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Peter J. Chmielewski

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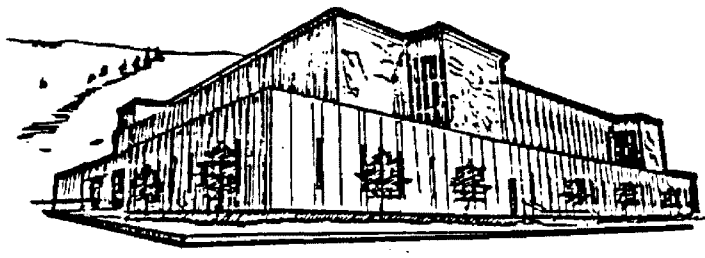
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University of  
**Montana**




Consumption  
Wasting Through Appearance

By  
Peter J. Chmielewski

B. A., University of Kent, 1987

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
University of Montana  
1991

Approved by

  
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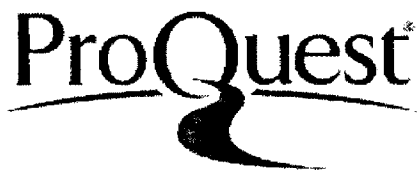


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Chmielewski, Peter J., M.A., August 1991

Philosophy

Consumption: wasting through appearance (138 pages)

Director: Fred McGlynn *F. M. G.*

The consumer holds dear the simple need to create and control a life that is desired; consumer actions are a response to the things which conflict with, or threaten that life. One can broadly characterise consumption then, as being predicated on control. This characterisation can be brought out through etymology and shown to instantiate itself not only in modern living, but also historically. From this characterisation one can begin to draw out the implications of the "human" life which the consumer protects and is absorbed in.

Not only is this life absorbing, but it is also a simulation reproducing itself. The absorption into this simulation can be shown in three parts: 1. the assimilation, by consumers, of the images of control which surround them until they cannot see what lies beyond; 2. by responding to external threats and conflicts the consumer self is validating itself as a conflict--through this, making itself feel "human" as well as reproducing the idea that being "human" is predicated solely on conflict; 3. to maintain this idea of "human" life, consumption reproduces the conflicts themselves. Since consumption is being drawn as a simulation though, the conflicts reproduced will be shown in this thesis to be mere "signs" or appearances in that simulation.

The result of this simulated "human" form of life being inhabited, is an isolation from the natural world and an alienation from ourselves and others. Through the continued reproduction and growth of both internal and external conflicts--generated by the need to control--the consumer becomes further absorbed by consumption as well as deepening his own paranoias and neuroses.

This "human" life can be contrasted to the one in the fable The Little Prince, where the possibility of escaping such an absorption, along with its results, is dependent on our establishing non-controlling ties to what surrounds us, while maintaining vigilance in our actions.

## Contents

Introduction.....	iv
Chapter I What is Consumption?.....	1
Chapter II The Reproduction of Consumption.....	29
Chapter III The 'Hidden' Attraction of Consumption...	53
i. Self-consciousness as conflict.....	57
ii. Consumption's reproduction of conflict.....	71
Chapter IV The End in Consumption.....	87
Chapter V An Alternative to Consumption.....	101
Notes.....	120

## Introduction

Consumerism gives birth to a dream and entices with its promise. Its promise is simply that by being a consumer, the individual will be empowered to control his own future; he will be able to change his identity and manipulate his environment. It's not that through consumerism, you can merely "be all that you can be," to become this or that identity living in a particular environment, rather, it offers the consumer a chance to become any individual living in every environment. In this way, whatever I feel myself to be in conflict with, whatever I hate, dislike, am uncomfortable around, or am burdened by, I, as a consumer, can overcome; what I lack I can obtain; what faces me I can change; I needn't feel that I am trapped by inability and led by powerlessness. Anyone can possess the simple dream of controlling one's living, whilst the attainment of the dream appears to be predicated only on the consumer's will to achieve it.

It is this ability of individuals to respond to their 'civilized needs' which gives consumerism its attraction. It is little wonder that consumption's detractors find little or no voice. An attack on consumerism appears to become linked to an individual's rights to make his own life easier. The ability to buy and have medicines, time



and effort-saving devices and soft toilet paper is taken as an inviolable right. One's course to be master of one's own life is taken as a given. Thus any attack on consumerism simply appears, at bottom, to be an attack on civilization--an attempt to take away from the people what is seen on television. With this promise it is easy to see how consumption adapts itself around criticism. Not everyone can afford an IBM computer, but clones are within closer reach. One needs to ask whether consumerism actually delivers on the promise it makes to everyone.

If consumerism were merely an economic force, a Marxian analysis of capitalism might have lingered longer, but the fact that Marxism finds little attraction today, should raise questions as to what it is that actually needs to be examined. That is not to say that we should all rush to defend Marx, rather that consumerism was strong enough to withstand an economic attack. One of consumerism's strengths lies perhaps not only in its division of labour, but in its segmentation of everything around us into easily manageable parcels. Consider the various specialized tools, services and artifacts, which we have at our disposal. When put together all of these things make up a form of life which presents itself as the only way for us to be civilized and thus human. Without this ability to consume, we are made to appear insignificant, if not dead.

If we take seriously this presentation of consumerism as the only complete strategy for living, then we need to ask whether there is a thread which holds this life together. In this light economics is only a point through which the needle passes. Economics appears to reside in the realm of actions, with all of its theories aimed at a situation in motion. But actions invariably are exhaled from attitudes. One might look at consumption, then, from the point of view of actions which are held together by an attitude. Rather than observing it through the separated discourses of ecology, economics or politics, we need to enquire whether these critical languages are addressing similar facets of consumerism.

When we look at the dream with which consumption lures us, we might note that it is aimed at overcoming conflict. If we are burdened by something, it appears to threaten the control we desire in living--without a washing machine we are forced into the manual chore of washing by hand, while witnessing how those with this appliance are spared time to do with as they will. If we are faced by something foreign and thus out of our personal control, we are unsure as to whether it will not try to infringe on our lives--moving out to the country, we find a certain fear in knowing that something is prowling outside at night. We might ease this fear by buying a gun or installing a light outside. A lot

of things may lie in that dark region outside our personal ability to master, but by being consumers something appears to be available every time that we feel our own lives being infringed upon. If ugliness is considered a burden, it can be overcome not only through new clothes and cosmetic changes, but also through surgery. If one feels stupid, then an outing to a Shakespearean play or a poetry reading can at least give one the feeling of culture--along with a few quotes to throw into future conversations. Shelves appear stocked with things that we 'need.' Without possessing them, we are missing out on something to turn living toward the comfort that we desire. Something remains in the dark region which withholds my ease from me.

I want to suggest that consumption deals with overcoming conflicts, not because everything is in conflict with us and thus keeps us from controlling our situation, but because consumption constructs everything into a conflict. The only tools it provides us with are those which make us see and feel conflict, as well as only being useful in conflicts. It shows and teaches us how to light up the "dark" region. But just as one looks through glasses which are fogged-up with fear, seeing nothing but apparitions which threaten, so with the strategy for living which consumerism presents to us. One's sight becomes

polarized and one forgets that one is wearing glasses, when all that is being thought of is how to cope with this threat--to run and hide or to conquer, no other choices exist, no other thoughts surface, for one who feels himself to be endangered. In this way we live, viewing a darkness which has been constructed. It is constructed on the fear which originates in the anxiety one feels when confronted by something foreign. But surely it is 'better' to keep the glasses on and see the threat; then at least one has a better chance to deal with it--given that one has access to the proper tools and strategy, that is consumption.

This talk of "consumption" sounds misleading, given the common images which the word inspires; 'lighting up the darkness' appears a far cry from investing in shoes. The consumerism which I want to describe is both economic and mental. When a fire consumes, the thing consumed is not only destroyed, but it is also used to fuel the fire; the more that is consumed in its flames, the greater the light which emanates and the larger the area illuminated. In the light, one is safe from the creatures of the woods; one is happy, because of the warmth of the flames. One 'cannot' consider leaving its area and entering the cold, dark night. It is easier to fuel the fire more. But the bigger the fire, the easier for it to grow out of control. So as we fuel it, there is a risk that we will be the ones

consumed by it, unless we are vigilant. The vigilant might not, however, have built such a big fire initially. By halting the fire's feeding frenzy, its contrast with the darkness will be lulled. Our night-eyes might again be used. Consumption, then, implies a certain use and destruction of materials with an ever greater fanaticism. Further, it is through consumption that one views the world.

Following the example of Bowdler, the consumptive expurgates the world through his consumption. The objectionable, threatening parts are expunged from it. The Indo-European root of "expurgate" is "peuh"<sup>1</sup>; which means to cleanse, purge and make pure. An "expurgation" then is the purging out of impure parts. More generally though, "Peuh" is derived from "Peu," which means to cut, stamp, or strike, etc. In a broader sense then, an expurgation is a cutting out of, or striking out at, something, a culling and silencing of the unwanted. Concealed and sterilized darkness is filtered out by the expurgation. Consumption's expurgation serves to clean, tidy and neaten the chaotic and unruly, with the hope that the atmosphere surrounding the consumptive is sanitized and that the air breathed is fresh. "Expurgation" has also acquired nuances of prudery. The Bowdlerization of books, for example, works through a sort of blanket omission, or modification of,

parts considered vulgar. We are kept from seeing what it is that has been expurgated. We are told that it was a threat to morality, decency, honour; whatever affronts it is itself seen solely as a "threat." We never see into the dark region; we only feel its menace. And as long as we continue to consume and thus, in this way, expurgate the world, we find ourselves to be sleeping through in safety.

History has made us question some previous expurgations as being overly zealous in the pursuit of purity. Ensuing expurgations have thus come into question as being driven by short-sighted perversions which complacently adhere to overbearing rules. This possibility of prudery carried to a perversion, is submerged in the consumptive's expurgations. Just as the prude is always acutely aware of vulgarity, so the consumptive expurgator lives in the knowledge of that which he expurgates-- 'chaotic' darkness. In one sense, it can be said that the expurgator is very conscious of himself and his surrounding world. Such self-consciousness is weak though, since it operates on one level only--he sees himself in a world, but a world which has only two potentials, of being either pure, or tainted and vulgar. The consumptive, thus can also be said to be "self-conscious." He sees himself in a world which appears either safe, comfortable and under his own control, or else threatening. Some self-awareness is

better than none. At least with it there exists the possibility that one will one day question whether, in fact, certain expurgations were driven by misguided zealousness.

However, by turning one's questioning toward the enterprise of living itself, one might be led to existentialist concerns for dread, despair and guilt, until one does nothing but wallow in thoughts. While the consumer may see how hard life is, consumption appears to provide him with opportunities through which such a situation can be remedied. The existentialist, though, takes his thoughts to uncovering the "heart of darkness"-- toward viewing the abyss to which he traces his life. Such an extension of self-consciousness appears comical to the consumer. The existentialist is threatened yet appears to persist in doing nothing about it (except maybe wallow in a drunken stupor as Malcolm Lowry's Consul does in Under the Volcano).

The existentialist is perhaps also a comical sight to the post-modern mentality. "Pure subjectivity" itself needs to be deconstructed; and of course it does if it simply reduces the individual to a compressed heap by the weight of his threatening paranoias. But the individual cannot be dazzled and fascinated by the bright lights of consumables. Kierkegaard's "leap of faith" is made with

the faith that life's "simple pleasures" can be rekindled. But a leap to some sort of 'noble life' today, where one can again 'smell the flowers,' seems hard to understand. With a world filled with computers and national parks where the glance of the other is replaced by pleas from victims, a leap of faith fails to inspire any passion. Re-engaging with a life that is replete with shelves filled with sugar-coated breakfast cereals can hardly be done with passion. Perhaps the post-modernist sense of humour and absorption into this comedy is the only response.

The existentialist finds it hard to get away from the clouds that fill his eyes with conflict. Indeed, it is hard to see the existentialist's end in anything but the embodiment of Malcolm Lowry's Consul. The concerns shown for building a character capable of vigilance are still needed, though. The post-modernist's laughter somehow sounds hollow. The individual does need to build himself up, not because of some masochistic urge to stare into the abyss, but in order to show that self-consciousness can exist on more than the level of fear. Building one's vigilance is not to be separated from any task, but rather is made meaningful by a task. One can build one's vigilance by deconstructing consumption--as though learning from mistakes. "Treading lightly," for example, is not enough and can mean nothing, until the individual



understands that he is trying to get away from consumption, whilst still wearing its heavy boots and clouded glasses.

In what follows I want to take seriously Baudrillard's idea that we are inhabiting a simulation<sup>2</sup>--one in which our connection to the natural world has been obscured. I want to describe consumption as this simulation, initially showing what characterizes it, indicating also, that though a modern phenomenon, it has roots historically. This characterization will point to a view of consumption which is rooted in the desire for control and operates through conflict.

From this characterization I want to show that absorption into it follows--that the absorption is maintained because consumption continues to simulate itself. Reproduction of itself is only half of the picture. Since I will characterize it as revolving around the control of conflict (or threats), I want to show that in order to maintain itself, it must reproduce conflicts. I want to show that this is made into necessity, by showing that by reproducing itself, it is reproducing the individual consumer himself as a self in conflict with himself. Through this reproduction, I want to show why consumption thus appears to become the only way of life--the only way to be human--and thus why any attack on it

'quite naturally' becomes an attack on civilized life itself.

Since what I will be tracing out is a simulation--operating without reference to the natural world--I want to show that the conflicts which it reproduces are themselves only appearances--that the things which threaten us are no longer "things", but rather the mere concentration of their menace; that, for example, it is no longer the grizzly bear itself that is threatening, but rather that the threat of the grizzly has itself become threatening.

Underlying and operating throughout this analysis is what I want to call a "vicious circle." Beginning in the consumer's need for control, I want to show that such a strategy leads to separation from the natural world and, through this, a separation within ourselves. By becoming separated from this world, we are separating ourselves from the things which might be a threat. Never facing the threat itself, its menace remains. Since it remains, it reproduces the need to control it. And so, ad infinitum, the circle moves around.

Since this analysis will be wide-ranging, with consumption being characterized beyond simply the activity of a shopper, I will provide a contrast to it by showing the mechanics of the possibility of a move away from the simulation, as well as give an alternative to it. For

now though, let me turn my attention to providing a  
characterization for consumption.

## Chapter One

### What is Consumption?

By speaking of "consuming" as though one were simply dealing with an economic activity, one narrows the scope of the resultant discourse--consumerism is only dealt with according to the face which it presents. Though the term "consumer" was first used in 1745 to describe "one who makes use of goods,"<sup>3</sup> it was not until 1944 that the emphasis of the term became economic.<sup>4</sup> Political economy finally annexed the term in 1970 when "consumerism" was used to designate a "movement for safer and better production."<sup>5</sup> On the surface then, one is obliged to consider "consuming" within the confines of economic language. But by focusing one's attention solely on appearances, there is a tendency to forget to ask whether everything below the veneer is reflected in that surface.

Etymologically, "consumption" is rich in meaning. Even considering consumption's economic face, we already know that consumption is not only a use of goods, but also includes the notion of safety in the production process. "So what!" The obvious never seems interesting, and

perhaps that is why it is never prodded or poked further. Beginning with a gentle nudge then, two simple questions come up: i) How does the idea of "use" instantiate itself in the consumer's activity? ii) What is seeking "safety" or "protection" a response to? The simplicity of these questions still appears to be hiding nuances which seep through consumption's surface. When political economy made the word its own, not only did an economic slant eclipse all other meanings of the word, but in doing so it united them. "Use" and "safety," for example, are deeply rooted in the meaning of "consumption," but, as I intend to show, so are such words as "take," "distribute," "destroy," "fanaticism," and "disease." One needs to ask whether this diversity of meaning is reflected in our usage of the term "consumer." If it is, then we need to know how it instantiates itself in our activities. One needs to uncover what, if anything, hides beneath the ideas of "use" and "safety."

It is already clear from the implicit rhetoric of the introduction and the preceding paragraphs, that I find economic language to be inadequate in dealing with consumption--or at least that to understand the consumer more is required than simply an analysis of "use values," "profit margins" and "modes of production." The actions of a consumer provide an outline for what consumption is.

Individual acts are grounded in an individual's character--actions express a certain attitude. By using a washing machine, for example, the consumer quite simply expresses the need for convenience in his life. An understanding of consumption, then, requires both the act and the attitude of the consumer to be considered. What assumptions lie behind the consumer's "use" of an object? How does this use manifest itself? Further, what is hidden behind the simple and innocent need for "safety" in the production process, specifically, and the goods produced, generally?

Consider again the consumer's use of a washing machine. The convenience afforded by the use of this appliance serves to counteract the manual chore of washing by hand, as well as freeing more time for 'important' things. A burden is lifted and replaced with something chosen by the consumer. Such use, then, finds its telos in overcoming burdens; with the achievement of this goal, the consumer is able to do something which he actually wants to do--for example, with no clothes to wash, one can relax in front of the television.

Since my approach to consumption is to see it as an attitude which specifically involves strategies that are predicated on overcoming burdens, the category of things to which the term is applicable will be greatly widened.

In this light, the term "consumer" is more than a mere synonym for "shopper." One central argumentative thrust of this thesis will be to justify that the ordinary usage of the term "consumer" as a purchaser and user of goods, needs to be broadened in order to understand what stands behind these actions; that underlying these actions is a need to absorb and eliminate everything that appears threatening. Just as, for example, the shopper buys manufactured goods, so the philosopher 'buys' manufactured ideas; while shoppers find 'quick-fixes' to physically demanding chores and unquenched desires, philosophers dance amongst the dusty tomes of history to keep the light of reason burning as a talisman against the threat that intellectual life might be thrown into chaos by conflicting emotions and confusing contradictions. It is not just the philosopher whom I will describe as a consumptive. Consumptive activities and attitudes can be found in the age of heroes. Heroes such as Gilgamesh and Beowulf can be shown to have acted from an attitude which sought to keep their surroundings from becoming unbearably dark, using whatever resources they could.

As a frame of mind, consumption is an attitude that unconsciously or recklessly needs to treat apparent burdens solely as things to be consumed; that is, when one experiences anything foreign, one views it purely as a

threat--or potential threat--in need of one's control or mastery. The act of consuming holds this attitude at its root. The consumer's actions are always responses to threats. Basically the attitude is consume or be consumed; this is shown to be the only attitude which brings one meaning in living. Part of the resemblance between shoppers, philosophers and heroes as consumptives, lies not only in this single-mindedness of purpose, but also in the coincidence of the assumptions underlying the strategies which they employ.

I will explicate through etymology the notion that mastery or control are ideas intrinsic to consumption. But etymology is merely my point of departure. From the etymology, I want to go on to exemplify the instantiation of this idea by showing, not only that it is rooted in our present culture, but also that these roots can be traced historically from the "heroic" age through philosophy to this time. Through this characterization of consumption, it might appear that I am applying the concept in a far too encompassing way, I want, then, to also give an indication of what it is not--saving a complete description of this, for the final chapter. I want to also show what role my characterization of consumption might play in our present culture.



In 1425, the suffix "er" was added to the English word "consume." "Consumer" designated "one who consumes or destroys."<sup>6</sup> The idea that consumption is somehow related to destruction, can initially be traced to the Latin verb "consumere."<sup>7</sup> The verb is composed of the prefix "con" which means "altogether" or "with," and "sumere," which means "to take up" or "to lay hold of." The prefix "con" acts to intensify the verb "sumere." The meaning of the verb "consumere" quite literally is "to take up with" or "to altogether lay hold of." With "sumere" intensified though, when one is "taken up with" something one is taken up with it completely;<sup>8</sup> or when one "altogether lays hold of" something, one takes it in its entirety. Taking something in its entirety is to destroy it or at least to get complete use of it.

As a simple example, if I am to consume an apple, that is, to take it in its entirety, by implication I am doing something more than just holding it. I am devouring it until nothing of the apple remains. With the "destruction" of the apple I simultaneously "destroy" my hunger by satisfying it; consuming the apple consumes my hunger. Through this I have in a trivial way expurgated my world; it becomes one in which I am no longer hungry. Though my use of a washing machine isn't destructive of the appliance, as a tool--and thus as an extension of the

individual--it destroys the burden of washing by hand. In an analogous way, a fire consumes what it burns. It uses the thing being burned and destroys it, and in doing so it destroys the darkness of the night. Something that is consumed, therefore, is something that is either destroyed or used to destroy.

In order to be in a position where I can consume something--that is, to be a "destroyer"--I must on some level be master of it--I thus demonstrate my control. This appears to be trivially true, since at the moment that I am using it, I must be in control of it. To consume something can also mean to buy it, that is, to take it into one's possession. When I own something, I can do with it as I will. Again examples appear trivial, and it is labouring the point too much perhaps to say that if I own an appliance, I control when to switch it on; or if I own a pair of shoes, it's up to me when I wear them. In the days when one consumed slaves, one was their master. One can also consume another individual. By using him for one's own ends, one is treating him as nothing but a thing to be controlled. When I keep my own agenda or purposes hidden, I am not treating the other individual other than as a thing to be used. I may, for example, have sex with the intention of adding notches to my belt, flattering my own ego, or be trying to screw them

out of money, etc. One can also consume a philosophy. Once one has mastery over it--has taken "possession" of it in its entirety--one is in control of it. One can use it in arguments to destroy opposing opinions, or one can use it to destroy any confusions one finds oneself caught up in. Philosophy as an endeavour toward understanding becomes a mere tool for control and destruction.<sup>9</sup> Again, by analogy, once a fire has taken control of something, that thing can do nothing but "obey the order" to burn.

Looking further into etymology, it should be noted that the Indo-European root of "consume" is "EM", part of whose meaning is "to take."<sup>10</sup> One takes what, quite simply, one does not have. Trivially, the thing taken is foreign to one; it isn't part of oneself. Through taking something one shows oneself to be its master. If one takes to oneself something which is opposed to one or something from which one is estranged, the conflict from the opposition or estrangement appears to vanish. As a consumer, I see in advertisements various items which withhold from me an ability which I am told should be mine--without a microwave I am using up too much of my own time cooking food in the 'old-fashioned' way, time with which I surely have better things to do. Taking something, I control it. Through it I can control other things which surround me.

On the other side of an individual consuming is the fact that an individual can be consumed. When one consumes, one controls; when one is consumed, one is controlled. Recall again that "consumere" meant: "to be taken up with something completely." If one is consumed by drugs, one is controlled by them; if consumed by alcohol, one cannot speak without speaking through drunkenness; if one is consumed by love, one literally does nothing that is not in reference to that love; if consumed by grief, one is immobilized by it and under its sway. One can also be consumed by a particular religion, psychology or philosophy, seeing only through its words to the point of blindness, intractability and intolerance for everything else. When a fire really begins to burn, it is sometimes hard to do anything but to let it continue. Control thus inheres in any idea of consumption.

Let me again go back to the Indo-European root of consume. The other half of the meaning of "EM" is "to distribute"<sup>11</sup> When one distributes, one assigns or allots separately--one controls where the things distributed go. Looking at the word more closely, something of interest crops up. "Dis" literally means "apart," or "individually" while a "tribute" can be either: i) "a token showing respect/affection," or ii) "a tax paid to a ruler/master for safety/protection." One pays tribute

either in recognition of a thing performed well or out of fear for one's life. Contained within the notion of "distribution," then, are the ideas that i) it is an allotment of recognition, for each individual separately, based on his showing mastery in something; ii) each individual buys into something, because of that thing's power to protect. One has either shown mastery in something or one finds the power of mastery to be contained in something other than oneself. Drawing this out as an analogy to "consume," one might say that a consumption is carried out either by one who is merely acting through the mastery which is already his or he takes in, or aligns himself with, something that has that power. Wherever one seems to turn in the etymology of "consume," the idea of control (or mastery) appears.

Through this etymological explication, the idea of mastery has also hinted at the thing which is being consumed. One appears to consume to remedy a state of affairs by which one is burdened, or at least with which one is unhappy, while in the last paragraph it appears to be linked with protection. One might note here that if one is camped in the middle of bear habitat, one uses the fire as a source of protection and control over one's safety. Through it, the threat from bears is cut out, or expurgated, from one's surrounding domain. Whatever the

thing is which one expurgates through one's consumption, it is minimally something from which one feels the need to be protected; it is on some level a threat. When we think of a very basic activity of consuming, we think of eating. It appears slightly more than coincidental that the Indo-European root of "food" is "Pa," which means "to protect."<sup>12</sup> At the moment, I don't really want to push this idea of consuming because one is in need of protection further than to leave it as suggestive. It is, however, something to which I will be returning throughout my later analysis.

All that I have tried to establish through etymology is that we cannot think of the word "consume" without understanding that the attitude to master or control is contained within it. It may be an activity which involves the use of things which are manufactured, but the attitude which underlies such use is one of hope that, through this use, one can produce an environment over which one feels some form of control. Given this, I want to go on to spell out what it is that makes the idea of "consumption" not simply one which can be interchanged with "shopper." I want to give examples of where this extended idea of consumption can be found historically. And in this way, I will give more plausibility to the idea itself while suggesting why economic consumerism is merely a historical

extension of consumption--that the newness of the idea merely appears so because of the greater number of people to whom it seems available in our present consumer culture. Let me turn to trying to show by example why "consumption" might be thought of as a theme inherent in various historical plays.

The ancient ballad of Gilgamesh<sup>13</sup> portrays Gilgamesh as two-thirds God. His rule was unquestioned by the populace. Through his life he can be exemplified as inhabiting the form of an Hegelian "master self-consciousness."<sup>14</sup> He did as he pleased, consuming whatever he desired. He is shown as inhabiting an environment which he created and controlled. This position of mastery made him arrogant. He felt no compulsion to do what he did not desire. When the Goddess of love attempted to seduce him, he spurned her advances, thus displaying his ability to control. Even when the gods created his brother, Enkidu, as someone to humble Gilgamesh and show him that he could not expurgate the world however he desired, he triumphed. Enkidu symbolised the gods' revenge for Gilgamesh's rejection of the goddess of love. He was created out of the untamable wild and raised by everything that was wild. He embodied the "chaos" of everything that was untamable. Gilgamesh tamed him. He took away his wildness and placed him by his

side. Through the taming of Enkidu, there is perhaps symbolised the taming of everything wild in nature. Not only is this a taming of "chaos"--of whatever appears uncontrollable to Man--but with Enkidu by his side, Gilgamesh is made to appear in control of all of nature's force. Symbolically, he is now free to use this power as he pleases. He can perhaps be seen to have caged this force to use it at his leisure. In this sense, then, Gilgamesh can be considered to be a consumer. There was nothing that he could not control, nothing to jar him into a mood of terror. His world was expurgated as he desired it to be. In this light he can be seen as exemplifying the ultimate achievement in mastery--the epitome of a consumer, using, taking and destroying, never needing to face unfulfilled desires. In today's society he might be seen as standing above even the richest and most powerful of "playboys." (Unfortunately, being only two-thirds god, Gilgamesh was still mortal; no power he possessed could relieve him of death's control.)

The myth of Gilgamesh's power was born in the ancient land of Sumer--positioned between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The myth of a mortal--though being two-thirds god--taming the wild and bringing it under his control, is aptly to be found arising out of Sumer. The Sumerians were perhaps one of the first peoples to give up the



nomadic hunter-gatherer life and turn instead to intensive agriculture. They gave up wandering through the caprices of nature and settled down by controlling its forces. On a limited scale--unlike today's consumerism--they were able to move away from a life where nature seemingly dictated their desires to them. Through their taming of nature, they were able for the first time perhaps to dictate their desires to it. Though initially it was the temples that ran the land and later the various individual rulers, whoever controlled it might perhaps be viewed as the first consumer. Whatever one desired that the land couldn't produce, one could trade its crops for. By consuming the land, and thus nature, the Sumerians were thus able to consume their desires, to light up their own world and face it only in the form into which they had expurgated it.

The myth of a larger than life human in possession of the power to control his world is also present in Norse mythology in the form of Beowulf<sup>15</sup>. As a more recent story within our cultural background, Beowulf typifies consumption's reliance on dealing with darkness solely as a thing to be controlled or destroyed.

Having been cast out from the world of humans, Grendel is forced to live in the "heart of darkness." He inhabits the "mere." Light fails to penetrate to the

water, as it is "overcast with dark crag-rooted trees that hang in groves hoary with frost" (p. 94). It is from here that he attacks the quiet, peaceful and bright world of the Scydlings. He threatens the life which God himself dictated to humans:

The Lord formed Earth,  
 a plain bright to look on...  
 exulting established the sun and moon  
 as lights to illuminate the land dwellers.  
 (p. 100)

Not only does Grendel attack the light which God gave to man, but he actually attacks the symbolizations of the Scydlings' bright world. He attacks the mead hall "Heorot"--which means "stag" or "red deer" and symbolized royalty. He attacks the very thing whose "radiance lighted the lands of the world" (p. 60). In this way "Grendel became ruler; against light he fought," (p. 55). By attacking Heorot he is said to have "chewed on the strength of this nation" (p. 65). Grendel is thus truly a 'nasty piece of work.' Even his name means "grinder" and is closely related to the word "Grandil" which refers to the ground or sand of a bottom of water. Grendel, then, is truly synonymous with everything that is dark.

Opposing him is Beowulf. Literally, Beowulf is the "Bee-Wolf", stinging his enemies clinically and painfully; more generally he is the "sweeping-wolf," a cleansing wind

that chases the mists away--blowing aside the threads from the wild, untamed region. His conflict is one which epitomizes Good versus Evil, light and the human life against the wild and unbearable darkness. The struggle is far more dramatic than, say, the consumer's 'struggle' to possess a sports car. But if a consumer today is not able to fulfill this dream, he is somehow less successful, less human maybe, than someone who has. By analogy, he is unable to take up residence in Heorot. His world is not quite expurgated to the point that he desires. Through his actions, Beowulf is able to bring back the light. By consuming (or destroying) Grendel, he brings back a human world--one that is strictly controlled. Likewise, the consumer with the sportscar dream, finds life to be, at least momentarily, brighter.

Not possessing a sports car hardly appears as a serious threat to one's life. But Grendel, too, initially was not a "threat." He was created as a threat:

This unhappy being  
had long lived in the land of monsters  
since the Creator cast them out  
as kindred of Cain. (p. 54)

He was thus "condemned to agony." Grendel is initially introduced as being resentful of light, because his life will not revolve around its joys:

It was with pain that the powerful spirit  
dwelling in darkness endured that time,

hearing daily the hall (Heorot) filled  
with loud amusement; there was the music of  
the harp;  
the clear song of the poet. (p. 53)

In this way Grendel is similar to Mary Shelley's Frankenstein monster, who initially tries to live in the human world, but is rejected on appearance alone. Likewise, until Grendel attacks Heorot it is his appearance in the surrounding woods which acts as the threat. One can further note how in the myth of Beowulf, Grendel's mother is shown to possess human emotions. (It is because she possesses these 'feminine' emotions--that is by being consumed by grief for the death of her son--that she is shown to be weak! The story thus symbolises that the male, Beowulf, is somehow superior because, no matter what, he is always in control of his emotions, rather than being controlled by them.) Analogously it is only in appearances that the consumer feels a threat.<sup>16</sup> The myths of Gilgamesh and Beowulf show that threats can be overcome. They keep alive the hope that if one tries, one can attain a position of mastery--of somehow being able to succeed as a human.

Gilgamesh and Beowulf show consumption operating in an heroic age--consumption manifested externally--where threats appeared only externally and were dealt with in the natural world. Threats were found in nature, and the

'natural' response was to expurgate them heroically. During the Enlightenment, however, consumption took on a more internal aspect. One did not achieve control over the natural world by solely opposing it physically, but rather by clarifying it through reason--ordering its wildness not primarily by setting up physical Heorots throughout the land, but through discovering its 'hidden secrets' and making them the basis of an intellectual Heorot. The likes of Grendel could be dealt with not by destroying his wildness physically, but by encapsulating it within a logical structure--as with adverse weather conditions, one need no longer be surprised by them, since, because one understands them, one is prepared for them and thus need not be affected by them. Philosophy was one aspect of this consumption, and it is to philosophy that I now want to turn in order to bear this out.

Superseding Christianity, philosophy took to heart one of the Bible's assumptions: through naming one was put in a position of control. In the Old Testament, God is identified by a group of unpronounceable consonants: "YHWH." He is never named, while man is given control over the world because he knows its names. For philosophy, if something can be named, wrapped up in a

concept, or described by a theory, then it has been controlled and can be forgotten.

Descartes was driven to find certainty. Without it he had no assurance that his life was not illusionary, that it might not at any moment disintegrate into chaos. If one feels as Descartes did, that one isn't sure that one exists, then one certainly 'needs' to consume this 'terrible' threat. By trying to bring the rigor of mathematical method to his thought, Descartes attempted to find at least one thing out of which would come a solid grounding from which to solve troubling intellectual conflicts. One would then be able to internalize this philosophy and thus destroy the chaos with which the "Evil Genius" is constantly threatening our lives.

All the facets of living surrounding us become merely things to be kept in order, encapsulated in intellectual rigor. Anything assaulting our minds too violently could be destroyed in the proverbial puff of logic. A philosophy seeking to destroy paradoxes might occasionally miss the point that these paradoxes might indeed be pointing to a fallacy in the philosopher's own logic. In just the same way the consumer might find ever more dangerous bugs developing in his yard in response to his ever increasingly more potent chemicals used to control them. With Descartes the need to seriously doubt his own

existence in order to prove it, might point to an obsession with being in control.

Let me turn to Hegel as another example of how philosophy can be seen as being consumptive. Like all rationalist philosophers, the idea of chaos was unthinkable to Hegel: the real is rational, and what is rational is real. Hegel could only understand the rationality of the world by seeing it as a struggle within Reason itself. Conflict would be overcome because conflict was the very nature of Reason. Chaos and conflicts are finally encapsulated at the end of Reason's march through history. The conflicts are merely a way for Reason to understand itself. At the culmination of history conflicts will be transcended, with Reason realising that they are not hostile to it, but rather are its parts. No matter what the cost, Reason has to discover that it ultimately is in control. In this way, Hegel's grand system sought to save our confused living by enveloping it in Reason. He attempted to control any possibility for chaos to ooze into life. Blinded by this need to control, he was later accused of leaving any idea of the single individual out of his system,<sup>17</sup> as well as, of playing his moves of logic purely in the realm of the mind and of thus overlooking real people living real lives.<sup>18</sup>

The idea that philosophers can be consumptives through their philosophies is simply this: When a philosophy seeks to wrap up an intellectual problem in reams of logic, it is concentrating purely on controlling, in a way analogous to the economic consumer who tries to wrap up the one he loves in expensive gifts--with the hope that she will not do anything against him in their affair. A fire might consume many things, but it has no role to play when it encounters a waterfall. One might attempt to understand many things, but a philosophy consumes when it merely attempts to wrap everything up neatly, so that it can be said to have finally been dealt with and thus never looked at again.

As a tool for consuming, philosophy remains as something for the intellect. The outside world is much more accessible--something solid where one can really see changes and progress through one's steady methodical steps to master it. With philosophy turning away from the world and toward reflection as a strategy of consumption, one's intellectual Heorots replaced the physical ones which the hero constructed and protected. The intellect only moves intellectual mountains. One's daily life still needs attention. As with the heroic age, consumption again becomes external. But since it has also now known



successful strategies through the intellect, it brings these strategies with it.

Through mass production methods science is able to provide affordable technologies for vast numbers of consumers to use. While once only a very limited number of rulers could enjoy the power to control their lives as they pleased, now a multitude of consumers takes it as a right--even Gilgamesh's problems with death may be becoming tractable either through cryogenics or the search for longevity drugs. As a consumer, even if one has a troubling intellectual dilemma, one needn't try to do philosophy's dance steps; one can simply go out and buy something as a way to push one's problem away and control it by forgetting about it. Where once magic was used to chase away the demons that crept around one's village, now we have the seemingly much more realistic response of technology. Just as magic, because of its hidden powers, was feared, so technology is becoming. As it becomes ever more complex, its workings are hidden from the majority. Science fiction writers, film producers and artists are portraying images of a technology that is turning on us--just as magic could once have. Through these images we perhaps hide our anxieties that our right to consume will be taken from us, as we become absorbed in the benefits of our consumer lifestyle.

Let me just turn back to etymology. "Consumere," it was noted, meant that a consumed individual was one who was absorbed in/by something. This is borne out in the Oxford English Dictionary where someone who is consumed, is someone who is "burning with zeal" for, or "occupied" by something, perhaps to the point of fanaticism. The fanatic is seen as someone who not only "burns with zeal" but as someone who has the potential to be burned up by that zeal. By being consumed by something, then, one runs the risk of "wasting one's substance." Such self-destruction is not limited to the fanatic who absorbs himself in various causes. One can be consumed by grief (or emotions generally) as well as by ideas and physical objects. With one's energy focused so narrowly, one is torn further away from what lies outside that focus. The very thing that guides one's fanaticism becomes the very thing that fuels the fire as one is burned up by zeal. By treating friends merely as things to be used and in this way controlled, one will soon have no friends. If one consumes friends for recognition or a shoulder to cry on and considers this the only way to treat them, one will not only have no more friends, but also, because one's life around people was centered on control, one will no longer have a life, because one no longer controls. It is apt that a wasting disease was thus given the name

"consumption." One wastes from within. The wasting is mainly associated with the destruction of one's lungs. If one is surrounded by pollution, the more one breathes the further one wastes. Each attempt at living thus beckons one's demise. Thus in being consumed, one's very self is apt to rot. If the consumer falls prey to fanaticism in seeking the life that he wants, he can be regarded as possessing a disease with the potential to destroy him. In the past, the only cure for "consumption" was to breathe the air in the mountains. It is perhaps necessary, given how I have thus far characterised consumption, that I should say what would not be considered consumptive.

From my characterization, consumption appears to be control. Seen in this way consumption might be thought to include far too many things. I have portrayed consumption as being in many disciplines and activities. By referring to too much, the word might become redundant--if everything is consumptive, why bother to name it? To this point, I simply want to reply that from the fact that "consumption" does appear to be very far-reaching, the conclusion that it is empty of meaning is not the only conclusion to be drawn. The other thing, which might be taken from this, is that consumption is far too prevalent--simply because someone lived in the Middle Ages, knowing only the governance of a monarch, does not imply that no

other political systems could exist, but merely that one's life at that time would have been bound around one's monarch. I will return to this point later in the essay and will thus at this moment offer no proof. I do, however, want to mention here what might not be considered a consumptive form of life.

Sometimes, what might appear to be a burden or a threat could simply be something that is foreign. If blinded by an attitude that seeks merely to control, one might learn no lessons from this encounter. If one succeeds in actually controlling this foreign thing, one's success might simply reinforce the attitude that the only level on which one can deal with this thing is to control it. Consider the Socratic lesson of not being too quick to encapsulate things in a definition. For whatever reason, Euthyphro is content to take his father to court on charges of impiety for killing a slave. After Socrates has dealt with all of Euthyphro's attempts at defining "piety," Euthyphro leaves the conversation angered and perhaps a little confused. His world, tidily summed-up at that moment under a crisp definition of "piety," is shaken. The conversation ends with the call for a definition of "piety" unanswered. But somehow one leaves the conversation feeling 'better for having had it.' Questioning may expose many facets of an idea, which a

crisp definition would have hidden. The questioning exposed many things from which one could learn. Controlling and dominating are simply not good responses to many things. One runs the risk of destroying oneself, if all that one thinks about is whether one is in control or not. It is obvious that in saying what consumption is not, one runs into problems. If the major constituent of consumption is an attitude--an obsessive need to control--it is hard to point to a concrete example, without having to flesh it out, without turning to a very elaborate description of a situation. But one can go part way to learning what lies outside a consumptive form of life by actually examining "consumption."

If a fire is burning fiercely, sometimes it is better to simply let it die down of its own accord--which it might slowly do. What to do afterwards is only a realistic thought for afterwards, since if the fire is really fierce, one can see very little but how fiercely it destroys--one can be unsure what it will engulf in its flames. In the time that one has, though, while waiting for it to die, one can learn something (not everything) about how it reached its present size and what factors fanned and directed it. This is a start toward resuming one's living after the fire has died down. One learns what to do after consumption by learning what kept it

burning and by seeing what is left after it has died down. I am thus in no position to give advice on what to do after consumption. One can, for example, be consumed by alcohol for many reasons. While each needs to be dealt with in its own way, understanding one's own problems will be informed by alcoholism generally. Understanding why one's problems are lulled by an alcoholic mist is in part to be dealt with by examining the moves which one makes to keep one's living deadened--by understanding why one's problems themselves are mostly forgotten when one drinks simply to stay drunk, knowing no other way with which to fill one's living.

It should be noted that my characterization of consumption is not an attempt to reduce all of modern life to one analysis. It does not attempt to subsume all psychological disorders to a desire for control, for example. Neither is it an analysis which is providing some statement about "human nature." There is also no claim being made as to the origins of consumption. What this analysis does try to implicitly achieve, though, is to bring together disciplines dealing with modern life, which at the moment appear separate. My underlying assumption is that it is consumption itself which keeps these disciplines isolated from one another, since, as I will try to show, separation is one of the facets of

living which consumption reproduces. It is not an attempt to subsume such disciplines under one approach for dealing with modern life, but is itself an attempt to ask these disciplines to flesh-out this particular skeletal analysis. Control takes many forms through use, waste and destruction, while each thing controlled is different in character. Control is certainly part of our strategy against nature, women and other cultures, for example. Understanding this connection might help to elaborate these specific instances of control, while further deepening our conception of control generally.

I want to proceed now by showing how consumption consumes us. I want to turn to an examination not only of how it reproduces itself, but of how it reinforces itself as the only ideology to which, it is made to appear, we must adhere. It shows itself as the only form of life under which we can appear to be human; without it there is no life.

## Chapter Two

### The Reproduction of Consumption

Consumption keeps itself going because it has created a circle of viciousness--the circle is both vicious and is moved by viciousness. It keeps us drunk on power and the toys that we get through the virtue of mastery. It simultaneously never allows us to sober up and to really look at what it is that supposedly threatens us. It keeps us absorbed in trinkets and sustains our zeal by the promise of more. Not only metaphorically does it light up darkness, but also physically. The consumer's life is framed by neon. Where there is no neon, no light, no "sale," there is no life. Life takes place in the lights of downtown, on the "strip" or under the fluorescent lights of an office. Further, the metaphor of the "Ivory Tower" is kept alive and shining. It is a place where the dark recesses of the mind need not be feared--where reason can dissipate the smoke screen that emotions and contradictions have thrown up. Living is framed within light, and the need to keep it there is reinforced; even a move into the country brings with it the installation of an outside



light. One consumes under neon and then takes the need for light wherever one goes.

Consumption reproduces itself in everyday images. The one who lives the most, has the broadest smile, the shapeliest body, the most influence, the most power, is the one who succeeds as a consumer. One lives high on life when one enjoys the "life-style of the rich and famous." The rags to riches story is very potent in the hands of consumption. Through advertisements and television images, one is shown what is possible if one "dares to succeed," if one understands that there is no substitute for victory. Whereas once only the meek would inherit the earth--only the meek would find the darkness of the world bearable with the promise of heaven--now you don't need to be meek (or weak); it is through consumer power that one inherits the earth. Christ brought light into the world; so when the Christian walked he did so with the light of the world by his side. The consumer today lights up the world by himself and rejoices in his ability to do so. Through television one is shown that as a consumer one can make one's dreams real and bring desires to life. Technology greatly enhances the potency of the promise, allowing the consumer to actually take into his own possession and control his own light source.

British imperialism brought civilization to the "savage," taking the light of order into the very "heart of darkness." It created the dream of development in the minds of the savage; it showed itself as an example of how human life was, if only everything in it were continually controlled to one's own specifications. Magic, for example, had to be abandoned in favour of a much more solid and thus controllable way of ordering the caprices of nature. It showed the savage not only how much more human its form of life was, but also pointed to how far from human the savage's life was; how poor in comparison to it the savage was for being unable or unwilling to control his life. We still use the lack of development, the position of poverty, as an example of people who are somehow not as successful at being human. If one does not possess an expensive car, one might be excused, but if one has no car at all, one is somehow nobody, maybe even undesirable and to be watched closely as a potential threat to consumerism. All hitchhikers appear as fair game for police scrutiny. There is nothing like British imperialism, though, to push along the development of the poor in the west. Instead, they must take their own initiative and acquire the tools which advertisements show consumerism as providing.

Consumption is a form of life which sells to us an image of ourselves and our environment. Pictured is an unencumbered, happy, carefree self within a brighter, civilized and more human world--one free of pressures and manipulations external to us, away from the hostile, overbearing world, against which the Hegelian "self-consciousness" struggles. It is a form of life which perpetuates itself through these images. In this section I will give examples of what these images are, showing how the consumer is absorbed by them. Through this, I will continue to draw an implicit picture of the (human) life represented by them. It should be noted that the interconnections between these images, though guided by an attitude of strict control over one's living, are not to be seen as being held together by any strict logical necessity. Many different examples could have been chosen, each with a slightly different structure. What is important to note through these examples is the subsumption into a way of life where control takes whatever guise it can.

The result of this analysis will be to show how the consumer becomes absorbed into consumption to such a degree, that it appears as the only form of life--that it is the only way in which to be human. In this section, though, I will only deal with part of this process of

absorption. Here, I simply will describe some of the tools employed by consumption as it sets out the parameters within which human life is to be lived. I will show how the idea of control presents itself, leaving aside for the moment the connected question: "Why?"

Television and the media do more than show us what we can be if only we want to. They point to the results of individuals not wanting to consume or for being inept at consuming. It isn't just the rich and famous who are shown on television. Programs further portray poverty and misery (the really 'dark' sides of life). It is perhaps significant that around Christmas, news shows are suddenly deluged by stories of the homeless and lonely. These are then interspersed with advertisements of things soon to be on sale. With this media coverage in view during the holiday celebrations, the family can give thanks to their successes for not being in such a situation and be grateful that their power as consumers is great enough to purchase the television on which these images appear. They are then shown the items which might help them keep loneliness, say, at bay. Whether it's in the form of new clothes or a large, top-of-the-line, hot tub, one is shown things with the potential of attracting others around one. Beware, without consuming one will be 'dead,' just as those poorer

than oneself appear to be. One cannot afford to be inept or to fail, as a consumer. No matter how much one has, one is poor as long as one does not have more. If one is poor, it is made to appear that one did not create chances for oneself. It is rarely that the chances just did not exist. No matter whether the "poverty" is taken to mean not having a double garage or running low on one's supply of alcohol, if one does not keep ahead of it, as a consumer, one will be consumed by its burdens--one's extra car will rust in the street, or people might not attend or enjoy one's parties. In this way poverty serves as a good example to be used as a spur for the consumer to keep up his activity. It reproduces in one the need to consume and thus to avoid the disabilities of poverty. The poor--regardless of the level of that poverty--have become weapons against themselves.

Pushed from below by these images of poverty, the consumer is pulled from above by the portrayals of a "better" life, surrounded by riches. Whether it is in the form of "Dallas" or Donald Trump, these images draw the consumer toward them, in a way analogous to Aristotle's Prime Mover--serving as an example for everything to reach its state of 'perfection.' The images of politicians, movie stars or bankers revelling in the life of ease, lure

the oppressed to see a life of consuming and constantly controlling, as the only life to enter.

The lure of consumerism does not operate simply on those who can already be viewed as successful consumers. The potency of the images of poverty and plenty infects the minds of gangs, thieves and drug lords. Robberies, muggings and intimidations are carried out not for their own sake, but rather for the images which talk of a way out of the very visible poverty surrounding gangs. It is striking to note that gangs compete not for "bare essentials," but for the latest fashions in sneakers, jackets and boom-boxes. Being human is not the act of simple survival, but rather survival as an image which surrounds one. Certainly drug lords do not ply their trade in order to cause death, but to some day live the life enjoyed by J. R. Ewing. Crime becomes merely a way of appropriating what otherwise may not be possible, of buying into the images that make one human, civilized. Criminal life paradoxically becomes the means of escaping the darkness of criminality, as criminality becomes another tool for consumption, serving not only as an example for what might happen if one fails as a consumer, but also as the threat of lawlessness to the "honest" consumer. One needs to be protected if one intends to continue to surround oneself with control. Even gang members enter the

gun market and buy into the array of security devices, in order to protect themselves from the "darker elements" of society.

The images in the media are a general announcement of the basis to (human) life. They operate in all areas of society, setting up parameters for where life flourishes and does not flourish. The poor and criminals--nouns that sometimes are used in the same breath--are represented as burdened lives from which to escape. The distinction between poverty and plenty is blurred by the images, though, since there always appears to exist an image of some new form of a controlled life. The images, though pointing to specific burdens to be overcome--loneliness, immobility, wrong hair colour, inappropriate fashions, etc.--indicate more generally the benefits to be had, the more tools of control that one has. And the more one has, the more attractive, more respected one is--the better one is.

Poverty and lawlessness are physical statements of criticism of the individual in these states--pointing both to his failure and the image of failure within consumption generally. Through its moralising against such failure and its efforts to control it, consumption is able to reproduce itself. But consumption also receives more general criticism aimed at the state of affairs it brings out. Through such criticism it is further enabled to perpetuate

itself by assimilating these threats into its own scheme--damning the critic as challenging the consumer's civilized and human life.

Those who rebel are portrayed by the media as threats to the consumer way of life; their protests are unambiguously seen as attempts to destroy (or consume) what the consumer has worked hard to achieve. Strikers appear to be rebelling against the pay or conditions under which they work--suggesting unfairness within this way of life. But their striking becomes a threat to consumers. The striking worker is no longer someone to share solidarity with, but rather as someone who through "greed," is threatening to destroy one's life. If teachers strike, they are a threat to the pupil's education (an inviolable right); if nurses strike they threaten patients' lives; if air-controllers strike they threaten safe skies; and if energy workers strike, they really do threaten to remove light from one's very home. Strikers' livelihoods are threatened, they are threatened as consumers, yet eventually their acts themselves are made to appear as a threat to the very thing that bred them. Consumption needs to keep a strict control over strikers' demands in order to consume the potential threats which they pose, otherwise they might continue to want more and thus reactivate their threat to strike again. Strikers are thus assimilated by



consumption under the category of burden or threat, marking strikers not only as a threat to our lives, but also as a state of affairs to be avoided at all costs (as poverty is)-  
-"make sure you get yourself a better job."

Strikers are not questioning the whole enterprise of consumption; they are merely asking for a redistribution of its benefits. The "radical" views of environmentalists and feminists differ qualitatively from the threats of strikers in that they are attacking the whole enterprise of control. If feminism is pushed to the point of questioning a man's right to control and the idea of control generally, like the striker or the criminal, the view is seen as a threat to what appears as the human life. The rise of feminist ideologies in the 70's and 80's was accompanied not only by the further entrenchment of those at the top of the consumer ladder but also by a reaction from women, for whom counter images of the likes of Mrs. Thatcher, for example, kept alive the idea of control as the only means to achieving a better life. Likewise, it appears hard for environmentalists to level serious attacks on the timber industry, where, without clear-cuts, we are threatened by a life where we will have to "wipe our asses on a spotted owl," where soft toilet paper will become a thing of the past and our existence without it will be somehow less than human. The control and domination of nature, like the

attempted control of women and people in society generally, is implicitly made to appear as a necessity for maintaining a human life. As long as such critical views are shown to be a threat to this way of life, I am justified in reacting as one quite naturally does to a threat--destroy it, rape it, until changed by my actions, it appears no longer hostile. In a paradoxical way, the consumptive best knows the consumptive attitude, and by labelling the critical attitude as a consumptive one, one understands that it is bound to be destructive. As a consumer I have a right to be in control of my own life; whatever I do therefore, right is on my side. There is no logic but the logic of destruction, when consumption is attacked.

Consumption helps the consumer to consume some threats by being bigger than the individual. It provides security through the strength of numbers. The individual, by giving himself over to the enterprise of consumption, joins with others doing likewise. Through it, he has more power to protect his own life--whether against criminals or opposing ideologies. In a Hobbsean way, the consumer gives himself over to the great Leviathan of consumption<sup>19</sup> in order to assure himself of greater security and power. He gives himself over in order to live a human life as opposed to existing in a state where he is in conflict with everyone around him. Further, by being engrossed in something

bigger than himself, he can forget any personal worries that are proving painful.

Criticism about and within consumption, also holds the possibility of prompting us to see the puzzling contradictions within this "human" life. Not only are thoughts prompted by criticism though, because of some of the physical burdens which the items on the consumer market free us from, we are also exposed to reflection. Anxieties about one's looks, one's person, contradictions within one's emotions and the crippling effect of stress, can cloud one's mind at the very moment that one feels a greater sense of control in the physical world. But just as the media provided the images through which that control was possible, so it now provides images through which one can again achieve control over what appears as a self in conflict.

The soul's conflicts can be controlled by an individual's absorption into pleasure and laughter. There are many things to buy and many places to go, and each might provide a momentary consumption of what ails one. One is allowed the blessing of forgetfulness--as a tactic of control--through objects and material things. With the rise of technological power, there has been an increase in the number of ways and things which present themselves as dreams of forgetfulness. Not only are exotic vacations

easier to reach, but one can also attend a concert of Mozart's "Requiem," played by the New York, London, or Berlin symphonies at any time one wishes in the comfort of one's own home. One can visit beauticians or watch any one of at least a hundred different television channels; or one can simply envelope oneself in work with the added promise of treating oneself once one has worked enough. As a counteractive force against the burden of a dark soul, the consumptive can turn a mood of despair to one of gaiety. Efforts, in defiance of darkness, turn toward pleasure, as, through the lure of well-stocked shelves, pleasure becomes a "...highly valued means of combatting depression...that is easily attainable and can be made into a regular event."<sup>20</sup> With the wide expanse of pleasures being advertised in front of us, the defiant stance toward our darker moods appears sustainable. With all these pleasures arrayed in our sight, it is difficult to see how despair could not be omitted from one's vision; if one laugh dies, there are still plenty of things present that one can laugh at. Dealing with threats by consuming them in this way, reinforces itself, since in a consumer society the advertisements show no end in sight of the objects that will help us. As soon as one begins laughing, it is hard to see how the laughter cannot become infectious.

Through laughter we can control our soul's conflicts, perpetuating the life of leisure, while leisure indicates a life free from the burdens of the physical world. Through accepting the appeal to leisure, one can become pure desire. The body no longer dictates need; the eyes give them to it. The successful consumer no longer worries about whether he will be fed and how much it costs, but whether it will be Thai or French cuisine. One needs what one sees and sees what is needed to satiate that desire. Even the body itself is moving from being physical to being merely an image, serving as a thing to be desired, through which one might alleviate the pain of loneliness. It has become a thing through which one can control the satisfaction and fulfillment of the desires of others and, through this, one's own. By becoming pure desire, one distorts the threats one faces and separates oneself from the natural world.

In trying to satisfy our desires we have altered many things. Outdoor leisure activities remove one from the natural world. "Nature," as a resource for pleasure, must be kept under control for that enjoyment to be safe. In this way "nature" is interacted with only as an indentured satisfier of our pleasures. Any idea of nature existing as anything but a resource of some sort, appears unimaginable. It is controlled to the point where there is

nothing wild left to threaten us as we begin our adventures. It has become a safe simulation.

Through our leisure time, we have shown ourselves to be removed from the physical burdens of living, as well as the idea of living outside consumption--which begins to appear as the only existence while one is operating within its own logic. In work also we are moving away from the physical, natural world. Our society is being fashioned around services.

In the West there is a slide away from primary production, reducing its present work force to lower paying service jobs while training those now entering the work force to expect less physically stressful jobs. No longer is the image of the Hegelian "Slave Consciousness," working on a hostile world for his master, appropriate. Workers in the West merely manipulate what others have produced or extracted from the earth. Capitalism has transformed itself from the times that Marx described a physical worker producing a physical object which he could not afford. "No longer, as in early capitalism, is his work merely alienated in the seizure, by capital, of the object he creates, he himself, is no longer an individual worker: he produces nothing merely supervises what the machine produces." <sup>21</sup> That is, he produces nothing physically, but merely stands behind the production of consumer images.

Finding his life enacted within service industries, within high technology, the worker in the West appears to actually produce nothing himself--we buy pullovers from Peru, oil from the Middle East and American cars from Mexico, while all that our banker does is to tell us that, according to the bank's computer, we can afford them. The perpetuation of consumption is made easier because the production worker merely supervises the robot; an office is run through fax machines and computers, the worker is there to make sure that the paperwork is kept straight; through stocks and shares, the stockbroker merely analyzes on paper what is actually produced, while the "silent" stockholders play the market simply seeing money produced--their lives being completely removed from the actual production of the product. Consumption, through technology, is realizing a perversion of the Marxist dream to "liberate" the worker by making the work less physically demanding. For the worker then, technology is seemingly taking away the physical burden of working. By supervising the machine, the worker oversees the reproduction of consumption--the machine producing the very thing which the advertisers then tell us is ours by virtue of our inalienable rights as a consumer. In this way, the worker is supervising and maintaining the reproduction of consumption and himself as a consumer. He is both maintaining the production of the items which he

will consume and also showing through the work itself how physically easy life can be made. He participates in and propagates the idea that life will not be burdensome.

Universities now produce students who "are the agents of a consumer capitalism" and who are "themselves the symptom of the development away from the primary production to incessant reproduction and, a part of the same process to consumption."<sup>22</sup> So the demand for business graduates grows and with it, the university's push to produce them. Education is now gearing itself to put out the "guardians of the process of production, surveyors of that production's reproduction."<sup>23</sup> Students are being trained to become lawyers, advertisers, bankers and stock brokers, all aware of how to interface with the world with figures and computers.

Universities are not only producing people to control machines, run offices and thus to reproduce consumption, but, further, they are producing graduates to reproduce the ideology itself. They serve "not just to produce the right economic workers, but to train personnel for the maintenance of the ideological structure itself."<sup>24</sup> Passing at any cost is seemingly more important than the subject one passes. One's education prepares one for consumption, and the only question in need of being



answered by the student is which job will best provide consumptive success.

Even the professors indirectly can be seen as teaching success at any cost. The focus of universities is on research and thus away from teaching. Lower division classes are given to teaching assistants and poorly paid adjuncts to the regular staff. Each sees in the faculty members individuals, who, through their successes in research, have liberated for themselves enough time that they are actually able to do what they want to do. While the students, for whom contact with the regular faculty is initially rare, see only teachers who would rather not be bound by the "chore" of teaching. They see only people who, through their successful research projects, can demand higher salaries, grants for further research and less time spent with students. As long as when you leave your education behind, you have succeeded in understanding the benefits that success will bring, that your success as a consumer--your success in creating your own life--is dependent on your efforts alone, you "will" succeed in controlling, dominating and destroying whatever appears to infringe on your well-being.

The consumer in his workplace is being taught to supervise the production of his own images. The views of poverty and plenty are being upheld through the production

in this new workplace as well as through the images of pleasant leisure times. The advertising people circulate the images, while the businessmen act out and reproduce in reality what is given by the images. In this process of reproduction, its critics serve merely to speed it up as the consumptive discovers newer threats to consume, a "better" life to build and alternative pleasures to soothe the harassment from his emotions. Above all, what is being reproduced is the circularity of the reproduction. Consumption is reproducing itself as a continued simulation.

Regardless of the job entered, consumption has in every way prepared the consumer to seek success. As long as success is one's dream, consumption asks for nothing else, since "the system no longer needs universal productivity; it requires only that everyone play the game."<sup>25</sup> Even unemployment and poverty are unimportant as long as those in such situations hold onto the consumptive dream. By believing in consumption's dream, the consumer is an accomplice to the way that the ideological structure "maintains" itself. Consumption has moved us away from the "natural" world, by showing us that we need no longer deal with it on a primary level. Consumption in the Western world now has its own dream played out in a 'natural' world of its own creation--one finds oneself removed from the

hostile world where one might always feel the glance of the other staring at us through the trees. Consumption is left to reproduce itself in the symbols (images) it has created and is creating. All that is left for the consumer to do is to keep himself familiarized with the new symbols and appearances the game of control is reproducing.

The alcoholic may have turned to alcohol initially as a response to some unfortunate or threatening situation--whether because of a disastrous love affair, the death of someone close, or whatever. Once his alcoholism has a grip on him, he continues to drink, having forgotten why he began. It has become his only way of life; he cannot conceive of living without it--or if he does, the idea of an alternative seems to point to no possibilities. So it is with the consumptive; the actual sight of a threat is replaced by its mere appearance. Once one is no longer suffering from malnutrition and hunger, one grows fat through gluttony, with the promise in one's mind that one will never be hungry again. Everything seems to turn on symbols and appearances:

...the signified and the referent are now abolished to the sole profit of the play of signifiers, of a generalized formalization in which the code no longer refers back to any subjective or objective "reality," but to its own logic. The signifier becomes its own referent and the use value of the sign

disappears to the benefit of its commutation and exchange value alone. The sign no longer designates anything at all.<sup>26</sup>

With the belief that consumption can alleviate his burdens, the only questions which the consumer must face are which of its methods are to be utilized. The questions are now answered by referring to the logic which it has set up--by simply manipulating the "signs" which consumption produces and reproduces over the implicit backdrop of control. Living within the consumptive framework, the consumer deals with consumptive signs at their face value. Consumer images are no longer signs of anything except themselves. The image of a certain fashion does not represent beauty; It is beauty. In the same way, a beautiful person does not represent beauty, but rather he himself is beautiful. Questions regarding the semantics of the signs are no longer even viable questions. Such questions would be akin to asking what a tree "represents," to which the only possible answer is: itself. A simulation is a model which works through its own dynamics with reference to nothing else, to no original. Within consumption, one simply has an 'honest' concern for manipulating its images in an appropriate manner, "exchanging" them in response to the appearance of a threat. Just as a zealotry in "expurgation" can become a perverted form of prudery, with

the expurgator blindly concerned with throwing out any suggestion of vulgarities everywhere, so the consumer can become blinded by his power to control threats, even though he no longer knows what a "real" threat is.

The individual now registers his consumption from within a habituated self. He is habituated by his dream of control, while successes toward this end drive the habituation. If one's previous consumptions have succeeded, then one need not consider any other response in the future. The consumer turns away from the appearance of threats. Within this atmosphere of conflict, the consumer is beset by tongues which whisper of unsatisfied desires and unquenched cravings. The miserable and malicious tones of the voices never reassure, since within darkness life is quite rightly undesirable and remains so. Consumerism has become a way of life, indeed the only way of life. It has become a "new" reality, and as a simulation, appears as the only reality since it is providing referents of nothing but itself. The ability to control infects one's life, until the need to control is no longer a point to be questioned but rather is the only method through which one perceives one's environment. By any normal understanding of the idea of "threats", the consumer can thus be seen as making the only possible response. But his responses are given too easily.

If one is absorbed by or fanatical about something, by implication one might be said to have lost any power of critical reflection which is not blinkered by the thing which absorbs one. If one is consumed by grief or sorrow, one is said to be "unable to think straight." Since I am absorbed in the appearance of threats and my control of them, I myself must become an appearance of self. I cannot deal with the world as signs without myself becoming a sign. Any existentialist idea of self-consciousness (in this world) therefore becomes another aspect of the postmodern fiction. If the "self" is defined by its relation to another, I must thus be defined by the signs, and, as a result, by the game. As a consumer, I have, therefore, become nothing more than a simple show of self. If I don't play the game (or cannot) since it surrounds me, I must be dead. Critical reflection on society appears to expose one only to alienation and later drunken melancholia, if not suicide. This is hardly surprising, since, while reflecting, I am not involved and therefore am not defined as a self. Away from any form of self-reflection which is now only the appearance of reflection, and by being at least partially in control of his world, the consumer manifests indifference toward anything which might surround him. The consumer cannot conceive of life outside consumption.

If there were no threats, this absorption in control would fizzle. I want to show, then, that consumption further reproduces itself by reproducing conflicts; that it perpetuates the myth of control and domination by reproducing the appearance of "dark things" to control. Before turning to this, though, I want to examine the self which seems to be mere "appearance." The consumer would deny the allegation that he is mere show. One does appear to have the power of self-reflection and, with it, self-consciousness. The idea that one must control threats--- which appear in front of one--or otherwise one is somehow not alive, is to be found in the idea of self-consciousness that underlies our thought. By understanding what this "appearance" of self-consciousness is, it will become clearer why threats must be created and fought; why, without playing this game, one becomes somehow less than human. It will become clearer why it is not possible for the consumer to critically reflect on the ingrained patterns of thought which are aimed at control and through which he faces something foreign.

## Chapter Three

### The "Hidden" Attraction of Consumptive Images

In part, consumption has moved away from the natural world. We no longer deal with it on a primary level. It has seemingly become Baudrillard's simulated world operating only through its own signs and appearances without recourse to any external referent. We ourselves have thus become a part of that simulation. But have we dealt with anything but a simulation? Has there ever been a referent which was not itself merely a sign?

"Nature" has never been anything but a threat for the consumptive tradition. It threatened to keep people hungry; it threatened to unleash natural disasters; it held the threat of demons at night; it held the threat of the wild, of the glance of the other. It was something man could test himself against as a "hero" or as a Christian. Unraveling it, the scientist took its (dark) secrets; analyzing it, the philosopher produced rationality from the chaos. Consider death. We say that in consumerism, death is no longer faced. The old are put into homes, and death



has turned into extravagant theater through television. Death is now something that exists on television. Rambo "blows away" many enemies who are overlooked, since they are merely a side show to his "mission." What is removed by Rambo's mission is brought back to us by the reporter who is always "on the scene." Where once a reporter would report tragedy from a distance, keeping away from the grief in the immediate area, reporters now stand right in the middle of the scene--we are shown grief very graphically. Why? Have we forgotten about grief? Does television provide us with the only place where we can "really" remember it? How much does this differ from the past? What is this "authentic" death which has been superseded by a sign?

The Lords of the past certainly tried to keep it at arms length. When Gilgamesh found himself close to old age, he didn't just resign himself to his fate. How could he, when his mastery in the world was made pointless by the fact that he couldn't master his own death? First he sought the advice of Utnapistition, who, at the time, spoke seemingly pointless words: "There is no permanence." Later, he found a "healing plant." Even that couldn't hide death from him--unluckily for him, he didn't have a television to turn to. Consider further, how for the Norse heroes, death (in battle) meant that one could converse

with the greats who inhabited Valhala. Fear of death was not only kept at arms length, but was consumed by the dream of immortality through an afterlife. This attitude was similar to the Christian's attitude. Death was easy to bear for the martyrs of the Church, since it was merely a transitory stage to a better life. There was the promise of "permanence." Without the hope of an afterlife, without the idea that Good would eventually win out over chaos and darkness, living would have been unbearable and dying would be the final laugh that life had. How could living be anything else for those subjugated and oppressed? The claim here is nothing more than what might be considered a very simplistic fact: Man tries to make the world habitable, and in doing so he creates. What the world is "really" like is unimportant at the moment. Individuals create by responding to needs or to threats. Only by consuming, by responding to threats, does consumption make it appear that we are living. Consumption, as the only way to live, shows that the only way one can be human is by overcoming conflicts.

A consumptive will never say that he is "unaware of himself"; that he is not "conscious" of himself; that he is not "self-consciousness." The question that should be asked, then, is what is meant by "self-consciousness" here? The consumptive self-consciousness is alive only to

the degree that it sees itself faced either by threats or threats overcome. Advertisers make it aware of the objects necessary to fulfill its "human potential" and, in doing so, simultaneously point to what appears as a less than human life without.

It is through overcoming threats, by destroying, oppressing, imprisoning and manipulating that we feel ourselves to be human; that is, we are human only when we are exercising our consumptive virtue of mastery. One is "alive," for example, when one challenges the wilderness--merely walking through it, "treading lightly," and not disturbing it appears somehow lifeless compared with defending oneself from the threat of grizzlies. Note that the more of a consumer one is, that is, the more that one has or has power to possess, the greater one's stature in the lived, human world. The validation that one receives as a human--that is, as a consumptive--appears to grow proportionately to the magnitude of the threat which is mastered; thus the potency of the rags to riches story. If the idea of "self-consciousness" is thus to have meaning for the consumer, it will need to be as a conflict.

In this chapter I will show the other part of our absorption into the images which consumption gives to us. I will complete the circularity of consumption by showing what lies behind the absorption--drawing full circle the

use of control as the only strategy to living through the continued need to continue. This I will do in two parts: firstly, showing that the strategy to control, which has led the consumer away from dealing with the world on a primary level, points to a self that not only finds itself in conflict with its surroundings, but which itself is a conflict; and secondly, that to maintain itself as such its continuance in the strategy of control is perpetuated because of the continued reproduction of threats.

i) Self-Consciousness as Conflict

I will begin by pointing to the basis in western thought of the idea that the self is nothing but a conflict. To this end, I turn to two of the major philosophers who have affected our century--Karl Marx and Soren Kierkegaard--indicating further, their philosophical roots. Through this foray into philosophical thought I hope to make clear the dialectics of this conflict, before showing how this idea instantiates itself in the consumptive way of life.

One is said to have "self-consciousness" when one can see and reflect upon one's self interacting with an environment. The consumer's environment is filled with threats. There are many things from which he appears

alienated. With the many things and abilities which the consumer market presents to the consumer, he is given many opportunities to form paranoias. If one cannot afford the latest fashions, one runs the risk of being unattractive to other consumers; one runs the risk of despair through finding only unrequited love and loneliness, by being seen as "unfashionable", undesirable and, therefore, "ugly." If one is already successful as a consumer, one has already freed time in which one can reflect on these paranoias, to reflect on conflicts that are now 'intimately' his conflicts which he has taken 'into' himself. Little wonder, then, that the Marxist sees only the wallowings of a spoilt capitalist in existentialist writings and thoughts.

The Marxist accuses the existentialist of floating away from the actual, concrete, material world. It is not surprising that the existentialist feels "alienation" and becomes nothing but a bundle of paranoias, when the context that he inhabits is itself "alienating."<sup>27</sup> In this light, the existentialist is merely an outpouring of this external alienation which has been internalized.

The individual described by Kierkegaard is certainly alienated both from the world and from himself. When the individual looks at himself he sees only threats inside: dread, despair and guilt. This is hardly surprising,

however. Kierkegaard's initial move is to say that the individual is a conflict.<sup>28</sup> The notion of "spirit," that is, of the human, is, for Kierkegaard, nothing more than the idea of a battle ground on which the conflicting notions of the self come together; what is possible, against what occurs in actuality; what one desires, against what one has; the unrestricted freedom one yearns for, against what one has; the unrestrained freedom one yearns for, against the fear one sees when close to it.

Kierkegaard's "leap of faith" acts to simultaneously take one back to the innocence which one enjoyed before one's reflections opened up the spirit and thus the "abyss"--before one's thoughts became uncontrollably dark--while also knowing that the 'innocence' to which one leaps has been, and still is, informed by dread; that one's innocence is now matured by the fact that one has plunged one's soul into dread, knowing that one will never be without it. If Marxist criticism is pushed, one will need to say that one leaps to and re-engages with the very life which bred the confusions initially. Kierkegaard confirms this by realizing that he will always be living, as Lowry's consul does, "such that wherever he turns the abyss is always waiting."<sup>29</sup> Of course the individual cannot leap the abyss, since he himself is the abyss. Whatever leap he makes must result, as it does, with the abyss still there.

Since the "spirit" is a conflict, its own existence is confirmed in every conflict, Initially then, for Kierkegaard, one is human only when one is in conflict, in tension, being threatened. One can never win, since at the point that one did, one would become less than human. No matter how absurd it may seem, Sisyphus continues to push his rock, showing, for Camus, that the only 'nobility' of which the human is capable, is in persevering with the absurd task of constantly overcoming the 'control' that gravity has over the rock. One notes also how for Sartre the human is a conflict. Human consciousness stands in opposition to the physical world. It bridges the theoretic world of possibility to the actual world of possibility. Like Kierkegaard's "spirit," the Sartrean human is made real when he confirms this tension by acting, apart from habit, consciously, in the face of the world.

What about Marxism? It is only in the communist state that man is allowed to be what he is: a "species being." By becoming "liberated labor," the worker no longer creates a world which looms above him--in which he is not at home--rather, the world becomes his--what he creates is not taken from him. Initially, he struggled against and transformed nature for his master--he created a world for the 'capitalist.' The hostile environment in nature is superseded by a hostile capitalist world. Now he

transforms the world for himself: he makes of it a human world. This becomes an acknowledgment of his "species being." The worker shapes the world, while the world, which is crafted by the worker's transformation of it, simultaneously shapes the worker. One realizes himself to be a member of the species through such activity, and such activity confirms his membership. The "liberated worker" thus struggles against the world in order to create a livable world, and by doing so, he creates and validates himself. He objectifies his existence through the object of his labor, by seeing in the object a creation of his species life--and thus an objectification of it. He sees himself as a dignified human in a world which, through its creation, provides the atmosphere for a dignified life. By making it a better place for himself to live, he makes himself a better life as a human.

For the Marxist the worker struggles against the 'natural world' in order to create a human world. Through technology, Marx hoped that the worker could finally liberate, and thus distance, himself from the 'untamed' world. The worker could now engage with the world as befits a member of a noble species, as a man at leisure, as someone constantly on vacation in a world which he controls. The world transformed by the "liberated worker" would become one which machines make for him as his home.



Through technology, then, the worker is taken away from 'raw nature.' In this way, can the "liberated worker" be seen merely as a consumptive under a different guise? Is he no more than Kierkegaard's human, thriving only because he overcomes hostilities--specifically in the form of an untamed and threatening natural world? Recall that the worker confirms his humanity, his membership in the species, by seeing his transformation of the world into one for the human species.

I'm not sure that these questions really need an extensive answer. By raising them, however, I want to pose the possibility of connecting some of philosophy's ideas, of what it is to live as a human, to consumption. Philosophy does describe the world. In this way its descriptions should be placed within the historical perspective underlying our world. By creating a bridge between certain philosophies and consumption, I want to make clear why consumption is a way of life which is not only predicated on controlling conflicts, but which makes it appear that one can only be human through this control. Through these philosophies, I want to exemplify what it is that this consumptive self appears as; that by dealing with the world as a place of conflict, the self is acting out its own conflicts. Thus, every time that it does respond to conflicts, it verifies its own apparent nature. By

beginning in certain philosophies, though, I not only want to show why it is that a self that is no longer in conflict no longer feels itself human--that it is no longer confirming its apparent nature--but also want to reinforce the claim that consumption is more than purely economic, that consumptive behavior is something which has deeper roots historically. Before dealing with the assertion that the consumer self is conflictual, I want to show how both Marxism and existentialism are rooted in Hegel in order to further ground the assertion that the self is a conflict.

Marxism takes the Hegelian dialectic and "stands it on its head." Marx externalized Hegel and made him concrete in the material world. The notion of a nebulous "Geist" struggling against itself, in order to validate itself and again become whole, is made concrete by Marx as soon as he takes Hegel's intellectual flights and puts them into the very real struggle between classes. Kierkegaard on the other hand, though he also found Hegel's system too removed from the concrete, found it removed not from the concreteness of societal relations, but rather from the 'real' sufferings of the human soul. So, while Marx externalized Hegel and put him into society's conflicts, Kierkegaard internalized Hegel and put him into the struggles within the individual.

It is clear in Hegel that "alienation" is part of "spirit's," and thus man's, nature:

Hegel is quite explicit that there is no room for the experience of estrangement in the act whereby the self externalizes itself in the world of objects. It is the very nature of consciousness to act to externalize itself in deed or work.<sup>30</sup>

It is not Hegel's "master" who moves history forward, but rather the "slave consciousness." The master has nothing to test himself against, nothing to give him validation or recognition. Recognition from the slave is laughable--see how the greatest compliments which we get come from people whom we look up to (our 'teachers') rather than from people whom we view as knowing less on a subject than we do. Further, the master no longer faces a threatening world, since the slave is transforming it into the one in which his master lives--where he is insulated from the hostile world. Hegel calls man's essential nature his negative-being-for-itself; quite simply the human described by Hegel is, by nature, someone who acts, someone who "externalizes" himself in the world. When one sees the effects that those acts have produced, one feels one's actions, and thus oneself, to have been validated or recognized. It is the slave, then, who continues history's progress, because it is the slave who continues to have to act against a world which appears hostile and threatening. The environment is a

threat, as is his master who takes away the very thing the slave has produced, the very thing in which the slave has placed himself. In every action, then, the slave is showing himself to be human. His struggles with the world and its inhabitants will always continue, since, for Hegel, there are two sides to the human: "being-for-itself," and "being-in-itself,"--how one is seen by the world and how one sees oneself. The end of world history, for Hegel, does not end this struggle as such; one simply realizes that the struggle is intimately one's own. The struggle is transcended because it becomes a fully realized idea in society's, the individual's, and Absolute spirit's mind. There are and always will be conflicts; those conflicts are one's own, because one confirms oneself as a human only when one is acting; one reproduces and validates oneself as a human when one's actions transform an environment hostile to one into one in which one has invested oneself. The more one can transform and change the threatening environment into a human one, the more human one becomes. In the extreme, one becomes the 'most human' when one changes a thing seeming most intractable to change. Why does one feel a greater sense of achievement if one changes the opinions of someone who is threateningly opposed to one, whose opinions are the exact opposite of one's own? Just as Kierkegaard's "leap of faith" is not really a leap

away from the horrors of the abyss, but rather a continuance of life in relation to it, given the structure of the Hegelian individual, a transcendence of alienation--felt through the act of externalizing--becomes an acceptance of it as one's own when one realizes that it is one's very nature to externalize oneself. Spirit continues its life only because of this alienation.

In each of the philosophies mentioned, the idea of being human is predicated on a self that is in conflict with itself. When the self is not dealing with conflicts, it is not validating or mirroring itself. In this light, it cannot see itself as human. One person whom I failed to mention in connection with Marx, was Adorno. His brand of Marxism is interesting in that he rejects the idea that communism is the final state of history. Any dialectic, for Adorno, will never end; indeed we should be pleased that it doesn't. Antithesis will always appear and oppose thesis.<sup>31</sup> I realize that I appear to be using loaded language, and in this seem to be rallying against all conflict. Such a conception should be avoided. The only conflict which concerns me, however, is the kind where one sees oneself opposing a threat to one's life as a consumptive. With the self appearing as a conflict, one must consume threats which appear, in order to continue a human life. It does not matter that one knows what the

threat is, just that there is a threat opposing one. Before going on to show that consumption creates threats (or at least their appearance) and through this reproduces the consumer, I want to spell out how the consumer self is akin to the human described in the philosophies above--that he appears as nothing more than a conflict.

For whatever reason, there is a conflictual way of life where all that matters is that one consumes (threats) in order to create a comfortable life, replete with cars, books, large house and a new pair of shoes for every day of the year. But if a system is alienating, how can this alienation not be internalized? Certainly when the consumer frees time from physical burdens, that time can open up reflection--only the well-off have time to think about themselves; the poor or oppressed can only continue to struggle. One can only think about what one knows or sees. What the consumer sees is an environment with which he is in conflict. His thought then must be conflictual--centered on controlling threats. If these are threats that one cannot or is not controlling, one's thoughts are on that. But such thoughts are themselves a burden, nuisance or threat, since one's mental state infects one's concrete interactions with the environment. One runs the 'risk' of living in a cloud of despair and thus needs to blot out the misery. In this way the self, itself, is a conflict.

(Note: It is irrelevant whether the self becomes a conflict because of a conflictual environment or whether because it is so that environment becomes conflicted.)

Now, if the self is a conflict, the environment becomes a place where one can consume those conflicts in a 'real' way. Consumption of these conflicts is simultaneously an acknowledgment or recognition of them. And since the conflicts have been internalized through reflection on them, it is an acknowledgment of one's self. With this in mind, it is little wonder that when one questions consumption, stops consuming or is unsuccessful as a consumer, one is seen as either crazy or else not fulfilling one's 'potential' as a human. With living as a human self predicated on controlling threats, not to consume amounts to not being alive. In this light, the tragedy of Lowry's consul is understandable. This final death becomes an acknowledgment of his death within the British empire. With this in mind, his partial acceptance that the last time he drinks mescal will be his last, becomes comprehensible.<sup>32</sup>

The desires which we feel as consumers are apt to plague our sense of control and comfort if they are not satisfied. Desires can thus be seen to exemplify the appearance of a self in conflict. The consumer market advertises many things which whet our appetite. It

introduces us to the many potentials we have as humans. If, because of our economic conditions, we cannot realize those desires, the desires are left to haunt us. By not realizing them, we are failing as humans. If I cannot afford the car that I want, I feel myself to be less worthy than someone who possesses it. Whether I simply want the thrill of speed from a red Porsche or want the Porsche as a tool with which to attract others, without it I appear less than I could be. Every time I see one, I am reminded of my own 'inadequacy' for living. I can see in myself only desires I shouldn't have. I am a self in conflict, torn between what I want and what I don't have.

Though desires exemplify a self in conflict, restoring order in the self need not necessarily be attempted by entering the consumer market. In an alternative response, one might attempt to consume the conflictual threat of the desires by withstanding them through rationality, using reason as a tool to consume the conflicts raised by the desires. Regardless of how one attempts to alleviate a self thrown into confusion by desires, what is important is that at the instant that one attempts to resolve the conflicted self, one simultaneously acknowledges oneself as that conflict. By consuming one's desires, emotions and passions, one is consuming oneself and entering into the dialectic of conflict.



Satisfaction<sup>33</sup> brings with it the human self that I want to be. Through the Porsche, say, I can realize my attraction to others. But through this satisfaction I simultaneously validate myself as a self in conflict (with my desires). I show that my living is predicated on the desires which have tormented me. By not fulfilling my desire for the Porsche, my 'reasoning' describes me to myself as being in conflict with my desire. I therefore validate my reasoning process by trying to consume the threat from my desires and through this acknowledge myself as the conflict described.

Living in Baudrillard's simulation, as consumers, we have become the simulation of self as pure conflict. In order to continue as a self, as a human, this conflict must be further stimulated, and, as such, external conflicts must be reproduced and further simulated. One can never be in control of all threats, since if one did control all threats one would no longer be human. Consider how the excessively rich, in their boredom, risk death and continue to escalate pleasure--seeking ever greater depths of baseness and perversion. Man's creation of oppositions was being pointed to as far back as Parmenides, when he wrote, "They (mortals) distinguished opposites in bodily form and set up signs separate from each other."<sup>34</sup> Consumption does recreate the consumer by reproducing threats in need

of controlling. It should not be surprising, then, that when a consumer does shine his light on a threat, expurgating his world, the threat vanishes. It was never 'really' there, but only existed as a simulation or appearance, as merely the sign of a threat, its referent being nothing but what the logic of consumption has created.

ii) Consumption: reproduction of conflict

If the self is to continue to exist as conflict, then it requires a continued reproduction of conflict. I will show how consumption reproduces the threats to which we respond. Since consumption is reproducing both itself and the consumer as mere appearance or simulation, the threats reproduced will also be the appearance of threats.

I want to begin by showing what I mean by "the appearance of threats." To this end, I will utilize the ideas of "dread" and "death," showing through these notions how the "appearance of threat" is taken as far more threatening than 'real' threats. In this explication, I will discuss the dynamics of the reproduction of such apparent threats. To do this, I will return to Beowulf. Finally, I want to illustrate the instantiation of these points in our consumer way of life.

The expurgator, in order to be seen as decent and honorable, must continually expose vulgarities everywhere. It doesn't really matter what appears as a vulgarity, as long as one does appear. One doesn't need to actually see any threat; one merely needs to feel its menace. We never actually see the threats the expurgator has put his red line through, but rather just know that they are a threat to our sensibilities. This idea of unseen threats is contained in the existentialist idea of "dread."

Dread, or Angst, certainly threatens the individual who finds himself to be wallowing in it. It is that form of listless boredom whose referent is seemingly nothing in particular. It is an unnameable and unknowable horror, since "that in the face of which one has anxiety (dread) is not an entity within the world." It is "completely indefinite."<sup>35</sup> Dread's darkness is a pain differing from fear. Fear has an object, while dread is the pure unadulterated appearance of fear. While one might have a legitimate fear of grizzlies, dread is the appearance of the looming menace of grizzlies--it is not in the particular rustling or cracks of the woods, but rather in the general appearance of oppressiveness in the atmosphere. It is because of its indefiniteness, because one cannot put one's finger on it, that dread is the pure concentration of threat, that is, the pure appearance of

threat; "threat" merely as a sign with no referent. It is the threat from no-thing in particular.

One need not consider dread simply in light of existentialist concerns for self-consciousness. Adorno ties it to society. For Adorno, "what some...call angst...is claustrophobia in the world: In the closed system."<sup>36</sup> It is the feeling of being "powerless against a society which has become independent of" one.<sup>37</sup> He takes these points further:

Angst, busily to be distinguished from inner worldly, empirical fear, need by no means be an existential value. Since it is historical, it appears in fact that those who are yoked into a society which is societalized, but contradictory to its deepest core, constantly feel threatened by what sustains them. They feel threatened without ever being able in specific instances to concretize this threat from the whole of society."<sup>38</sup>

In this way, one feels dread in the face of one's society which looms above one. And, if that society is filled with paradox and contradiction, one is unable to direct one's fears at anything specific--note how an intellectual paradox or contradiction is such because there is no angle from which to approach it (EXCEPT to throw into question the very reasoning and assumptions which bred it!). However one views dread, whether through existentialism or Adorno, it still remains as fear taken to the point of

paranoia, in response to something which is the pure appearance of threat. Death can be viewed in a similar way.

Death, like dread, is feared because of its indefiniteness. It is a threat, yet we can't know it. It does not appear commensurable to living. And if one does get 'close' to it, it throws into question our living. One still clings to the hope that it is not the final end to our lives and, as such, the end of everything which our living has achieved. It is completely separated from us. Few now see those close to them die--one only sees the removed images on television. Death has become something alien to us. Like dread, it thus epitomizes a threat as pure appearance. One is no longer close to it and, indeed, pushes reflection on it, away. It can only be in its appearance, then, that it menaces us.

A threat becomes appearance once there is no object for it beyond the idea of a threat. Apparent threats are signs whose only referent is themselves. Before showing that there is a similar dynamic in consumption--where it is not that something threatens us but rather that we feel threatened--I want to show how a consumptive attitude--where intentions are focused on control and domination--reproduces the appearance of threats. Let me again turn to Beowulf's struggles against Grendel and Grendel's Mother.

As a story within our cultural background, "Beowulf"<sup>39</sup> typifies consumption's reliance on dealing with darkness as a thing to be expurgated. In the shape of Beowulf, himself, we have a perfect exemplification of consumption's dream of mastery, while in his actions there is seen the effectiveness of dealing with darkness through (violent) expurgation. The story serves not only to show the consumptive's process of expurgation but also to highlight the creation of darkness--exposing both the fear of and fascination with it.

Darkness is made to appear as an active threat. In a way similar to the Hegelian dialectic, the individual feels the objective world acting as an oppressive "subject"<sup>40</sup> in relation to him as an object. The world appears to be attempting to stunt the individual's ability to master, by apparently forcing its mastery on him. The individual's resentment sharply brings into focus the world's threatening darkness, which appears to be trying to overrun him through its mastery. In this way Grendel becomes a threat to the Scydlings, a threat to the light which "Heorot" is throwing on the world. He is shown as purposeful in the destruction of the control in the world that the Scydlings had.

Darkness, embodied by Grendel, is shown as being purposed in its animosity. The calculating demon, with its

calculations enshrouded in mist, is far more of a threat than an unreasoning novice of darkness. The wild can be swotted away, but when purpose is 'found' in the wild and the nature of the purpose is hidden by wisps of wildness, fear becomes anxiety in the face of the unknown assailant. Initially, Grendel causes blind fear. His 'purpose' is to destroy the light. He has a grudge to bear and is an enemy of the Scydlings. He knows the significance of Heorot, and so from out of the heart of darkness he moves to attack the beacon of light (life). He chews on the very "strength of the nation." (p. 65) He "contrives" and is "bent on destruction." (p. 116) He knows where to strike; toward that goal he directs his "greedy palm." (p. 116) With each move, the Scydlings find him pursuing their light, while their ability to keep it shining is overwhelmed by a creature of darkness whose perverted mind rules his actions. Thus, they constantly felt, "the dark death-shadow (which) drove against them." (p. 56) He drove against them with the determined resolve to annihilate the living which they had built up. The ascription of the intent to destroy and being able to uncover 'motive,' in part acts to take Grendel's actions away from the unknown. But though he has purpose, its enactment is distant from the rules of chivalry through which the heroes lived. Darkness, then, is given motive. The threat is intentional, and its intent

is to threaten. The threat is further augmented since Grendel is initially not given any description.

Before his conflict with Beowulf, Grendel deals out his evil, "stalking unseen." (p. 56) Before Beowulf's consumption (destruction) of Grendel's threat in battle, he refers to the "demon" as "an obscure assailant in the opaque night-times." (p. 56) Before the battle Grendel is oppressively terrifying. He is described and characterized in vague terms. In this he is terrifying, not only because he has a diabolical purpose, which he carries out in ways external to the sensitivity of heroes, but also because he is unseen. He walks "night long the misty moreland" (p. 58) and "glides" through the "shadows." He is by definition almost unseeable. Just as "the wit of men is not enough to know the bottom," (p. 94) so Grendel is symbolized as initially beyond the "wit" of the heroes, since his name refers to the ground or sand at the bottom of a body of water. Mostly, the unseen and terrifying is seen by the heroes as a "wicked affliction, the worst of nightmares" (p. 57); the "reckless," "dire-dusk fiend" (p. 116) is "abominable." He is a "wrathful" and "invidious" creature. Not until Beowulf weakens Grendel in their combat and Grendel's hand is shown for all to see, does the oppressive fear he caused, subside. It disappears only



after Beowulf has been to the bottom of the dark mere, to the very 'heart of darkness.'

Through the combat, the threat of Grendel is taken away from the simple appearance of menace. He is no longer a threat. It is in the combat that we get our first actual descriptions of Grendel:

A breach in the giant  
flesh-frame showed then, shoulder-muscles  
sprang apart, there was a snapping of tendons,  
bone-locks burst...  
...Grendel's lot  
to flee....with flagging heart. (p. 76)

The appearance of Grendel as a threat vanishes, since now he is in part seen as human--even though deformed. Thus he lights-up for humanity the terror of the unknown. No longer is his threat uncharacterizable. When, "as a signal to all the hero hung up the hand, the arm and torn-off shoulder, the entire limb," (p. 77) darkness' sting was diffused and consumed. Setting darkness' weapon for all to see, the fear which it had exuded is now seen as harmless. It is now only after the fight, in retrospect, that a physical description is given. Apart from his mother and him still being described as "huge wayfarers," (p. 93) or "outerworldly ones," (p. 93) we now hear that Grendel was: "in the shape of a man/though twisted." (p. 95), but that, "he was more huge than any human being" (p. 93), and that

his mother, "was in woman's shape." (p. 93) Now, with Grendel's darkness consumed, the threat from the remaining monster, his mother, is greatly reduced.

The darkness which accompanies the attack of Grendel's mother, though a threat, does not have the same intensity as Grendel's menace. She is still described as the "horror" and as in opposition to Beowulf; she is the "mere wolf"--"the she wolf of the deep." (p. 101) But with her son's defeat, rising out of a secretive and harmful darkness, she has, in part, lost the terror of the unknown. Not only because of her son's defeat does the "radiance" of Heorot begin to shine over the world, but also, as a mother, her actions are easier to understand than Grendel's unintelligible revenge. It is as a mother that she "purposed to set out" (p. 91); it is as a mother that she was "ailing for her loss" (p. 90); it is as a mother that she was "savage in her grief." (p. 91) Notions of revenge can be understood if they come from a mother--they are not so threatening. As a mother she is a woman. Knowing that she is a woman further diminishes the fear of the unknown. As a woman, "the fury of her onslaught was less frightening than his, as the force of a woman, her onset in flight, is less feared by men." (p. 91) With Grendel's defeat, darkness already begins to be repelled. Since it fights back only in the shape of a woman, the

Scydllings have already been released from the oppressive threat.

There is little incentive for the consumptive to view darkness as anything but a threat. Addicted to control, the consumptive, by dealing consumptively with darkness, takes on the attitude of perverted prudery. Darkness can always be dealt with consumptively, and the consumptive gains an excessively acute sense for threats, which can lurk everywhere. Since prudery has been carried to a perversion, threats do appear to lurk everywhere. Since the perverted prude is such by virtue of his addiction to the cleansing power of consumption, the likes of Grendel and mother, or of Frankenstein's monster, will always be banished from the human world and then viewed as a threat to it. By being viewed as a threat, they are dealt with through all the aggression which consumption can muster. While simultaneously being banished from the glowing light of consumption and being relegated to a murky shadowy region, they are themselves shown as 'evil' consumptives, intent on subjugating the world through their own brand of threatening behavior.

Consumption 'creates' threats for us; it is their mere appearance that is the actual threat. Grendel's 'real' threat resulted from him being hidden, from being able to "stalk unseen." What held the Scydllings in terror was

Grendel's threat. Once they had established Heorot to light up the world, they could not let him in to enjoy it, since, though he was human, he was deformed. Just as Frankenstein created his monster, so the Scydlings created theirs by keeping Grendel from the sight of 'decent' people. Perhaps Grendel was menacing to the core, but the Scydlings never allowed him close enough to see his grief-stricken heart until they destroyed him. Grendel had suffered long before he attacked. He could finally do nothing but act out what he had been created as--a monster. The Hobbsian myth, that without the control of a Leviathan there would be the chaos and utter helplessness in the battle of all versus all, has perhaps become too powerful. One forgets that Hobbes saw people only through the cruelty of civil war and that once away from it, as Locke was, this cruelty might be seen as predicated on the society which raised us. In this way, if the environmental movement is perceived as having too little success within the law, it splinters, with one faction going outside the law. By 'definition' it becomes a threat, because it is outside the confines of consumerism. The threat from "Earth First!" when, like Grendel, they become hidden, grows. They could strike anywhere; in this way, the aura of a threat is created. As soon as the threat becomes founded on something actual--turning from Heideggerian

anxiety to simple fear--as soon as there is a real object for the threat, it loses most of its potency; we already have a handle for controlling it. Let me try to bear out what I have said, by making these claims concrete in relation to consumerism.

We are certainly threatened by appearances in a very real way because of our appearance (to others). The rhetoric of sex is a potent weapon in the hands of advertisers. Not only does it sell fashions, but it also sells cars, foods, coffee, beer, cigarettes and even carpets. Without these items, it is hard to imagine how inadequate our own sexual attraction will become. What I can afford, though, is not an active threat. It is what I cannot afford that threatens me. Appearance has become a large part of our lives, and so has the appearance that we are threatened.

Without a "Dupont stain resistant carpet," how can we possibly expect to have a carefree and romantic evening; without a "Coors Lite" how can our kisses be anything but those of the superficial Budweiser kind; without "Taster's Choice," how can we possibly expect a beautiful and sophisticated woman to appear at our door whilst we are entertaining another? How much further removed can we be from a real threat, like a grizzly, if our sexual

attraction is predicated on having the right carpet, or drinking the right "lite" or right coffee?

There are many things which bolster our attractiveness; so many that we can't know where to begin and don't know where to end. An atmosphere of sexual attraction hovers over us. Every time we try to grasp it we come away empty, since there are always new fashions and looks. We never see the object that withholds our attraction from us, since it is always changing. Like Kierkegaardian dread, every time that reason believes that it has cornered it, it escapes, hiding deeper than before, while continuing to cast out a terror which we never see as an object.

As a further example, one might consider the recent war against Iraq. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was an attack on the consumer way of life. It wasn't simply an affront to Kuwait's sovereignty; it was an attack on the way we live. It threatened our need for oil; then it threatened the livelihood of workers already suffering from a recession; it held the threat of chemical and biological warfare; it threatened through the unknowable threat of nuclear weapons. The further involved the West became, the bigger Iraq's threat became. While the magnitude of the threats was being built up, we never entered Iraq's culture. Once we did, it relocated itself solely in the

person of Hussein and a command structure that hid itself in bunkers. While initially Hussein was a "madman" and therefore crazy, he soon became a "calculating demon." Finally he threatened the deaths of 200,000 Americans. During the war we saw letters in the local papers envisioning Iraq's soldiers marching over the Rockies and invading Missoula, Montana. One wonders how paranoid a culture intent on control can become? I am not saying that Hussein and his army posed no threat at all. I am simply saying that, as a threat, it ever increasingly entered the world of simulation to the point where Americans began seeing Iraq's army on its own doorstep. Finally, it no longer really mattered what the threat was, just that there was a threat to one's controlled life.

AIDS, though maybe not an invention of consumerism--no matter what proof the "Enquirer" or "World Weekly News" may have had--acts as a perfect metaphor for a threat whose reality has been perpetuated as a myth and mere appearance of a threat. Not only does it attack our consumer ideas of carefree sexual attraction, but, as a disease, it attacks the very core of our defenses--it attacks the very cells that protect our body. Its aura pervades every aspect of our living. Can we possibly go swimming anymore? Can we use the public toilets? Can we shake hands? Can we really

get close enough to anyone to speak with them? It is not enough that we might be facing an actual threat. The threat itself is built up until it becomes nothing but a menacing sign. It has become so hidden in appearance that we know of no way of dealing with it without turning to the only life which we know--one of controlling or destroying, one of consuming. Appearance of self as conflict attempts to consume appearance of threat. One knows the approach of something foreign only through glasses which are fogged-up with fear, while knowing no response other than beating the thing into submission before any dialogue can be begun. Every time one's actions find success, they are reinforced; every time one fails, one perceives in 'otherness' its ability to control. Again control as a way of life is reproduced.

But darkness is not simply something too horrific to face. Even though Grendel's head "was an ugly thing for the earls and their queen, an awesome sight," (p. 103) nevertheless, "they eyed it well." (p. 103) There is still a fascination with the threats<sup>41</sup> that lie waiting in the darkness. One is lured to the zoo not simply to see exotic birds or lizards, but to view the menace of a man-eating tiger or crocodile; one is fascinated by the "freaks" in a circus; one is drawn to gather round and stare at the scene of a tragic accident; one is pulled by horror movies and



Stephen King novels. Coming into contact with what had been a threat and which no longer is, since it has been contained or controlled, becomes both a validation that we were in fact threatened by something, as well as a validation of our strategy to control threats. There certainly are things which threaten us in actuality (like hunger, or failing health, for example) even though they have now become hidden by a veneer of appearance. In a sense, this is a response, perverted by consumption, to our wanting to get to know what lies behind the appearance of menace--an attempt to understand the other only once its threat has been contained and thus changed by this containment.

Having given an outline of this simulation which we inhabit, I now want to turn to drawing out the implications of it. I will show the state of affairs in which it concludes itself. Along the way I will indicate where a possibility might exist for moving beyond it, before showing finally what lies at its end.

## Chapter Four

### The end in consumption

Yes, if one is threatened then one should make a response. And, yes, we should want and have a comfortable life. Through this paper, I have not been advocating that one shouldn't seek a more comfortable life, simply that it cannot be achieved through a blind leap toward control. Such a leap merely produces a simulated existence, where the self is simulated as conflict and threats are simulated as their appearance. We cannot see beyond control and threat. We have been blinkered to see nothing beyond a life of consumption in which the ideas of control and threat have been taken to the point of perversion.

I have tried to show that all this follows once we widen our idea of what "consumption" is. Once consumer activity is understood to spring from a desire to control, I would hope that the aspects of conflict and the appearance of threat as sign have been shown to be self-producing and, thus, reproducing the attitude to control.

I have attempted to give plausibility to this move not only through etymology, but also through specific examples. What I have arrived at is a description of a vicious circle which runs from control, through separation, to darkness and back to control.

In this chapter I want to draw out the conclusion of life within consumption. I want to make clear the increase in isolation as one is being removed further from the natural world and the increased menace from 'threats.' As we become absorbed in the circularity of the simulation, there appears to be little recourse against it. I do, however, want to point to ways which might present themselves as points of departure from consumption, before carrying the logic of isolation to its complete conclusion in the existence of the conflictual self at ever more painful breaking points.

By dealing with things only as threats, one does not conceive of doing otherwise--a threat after all is threatening. If one becomes driven by and absorbed in this attitude, one begins to lose sight of real threats. One no longer sees the actual things which threaten. One only feels their menace. If one's world is seen as revolving around nothing but conflicts, if one is in a world of businessmen, then one is oneself a businessman. Each of

one's actions in the face of threats with which one is in conflict verifies oneself as a conflict (or separation). But, in doing so it also reinforces one's separation from the environment one is acting against. Every time that one switches on the television to blot out the day, one is no longer dealing with the actual world; one is simply watching it pass by on the screen. If one is trying to blot out some misery by turning to the absorption of television, once the television is off, one has to again face the misery; but now it has retreated further into one's mind and has become more painful. By analogy, once one has taken a light source into a dark night, because of some fear of the dark, one will continue to turn to the light every time, and the darkness will become more unbearable. But what happens if the light fails? How does one deal with darkness then? If one visits the countryside in an air-conditioned car, feeling the elements to be too harsh, one has separated oneself from everything that is natural. The consumer has created this technology and is re-creating it only by supervising technology. In this way the need for control through technology clouds his vision of the world, isolating him from it, from the very things that threaten him. Guy DeBord puts the point thus:

The economic system founded on isolation is a circular production of isolation. The technology is based on isolation and the technical process isolates in turn. From the automobile to the television, all the goods selected by the...system are also its weapons for a constant reinforcement of the condition of "lonely crowds."<sup>42</sup>

One isolates oneself from an isolating environment and must now constantly retake it in order to feel that one is alive in it. Since one has isolated oneself by reacting to perceived threats, one has isolated oneself from the objects that really threatened.

Since one has separated oneself from the object of the threat, it has become more of a 'threat.' Now, with the threats more concentrated, there seems to be nothing to do but to continue as one has, to continue in the only way one knows, by controlling. The consumer is like Oedipus, threatened because of actions that were performed 'unknowingly.'

This is not some form of a conspiracy theory where the great and 'evil' Leviathan, consumption, controls everything that we do. We are consciously and deliberately involved. Consumption works through each individual. But, as a consumer, the self is a conflict. It knows of no responses that are not conflictual and thus perpetuates the Leviathan, as well as itself. One is 'unknowing' not

because one does not know of an alternative, but because there is no conception that there might be an alternative.

By becoming the only way of life, consumption is taking us away from any other way in which we can be human. Though it produces only a dishevelled menagerie of desires--nothing like the fully plumed peacock which it promised--questioning it, and thus ourselves, is unpalatable, since it is showing us how to be 'human.' It is thus hard to understand that this perception and its enactment have been, and are, created and reproduced, since without it there would appear to be no life:

The more relentlessly societalization commands all moments of human and inter-human immediacy, the smaller the capacity of men to recall that the web has evolved, and the more<sub>43</sub> irresistible its natural appearance.

One cannot raise questions about its foundations, but only about its revolutions. One cannot question the axioms and rules of logic, but only their successful application. If one does, one is no longer doing that logic. If one questions what appears to be the only way of living, one is not living. We are thus addicted, since we cannot see except in terms of that addiction. We understand only conflict, because we ourselves are conflict. But even an addict will occasionally see past his addiction.

There is no logic which dictates that consumption will stop; there are merely opportunities from which we may have a chance to take steps against it. There is no 'formula' from which to say what will stir one into seeing one's situation. I want, though, to give some examples of such a possibility. Let me again turn to Lowry's consul.

He wallows in his alcoholic haze because his dream of escaping life within the British empire has faltered. The control of the 'heart of darkness,' on which it was predicated, has followed him to Mexico--where he is unable to realize his visions of living amongst the "noble savage," as Blackstone did. Through the characters of Yvonne and Hugh, he is exposed to other alternatives: the romantic ideal of living in the country, off the country, and the Marxist vision. He rejects both. There are still reminders of life without the bottle and a life away from the isolation and control of consumption:

"Regard! See how strange, how sad, familiar things may be. Touch this tree, once your friend: alas that that which you have known in the blood should ever seem so strange! Look up at that niche in the wall over there on the house where Christ is still, suffering, who would help you if you asked him: you cannot ask him. Consider the agony of the roses. See on the lawn Concepta's coffee beans, you used to say they were Maria's drying in the sun. Do you know their sweet aroma any more? Regard: the plantains with their queer familiar blooms, once emblematic of life, now of an evil phallic death.<sup>44</sup> You do not know these things any longer."

He feels a time when he was not isolated from the world. He feels a life wherein he had familiarity with things that were natural, one where there is no mention of control. Sadly for the consul, he cannot see past the baranca--both real and metaphysical--past the threats of a lawless Mexico and their reminders in the looming volcanoes. Though his memories have been jarred, he cannot see beyond the refuge that he has taken in the bottle. Even when Yvonne tries to show him a life where he can again 'know, in his blood the trees which were once his friends,' he is unable to hear.

The death of a close friend or relative can stir one. Maybe one might be pushed, as Gilgamesh initially was, to see the pointlessness of one's control in the world. One might see that everything one was driven to achieve was made absurd by death. One might see that, no matter how much one's father, for example, worked overtime, in order for you to have better comfort and control over your life in the future, you would rather that you had had the time to know him better; that though his work itself showed love for you, you would rather that that love had been tied directly to you rather than through the medium of control. Of course, one might feel that one's father had not been successful in giving one the better life; that through having more aptitude for controlling, one might give one's



children a better life and have the time to enjoy it with them.

One might further feel disquieted by the dream of control, when the promise of a much easier work place in front of a computer, instead of facing a coal fire, raises one's stress levels. Or the consumer market is found not to be delivering on its promises: even with a jar of "Taster's Choice," one might still continue to sit around at home waiting for a beautiful woman to appear, just as one did when one sat around in bars making a display of one's 'rugged manliness' by smoking regular "Malboroughs." One might also find that one's ability to kiss is not made more sexually vibrant after a night of consuming "Coors Lite." And of course the question "Why ask why?" might not appear to be dealt with by drinking "Bud Dry," when one wakes to discover that any thinking one needed to do has been clouded by a hangover. Of course one can always buy more or, because of the choices that consumerism presents to us, try a different brand. Perhaps the "Coors Lite" advertisement lied about my ability to have fun with bikini-clad women; perhaps my sexual attraction might not be so bad if I drank "Budweiser?" Whatever has the opportunity to jar one, also holds the risk of further reinforcing the mandate to control.

One might always enter consumption again. But if one has been stirred too much, one's reflections will remain. One has run the risk of being like the Consul epitomizing the Hegelian "Unhappy Self-Consciousness." If one cannot move away from consumption, one will live on its periphery-- isolated and feeling dead in the world of 'humans,' while being constantly tormented by thoughts.

If one has not been stirred enough, one might see the very thing doing the stirring as in need of consuming. One enters further into the circularity of the simulation. In this case, one fails to realize that there will never be an end to pain while one is a consumptive. The logic dictates pain and conflict. If in some possible world one did achieve the consumptive dream of complete unquestioned control, the self would be dead as a 'human,' having nothing left in the world through which to validate itself as a conflict. If while attempting to change a 'friend' into an image that one has of him/her, one succeeds, one has gained nothing but a thing, a dog, with which to associate. One thus becomes a dog oneself. By isolating oneself completely from what surrounds one, one has isolated oneself even from conflict and thus from oneself as a 'human.' This, however, is merely the theoretical end of consumption, since within consumption, conflicts are continually reproduced.

Consumption reproduces haunting apparitions. As a result, the practical end in consumption can only be the increase of one's fear and of one's fears turned to paranoias and neuroses. Paradoxically, as one's power as a consumer to overcome threats apparently increases, so do the conflicts that one faces--recall again how the more one controls, the more one is removed from the things that threaten, the more frightening the appearance of the threat becomes. As the external conflicts increase, so do one's own. With the individual as a conflict, the abyss opens ever wider. He is threatened by something so far removed from him, his desire to control it must increase in order to try to overcome the conflict within himself that is now growing. Validation of the self as conflict, then, increases the conflict. Let me give a couple of examples to bear this out.

Consider again the idea of friendship as use. There might be nights when one simply wants to be at home alone--needing to finish assignments, work, or to reflect on something. One's friends come and 'drag' one out for a drink. When one returns home drunk, with nothing finished, one's friends might appear as a burden. They have satisfied their need for enjoying the company of others, apparently to one's detriment. But there comes a time when

one is feeling lonely sitting in an empty apartment watching a dreadful show about lonely people. One needs company. So one drags one's friends to the bar. Through their company, the need for company is reinforced when it is enjoyable. One's friends take one away from the feeling of loneliness. But through them, one can sometimes feel one's 'right' to be alone to be infringed upon. Without them, one will be lonely. With them, one will not be able to be alone. Times may occur when one cannot afford to go out when one has to work or do something pressing. Forced to be alone, being alone becomes loneliness. Though in the future one may want to be alone, it is simultaneously apt to be hated because it points to loneliness. Friends can in this way become nothing but use values, used to ward off loneliness. Their use, though, keeps alive both one's hate of and one's need for being alone, as well as a hate and need for one's friends. How can one become anything but paranoid, divested of company which does not itself point back to the paranoia?

The idea of sexual attraction has become predicated on what consumerism says we must possess--whether actual consumer items or the images of another's body--and thus the 'threat' of being unattractive has become based, not on what I am like, but on what I have to make me what I am like. One is witnessing the rise of bulimia--dieting

pushed to an extreme in order to possess someone else's body. One is actually able to satisfy the desire for foods one loves, yet ones which one hates because of the body shape that they signify. One hates oneself for eating and loves oneself for purging the body of food. One is also witnessing the rise of steroid use, where one makes one's body into what one desires, only by destroying it. The further one carries one's fear for one's appearance, the further one makes one's fear into an appearance; the more one tries to take on another's appearance, the more one hates one's own appearance.

For those who are not so successful as consumers, consumption still reproduces itself and thus darkness. In a society which places emphasis on its members' mobility, one forgets that "the pleasure of mobility becomes a curse for the homeless."<sup>45</sup> Moving from shelter to shelter is opposed by the images of jetting from island to island trying to keep up with the sun. These images show to the homeless the pleasure of travel, yet in their own lives they have come to hate it. The poorer elements of society become lost in the circularity of consumption, without ever being 'allowed' to think the dream of control seriously, though it stays in their vision as a taunting reminder of their own inabilities. For those on the border-line of economic consumption--where those above them continue to

take more in order to remain in control, and the image of those below needs to be escaped from--there is nothing left but to alleviate their pains in activities that are advertised under the image of success, but which prompt a vision of the threatening burdens of the exterior world. Obviously, when one is facing the very real threats of hunger and homelessness, one can do nothing about consumption itself, since at that moment it is providing one with the means to be clothed, fed and sheltered.

Consumption, thus, is seemingly tearing consumers apart. But the consumer has to continue as a consumer. He has to continue to oppress other cultures, minorities and the environment, because without doing so he would not feel himself to be human--would not be acknowledging himself as the conflict which he has become. As these 'threats' become apparently more active, seeking to control us, they must continue to be dealt with consumptively. But as they are, one fails to listen to anything that is said, unless it appears as more provocation. This kind of isolation and alienation from the things around us is a problem of consumption only because it is a problem of the self which has been made by consumption and which makes consumption. One is threatened from without, because one is a threat from within. One therefore becomes human by being a threat to what surrounds one, and, in doing so, becomes a greater

threat to oneself. The threats are becoming more and more appearance, since, because of consumption's continued circular reproduction, one is no longer able to see that it is consumption itself that is the threat.

## Chapter Five

### An Alternative to Consumption

If consumption predicates relationships on control and use, then an alternative would lie beyond this. It is not simply this side of consumption that must be overcome, but also the absorption into its simulation. An alternative lies beyond this narrow focus on the continued reproduction of this strategy to control. Such a strategy fosters the attempt to become familiar with what surrounds one by controlling it to one's own specifications. What surrounds one has become either something of one's own coercion or threatening to what one has constructed. An attitude of vigilance must be nurtured away from reflections which are enclosed by haunting mists. When "consumption" was still a prevalent disease, the only cure to be had was to take oneself to the cleaner air of the mountains; to get away from the smog of civilization. By distancing oneself from the smog, one's reflections are infused with that cleaner air. In order to show what living might be like away from



consumption, I want to turn to Exupery's fable, The Little Prince.

The attempt to use The Little Prince might in this regard appear as an appeal to sentimentality. Since it is a children's fable, it certainly does appear to be charged with sentimentality, especially in comparison to the violent myths of Gilgamesh and Beowulf. And, since it is a child's fable, it shows the Little Prince being "tamed" by (establishing ties with) things on human terms--everything, for example, speaks the Little Prince's language and does not threaten him, perhaps because he is a child. I would like to assume that this is a metaphorical tool for St. Exupery in order to show that there is not necessarily anything to be afraid of when one encounters radical otherness. Away from a child's world, if we are to have a discourse with some radical other, it may be hard if not impossible to understand it on our terms. As humans we certainly will look through our own expurgated view of the world. This cannot be helped. What can be moved away from, though, is the arrogant attitude of the consumptive who carries his particular expurgation to the point of being blind without it. Thus, although the Little Prince does speak to foxes and flowers, what is important in the fable is that he tries to listen to what they have to say. Not only does he listen, but also through the things

that he meets he is implicitly prompted to critical reflections on his own situation in the world--prompted to question his own expurgated view. The fable, then, does need to be reinforced and its brand of sentimentality taken seriously because it is a contrast to the blinded need for destruction in myths such as Gilgamesh and Beowulf. I will use the fable to show not only what non-control orientated relations might be like, but also how an attitude of vigilance might be kept alive in the face of expurgations which are carried toward blinded zealousness.

The fable of The Little Prince<sup>46</sup> argues for moving away from an absorption in a form of life where one has no ties; that is, no ties except for one's imprisonment in an absorption, where one becomes isolated in a "circular reproduction of isolation." We are introduced to the results of a life that is destroyed and reduced to isolation through Exupery's use of the Baobabs. If what matters to one is suddenly overwhelmed by a Baobab which has taken root, one will be left to see nothing but the enormity of the Baobab. Such things, then, must be rooted out while they are still small, although one cannot root out every shrub that grows because of a paranoia for Baobabs, since, as the Little Prince discovers, some may be roses. By not being constantly vigilant to the development of something, one runs the risk of allowing it to

completely overrun one's living, until one knows living only in terms of Baobabs. By analogy to consumption, we need to keep our relationship to everything which surrounds us from being clouded by visions of threats and our need perpetually to control. We need to become aware of the destruction of ourselves and that which surrounds us, if we persist in being absorbed in this strategy. If one allows hunger to grow into famine, what does this say about the life that one is building for oneself if one isolates oneself from that suffering?

Metaphorically, a Baobab had taken root in the Little Prince's life. Once, the Little Prince had found only pleasure in tending to the needs of his small world; he "found...only entertainment in the quiet pleasure of looking at the sunset." (p. 24) But one day he found that he had seen the sunset forty-four times, adding in comment: "You know, one loves the sunset, when one is so sad." (p. 26) His sadness had taken him away from caring for the things in his own small world--away from his vigilance for Baobabs. His sadness and dejection had isolated him from his world. All of this came about because of the relationship which he was developing with a rose that had recently taken root.

He had watched as the rose took root on his planet; watched how it gave out a flower, and smelled the fragrance

with which it covered his planet. The Prince saw only its beauty, which excited and moved him; he "could not restrain his admiration" (p. 33) for it. But it was not modest in its glory.

"She began very quickly to torment him with her vanity." (p. 33) She made him do everything for her, while continuing to puff up that vanity. Although the Little Prince understood that she was "a very complex creature," (p. 35) she continued to make him "suffer from remorse," (p. 36) when he failed to care for her needs. He "soon (came) to doubt her" (p. 36) as he took "seriously words which were without importance." (p. 36) He did not look beyond the "radiance and fragrance which she cast over him" (p. 36-37); nor did he look "beneath her poor little strategems" (p. 37) and the harsh words she uttered toward him. He was unable to guess the affection that she had for him, until he fled, since he could not see beyond the burden that she had become. She made his life so unhappy that he could not see without that unhappiness.

Dazzled by appearance, he had no thought of trying to understand her, while she sought merely to use him in order to separate herself from an environment which threatened her beauty. Though one must be prepared to leave oneself behind--leave one's preconceptions out of the picture--in order to understand what is important to the other, one

cannot give oneself over to the other completely, without losing the vigilance necessary to attend to the other. Before he leaves his planet, the flower gives him a start toward understanding this: " 'Of course I love you...it is my fault that you have not known it all the while...but you have been just as foolish as I.' " (p. 40) He had failed to delve deeper into his understanding--he "was too young to know how to love her" (p. 37)--while she had taken for granted her use of him.

He needs to go away, perhaps because having known only her harsh words and strategems, he can see nothing but strategems in her final words, since, afterall, "she was such a proud flower." (p. 40) The Prince goes away from the rose and his planet, searching for a better way to live, unaware that through his journey he will learn about relations generally and his tie to the rose specifically. What does he learn in his journey, and through him what do we learn?

He initially learns what kinds of ties are not proper. Passing through six planets, he meets their inhabitants. They are involved within their own simulation, reproducing it from within their own isolation. They cannot see beyond the rules and symbols which frame their own lives; they have not been stirred to travel beyond in order to realize what surrounds them.

They continue to simulate the signs which absorb them and through which they see what surrounds them. The questions which the Little Prince puts to them are incomprehensible to them, since they address not the commutations of signs, but the very idea of the simulations themselves. Unless one speaks through the language of the other, one's words are likely to be either reconfigured into that language or one's voice is apt to be disregarded. Through these encounters, the Little Prince learns that in order to be tied to something of consequence, one cannot blindly adhere to rules and signs of a simulation where there are no referents. He needs to continue to pose questions which address the basic assumptions in a form of life, in order not to be blinkered by that life.

He arrives on earth and begins to feel disconnected and lonely. He sees the stars and, amongst them, his planet. He knows himself to be tied to the stars because of his connection to the rose. He feels his loneliness on this unfamiliar planet and grows homesick. He wants to begin a search for humans in order to create the ties that might give him a feeling of familiarity with the earth. He forgets that attaining familiarity is not an act of pure creation, but rather one of attention to what surrounds one.

He learns two lessons at the start of his journey. Still searching for humans, he finds a flower who saw them pass by once, as she comments: "One never knows where to find them. The wind blows them away. They have no roots and that makes their life very difficult." (p. 74)

Without good ties one is apt to become nothing. The Prince is made aware of the necessity for being rooted through ties. But such ties cannot be taken or given by someone. One cannot buy into a prepackaged idea. One cannot be like an echo, "repeating whatever someone else says." (p. 76)

Through one's own reflections one will come to understand one's own ties.

Following a road, he finds at its end a thousand roses. No rose is different from the other. He begins to learn about his own rose. If she did not feel special, it would hurt her vanity and pride. If she did not feel herself to be 'his' rose, she would not flourish. She would "cough most dreadfully and she would pretend she was dying, to avoid being laughed at" (pp. 77-78), and the little prince "should be obliged to pretend that (he) was nursing her back to life--for if (he) did not do that to humble (himself) also, she would really allow herself to die." (p. 78) Is she then just a 'common' rose, or does her tie to him make her special? If she is 'common,' the Prince has nothing. He cries because of this thought.

Through this encounter, he is learning about the tie to his rose, although he is as yet unaware of this.

A fox appears, which he does not initially see-- perhaps because he is too involved in his own grief. He wants to play with it, to forget his unhappiness in games. But the fox says no, " 'I am not tamed.' " (p. 80)

" 'What does that mean--tame?' " " 'It is an act often neglected....it means to establish ties.' " (p. 80) One's games are empty without such ties. To the fox the prince is like "a hundred thousand other boys," (p. 80) while to the prince the fox is like "a hundred thousand foxes." (p. 80) To establish ties, is to make the thing "tamed," unique to one, and one becomes unique to it. To men, the fox is like any other fox. They hunt him to keep him from the chickens; he hunts the chickens who are all alike to him. He is bored. Through a taming, an establishment of ties, "it will be as if the sun came to shine on (his) life." (p. 83) This will be a real light, as opposed to the artificial one which the lamplighters gave. He continues:

"Other steps send me hurrying back underneath the ground. Yours will call me, like music, out of my burrow. And then look: You see the grain fields yonder? I do not eat bread. Wheat is of no use to me. The fields have nothing to say to me. And that is sad. But you have hair that is the color of gold. Think how wonderful that will be when you have tamed me! The grass, which is also



golden, will bring me back the thought of you. And I shall love to listen to the wind in the wheat." (p. 83)

The Prince does not want to tame the fox: " 'But I have not much time, I have friends to discover, and a great many things to understand;' " (p. 83) to which the fox replies, " 'One only understands the things that one tames.' " (p. 83) How can one use one's time, if one has nothing to use it on? What is it to tame? " 'You must be very patient.' " (p. 84) One must begin by looking, moving closer each day." 'Words are a source of misunderstanding.' " (p. 84) One must observe "proper rites." One shouldn't, for example, come and "look" at any time of the day. " 'If...you came at four o'clock in the afternoon, then at three o'clock, I shall begin to be happy. I shall feel happier as the hour advances. At four o'clock I shall already be worrying and jumping about. I shall show you how happy I am! But if you came at just any hour, I shall never know at what hour my heart is to be ready to greet you.' " (p. 84) One cannot be tied to another, if one does not observe a sense of responsibility and consideration for the other-- if one walks in and out of another's life solely as one pleases. "Taming" becomes a mutual attachment of ties.

If ties are broken, one will of course cry, but one

will still remember and see with them. One has gained something that one did not have without them--consider how the wheat fields will now mean something to the fox. In establishing ties with another, however, one is not controlling the other. The prince realizes through the fox that his rose is special. " 'She is my rose.' " (p. 87) This is not a possessive "my," but rather one which expresses acquaintance with and understanding of the other, which serves to help locate and identify the self.

Before he leaves the fox, the fox gives him its secret: " 'It is only with the heart that one can see rightly: What is essential is invisible to the eye.' " (p. 87) By way of an explanation the fox goes on: " 'It is the time that you have wasted for your rose, that makes your rose important.' " (p. 87)

Because of his time with the rose, the rose has become special. The time spent only appears "wasted," if one does not look beyond the appearance of unhappiness which the rose brought him. He is unhappy only because he has a relation to the rose. If he simply runs away, because of this unhappiness, trying to consume his grief, he is trying to destroy a real tie. He is trying to forget that "you become responsible, forever, for what you have tamed." (p. 88)

In contrast to these points on taming, he goes off and learns what life is like without a recognition of this taming. Through the switchman, he is shown how people go off on a journey of what might appear to be discovery in a bad way. The people on the trains continue to journey, never wanting to stay where they are, because they have not made, or do not recognize, the ties which they have. The journey never ends with what one is apparently looking for, because one does not see what was there at the start. Only the children still look out of the window. They are not yet subsumed by the journey. For them, "the rag doll becomes important...because they waste their time on it." (p. 89) To further emphasize this point, the Prince converses with a merchant who is selling thirst quenching pills in order to save the consumer time. But what does one use this time on, if one does not realize that one is tied, in a way, to water?. Without realizing that what one wastes one's time on is the very thing which one is tied to, one will continue to journey, never finding the 'meaning' which one seeks. One's sight has become too focused, looking only at the ground in front of one, without thinking of the ground on which one is standing.

Maintaining one's vigilance "is a question of discipline," (p. 23) but how can we foster this vigilance if we come up against a very different "other?" The

lessons which the fox has spoken, have been spoken in a language understood by the Little Prince; the fox has been understood by the Prince only because there is already a basis of familiarity between the two. It thus appears that the Little Prince has never faced anything which is so foreign that no familiarity exists as a starting point.

By the time that the Little Prince talks to the fox, the Little Prince has already talked to many strange and foreign things and people. One forgets how disastrous his first encounter with something foreign was. The rose was foreign to his planet. She had been accidentally blown there through space. In a sense, although he understands her language, he does not understand what she is saying. Her words were the "source of misunderstanding" of which the fox warned him. In this way the rose becomes an analogy to a culture very foreign from our own, or to a wild and untamed nature, for example. How does one understand what a particular glade or stream is "saying"? Such a question appears ludicrous, although, if taken seriously, it points back to the assumption that one is trying to become familiar with something, trying to establish a tie to it, by first anthropomorphising it; one is already assuming the familiarity with nature before one has even begun. The Prince deals with the rose in an analogous way.

He deals with her as he does with everything else on his planet. He tends to her. He is of some use to her. But she is "more complex" than his volcanoes; his volcanoes were certainly not vain, neither did they "use" him unceasingly. In the form of the rose the Prince has encountered something that is beyond the scope of his understanding. He therefore addresses the rose and her complexity from within his own simplistic view of the world--from within his own expurgations. In this sense the rose is analogous to a radical other; although she knows how to speak, he cannot understand her.

The critical point in his encounter and dealings with the rose is that, through her, he is not only prompted to try to understand her in different ways, but also to integrate himself and his expurgations within the world. By the time that he meets the fox, he is not only more attentive to what the fox has to say, but also to what he himself is saying. The Prince has thus learned to listen and hear through his own questioning process, while the process is itself fostered by such listening. All this has been arrived at because initially he could not understand what lay "beneath the rose's strategems." His initial encounter with her, then, 'pushes' him into his journey.

Approaching something (or one) that is very foreign does pose problems of communication. If it is too foreign,

sharing no common point of reference, there is very little chance of initial communication. In this light, the Prince has as little understanding of the rose as does someone who tries to "speak" to trees! Just as the Prince came to realize a tie with the rose by looking beyond his initial preconceptions of how to be around her, so one can begin to find a tie to a forest by attending to it as more than a resource to be exploited for work or leisure, or as a place to pass through in order to get beyond. One can thus become tied to something foreign, as well as being prompted by it to a point of self-interrogation.

Let me just sum up the points that I have made through the Little Prince's journey. He was looking for "matters of consequence"--for those things which are our ties--and initially he discovers what they are not. This is akin to Socratic knowledge: "knowing what is false or wrong." His search moves him beyond his world, just as the pilot is metaphorically moved beyond his initial concentration on saving his own life (though he may not have a life to save). What his ties are, are given by the journey itself. Keeping up one's vigilance is important. One keeps alive the journey as a process where questions should be pursued. Remember that the Little Prince "never...let go of a question once he had asked it." (p. 54) Just as

in Socratic questioning, even though (as in the Euthyphro) the questioning appears to lead 'nowhere,' one has nevertheless learned something in the process--the importance of pushing one's questions further, along with more of a picture of what ties us to our surroundings. The questioning itself is made meaningful because it begins in concrete situations. Through the questioning, one comes to know more about one's beginning--the situation and ties. By understanding one's ties, one gains knowledge of oneself. One comes to see that one is changed by, and changes through, one's relation to the thing tamed. This reinforces a continuing vigilance. One continues in one's "discipline" for a task by attending to one's vigilance in it, and maintains one's vigilance through this discipline. If one stops and becomes tied through control, one can lose one's vigilance. One becomes disconnected from what surrounds one--as the Little Prince becomes disoriented through his initial relation to his rose. By remaining vigilant, however, one can continue in his task--as the prince does through his continuation in his questioning--which is itself given by the ties that one is making explicit--the rose has different needs than the needs of his extinct volcano.

Let me explicitly show how the attention to ties is an alternative to consumption--that is that it addresses the appearance of a conflictual self in an environment simulated through threat. Consumption separates us from the world and opens an ever greater conflict within the self--whose isolation from the world grows simultaneously. Isolated from the world, the simulation becomes dominant in the individual's life, providing nothing substantial by which the conflictual self can validate itself, since there are too many threats developing--each being more and more hidden in appearance. The self becomes lost in these images. For the Little Prince, the world remains approachable, because it is centered on a small number of ties. He thus has the ability to give greater attention to that to which he is tied--having the time to try to understand its words. Although the Little Prince's world appears small, because it is centered on things to which he is tied, his extended environment has meaning to him--whether it is the stars that have come alive for him, or the water in the well. If one is not isolated from what surrounds one and does not approach the world as purely hostile, then the self is no longer purely a conflict needing to validate itself as such; there is no need to zealously expurgate the world through control. To keep ties alive, however, one must maintain one's vigilance.



Through vigilance, one not only keeps the absorption of the simulation from becoming a fast-growing Baobab, but also keeps one's attentiveness from becoming clouded. One keeps alive the humbling wisdom of Socrates--accepting that one's knowledge and understanding can change.

It should be noted that this is not a thesis which espouses a theory of "intersubjectivity" in human relations. The idea that humans together create and maintain a form of life, is in part an idea implicit in consumption--since it is a simulation of the people, by the people, and for the people. The idea of being tamed, on the other hand, contains within it the possibility of being tied not simply to other humans. One can, for example, be tamed by music. One's relations to others or to a place might be made meaningful through music. Consider how a first intimate moment can be recalled vividly when one recalls the record that accompanied the moment. Music becomes something which brings out intimacy. One can also be tamed by something in nature--like the Little Prince's flower or his volcanoes. A particular glade or grove of trees might bring a wood alive and give meaning to one's future walks in woods.

Even if one begins one's ties through control, one's time is not being "wasted," since a tie is still being created. But when one does not look beyond that control,

one's control finally reduces the person or the 'rose' to a mere thing--no different from any other thing. In doing so, one has reduced oneself to nothing but another thing. One cannot stop one's journey--once one realizes its beginnings in a tie--since one's vigilance will stop. As soon as one tries to show one's understanding of someone by encapsulating them in it, one forgets that it is through the tie that one is constantly being changed while changing it. One runs the risk of really wasting one's time on a journey without a beginning. One should finally remember that if one aims at control, at a finality in resolution, one seeks to use. Although a world given by ties and vigilance comes to no final resolution, still, in such a world, at least one is of use to that to which one is tied.

## NOTES

1. The etymology of expurgate is taken from: R. Clairborne, The Roots of English (New York: Times Books, 1989) 195.

2. The idea of a simulation is put most clearly in J. Baudrillard, Simulations, trans. P. Foss, P. Patton, P. Beitchman (New York: Semiotexte, 1983). It is exemplified in a work such as J. Baudrillard's America, trans. C. Turner (New York: Verso, 1988). The idea of a simulation is simply of a 'copy with no original'; one which operates through its own logic without reference to anything outside of itself. The signs, or symbols, in the simulation appear as nothing but themselves--this is akin to the "p" and "q" in deductive logic, which, though they initially designate propositions, generally are manipulated as mere symbols--the symbols being operated on without reference to concrete situations.

3. R. K. Barnhart, The Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology, (New York: The H. W. Wilson Company, 1988) 212.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. I will return to this half of the definition on page nine.

9. I intend to indicate at the end of this chapter what a 'non-destructive' philosophy is through Socrates.

10. R. Claiborne,, The Roots of English (New York: Times Books, 1989) 95-6. At the moment I will only deal with this one part of the definition, though I will return to the other half which is: "to distribute," briefly.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid, p. 181-2.

13. Gilgamesh, The Epic of Gilgamesh (London: Penguin Books, 1972).

14. See the section on "self-consciousness" in: F. Hegel, The Phenomenology of Spirit. The "Master Self-Consciousness" is depicted as being an absolute monarch who has and does everything that he wants, because his slaves are creating the world to his designs. His rule is unimpeded.

15. Beowulf, Beowulf, trans. M. Alexander (London: Penguin Books, 1973). I want to discuss Beowulf in a more thorough way than Gilgamesh, since it is a book to which I will be returning in Chapter 3, ii. References to the quotes used from Beowulf in this present discussion, will be cited with a page reference in parentheses directly after the quote.

16. This will be dealt with in Chapter 2, with added depth to the point given in Chapter 3.

17. S. Kierkegaard's repeated attack on Hegel is that his grand system leaves no room for particular individuals.

18. K. Marx's writings are a response to Hegel, in that Marx found that Hegel's system was not grounded in the concrete relations to be found in society. Hegel's philosophy simply did not go beyond thought.

19. In the political philosophy of Hobbes, one gives oneself over to the Leviathan of the state, controlled by a sovereign, in order to assure oneself of one's fundamental right to life--regardless of what that life is like.

20. F. Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals, trans. W. Kaufman and R. J. Hollingdale (in the same ed., Ecce Homo, trans. W. Kaufman)--ed. and commentary W. Kaufman (New York: Vintage Books, 1967) p. 135.

21. J. Mitchell, Woman's Estate (New York: Vintage Books, 1973) p. 30.

22. Ibid, p. 29.

23. Ibid, p. 30.

24. Ibid, p. 32.

25. J. Baudrillard, The Mirror of Production, trans. and introduced by M. Poster (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975) p. 132.

26. Ibid, p. 127.

27. In this context, I refer the reader to: T. Adorno and Negative Dialectics, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), as well as his The Jargon of Authenticity, trans. K. Tarnowski and F. Will (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973). Contained in both of these books is an argument against, in particular, German Existentialists in this century (although implicitly against existentialism generally). Adorno argues that the various concepts used by existentialists are to be found rooted not in the mind's own workings but rather in problems in society which the existentialists have merely internalized. One particular example of this is "Angst," which I intend to deal with in section ii of this chapter.

28. I refer the reader to the opening chapter of S. Kierkegaard's The Concept of Dread, trans. W. Lowrie (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1944).

29. See M. Lowry, Under the Volcano (New York: Plume Books, 1971). The idea of the abyss is a recurrent theme through this book. The Consul lives on the edge of both the physical Baranca as well as viewing an internal void.

30. J. Hyppolite, Studies on Marx and Hegel, trans. J. O'Neill (New York: Heineman Educational Books, Ltd., 1969) iv.

31. See T. Adorno, Negative Dialectics, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973). Through the whole book he argues for a continuance of a dialectic; one might specifically read Section II, "World Spirit and Natural History."

32. In M. Lowry's Under the Volcano, the Consul understands that for all intents and purposes he is dead in the real world. He has no ties to anything and cares for nothing. Throughout the book, the Consul is portrayed both as having a heightened sense of self and as fearing the conclusions he draws from the self-awareness. He understands that if he again drinks mescal, it will kill him and thus simultaneously validate his theoretical death-- though we understand throughout the book that he also fears his real death.

33. Satisfaction is only momentary, since the self would be dead the moment it ended conflict, being conflict itself. In Chapter Four I will deal with why the satisfaction is only momentary .

34. S. Austin, Parmenides: Being, Bounds and Logic (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988) 163 (fragment 8, line 46).

35. M. Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962) 64.

36. T. Adorno, Negative Dialectics, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973) 346.

37. Ibid, p. 221.

38. T. Adorno, The Jargon of Authenticity, trans. K. Tanowski and F. Will (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973) 35-6.

39. The proceeding references from Beowulf will be given by citing page numbers in parentheses directly after the quote. The particular edition used throughout is: Beowulf, Beowulf, trans. M. Alexander (London: Penguin Books, 1973).

40. "Subject," designated the thing acting, in Hegel. For Hegel the world could be "subject" because it appeared to be acting against us.

41. See also J. Conrad, The Heart of Darkness (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1971). Conrad names this phenomenon the "fascination of the abomination"; the book itself portrays individuals who, for some reason, are drawn to the dark wild regions, where they know that they risk their sanity.

42. Guy DeBord, Society of the Spectacle (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983) 28.

43. T. Adorno, Negative Dialectics, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973) 358.



44. M. Lowry, Under the Volcano (New York: Plume Books, 1971) 65.

45. T. Adorno, The Jargon of Authenticity, trans. K. Tarnowski and F. Will (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973) 112.

46. All references in this chapter are taken from A. de Saint Exupery, The Little Prince, trans. K. Woods (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1943). Page references will be given, in parentheses, immediately after the quote.