 free competition between 98–9
 identity and lifestyle 242–4
 industry 257
 infancy 255–6
 inferiority 257
 information processing 102–3
 initiative 256–7
 inner-directedness 243
 insecurity 60–3
 institutional reflexivity 70
 integrated consumers 44, 45–6
 integration 268
 integrity 258
 intellectuals 380
 interest groups 87–91
 internalization of control 236, 286–7
 internalized other 247–8
 Internet communities 177–8
 interpretant 209–10
 intimacy 257–8
 introversion 233–5
 Irish ‘theme’ bars 41
 Irn-Bru 371–3
 irrationality of rationality 38, 39
 Isherwood, B. 157–8
 isolation 257–8
 issue-based identities 46–7

 Jhally, S. 58
 ‘Jim Twins’ 232–3
 Joe Camel 388, 389

 Kabyle people 30–1, 237
 Ki-Zerbo, J. 54
 Kilbourne, W.E. 50
 Kirshenbaum, R. 101
 Klein, M. 400–1
 Klein, R. 339–41, 406
 kleptomania 52
 Knapp, C. 390, 391
 knowledge, mediation of 103–5
 Kotler, P. 95, 96–7
 Kula exchange 139–40

 labour-saving devices 163
 Lacan, J. 403, 404
 narcissistic ego 261–5
 Lane, R.E. 69, 70
 language 184–8, 189, 207
 langue, la 186–7
 large-scale farming 74–7
 Lasch, C. 400–1, 402
 latency 252
 legislation, drugs and 383–90
 Leiss, W. 157

INDEX

- leisure time 34, 39, 70, 241
leptin 317, 337, 339
Levi-Strauss, C. 198–9, 200, 202
Levitt, T. 93
Leymore, V.L. 201–5
liberal pluralism 86–8
liberalism 82–108
 marketing theory 91–6
 questioning liberal assumptions 97–105
 view of power 86
libido 250, 260
life-cycle 255–8
 marketing and 258–60
life expectancy 49
lifestyle
 identity and 242–4
 time-squeezed 67–72
liminal identities 44–5, 50–2
'Lite' cigarettes 386–7
livestock farming 75–7
long-term 93
looking-glass self 247
love 260
Lukes, S. 112
- machine bodies 289–90
Madden, O. 272–3
Maffesoli, M. 19–22, 24–5
male body 289–90
Malinowski, B. 139
malls 41
Malson, H. 323–31
managerialism 92
 discourses of brands 354–61
manners 15–16, 280–1
Marcuse, H. 112–14, 121–2
margarine 202–4
marginal utility 149
marker goods 151–3, 282–3
market 84, 118–19
market share 349–50
marketing
 and creation of false needs 158–60
 images and bodily self-protection 287–92
 liberal marketing theory 91–6
 and the life-cycle 258–60
 making the market 65
 proliferation of marketing discourse 127–8
 scope of semiotic research 218–19
marketing character 399–400
marketing concept 92–5, 96–7
marketing myopia 93
Marsh, A. 391–2
Marx, K.
 annihilation of space through time 57, 59–60
 and fetishism of commodities 57–9, 119
 Marxist analysis of changing space-time relations 56–73
Maslow, A. 149–51, 155–6, 167, 171–2
Massim peoples 139
materialism 240–1
 marker goods 151–3
mature age 258
McCabe, M.P. 309–10
McCracken, G. 3–5, 16–17, 190
'McDonaldization' thesis 38–40
McIntosh, A. 404–6
McKay, S. 391–2
McKitterick, J.B. 92
McLuhan, M. 289
MDMA 382–3
Mead, G.H. 248
meaning *see* semiotics
mediation of knowledge 103–5
medical discourse 323–4
Mennell, S. 281–3, 306–7
mercantilist system 83
Merrill Lynch 192–3
metaphor 188, 191–4
metonymy 188, 191–4
Michman, R.D. 86
Middle Ages 11–12, 278–9, 281–2
Midland Bank 360–1
Miller, D. 53, 54
mimicry 261
mirror stage 262–4
misrecognition 263
Mizerski, R. 388–9
mobilization of bias 108
models 287–8, 300–1
modernity 18–19

- Marxist analysis 56–73
 modern identity 283–5
 as rational ordering of space 32–56
 ‘Mods’ 245–6
 money exchange *see* commodity exchange
 monoculture 74–5
 Monteath, S.A. 309–10
 Monterey tourist sites 220–1
 mood-repair 396
 moral agency 165
 moral object, customer as 93–4
 moral subjects 164–5
 morality 164–5
 More, M. 299
 Morrison, S. 300
 mourning 260
 multinational corporations (MNCs) 40
 Muniz, A. 176–7
 music 51, 169, 381–3
 mutation, genetic 231, 392
 myth 200
- Nader, R. 94, 95
 narcissism 2–3
 addiction 399–402
 narcissistic ego 253, 260–5
 needs 137–80
 in commodity exchange 147–61
 neo-tribes 18–25, 66–7
 nervous systems 231
 neurons 228–9, 230
 neurobiology of drugs 378–9
 neurotransmitters 229–31
 news 216–17
 ‘no-logo’ identity 363
 non-decisionmaking 107–8
 non-places 62
 Norkunas, M. 220–1
 normality 122–3
 nose blowing 280–1
 novelty 4, 269–70
- obesity 304–5, 333–41
 biological explanations 337–8
 eating disorders and fear of fatness
 306–7
 psychoanalytic explanations 336
 social explanations 334–6
 object–sign relations 210–12
 objects 209–10
 alienable and inalienable 143
 extending the self into 266–7
 symbolic and diabolic devices 268
 system of 190–1
 see also commodities; products
 obsessive–compulsive tendencies 230–1
 O’Donohoe, S. 207–8
 Oedipus complex 252
 O’Guinn, T. 176–7, 395, 396
 olestra 341–3
 Olsen, G. 359
 operant conditioning 393–5
 opium 379, 380, 383
 oral stage 251–2, 255–6
 Orbach, S. 319–22
 organizations 111
 attempts to control consumption environ-
 ment 100–2
 decision-making 99–100
 fitness 127–8
 rationality 99–102
 responses to instability and flux 65–7
 Orlan 297–8
 other-directedness 243–4
 and reference group influence 244–6
 ownership 350–1
- Packard, V. 94, 95
 Pahl, R. 68, 69
 paradigmatic relations 188
 analysis of advertising 201–5
 paradox of self-affirmation 297–8
 paranoid–schizoid position 400–1
 parenting 320–2
 Parker, M. 55
 parole 187
 patina 3
 patriarchy 325
 peak experiences 171–4
 Peirce, C.S. 184, 209–12
 Pepsi 166, 372
 person, as brand 369–70
 persona
 brand 356–61

INDEX

- persona (*cont.*):
 metaphor, metonymy and 192–3
personal capital 398
personal power 109
personality
 brands and 358–61
 ideology and 112–14
 introversion and extroversion 233–5
perspective 33
phallic stage 252, 256–7
pharmaceutical industry 384
phenteramine 337–8, 339
Philo, G. 216–17
physiological needs 148, 150, 154–5, 155–8
piercing, body 368–9
PIMS database 349
pituitary gland 227–8
place of community 30–2
Plant, S. 380
plastic surgery 295–8
play stage 248, 256–7
pluralism, liberal 86–8
politics 20, 23, 24
polysemy 208–9
popular culture 167–8, 381–3
position, brand 356
possessions 267
post-Fordism 63–5
postmaterialism 23
postmodernism 126–7
 and neo-tribes 18–25
poverty 157–8
 excluded identities 48–50
 and smoking 380–1, 391–2
 and time 71
power 81–136
 anorexia, identity and 328–9
 disciplinary 121–9
 sovereign 82–120
Precari Nati 129–30
preconscious 250–1
predestination 33–4
predictability 38
primitive eating community 32, 278–9,
 283–5, 291
production 36
 circuit of 118–19
 creation of needs 158–60
products
 consumer goods and convenience 162–3
 consumer goods and saving labour 163
 generation of meaning 195–7
 system of 189–91
 see also commodities; objects
profits 349–50
property 109
Propp, V. 205
protectionism 83, 84
proxemics 21
Prozac (fluoxetine) 315, 338, 384
pseudo-events 217–18
psychic energy, investment of 265–8
psychoanalysis
 addiction 398–407
 approaches to identity 226–7, 249–65
 starvation disorders 317–22, 332, 333
psychogenesis 9
psychological needs 148, 150, 154–8
psychologization 14
psychology: approach to needs 149–51,
 155–6
psychoticism 235
Puritanism 33–7

qualitative relations 143
quality 165–7
quantitative relations 143

radical view of power 112–20
Radner, H. 127, 297
rage 401
railways 62
rational economics 397–8
rationality
 consumers 85, 102–5
 modernity as rational ordering of space
 32–56
 rational calculation of interests 99–105
rationalization 15, 36, 37
 global space 40–4
raves 51, 382–3
real order (stage) 261, 262
realist ego 253–60
reciprocity 138, 140, 141

- recreation 34, 39, 70, 241
 redundancy 203
 reference group influence 244–7
 referent 185, 197
 reformism 107–12
 regulation 385–9
 reinforcement 393–5, 398
 relationship marketing 96
 relationships, brand 359–61
 reliability 165–7
 religion 23
 fasting 323–4
 peak experiences and 172–4
 renunciation of the flesh 328
 repression 250
 disciplinary power as 121–2
 ideology as 112–14
 repressive desublimization 113–14
 reputation 169
 revised sequence 108, 111, 155, 158
 revolutionary identity 47–8
 revolutions 82
 Riesman, D. 242–4
 rights 82
 risk 60–3
 modern hazards 104, 105
 Ritalin 384
 rites of passage 258
 branding the skin 368–9
 cosmetic surgery 296–7
 ritual shared meals 284–5
 Ritzer, G. 35, 38–40
 Roberts, J.A. 396, 397
 Rochberg-Halton, E. 265–8
 ‘Rockers’ 245–6
 Rogers, M. 100–1
 Rossi, J. 337
 Rudmin, F.W. 50
 ‘ruling ideas’ 114–17
 Run-DMC 51, 169

 safety 164–7
 Samms, C. 68
 Sandikci, O. 208–9
 Saussure, F. de 184–8, 207
 school age 257
 Schor, E. 67–8, 69, 70, 71, 163

 Schouten, J. 296–7
 scooters 245–6
 Scotland Against Drugs (SAD) 408–13
 sculpted body 295–8
 self
 brands and filling the self with goods 352–3
 concepts of 249–50
 empty self 283–5, 402
 extension of 265–8
 looking-glass self 247
 negative constructions of 330
 social self 6, 17, 248
 self-affirmation, paradox of 297–8
 self-control/self-discipline 34, 122
 and the body 17, 280–3, 327, 330
 civilizing process 10–16, 17
 self-expression 293–300
 self-fulfilment 292–3
 self-gifts 140, 141
 self-interest 86–7, 93
 self-protection 286–92
 selfishness 84
 selling 93
 semiotic square 44, 45
 semiotics 181–224
 other sign systems 189–94
 Peirce 184, 209–12
 products and generation of meaning 195–7
 scope of semiotic research 218–19
 semiological tradition of de Saussure 184–8
 signs, identity and difference 212–13
 signs telling the truth and lying 213–18
 structuralism 198–209
 senses 218–19
 sentiment, shared 20–1
 serotonin system 314–17, 337–8
 services 64
 sexuality
 and development 251–3
 disciplinary power 121–3, 125
 shame 15, 256
 Shell 351–2
 Sherry, J. 146
 shoplifting 52

INDEX

- shopping 392–3
 - addictive 395–7
- shopping malls 41
- short-term 93
- Sibley, S.D. 86
- sign value 181
- signified 185–6
 - product as 195–6
- signifier 185–6
- signs 209–10
 - arbitrary nature of 184–6
 - identity and difference 212–13
 - linguistics 184–8
 - object–sign relations 210–12
 - other sign systems 189–94
 - telling the truth and lying 213–18
 - see also* semiotics
- Silk Cut 405–6
- simulacra 215–18
- simulations 216–18
- skin, branding 368–9
- skinfold thickness measurements 333–4
- Smart, B. 35
- Smith, A. 35, 83–4, 110
- smoking 234–5, 380–1, 402–7
 - cigarette advertising 385–9, 404–7
 - gene for 235–6
- social capital 398
- social class 16, 49, 169–70
 - and eating disorders 307
 - identity 237–9
 - measuring social classification 241–2
 - needs and distinction 152–3
 - obesity and 334–6
- social control 5–7
- social determinism 391–2
- social self 6, 17, 248
- socialization 247–8, 266, 320–1
- societal marketing concept 95
- society
 - community and 269–70, 283–5
 - drugs and 378–81
 - space of society 30–2
- sociogenesis 9
- sociology
 - explanations for obesity 334–6
 - explanations for starvation disorders 306–12, 331–2, 333
 - and needs 151–3, 156–8
- Solomon, M. 246–7
- sovereign power 82–120
 - liberalism 82–107
 - radical view 112–20
 - reformism 107–12
- space 29–80
 - annihilation of space through time 57, 59–60, 62, 73
 - Marxist analysis of space and time 56–73
 - modernity as rational ordering of space 32–56
 - place of community vs space of society 30–2
 - separation of time from space 55–6
 - speed-up and changing perceptions of space and time 71–2
 - time–space compression 62–3
- Spence, J. 320, 321
- spirituality 171–4
- stagnation 258
- Stanford Research Institute (SRI) 244
- starvation disorders 304–33
 - biological explanations 312–17, 332, 333
 - description and prevalence 306
 - discursive explanation of anorexia 323–31, 332–3
 - psychoanalytical views 317–22, 332, 333
 - social explanations 306–12, 331–2, 333
- state, role of 87, 107
- status 169–71
 - exchange and 142
 - objects and 190–1
- Stelarc 298–9
- Stern, B. 192–3
- stigmatization 361–2
- Stohr, O. 233
- strangers 11
 - identifying 236–41
- stress 316–17
- structuralism 187, 198–209
 - analyses of advertising 201–7
- style 51, 370
 - anti-style 212

- self-expression 293–300
- subcultures, brand 364–5
- sublimation 250–1
- sublime 406
- subliminal advertising 100–2
- superego 113, 249–50, 252, 253
- supermodels 288
- surveillance 42, 123
- symbolic interactionism 248
- symbolic order 261, 264
- symbols 210–12, 268
- synapses 228–9
- synchronic 187
- synecdoche 188
- syntagmatic relations 188
 - analyses of advertising 205–7
- tangible brand 355
- taste 282–3
- tattooing 368–9
- technology 298–9
 - drugs and 379–80
- technostructure 110–11, 112
- Thanatos (death drive) 249, 402–7
- themed spaces 41–2
- thin body 287–8, 300–1
 - meaning of 324–5
- Thompson, C.J. 292–3
- throwaway society 65
- time 29–80, 335–6
 - annihilation of space through time 57, 59–60, 62, 73
 - consumer goods and convenience 162–3
 - Marxist approach to space–time relations 56–73
 - modernity as rational ordering of space 32–56
 - separation of time from space 55–6
 - speed-up and changing perceptions of time and space 71–2
- time–space compression 62–3
- time-squeezed consumer lifestyle 67–72
- Toffler, A. 65
- tolerance 23, 24
- tone 192
- topology 278–9, 283–5
- ‘totem’ drinks 200
- tourism 46
 - tourist sites in Monterey 220–1
- tradition 31
- tradition-dominated person 242–3
- ‘train’ metaphor 207
- tranquillisers 384
- transportation 63
- tribes, neo- 18–25, 66–7
- Trinidad 53, 54
- trust 255–6
- Turner, B. 277
- turnover time of capital 60
- twin studies 232–3
- unconscious 250–1
- underclass 48–9
- uneven development 17–18
- Unilever 42–4
- United Kingdom (UK)
 - and American popular culture 167–8
 - England 3–4, 9, 18, 32
- United Nations Human Development Report 40
- United States (US)
 - consumption in the 1920s 5–9
 - globalization of culture 53
 - obesity 333, 334, 335, 337–8, 339, 340–1
 - popular culture 167–8
 - tourist sites in Monterey 220–1
- use value 148–9
- uses and gratifications research 117
- value
 - for money 167
 - and worth 145–6
- values 137–80
 - aesthetics 167–8
 - brand values 348–54
 - brands, connotation of 350–2
 - efficiency and convenience 161–3
 - neo-tribes 21–2, 23–5
 - reputation 169
 - safety 164–7
 - spirituality 171–4
 - status 169–71
- Values and Lifestyle Study (VALS) 244
- Van Gogh, V. 406–7

INDEX

- Veblen, T. 171
- virtual communities 177–8
- voluntary simplicity 50
- Walmart 86
- warriors 11
 - transition to courtiers 12–16
- waste disposal 59
- Weberian analysis 32–56, 73
- Wedgwood, J. 4
- Wellman, B. 176, 177–8
- Wensley, R. 96
- Williamson, J. 117–18, 195–6, 197
- Williamson, K. 409–13
- Wilson, W.J. 48
- women
 - advertising and 7, 45–6, 115–17
 - and body 126–7, 287–8, 289, 300–1
 - ideal woman 287–8
 - ‘perfect’ femininity 325
- work 68–9, 241
- working class 238–9
- worth 145–6
- Yannacone, V. 88
- young adult 257–8
- youth 50–1
- Yufe, J. 233
- Yurok people 144