The Millennial Consumer in the Texts of Our Times: Experience and Entertainment

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Two decades ago, (macro)marketing researchers awoke to the hedonic and experiential aspects of consumption—sometimes known as fantasies, feelings, and fun or the "three Fs." More recent literature has further extended our view toward a broadened recognition of "four Es"—experience, entertainment, exhibitionism, and evangelizing. This essay reviews each of the four Es and will appear serially as three sequential installments: parts 1 and 2 on experience and entertainment, part 3 on exhibitionism, and part 4 on evangelizing.

Two decades ago, marketing and consumer researchers awoke to the importance of hedonic consumption (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982) and the experiential aspects of consumer behavior (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). As a shorthand for the various issues involved, the consumption experience was summarized under the headings of fantasies, feelings, and fun or the "three Fs." Increasingly, consumers were viewed less as computer-like decision makers whose brand choices lead to buying behavior in the form of purchasing outcomes and more as flesh-and-blood humans who daydream about pleasurable adventures, respond emotionally to consumption situations, and use products in various playful leisure activities. Clearly, these revisions in our approach to studying the consumer carried further implications for marketing managers concerned with shaping communication messages, designing retail outlets, and orchestrating product meanings to accommodate their experience-oriented customers.

All this has been in the air for some time and can hardly be considered novel or revelatory at this late date. However, it appears that a new wave of experiential perspectives and expansions thereof has recently broken upon the scene—indeed, a veritable tsunami of new literature that has swamped us in a flood of texts attempting to extend our view of the experiential consumer. Enlarging on the essence of the three Fs, these new literary offerings have caught the spirit of a broadened purview that we might refer to as the "four Es"—experience, entertainment, exhibitionism, and evangelizing.

Each of these four Es is, in turn, marked by an emphasis on various themes that can also be summarized by words beginning with the same letter:

Experience	*Entertainment*	*Exhibitionism*	*Evangelizing*
Escapism	Esthetics	Enthuse	Educate
Emotions	Excitement	Express	Evince
Enjoyment	Ecstasy	Expose	Endorse

But where did these texts come from, and what is their relevance as we rush into the next millennium?

The purpose of the present essay on "The Millennial Consumer in the Texts of Our Times" is to answer such questions and to address each of the four Es in turn. Accordingly, this review is divided into three installments, to appear sequentially. As the first installment, parts 1 and 2 focus on experience and entertainment. Next, part 3 will address issues concerning exhibitionism. Finally, part 4 will deal with evangelizing.

EXPERIENCE

The idea that value inheres in the consumption experience is hardly a new concept. Lebergott (1993, 3) begins his retrospective look at *Pursuing Happiness: American Consumers in the Twentieth Century* with a reminder that "economic activity aims not for output, but for experience via consumption." He traces this view back to the writings of such classic economists as Adam Smith, Alfred Marshall, and John Maynard Keynes. Rather presciently, in *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith ([1776] 1937) insisted that "consumption is

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the sole end and purpose of all production." More recently—focusing on consumption as usage (i.e., using vs. choosing)—Marshall ([1920] 1961, II/63-64) pointed out in his *Principles of Economics* that

> man cannot create material things . . . when he is said to produce material things, he really only produces utilities. . . . Just as man can produce only utilities, so he can consume nothing more. . . . Often indeed when he is said to consume things, he does nothing more than hold them for his use.

Though purportedly writing a *General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*, Keynes ([1936] 1964, 104) emphasized that "consumption—to repeat the obvious—is the sole end and object of all economic activity." Adding experience-related specificity to this emphasis on consumption, Abbott (1955, 40) viewed all products as performing services that provide consumption experiences:

> The thesis . . . may be stated quite simply. What people really desire are not products but satisfying experiences. Experiences are attained through activities. In order that activities may be carried out, physical objects . . . are usually needed. Here lies the connecting link between man's inner world and the outer world of economic activity. People want products because they want the experience-bringing services which they hope the products will render.

A focus on the consumption experience also enjoys a long history of development in sources closer to marketing and consumer research. Thus, Ruby Turner Norris (1941, 136-37)—a founder of the Consumer's Union—stressed the dependence of consumer value on the experiences that goods provide:

> The emphasis . . . is upon the *services* of goods, not upon the goods themselves. Wants should be thought of not as desires for goods—but rather for the events which the possession of them makes possible. . . . Goods are wanted because they are capable of performing services—favorable events which occur at a point in time.

Even more conspicuously, as the great patriarch of theory in marketing, Wroe Alderson (1957) saw the foundation of customer value as rooted in the consumption experience. Subsequently, the popular author Alvin Toffler (1970) leaned heavily on the concept of consumption experiences in his influential book *Future Shock*. More recently, a neglected work by Walter Woods (1981) developed the theme of experiential consumption. Meanwhile, Beth Hirschman and I rediscovered and extended these concepts in our discussions of hedonic consumption (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982) and the consumption experience (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). And the story has continued via empirical studies of emotions in the consumption experience (Havlena and Holbrook 1986; Richins 1997; Westbrook and Oliver 1991), measures of the experiential aspects of consumption (Lacher and Mizerski 1994; Mano and Oliver 1993), and overviews from sympathetic conceptual orientations (Holbrook 1987, 1995a). Rounding out this progression, the Marketing Science Institute (1998-2000) recently designated the goal of "Understanding the Customer Experience" as one of two capital topics that "deserve intensive research attention," with special emphasis on the importance of "value from a customer/consumer perspective," "the social psychology of the retail experience," and "understanding the consumer experience from multidisciplinary perspectives" (p. 5).

The Experience Economy of Joseph Pine and James Gilmore

Given the abundance of previous literature on this topic, I tended to greet *The Experience Economy* by Joseph Pine and James Gilmore (1999)—which builds on a recent piece in the *Harvard Business Review* (*HBR*) by the same authors (Pine and Gilmore 1998)—with a slight sense of déjà vu. These authors claim to have presented "the first publishing of the concept of experiences as a distinct economic offering" (p. 207), but the date of this letter to the editor of *HBR* (Pine 1996) identifies them as arrivistes rather than pioneers in this direction. Nonetheless, false claims to intellectual primogeniture notwithstanding, I found the energy and breadth of focus invested by Pine and Gilmore (P&G 1999) toward investigating this topic to be both admirable and refreshing.

P&G's not-so-new thesis is that "experiences represent an existing but previously unarticulated *genre of economic output*" (P&G 1999, ix) and that their provision as part of the firm's offering permits the sort of brand differentiation that can save a company from the price- and profit-eroding perils of commoditization (p. x). In this spirit, P&G promise to supply the managerially inclined reader with "the tools to begin staging compelling experiences" (p. xii).

At the heart of P&G's account lies a conceptualization that I find somewhat awkward. Specifically, they tend to offer a rather teleological view of commerce, regarding economic progress as a succession of stages from commodities to goods to services to experiences (p. 5). In this progression of economic value—as outlined in an elaborate set of homologies or parallel binary oppositions (p. 6) or a boxes-and-arrows representation (p. 22)—the nature of the offering and its key attributes advances from fungible and natural (commodities) to tangible and standardized (goods) to intangible and customized (services) to memorable and personal (experiences). The seller-buyer relation evolves from trader-market (commodities) to manufacturer-user (goods) to provider-client (services) to stager-guest (experiences).

Impressively comprehensive and logically tidy as these homologous parallelisms might seem, I find at least three major problems with this conceptualization. First, the P&G framework encourages us to think of all products as experiences staged for *guests*—even in the cases of experiential products for which this viewpoint might be counterproductive (such as education, medical services, clinical social work, or the penal system). But I have previously inveighed against the rule of customer orientation in cases where some of us believe a touch of elitism is appropriate (Holbrook 1995b), so I shall not revisit this debate in the present context. Second, the P&G analysis encourages us to adopt a "what's next?" viewpoint, to wonder what the next stage in the progression will be, and to assume that the economy must be moving toward some higher level of output to be found past the realm of experiences. P&G have an answer for this problematic issue, and that answer will occupy our attention in part 4 of this review. Third, the P&G conceptualization is just plain wrong.

I say that the P&G conceptualization of progress is "wrong" because it flies in the face of everything I believe we have learned about the nature of consumer behavior. Elsewhere and at a length too monstrous to rehearse here (e.g., Holbrook 1994, 1995a, 1999b), I have labored mightily to convince the world that *all* products involve goods that perform services to provide consumption experiences. This conflation of goods-services-and-experiences applies, I believe, to every sort of experiential consumption—from a commodity such as sugar (sweet-tasting experiences) to a good such as a television set (humorous and dramatic experiences) to a fast-food restaurant service (nonnutritious but hunger-satisfying and thirst-quenching experiences) to a purely experiential offering such as a Broadway show (I-laughed-until-I-cried-and-it-only-cost-me-$75-per-ticket experiences). In other words, I believe that *every* consumption event provides some form of experience(s) and that this has been true since the time of (say) Adam and Eve (gee-that-apple-tasted-good-but-now-I-suddenly-feel-very-ashamed experiences). It may be that some management consultants now reap escalating rewards from more insistently calling the attention of their clients to the importance of experiential consumption. It may also be that some companies—Disney, Starbucks, Harley-Davidson, or Nike (to pick some favorite examples pursued by P&G and others)—are striking it rich by staging memorable experiences. But this is *not* a new phenomenon. Just recall what God tried to do for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. How happy those blessed creatures were in Paradise. How content the rest of us could have been if they had just kept their greedy paws off the forbidden fruit. And how these two ingrates blew it all for the sake of tasting that delicious and knowledge-conferring apple.

That said, I must admit that P&G (1999) provide some marvelous illustrations in an engaging and always lively if sometimes slightly irritating style. The irritation tends to arise when they get just too cute for words—as when they coin an oh-so-twee verb *ing* to express the notion that "manufacturers must focus on the experience customers have while *using* their goods" (p. 15). So the managerial prescription follows irresistibly: "*ING* THE THING" (p. 15). From this perspective, clothes become a "wearing experience," trash becomes a "wastebasketing experience," and sealing an envelope becomes a "mask-taping experience" (p. 16). Reading P&G's book, I suppose, becomes an "ing"-ing experience. Which means, of course, that the present review becomes an "'ing'-ing"-ing experience. In short, "any good can be *ing*ed" (p. 16). I actually agree with this advice. I just object to P&G's manner of couching it in baby talk. At times like this, their practitioner-oriented rhetoric becomes an "annoying experience."

The conceptual heart of P&G's book insists that rich and memorable experiences of the types they advocate cannot be reduced to mere entertainment (p. 29). Rather, they involve different degrees of passive-active participation and absorbed-immersed engagement to compose four distinct realms of experience: entertaining (passively absorbed), educational (actively absorbed), esthetic (passively immersed), and escapist (actively immersed). Here—making a supreme effort to forgive P&G for their advocacy of "edutainment" (p. 32)—I appreciate the richness of their multifaceted view of experience as involving distinct but potentially complementary types of customer value (cf. Holbrook 1994, 1999b). And I endorse their insistence on the commercial potential for offerings that encompass all four realms of experience:

> The sweet spot for any compelling experience—incorporating entertainment, educational, escapist, and esthetic elements into otherwise generic space—is similarly a mnemonic place, a tool aiding in the creation of memories, distinct from the normally uneventful world of goods and services. (P. 43)

Along the way, P&G (1999) offer much sound commonsense advice on how to jazz up the experiential aspects of one's offering—how to achieve what we used to refer to as selling-the-sizzle-instead-of-the-steak. These include playing on special themes as at the Forum shops in Las Vegas (p. 47), appeals to nostalgia as at the Hard Rock Cafe (p. 56), or engaging all five senses as at the Barnes & Noble coffee bars (p. 59). But P&G's number one piece of advice follows as the dusk the dawn from their inveterately managerial orientation—namely, . . . Charge Admission:

> Ultimately, a business is defined by that for which it collects revenue, and it collects revenue only for that which it decides to charge. You're not truly selling a particular economic offering unless you explicitly ask your customers to pay for that exact offering. For experiences, that means *charging an admission fee*. (P. 62)

Later, P&G (1999) restate this theme as a phrase that might become a popular aphorism were it not so alarmingly ungrammatical: "What we once sought for free, we now pay a fee" (p. 163). Even if we were to replace this grammatically tortured gibberish with the more linguistically coherent, "For what we once got free, we now pay a fee," I am not sure that all readers would wish to follow P&G down this particular mercantile path (pp. 63-64)—selling tickets to Sharper Image or Brookstone stores, for example; collecting money at the door of Niketown; or charging admission to FAO Schwartz, The Nature Company, and Victoria's Secret. If you do agree with P&G that "the history of economic progress consists of charging a fee for what once was free" (p. 67), Dear Reader, then please strike a blow for economic progress by sending me (say) $10.00 for the pleasure of reading this review. You'll feel better, and so will I. If not, I rest my case.

Other aspects of P&G's advice will have a familiar ring to those who have perused Pine's earlier work on mass customization (Pine 1993; cf. Holbrook 1999a). P&G (1999) view customization as the magic ingredient that turns commodities into goods into services into experiences (p. 72). Again, I am not sure I can agree with the teleological flavor of this analysis. As a consumer, the experience I get from a standardized good or service—say, a McDonald's hamburger—may be bland, boring, or downright barf inducing. But it *is* still an *experience*, albeit an unpleasant one. I think P&G mean to imply that rich, memorable, or otherwise successful experiences often or usually involve some element of tailoring to the individual customer—a premise with which we can all agree. But here, P&G grow perhaps a bit too grandiose for their own good. They define customer satisfaction as "the difference between what a customer *expects* and what the customer *perceives* he gets" (p. 78) and even go so far as to express this truism as a mathematical formula:

$$\begin{array}{c}\text{Customer}\\ \text{satisfaction}\end{array} = \begin{array}{c}\text{What customer}\\ \text{expects to get}\end{array} - \begin{array}{c}\text{What customer}\\ \text{perceives he gets.}\end{array}$$

In this, P&G reveal that they are no mathematicians. Perhaps they neglected the third of the three Rs—reading, writing, and 'rithmatic—in favor of pursuing their recommended orientation toward edutainment. Or perhaps they really have their minds on sacrifice rather than satisfaction, a theme to which they turn when they address questions of how various types of customization can lead to "experiencing less sacrifice" (pp. 81-94).

Bernd Schmitt's Experiential Marketing

I shall return later to some additional aspects of Pine and Gilmore's (1999) *Experience Economy* that deserve our attention, but first let us consider the new book titled *Experiential Marketing* by my friend and colleague Bernd Schmitt (1999). This author currently occupies the sunny office at the Columbia Business School in which I worked and practically lived for many years before I moved across the hall to cooler quarters. The vibes or karma in our sequentially shared space might have been just right to encourage something of a convergence in our thinking. Indeed, unlike P&G, Schmitt very graciously acknowledges the contributions by those who have previously investigated the role of the consumption experience. Whatever the explanation, gratifyingly if not surprisingly, I find his work quite congenial to my own viewpoints. However, judging from the wildly enthusiastic endorsements found on the back of the dust jacket, I suspect that—beyond the book's conceptual congeniality—some who are not quite so accustomed to the experiential perspective may find Schmitt's message revelatory in several respects that deserve comment.

Like P&G, from the first, Schmitt (1999) focuses on those aspects of marketing aimed at "creating experiences for . . . customers" (p. xiii). Toward this end, he promises to provide "tools for this new approach" (p. xiii) and, if not exactly tools, does indeed offer a new vocabulary composed of such acronyms as SEMs (strategic experiential modules) and ExPros (experience providers). In this, building from his earlier book on *Marketing Aesthetics* (Schmitt and Simonson 1997), Schmitt (1999) extends the traditional features-and-benefits or F&B paradigm to build a conceptual model for designing, managing, and integrating consumption-based experiences.

Schmitt (1999) begins with something of a diatribe on the shortcomings of the traditional F&B approach to marketing, its assumption of a rational decision-making consumer, its reliance on analytical-quantitative-verbal methods, and its unfortunate implication that "for marketing purposes, products can and should be described in terms of functional features and benefits" (p. 17). Schmitt finds such conventions "ugly" because they neglect "the very essence of a brand as a rich source of sensory, affective, and cognitive associations that result in memorable and rewarding brand experiences" (p. 21).

I could not agree more wholeheartedly with the tenor of this discussion (Holbrook 1987, 1995a), but I do have some reservations concerning the manner in which Schmitt (1999) couches it. Throughout, he seems to assume that it is consumers more than merely our views of consumers that have changed. For example, he suggests that "today's consumers are simply not what the rational model of marketing wants them to be" (p. 57):

> Today, customers take functional features and benefits, product quality, and a positive brand image as a given. What they want is products, communications, and marketing campaigns that dazzle their senses, touch their hearts, and stimulate their minds. . . . They want products, communications, and marketing campaigns to deliver an experience. (P. 22)

But, I would contend, this is exactly what consumers have *always* wanted and *always will* want. When I once titled a piece "O, Consumer, How You've Changed" (Holbrook 1987), the tone was ironic (Holbrook 1995a). I meant to imply that—as members of the human species—consumers do now and always did value consumption experiences but that in relinquishing the more extreme assumptions of the decision-oriented focus on brand choices in buying behavior, it is *we*—that is, we marketing thinkers—who have changed. Schmitt (1999) seems to think that today's consumers suddenly differ from their former selves—a discovery that he delivers with an air of breathless excitement. But I would disagree. Consumers still sensuously savor their food. They still daydream about their summer vacations. They still feel sad in tear-jerking movies and happy when their team wins the championship. They still play tennis or golf for fun and derive esthetic pleasure from a Bruckner symphony or a Dickens novel. So consumers themselves have not changed. Rather, our own understanding of them has been radically revised. Schmitt's book helps us better to appreciate all that and to connect it to the world of marketing management. In that spirit, I would rephrase his summary formula (p. 30) as, in my words, "From Brand X to Brand Ex"—that is, from the brand as an identifier (e.g., "X") to the brand as an experience (i.e., "Ex").

Schmitt (1999) fills his book with all sorts of wonderful examples. He sees cars (Jaguar, BMW, Lincoln) as "quintessentially experiential products" (p. 35). He interprets a new Amtrak train service as "focusing on the entire experience of the traveler" (p. 41). He views Singapore Airlines as pursuing a "new experiential initiative" (p. 44). Other telling illustrations abound: Palm Pilot organizers, Microsoft software, Polartec climate control fabrics, CNN news, Crystal Run health care, Michael Jordan, and so forth (pp. 34-57). But the main value of *Experiential Marketing* lies not so much in Schmitt's colorful illustrations as in his conceptual framework.

That framework fills the central portion of the book—chapters 3 through 8—and suggests its subtitle: *How to Get Customers to SENSE, FEEL, THINK, ACT, and RELATE to Your Company and Brands*. Schmitt (1999) regards the five relevant aspects of experience as the strategic experiential modules, or SEMs, on which a company can build its marketing efforts to help the consumer *sense* (e.g., Richart luxury chocolates, Gucci purses, Nokia cell phones, Tiffany jewels, British Airways), *feel* (Clinique's "Happy" fragrance, Häagen-Dazs cafés, Campbell's soup, Calvert mutual funds), *think* (Microsoft's "Where Do You Want to Go Today?" campaign, Genesis ElderCare, Apple computers, RCN cable TV, Finlandia vodka), *act* (Nike's "Just Do It" campaign, Gillette Mach3 razors, the Milk Moustache ads, Martha Stewart Living), and *relate* (Harley-Davidson motorcycles, Tommy Hilfiger clothing, the Wonderbra, Michael Jordan fragrances). Such SEMs are accomplished by means of experience providers or ExPros—roughly comparable to what we used to call the elements of the marketing mix—namely, communications, identities, products, cobranding, environment, Web sites, and people. Schmitt arrays the SEMs and ExPros against each other to form a conceptually useful experiential grid (p. 74), though it presses credulity a bit when he positions this rather modest conceptual framework as "a key strategic planning tool of experiential marketing" (p. 72).

One of the ExPros to which Schmitt (1999) devotes considerable attention involves Web sites and appears frequently throughout the book. Thus, he explicitly calls our attention to the Web sites of Jaguar (p. 36), BMW (p. 37), Singapore Airlines (p. 44), Kinko's (p. 54), Microsoft (p. 67), Harley-Davidson (p. 69), Club Med (p. 91), Discovery Channel (p. 92), Häagen-Dazs Cafés (p. 118), Digital Corporation (p. 151), RCN Television Services (p. 152), Gillette's Mach3 (p. 156), Milk (p. 158), Victoria's Secret (p. 161), and Hallmark (p. 222). Indeed, I strongly suspect that someone too impoverished to buy this book could glean much of its content by simply browsing the relevant Internet destinations— especially since its author has also constructed his own highly appropriate and provocative Bernd Schmitt Web site: www.exmarketing.com. If you want to flesh out the B.S. experience, don't miss it! (The URL for my own more modest effort in this direction is www.morriscat.com. But that's another story.)

At the risk of oversimplification, I might suggest that Schmitt's quintet of SEMs strongly parallels the framework that underlies our conceptualization of fantasies, feelings, and fun or the three Fs (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982)—except that we collapsed two of Schmitt's types into one and omitted the last of the five. Specifically, our scheme followed the traditional cognition-affect-behavior framework. Thus, *fantasies* included all aspects of experientially oriented *cognitions*; these would encompass the SEMs that Schmitt (1999) refers to as *sense* (chapter 4) and *think* (chapter 6)—especially with respect to his emphasis on sensory or esthetic elements and on thoughts consistent with convergent, divergent, directional, and associative ideation. *Feelings* emphasized the various consumption-related *affects*; Schmitt analyzes these as aspects of how consumers *feel* (chapter 5) via special attention to the hedonic, pleasure-seeking aspects of moods, emotions, or other affective responses and via a somewhat confusingly labeled "Perceptual Map of Consumption Emotions" (p. 133). *Fun* referred to various play- or leisure-oriented aspects of *behavior*; Schmitt includes these when considering how consumers *act* (chapter 7)—though, in his treatment, "act" also refers to a broad spectrum of lifestyle-related activities (which the three Fs scheme included under the heading of General Customer Characteristics in general and Psychographics in particular). In a useful chapter that further echoes some of the earlier work on experiential consumption (Hirschman and Holbrook 1986), Schmitt (1999) points to the importance of regarding the individual SEMs as combined interactively into gestalt-like "holistic experiences" (chapter 9); he convincingly shows how his example, the new Volkswagen Beetle, successfully integrates the five relevant SEMs into one holistic campaign (p. 197). In an especially entertaining section, he also prowls the supermarket in search of well-integrated packaged-goods offerings: Arizona iced teas and Celestial Seasonings herbal teas; various brands of bottled water, including Perrier and Wazu; and Balance, Think, or Clif high-energy health food bars. The point is that in such products, the experiential components are "interconnected" in a way that builds an "overall gestalt far beyond the sum of the parts" (p. 212). Amen!

Schmitt (1999) concludes with some words of wisdom on how to build an "experience-oriented organization" (chapter 11). Here, he proposes the need to integrate Dionysian (inspired, ecstatic, passionate, unbounded) with Apollonian (rational, harmonious, ordered, planned) corporate cultures. I particularly enjoy Schmitt's comments in this Nietzschean direction because they tap the Hegelian dialectic principle of integration (thesis-antithesis-synthesis) or the reconciliation of opposed viewpoints (to resolve conflict or tension) that I also find central to the creative process (Holbrook 1984, 1997). Indeed, Schmitt (1999) revisits my own favorite metaphor in this connection when he quotes Mr. Nuovo of Nokia mobile phones to the effect that creativity resembles "improvisation in a jazz quartet, where good ideas come from everywhere and they gel and become a whole" (p. 247). In other words: Swing, Brother, Swing.

ENTERTAINMENT

Beyond Experience

Moving beyond the focus on consumption experiences, I would suggest that Pine and Gilmore's (1999) *Experience Economy* directs our gaze toward a second phenomenon that lies at the heart of the aforementioned four Es—namely, *entertainment*.

As already noted, P&G (1999) make it clear that to them, consumption experiences are not mere entertainment. Nonetheless—starting with its subtitle, *Work Is Theatre & Every Business a Stage*—their entire book exudes a show-business mentality that we should avoid confusing with anything else. Consider, for example, such chapter titles as (2) "Setting the Stage," (3) "The Show Must Go On," (4) "Get Your Act Together," (5.5) "Intermission," (6) "Work Is Theatre," (7) "Performing to Form," (8) "Now Act Your Part," or (10) "Finding Your Role in the World." Clearly, following in the wake of Erving Goffman's (1959) *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, P&G see that we are all actors on life's stage, performing our roles according to script with the appropriate costumes, props, stage sets, and scenery for support. Indeed, P&G claim that this view is *more* than a dramaturgical metaphor; it is a *theatrical model* of the enterprise (p. 104). This "theatrical model" leads P&G in the direction of considering different forms of theater (street theater, improv theater, platform theater, and matching theater) while spelling out their relevance to marketing performances (pp. 122-37). Toward this end, they have studied some of the literature on acting—which gives their book the rather bizarre cast of a work on marketing strategy that makes almost no explicit reference to the marketing literature but that copiously cites works with such titles as *Directing the Action: Acting and Directing in the Contemporary Theatre*, *The Complete Book of Script- writing*, *Screenplay: The Foundation of Screenwriting*, *Script to Performance*, or *Costume and Make-Up*. I find this eclecticism refreshing and appreciate the thoroughness with which P&G develop their "theatrical model," though I am not yet prepared to regard this enlargement of the "dramaturgical metaphor" as a fulfillment of the authors' promise to provide "managerial tools." At any rate, P&G's thespian theme definitely prepares us for a consideration of the second of the four Es—namely, entertainment.

Michael Wolf on the Entertainment Economy

As Pine and Gilmore (1999) make clear in their business-like analysis and as Schmitt (1999) illustrates plentifully in his own more febrile manner of writing, one facet of experience that looms large in today's world of marketing is *entertainment*. Recognizing this phenomenon, the University of Southern California has recently initiated an interdisciplinary effort—heavily financed by the television producer Norman Lear and bearing his name as the Lear Center at USC's Annenberg School for Communication—based on the organizing thesis that "today, in every advanced industrial economy on earth, the largest and most important component of cultural content is entertainment" (Purdum 2000, A16).

Even a resolutely studious philosophical scholar such as Arneson (1999) acknowledges the potential link between well-being and entertainment. In the course of espousing an "objective-list theory" of happiness or human flourishing (p. 116)—as distinguished from a "perfectionist" theory—Arneson proposes that one source of well-being (among others) falls under the heading of "cheap thrills" (p. 120). Indeed, he waxes rather eloquent in defending this position:

> Among the goods that intrinsically enhance the quality of someone's life, some may have nothing whatsoever to do with fashioning oneself as a more perfect specimen of the human species or as a more perfect specimen of the type of individual one is. Consider what are sometimes called "cheap thrills," activities that provide pleasure and excitement without any significant effort or sacrifice on the part of the agent and also without the exercise or development of any of the agent's significant talents. Cheap thrills are pleasures with no redeeming social value beyond their pleasantness. The world being as it is, and human nature being what it is, such pleasures seem to me to be important sources of enjoyment that significantly enhance many people's lives in ways for which there is no practical substitute. . . . I would think that if these pleasures were to disappear without replacement, the world

> would be immensely worse and most human lives would be significantly blighted. (P. 120)

Not wanting to be thus "blighted," we gratefully turn to the work of a true entertainment-oriented Wolf-in-Chic-Clothing.

For as he constantly reminds us in *The Entertainment Economy*, Michael Wolf (1999) occupies a position uniquely suited to spelling out the implications of such "pleasures with no redeeming social value beyond their pleasantness"—indeed, their growing cultural intensification—as a trend for all to admire. Billed as "the leading consultant to the world's top media and entertainment companies" (dust jacket), Wolf runs the Media and Entertainment Group at Booz-Allen & Hamilton, where he supervises more than 200 consultants worldwide. You can e-mail him at wolf@entertainmenteconomy.com if you want to chat.

Still attending to the book's cover, we learn that—as the industry's most in-demand strategist—Wolf (1999) demonstrates that entertainment is "the driving wheel of the global economy." This principle and its implications for the importance of hits and blockbusters permeate not just the media but all enterprises—Ford Motor Company, Tommy Hilfiger, Citibank, Amazon-Dot-Com, and so forth—so that, quite literally, "there's no business without show business."

Having established Wolf's credentials as a reigning guru and the contemporary heir to P. T. Barnum, the book gets down to the more sober task of offering the modest proposition that "entertainment is transforming our economy" (p. xi). By this, Wolf (1999) means not just that we all watch a lot of TV, but that entertainment has become the essence of most business practice. More colloquially, Westinghouse does not make turbines and refrigerators any more (not entertaining enough); now they do broadcasting. Furthermore, using the past tense as a sort of rhetorical flourish, Wolf revives the term *synergy* to describe the changes observed around him:

> Companies were no longer interested in merely being the biggest studio or the most successful TV network. They had to be more. Theme parks, cable networks, radio, consumer products, books, and music; all became prospects for their potential empires. Medialand was gripped by merger mania. If you weren't everywhere . . . you were nowhere. (P. xviii)

So what we get is giant conglomerates, with virtually every major company having its thumbs in the media pie and with the entertainment imperative rubbing off onto previously unrelated enterprises. All businesses—even academic college professors—need entertaining Web sites. (Hey, don't forget www.exmarketing.com or www.morriscat.com!) Every retail establishment aspires to the status of a theme park until "the line between entertainment and the rest of the economy [has] disappeared" (p. xxi).

Think Las Vegas, ladies and gentlemen, and you will soon realize that " *entertainment—not autos, not steel, not financial services—is fast becoming the driving wheel of the new world economy*" (p. 4). It's big ($480 billion in the U.S.A.), it's growing faster than all other sectors of our economy (like a weed), and it's everywhere (Disneyland, Disney World, the Grand Canyon, and—drawing more visitors per year than the other three combined—Mall of America). In New York City, we have Lincoln Center (the N.Y. Philharmonic, the N.Y. Ballet, the Metropolitan Opera); but, hey, right across the street and selling a whole lot more tickets, we have . . . the Sony Multiplex. This (inherently lowbrow) multiplexification encircles the globe and fills our minds to the point where "it is becoming clearer all the time that all consumer businesses are going to have to be partly about entertainment in order to be noticed in the increasingly crowded marketplace" (p. 17).

Another facet of this phenomenon involves *convergence* in which all media (newspapers, magazines, personal computers, the Internet) appear to emulate the features of television (*USA Today*, *People*, PowerPoint, WebTV). We do not yet know whether the information channels of the future will rely on cables, telephone lines, satellites, fiber optics, microwaves, or whatever. But now that we have all learned to point-and-click and have forgotten how to type DOS commands, it is already clear that PCs will increasingly look a lot more like TVs with their finger-ready remote controls. In Wolf's (1999) rather witty turn of phrase,

> Entertainment and the rest of the economy have . . . been thrown into each other's arms in a marriage of convergence. The result is a world of commerce where the lines between entertainment and nonentertainment are increasingly blurred. (P. 26; see also p. 94)

Success in business no longer hinges on (say) good accounting practices or savvy inventory management. Rather, companies "have to create an experience; they have to inform and amuse; they have to build a destination": "*Consumers are looking for the E-factor in every product* . . . that's E as in *Entertainment*" (p. 27).

In this connection, Wolf (1999) coins a term that emphasizes the *fun* aspects of the three Fs—namely, *hedonomics* (p. 30). But don't forget *feelings*. Wolf has those covered, too, in his pat phrase "From Real Goods to Feel Goods" (p. 32)—in other words, from cars-couches-dishwashers-homes to CDs-videos-games-cable-TV (p. 33)—all of which provide attractive alternative ways to spend our increasingly scarce free time in the form of (conspicuous and often multitasked) leisure consumption.

As with Pine and Gilmore (1999) or Schmitt (1999), we must ask whether all this is really new. Don't we hear traces of (say) Thorstein Veblen ([1899] 1967) or Stefan Linder (1970) in Wolf's comments on leisure and the scarcity of free time? The answer, in part, is that we most certainly do. Here, Wolf (1999) upstages himself a bit when he refers to Viagra and

VH1 for the baby boomers as getting "right back to sex, drugs, and rock and roll" (p. 32). My point exactly! The quest for entertainment is *not* really a *new* phenomenon. It's our growing *recognition* of this phenomenon—in marketing and consumer research, as elsewhere—that makes it suddenly seem so *important*. And in this connection, as Wolf shows vividly, we all search incessantly for *fun* ways to spend our increasingly regimented *time*—which we plan in something like the manner in which a TV network slots its daily programming—amounting to something of a "new *mentalité*" wherein "we see our lives in the same kind of grid in which we see television schedules" (p. 40). Paraphrasing: "It's 11:15 a.m. on my calendar for Tuesday," we say to ourselves, "Let's see what's playing. Ah, *The Price Is Right*. CBS. Channel 2."

Much of Wolf's (1999) book consists of juicy examples drawn from companies and industries in which the "E-factor" has come to the fore. These include bookstores (Borders' or Barnes & Noble's cafés and library-like reading rooms), restaurants (Hard Rock Cafe, Planet Hollywood), hotels (Las Vegas), fast food (McDonald's and the Disney characters), travel (theme cruises aboard *Disney Magic*, luxury flights on Singapore Airlines), retailing (Stew Leonard's singing chickens, REI's hiking-biking-climbing trail, Niketown's intensely athletic atmosphere), fashion (Tommy Hilfiger's hip-hop creations, Ralph Lauren's faux-British clubbiness), banking (Citibank's "Who Says a Bank Can't Rock and Roll?"), other financial services (cyberdealing via E-trade), and, of course, marginally (il)legal activities (gambling casinos such as Foxwoods, pornography on the Web). In short, everywhere one looks—from books to crooks—one finds the E-factor operating in the service of "the *entertainmentizing of the economy*" (p. 72), where "entertainment is first and foremost a way to build brand image by enhancing a customer's experience" (pp. 80-81).

Amid the drift toward convergence and conglomeration in pursuit of the blockbuster entertainmentality via a reliance on the E-factor, the quest for audience share places a premium on the need for synergy:

> Most media companies have begun to reexamine their portfolios to see if yesterday's hoped-for good fit makes sense within their current strategy. . . . The winners will be better-focused companies that are more capable of winning the battle for attention. (P. 100)

Transcendent winner in the push-to-entertainment-based sweepstakes is, as discussed later in Wolf's (1999) book, the Disney Company with its brand empire of theme parks, hotels, movies, books, videos, recordings, magazines, fast food, toys, clothing, television networks, retail outlets, and other offerings too numerous to mention:

> The hope is that all these products and the efforts behind them will mesh and contribute to a chain reaction that creates more energy, awareness, and economic effect than any single aspect might have done on its own. This is true synergy. (P. 231)

Here, Wolf sounds like the Booz-Allen-&-Hamilton consultant that he in fact is—one devoted to studying the effect of complementarity among business components on the firm's bottom line.

But soon enough, irresistibly, Wolf's focus shifts back to the gee whiz, stargazing perspective of the blockbuster orientation as he announces the key principle behind E-power— "In two words: *talent rules*" (p. 102). This means that in a world of commerce governed by the E-factor, it made sense for an E-player like Patrick Ewing to collect $21 of every $47.50 Knicks ticket sold (p. 104) or for a cast E-member of *Seinfeld* to have collected $600,000 per half-hour episode (p. 104). (Perhaps we should call each 30-minute program an "E-pisode.") The lesson here is that—where the E-factor prevails—the cost of talent will skyrocket (apparently, even where the recipients of this largesse are not as indisputably gifted as one might hope). In the movie industry, they call this "star power"; in economics, Frank and Cook (1996) call it the "winner take all" phenomenon; in Wolf's *Entertainment Economy*, where talent rules, "as long as consumers are drawn by big-name stars, skilled athletes, top directors, and best-selling authors, the price of talent will be high" (pp. 105-6).

On the global level, according to Wolf (1999), the appropriate models for success are the business moguls: "Egoistical, focused, controlling, deeply intuitive, and undaunted by failure, they are the absolute—and necessary—monarchs of the entertainment industry" (p. 116). Hence, Wolf devotes chapter 5 to a series of mini-bios chronicling the Big Careers of Rupert Murdoch (Fox TV, etc.), Barry Diller (USA Network, etc.), Ted Turner (TNT, CNN), Sumner Redstone (Viacom), Bob Pittman (MTV), Gerald Levin (Time Warner), Thomas Middelhoff (BMG), Jack Welch (NBC), Lew Wasserman (MCA), and Bill Gates (Microsoft). And in case Bill Gates seems out of place among these entertainment-driven companions, just reflect on how Microsoft has moved to embrace the Web—that most entertainment-oriented of computer-related media (WebTV, Internet Explorer) (p. 127), as also illustrated by the instance of Steve Case at America Online (p. 128). Or consider Richard Branson, whom Wolf regards as "a fun-divining rod" (p. 137):

> There's Virgin Atlantic, the world's most hedonistic airline. There's Virgin Net . . . Virgin Hotels . . . Virgin Cola—perfect for washing down popcorn bought at the concession in one of the chain of Virgin Cinemas . . . Virgin Brides . . . for that most fun of nights . . . Virgin Rail . . . Virgin Megastores—where everything you can buy has to do with enhancing the fun in life and a visit to the store is itself an entertainment experience. (P. 137)

These are the wheeler-dealers with the freedom to act, the flexibility to turn on a dime, and the ability to rely on gut-level intuition when needed to maximize the E-factor via the Talent Chase:

> As many industries converge around entertainment, their leaders will increasingly take on many of the traits of successful moguls: the ability to create and execute a bold vision, keep their fingers on all parts of an enterprise, change the course of a business as the environment shifts, and take a leap beyond the analysis to provide broad direction based on an educated gut. (P. 153)

And what is it that drives the fortunes of these successful business moguls, these masters of entertainment? The answer, of course, is this: The Hit. In Wolf's (1999) view, "Hits are the only defining success factor in the entertainment industry and increasingly in every business in the entertainment economy" (p. 157). Beyond the hit, as the "Holy Grail of the entertainment economy," we have "the *phenomenon*" (p. 158). Here, Wolf speaks of blockbusters on the order of *Titanic*, *ER*, Oprah, Michael Jordan, and (unfortunately) Princess Diana (p. 158). These examples apply to the world of media. But notice how the entertainment-related hit imperative permeates all aspects of commerce, including the most mundane of consumer products, where conspicuous successes have included Sony's Walkman (p. 161), Lilly's Prozac (p. 162), Pfizer's Viagra (p. 162), or Yang & Filo's Yahoo (p. 164).

According to Wolf (1999), such shared icons are important because they help consumers build "a sense of community" (p. 171) that bolsters their feeling of identity while enhancing their self-concept. In other words, entertainment contributes both to our sense of belonging and to our sense of who we are:

> Entertainment . . . can give consumers a sense of belonging to a group that sets them off as cool, sexy, tough, rebellious, or even stylishly nerdy. The products we buy are increasingly seen to make a statement about the buyer. They also bind the buyer to other like-minded consumers. . . . Communities of consumers create hits. (P. 172)

Notice how the same logic applies even in the august circles of academia. In the university, it is often the professor with the big course enrollments who gets the bonuses and perks. In tenure decisions, somebody sooner or later asks whether the candidate has had any "home runs"—in other words, any spectacular, crowd-pleasing, base-clearing *hits*. When we hire and promote faculty, we increasingly look for something like . . . well . . . *Titanic* (the movie, not the boat). Or *Jurassic Park*. Or Howard Stern. Or Donkey Kong. Or Palm Pilot. Or the Gillette Mach3. Or Beanie Babies. So of course this blockbuster logic now dominates "industries" such as education, where the student is increasingly viewed as a consumer; where the job of the professor is, at all costs, to entertain; where big hits win the day; and where you had better make an obscenely lucrative offer to that sure-to-win-the-Nobel-Prize economist who just might be movable from Harvard:

> Hits are what make the entertainment business run, and as other consumer businesses are drawn into the entertainment economy, they too will be more subject to this volatile but inescapable cycle. (P. 186)

Like Schmitt (1999) in describing experiential marketing, Wolf (1999) in delineating the entertainment economy places premier importance on the role of the Internet (chapter 7). In Wolf's view, the World Wide Web reduces everything to the level of entertainment: "In other words, *when consumer-focused businesses move to the Internet, they must inevitably become entertainment companies*" (p. 196). On the WWW, "business and entertainment finally converge" (p. 196). To enlarge a bit, I would add that *all* aspects of computer life have come to resemble not just entertainment in general but television in particular. In the old days, we used to write elaborate data analysis programs in Fortran (maybe entering them via punch cards). Then came terminals that could hook us up to the mainframe and run statistical packages via elaborate commands in (say) Wylbur. Then came PCs running on DOS where self-contained operations made it possible to use packaged software to analyze data in our own home offices. Then came the Apple-inspired mentality of Windows, which permitted us to point-and-click our way to a complete statistical analysis by merely fooling with various icons and drop-down menus on an ever more user-friendly screen. So computer-assisted data analysis now closely resembles channel surfing on the TV with the help of a slightly more sophisticated though way less reliable remote control device. (As I write this, inexplicably, my home computer has just erased three months of work stored on a backup Zip diskette, putting me in a Really Bad Mood. More nightmare than entertainment, I would say. But this just goes to illustrate a seldom acknowledged principle of entertainment—namely, that when you dumb down something to make it more accessible or more user-friendly, it does not always work as well as it once did. Pavarotti with the Three Tenors or Elvis in Las Vegas would be other obvious examples.)

As Wolf (1999) makes clear, though no one can confidently predict whether the TV or the computer will win out in the struggle over which type of CRT screen will dominate the living room, "When the much-talked-about era of digital convergence arrives, the competition will be for time sharing on the one box that will control all the incoming and outgoing content in homes and businesses" (p. 203). The ultimate winners in this contest will be the ones who provide the most entertainment. To extrapolate, that means we'll find a lot more pizzazz in SPSS. And SAS will need to grow quite a bit sassier.

All this suggests that the Internet will gain a central position in the conduct of business at the global level—leading Wolf (1999) to coin another term: "antidisintermediationism" (p. 217). Is this Wolfian concept of World Wide Webification influential? You bet. I recently heard Professor Toshiaki Izeki of Keio University use the term *antidisintermediationism* during a presentation I attended in Tokyo. Indeed, because his talk was in Japanese, this was the only word he used that I could actually understand. And Professor Izeki does not even have an e-mail address, let alone a Web site.

In presenting a list of entertainment-oriented companies that have created impressive brand empires (chapter 8), Wolf (1999) overlaps considerably with the role models identified by Pine and Gilmore (1999) and by Schmitt (1999): ESPN (the sports channel), *Jurassic Park* (the merchandising phenomenon), Disney (yea, Mickey), MTV (cool rules), *Good Housekeeping* (the seal of approval), Barbie (now less voluptuous to fit the times), Martha Stewart (icon of good taste), the NBA (in general), Michael Jordan (in particular), Harley-Davidson (hog heaven), and the Gap or Starbucks (fighting to gain control of every street corner between here and wherever). This basis of touchstones in common gives Wolf (1999) and the others a certain measure of convergent validity, at least insofar as they tend to choose the same examples to make their key points concerning the first two of the four Es—experience and entertainment.

I also find convergent validity in Wolf's thinking insofar as it tends to cohere with the views of those who have considered the role of emotion in advertising (Aaker, Stayman, and Hagerty 1986; Edell and Burke 1987; Holbrook and Batra 1987; Olney, Holbrook, and Batra 1991; Stayman and Aaker 1988). Briefly, Wolf (1999) suggests that natural-born surfers—habituated to having their fingers on the mouse clicker or the channel changer—will be lost to the zipping and zapping impulse unless they are strongly lured by appealing emotional responses: "In this context, advertising itself must include megadoses of the E-factor to connect emotionally with the consumer" (p. 257). I could not agree more wholeheartedly (Olney, Holbrook, and Batra 1991). Worse yet, the members of Generation Y—who have been playing with computers since infancy and who therefore have very itchy clicking or switching fingers when using a mouse or a remote control—will increasingly dominate the viewing habits of the population. Their dwindling attention span and point-and-click inclinations will dictate the need for an even higher level of the E-factor in Gen Y-directed advertising campaigns. In this climate, one wonders if any sort of sustained commercial message that demands anything more than the most minimal eye blink of attention might become a thing of the past.

Toward the end, the prospect of predicting the future seems to sober Wolf (1999) up a bit. Thus, he suddenly proclaims, "I cannot stress strongly enough that I am *not* arguing that all consumer businesses will be directly driven by entertainment" (p. 282). I am not quite sure why he would say this because that is *exactly* what he *has* been arguing for the past 281 pages. Nevertheless, he ends with two themes that do manage to tie together the roles of the four Es—experience, entertainment, exhibitionism, and even evangelizing—namely, the shopping experience with its tendency to evoke the fun often associated with a theme park (p. 284) and the market potential for "edutainment" with its treatment of learning as a candy-coated pill (p. 287). Best of all, when these threads are combined via shopping for educational toys, we can have fun (experiences), enter the themed environment (entertainment), display ourselves (exhibitionism) while watching others (voyeurism), and hope that some sort of edutainment rubs off on our kids (evangelizing)—all at the same time. This potential for synergy is what draws the Wolf family on lengthy weekend car trips to visit Zany Brainy in New Jersey when they live only a few blocks from the Museum of Natural History in New York City (p. 285).

Nobrow

This fun-dumb-mental embrace of the entertainment ethos, as championed by Wolf (1999), prompts the masterful narrative spun by *New Yorker* writer John Seabrook (2000) in his almost lyrical account of these themes entitled *Nobrow.* Keenly aware of the example set by Disney—indeed, regarding Michael Eisner as "the Pope Julius of Nobrow" (p. 203)—Seabrook vividly describes the disappearance of the cultural hierarchy based on a continuum of taste running from the most highbrow to the most lowbrow cultural preferences as a source, reinforcer, or reflection of invidious distinctions in social status (DiMaggio 1992; Holbrook 1999c; Levine 1988). Pursuing a telling metaphor, Seabrook (2000) suggests that the old cultural hierarchy resembled a townhouse with a clear value-embedded relationship between the upstairs aristocrats (highbrow culture) and the downstairs servants (lowbrow culture). In his view, this townhouse has given way to the cultural megastore in which aspects of all former artistic or intellectual echelons jostle for recognition, for patronage, or for access to the energy-defining, attention-validating, importance-valorizing *Buzz.* Thus—whereas we might once have distinguished between symphonic music and top-40 pop, between the MOMA and Graffiti, or between Savile Row and tank tops—all these cultural options compete for acceptance in the commercial realm of the megastore. In this world of "Nobrow," as reflected by Seabrook's subtitle, *The Marketing of Culture* has become synonymous with *The Culture of Marketing* (p. 92): "A subtle but all-significant shift in the tastemakers' authority had been made, away from the individual's taste and toward the authority of the market" (p. 70). Later, Seabrook returns to this motif in his analysis of the *Star Wars* phenomenon:

> The marketing is the culture and the culture [is] the marketing. The space that the marketing of Star Wars takes up in the culture, in terms of Buzz, is validation for the fans of the movie—a kind of return on their investment—just as, in a smaller way, the marketing of the WASP lifestyle by Ralph Lauren is a validation of my preppy culture. Star Wars is both something to *buy (marketing)* and something to *be (culture)*, through the buying: a *Star Wars* fan. (P. 153, emphasis added)

The one-word-or-less phrase to capture the phenomenon that preoccupies Seabrook (2000) is . . . in a nutshell . . . *commercialization*. He finds "in the culture at large" a pervasive "attempt to match consumption to production: to figure out what the public wanted and then give it to them . . . to assign a kind of Q Rating to cultural experience that had never been quantified or measured numerically before" (p. 7). This purposeful commodification leads in the direction of the "Nobrow moment—neither high nor low, and not in the middle, a moment that existed outside the old taste hierarchy altogether" (p. 12)—as symbolized, for Seabrook, by the fact that the classical music room at the Virgin Megastore is so empty of customers that it provides "a good place . . . to ring up purchases of pop music when there was a line upstairs" (p. 13). Such "nobrow" moments have become the norm: "With the waning of the distinction between elite culture and commercial culture, concepts like 'going commercial' and 'selling out' became empty phrases" (p. 69). In other words, where aesthetic truth is concerned, the self-respecting cultural entrepreneur will prefer mendacity to mendicity every time.

We find occasional signs that Seabrook (2000) experiences discomfort over the lost moorings of his cultural orientation—nowhere more than when he refers to his over-commercialized neighborhood shopping environment as "the Valley of the Shadow of Nobrow" (p. 174), thereby substituting "Nobrow" for "Death" in the original Twenty-Third Psalm. Having grown up in a clearly upper-middle-class, intellectually privileged New Jersey setting in the general vicinity of Philadelphia, Seabrook seems almost surprised to find himself riding the New York subways, reading the *New York Post*, studying the fortunes of the N.Y. Knicks, listening to Biggie Smallz through his headphones, and wandering around the Virgin store in Times Square in pursuit of the latest Chemical Brothers and Underworld albums. He also appears to experience some dismay over the carefully chronicled way in which his employer—*The New Yorker* magazine—has evolved from the vehemently anticommercial leadership of William Shawn to the buzz-courting, publicity-seeking, exposure-thriving turnaround engineered by Tina Brown after the acquisition of the publication by Si Newhouse. We sense throughout that as a writer, Seabrook feels vaguely repulsed by the transformation—by the dismemberment of the grand *New Yorker* tradition, by the dishonoring of its history of literary excellence—but that he accepts it as a cultural fait accompli, as a symptom of the prevailing zeitgeist in all branches of the arts and entertainment: "No one could translate the old *New Yorker* values of amateurism, whimsy, good taste, and tradition into the values of sizzle, edginess, 'home runs,' and 'hot books'" (p. 22). In this scheme of things, the nobrow-sympathetic regime of Tina Brown was not necessarily *good*; it just *was*:

> Brown represented the coming of Nobrow to the magazine. The old distinction between the elite culture of the aristocrats and the commercial culture of the masses was torn down, and in its place was erected a hierarchy of hotness (p. 28). . . . The kind of stories Tina favored were much more dependent on market-oriented conditions and on a whole complex of tiny compromises of one's independence that make up the space between culture and marketing. If you wrote about a pop star, or a designer, or an athlete, you were necessarily borrowing some of your subject's celebrity and using it to sell your story (p. 31). . . . George Trow . . . accused Tina of "kissing the ass of celebrity" (p. 34). . . . In my mythology, Tina was the temptress of the lowbrow side of my writing, the too-eager-to-please side, the merely entertaining, which the serious writer in me distinguished himself against, along traditional High-Low lines. (P. 35; for further ruminations on the role of celebrity stature in publishing, see Binder 1996)

Thus, Seabrook (2000) begins by questioning his own "Place in the Buzz" (chapter 1). As empathetic readers, each of us trapped by some aspect of the nobrow culture to which Seabrook refers, we recognize that we are all enveloped by the Buzz as we search in our own careers or lives for what's hot and seek to avoid what's not in the commercial culture of consumption.

The story told by Seabrook (2000) weaves together three strands of the "nobrow" experience that converge in this particular book: (1) the temper of the times as a nobrow moment, represented by interview-based sketches of such postmodern cultural paragons as Ben Kweller (the teenage rock singer who was fleetingly billed as the successor to Kurt Cobain), George Lucas (famous for *Star Wars* and other nobrow masterpieces), or David Geffen (master of Broadway *and* popular music *and* motion pictures); (2) the progress of *The New Yorker* from middlebrow literary magazine to gushing buzz-hungry identity crisis; and (3) Seabrook's own personal odyssey from artsy intellectual impressed or even obsessed by the distinctions between highbrow and lowbrow culture to the ranks of the nobrow-entrenched citizen weaving his way through the megastore offerings of the pomo pact between culture and marketing (illustrated most brilliantly by two chapters focusing on his own habits of haberdashery as they manifest a reaction against the fastidious foppery of his father and an embrace of the high-fashion ethos wherein a $200 T-shirt, aping the styles worn by ghetto youths via a higher quality and better tailored level of craftsmanship in the service of *in*conspicuous consumption, becomes a plausible if unconsummated sartorial investment).

In pursuing these points, the main contribution offered by Seabrook (2000) lies in his accomplished and sometimes nearly breathtaking capacity to render these descriptive observations vivid, colorful, lyrical, and . . . well . . . literary in the best sense. I have already alluded to his metaphor based on the cultural change from a townhouse-like hierarchy to a megastore-like egalitarianism. This trope serves as the main focus for chapter 3, "From Town House to Megastore," as illustrated by a contrast between *The New Yorker* and MTV (p. 65) that someone like myself, with a penchant for diagrammatization, might chart as follows:

town house	: megastore
symmetry	: multiplicity
quiet	: cacophony
sequestered commercialism	: rampant commercialism
elite-commercial distinction	: cult-mainstream distinction
quality as value	: authenticity as value
consistent preferences valued	: varied preferences valued
content vs. advertising	: both at once

As Seabrook (2000) describes it, "By starting from the megastore and working backward, one could learn something about the evolution of Nobrow":

> The town house of culture had been an upstairs-downstairs affair. Upstairs with the legitimate artists were the wealthy people whose money had built the museums and opera houses where the high art was enshrined; downstairs were the masses, watching shows like *Cops*, listening to gangsta rap, and reading the *New York Post*. (P. 66)

Others have chronicled the debates concerning this cultural hierarchy, the commercialization of culture via an infusion of marketing into the realms of art and entertainment, and the postmodern effacement of the distinction between highbrow and lowbrow culture in the general direction of what Seabrook calls "nobrow" culture (for reviews see, among others, Holbrook 1999c). But Seabrook (2000) brings powerful literary skills to the task of putting these issues into the context of a vivid and colorful narrative in a manner close to what I have called subjective personal introspection (Holbrook 1995a). In a sense, we might read this book as a story of the thoughts that race through Seabrook's head as he wanders around town on the subway and on foot, cruising through the underground tunnels and rambling through the various nobrow-culture emporiums that sell music, clothing, and furniture. Along the way, he shows a constant flair for snappy and sometimes poignant exposition.

In chapter 2 on "My Father's Closet," for example, Seabrook (2000) traces the history of his own sartorial tastes via an account of his early family life in an affluent household wherein his father sported a definite status-defining look: "double-breasted, high-waisted suits with wide lapels, snug in the body but with deep vents in the back . . . but . . . flashes of purple and pink in the wide-spread-collared shirts, polka dots in the ties, and a bold green chalk stripe of imagination in the suits, signifying the American tycoon" (pp. 48-49). These reflections catapult Seabrook back to his earlier days at Oxford circa 1983 in a class taught by Raymond Williams and his realization, in accord with hegemony theory, that "taste is power pretending to be common sense" (p. 53)—clearly a nicely compact turn of phrase that elegantly encapsulates an idea often expressed far less gracefully by the legions of post-Gramscian theorists:

> Hegemony, a familiar word in the seminar room today, is the idea that power becomes embedded in cultural distinctions as common sense. Taste is the ideology of the tastemaker, masquerading as disinterested judgment. (P. 24)

Seabrook identifies his father's taste in clothing with the "canon" descended from Matthew Arnold and defended by Leavis, Eliot, and other literary titans (p. 54). And he almost shamefully confesses to his own early naive belief in taste as an arbiter of goodness or badness in cultural artifacts during a period when he thought that "elite culture . . . *was* different from, say, pop music on the radio" (p. 57): "I accepted without question that classical music was of a higher order of quality than pop music, and that it was, sooner or later, the music I would grow up to appreciate" (p. 57). But the subsequent story of Seabrook's cultural life leads toward demolishing such cultural distinctions in the face of the "nobrow" transformation:

> The old cultural arbiters, whose job was to decide what was "good" in the sense of "valuable," were being replaced by a new type of arbiter, whose skill was to define "good" in terms of "popular." This vast change in our civilization made itself felt in virtually every museum, library, university, publishing house, magazine, newspaper, and TV station in the country [as] a larger tectonic shift in the uses of culture-as-status in America, from the old town-house world of High-Low to the new megastore of Nobrow. (P. 26)

This shift at the level of tastes in the arts and entertainment parallels a comparable battle with his father's preferences in the realm of clothing: "My father used his clothes to pass along culture to me. I, in turn, used clothes to resist his efforts" (p. 58). Thus, we find the author wearing jeans and T-shirts with funky messages and brand names inscribed on them: "In some dim inchoate way I perceived that T-shirts with words were *my* culture, and that was the only way out of a larger cage of hegemony in which my father's houndstooth and windowpane checks had me trapped" (p. 60). Later, when gaining access to a little money of his own, Seabrook turns to more expensive designer-label styles bound to offend his dad—Helmut Lang jeans, blazers by Hugo Boss, suits from Zegna (pp. 60-61). But we should not miss the twinge of regret with which the author leaves behind both the security of his father's hegemonic guidance and the comfort of the old distinctions along the cultural hierarchy from highbrow to lowbrow. At the end of the chapter, Seabrook tries on one of his father's old gabardine suits. And, finding it a perfect fit, he joins his proud parents for dinner, taking time to decant the wine in just the right way and feeling "lucky to have a father who cared about the ritual" (p. 63). The last paragraph—both as a conclusion to the story about waning sartorial tastes and as a wistful reminder that the movement toward "nobrow" culture carries certain costs—is perfect prose poetry:

> I came back to the table with the decanter of wine and poured a little in my father's glass for him to taste. The wine splashed quietly; the lip of the glass rang softly as I touched it with the decanter. I was careful to roll my wrist smoothly as I poured, so that the last drops slid along the rim on the decanter, just as the sommeliers at "21" do it. My father nodded, lifted the wine noiselessly and carefully from the table, and gave it a swirl. "To your new suit," he said, and then, smiling across the table at my mother, who lifted her water glass and smiled back, he let the wine run into his mouth without any drawing suction, sighing through his nose as he tasted it. He swallowed, replaced the glass noiselessly, reflectively, on the table, and said, with quiet, absolute certainty, "That's good wine." (P. 63)

Personal subjective introspection as a mode of consumer research doesn't get any better than that. But throughout Seabrook (2000), we find plentiful additional examples of the author's ability to couch his nobrow-witnessing cultural observations in the most graceful of writing styles. Thus, he treats us to frequently felicitous turns of phrase, as when he describes a performance by Ben Kweller—fourteen-year-old aspiring performer: "He was like a boy who had been temporarily possessed by a rock star" (p. 103). Or consider his evocation of the feeling evoked by George Lucas films in which "the desire seemed to exist in a purer form—as fake history, marketed to people who cannot remember their past and therefore are compelled to experience it again, not as farce but as nostalgia" (p. 137). Or notice the no-nonsense characterization of how the friends of Lucas reacted to the first screening of *Star Wars*:

> These people were seeing the movie for what it really was—a film with comic-book characters, an unbelievable story, no political or social commentary, lousy acting, preposterous dialogue, and a ridiculously simple morality. In other words, not a very good movie. (P. 149)

Or observe how he ratchets up the vividness of his passage describing the computer wizards in the software-testing room at LucasArts by stirring our sympathy for "a young female victim of carpal tunnel syndrome, her left hand and wrist wrapped in Ace bandages, with just enough of her fingers poking out of the top for typing, pecking away at the beta version of a new LucasArts CD-ROM game" (p. 155). Or savor the verbal karate chop with which Seabrook characterizes the progress of the Lucas oeuvre:

> Did Lucas worry about being turned to the dark side himself—the marketing side? Maybe it happened slowly and subtly, with the temptation to stop being a filmmaker and become a kind of master toymaker instead, which is fun until you wake up one day and realize you have become one of your own toys. (P. 159)

Furthermore, Seabrook (2000) evinces a striking ability to reconfigure insightful cultural observations in the form of trenchant analogies. Still on the case of George Lucas, Seabrook casts him in the role of an antagonist to Hollywood, fighting for creative independence in a studio system dominated by enforced conformity and pushed in the direction of a business orientation espoused by his father (p. 144). Here, playing on the resemblance between the names (George) Lucas and Luke (Skywalker), the parallels cannot be denied:

> He was Luke, after all, and like Luke he had to reckon with his patrimony. . . . Just as Luke has to contend with the abilities he may have inherited from Darth Vader, so Lucas, in his career after *Star Wars*, had become the successful, fiscally conservative businessman that his father always wanted him to be. Instead of gaining his independence with the success of *Star Wars*, Lucas had lost it. That was the real lesson of *Star Wars*. In the end, the empire wins. (P. 160)

A rather chilling analogy. And just one example of how, every twenty pages or so, the reader of Seabrook—or, at least, *this* reader—feels like pausing to shout, "Yes!"

As another illustration of the Seabrook (2000) flair for analogies, we must admire his comparison between the career of the legendary record producer Ahmet Ertegun and that of David Geffen:

> As Ertegun had presided over the transformation of black culture into hip white culture, so Geffen presided over the transformation of hip culture into the new consumerist culture of cool. (P. 188)

To note one final example of the insightful workings of Seabrook's homologous mind, appreciate the striking connection that he draws between the Internet-friendly stock market and the infidelity-tolerant populace:

> Just as the people continued to support a president who had no moral authority, so were they willing to invest huge sums in Internet companies that had never made a profit. The old notion of telling the truth had faded along with the old notion of an honest day's pay. (P. 209)

Here, in a few keystrokes, Seabrook (2000) captures the essence of the similarity . . . and of the difference . . . between these two forms of bankruptcy—one moral, the other financial.

Never mind that some of the "nobrow" phenomena noted by Seabrook (2000) are not exactly brand new—as in the phenomenon of "art that has been made out of the discourse of advertising" (p. 169). This, of course, was exactly what James Joyce accomplished in *Ulysses* (Wicke 1988). What Marcel Duchamp achieved by mounting a urinal on the wall and calling it a "Fountain." Or what Andy Warhol did with brilliance and camp in his paintings of Brillo boxes and Campbell's soup cans.

In the end, then, Seabrook (2000) covers ground familiar from other treatments of the cultural hierarchy and its disappearance in the age of postmodernism. *But*—and this is a big "but"—he does so in a manner that permits us to *feel* and to *share* his discomfort as his cultural moorings come tumbling down and he finds himself on the subway, reading the *New York Post* and listening on his discman to a piece by Biggie Smallz called . . . well . . . *Ready to Die* (p. 3).

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