Proceedings of the MARKETING ILLUMINATIONS SPECTACULAR

Held at St. Clement's, Belfast
5th - 7th September 1997

Editors: Stephen Brown
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Searching for Byzantium:
A Personal Journey into Spiritual Questions that Marketing Researchers Rarely Ask

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Abstract

Spiritual questions often concern the human search for purpose, meaning, eternal truth, harmony, unity, and peacefulness. Despite the fact that most people face such questions as part of the existential struggle of life and despite the possibility that the contemporary marketplace plays a substantial role in influencing the search for relevant answers, marketing researchers have largely ignored such spiritual issues. The author recounts his own awakening to these matters and then suggests areas of marketing and consumer behavior in which the study of spiritual questions may be fruitful for theoretical and substantive advancements.

Introduction

As many of you are undoubtedly aware--especially our gracious Irish hosts--William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) was one of the greatest poets of the 20th century. Among his many famous poems are those in which he dwells upon the ancient metropolis of Byzantium. The illustrious history of Byzantium began in AD 330 when Constantine the Great moved the imperial capital from Rome to an old Greek port in Asia Minor known as Byzantium, renaming it Constantinople (today Istanbul). Among the many developments during the succeeding era, the Roman empire disintegrated and Christianity became the predominant religion of the Greco-Roman world. In addition, a thousand-year period of human creativity ensued, during which Byzantine genius produced art and architecture inspired by a depth of spirituality unmatched in any other age. As a personal testimony, I highly recommend the astonishing mosaics in the walls and ceilings of the Byzantine churches of Ravenna, on the Eastern coast of Italy.

For Yeats, Byzantium represented a synthesis of the religious, aesthetic, and practical, as presented to the populous through the elegant and intricate work of painters, goldsmiths and silversmiths, and illuminators of sacred books. In his Byzantium poems, Yeats seeks to attain a spiritual purification by escaping the confusion and turbulence of the natural, biological world into the serene and timeless world of art which Byzantium symbolized. As Yeats writes in "Sailing to Byzantium" (1927):

Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unaging intellect

He goes on:

And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
To the holy city of Byzantium
St. Clement's retreat house seems an apropos setting to evoke Yeats' magnificent poetry and his mystical and wayward urge for spiritual deliverance. In keeping with the theme of this Marketing Illuminations conference, St. Clement's seems also an appropriate place to consider some spiritual issues in marketing, and perhaps in our own personal lives, which we seldom seem to acknowledge as researchers, let alone investigate.

By spiritual I generally mean the human search for purpose, meaning, eternal truth, harmony, unity, and peacefulness. Admittedly or not, each of us here today--as struggling inveterate intellectuals--has probably been on a lifelong quest for spiritual answers. In fact, nearly everyone, regardless of educational background or economic circumstance, wrestles with spiritual questions to varying degrees. Why am I here? How should I use my energy? My talents? My time? My money? What is the proper way to live? What is the good life?

I have come to believe that these questions are not mere philosophical enigmas with no relevance to marketing research or business management. These issues are arguably the inevitable angst of our species, once the basic needs for food and shelter are met. As researchers, however, we rarely ask what is the role of marketing, the marketplace, and the gamut of consumer behaviors in affecting the spiritual journeys of the common man, common woman, and common child. A few marketing researchers have broached these concerns (e.g., see articles in Firtat et al. 1987; also in Samli 1987), but for the most part they are a muffled, minority voice. There are numerous questions about marketing and spiritual matters that remain not only unaddressed, but also never asked.

In this brief paper I would like to suggest that, following Yeats, we should consider eschewing the worldly, mundane topics of marketing and consumer behavior and begin to confront those of spiritual significance that the marketplace and consumption may influence. I have grappled with some of these spiritual questions in recent years and, in some cases, begun to examine them--however feebly--in my conceptual and empirical work. In retrospect, I realize now that these issues have been integral to my own personal journey since I was a young boy. Perhaps in mentioning them I can light your interest and curiosity, and encourage more of us to consider these issues as intellectuals, commoners, and marketing researchers.

I should stress at the start that I do not believe that the spiritual issues I will discuss are strictly or primarily related to consumer behavior in the hypercommercialized American society. Many other nations and cultures throughout the world, for better or for worse, are emulating the economic structures and consumer aspirations of the USA.

Before raising these spiritual questions, I hope the reader will briefly indulge me as I wax autobiographical. I outline certain aspects of my personal history for two reasons. First, it underscores how each of us has lurking within us a spiritual journey that began long ago and along which our academic research can readily travel. Secondly, there was a particularly defining stage in my life about 10 years ago that elevated my concerns with spiritual matters to a higher level of consciousness which, in turn, provoked new directions in my research. The basic details of that period may offer insights into what is required for most of us to hear the call to study spiritual questions in marketing.
A Dialogue of Self and Soul (see WBY's poem of the same title, 1929)

I was raised Roman Catholic and learned my Latin prayers by heart, as every altar boy must do. The church of my youth was filled with ornate plastering and marble altars, golden candelabra, larger-than-life statues of the saints and the Virgin Mary, and the Ways of the Cross in sequential stained glass panels. The smell of myrrh and frankincense permanently filled the air. I served and attended at hundreds of masses in that church. I often kneeled in the silent mysteriousness and wondered what was the relation of that place and its attendant feelings to those on the other side of the thick wood doors at the vestibule.

I attended parochial schools for 12 years and took an early interest in music, poetry, and literature. Two of my favorite books in my mother's collection were the short stories of the American gothic author Edgar Allan Poe and a set of essays on ethics and society by the British philosopher Bertrand Russell. When I went on to college I majored in English literature and philosophy, completing one senior thesis on Poe's 1836 novel The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym (about an expedition to the unknown south pole) and another thesis on the ontological argument for the existence of God initiated by St. Anselm of Canterbury in the 11th century.

Subsequently, I attempted and quit graduate school in literature, I wrote poetry and music, and I tried a number of different jobs, from selling insurance and managing our family's liquor store to teaching philosophy and rhetoric part-time at local colleges. A few years later I got married and I also began doctoral work in business administration. Not surprisingly, I quickly gravitated toward research issues focusing on meaning and communication, particularly semiotics and psycholinguistics. I took my first full-time academic position at the University of Florida and we soon purchased a relatively new three bedroom house with two-car-garage, situated on an acre of land on the outskirts of town. Both of us were working and our lives were charmed with all the accoutrements of American consumerhood.

A couple of years later I received an invitation to serve for a year as a guest professor at the Copenhagen Business School. We had previously travelled in Europe and one of my life-long dreams had been to live abroad for an extended period. Suppressing our trepidations about the logistics of such a move, we accepted the offer and arrived in Copenhagen in August, 1989. We left virtually everything behind, except for some clothing, books, research files, and musical tapes.

We lived in a modestly furnished house in a working class suburb of Copenhagen called Valby, perhaps best known as the home of the world-class brewer, Carlsberg. The house was 100 years old, but clean and quiet. The kitchen had a small, older-model refrigerator and gas stove. The kitchen was otherwise simple, with no electronic appliances such as an automatic coffee maker or microwave oven. There was an outdated black-and-white television, without VCR, on which Danish and Swedish programs were broadcast—and may just as well have been in Swahili, given our ignorance of the local languages. The furniture was typically Scandinavian, with plain wood designs and comfortable padding. We bought one used bicycle, and had no car. The yard was small, with several flower beds, and we cut the grass with a manual, twirling-blade mower.

Buying bread, vegetables, and other items meant regular walks of five to eight blocks to the main
street of Valby where most of the quaint, family-owned shops were located. Together my wife and I would prepare our meals and then wash the dishes by hand. In the evenings and on weekends we would go for long and winding walks through the large glorious parks nearby. One of the parks was actually an old and stately cemetery with many commemorative statuary and serene ponds with ducks and swans. During these walks we wove together the tranquil silence with occasional discussions of our past, present, and future. When the weather did not permit these excursions, we would sit and read books and magazines, with our favorite classical and jazz music in the background.

Being in Europe, of course, permitted us to take some long awaited trips to historical and cultural sites we had only dreamed of: Cairo and Luxor, Egypt, with their towering pyramids and crumbled temples; Krakow, Poland, with its medieval aura and the nearby hell of Auschwitz; Giverny, France, with Claude Monet's shrimp-colored house and accompanying art studio, resplendent gardens, and lillied gazing ponds. And there was Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, England, Finland, Holland, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Sweden, and more.

During our year in Denmark we came to appreciate the Danes very much, especially their egalitarianism and lack of ostentation. It was indeed a year of living across cultures, geographies, and times--a year whose pleasant memories have led us back to live in Europe again, among our new hosts and friends in Dublin.

The day we left Denmark, in late July 1990, it was cloudy and cool at noon, about 65F. On the bus to the airport we drank in every last image of Danish life we could. We felt sad and oddly apprehensive about our departure.

My wife's elderly grandfather who lived in Phoenix, Arizona, had insisted that we visit him before re-settling in Florida. So, we flew from Copenhagen to Chicago and waited in the terminal for our connecting flight to Phoenix. Landing in Phoenix at 10pm local time, we exited the plane and walked out of the terminal into a starry black night, and a temperature of 103F. If we had any lingering doubts, it was clear we were not in Denmark anymore.

After sleeping off our jet lag, our re-acquaintance with America began. Since grandpa was short on groceries for his guests, our first foray the next morning was to the supermarket. And super it was. I felt like I was in an industrial warehouse, high ceilings and multiple, long, linear aisles of crammed shelves, stacked with thousands of products. My initial duty was to select a couple of boxes of breakfast cereals. Finding the right aisle was easy: it was 75 feet long, five shelves high, and packed with every grain, flavor, color, and nutritional combination a person could want. Yes, I wanted, but I did not know exactly what I wanted with any conviction. I grabbed a box or two and fled the aisle, hoping wife and grandpa would approve of my choices. My next duty was to pick out some soda. Another easy aisle to find and another cornucopia of options and emotions. Here I was, a consumer researcher, and I had never felt so dreadful or repulsed by mundane grocery shopping.

Our week with grandpa was mixed with joys and further cultural aftershocks. As our desert visit ended, we boarded another plane for home sweet home in Florida. Or would it be bittersweet home?
We arrived to a house vacated by our year-long renters and in need of replenishment. Since we had placed many of our belongings in a local storage facility, I borrowed a neighbor's truck and began the numerous back-and-forth trips, hauling couches, chairs, end tables, lamps, television sets, small kitchen appliances, computer, stereo speakers, art work, clothing, etcetera, etcetera. After cleaning and setting back the furnishings, we headed for the yard. Full of trees, shrubs, and native plants, the yard had been mostly neglected and it took a full week of hot and back-breaking labor to restore it to pre-Denmark condition. Of course, the gutters were full of leaves, the air conditioner was making strange gurgling sounds, and our two cars required immediate tune ups. The need for toiletries and additional household items led us to the huge regional shopping mall where.....well....you can guess this part of the story. And of course, there was also grocery buying at the supermarket. By that point, I nearly refused to go, but hunger got the best of me.

Three months after re-entry to the USA, we were tired and grouchy, with little time or energy for each other or anything else we came to cherish in Denmark. It was not simply a temporary phase of re-adjustment. Slowly, my mind crept back to age-old questions about the purpose, meaning, and content of the good life—this time in the context of marketing and consumption.

I shared my new spiritual crisis with Susan Fournier, a bright doctoral student at the university, and soon afterward we embarked on a multi-method, multi-product study of consumption in everyday life, focusing especially on technological products. Susan has since gone on to professorship at Harvard University and we have remained good friends and steady co-authors (Fournier, Dobscha, and Mick 1997; Fournier and Mick 1997; Mick and Fournier 1995; Mick and Fournier 1996). These joint projects and my own ruminations have increasingly related to several spiritual questions raised by breaking away from an intensive materialistic lifestyle.

**Consumer's Curse** (see WBY's poem "Adam's Curse" 1902)

*Attention and Consciousness*

In a holistic sense, what role does marketing and the marketplace serve in terms of human attention and consciousness? Consciousness involves the dual monitoring of internal psychological states and external environmental factors. It is arguably the most sophisticated and integrated form of information processing and meaning making of which people are capable. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1978), attention is the limited resource of psychic energy that governs the stream of consciousness, admitting or denying various contents into consciousness. Only that which appears in consciousness is phenomenologically real to a person. Thus, Csikszentmihalyi (1978, p. 337) argues, "How attention is allocated determines the shape and content of one's life." Who we are and what we will be are a direct outcome of how we allocate attention for controlling the flow of consciousness.

There are two kinds of human attention, optimal and aversive. The former involves voluntarily focusing on a limited stimulus field whereas the latter involves involuntarily focusing. Research suggests that the inability to manage attention voluntarily can lead to a host of psychological problems, including impatience, irritability, carelessness, and even depression (Csikszentmihalyi 1975). According to Csikszentmihalyi (1978), numerous everyday contexts are designed in ways that make voluntary attention difficult. He does not specifically mention the marketplace as one
of those everyday contexts, but it is not difficult to make that association.

The study of who and what controls attention is intimately tied to the issue of how people spend another scarce commodity: time. Linder (1970) developed a taxonomy of time according to five fundamental categories:

- **Work**: time spent in specialized production which affects income
- **Personal**: time spent maintaining goods and one’s body (e.g., personal hygiene)
- **Consumption**: time spent consuming goods
- **Cultural**: time spent cultivating human growth (e.g., reading, music, travel)
- **Idle**: time spent in passivity or strict relaxation

Cultural time and idle time are the two classifications that relate directly to spiritual issues. Together they offer the individual the opportunity to step back from the frantic tempo and demands of contemporary life and to seek quiet contemplation and sustained human interaction in pursuit of knowledge, intuitive insight, and the ultimate purposes of life.

Unfortunately, based on government and survey statistics, econometric modelling, and sociological analysis, Linder concludes that the harried pace of current life is leading to significant reductions in cultural time and idle time. Attention and consciousness are drawn more to work time and to the acquisition, consumption, and maintenance of consumer goods. Recently, Juliet Schor (1991) argued that Americans are working harder because they are spending more. In her theory, work and consumption fuel each other. As the cycle spins over and over, and out of control, leisure opportunities necessarily decline because there is less time available for them.

As consumers find themselves making more and quicker decisions from a teeming jungle of options, the mind becomes more like the hyperactive monkey who swings nervously, endlessly, and aimlessly from one branch to another, going nowhere but toward exhaustion, the fundamental postmodern condition (Brown 1995). These issues of attention, consciousness, and time troubled me most in returning to the USA. In Denmark, my mind slowed and it focused more voluntarily on the few things that mattered most to me: my wife, my books and music, my students, my research. Back in the USA my mind seemed increasingly and involuntarily drawn to a welter of marketing and consumption I had enjoyed escaping.

In marketing research we have hardly considered these complex issues. For example: How do consumers experience shopping and buying today? What about setting up, operating, and maintaining goods? Securing and monitoring services (e.g., house cleaning)? Do they recognize and feel the demands of these activities on human energy and time? Do they sense that they control their attention and consciousness in consumer activities? Do they experience mindfulness or mindlessness? Why or why not? When or when not? How do they attempt to manage their attention and consciousness with respect to the marketplace? What tactics do they use? Are people spending less time today on cultural activities or idleness as Linder predicted? Do they sense a loss of cultural or idle time? If so, do they lament a lack of cultural or idle time? Why do they think they are unwilling or unable to restructure their lives in order to shift attention and consciousness to cultural and idle time?
If the way we spend our attention, consciousness, and time determines who we are as people and as societies, and if marketing and consumer behavior influence these aspects of life, then it seems we should be investing more research effort to understand these connections for theoretical, substantive, and social policy purposes.

Overchoice

Studying how consumers choose one brand over others has been one of the most examined areas of the marketing field. It encompasses the use of memory, information processing rules, prior attitudes, and personality factors. Researchers have found that aspects of the choice context (e.g., the type and extent of brand differences; amount of time to process information) also affect brand selection. In the end, however, the dependent variable is almost always the same: which brand was chosen.

Thinking back to the supermarket experience in Phoenix, it involved much more than simply how I perceived the brands and which I preferred. In fact, for me that singular experience encapsulates the condition of choice proliferation that extends now into every sphere of developed consumer societies. Choice overload is inescapable: from soda and socks to insurance and television shows. More options, smaller and sometimes illusory differences among options, and less time to choose. However, to complain of this scenario seems heretical. Protesting it seems to challenge the very foundation of democracy and capitalism, namely, freedom of choice. But as Waldman (1992, p. 23) reminds us, too much of a good thing may be a bad thing, and he argues that "Choice can be debilitating. It forces us to squander our time, weakens our connections to people and places, and can even poison our sense of contentedness."

Some in our field have suggested that the study of consumer choice has been over-emphasized and should now be de-prioritized. In my view we should recommit ourselves to studying choice behavior, but with a wholly different focus, especially on the dependent variable side. This alteration in perspective should reflect a spiritual orientation that centers more on the impact of consumer choice on the serenity and well-being of the individual. For example: When choosing products, what effects do less time and more options (with fewer discriminating criteria) have on dysfunctional behaviors such as buying more products than reasonably needed, buying in larger volume than reasonably needed, neglecting or misunderstanding product labels, and miscalculating the best deals? Also, what effects are there on consumers' stress levels, fatigue, confidence in choices, satisfaction with choices, and emotions such as frustration, regret, self-confidence, and pride?

These are issues at the core of everyday consumer behavior in a world of expanding options and choices. I am now much more suspicious about the freedom of boundless choices when choosing is the principal activity of human lives trapped in the marketplace. We need to understand in greater detail and more depth the experience and effects of overchoice.

The Content of Our Characters

Another set of spiritual questions we seldom ask ourselves concerns the effects of marketing and consumption on human character. By character I do not mean human values, but rather our psychological temperament as we go about our daily activities. What kind of person does marketing and consumption encourage or discourage? Many observers who have addressed this
question have tended to emphasize effects such as egoism, selfishness, and insidious social comparisons. They argue that marketing strategies urge people to think only of their own individual desires, their own self-images, and their relative superiority (or inferiority) to other people, usually in terms of physical appearances and ownership of expensive items. These arguments are persuasive, but I believe the impact of marketing and consumer behavior on human character extends further into other spiritual territories.

Impatience. Certainly, marketers alone have not caused the frenetic pace of life which we endure, though they may definitely exacerbate it. Products and services that are loudly promoted to save energy and time may only reinforce the belief that doing things quicker is the right way to live. In fact, consumer technologies that are touted for the wondrous quality of increased efficiency in household and workplace activities may be unwittingly jacking up our need and desire for faster outcomes in all domains of life. Consider also the plethora of marketing promises about service delivery, as in "We will return your phone inquiry in less than one hour" or "We will deliver a pizza to your table in less than five minutes." What do all of these promises of speed do to our expectations? Our nervous systems? The need for speed seems to be escalating with most products today. We work faster, we travel faster, we communicate faster. We feel faster. But we also feel impatient when we are not going as fast as we have become accustomed to.

What is impatience? "Scratch the surface of impatience," writes Jon Kabat-Zinn (1996, p. 48), "and what you will find lying beneath it, subtly or not so subtly, is anger." Impatience, he argues, is a strong energy aimed at not wanting life to be the way it is at the moment. The hypermarketplace of postmodernity, with its crowd of daily choices and "guaranteed faster" products, may be making us less tolerant, less patient, and perhaps angrier.

Incivility. Tied to the general issue of impatience is the specific aspect of incivility. It may seem a far stretch to suggest that marketers and consumption may erode human courteousness, but when the target of impatience shifts from things to people, it may be unavoidable that interpersonal rudeness also increases. Always in a hurry; feeling the pressure of constant choices; regularly expecting efficient responses--these conditions of postmodern consumption appear antithetical to those that encourage politeness, let alone authentic human bonding. Rivenburg (1995) laments how we have become meaner and ruder because we are always in a rush, which he incisively names the Microwave Oven Theory of Belligerent Behavior. It is a theory that deserves as much to be tested as, say, multi-attribute attitude models or the Elaboration Likelihood Model.

Judgmentalism. It has long been claimed that marketing encourages people to compare themselves to others and to use products for displaying relative social status. But this is only one form of judgmentalism. Consider that virtually every single choice a person makes involves the exercise of evaluation and preference formation. This is obviously true in cases of decision making when no prior evaluations and preferences have been determined. But even when evaluation and preference are stored in memory from prior events ("I always choose brand A because I like it better than brands B or C"), there is still the experience of judging in the given moment when memory is activated. What then does the environment of plentiful consumption and overchoice entail in this regard? An unabated march of consumer judgments, every hour,
every minute.

The incessant cycle of judgement and choice may have another pernicious effect on human character. When we rapidly judge something we have closed our mind to it. If we are constantly judging things, then we are not open to those things, particularly to seeing new qualities, new meanings, new possibilities. It is a wish to size up the situation, manage the situation, and move on. Rapid and habitual judgment means that we are not eager to learn from our environment. Constant judging and choosing work together as a form of control behavior which, according to Slater (1974, p. 10), "dulls and deadens our experience." If so, human growth via open-mindedness may be jeopardized by a marketplace that demands ceaseless judgements and choice.

Distrust. One of the benefits of living abroad is that most of the companies that knew where you were in your domestic marketplace cannot find you anymore. The junk mail does not get forwarded. No more envelopes arrive marked "Survey Inside #23407" which, when opened, quickly turn into a not-so-subtle plea for a donation, or an invitation to request more "product information" (also known as direct mail and advertising). Similarly, at dinner time phone calls of solicitation cease. In fact, at our Danish residence the phone rarely rang at all. In Denmark I no longer felt like the hunted prey of hundreds of corporations.

What does this constant chase of cat and mouse do to the bond of trust among human beings? If our days and weeks are filled with the need to be suspicious, on continuous guard against those who would like to acquire a portion of your bank account, then suspiciousness becomes a salient mental orientation, always at the forefront of our minds, even in contexts that may not call for it. In fact, priming studies in psychology have shown how people can be surreptitiously sensitized to interpret new stimuli in specific ways by having them first read supposedly unrelated material that evokes certain mental constructs (e.g., see Higgins, King, and Mavin 1982). These researchers have shown that the degree to which a particular mental orientation frames a person's ongoing interpretations of new stimuli is a function of how often and how recently that mental orientation has been activated. The moral is that people who feel the need to be skeptical or distrustful on a customary basis, are probably more apt to be distrustful in situations when there is no need to be so. But they cannot control the activation of distrust very well because it has become their chronic mental construct. The marketplace may be eroding our ability to trust our fellow human beings.

Materialism

Materialism has been investigated for several years in consumer behavior. Russ Belk was an early pioneer over a dozen years ago in writing about the history of worldly possessions and the traits of people who are absorbed by materialism (e.g., see Belk 1985). Other recent work has extended inquiry into the dimensions of the materialism construct and related them to psychological adjustment characteristics and dysfunctional behaviors such as compulsive buying (e.g., Mick 1996; Richins and Dawson 1992).

The dominant theories of materialism in consumer behavior have been implicitly founded on an involvement perspective, i.e., a person's enduring interest in something (Zaichkowsky 1985). For example, Belk (1985) defines materialism as the importance a consumer attaches to possessions and Richins and Dawson (1992) describe materialists as those who value possessions more highly.
than most other aspects of life. While the involvement approach to materialism is unassailable, it overlooks a key component of materialism that implicates deep philosophical and spiritual questions.

As we arrived in Denmark from our American lifestyle, our interests in material things, and the importance we attached to them, did not change overnight. But some other things did change rapidly, one of them being the interdependencies we shared with the numerous possessions left behind. Not only did we no longer consume a car, a television set, a VCR, a motorized lawn mower, a microwave oven, a dehumidifier, a leaf blower, 28 dress shirts, 15 pants, 30 dresses, and two dozen pairs of shoes (and much more), we were also no longer dependent on them for our happiness and they were no longer dependent on us to keep them running well and looking proper. As Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "If I own the cow, then the cow owns me."

Essentially, the numerous possessions we left behind no longer commanded key parameters in our lives, including the use of time and space, the character and quality of interpersonal interactions, and reliance on complicated machine outcomes. Materialism certainly concerns involvement in marketplace things. More than this though, materialism also concerns the extent to which an individual (or a society) encourages things to become determinants of how time, space, effort, and relationships are defined and maintained. Materialism is about unconscious and conditioned habits of person-object relations that subtly influence the mind and body.

Many things people own are not considered on a regular basis to be extremely important and would not necessarily score high on an involvement scale. These might include, for example, refrigerators or electric can openers or pencil sharpeners, as compared to television sets or automobiles. Yet when refrigerators, electric can openers, and pencil sharpeners break down, people often feel helpless about accomplishing their current tasks or goals. What effect does such dependency have on feelings of self-competence and self-esteem? This line of reasoning suggests that interdependency may be central to materialism, and new advances may come forth from considering its nature and development among consumers and possessions.

Conclusion

Most human beings, I believe, are searching for a Byzantium of spiritual purification, a deliverance from the trials and tribulations of daily life. The marketplace and consumer behavior affect people in regard to this search. Some people believe that consumption is the best route to Byzantium; they even believe that the marketplace is the most sacred space of the postmodern world (see examples in Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989). I suspect, however, that these people are thousands of miles from the true Byzantium, and they are headed in the wrong direction.

Since returning from a year abroad--a year of simpler, slower living--I have thought about marketplace phenomena in ways I had never done before. I have come to the conclusion that the effects of the marketplace and consumer behavior on the human mind and body can be more pervasive, more subtle, and more distressing than we have ever seriously considered in our field. Ultimately these are spiritual issues because they concern human growth and integrity. Studying them will require courage, persistence, and a range of paradigms and methods, from naturalistic
observation and phenomenological interviews to surveys and experiments.

Here in this solemn retreat house on the northern coast of the Emerald Isle, perhaps we will all begin to ask more spiritual questions about marketing and consumer behavior, inspired by the closing lines of Yeats' "Sailing to Byzantium":

Once out of nature I shall never take  
My bodily form from any natural thing,  
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make  
Of hammered gold and gold enameling  
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;  
Or set upon a golden bough to sing  
To Lords and Ladies of Byzantium  
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

Acknowledgements

I thank Jim Burroughs for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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