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The real self: authenticity in the USA

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The Real Self: Authenticity in the USA

As I briefly argued in the last chapter, the evocation of feeling as ultimate guarantee of the really real occurs as the pervasive market mentality of modern capitalism perpetually works to reproduce the authenticity of the objective world for profit. This is true especially in the United States, where “the American imagination demands the real thing and, to attain it, must fabricate the absolute fake.”ⁱ When commodified fabrication challenges truth, then, according to Jean Baudrillard, “there is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity. There is an escalation of the true, of the lived experience.”ⁱⁱ Under these circumstances, the question ‘what is the real self?’ cannot be answered by reference to the institutions of the external world, but only by reference to impulse, so that bodily craving (or revulsion) is taken as constitutive of the deepest core of the self.

As Ralph Turner explains, there is a vast difference between the two notions of the loci of the self. For the institutionalists of premodern societies, the self is *achieved* by exercising mastery over the emotions and acting according to the highest principles of society; for impulsives, the self is *discovered* through spontaneous emotional revelation, and is best found when appetites are indulged and inhibitions are lowered.ⁱⁱⁱ The impulsive mode of being, which Christopher Lasch famously called the ‘culture of narcissism,’^{iv} correlates with the modern collapse of reliable and sacralized institutional frameworks that offer meaning and succor. Without such frameworks, the public is viewed as “one vast stranger, who appears at inconvenient times and makes demands viewed as purely external and therefore without the power to elicit a genuinely moral response.” When cut away from the comfort of community and subject to the

instrumental, impersonal and pitiless demands of the market, individuals struggle to find some stable ground to stand on. Often enough, they substitute present-day well-being for any fallible theologies claiming ultimate significance. "Not the good life but better living is the therapeutic standard." ^v Immediate feeling supplants outworn doctrine.

The idealization of impulse is the source of what Alasdair MacIntyre has called the dominant modern philosophy of 'emotivism,' that is, "the doctrine that all evaluative judgements and more specifically all moral judgements are *nothing but* expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character." ^{vi} The genuine and valid rationale for action, from this perspective, can only be: 'I like it' or 'I don't like it.' The taken for granted belief that authenticity is a product of a direct and immediate connection to spontaneous feelings that are then expressed in preferences is basically utilitarian. The idea is that when there is no ultimate meaning to be found, the only thing to do is maximize pleasure and minimize pain, and that this can be accomplished easily by knowing and pursuing what feels good, and knowing and avoiding what feels bad. As I've shown, self-constructing preference is most concretely revealed through consumption. Emotivism is the hidden engine of capitalism.

The problem for utilitarian thinkers is how to get people to somehow understand that feeling good, rightly conceived, implies collective responsibility. But even at the pragmatic level, connecting with and realizing one's desires is not the simple matter it seems to be. In large measure this is because the utilitarian or impulse model of desire is too simplistic and one-dimensional, and is based on the assumption that we do indeed know what we like and don't like. But, as Freud and Nietzsche have taught us, the truth is that our emotions are usually ambivalent and often self-contradictory. Even choosing

between chocolate and vanilla is complicated: we may want both, or neither, or some of one and some of the other. And when it comes to more complex and intense feelings we may discover that we simultaneously love what we detest and detest what we love; we may find ourselves taking pleasure in pain and feeling misery in joy. And when we look deep within to discover what we really want and who we really are, what we find is likely to be inchoate, incomprehensible and frightening. Or, to put it another way, before we try to get in touch with our inner child, we ought to recall what infants are really like.

Despite, or because of, the practical difficulties of actually locating and expressing inner feelings spontaneously and unambiguously, the emotivist search for a real self based on impulse has had profound spiritual implications, manifested most spectacularly in the rise of New Age and other 'world affirming' mystical religions which are characteristic of the modern era, especially in America.^{vii} As mentioned in chapter two, these optimistic beliefs portray existential ambivalence and anxiety as delusory. Instead, they presuppose the existence of a universal cosmic self that lies beneath fear and trembling. To achieve communion with the ineffable primal self, they preach a devaluation of social mores while using various training techniques to challenge personal identity and undercut any ties with family, friends and neighbors. The purpose of this process of destabilization is to release the seeker "from the cultural trance, the systematic self-delusion, to which most of us surrender our aliveness."^{viii} After being freed from the alienating programming instilled by society, school and parents the seeker will awaken the inexpressible, timeless and vital transpersonal essence within, and discover the ecstatic power of true being. The emotional experience of enlightenment is described in testimonies from believers: "After I realized that I knew nothing, I realized that I knew

everything... I didn't just experience Self, *I became Self*...It was an unmistakable recognition that I was, am, and always will be the source of my experience... I was whole and complete as I was." ^{ix} Or, as Yeats says, the liberated soul "learns at last that it is self-delighting, / Self-appeasing, self-affrighting, / And that its own sweet will is Heaven's will." ^x

The unexpected efflorescence of personalized world affirming mysticism in the modern age is another consequence of capitalism's delegitimization of the sacred social order and the human search for a convincing spiritual alternative in the self. ^{xi} As Durkheim wrote: "Since human personality is the only thing that appeals unanimously to all hearts, since its enhancement is the only aim that can be collectively pursued, it *inevitably* acquires exceptional value in the eyes of all. It thus rises far above all human aims, assuming a religious nature." ^{xii} The problem is that the New Age religion of the self is asocial and experiential, without moral content save for the ultimate value of mystical communion with the mysterious divine essence buried deep inside. In a less extreme form, precisely the same hope inspires the therapeutic search for personal authenticity; that is, a yearning to tear away masks of repression, eliminate false selves, and unify the individual's inner impulses (taken as the source of the true being) with their outer expression. In sum, the rise of New Age religions and their remissive therapeutic counterparts correlates with alienation from a demystified public world, the destabilizing proliferation of commodified simulations of authentic experience, and an emotivist philosophy. The result is a desire to penetrate the ineffable core of being, express one's deepest feelings, open one's heart to the universe, and *be*.

To a greater or lesser degree, all those in the modern world who have been subjected to capitalism and its atomizing effects yearn to experience the ineffable real self emerging in all its mysterious radiance from beneath the weight of conditioning and constraint. But this hope is especially prevalent in the United States. This is because the USA is a nation where social and spatial mobility is extraordinarily high and where almost the whole population is descended from immigrants. Tradition and ancestral links have little hold in such a transient society. Loosening of primordial ties is furthered because the United States is a revolutionary nation that has fractured relations with its colonizing power. The country is also deeply egalitarian, individualistic, and anti-authoritarian, which correlates with a general lack of awareness of manner in which the social world pre-exists and shapes the person. As one astute commentator remarks, in the United States "individualism is natural, community problematical. *Society has to be built.*"^{xiii} According to this worldview, persons are left to discover themselves according to their own lights (oblivious of the fact that the value of autonomy is a cultural construction).

The self-transformative mission of Americans fits in well with the founders' Protestant faith that individuals must take spiritual and moral responsibility for their own salvations. Good deeds are not enough; the intent has to Godly as well. This means a constant questioning of inner motivations.^{xiv} Correspondingly, without any priests to intercede with God and with no assurance of salvation, Protestants must look into their own souls for some spiritual evidence of God's mercy.^{xv} The habit of soul-searching for a saving truth deep within the self has become ingrained in the American mentality, and feeds into New Age mysticism, therapeutic self-analysis and the quest for authentic

expressivity. Intimately intertwined with all the other factors is the fundamentally capitalistic nature of American culture, which coincides with personal isolation and self-interrogation, as mentioned above, and favors the commercial production of simulacra of authenticity, which turns the truth-seeking gaze inward. It also leads Americans to believe in progress, self-help, and self-improvement; ideals manifested spiritually as well as materially. On all counts the American pattern is in contrast with that found in other contemporary societies discussed in earlier chapters which have a greater degree of historical and genealogical continuity, a greater awareness of the solidity of collective and community, and so have more concern with forms of authenticity based on origin and tradition. ^{xvi}

The Commodified Self: Selling Feeling

In the American context, where authenticity, feeling and expression are ideologically united, the primary refuge from the public sphere of impersonal efficiency and phony commercialization has always been the home, the ‘haven in a heartless world’ where, ideally anyway, love rules and the true feeling self can be revealed. ^{xvii} The symbolic divide is between rational and emotional, calculated and spontaneous, contrived and immediate, adult and childish, masculine and feminine, civilized and primitive, public marketplace and private home space. ^{xviii} At home the worker can drop his adult, civilized masculine façade of responsibility and simply ‘be himself’. Women’s traditional job is to ease the translation from drone to dad. According to the emotional division of labor, women, like savages and children, are reckoned to have special access to the intimate realms of feeling that are the hallmarks of authentic being, but at the price of marginalization from the civilized public world of power and wealth. This asymmetry

leads to considerable conflict. Men resent as well as revere women's place as the guardians of the heart and hearth. Meanwhile, women have tried to escape from their infantilization by earning money for themselves.

The gendered restriction of authentic emotion to the home has been transformed as women have become workers. Merchandisers now routinely use stereotypical feminine expressions of acceptance, sympathy, sexuality and nurturance to appeal to customers' heightened desires for individual recognition in an increasingly impersonal and commodified universe. Service and sales employees, who make up the majority of the female workforce, now do not merely supply labor, but also, and more importantly, they provide the simulation of a warm emotional relationship with customers. This trend has rapidly spread to masculine service jobs where the relationship between customer and client was previously purely instrumental: once the gas station attendant simply wiped the windscreen and pumped gas, now he must also give 'service with a smile.' So, as the home has been eroded as a space for spontaneous self-expression, feelings that were once wholly private now "fall under the sway of large organizations, social engineering, and the profit motive." ^{xix}

The consequences of the commercial appropriation of authentic feminine emotional expressivity are complex and ambiguous, as revealed in the relationship between the performer and her clients in a modern strip club. The contemporary habitué of the strip club is a tame middle-class descendent of the slumming aristocrats and flâneurs of the turn of the 20th century who sought out 'real life' in brothels, opium dens, bars, and taverns, mingling with marginalized people who were fantasized to have no pretenses of respectability, no roles to live up to, no honor to maintain, no constraints on

their behavior. ^{xx} In these permanent back-stage settings, Foucaultian ‘limit experiences’ transgressing conventional moral boundaries could easily be purchased. The slumming tourist’s search for the thrilling hyperreality of forbidden pleasure was built upon clichés about the unbridled sensuality of the lower classes and the inferior races. The exchange of money was a crucial part of the experience, since payment turned the server into a thing existing for the buyer’s pleasure, not a person with independent desires. Precisely *because* transgressive services were for sale, they were more desirable, since part of what the slumming consumer craved was dehumanization and subordination (cancellation) of the submissive other and the concomitant expansion of the self, independent and unfettered by the particularity of the one degraded. ^{xxi}

Similar desires would seem to motivate the clients of the modern strip club. According to their own testimonies, they see the club as a dangerous and thrilling escape from the responsibilities of work and home, a place where ordinary morality does not hold and forbidden desires for sexual domination can be indulged. In her performance, the stripper parades before the client in the nude, asking to be chosen. He can reject her at will. If he accepts her approach he can command her to dance naked for him on his mirrored table, turning what is most intimate into a public display for himself and anyone nearby. As she performs his voyeuristic fantasies, there is no need for casual conversation, no need for social games or feigned romantic interest. The dancer makes no demands on the customer except for payment. He commands. She obeys.

As ever, the picture is more complicated. The club is actually tightly regulated and is far from dangerous, transgressive sexuality is strictly forbidden, and “even men who claim to be wild with desire or testosterone are usually found sitting docilely in their

chairs.” What occurs in the club is not real risk, real transgression, real lust, but a show, performed not only by the strippers, but also by the audience. “Strip clubs offer an opportunity for men to ‘pass’ or perform as straight for their friends and themselves, as well as offering ways for male customers to think about their sexuality as transgressive or liberating.” Most importantly, the fantasies of sexual domination and degradation that motivate customers are moderated by a pretense at intimacy, since the dancer not only dances, but also sits with and talks to any customer who pays her to do so. As Katherine Frank notes, “a commodified relationship can both assuage doubt and redouble it.”^{xxii} By purchasing the stripper’s attention, the certainty of the customer’s own identity is challenged, since the dancer’s paid compliance forfeits the possibility that she might recognize her customer as a person, yet that is just what she pretends to do.^{xxiii}

To ease their own objectification in the eyes of the dancer, regular customers commonly try to establish a relationship where monetary and exploitative aspects are set aside and viewer and performer can connect ‘as real people’. The dream is that the dancer’s nakedness will no longer be compulsory, but will be displayed out of her own wish to please; in this way, forced compliance will be transformed into an action freely done. Every stripper’s main income is derived from this fantasy, since she relies on tips given by clients who believe that she is genuinely interested in them. These become her regulars who come to the club not just to see her naked, but to talk with her. So strippers are trained to act *as if* they cared. As a club DJ advises a beginning dancer: “If you’re not a flirt and a tease and you think you’ve always wanted to be an actress, then *act* like a flirt and a tease. Ask these guys: What do you do for a living? What are your hobbies?

You know, do you race trucks? Do you like speedboats? Do you ski? You know, what do you like to do? So you start trying to get personal on him.”^{xxiv}

Habituéés of the clubs are well aware of this tactic, and are cynical about the strippers’ efforts to ‘get personal’. Yet in spite of their painful consciousness of the inevitability of falsity and exploitation, clients nonetheless try to lure the dancers into an authentic friendship. Seeking a mark of intimacy, they attempt to learn the dancer’s actual name (all strippers have stage names, and many will have a second false name they give out to regular clients), find out her phone number (she may have a special phone line just for her customers) and inquire about her personal history (she is likely to have several stories worked out to appeal to different tastes). To the dismay of those who would prefer hard cash, regulars tend to give their favorites non-transferable presents – clothes, flowers, vacations – that serve to personalize the tie and blur its commercial aspect. They also like to buy her expensive dinners and drinks at the club and start conversations about their hopes and dreams, their family problems and personal worries. In turn, she works hard at giving the impression that he is a man who is worth being listened to *regardless* of the money that he pays her and the power he has over her.

No matter how convincing the stripper’s affection and interest may be, the client is assailed by the realistic suspicion that she is lying.^{xxv} To offset gnawing doubts, customers look for attributes that they believe faithfully indicate a dancer’s sincerity. Some customers believe that false breasts, blonded hair and thick make-up show that the dancer is a fake in other ways as well; others listen for working class accents in the belief that girls from this background are less capable of scripted behavior and so are more real in their responses; still others think that upper-class dancers have interests besides money

and so are more reliable. Youth and inexperience are usually seen as signifying innocence; a performer who seems shy or inept is more authentic than one who is slick and confident (leading some dancers to purposely act clumsy and nervous). The most jaded customers say that gender relations in the strip club are always more authentic than those in real life, because in the club the exchange of money is overt, whereas in romantic relations it is hidden. But while they laugh at men who are fooled by fake sympathy from the dancers, even the cynics pathetically look for clues that will prove which strippers really like them and which are frauds.

What is most astonishing is that, despite all odds, some clients do succeed in their search for recognition. This is in large measure a result of the length of time spent in the club, learning to know and trust the dancers, and, more importantly, letting the dancers know and trust them. Without the intervention of an external authority controlling the relationship between customer and stripper, the dancer may gradually drop her commercialized performance, which is effortful and dehumanizing at the same time. She, after all, is also seeking to be known as a person and not as an object, and so may become sympathetic to the client as confidences (both true and false) are reciprocally exchanged along with the one-way flow of cash. At the same time, the client gradually begins to see the woman behind his fantasy. As Hegel puts it: "They recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another."^{xxvi} The potential for a genuine relationship, it seems, is possible, even when bought and paid for.

However, the hard-won humanization of the commodified relationship between stripper and client cannot occur in the majority of other feminized jobs requiring emotional labor. Most of these occupations entail very short-term interactions which are

unlikely to be repeated. In such jobs, the server is required to wear a constant emotional expression of welcome, enthusiasm, charm and seductiveness without revealing contrary feelings, or gaining recognition as a whole person from the transient client. The type case is the airline stewardess, studied by Arlie Hochschild. Although it seems a far-distant time, stewardesses were once required to project a warm, nurturing, sexy and generally appealing aura of comfort, welcome and female allure to their customers. To accomplish this, several ploys were used. Some simply acted the part on the surface, smiling without significance, and suffered from cynicism and burn out as a result of the constant effort. Others followed the company line and actively tried to convince themselves that the emotions they were required to show the customers were indeed deeply felt and valid. Unruly and rude passengers were reconceptualized as children needing care. Providing meals and soothing irate or drunk customers were tasks envisioned as helping others, like a nurse or teacher.

By investing themselves in the emotional labor of their job, they avoided the conscious inner split suffered by those who just played the part. However, the psychological consequences were even more severe, due to the American faith that heartfelt emotional expressivity constitutes the core of the self. Because of this ideology, when an emotion worker strives to transform the emotional stance required by her job into her own, she must hide her management of her expressivity from herself, since feelings in the American context must be spontaneous and deep in order to be authentic. In other words, by manufacturing feeling, she alienates herself from what she believes to be her most essential reality. Furthermore, if she does succeed in convincing herself of the correspondence between her own genuine feelings and those demanded by the job,

then she must believe that her true self is for sale, and therefore is devalued. As Hochschild concludes: "When the product - the thing to be engineered, mass-produced, and subjected to speed-up and slowdown - is a smile, a mood, a feeling, or a relationship, it comes to belong more to the organization and less to the self." ^{xxvii}

The Performed Self: Art, Trance and Bacchanal

A debilitating sense of essential inauthenticity haunts emotion workers who must suppress, manipulate and sell their feelings. But in Western thought repressed feelings are also understood to be extremely powerful. Too long denied, it is believed that they will boil up, overwhelm social restraints, and explode in disintegrative paroxysms of rage or desire. Then things become *too* real, and the result is mental breakdown or criminal behavior. ^{xxviii} In Western society we try to avoid the dangerous manifestation of extreme emotions in our own lives, but are drawn to their artistic expression. ^{xxix} At a show where the players appear to be carried away by their performances, the audience members share their engagement, and experience a more brightly colored, more intoxicating, more *real* life. ^{xxx} The moment is transient, but revitalizing. It provides what Victor Turner called *communitas*, an anti-structural collective immersion in a liminal state, marked by high emotional intensity and a temporary loss of boundaries of the self. Following Durkheim, Turner sees this experience as the source of the sacred, though it has been attenuated in the modern individualistic context. ^{xxxi} Unfortunately, as I noted in chapter seven, there is a psychological danger for the artists. To convince themselves and others of the permanent reality of identities that are actually transient, they may try to live out the anti-structural intensity of their shows in daily life; the results can be devastating.

Artists who lose themselves in their performances are, in many ways, the shamans of today, spiritually revitalizing those who gather around them to witness their emotional exaltation. In a traditional society, these performers existed within a taken-for-granted sacred framework. It was known that possessing spirits sometimes displaced the consciousness of the otherwise quite ordinary person chosen as their momentary instrument, overwhelming the performer with their primal power. The shaman collapses and trembles while experiencing “the death that kills us all” but the shudder of horror at psychic disintegration gives way to ecstatic possession as the spirits dance, play and otherwise reveal themselves, filling the shaman’s body with a sacred force that spreads to the congregation.^{xxxii} Characteristic are the experiences of the !Kung hunters and gatherers of the Kalahari, many of whom enter trance regularly. Through dance and music and breath control they stimulate the primal spiritual power called *n/um* to rise from the base of the spine into the skull, inducing trance (!kia). When overcome by !kia their “emotions are aroused to an extraordinary level.... they experience themselves as beyond their ordinary self by becoming more essential, more themselves.” They describe the experience as follows: “Your heart stops. You're dead. Your thoughts are nothing....Then you heal, you pull sickness out. You heal, heal, heal. Then you live.”^{xxxiii} Similarly, the shamans of the Nilotic Dinka awaken the God Flesh in themselves, which is the same vital energy manifested in the death spasms of a newly slaughtered animal, Flesh rises, spreads, and heats like the sun, transforming the shaman into a source of cosmic power who can cure or kill by his thoughts alone.^{xxxiv} Possessed by the spirits, the shaman tames a disordered world where human plans and capacities count for little.^{xxxv} The authenticity of possession was not an issue to the !Kung, the Dinka, or the many

other premodern peoples who knew from experience that a vital spiritual force transforms its carriers when it flowers inside their bodies. ^{xxxvi}

The same force exists today, but now its authenticity is both confused and contested, as Mattijs Van de Port has documented in the case of Brazilian Candomblé, a possession religion with African roots. The central ritual of Candomblé is a spectacular ecstatic public performance in which *orixás* (spirits), encouraged by powerful rhythmic music, enter dancers and onlookers and inspire them to extraordinary feats. These exciting ceremonies have become so popular that they have been co-opted by many interests, including the tourist industry, which sponsors special sessions where the dancers wear skin-tight clothes instead of the usual elaborate costumes. To protect their legitimacy and authority against dilution, the Candomblé priests defend the authenticity of their own ceremonies and try to limit the spread of trance into the general public. Predictably, they use a genealogical gambit, claiming that only true Candomblé can trace its roots to ancient African cults. External experts (including anthropologists) are then called upon to testify as to the historical continuity of the ritual, the music and the costumes, and to mark the real thing off from commercialized fakes.

It is true that, in contrast to most mystical traditions, Candomblé and other New World possession cults that share an African influence are strongly oriented toward immediate bodily expressivity and show a disinclination for verbalization or analysis. ^{xxxvii} But these religions are also highly syncretic, and cannot be traced to one historical line. For example, Catholicism also has had a considerable effect on the form of Candomblé. Unlike Protestants driven to inwardness and self-interrogation, Catholics can rely on saintly mediators for salvation, and these cultic figures have been readily appropriated

into Africanized New World religions. Externalized performances of expressive piety are also part of the Catholic sensibility, and this too is transferable to Candomblé and related trance-based religions, though forms of spirit possession in Pentecostalism and other ecstatic Protestant sects have been appropriated as well. ^{xxxviii}

But the mixed heritage of Candomblé is not the reason that priestly efforts at establishing their authority have been unsuccessful. Rather, their efforts have failed because possession trance is at the heart of their religion, and trance goes beyond history, beyond human authority, beyond description and analysis. It is immediate, experiential, and exists only when the *orixás* transfer *axé* (life force) to their human vessels, filling them with the spiritual power that, in the mesmerizing beauty of ecstatic performance, refutes a chaotic universe where nothing is certain – including the legitimacy of official Candomblé itself. Whether those possessed are astonished tourists or faithful followers, when the *orixá* alights, the transformation is as real as real can be – far more real than ordinary life. ^{xxxix} As Van de Port concludes: “in a symbolic universe in which meanings are adrift and truth regimes are in disarray... in a world where authenticity is in high demand, phenomena that seem to be *hors discours* – in other words, seem to be positioned beyond received ways of knowing and understanding – become increasingly attractive.” ^{xl}

As Daniel Miller documents in his ethnography of Trinidad, the exteriorized form of self-authentication through transformative action and emotional expressivity is especially characteristic of the Caribbean, where the populace has “come up against the problematics of modernity with a particular jolt, having had stripped away many of the traditions and structures which would mediate this relationship elsewhere.” ^{xli} In

Trinidad, this ethic manifests itself not only in the trances of those possessed by *orixás*, but also in the daily lives of ordinary people, particularly the young, the outsider, the poor and disreputable, extending to a wide range of those who seek authenticity in the immediate pleasures of performance (Miller calls this the position of transience) as opposed to the official ideology of respectability and tradition (the position of transcendence). The division is locally expressed as “people who live only for the event, spend their money out, emphasize style but know how to enjoy life, or ...those who can plan and save, but are mean and oppressive, who can be true to their families but exclude others.”^{xliii} For adherents of transience the respectable are pretentious frauds who pretend to be superior but are unable to dance, love or play. For the transient, real life is not lived in the inner depths of the soul; interiorizing, self-questioning and deep feelings are devalued in favor of spontaneity and sensation. The standard response to misfortune is ‘doh take it on,’ and the introspective are ridiculed.^{xliiii} Coolness, not commitment, is the ideal; leisure activities, not work, define a person; freedom and expressivity, not responsibility and insight, are sought. Limiting definitions of ‘who I really am’ are eschewed in favor of constant change; becoming, not being, is the goal.

Because they resist placement in structure or tradition, an exteriorized personal aesthetic of fashion, originality, bearing, and sensuality serves to constitute the transient’s self. These everyday performances of identity can be read back to indicate “who one has been” but they do not connote permanence. Rather, the surface self is constantly created through new presentations, which must be carried off with wit, panache and eye-catching physicality. The never-ending purchase, display and subsequent disposal of material possessions are essential aspects of the transient’s dramatic self-definition through style.

For this reason, instead of being 'practical' those who follow the transient lifestyle are likely to spend their hard-earned money on expensive 'luxuries' such as hairdos and shoes that match an outfit. From the perspective of those who have authority and reputation, the emphasis on style and fashion is a clear sign of superficiality. However, for the transient, changing patterns of consumption and display not only define a fluid existence, but also allow alternative surfaces to be tried on, paraded, then discarded. As Miller says, "the development of multi-faceted forms of identity is the most appropriate response to a modernity which has contradiction as an intrinsic condition."^{xliv}

Carnival in Trinidad and elsewhere is the most potent expression of this pluralistic, anti-structural and liminal mode of becoming. It is a bacchanal, an intoxicating public performance of status reversal and *communitas* vividly demonstrating that the façade of respectability is thin and can easily be torn away, exposing the exciting chaos and scandal lurking in the dark. Celebrants fill the streets, dancing, singing, and satirizing those who rule; the powerful, the conservative and the pious stay at home, fearing to be attacked as pretentious hypocrites without any spark of humanity. Music inspires the dancers to lose themselves in its strong rhythms and to join the collective celebration, while also allowing the display of expressive and sensual individual styles. It is a time of emotionally exhilarating collective upheaval where individuals immerse themselves in their bodies. For those on the transient side of society, carnival is the most genuine and most compelling part of the year, the time when they can be who they really are.^{xlv}

Personal identity, the performers of transience believe, is not given by history and lineage, nor can it be discovered deep within. It has to be made up by the actor,

constantly improvising to win confirming praise from the audience. From this position, it is only in its own self-creating that authenticity exists. Or, as Miller concludes, when "nothing can be taken for granted any more; identity, like liberty, is intrinsically an act of forgery." ^{xlvi} Perhaps, in a Hegelian reversal, this is the way authenticity will be understood and experienced in the future, when fragmentation, commercialization, pluralism, implausibility and anomie have finally sapped the vigor of all the old truths, including the truths of the heart. Then, with nothing left to cling to, what remains is the performance of personal taste and style. Which must be authentic, since it is all that exists.

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Endnotes

ⁱ Eco 1986: 8.

ⁱⁱ Jean Baudrillard 2001 "Simulacra and Simulations." In Mark Poster (ed.) Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings. Cambridge: Polity Press: 174. Quoted in Mattijs Van de Port 2005 "Circling around the *Really Real*: Spirit Possession Ceremonies and the Search for Authenticity in Bahian Candomblé" Ethos 33 (2): 149-179: 160.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ralph Turner 1976 "The Real Self: From Institution to Impulse." American Journal of Sociology 81: 989-1016.

^{iv} Christopher Lasch 1978 The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations. New York: Norton.

^v Philip Rieff 1987 The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 52, 58.

^{vi} Alasdair MacIntyre 1981 After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory London: Duckworth: 11.

^{vii} The term 'world affirming' is taken from Roy Wallis 1984 The Elementary Forms of the New Religious Life. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. For other characteristic accounts, see Paul Heelas 1996 The New Age Movement: The Celebration of Self and the Sacralization of Modernity. Oxford: Blackwell; Charles Lindholm 1992 "Charisma,

Crowd Psychology and Altered States of Consciousness.” Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry 16: 287-310; Steven Tipton 1982 Getting Saved From the Sixties. Berkeley: University of California Press.

^{viii} Richard Marsh 1975 "I'm the Cause of My World." Psychology Today 9, no 3: 38.

^{ix} Quoted in Heelas, op.cit.: 58.

^x W.B.Yeats Prayer for my Daughter

^{xi} See chapter two for more on the history of this split.

^{xii} Robert Bellah (ed.) 1973 Emile Durkheim on Morality and Society, Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 51-2 cited in Heelas op.cit.:158

^{xiii} Hervé Varenne Americans Together: Structured Diversity in an American Town New York: Teachers College Press: 70 (emphasis in the original).

^{xiv} For more on the relationship between Protestantism and authenticity, see chapter two.

^{xv} It is often thought that Max Weber’s analysis of Protestantism was concerned only with Calvinism and the austere relationship with God resulting from its doctrine of predestination. But he was well aware that this dogma was too harsh for most people, and that more popular forms of Protestantism softened its severity with notions of grace, inner light, and so on. The mystical aspects of American Protestantism are crucial for explaining the centrality of emotional authenticity in the culture. See Max Weber 1930 (original publication 1920) The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism New York: Scribner.

^{xvi} For more on my view of American culture see John A. Hall and Charles Lindholm 1999 Is America Breaking Apart? Princeton: Princeton University Press.

^{xvii} Christopher Lasch 1977 Haven in a Heartless World New York: Basic Books. See chapter two for more on this split.

^{xviii} See chapters 14 and 15 for more.

^{xix} Arlie Hochschild 1983 The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling Berkeley: University of California Press: 19. The term emotional labor is also taken from Hochschild’s pioneering work. See the previous chapter for more on the relationship between authenticity and the marketplace.

^{xx} For more, see Chris Rojek and John Urry (eds.) 1997 Touring Cultures: Transformations of Travel and Theory London: Routledge.

^{xxi} For the classic analysis of this type of relationship, which I follow here, see the 'Lordship and Bondage' section in G.W.F. Hegel 1967 (original publication 1807) The Phenomenology of Mind New York: Harper and Row.

^{xxii} Katherine Frank 2002 G-Strings and Sympathy: Strip Club Regulars and Male Desire Durham: Duke University Press:100, 143, 197. This section is based on Frank's perceptive ethnographic account of her interactions with clients in strip clubs.

^{xxiii} From the Hegelian perspective, the human struggle to attain the truth of the other, as so achieve self-certainty, is the motivation for the customer's attempt to become friends with the stripper. "Desire and the certainty of its self obtained in the gratification of desire, are conditioned by the object; for the certainty exists through canceling this other; in order that this canceling may be effected, there must be this other. Self-consciousness is thus unable by its negative relation to the object to abolish it; because of that relation it rather produces it again, as well as the desire.... Each is indeed certain of its own self, but not of the other, and hence its own certainty of itself is still without truth," G.W.F. Hegel op.cit.: 225, 232..

^{xxiv} Frank op.cit.: preface

^{xxv} A similar suspicion occurs as well in other settings where sexual relations are commodified, though without the notion of authenticity. For examples, see Charles Lindholm 1998 "Love and Structure." Theory, Culture and Society 15: 243-63; 1995 "Love as an Experience of Transcendence." In W. Jankowiak (ed.): Romantic Passion: A Universal Experience? New York. Columbia University Press.

^{xxvi} Hegel op.cit.: 231.

^{xxvii} Hochschild op.cit.: 198.

^{xxviii} This model has been explored in George Lakoff and Zoltan Kovecses 1987 "The Cognitive Model of Anger Inherent in American English". In Dorothy Holland & Naomi Quinn (eds.) Cultural Models in Language and Thought Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See also George Lakoff 1987 Women, Fire and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

^{xxix} See chapters six and seven for more.

^{xxx} David Grazian 2003 Blue Chicago: The Search for Authenticity in Urban Blues Clubs University of Chicago Press

^{xxxi} See especially Victor Turner 1985 "The Anthropology of Performance". In Edith L. B. Turner (ed.) On the Edge of the Bush: Anthropology as Experience Tucson: University of Arizona Press; Victor Turner 1974 "Passages, Margins, and Poverty: Religious Symbols of Communitas". In V. Turner (ed.) Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors:

Symbolic Action in Human Society Ithaca: Cornell University Press; Victor Turner 1977
The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure Chicago: Aldine.

^{xxxii} Richard Katz 1982 Boiling Energy: Community Healing Among the Kalahari Kung.
 Cambridge: Harvard University Press: 116

^{xxxiii} *Ibid.*: 42, 43, 45.

^{xxxiv} Godfrey Lienhardt 1961 Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka Oxford:
 Clarendon Press.

^{xxxv} I. M. Lewis 1971: Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession
 and Shamanism. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

^{xxxvi} For more on shamanism, see chapter eleven in Charles Lindholm 1993 Charisma
 Oxford: Blackwell.

^{xxxvii} Joseph Murphy 1994 Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora
 Boston: Beacon Press. For a revealing comparison between African and South-Asian
 ecstatic possession cults in Trinidad see Keith McNeil 2005 “Notes on the Variability of
 the Ecstatic Body.” Presented for a panel on “Religion, Emotion, and the Body” at the
 Society for Psychological Anthropology.

^{xxxviii} See the essays in Stephen Glazier (ed.) 1980 Perspectives on Pentecostalism: Case
 Studies from the Caribbean and Latin America Washington: University Press of America.

^{xxxix} Brazilians agree that some possession trances are faked, but many believe that the
orixás are real, and that their power is manifested in real possession trance, which can be
 recognized by experienced observers. Similar doubts about specific enactments
 combined with a belief in the authenticity of possession as a general phenomenon occurs
 in shamanistic cults and in Sufi orders as well. For more on trance in Sufism, see Paulo
 Hilu de la Rocha Pinto 2002 “Mystical Bodies: Ritual, Experience and the Embodiment
 of Sufism in Syria.” Doctoral Thesis, Department of Anthropology, Boston University.

^{xl} Van de Port *op.cit.*: 153.

^{xli} Daniel Miller 1994 Modernity an Ethnographic Approach: Dualism and Mass
 Consumption in Trinidad Oxford: Berg: 12.

^{xlii} *Ibid.*: 286. In Trinidad, people of African descent are assumed to belong to the first
 category, people of South Asian descent to the second. Elsewhere in the Caribbean,
 gender or class are taken to be the determinants of one’s position in this dialectic. Miller
 argues that these are objectifications that attempt to explain central pan-Caribbean
 dualistic contradictions.

^{xliii} Roland Littlewood 1985 “An Indigenous Conceptualization of Reactive Depression in Trinidad.” Psychological Medicine 15: 275-81.

^{xliv} Miller op.cit.: 316

^{xlv} See, for example, Roberto DaMatta 1991 Carnivals, Rogues, and Heroes: An Interpretation of the Brazilian Dilemma Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press: chapters 1, 2, 3; Richard D. E. Burton 1977 Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean Ithaca: Cornell University Press: chapters 4, 5.

^{xlvi} Miller op.cit.: 322.