New Ritual Society

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Consumerism and Culture in the Contemporary Era

By

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Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

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This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-1090-5
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-1090-6

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NOTES ON MICHEL COUTURIER'S IMAGES

The images that enrich this book are works by Belgian artist Michel Couturier. Simple reproductions of consumeristic behaviour would not have added anything to our knowledge of consumerism. This is not a marginal or hidden social phenomenon, but rather the more evident "normality" of everyday life. Moreover, images of consumerism risk being mere advertising. And advertising consumerism was not one of the aims of this book.

The use of images as a reflection rather than as a communication is part of the range of art's possibilities. So I turned to an artist. In recent years Couturier has created a series of works based on images of shopping malls, especially car parks, combining them with sentences from *Dialogues with Leucò*, a collection of short stories published by Cesare Pavese in 1947. Finally, the Belgian artist's works were also used as street posters, thus flanking and short-circuiting the "deluge" of images of modern consumerism.

It seemed to me that Michel Couturier managed to capture some hidden elements of consumerism. The car parks in the shopping malls are in fact the "dirty conscience" of consumption, as Victor Gruen, the architect who designed the first shopping malls, had already pointed out. The car parks are thus connected to the dark side of an apparently golden world.

The relationship between images and texts gives rise to a series of symbolic associations. Pavese wrote his stories immediately after the horrors of World War II, horrors that were the dark side of the ideologies of previous decades. His words build a bridge between the myths of the past and the symbols of the present. Thanks to the relationship between words and images, the men who appear in Couturier's works seem at the same time victims and heroes, slaves of consumerism and champions of a humanity that manages to survive even when the absurdity is barely covered by the patina of well-being. Victims or heroes, men continue to push their trolleys, icons of the current form of destiny, of the unavoidability with which consumerism has imposed itself as a dominant ritual practice.

More than any words, the images of Couturier seemed to me to go in the same direction as the social research that led me to write this book.

Thank you Michel for allowing their publication.

Reference for the texts:

Cesare Pavese (1947), *Dialoghi con Leucò*, Einaudi, Torino; English translation by William Arrowsmith, *Dialogues with Leucò*, Eridanos, Boston Mass. 1989.

PREFACE BY CHRISTOPH WULF

"New Ritual Society" is a fascinating book, deserving of a wide readership. It examines the meaning of rituals in the complex societies of the modern world. It focuses on the constitutive role played by rituals in our consumer society. There may be divergences in their social ideologies, but a common feature of many societies today is that they are heavily consumer-oriented. Over recent decades there has been a proliferation all over the world not just of shopping centres but of countless malls, or "cathedrals of consumption". Malls are no longer there just to sell goods. Rather, they create a consumer environment where millions of families and young people spend much of their free time. A new life style has emerged, expressing the fact that human beings have become consumers. This goes hand in hand with a cult of abundance, generating a hedonistic mentality that sees the meaning of life in the enjoyment of consumption.

For many people the freedom of modern democracies is expressed in the ever increasing opportunities to consume. Consumption is becoming a surrogate for religions, faiths and philosophies. The disintegration of traditional ways of life in the 20th century has led to people becoming increasingly unsettled and insecure. Many find themselves in crisis, doubting the meaning of life, which leads to a growing number of suicides. To ward off these crises many people turn to excessive consumption as the only way out. It is becoming a civil religion in which the traditional distinction between sacred and profane areas of life no longer holds true.

How do modern societies (despite their diverging ideologies) manage to make the consumer the model of what it is to be human? Gianpiero Vincenzo's answer is absolutely clear. Only through rituals are such processes that change individuals and communities possible. It is a mistake to believe that in today's societies rituals are less important than in traditional societies. Because there are more and more differences emerging in modern societies, many rituals, however, are no longer important for the whole society in the way that they were traditionally. Now most rituals are specifically for certain groups and communities and as such are of great importance in both actively constituting groups and as differentiators. There is also a great variation in consumer possibilities, which has resulted in a wide spectrum of ritual forms and ritual elements. This plays its part in creating the consumer and the consumer society.

Within this spectrum we can make the distinction between individual and collective rituals. Some of these rituals involve relating to objects and some the interaction between people. What these rituals have in common is that they generate collective ways of behaving which create consumers with the same attitudes, feelings and behaviour.

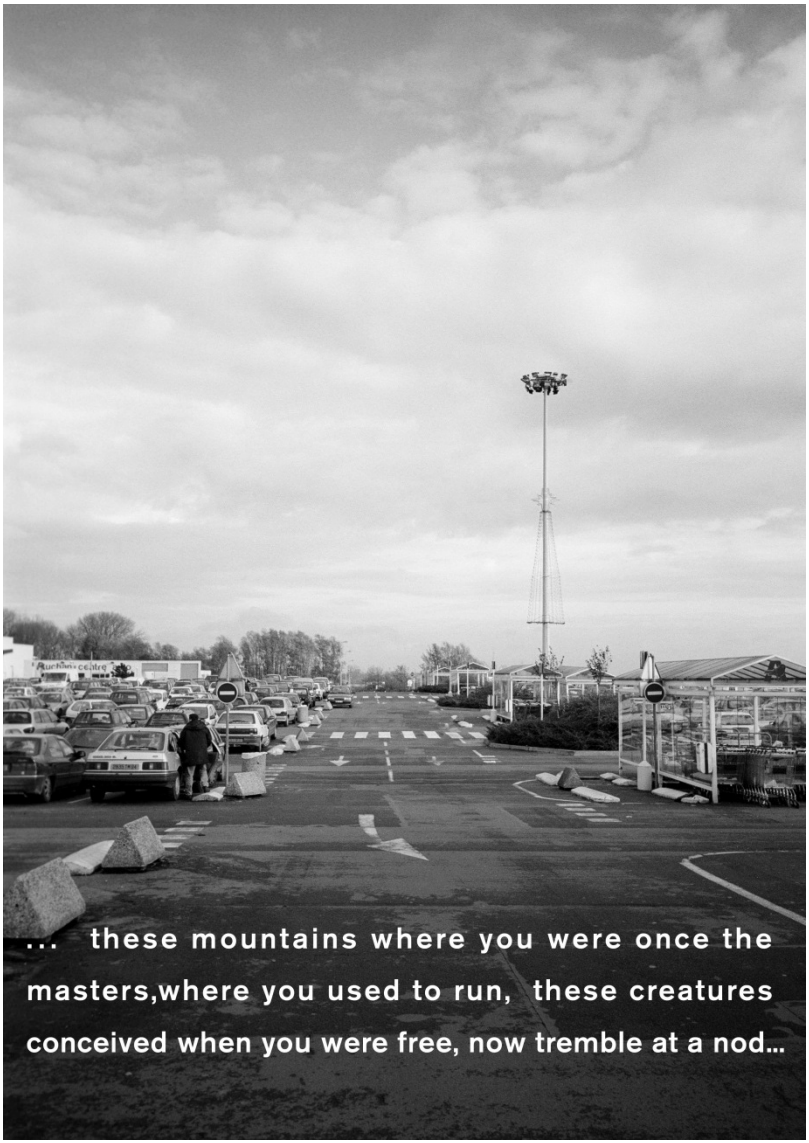
If we look at the etymological meaning of the original word for ritual in Sanskrit, we find the meaning of a "cosmic" order. This leads us to ask whether consumer rituals do not also relate to a "higher" order. Could this lie in the anthropological necessity of using the world's products to sustain human life? Furthermore human beings also need rituals to generate social relations as a condition of their lives and to develop symbolic forms to help understand them.

This study makes it clear that consumer rituals are not only focussed on industrial products. They are also concerned with information, immaterial representations and virtual images. The history of advertising, photography and modern art in the 20th century illustrates the importance of consumer rituals. Works of art have lost their aura as a consequence of their mass reproduction by technology and the media, and this, along with the emergence of new forms of enchantment, characterises the rapidly expanding importance of images, both for societies and individuals. We no longer see ourselves as part of *physis*, or living nature, as did the ancients, and no longer as part of the *creatio* of God. We are confronted in the modern world with a world of objects and images. Thus we can speak of a *material turn* and a *pictorial turn*. The ubiquity of photographs and other media-produced images leads to an intensifying of their ritual consumption, which has a momentous effect on our imaginary.

Whilst the importance of "grand narratives" seems to be on the decline, in today's societies it is above all the diverse consumer rituals that connect people and create communities. These ritual processes are body based. They are performative and mimetic. They exert an effect on people from early childhood and this is why they are extremely effective. Only if we manage to change these rituals can we succeed in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the international community in New York, 2015.

With its new perspectives, Gianpiero Vincenzo's study not only makes a valuable contribution to ritual research, but is also highly recommended for its significant contribution to the sociology of modern societies.

Christoph Wulf
Berlin, December 2017


... these mountains where you were once the masters,where you used to run, these creatures conceived when you were free, now tremble at a nod...

INTRODUCTION

Discovering which are the most visited places on Earth is peculiarly indicative of human behaviour and can be really surprising. Just consider places dedicated to art and culture. In 2015, the monthly magazine The Art Newspaper calculated that the Louvre in Paris was by far the most attended museum in the world, with 8.6 million visitors per year, followed by British Museum in London (6.8) the Metropolitan Museum in New York (6.2) and the Vatican Museums (6.0). The foremost Italian museum was the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence, in twenty-eighth place, with 1.9 million visitors.

Museums are not, however, the main pole of attraction for people. Theme parks manage to appeal to a more numerous audience. According to Disney data, in 2016, the Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World in Florida attracted more than 20 million visitors, two more than Disneyland in California: more or less the same number of people as the first three major museums of the world put together.

Nonetheless, continuing along the lines of the Guinness world records, the biggest crowds of people move neither for cultural tourism nor for entertainment, but they rather go in the direction of pure consumption. The record for most visited places goes to shopping malls, such as the West Edmonton Mall in Alberta, Canada, which has a shopping surface of 350,000 m², and a total of 500,000 m², with an average of more than 30 million visitors per year.

In the complex, there are almost a thousand stores, an artificial beach, an indoor amusement park, an ice rink, and water parks where submarines explore an underground lake. The most attended American mall is, however, the Mall of America in Bloomington (Minneapolis, Minnesota), owned by Triple Five Group, which also owns the West Edmonton. It reaches 40 million visitors per year, a figure likely to increase; in fact, an investment plan of over 2 billion dollars has been recently launched, in order to double the current surface up to 480,000 m². It is a framework that encompasses a huge number of commercial attractions, from the theme park – initially called Knott's Camp Snoopy, and since 2007, Nickelodeon Universe, after an agreement with the kids' TV network of the same name. Attractions include "Flyover America" - a virtual flight over the most famous landmarks in America and a virtual diving experience that allows

visitors to meet over 3,000 protected sea species in the aquarium. An estimated 30% of visitors are tourists.

The number of tourists attending shopping malls is comparable to the number of visitors in the major cities all over the world, for example London, with about 31.5 million tourists per year (Office for National Statistics, 2016). But the Oscar for the most touristic place in the world goes to Times Square in New York, a record that functions within consumerist dynamics. Smaller than many squares in other metropolises, such as Red Square in Moscow or Trafalgar Square in London, Times Square owes its fortune to the organization of the city's New Year's Eve celebration, which took place for the first time in 1907. Since then, the square has changed its look many times, today it's covered by monumental neon billboards: it is not by chance they are called spectaculars, in fact the area resembles an outdoor shopping mall and is one of the major attractions in a city that exceeds 50 million visitors a year (NYC & Company, 2015).

However, the Canadian and American malls are neither the biggest, nor the most attended in the world, since they sit respectively in twelfth and twentieth place. In this special world classification, it's Asia that excels. The two biggest shopping malls are indeed in China, and recently, after major development in Malaysia and the Philippines, 9 of the first placed 22 world malls have been built, such as the SM Megamall in Mandaluyong (Ortigas business district, Manila), which has a maximum capacity of 4 million people and has 500,000 daily visitors.

Modern society is more and more characterised by consumption. It is a generalised process, though not always linear. Consumerism requires a certain degree of adaptation, at least in some parts of the world that are not wholly integrated in such a system. Indeed, the biggest shopping mall in the world is the New South China Mall (Dongguan, Guangdong province), with over 650,000-m² of surface space and matching business expectations. Seven years after its opening in 2005, the semi-deserted galleries which were supposed to contain 2,350 stores, housed only 47. Scattered groups of visitors wander gloomily through reproductions of "The sunny and lively Californian and San Franciscan southern coast, tidy and charming Amsterdam, the smart and romantic Parisian Champs-Élysées, mysterious and passionate Venice, the sensational, enchanting Caribbean seaside and the adventurous tropical forest" (from the former official website of the New South China Mall).

The images of the raising of the flag, which takes place every morning, were immortalized in the video *Utopia, Part 3: The World's Largest*

Shopping Mall by the American documentarist Sam Green, a prizewinner at the Sundance Film Festival in 2009.

Similarly, in New Delhi six new malls opened in the first quarter of 2011, but their percentage of commercial leasing was no more than 10% in the best of cases. About half of the shopping spaces opened one year earlier are still empty. It may be presumed that consumerism does not assert itself identically everywhere, but it requires time and different approaches in order to adapt to different and changeable realities. The analysis of consumerism, its origins, its development, its social and historical context is not only an attempt to contribute to understanding some of the most relevant aspects of contemporary life, but is also an account of the social events that deeply influence contemporary culture and mentality.

The detection of consumerism's central role in the twentieth century and the following development of the new "cathedrals of consumption", as modern malls have been defined, and all the enchantment that surround them, is not enough (Ritzer 1999). The main features of consumption's modern universe, together with those conditions that allowed such a development – i.e. why modern man has been so permeable to such a new world – should be identified. The main phases of the affirmation of consumer society have been explained, so that the essential characters, through which consumerism has become a fundamental and inevitable element for the current social order, may be defined. Consumerism is a widely discussed theme in sociology, as well as the idea that, with society's secularization, genuine "civil religions" have emerged – last but not least, the "market religion" (Loy 1997). Since modern scientific research in religion is sometimes superficial, a new essay that enters into the details of the new and peculiar consumption religion is needed, without limiting itself to highlighting a generic link between consumerism and ritualism (Douglas, Isherwood 1979, Rook 1984). The modern "consumption religion" has gained a relevant role within the "invention of tradition" that contributed to the emergence of nationalisms.

> "Invented tradition" is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, 1).

"Invented traditions" are more crystallized and unchangeable than customs, more formalized and ritualistic than conventions. They include most public ceremonies of crowning, flag flying, assumption of power, as

well as processions, anthems, song festivals, exchanges of public delegations and offering on the altars of holy places, both religious and secular. All that forms the necessary corollary of nationalist cults. As stated by the English historian Eric Hobsbawm (1917-2012), however, new nationalist traditions managed to fill only "a small part of the space left by the secular decline of both old tradition and custom" (ivi, 11). Most of daily life, from little personal and family rituals, up to the bigger formation and cohesion of social groups, is now a prerogative of modern consumerist ritualism. The invention of tradition should be looked at in an epistemological frame that includes modern ritualism, and not only defined by nationalist praxis. This study necessarily requires an interdisciplinary study, both historical and sociological, and this is what this work tries to achieve.

Such a perspective also stems from Weber's "Protestant Ethic" (1904), though perhaps modern consumerist society really establishes itself after the Great Depression of 1929, because only in those years does the ethic of capitalism become a great mass "pseudo-religion". It seems that consumerism has in some way become necessary after the social changes of the second industrial revolution. If the need for rituality, life rhythms and social norms is a constitutive part of man, their lack creates decompensation and unbalance, sociologically defined as "anomic". Consumerism managed to alleviate this void in contemporary man, though only up to a point, it certainly hasn't provided a solution. Even psychoactive substances have become part of the mechanism of consumption as a way to alleviate contemporary psychiatric problems, as seen by the rise of drugs such as amphetamines, barbiturates and alcohol, often on the borderline between legal and illegal.

Different lifestyles and different forms of consumption are the boundaries of contemporary culture, and it could not be any other way in a world where shopping malls are the most visited places. In the twentieth century, art, literature, photography, cinema lived together within the consumer society, forming and transforming in deep connection to it. Rather than tackling the cultural issue in generic terms, some of the main cultural developments will now be focused on. Art has had to face the problem of cultural enchantment and disenchantment many times, and different strategies have been adopted in order to regain that aura of distinction and consideration lost in the age of consumption. Finally, American literature, with its utopias and dystopias, highlighted some of the aspects of consumer culture in the following years. Starting in the seventies and especially from the nineties onwards, these have entered a new phase of consumption, marked by the transition from material production to immaterial and digital production, in the new "informational" society of

techno-consumerism. Our survey confirms the view of the twentieth century as “a short century”, between the survival of the preceding century and the premature development of the web society (Hobsbawm 1994, Castells 1997). This is considered briefly here, but a deeper analysis of the latest configurations of consumption would weigh this book down. Those who have written before us about the close relationship between rituals and consumption disagreed with much of the literature on the subject (Miller 1998): perhaps the time has come to change perspective and find a wider convergence.


A limit has been imposed upon you, mortals. The rain,
the wind, the peak, and the clouds are no longer yours,
you can no longer hold them in your arms, live with them

THE ORIGIN OF CONSUMERISM

There is an impressive quantity of literature concerning consumerism; however, theories are very different from each other and they date its birth in a span from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century. Although it may seem a mere theoretical-academic exercise, an historical context should be determined, in order to achieve a better analysis of social factors, avoiding secondary and irrelevant circumstances.

The American sociologist Chandra Mukerji (b. 1945) indicates the earliest date in time for the origin of consumerism: it started during the Renaissance with the emergence of materialistic cultural models, which are one of the causes of our consumer behaviours (Mukerji 1983). Consumerism then has existed since the beginning of modern age, paving the way to the development of industrial capitalism. This view sheds light on the role played by the materialistic mentality on the development of modern individualism and of a "society of objects", which will be discussed more fully in the following chapters. One of the conventional dates that indicate the beginning of the Renaissance, 1492, corresponds not only to the discovery of America, but also to the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain, and the consequent fracture of ethnic-social unity in the Mediterranean and the birth of what would be called the "West".

According to the American anthropologist Grant David McCracken (b. 1951), however, the birth of materialist culture should be looked upon in England, in the second half of the sixteenth century, during the reign of Elizabeth I, who obliged aristocrats to live at court. Once they had left their countryside residences, noblemen were confronted with each other, thus differentiation began and hedonistic consumption emerged. Before that age, aristocracy took care to preserve and perpetuate their heritage for the following generations, rather than consuming; indeed, the "patina" of time on objects was an index of luxury. Since the Elizabethan Age, a new emphasis on fashion has triggered modern consumerism (McCracken 1988).

Even the English historians Neil McKendrick (b. 1935), John Brewer (b. 1947) and John Harold Plumb (1911-2001) locate the birth of consumer society in England, but two hundred years later than the date indicated by McCracken. Since the eighteenth century indeed, industrial producers had started employing sales techniques to orientate the tastes of the upper classes. Josiah Wedgewood (1730-1793), founder of the

homonymous brand of luxury pottery and one of the greatest exponents of the first industrial revolution, may be considered as a forerunner of the future of industrial design. In 1765, he began the production of cream-coloured pottery, defined *Queen's Ware* because of the appreciation by queen Charlotte (1744-1818) and the international spread of the brand, widely imitated and known in Italy as *Faenza inglese*. Women then, became the protagonists of the increasing consumption, thanks to their higher disposable income (McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb, 1982).

The German sociologist and economist Werner Sombart (1863-1941), on the other hand, assimilates the two former views in a dynamic theory that shows, between 1200 and 1750, there was an initial period of development of luxury consumption, followed by the beginning of "mature capitalism." In his opinion, luxury consumption is able to create new markets because it is founded on high-value goods that require capitalization and credit. Capitalism would be born out of such a context of goods, promoting a hedonistic-aesthetic orientation. From the second half of the eighteenth century on, luxury shops would develop new customer/goods relations of a depersonalized and materialistic kind, mainly because of the new policy of a fixed price. In mature capitalism, the bourgeoisie, the new rich, would exhibit a new "luxury thirst", leading aristocracy to compete in the field of luxury consumption (Sombart 1913). If in the first phase of capitalism there was a "quality" development of high-profile products, in the second phase, the democratization of taste and production would lead to the decline of quality and the quantitative increase of the pace of fashion. Finally, the development of big cities, further increased consumption, with the opening of places of entertainment: theatres, hotels, restaurants, and shops. Sombart also underlines women's role in the development of consumption, because the emergence of luxury and refined tastes influenced upper-middle-class women, who were the best interpreters of the new tastes.

Although the first shop windows actually spread in the eighteenth century, the Italian sociologist Vanni Codeluppi (Reggio Emilia, 1958) states that only since the second half of the nineteenth century a real spectacularization of goods has been taking place. From 1850 on, indeed, huge windows would be made in order to exhibit goods, as if people were in front of large-format paintings. Simultaneously, electric lighting contributed to such spectacularization. In Paris, the first lighting dates back to 1841, while Thomas Edison's patent of carbon-filament lamps, on the 27th of January 1880 helped to spread artificial lighting and create "theatrical" effects. As a result, points of purchase increased in number, this was also thanks to the realization of the new covered commercial

gallery, or *passage* (Codeluppi 2000). Zola addresses this in detail in "The Ladies Paradise" (*Au Bonheur des Dames* 1883).

One of the features of the second revolution are the Great Universal Exhibitions, the first of which took place in London in 1851, where over 14,000 exhibitors gathered in the *Crystal Palace*. It was designed by the garden architect Joseph Paxton: a pioneering iron and glass structure of 92,000 m², more than 550 metres long and almost 40 high, with a cost of over 13 million of today's pounds (McKean 1994).

The progress of material culture consumption occurred at the same time as a general shift in mentality. According to the English cultural sociologist Colin Campbell (Sutton Coldfield, 1940), consumerist mentality developed together with Romanticism from the end of the eighteenth century, and fostered the spread of a "desire culture", where the need for a particular object would progressively turn into a "metadesire", the desire for new and different things, which mixed consumption and dissatisfaction (Campbell 1987). In Romanticism, a transition from traditional hedonism, based on physical stimuli, to modern hedonism, where emotions and imagination prevail, took place.

> The essential activity of consumption is thus not the actual selection, purchase or use of products, but the imaginative pleasure-seeking to which the product image lends itself, "real" consumption being largely a resultant of this "mentalistic" hedonism. Viewed this way the emphasis upon novelty as well as that upon insatiability both become comprehensible. (…) The modern consumer is able to adjust his tastes rapidly and continually in a way which traditional consumers find impossible because of his possession of the psychological skill of autonomous day-dreaming (ivi, 89 and 94).

Campbell's interpretation is extremely appealing, but is limited in considering consumption as an individual dynamic, that owes little or nothing to social emulation and imitation. On the contrary, the study of the American historian T.J. Jackson Lears, *From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture*, 1880-1930, underlines the strong "therapeutic" collective vocation of consumption. According to Lears, the definite beginning of the consumer culture dated back to the end of the nineteenth century, through another secularization of Protestantism, which made a determinant contribution to the conceptual development of capitalism (Weber 1905), as pointed out by Max Weber (1864-1920).

A milestone in such a development was the launch of the *Emmanuel Movement*, at the *Emmanuel Church* in Boston in 1906, a hybrid of religion and medical treatment. Guided by Reverend Elwood Worcester,

the movement promoted a new psychological–therapeutic approach to religion, coordinated in a clinic that provided medical and psychological services, and would remain active until 1929. In 1909, with the support of the rubber industrialist Ernest Jacoby, the *Emmanuel Movement* gave birth to the *Jacoby Club*, dedicated to the cure of alcoholism, and a precursor of the familiar association *Alcoholics Anonymous*. Other liberal schools of thought, such as that of Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1979), a major protestant moralist in the twenties, underlined the sanctity of human potentialities, emphasizing the idea of a growing process with an end in itself.

The new American protestant elites, far more than European Romantic culture, were the promoters of a new hedonist mentality of well-being and self-realization. The means of such a perspective would be the great novelty of the time, advertising, whose influence was part of a wide reformation of religion and culture.

> Advertising cannot be considered in isolation. Its role in promoting a consumer culture can only be understood within a network of institutional, religious, and psychological changes (Lears 1983, 4).

Simultaneously, advertising would largely develop between the nineteenth and the twentieth century, thanks to image-elaborating techniques, which would become more and more sophisticated, and to the application of psychology to advertising. From our point of view, it is of great interest that consumerism has been proposed from its origins as a possible therapy for the "evils" of the modern world. So consumption growth has been associated with that of socio- psychological well-being.

> For many psychological consultants, therapeutic advertising became a method of social control — a way to arouse consumer demand by associating products with imaginary states of well-being (ivi, 15).

One of the first modern advertising agencies was founded in Philadelphia in 1869: N.W. Ayer & Son, who also opened in New York in 1874. Their first customer was the weekly magazine, *National Baptist*, followed by no less than 10 other religious newspapers. Clearly, the relationship between early advertising and the Baptist Church must also be noted. From 1876 on, N.W. Ayer & Son started offering a payment system on commission, called *the open contract*, paving the way for professional advertising. In 1888 the first professional copywriter was employed, in 1898 an artist and in 1910 an art director, in charge of coordinating graphics and pictures.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, advertising was the official art of capitalism, and it created visual signs detached from traditional references, with a strong sense of alienation, as in *Alice in Wonderland* (Schudson 1980). In this age, the emphasis was on realisation through emotional exaltation, and the devaluation of the public domain over the private, the ideas of creating one's identity by purchasing goods and women's empowerment through shopping were reinforced.

Bruce Fairchild Barton (1886-1967), son of a Protestant Pastor and co-founder of the advertising agency Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn (BBDO), was one of the examples of the fusion of religion, therapy and advertising. He was even a prolific essayist and his books were highly symbolic of this new emerging view: *A Young Man's Jesus* (1914), *More Power to You* (1917), *It's a Good Old World* (1920), *What Can a Man Believe?* (1927), *On the Up and Up* (1929). His most famous book is *The Man Nobody Knows* (1925), where Christ is depicted as a supporter of individualism and material progress, a model for modern businessmen, and the apostles were depicted as one of the first modern corporations. Advertising, then, was not only a means of propaganda and information, much as that was effective, but a way to spread a new sort of religion of consumption. Advertising plays a decisively mythopoeic role within the universe of consumerism.

In brief, although we have quite rightly highlighted some aspects of consumption, Lears was the one who mainly focused on how real consumerism was affirmed only recently, operating as a means of both economic progress and social therapy, through "tailor-made strategies" to face up to modern society's "vague anxieties".

> The convergence of national advertising and therapeutic ideals strongly reinforced the spreading culture of consumption; but it also suggests that the process was generated by unfocused anxieties as well as deliberate strategies (ivi, 25).

Consumerism would assert brand-new personal achievement values, which were able to penetrate the psyche of people who were originally wary of the new world of values.

> No doubt many ordinary Americans refused to embrace this world literally, but they were drawn into it for its entertainment value — the sensual appeal of its illustrations, the seductiveness of basking (however briefly) in the promise of self-realization through consumption (ivi, 22).

Even feminist movements would mitigate their egalitarian principles in return for the gratification of consumerism.

> Feminist political claims were deflected into quests for psychic satisfaction through high-style consumption (ivi, 21).

Finally, even alterations in the structures of production would find in consumerism a therapeutic compensation.

> A quest for self-realization through consumption compensated for a loss of autonomy on the job. Therapeutic ideals converged with advertising and mass amusement to promote new forms of cultural hegemony (ivi, 2).

Undoubtedly, the consumerist mentality did not emerge immediately, its preconditions developed over a long span of time. However, the recognition of a precise consumerist therapeutic effect marks the end of the long preparatory period and the birth of modern consumerism.

This connection between the origins of consumerism, the birth of advertising and a sort of consumerist religion determines the beginning of the consumerist age in the first decades of the twentieth century, in a mature phase of the industrial society.

Consumerism in America is the model of modern consumerism: there are few doubts about it. It is the basis of a lifestyle completely different from previous eras. Between 1900 and 1930, American society completely changed its nature because "new consumer goods put in place new vital relationships and induced new needs that have stimulated the invention of new goods and so on" (Alberoni 1964,116). American historian Gary Cross also placed the birth of consumerism in America in the early decades of the twentieth century (Cross 2000). The question of the origins of consumerism had a satisfactory answer.

The ritual function of consumerism was only fully manifested from this date. Consumerism itself is a complex of ritual forms, as the title of recent research by a group of psychologists, "Rituals enhance Consumption", suggests (Vohs 2013).

Before consumerism, in the first years of modern industrialisation nationalism functioned as a surrogate to traditional religion.

> What sets out as essentially secular ideology and symbolism of culture and politics reveal a transcendental dimension, one that raises the individual above the earthly round and out the immediate time. In this sense, nationalism can be regarded as a "religion surrogate" and the nation as a continuation, but also transformation, of pre-modern ethno-religious community (Smith 1995, 166).

At first, consumerism was on the same level as nationalism, as a modern "civil religion", and then it slowly took over, metabolizing every other consumer practice developed in previous centuries. A deeper analysis

of industrial society's difficulties and symptoms, which consumerism stemmed from, should be carried out. At the same time, the organisation of consumerist symbolism and ritualism at the beginning of the twentieth century should be underlined.

> Consumerism succeeded where other ideologies failed because it concretely expressed the cardinal political ideals of the century - liberty and democracy - and with relatively little self-destructive behavior or personal humiliation. Consumer goods allowed Americans to free themselves from their old, relatively secure but closed communities and enter the expressive individualism of a dynamic "mass" society (Cross 2000, 2).

Now, however, the question is asked why consumerism is so easily and radically established. This makes us return to the nineteenth century and the second industrial revolution.

. . . before cutting up the body, they heat him in the sun till he becomes leather, until it is running with sweat, and then, when his blood is boiling pure and foaming ...

IN THE BEGINNING WAS ANOMIE

Western sociology developed simultaneously with the second industrial revolution, in an age of deep and serious social changes. In the USA, the first university course of sociology was set up at Yale University by William Graham Sumner (1840-1910) in 1876, while in France the first department of sociology opened in 1895, thanks to Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) at Bordeaux University. Germany would wait until 1919, when Franz Oppenheimer (1864-1943) took the first chair in Frankfurt, whereas in Italy, Filippo Carli (1876-1938) would be the first sociology professor in Padua, in 1924. The changes in those countries were carefully analysed by the first sociology scholars.

At that time, the relationship between industry and finance had strengthened large companies, especially in the aftermath of the 1873 crisis, which had led many small and medium-sized companies to close. Unlike the first period of industrialisation, technological innovations were not restricted to factories, but they spread among the entire population. Electricity allowed the creation of products destined to change the lives of all families: lamps, electric irons, and fridges. In the food sector, chemical fertilizers, pasteurization, sterilization and canning changed consumption behaviours throughout the food industry.

Between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, the invention of cinema and radio would bring about a cultural revolution, similar to printing. The French brothers Auguste (1862-1954) and Louis Lumière (1864-1948) made the first film in 1895, while the Canadian Reginald Fessenden (1866-1932) broadcast the first radio programme in December 1906.

Economic and cultural changes led to deep alterations in the division of labour and family structure. Balance among social classes changed and many workers had to leave their homes. While family had been in the centre of social as well as productive life for millennia, now education and socialization were subject to deep changes. Not only did the urban scenery change, but the whole symbolic universe crumbled. It is not by chance that the first sociologists studied the significant consequences of economic changes and production activities in the fields of social life.

Émile Durkheim was the first to examine a clear relationship between industrialisation and the suicide rate. France and Germany, the two most industrialised countries, were facing a rapid increase in the voluntary death

rate. Durkheim, with the expression "the suicide area of Europe", recalled the definition employed by the renowned Italian psychiatrist Enrico Morselli (1852-1929), who edited one of the first modern studies on the subject in 1879. In this area, the suicide rate increased threefold between 1821 and 1880. It was a generalised increase, not merely scattered episodes, and it mainly involved the group affected by economic and social changes: self-employed professionals rather than farmers, and men four times more than women. Economic progress then, did not imply a social well-being and did not induce greater joy in living (Durkheim 1893). The French sociologist outlined a hypothesis concerning the increase in suicide: division and specialisation of labour, a feature of the industrial revolution, had caused a new pathology, defined as "anomic division of labour". The fierce competition, which ruled modern working relations, involved more antagonism that finally affected society's inner cohesion. The more specialised work was, the more frequent were social uprisings.

There was a new perception of a competitive world, but without the old reference points, a clear sign of the age's human imbalance, which directly led to the increase in the suicide rate. Unlike traditional jobs, new economic activities were a source of weakness and precariousness. There was a sense of dissolution in the social order: in France, for instance, from 1849 to 1865, the number of bankruptcies increased by 70% (ibidem).

The term "anomie" was firstly employed in connection to the change and crisis in society. "Anomie" was not a new word, as "sociology" actually was, being coined by August Comte (1798-1857). Xenophon (427-355 B.C.) used it in the etymological sense of "absence of rules", in the sense of "illegality", "lawlessness". Just before Durkheim, the French philosopher Jean Marie Guyau (1854-1888) had treated anomie in his work *The Non-religion of the future* (1886). However, while Guyau deemed anomie a positive element, as a consequence of the disruption of old and outdated social equilibria, after Durkheim, anomie would be characterized as a mainly sociological factor that connoted the sense of imbalance people suffered from because of modern social changes. In fact, Durkheim refers to anomie specifically as "dérèglement", meaning "derangement" (Durkheim 1897, p. 281 of the original French edition).

In the modern world, cyclic crises started undermining the fabric of social solidarity. Governments – according to the French sociologist – had to take increasingly vigorous social measures. In this, Durkheim was explicitly following Comte's indications concerning the tasks of the State, which include a systematic marshaling of elements of society towards a common unity and solidarity (Comte 1830-1842, 484-485).

Proletarianization of the masses had deeply affected industrial countries in the nineteenth century. Working together, the various organs of the state should have led to greater justice and the reduction of social inequality. However, in the second half of the century, inequality was clearly becoming one of the main problems of modern societies (Durkheim 1893, 314). Durkheim wanted to determine and define the causes of social crises and this led him to shed light on suicide, to which he devoted one of the first sociological studies based on statistical data. Since his work, suicide rate variation has always been considered as one of the principal alarm signals regarding the arrival of social unease, or, inversely, as a sign of new balance and stability.

The causes of the tendency towards suicide had to be detected, in order to determine the factors of its regression or stabilisation. A relatively constant suicide rate, in different cultural areas, proved the existence of a precise "social fact", e.g. "any way of acting, whether fixed or not, capable of exerting over the individual an external constraint" (Durkheim 1895, 59).

According to Durkheim, suicide had to be deemed as "contagious", because it spread in society, but it was neither hereditary nor connected to imitation. There was no relation between suicide and psychopathic states, as occurred with alcoholism. He noticed that the suicide rate was higher in Protestant countries than in Catholic ones, and it was very low in Jewish and Muslim communities. Durkheim also clarified some ambiguous data. On the one hand, at the end of the nineteenth century, the suicide rate appeared to increase with the level of education, on the other hand, he proved that the main cause was modern culture itself, because it led people to break boundaries with religion and traditional solidarity. Indeed, when education was not "secular", there was a firmly opposite effect, as in Jewish culture, where a high level of education matched a low suicide rate. Religion and ritualism appeared to deeply lower the suicide rate.

In data, Durkheim found a higher number of suicides among divorced people, and a higher frequency of deaths in summer and during the working days of the week, when "normal" social life is more intense, rather than in winter or during festivities. When symbolic and ritual normality declines, anomie is greater.

In exceptional times anomie decreases and so does the rate of suicide, such as occurs during economic and political crises. In France, in the nineteenth century upheaval, they decreased by 10%. On the contrary, during the seven-month *Exposition Universelle* in 1889, one of the greatest celebrations of the industrial age, suicides increased by 10%. In the same years, in the remote and "underdeveloped" Calabria, there was almost no

such thing as suicide, also in Spain, as poor as the south of Italy, the suicide rate was ten times lower than in France. Durkheim remarked wittily that "poverty protects against suicide" (Durkheim 1897, 214).

The underlying principle of all this data, according to the French sociologist, was the disruption of traditional, communitarian, familiar, and social boundaries, as well as the end of inveterate habits and local customs. In a word: anomie. According to Durkheim, anomie was on the opposite side of that *consensus* that Comte considered the basis of "social statics" and was the equivalent of the necessary solidarity between social structure and political and cultural institutions (Comte 1830-1842).

In Durkheim's view, anomie was also connected to an imbalance between needs and means: one could not really be happy if needs were not balanced with means. The anxiety for unachievable dreams was the condemnation to eternal dissatisfaction. Dreams are closely related to the symbolic universe in which everyone lives. And symbolic needs in many cases are more stringent than material ones. If nature controls animals needs and passions, in man there are no clear physiological limits and rather it is society that has to frame and limit individual impulses. Life regulation was indeed necessary, both from the ritualistic and customary points of view, and in the legal and statutory fields. It is indisputable that symbols, rituals and mythopoeic narratives carry a wide range of social regulation. Symbolic objects are necessary for ritual action and if men cannot, or can no longer have them, it gives rise to anomie. Durkheim himself didn't restrict anomie to a single social sphere, and he spoke of economic anomie, sexual anomie, conjugal anomie, etc., as a symbolic and ritual void that can emerge in various areas. He indicated that it was necessary to consider anomie beyond the mere material perspective: in man "most of his needs are not dependent on his body" (Durkheim 1897, 207). Human daily life is mainly based on a symbolic regime.

> A genuine regimen exists, therefore, although not always legally formulated, which fixes with relative precision the maximum degree of ease of living to which each social class may legitimately aspire. However, there is nothing immutable about such a scale (Durkheim 1897, 210).

Abrupt changes of life may lead to an inability to distinguish between legitimate hopes and claims, and unrealistic longings. After Durkheim, sociological tradition has tried different paths for a better definition of anomie. For example, Merton stressed that anomie involves the breakdown of social and moral regulation (Merton 1938 and 1957/1968). Messner and Rosenfeld have developed the idea of cultural obsession with economic success and fetishism of money (2001). In the past Leo Srole has developed

a scale for assessing anomie, insisting on the concept of social integration (1956). And recently a large group of phycologists have relaunched the idea of measuring anomie based on the perceived breakdown of social fabric and leadership (Teymoori et al. 2016).

We believe that the concept of anomie needs a more precise definition than as a disturbance of the symbolic order. It is on this level that social crisis is reflected directly at an individual level, as in the case of suicide, and if anomie was a truly sociological category that defines the state of dissatisfaction and stress, of regulatory disorder, typical of modern men (Izzo 2000), the "elementary form" of anomie is the lack of rituals. The imbalance between needs and means can also be interpreted as the disproportion between symbolic needs and ritual means. Otherwise, the forces that regulate the constitution of needs in relation to their possibilities of satisfaction "risk remaining one of the greatest unknowns of consumption sociology" (Alberoni 1964, 296).

Law is the coding of symbolic behaviour that defines right and wrong, justice from injustice. Law always has a ritual content, and ritual and ritualized behaviors are essential to the transmission and reinforcement of social norms (Rossano 2012). In religious traditions, such as the Jewish one (Durkheim grew up in a rabbinic family) the rules of the Law, the 613 *mitzvot*, are the basic rituals of Judaism. Even in secular law there is much direct evidence of such symbolic elements: still in many modern legal systems the juridical process is defined as "ritual". In everyday life, the "abstract" rules merge into concrete rituals. Marriage does not consist of the daily revision of the law articles governing it, but in the effective implementation of a significant set of symbolic practices. Anomie is "when the social norms that were supposed to create some form of solidarity lose their legitimacy and meaning and thereby their regulatory function" (Ali Teymoori private correspondence). As we will define later on, the rite is a symbol put into action and the solidarity determined by rituals has a symbolic foundation.

The family is the first place where individual and collective rituals are born, and they contribute to marking different moments in life. Their abrupt interruption leads to anomic de-regulation and influences the suicide rate. In families lacking supportive ties and ritual communitarian participation, in case's of divorce or sudden status changes, people are more likely to commit suicide. Above all, the disintegration of the family fails to support a large number of rituals: from shared daily meals to festive celebrations, from small everyday symbolic exchange, to birth and deaths rituals. It has been seen as cohesion and anomic crisis trying to be solved through ritual intervention.