The Sacred and the Profane in Consumer Behavior: Theodicy on the Odyssey

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Two processes at work in contemporary society are the secularization of religion and the sacralization of the secular. Consumer behavior shapes and reflects these processes. For many, consumption has become a vehicle for experiencing the sacred. This article explores the ritual substratum of consumption and describes properties and manifestations of the sacred inherent in consumer behavior. Similarly, the processes by which consumers sacralize and desacralize dimensions of their experience are described. The naturalistic inquiry approach driving the insights in this article is advanced as a corrective to a premature narrowing of focus in consumer research.

It has been argued that revelatory incidents are the primary source of insight in ethnographic fieldwork (Fernandez 1986; Sherry 1988). These are highly charged encounters suffused with meaning. Because these incidents are directly experienced by the researcher, the significance of the phenomenon under study is more fully appreciated than might otherwise be possible. A number of such revelatory incidents have caused us to reevaluate some of the field's fundamental constructs for understanding marketplace and consumer behavior. Consider the following abbreviated examples:

> Among the wares for sale at the edge of the midway of a bustling Southwestern swap meet are decorative brooms and handcrafted dolls which closely resemble Cabbage Patch Kids. The vendor, a vibrant middle-aged woman named Sarah, fashions the dolls with loving detail born of remarkable social circumstance. After the birth of her first child—a son now embarking upon a trying preadolescence—an automobile accident prevented Sarah from conceiving other children, most notably the daughter she always wanted. During her recovery, Sarah began doing handicrafts, and eventually began "making the babies." In joining the dolls' fabric bodies and faces, Sarah sees the babies "come to life." She views her skill as a special gift, just as babies are a gift from God. As she talks about her dolls, she adopts a different linguistic register, shifting into baby-talk, and caresses their foreheads as she speaks. Prior to closing the sale of each doll, Sarah performs a deliberate transaction. She kisses the doll before releasing it to a customer, wishing it well and knowing all the while how happy the doll will make other children.

Describing his arrangement of sculpted ceramic figures alternately as a "surrealistic fantasy" and a "dream," Garth Warren watches viewers strolling past his exhibit at the open air art festival. The young Southern Californian artist has created a series of figures ("Eygot," "Wewants," "Sleep Drive," "Swollen Pride") complete with framed misspelled proem cautionary tales, which represent aspects of his own personality (notably "consumerism") which he purports to dislike greatly. He is building a portfolio suitable to entering galleries, and is using this show to gain some exposure. Significantly, he is little concerned with business matters, and finds pricing his artwork troublesome. He gives many of his pieces away for nothing, and is as content with a talkative looker as a paying customer. His younger sister, however, is sales-oriented, and has undertaken to protect Garth from his own philanthropy. Using a pricing policy that is at turns intuitive and strategic, she is not above reviling critical lookers or altering her brother's work to suit a prospective buyer. Garth's philoso-

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phy of "If people smile, it's enough; they don't have to buy" contrasts strikingly with the sister's philosophy of "I make sure he gets what's coming to him." Theirs is a symbiotic relationship in which commerce assumes a custodial role with respect to art.

The middle-aged proprietor of Mr. Ed's Elephant Museum and Gift Shop speaks with considerable pride of opening his present business. Operating on intuition he likens to predestination, Mr. Ed risked starting a venture sustained through the display and sale of elephant replicas and peanuts. His museum houses a collection of hundreds of elephant replicas he has amassed for the enjoyment of others and for posterity. His gift shop is similarly laden with elephantiana. Despite the apparent similarity of contents, Mr. Ed regards the two areas as sublimely distinct. The museum items will never be offered for sale at any price, regardless of their similarity (or even apparent inferiority) to items in the gift shop. Mr. Ed can conceive of no compelling argument (including his own hypothetically imminent destitution) for moving a piece from the museum to the gift shop. Mr. Ed maintains with axiomatic, heartfelt certainty that to attempt such a move would be "wrong."

Each of these vignettes reflects a dimension of buyer and seller world views previously undescribed in consumer research. Each is an example of the ritual substratum of consumer behavior. These observations make it apparent that consumption involves more than the means by which people meet their everyday needs. Consumption can become a vehicle of transcendent experience; that is, consumer behavior exhibits certain aspects of the sacred. It is the premise of this article that this sacred dimension can be clinically described and interpreted, thereby enhancing our understanding of consumer behavior. In the following pages, we explore the qualities of sacredness and the underlying processes of transformation manifest in consumer behavior.

Theory and research in the sociology of religion suggest that a fundamental distinction structuring social life is between what is set apart and regarded as sacred and what is regarded as profane or ordinary. In some societies, the sacred involves magic, shamanism, animism, and totemism. Such societies often accord sacred status to components of the natural environment that are revered, feared, worshiped, and treated with the utmost respect. In contemporary Western religion, the sacred/profane distinction is also important, although the elements of experience considered sacred differ. Contemporary Western religions define as sacred certain gods, shrines, clothing, days, relics, and songs. While less a part of nature, these objects are regarded by the faithful of contemporary Western religions as sacred, and there are parallels with the regard for certain natural objects by participants in non-Western religions. Both sets of objects fulfill a need to believe in something significantly more powerful and extraordinary than the self—a need to transcend existence as a mere biological being coping with the everyday world.

For many contemporary consumers, there are also elements of life with no connection to formal religion that are nonetheless revered, feared, and treated with the utmost respect. Examples include flags, sports stars, national parks, art, automobiles, museums, and collections. Whether we call the reverence for these things religious, contemporary consumers treat them as set apart, extraordinary, or sacred, just as elements of nature are sacred in naturistic religions and certain icons are sacred to followers of contemporary, organized religions. Although the specific focal objects differ, the same deeply moving, self-transcending feelings may attend each, and the same revulsion may occur when these objects are not treated with respect. Religion is one, but not the only, context in which the concept of the sacred is operant.

Explicit recognition of the sacred status accorded to many consumption objects illuminates aspects of contemporary North American consumer behavior that, while basic and pervasive, have not been explained by prior theory and research. The substantial body of social science theory on the role of the sacred in religion is used here in developing an understanding of sacred aspects of consumption. This body of related theory is used in analyzing and interpreting the Consumer Behavior Odyssey data (Belk 1987c; Wallendorf and Belk 1987; Holbrook 1987; Kassarjian 1987; Sherry 1987a; Wallendorf 1987b) and in building a theory of the sacred aspects of consumption.

The conditions and characteristics of consumption interpretable through the constructs of sacred and profane are detectable through introspection and a close reading of a diverse literature set. However, the processes of meaning investment and divestment—the sacralization rituals we treat at length in this article—are resistant to such distanced exposition. To reflect the insights immanent in armchair and field, we employ a compromise strategy of presentation. That is, *conditions* for and *foci* of sacredness are explored principally through literature evaluation tempered by fieldwork. *Processes* are examined principally through analysis of field data tempered by literature. This work is intended as a conceptual contribution to parallel disciplines and as an empirical contribution to consumer research.

After explaining the naturalistic methodology through which the insights in this article were derived, we review the sacred and profane in scholarly theories of religion. To understand what these theories can contribute to our understanding of consumer behavior, we next explore shifts in contemporary boundaries between the sacred and the profane. In so doing, we illuminate what is considered sacred in the secular world of consumption. Going beyond merely categorizing objects or experiences as either sacred or

profane, we then develop a theory of the central processes by which transcendence is achieved through consumption, using data from participant-observation and depth interviews from the Consumer Behavior Odyssey. Finally, we outline areas of consumer research that can benefit most from this theoretical perspective.

METHOD

The importance of the distinction between sacred and profane aspects of consumption emerged in interpreting our data from a pilot project (Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf 1988). Subsequently, the Consumer Behavior Odyssey collected data primarily through naturalistic, qualitative fieldwork as detailed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Data analysis and interpretation with corroboration from the religious and social science literatures were guided by the constant comparative method of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and techniques specified by Miles and Huberman (1984) and Becker (1986). We used natural settings, emergent design, multiple sites, purposive sampling, cross-context testing for transferability, depth and intimacy in interviewing, triangulation of data across researchers and data collection media, and triangulation of interpretation across researchers. Despite a long history of usage in anthropology and sociology, these approaches have been employed less commonly in the study of consumer behavior and, thus, are explained briefly here.

Before and during fieldwork, and throughout post-field coding and further analysis, we immersed ourselves in the literatures that address the sacred/profane distinction. Our reading of these literatures was both close and emergent, and has shaped and reflected the interpretation presented here. Unlike positivistic research, which supposedly evaluates extant literature to discover gaps to address through additional research, the Odyssey did not begin with a literature-based problematique. Rather, fieldwork prompted library research, which in turn led to additional fieldwork. What was at one moment a need to interpret consumer behavior in context, became at the next moment a desire to deconstruct and reconstruct scholarly theories. We employ a presentation style that reflects this balance between library and field.

Emergent Design

Data collection and analysis were guided by emergent design. This approach differs from surveys or experiments, which assume that the researcher understands the phenomenon prior to doing the research, so that hypotheses and fully specified data collection and analysis plans are possible.

In naturalistic inquiry, no such assumption is made. Instead, researchers build an understanding of the phenomenon as it occurs *in situ,* later testing the veracity of that understanding, also *in situ.* The first step is to observe and record the phenomenon in detail. Researchers then specify their understanding and construct guidelines for further data collection to test the emerging understanding. This iterative process continues in what Glaser and Strauss (1967) call the constant comparative method. Rather than data collection followed by analysis, data collected previously form the basis for an interpretation, which then defines what data still are required to test the interpretation. The process continues until conceptual categories are saturated and reach a point of redundancy, making further data collection unnecessary. For example, by the time we interviewed the collector of elephant replicas mentioned earlier, we had explicit hypotheses concerning the separation of sacred possessions from profane, usable commodities available for sale. This collector echoed the views of prior informants that collections are sacred and thereby differentiated from salable commodities.

Neither the number nor type of interviews needed to reach this point of saturation can be specified a priori. This results in a substantial amount of time spent by the researchers themselves gathering data and developing "thick description" (Geertz 1973). Initial interviews are largely nondirective (Briggs 1986), but later blend into more directed, semistructured ones.

Sites and Purposive Sampling

This article is based on data from a pilot study conducted in the fall of 1985, as well as data collected by the Consumer Behavior Odyssey in the summer of 1986 (see Kassarjian 1987 for the project's history). The Odyssey's goal was to develop a deep understanding of consumption, broadly defined. To accomplish this goal, a rotating team of academics employed naturalistic methods while traveling across the United States. Themes from the pilot study were pursued, but other themes and concepts also emerged as the project advanced.

Data for the pilot project were collected at a swap meet (Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf 1988). A major theme detected was that consumers made sacred and profane distinctions in their behaviors and uses of space, time, and objects. At the completion of the pilot study, this theme was not fully developed into theoretical propositions and was understood only with regard to the phenomena present at this site, but it appeared to be powerful enough to warrant broader investigation.

During the Odyssey, we first checked whether the sacred/profane distinction noted in the pilot study was apparent at other swap meets. This approach differs from that of single-site ethnographies and was

stimulated by our sense that these were broadly applicable theoretical concepts. Finding that the concept generalized well to four other swap meets, other outdoor periodic sales events were sampled, including two antique flea markets, a farmers' market, and a yard sale. Other outdoor events that combined the sales interactions already observed with entertainment or celebrations were added, including a Fourth of July festival, three county fairs, two community festivals, three art festivals, one historical festival, and two ethnic festivals. To generalize beyond outdoor events, we included fieldwork at two indoor antique fairs or auctions. We also did fieldwork at indoor sites housing more permanent sellers, including three museums, a gas station, a bookstore, an ethnic grocery store, several restaurants, and a fast food restaurant. To generalize to sites that are more permanent to consumers, we also went to informants' homes.

Homes were sampled purposively to represent sacred space, in contrast with commercial sites, which are generally more profane. In sampling for sacredness, we spoke with people about their collections and other objects given special status, such as cars in a car show. These data were contrasted with data gathered at temporary homes such as recreational vehicle parks, a summer trailer park, six resorts and hotels, a national park campground, a weight loss resort, a nursing home, and two homeless shelters. People in the midst of a long-distance move were interviewed, as were people encountered on the street or highway rest stops. Other sacred sites purposively sampled included a temple, a chapel, and two evangelical services. No interviews were conducted utilizing CB radios, although this approach was tried. Although differences in the specific focus of the sacred varied, we saw no indication that the sacred and profane processes discussed here applied only to certain sites or geographic areas in the United States.

Depth Interviewing

Data were collected through depth interviews and observations requiring unstructured responsiveness to consumers (Briggs 1986) as well as the development of intimacy between researcher and informant (Wallendorf 1987a). Informants were told that the interaction was part of a project attempting to understand American consumers. Possibly the field of consumer research has not explored sacred aspects of consumption previously because the sacred aspects of consumption are less likely to emerge in experimental and survey research interactions.

Data Record

Although fieldnotes were written for all interactions with informants, many interactions were also recorded on videotape. Although not problem-free, our experience with videorecordings leads us to challenge the speculative claim of Hirschman (1986) that videorecording should be avoided due to its intrusiveness. Videotaping captures the rich detail of an interview, while simultaneously leading researchers to examine their membership roles in the field (Adler and Adler 1987). Video and still photography are data collection techniques finding increasing support among experienced ethnographers in sociology and anthropology (Briggs 1986; Collier and Collier 1986; Ives 1974; Werner and Schoepfle 1987).

Since informed consent necessitates some level of intrusiveness (Punch 1986), video photography is not the problem it would be if covert participant-observation were being attempted. The extensive literatures on deviance indicate the wide range of behaviors accessible to research using undisguised, naturalistic methods and speak to the possibility and importance of acknowledging informants' rights to informed consent. Video captures informants' explanations constructed in response to researchers' inquiries, called "perspectives of action," as well as informants' actions in their social setting, called "perspectives in action" (Snow and Anderson 1987, after Gould et al. 1974). It provides rich temporal and nonverbal detail reminiscent of Bateson and Mead's (1942) early work with film and still photos and Leahy's photo ethnographies in the 1930s (Connolly and Anderson 1987).

Still photography was used to document sites and participants. These visual records were combined with written researcher records in the form of fieldnotes, journals, and photo and video logs. Fieldnotes consist of detailed notes about each interaction written on a daily basis by each researcher. Fieldnotes are the primary data record and the only material in those cases when video or still photo records were not made. Supplementing the fieldnotes are the more introspective journals of each researcher, which contain reflections, emerging interpretations, and memos to other researchers.

The pilot study data consist of 121 single-spaced pages of fieldnotes and journals, 130 still photographs and slides, two hours of videotaped interviews, and an artifact file. The Odyssey data include approximately 800 pages of fieldnotes and journals, 4,000 still photographs and slides, 137 videotapes lasting 15–18 minutes each, about a dozen audio tapes, and the artifact file. Odyssey data are archived at the Marketing Science Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Pilot project data materials were audited by three scholars, whose reports on the trustworthiness of interpretations are available. The point of listing the quantity of data is not to imply that it is related to the quality of data, but rather to indicate the extensiveness of the documentation from which this work draws. As is typical in ethnographic research, the depth and rich-

ness of the data is indicated by including verbatim excerpts from fieldnotes within the article.

Triangulation

Two forms of triangulation employed enhanced the thickness of description and sharpened the accuracy of researchers' observations. These two forms are triangulation across researchers and across media. Since Odyssey data collection was conducted by a team, several researchers often wrote fieldnotes on the same interview. These were written separately and without discussion prior to writing, permitting the assessment of completeness and convergence. Differences in emotions experienced may be expected to occur in journals, given the subjective nature of human interaction. However, triangulation across researchers minimizes discrepancies in the recording of factual information and improves the recall of the research team. As the team gained experience as a research instrument, the observational skills and perceptual biases of individual members allowed a division of labor to emerge that reduced redundancy in description and increased effectiveness and comprehensiveness in recording interactions; for example, we divided the labor required to simultaneously interview an informant, attend to the video camera, and shoot photographs. Triangulation across media involved examination and comparison of video interviews, photographs, and fieldnotes.

Triangulation is also useful in assessing the mutuality or uniqueness of the interpretation. We blended the perspectives of a bi-gender team (as recommended by Levinson 1987) of three consumer behavior researchers with theoretical and methodological training in psychology, sociology, and anthropology. These differences led to few disagreements regarding the appropriateness of the sacred/profane interpretation, although there were minor differences in the highlights given to this theme. For example, a psychological orientation leads the interpretation toward a definition of sacred experience as individually motivated, while the sociological focus is on consequences for societal integration and cohesion. Generally, we found our differing theoretical perspectives mutually compatible rather than mutually exclusive. Where such differences exist, they are noted in the text.

Interpretive Contexts

In building the interpretation, the data were obtained and structured by context. We use the term *site* for a particular type of physical location where data were collected (e.g., a swap meet), and the term *context* for categories of consumption phenomena, a distinction comparable to the "focal settings" and "cultural domains" identified by Snow and Anderson (1987). Contexts that emerged were gifts, collections, heirlooms, pets, time, souvenirs, art, mentions of "special" items, photographs, physical space, holidays, and pilgrimages. In building and testing interpretations, contexts were examined sequentially, with each succeeding context acting as a check on the interpretations supported by preceding ones (as in Lincoln and Guba's suggestion that researchers use referential adequacy materials to check the credibility and confirmability of an interpretation). Just as saturation was used to guide the emergent sampling design, redundant support over different contexts was used to assess generalizability of findings. We do not present propositions that were disconfirmed as we moved across contexts.

Analysis

During fieldwork, we circulated memos on our emerging understandings. As data collection progressed, these memos specified propositions to be challenged through purposive sampling. Contrary to the conception of interpretive methods described by Calder and Tybout (1987), naturalistic inquiry uses purposive sampling and constant comparative method to test by developing, challenging, and reformulating the emergent conceptualization.

Fieldnotes, journals, and photo and video indices were computerized for use in systematic data analysis. This data analysis was completed using ZyIndex, a computerized program for qualitative data management and analysis (see Belk 1988a). Analysis of each context also included examination of photographs and videotapes. Triangulation between researchers occurred with separate examinations of computer analyses and visual records.

Based on understandings developed in the pilot project and memos concerning emerging interpretations, two focal processes were identified: the transformation of profane commodities into sacred objects, and the maintenance and loss of sacredness (desacralization). Data for each context were coded using margin notations concerning each process. The transferability of these propositions was tested by sequentially analyzing contexts. Consistent with the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss 1967), propositions were revised in successive comparisons with new data until saturation and redundancy were achieved. What we refer to here as testing is in fact a large series of tests continued until the theory fully captured the phenomenon. Limitations and modifications are noted as the results are presented. The discussion is organized by process and draws from each context.

THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE IN RELIGION

What Is Religion?

William James's (1961, pp. 42, 45/orig. 1902) behavioral definition of religion still serves well:

> (Religion) shall mean for us *the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine.* . . . We must interpret the term "divine" very broadly, as denoting any object that is god*like,* whether it be a concrete deity or not.

In its avoidance of a particular theological perspective, this definition is hardly singular among social scientists. For example, Roberts (1984, p. 90) states:

> Religion has to do with a unique and extra-ordinary experience—an experience that has a sacred dimension and is unlike everyday life . . . the experience of the holy. Such an experience is often called nonrational, for it is neither rational nor irrational.

Such definitions stress the special quality of sacredness that makes something religious. Marcel Mauss (quoted in Ferrarotti 1979, p. 674) contrasted this observation with the more common assumption that religion involves particular deities:

> It is not the idea of god, the idea of a sacred person, that one finds over again in any religion, it is the idea of the sacred in general.

To understand how this perspective on religious experience applies to contemporary consumer behavior, we must specify the properties of sacredness.

Properties of Sacredness

The sacred can best be understood by contrasting it with the profane, as in the extensive theoretical treatments by Emile Durkheim and Mircea Eliade. Their perspectives are similar, although Durkheim's notion of religion is more sociological, focusing on societal consequences, while Eliade's is more psychological (Stirrat 1984). We present 12 properties of sacredness synthesized from the writings of Durkheim, Eliade, and subsequent theorists. Of these, hierophany, kratophany, opposition to the profane, contamination, sacrifice, commitment, objectification, ritual, and mystery all apply in both individual and social treatments of the sacred. Communitas and myth are primarily social concepts, and ecstasy and flow are primarily psychological.

Hierophany. Hierophany is "the *act of manifestation* of the sacred . . . i.e., that *something sacred shows itself to us*" (Eliade 1958, p. 7), conveying the idea that, phenomenologically, people do not create sacred things. Instead, sacredness manifests itself experientially as "something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world" (Beane and Doty 1975, p. 141). In Eliade's psychological view, hierophany involves the notion that the sacred does not manifest itself to everyone. A sacred stone continues to appear like other stones except to those who believe it has revealed itself to them as unique, supernatural, or *ganz andere* (totally other).

Durkheim (1915) also sees the sacred as being beyond individual creation; however, in his sociological view, the sacred emerges collectively when society removes certain things from ordinary human use. Something is defined as being sacred through a social process that brings a system of meaning to individuals (hierophany), resulting in societal cohesion.

Kratophany. The sacred elicits both strong approach and strong avoidance tendencies (Durkheim 1975/orig. 1896). This ambivalence creates an overwhelming power, the manifestation of which is called kratophany (Eliade 1958). Although the vernacular usage of the term sacred implies only that which is good and desirable, Durkheim distinguishes between beneficent sacred powers, such as those associated with gods, protectors, and holy places, and evil sacred powers, such as those associated with corpses, sickness, and impure objects (Pickering 1984). Both are imbued with sacred power through strong ambivalent reactions (kratophany) that combine fascination and devotion with repulsion and fear. Because people simultaneously seek the beneficence of the sacred and fear the evil it can unleash, they approach it with a care appropriate to its kratophanous power.

Opposition to the Profane. The extraordinary sacred is defined partly by its opposition to the ordinary profane. Profane refers to that which is ordinary and part of everyday life, not to that which is vulgar or offensive, as in vernacular usage. Although Durkheim recognized various degrees of sacredness, the extremely sacred was held to be inviolably distinct from the profane. "The sacred . . . cannot, without losing its nature, be mixed with the profane. Any mixture or even contact, *profanes* it, . . . destroys its essential attributes" (Durkheim 1953, p. 70). Such sacrilege includes trespass on the sacred by profane persons; only a priest or shaman can cross from the profane to the sacred realm, and only after appropriate purification. A primary societal function is the exercise of social control to maintain the separateness of the two spheres, protecting the inviolate status of the sacred and maintaining its position as set apart.

Contamination. Both beneficent and evil sacred things have the power to contaminate through contact. However, in contradistinction to medical usage of the term, contamination in this context generally indicates the spread of positive sacredness rather than evil (negative sacredness). Objects blessed through sacred ritual are thus said to be contaminated with sacredness. A religious example of contamination is the Christian ritual sacrament of communion, in which a congregation eats symbols of the body and blood of Christ (in some traditions, transubstantiation is said to occur). Similarly, possessions of sacred persons become venerated icons because they are contaminated with sacredness; places where sacred activities oc-

curred are contaminated with sacredness that the faithful seek to attain through pilgrimages (O'Guinn 1987; O'Guinn and Belk 1989; Turner and Turner 1978).

Sacrifice. As an act of abnegation and submission, sacrifice establishes communication with the sacred by purifying and preparing the sacrificer (Hubert and Mauss 1964). Sacrifice usually involves a "gift to the gods" of otherwise profane material goods, such as domestic animals in pastoral societies (James 1962). But sacrifice can also involve asceticism, fasting, sexual abstinence, self-mutilation, and martyrdom (Mol 1976). Sacrifices prepare one to commune with the sacred, bring about a strong degree of commitment to sacred experience, and indicate appropriate deference to reinforce the extraordinary character of the sacred.

Commitment. Individuals feel a "focused emotion or emotional attachment" to that which is considered sacred (Mol 1976, p. 216). Psychologically, such commitment directs attention to the sacred, which becomes a strong part of one's identity. This aspect of sacredness shares some features with what has been called involvement in the consumer research literature. However, sacredness goes beyond the concept of involvement, as will be explained more fully later.

Sociologically, collective formation of shared commitment to a definition of the sacred is the integrative basis for society (Durkheim 1915, 1960/orig. 1902; Weber 1962/orig. 1920). Regardless of what is chosen to signify the sacred in society, shared commitment results in what Durkheim terms mechanical solidarity, in which religious participants replicate the social order by maintaining commitment to the collective definitions of sacred and profane. Individual commitment to the sacred is so strong that initial experience with the sacred may result in conversion—an identity change resulting in an unshakable conviction.

Objectification. Objectification is "the tendency to sum up the variegated elements of mundane existence in a transcendental frame of reference where they can appear in a more orderly, more consistent, and more timeless way" (Mol 1976, p. 206). Through representation in an object, the sacred is concretized. This allows things of this world to take on greater meaning than is evident in their everyday appearance and function. A stone may continue to appear as a stone, but it is a sacred object when its origin is understood through a creation myth to be the tear of an animal. We find this aspect of the sacred to be particularly important in understanding the sacredness of some contemporary consumption.

Ritual. Rituals are "rules of conduct which prescribe how a man should comport himself in the presence of . . . sacred objects" (Durkheim 1915, p. 56). Rituals are often performed without deliberate thought to the rationale that guides them. They are functional through their performance, apart from their content (Bossard and Boll 1950). Like sacrifice, ritual prepares one to approach the sacred and may be enacted as an individual or, more commonly, as a group. Ritual surrounds the contact of profane persons with the sacred to ensure that the evil powers feared in kratophany will not be unleashed. Ritual also protects the sacred from contact with mere mortals and alleviates human anxiety about this contact (Malinowski 1954).

Myth. Myths often surround the sacred and are used historically to document its status through narratives, iterative tales, or speculations about existence (Kirk 1970). Such accounts define our place within the world and maintain sacred status through repetition (Eliade 1964; Mol 1976). They socialize participants' understandings of the collective definitions of the sacred and instruct new participants such as children and recent converts.

Mystery. The sacred "has conferred upon it a dignity that raises it above the ordinary or 'empirical' " (Pickering 1984, p. 159). It cannot be understood cognitively, for the sacred commands love, devotion, fear, and related spiritual or emotional responses rather than rational thought. This mystery is characteristic of phenomena that do not fit human behavior models based on presumptions of self-interest or competition, but rather derive from a desire for more profound experiences and meanings (Nisbet 1966). When something loses this mystery, it loses its sacredness and becomes ordinary and profane.

Communitas. Communitas is a social antistructure that frees participants from their normal social roles and statuses and instead engages them in a transcending camaraderie of status equality (Turner 1969). It is most likely to occur when the individual is in a "liminal" or threshold state betwixt and between two statuses, such as may occur on religious pilgrimages (Turner and Turner 1978) and in initiation ceremonies, fraternal organizations, countercultural groups, and occasionally among research teams (Sherry 1987a). This spirit of communitas emerges from shared ritual experiences "which transcend those of status-striving, money-grubbing, and self-serving" and act as "proofs that man does not live by bread alone" (Turner 1972, pp. 391–392).

Ecstasy and Flow. The sacred is capable of producing ecstatic experience, in which one stands outside one's self (Colpe 1987). Durkheim (see Pickering 1984) describes a joy that arises from the transcendent reality of sacred things. According to James (1961, p. 55/orig. 1902),

> Like love, like wrath, like hope, ambition, jealousy . . . it (religion) adds to life an enchantment which is not rationally or logically deducible from anything else.

The sacred can take a person outside of self, matter, and mortality, but such ecstatic experiences are momentary rather than constant (Greeley 1985). Ecstasy marks the extraordinary character of sacred experience and distinguishes it from the common pleasures of everyday life.

A psychological interpretation refers to the effect of participation in the sacred as flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1975) or peak experience (Maslow 1964). Flow experiences include a centering of attention, a loss of self, a feeling of being in control of self and environment, and an autotelic aspect such that the activity is its own reward (Csikszentmihalyi 1975).

Victor Turner (1977) has subsequently distinguished communitas as involving a "shared flow." Like the differences between Durkheim and Eliade regarding sacred experiences, the differences between flow or peak experience and communitas are not so much in the nature of the experience as in whether it is a group or an individual phenomenon. Although group ritual does not appear necessary for ecstatic experiences (Hardy 1979; Laski 1962), such rituals can and do bring about sacred experiences. To begin to explore the applicability of the concept of the sacred to contemporary consumption, we must consider the contemporary boundaries between the sacred and the profane.

SHIFTING BOUNDARIES BETWEEN THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE

The sociology of religion has noted changes in contemporary society that make interpretations of the sacred and the profane somewhat different than Durkheim's—in which the sacred resided in the sphere of religion and the profane resided in the secular world. Changes in contemporary life indicate that the sacred/profane distinction is no longer isomorphic with the religious/secular distinction (Becker 1957). Two trends work together to support the applicability of the concept of the sacred to the secular context of consumption. The first trend involves the gradual secularization of contemporary institutional religion, while the second involves the gradual sacralization of the secular. Both processes reflect shifting boundaries between the sacred and the profane.

Secularization of Religion

The secularization of religion is a widely noted pattern. For example, Ducey (1977) found growth in nontraditional church services and decline in traditional services in the United States during the 1970s. Nontraditional services substituted the profane for the sacred, such as lay for clerical dress, contemporary guitar for classical organ music, and oral participation by parishioners in addition to sermons by the pastor. These changes reflect culture's dynamic definitions of the sacred and the profane.

Others have found a gradually more secular celebration of traditional religious events, such as Christmas (Belk 1987a; Bock 1972; Luschen et al. 1972), and a marked decline in family religious rituals, such as prayers at meals and bedtime, and collective readings from sacred literature (Bossard and Boll 1950). The discontinuance of Latin in the Catholic Mass exemplifies a secularization of religion involving demystification, lesser separation of sacred and profane times, and lesser preservation of ritual and myth.

The use by contemporary religions of radio and television media also demonstrates secularization through the broadcast of sacred rituals into what may be profane spaces or times (O'Guinn and Belk 1989). "Televangelism" secularizes religion also by its association with the secular medium of television (Frankl 1987). By becoming more linked to the secular, religion may have undermined its own sacredness, opening the way for other foci of sacredness. That is, as religion provides less of an extraordinary experience, people look elsewhere for experiences that transcend everyday life.

Sacralization of the Secular

The emergence of the sacred in secular contexts has coincided with the secularization of institutional religion. As the Catholic church lost control of politics, knowledge, art, and music, each of these spheres developed sacred status of its own. To characterize this trend, Rousseau formulated the term "civil religion," which refers to finding the essence of religion in what is traditionally regarded as secular. The notion has been treated in greatest depth by Bellah (1967, 1985), whose theory of civil religion attempts to resolve the ambiguous role of religious symbols in secular society (Fenn 1986). Contemporary sacralization of the secular is seen as occurring in the cultural arenas of politics, science, art, and consumption. Evidences from each of these areas will be briefly reviewed.

Nationalistic celebrations reflect the sacralization of the secular within politics (Demerath 1974; Shiner 1972). National holidays are celebrated more widely than many religious holy days; national anthems are sung with all the reverence of hymns; national flags are icons; and contemporary national heroes and monuments have supplanted the widespread worship of religious saints and shrines (Geist 1978; Roberts 1984; Rook 1984; Warner 1959). Market forces accelerate and focus this sacralization of nationalism, creating invented traditions, such as Scottish clan tartans (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), and replacements for evil eye and hex symbols in official-looking

commercial security system and security patrol signs on the doors and windows of many American homes (Rook 1987). Europeans venerate royalty (e.g., Williamson 1986) with a mystique imparted by long-standing rituals and symbols (Hayden 1987; Shils and Young 1953). The crown jewels are regarded as icons that are as unthinkable to sell as it would be to turn the Statue of Liberty into condominiums.

A second area where the secular is sacralized is science. Rather than religion, science is considered the ultimate arbiter of truth in societies that venerate rational thought and causal explanations (Capra 1975), much to the dismay of fundamentalists. Weber called the substitution of scientific for religious belief "the disenchantment of the world," while Schiller called it "the disgodding of nature" (quoted in Berman 1984, p. 57). The miracles of god and nature have gradually been replaced by scientific explanations (Inkeles 1983). Now it is science rather than religion that is viewed as imparting knowledge, although a number of authors see this as an unfortunate divorce of eros from logos (Bateson and Bateson 1987; Berman 1984; Highwater 1981; Hyde 1983; Keller 1985; Pirsig 1974; Plato 1955/orig. 400 B.C.) that leaves us with an incomplete understanding of the world.

A third arena that provides evidence of the sacralization of the secular is art and music. Since the Reformation, religious content in music and art has declined and secular themes have increased (Berger 1967). Yet, both are sacred to many consumers. Art, like science, is not only sacred, it sacralizes. Placement in a gallery, museum, university, or other scientific or artistic institution can sacralize objects (Clifford 1985). Museum curators are among the priests of the art world. Prominent collectors are also accorded expert status to authenticate artwork and act as "missionaries" in promoting art to the uninitiated (Lynes 1980).

In a definition reminiscent of the sacred/profane distinction, Becker (1978) differentiates between art and craft, noting that both may be aesthetically appealing, but a craft object has a use. This accords with the idea that the sacred is set apart and beyond mundane utility and also accords with the noble portrait of the starving artist, which Becker (1982) finds accurate given the difficulty of having one's work defined as art.

The presence of the sacred is as evident in popular music as it is in the so-called "high arts," but there are clearer deities—charismatic rock stars. The sacralization of rock music is accomplished by each generation of youth, which draws its collective identity from the songs of these rock stars (Martin 1979) via a process that Goodman (1960) calls "the sacramental use of noise." The ecstasy here derives from the liminal experiences of sex, violence, and mysticism (e.g., drugs) associated with this music (Martin 1979), as well as deriving from the music experience itself (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982).

This leads us to consider evidence of the sacralization of the secular from the realm of consumption. Although consumption historically has often been opposed by institutional religious teachings (Belk 1983), it has gained sacred status in our consumption-oriented and hedonistic society (Campbell 1987; Mol 1983). Mol illustrates the "cosmic straddling, deep commitment, solemn rites, and expressive symbolism" that may attach to art, sports, music, and even secular objects such as some clothing and automobiles. That consumption has become a secular ritual through which transcendent experience is sought has been noted, but not empirically explored, in the consumer behavior literature (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Leiss, Kline, and Jhally 1986; Rook 1985; Sherry 1987b, 1987c; Wallendorf and Arnould 1988; Williamson 1986). Just as Protestantism helped secularize religion in Weber's (1958/orig. 1904) view, the rise of individualism has made it possible to define the sacred as that which brings secular ectasy to the individual. According to Campbell (1983, p. 293):

> Although nominally "secular" in character (this principle) . . . derived from the idea of a "covenant" or compact between each individual and his own "self," in which in return for acknowledging one's duty to serve the spirit of self, that spirit would in turn bring happiness to the individual. Heaven in such a doctrine is the fulfillment of self.

It is the sacralizing of certain aspects of consumption that will serve as the focus for the remainder of this article.

What is Sacred?—The Domains of Sacred Consumption

As a result of the secularization of religion and the sacralization of the secular, the sacred/profane distinction has become applicable to the secular context of consumption. While anything can potentially become sacred (Acquaviva 1979), sacred status is not distributed randomly across the elements of a culture. Instead, consumers enact the sacred/profane distinction within common domains of experience. Potentially sacred consumer domains, like potentially sacred religious domains, fall into six major categories: places, times, tangible things, intangibles, persons, and experiences. We will discuss the meaning of the sacred/profane distinction for contemporary consumers in each of these as a means of building a definition of sacredness.

Places. In agricultural societies, one's homeland is the sacred center of the world. Even contemporary displaced cultural groups such as the Navajos experience a fractured social fabric as a result of losing their

land (Scudder 1982). Some sacred places, especially those in nature, have the beauty, majesty, and power to evoke ecstasy and flow without help from myth, ritual, or contamination (Brereton 1987; Lipsey 1984). In other cases, these means may be needed to sacralize a place.

Places may reveal their sacredness through hierophanous signs, as with the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan, founded where an eagle landed on a blooming cactus (Brereton 1987). A place may also become sacred by contamination through events that occurred there (e.g., Jerusalem). Places where sacred persons were born, performed miracles, received mystic revelations, and are buried become sacred through contamination. Rituals may also sacralize a place, as with groundbreaking ceremonies, burials, and housewarming parties.

Once a place is regarded as sacred, it may command reverential behaviors such as pilgrimages, removal or wiping of shoes, silence, purification prior to entry, or sacrificial offerings. If they do not already exist, boundaries may be marked and shrines erected. The sacredness of some spaces is defined by the activities that occur there. In religion, churches, temples, and shrines are viewed as sacred. But distinctions are also made between sacred and profane areas in the secular world. A secular place commonly designated as sacred is the geographic area of a person's childhood. Pilgrimages are often made to these areas on vacations, especially when accompanied by other family members. Going back can be either a positive or negative sacred experience, depending upon how much the place has been changed and how much of one's former identity, familiarity, and mastery is retained (Belk 1988b).

The primary locus of the sacred in the secular world of consumption is the dwelling (Eliade 1959; Jackson 1953; Tuan 1978). It is sacred because it houses the family, because it is a home (Kron 1983). The most sacred and secret family activities occur there, including eating, sleeping, cooking, having sex, caring for children and the sick, and dressing (Saegert 1985). It is separated from the profane world "outside" (Altman and Chemers 1984; Rapoport 1982) through the careful attention given to entry thresholds (Deffontaines 1953; Rapoport 1981). In societies organized around nuclear families rather than collective groups, the dwelling imposes order by centering the world for its inhabitants (Duncan 1985). Within the home, private spaces serve as inner sanctums in a society favoring individualism (Tuan 1978). The hearth is often a communal family altar where family photos are enshrined and greeting cards connecting the family to others are displayed (Collier and Collier 1986; Jackson 1953; Levi-Strauss 1965).

Consumption also has its public cathedrals that enhance the mystery and sense of otherworldliness of the sacred. Such places have been instrumental in the development of consumer culture. Perhaps the most influential of these has been the department store. Rather than following the wheel of retailing pattern of entering the market as low-price institutions, turn-of-the-century department stores entered the market as extravagant show places where functional and financial considerations paled in the magnificence of their grandiose architecture, theatrical lighting, and sumptuous display (Bowlby 1985; Williams 1981). Today, the simple department store is eclipsed in grandeur by the shopping mall (Kowinski 1985; Mann 1980; Zepp 1986), where shopping has become a ritual in a consumption-oriented society.

Other cathedrals of consumption in the past two centuries have included the grand opera house (Naylor 1981), the theatre (May 1980; Sharp 1969), the museum (Rochberg-Halton 1986), world's fairs (Benedict 1983; Rydell 1984), and the grand hotel (d'Ormesson 1984). Such places gave consumers a taste of opulent luxury, often even being named "palaces" in the early 1900s. Although consumers could not aspire to live in such grand places, attending events there enlarged desires and created a sense of reverent awe for luxury and consumption.

Times. Just as sacred and profane places are separated, time is separated into sacred and profane periods. Sacred time is not merely an interval that is otherwise profane. Once sacred time begins, it seems infinite and without meaning. For example, creation myths form a history within a different time plane than that of the profane world. The sacred past is recoverable through rituals such as New Year celebrations that reenact a creation myth (Eliade 1958, 1959) or festivals such as Christian Easter, which reenacts the resurrection of Christ and renewal of nature. During initiations, graduations, weddings, funerals, and birthdays, we participate in the sacred.

Sacred times occur cyclically during the day (e.g., Islamic prayers, the morning coffee break), week (e.g., the sabbath, a leisurely reading of the Sunday newspaper), month (e.g., new moon ceremonies), and year (e.g., the harvest feast, birthday celebrations). As with entry into sacred places, purification rituals may accompany entry into sacred time to separate it from profane time. Special clothing, fragrances, prayers, utensils, and foods may accompany sacred time (Farb and Armelagos 1980; Leach 1961; Wolowelsky 1977). Sacred time may even serve in lieu of sacred place, as with the Jewish calendar, which has been suggested to be replete with sacred times due to the long exile of the Jews from their sacred homeland (Zerubavel 1981).

Sacred time also occurs episodically in secular consumption contexts; e.g., for the fan attending a sporting event or concert or for a gourmet sitting down to a fine meal. Irreverent behaviors, such as interruptions, inappropriate noise, or too casual an attitude toward

the focus of attention at these times, are considered not only rude but sacrilegious. Such actions profane events that devotees think should be regarded with awe and appreciation. Ritual garb, behaviors, foods, and vocabularies or silence may also be expected during these sacred intervals. As Rheims (1961, p. 29) notes:

> Museums are the churches of collectors. Speaking in whispers, groups of visitors wander as an act of faith from one museum gallery to another. Until the end of the nineteenth century it was customary to visit the Hermitage Museum at Leningrad in a white tie. The almost ritual habits practiced in the sales-rooms in London and Paris have been the same for two hundred years. The Hotel Dourot (an art auction site) is a sort of temple. It has fixed ceremonies, and its daily hour from ten to eleven has a completely religious atmosphere.

During a rock concert the behaviors considered appropriately reverential differ, but are still defined as sacred to participants. These behaviors include use of marijuana, lighting matches to indicate reverence at the end of a concert, ecstatic dance, and purchase of tour t-shirt relics. Here it is the quiet, seemingly uninvolved concert-goer who is considered inappropriate.

Tangible Things. Sacred tangible things include icons, clothing, furnishings, artifacts, and possessions that are symbolically linked with and objectify the sacred. Shrines honor sacred relics and separate them from the profane world (Geary 1986). In naturistic religions, animals may be totemic and sacred (Houghton 1955; Levi-Strauss 1962), whereas in vegetation cults, trees and plants are regarded as sacred symbols of life, creation, renewal, youth, and immortality (Eliade 1959). Sacred religious objects are sometimes fine pieces of art, but are sometimes quite simple things like the bone, top, ball, tambourine, apples, mirror, fan, and fleece shown to novices in the Lesser Eleusinian Mysteries of Athens (Turner 1972). Ordinary as these things may appear to be, they are made sacred by myths, rituals, and signs. They are the media by which a society's "deep knowledge" is passed on to succeeding generations. Objects may also be defined as sacred because of their rarity and beauty, marking them as inherently non-ordinary (Clark 1986), as with precious metals and gems (Eliade 1958).

Sacred objects are not treated as ordinary objects, but rather seem to require special handling. They are revered with a "bow, a prostration, a pious touch of the hand" (Eliade 1959, p. 25). They are consecrated, used in prayer, sung about, and used to trigger inspiration and ecstasy. Further, they may be believed to have magical powers, both beneficent and evil. As Eliade (1958) notes, rare stones and metals are often believed to have aphrodisiac, fertilizing, and talismanic qualities. They may be considered poisonous, able to cure diseases, preserve dead bodies, protect from harm, or bring prosperity.

Sacred objects are imbued with kratophanous power. Some possessions within the home are also sacred, even though they may be as humble-appearing as odds and ends on a bureau, a pincushion lid, a cigar box, faded American Legion poppies, and assorted pills and patent medicines (Morris 1948). Particularly favored possessions represent aspects of the person's life that are regarded as sacred (Wallendorf and Arnould 1988).

A sacred possession for many in the United States is the automobile (Levy 1978; Marsh and Collett 1986; Neal 1985; Sherry 1986a). As satirized by Mol (1976, p. 152):

> Once upon a time there was a country that was ruled by a god named Car. In the beginning it did not amount to much. Then it came to pass that out of Dearborn, Michigan, there came a man who took Car and said, "Let there be mass production," and slowly Car took over the country. Car temples were built, car stables were put up and special stores sprang up where people could go and buy gifts for Car. Weekends became ritualistic: On Saturday the people would wash Car gently with soap and on Sunday they would pet it with a soft rag to remove any stray dust and ride around the countryside. Car ruled the country for many years, demanding annual sacrifices of several thousand people and keeping most of the people in a downtrodden state as the people tried to meet financial pledges they had made to Car.

Thus, ordinary consumption items can serve as sacred icons.

Intangible Things. Immaterial things considered sacred include magic formulae, dances, crests, names, and songs (Beaglehole 1932). More contemporary examples include fraternity and sorority rituals, secrets between friends or lovers, and family recipes for stuffing the Thanksgiving turkey. Like tangible sacred things, intangibles exhibit kratophany and are approached with both attraction and fear (Clodd 1920).

Persons and Other Beings. While Durkheim held that individuals in general are sacred in modern Western society (Pickering 1984) due to values of possessive individualism, what is meant here is that certain persons are sacred and set apart from others. Gods, prophets, and saints are religious examples. The lives of saints take on a sacred character through good deeds, self-abnegation, sacrifice, martyrdom, and piety. At a slightly less sacred level are the leaders and officials of the church. They are not thought of as choosing their positions, but rather are "chosen" or "called," most often by a non-rational, hierophanous vision. In many religions, they too live a life of sacrifice, self-abnegation, poverty, chastity, and good deeds.

Some sacred persons have prophetic charisma that gives them magical power over followers (Weber 1968/orig. early 1900s). This power can be greater than that residing in impersonal things, so that the charismatic leader can redefine ideas of what is sacred. Over time, the power of the charismatic leader is routinized in a bureaucracy, which then confers sacred status on particular positions, and subsequently to those who occupy these positions. The sacredness of a charismatic leader, then, shifts over time from the person to a structure, to positions, and then to role occupants.

As an immediate manifestation of the self, the body may be regarded as sacred. It is ritually bathed, anointed with oils, groomed, arrayed in sacred clothing, and decorated, as with tattoos (Hope 1980; Rook 1984, 1985; Sanders 1985; T. Turner 1977; Wallendorf and Nelson 1986). Clothing adorns the body to symbolize group membership, as in the clothing signs that devotees of long distance running use to distinguish themselves from joggers (Nash 1977). Miner (1956) has deftly pointed out that contemporary body care rituals regard the bathroom as a shrine, the medicine cabinet as a treasure chest of magical potions and charms, and doctors and pharmacists as priests.

Pets are a type of sacralized animal (Sussman 1985; Tuan 1984). Apart from the way pets structure family interactions, their sacralization shapes human food preferences. Just as cannibalism is taboo, eating a pet or any animal considered suitable as a pet is unthinkable (Harris 1985). In ancient Polynesia, pigs were family pets (Titcomb 1969), but in modern agribusiness, the pig "has been reduced to the status of a strictly utilitarian object, a thing for producing meat and bacon" (Serpell 1986, p. 6).

Experiences. The experiences of prepared individuals at sacred times and places are themselves sacred, as with the travels of pilgrims. The distinction between sacred and profane travel can be made according to purpose and destination; travel to a shrine is sacred, while a journey away from home for business is profane (Fabien 1983). While the religious pilgrimage is a traditional form of sacred travel (Turner and Turner 1978), a part of any touring involves a seeking of the sacred. Worship of the pure, uncrowded natural site recalls naturistic religion. There are also new sacred sites, including such playful centers as Disneyland and Walt Disney World. The nostalgic motifs of these centers are designed to convey the visitor into a sacred time (Moore 1980) by evoking what Durkheim calls a nostalgia for paradise (Cohen 1979; Culler 1981; Giesz 1969; Tuan 1978). Sightseeing has become a modern ritual (MacCannell 1976) within the sacred, non-ordinary time of a vacation (Graburn 1977). It is a festive, liminal time when behavior is different from ordinary work time. An important part of the tourist's quest is to bring back a part of the sacred experience, place, and time. The objectified result is frequently a photograph or souvenir (Gordon 1986; Stewart 1984). An outsider may regard these as kitsch, but they are sacred for the pilgrim (Giesz 1969; Whetmore and Hibbard 1978).

Eating is a sacred experience in many contexts (Farb and Armelagos 1980), primarily when food has meaning beyond mere physical energy replenishment. Meals are eaten ritually at certain times, in certain places, with certain implements and procedures (Jones 1982). Eating is a ritual connecting the nuclear family, and there are a number of holiday occasions in which extended family and friends are bonded by sharing food that symbolizes life. For North Americans, these include Thanksgiving, Easter, Passover, Christmas, and birthdays (Wolwelsky 1977). Contamination through food is a strong symbolic perception, as evidenced by the rumors embodied in consumer oral tradition that deal with profanation and taboo (Koenig 1985; Sherry 1984). Certain foods, such as Big Macs and Kentucky Fried Chicken, can become sacred icons that nostalgically represent culture (Curry and Jiobu 1980; Kottak 1975).

Additional sacralization of experiences and of persons, places, and times attend the ritual consumption of spectator sports. Guttman (1978) reviews the original religious basis of spectator sports and argues that, while no longer religious, sports are still sacred. In spectator sports, the fan participates in an experience in which teams and heroes are revered, stadiums are temples that may be the site of pilgrimages, and artifacts may serve as sacred relics. Fans participate in various pre-, post-, and during-game rituals (Birrell 1981; MacAloon 1984; Stein 1977; Voigt 1980), and sports seasons are sacred times for them. Myths involving players, teams, and the principles they are thought to exemplify help sacralize sports, with the Super Bowl being the largest mythic spectacle in the United States (Birrell 1981; Cummings 1972; Real 1975).

Although not comprehensive in listing everything that is regarded as sacred, this discussion points out areas of secular consumption in which the sacred is experienced. This discussion highlights parallels between religious experience and the broad range of places, times, tangible things, intangibles, persons, and experiences that contemporary consumers may regard as sacred. What is of interest is not a mere listing of what is regarded as sacred, since almost anything can become such a focus, but rather the processes supporting individual and collective definitions of sacred consumption and the distinctions separating sacred from profane consumption. Rather than listing everything that may be labeled sacred consumption, we will outline the processes by which consumers understand and preserve particular aspects of consumption as set apart, extraordinary, and sacred.

Interpretive Summary of What Is Sacred

We have detailed a number of properties of the sacred, and have shown how conventional scholarly interpretations of religion enhance our understanding of consumer behavior. Our discussion of shifts in the boundary between the sacred and the profane demonstrates the selectively permeable nature of these domains of experience. Religion has become secularized, and the secular sacralized in contemporary Western society. In this context, consumption may become a primary means of transcendent experience. Rather than experiencing the kind of extraordinary meaning previously attained primarily through religion, contemporary consumers define certain objects or consumption experiences as representing something more than the ordinary objects they appear to be. In this, they participate in what the sociology of religion calls the sacred. The focal interest here is not on *what* is regarded as sacred, as almost anything can be imbued with this meaning. Rather, our primary interest is in the *processes* by which particular consumption becomes and remains sacralized.

Before examining the processes by which consumption is sacralized and preserved as sacred, it may be helpful to recapitulate our understanding of the sacred. We take the sacred in the realm of consumption to refer to that which is regarded as more significant, powerful, and extraordinary than the self. Sacred occurrences may be ecstatic; they are self-transcending. Such self-transcending experiences may, but need not, be aided by a social context involving fellow believers who also revere the object or experience. The profane, by contrast, is ordinary and lacks the ability to induce ecstatic, self-transcending, extraordinary experiences. Profane objects are treated casually rather than reverently and are not a focus of devotion.

Perhaps the closest existing analog in consumer research to our concept of the sacred is the involvement construct. Conceptually, high enduring product involvement (Houston and Rothschild 1978) is related to, but is not the same as, sacred consumption. It is likely that many of the high enduring involvement automobile owners identified by Bloch (1981) and Richins and Bloch (1986) regard their automobiles as sacred. However, high enduring product involvement and sacred consumption are distinctly separate concepts. The notion of sacredness in consumption is not restricted to products; it may also attach to people, places, times, and experiences. More importantly, high enduring product involvement is not a sufficient indicant of sacredness. A consumer who watches television frequently and who regards it as an important source of life satisfaction need not regard television or television programming as sacred. For television to be sacred to a consumer, it would also need reliably to provide self-transcending, extraordinary experiences, and be capable of being profaned. High enduring product involvement is often characteristic of those for whom a particular type of consumption is sacred, but not all who exhibit high enduring product involvement will regard the consumption as sacred. Involvement is a component of sacred experience, but is insufficient to fully capture the experience of sacred consumption. The involvement construct does not explain the processes of movement between sacred and profane that are explained in the theory of sacred consumption explicated in the remainder of this article.

Nor is recent work on self-concept and fluid body boundaries sufficient to encompass the sacred in consumer behavior. Whether objects are viewed in Western, masculine perspective as extensions of self (Belk 1988b) or in more feminine, Eastern terms as incorporated into self, no sacralization need occur in either event. Ultimately, the meaning of the sacred may lie in the discovery or creation of connectedness, but without a confluence of the properties we have described, sacredness will go undetected.

We know of no extant quantitative measures of consumption sacredness, which is why we have described the properties of the sacred in such detail, emphasizing the variety of the experience rather than relative degrees of intensity. We have not called for the development of quantitative measures because the nature and experience of the sacred may be antithetical to such measurement. The ontological and epistemological assumptions of positivist methods are not sympathetic to the mystical and experiential nature of sacredness, but instead are oriented to a different universe of discourse. Qualitative assessment becomes important in developing an understanding of sacred consumption processes and in discovering the dimensions along which their properties might be measured eventually. We will now examine the processes characteristic of sacred consumption.

RESULTS: PROCESSES OF SACRED CONSUMPTION

Anything may become sacred. Sacredness is in large part an investment process. Consumers construe meaning in various fashions and in different degrees of ontological intensity. Objects (broadly construed) potentiate and catalyze experience of the sacred. This experience may be ritualized at the level of ceremony or even of habit; it may be subject to much exegesis, or so deeply subconscious as to resist everyday inspection. The sacred adheres in that which is designed or discovered to be supremely significant; in this regard, industrialized society is no different from any other society, hegemonic and ethnocentric Western values notwithstanding. However, groups and individuals satisfy the universal need to experience the sacred quite differently. A comprehensive analysis must describe not just what is considered sacred, but

also the *ways* objects and people move between the sacred and profane realms. Our analysis will focus on two processes that occur regarding sacred and profane aspects of consumption: sacralization processes and maintenance processes that perpetuate sacredness.

Sacralization Processes

How do certain possessions attain sacred status? Is sacredness something that is acquired with the object, as power steering is acquired with an automobile, or is it something that happens after the object is acquired? Our data indicate that there are at least seven ways through which an object can become sacralized in contemporary consumer culture: ritual, pilgrimage, quintessence, gift-giving, collecting, inheritance, and external sanction.

Sacralization Through Ritual. An ordinary commodity may become sacred by rituals designed to transform the object symbolically. Much ritual behavior in contemporary consumer culture has been secularized—in effect reduced to ceremony or habit—but some ritual may be reclaimed, or singularized, and consciously returned to the realm of the sacred. These rituals may be public or private, collective or individual.

Sacralization through ritual is evident in informants' descriptions of the process of moving into a new house and turning it into a home. (For additional material on the architectural dimensions of sacralization, see Oliver 1987 and Slesin, Cliff, and Rozensztroch 1987). A man in a homeless shelter who was moving into his own room in a boarding house estimated that turning this space into a home would happen quickly; he expected that his new room would feel like home the first night that he slept there. For him, merely sleeping in the room for one night, combined with the knowledge that it was his, was sufficient ritual for transforming it into a home.

However, for lower middle-class people spending the summer in a trailer campground, making the place feel like home involved extensive work to the exterior of the trailer and the rented space, as indicated by the following excerpt from field notes:

> There is an amazing amount of work which has gone into outdoor settling and decorating. The sites have wood piles, awnings, colored gravel to be raked around the yard, white painted rocks to line the driveway, American flags, lawn statuary of all types including animals which are in fact native here such as squirrels, hanging lantern lights in abundant variety, and plastic chain strung around the space like a fence. There are lawn chairs of heavy metal, twirling daisies and other whirligigs, woodburned signs with the residents' names on them, planters with flowers, and even some annual flowers planted in the ground.

Kopytoff's (1986) call for a "cultural biography of things" provides the concept of singularization for interpreting this behavior. Singularization is the process by which a commodity becomes decommoditized (see also Appadurai 1986). A relatively undifferentiated object is individuated by the consumer through this process, which is paramorphic to management's intent in the practice of branding (Gardner and Levy 1955). Singularization can be tracked in the successive investments and divestitures of meaning associated with a consumer's relationship with an object. Since excessive commoditization homogenizes value, and in this sense is "anticultural," decommoditizing rituals ensure that some things remain unambiguously singular (Kopytoff 1986). Thus, in a Durkheimian sense, culture (through its bearers, i.e., consumers) sacralizes portions of itself; consumers transform a house into a home. Sacralized objects embody the power inherent in cultural integration. Although singularization does not guarantee sacralization at the level of culture, it does allow consumers to bring order to their own world of goods and make sacralization a possibility.

In the trailer campground, artificial nature was brought in to singularize the home. This was not unique to camper parks where people spent the entire summer; similar rituals for settling and designating as sacred were observed at a recreational vehicle park where most people spent only one or two days.

> Some campers have a great many plants about their sites, as if trying to cultivate the illusion of being at home in their yard, or of somehow having tamed nature while living in its midst.

Rather than finding this a waste of time, the owner of the first camper park mentioned was proud of the work many of the residents had done to decorate their sites. They were proudly demonstrating the lower middle class orientation toward home ownership and care of possessions (Coleman 1983; Levy 1966) by working diligently on their space—even while on vacation. One woman who lived in this park was getting a new trailer. She said that it would take a while before the new place would seem like home, and outlined the ritual transformations she and her husband would use to make it a home. They planned to build a deck around the new trailer, and she was making craft objects to decorate the interior. In addition to the desire to make the trailer more aesthetically pleasing, these rituals serve to singularize and transmute the trailer into a home.

Sacralization may be accomplished in part by imposing one's own identity on possessions through transformations. The urge to change, customize, or just symbolically appropriate, as with photographs (e.g., Sontag 1973), appears to be strong, as illustrated in this comment by a woman who was renovating the house she shares with her husband and children:

> "The first day that we were able to be here, which was two minutes after settlement I guess, we ran in. My hus-

> band's stepfather came and photographed inside and outside; and (then we also took pictures of) stages of change as we redid last summer. It's just fun to get those out and remember how, oh, it was awful." (wf, 35)[1]

The photographs are a reminder of the time when this was a profane house. The celebration of such sacralizing transformations is common. A teen-aged male described his months-long work altering his first automobile to make it just the way he wanted it. He ritually cares for the finished car with twice-a-week baptismal washings and a once-a-week anointing with wax.

An elderly informant explained that she and her husband had spent much of their adult lifetimes fixing their home just the way they wanted it. They then purchased a second farm home that they renovated extensively, including putting in a lake. Furniture pieces made from walnut trees removed from the lake site were given to each of their three children as symbols of the transformation of the farm into a singularized home.

> "It was such fun to do. Even though you didn't make them yourself, you felt like you were responsible for them." (wf, 65)

Her description unconsciously echoes a mythic theme in *The Odyssey* (Homer, Book 23:190–204) in which the bed of Odysseus and Penelope is hewn from Zeus's sacred olive tree. Although this informant hired a cabinetmaker, she feels responsible for the pieces because the ideas carried out were hers, as was the case in the restoration of the farm house. The transformation of the trees into furniture provides a tangible object to represent self and family heritage. This was supported by her 35-year-old daughter who observed in a separate interview:

> "It's very lovely furniture. But it makes it more than personal; it's like a piece of me." (wf, 35)

The furniture is a ritual symbol of the daughter's connection to her family.

Sacralization Through Pilgrimage. A second means by which an aspect of consumption may be sacralized is through a secular pilgrimage. By secular pilgrimage, we refer to a journey away from home to a consumption site where an experience of intense sacredness occurs. The most extraordinary pilgrimage we encountered among informants was being made by a middle-aged couple and their son traveling by horse-drawn, covered wagons. They had sold their house, truck, and possessions, and had given up jobs and school-based education to roam freely through the American and Canadian West. What was being sacralized through this pilgrimage was the self via self-sufficiency wrung from hardship, and through contamination by the natural sites they visited.

Other secular pilgrimages encountered were being undertaken by people in motor vehicles or on bicycles and were to last either months or weeks. These often involved historic destinations such as Gettysburg, Washington, D.C., and the mansions of Newport, RI. Whereas the first two destinations celebrate nation, the third celebrates the American ethos of wealth and worldly success. Through such pilgrimages, the sacredness of the site is maintained.

Such places are seen as shrines and are often visited on mass pilgrimages by tourists to attain a sacred state of being through contamination. This includes shrines with positive power, such as the Statue of Liberty, as well as those exhibiting kratophanous power, such as the Vietnam Memorial (Lopes 1987; Spencer and Wolf 1986). Secular pilgrimages typically occur during the liminal time of vacation when one is temporally away from the everyday, ordinary world.

In some cases, we encountered groups of pilgrims who had banded together much as the religious pilgrims chronicled by Chaucer (1948/orig. circa 1400). Three males and one female in their early twenties were camping near each other in a national park, although they had only encountered each other that evening. Two were doing long tours by bicycle and the other two had done so previously. A shared sense of values as well as a shared liminal state (Turner and Turner 1978) prompted their camaraderie, as was also true of those participating in the Consumer Behavior Odyssey (Belk 1987c; Sherry 1987a).

Not all persons we encountered traveling were involved in secular pilgrimages. Those moving to a new home were invariably rushing to their next destination, and the interim travel was an annoyance rather than an experience to be enjoyed as a favored state of grace. They were anxious to get to what was sacred to them: a place they could call home.

Sacralization Through Quintessence. Not all sacralized objects are as unique as handcrafted walnut furniture or a cross-country bicycle trip. Some sacred objects seem ordinary, yet are regarded and treated as extraordinary. Initially this puzzled us, particularly for objects that are sacralized and cherished precisely for their similarity to other objects. We observed the sale of jewelry "As seen on Dynasty and Dallas," complete with photographic murals of Linda Evans. We observed the use of Don Johnson cardboard mannequins to sell jackets similar in appearance to those worn on his television show "Miami Vice." While the concept of contamination is at work here, there appears to be something more operating to sacralize commodity objects. It was even more apparent in one automobile enthusiast's explanation that he was a believer in Chevrolets and came from a family of "Chevy people," while another was a "Ford man."

[1] Parenthetical notations with fieldnote material indicate race, gender, and age.

Simply put, how can mass-produced, anonymous, commodity-like objects acquire sacred status?

One enlightening concept is quintessence. Quintessential objects possess a "rare and mysterious capacity to be just exactly what they ought to be . . . unequivocally right," according to Cornfeld and Edwards (1983). Objects cited by both Cornfeld and Edwards and Sudjic (1985) as quintessential include the Mont Blanc Diplomat pen, the Swiss Army knife, the Cartier Santos watch, Dom Perignon champagne, the Polaroid SX-70 land camera, Levi's 501 jeans (see also Solomon 1986), the Zippo lighter, the American Express card, the Wham-O frisbee, the Volkswagen Beetle, Coca-Cola, and Ray Ban sunglasses. What do these products have in common? According to Cornfeld and Edwards (1983, n.p.):

> The pleasure such things offer us is wonderful and illogical; it is very like the pure joy a child feels when he unexpectedly comes into possession of something magically desirable. . . . For while we may use quintessential things for commonplace purposes, they serve as talismans and guideposts, touching our souls with souls of their own.

Sudjic (1985, p. 18) echoes this mystical totemic language.

> Caring about green wellies, or about customized Cortinas are both examples of the practice of using cult objects in a tribal way, for members to identify each other, and to exclude outsiders.

Armstrong (1971, pp. 26, 29) designates an object exhibiting such quintessential qualities as an "affecting presence."

> The . . . affecting presence (is) . . . a self-contained, perpetuating actor on the one hand and a human-perceptor related affectant on the other. . . . Ontologically, the affecting presence is a perpetuating affecting act—a near-being with its unique "personality" continuously exerting its own existence, though it is known only in transaction. It is independent of any source of "meaning" or energy external to itself; being a self-sufficient entity, it is its own "meaning" and provides its own energy.

The metaphors employed in these descriptions indicate that these are sacred objects. They are branded commodities, but give the impression that they are beyond mere commerce. This suggests that sacred objects need not be one of a kind. As with the "Chevy man," for some consumers it is the brand and model that is sacred rather than a specific, personally owned object. Sacred objects are not always singularized (Kopytoff 1986), particularistic, or unique objects. Instead, the item may be seen as unique from other brands, as with the smell of Lysol to some Irish Catholics or the flavor of Oreo cookies to their devotees. Uniqueness theory (Snyder and Fromkin 1980) recognizes a range of such individuation strategies. An example of the mysticism that may attach to such quintessential brands is the furor caused by Coca-Cola's 1985 decision to abandon its age-old formula in favor of a tastier one. Despite positive indications from taste tests, for consumers the magic and mystique were gone. As the quintessential products listed previously suggest, quintessence generally is achieved over a long period of time and is not a process that emanates exclusively from efforts by the producer.

This temporal dimension of the sacred is bound up with authenticity. While museums of art reproductions were once common, our society is currently unwilling to accept such displays as sacred. In our interviews with collectors, authenticity—discerned in various ways, including signatures, numbered prints, first editions, and items produced during a certain period of time—was a commonly cited criterion in selecting items for a collection. The quest for quintessence is a quest for authenticity—"The Real Thing" in Coca-Cola's well-chosen vocabulary. However, quintessence is seldom as universal as Coca-Cola's. It may be supported by a cult of "true believers," as with the "Chevy man" mentioned earlier. Alternatively, it may be supported by the celebration of newness in an object, as newness renders the object quintessentially perfect.

Some places were rendered quintessentially sacred by consumers' desire for authenticity. For some informants, the more commercial a place was seen as being, the more it was disparaged. The more natural, real, or authentic it was perceived as being, the more it was treated as a sacred place. Perceiving a place as real is more a matter of having it fit one's prior images or imaginative reconstructions than it is a matter of being factually, historically, or locally accurate, as noted in this field note excerpt concerning a Japanese tourist in his early twenties.

> He exhibited typical Japanese unwillingness to offend by claiming to have difficulty picking a favorite place he's been in America, but he liked the West due to the cowboy flavor of Arizona and New Mexico, and he wants to move to a smaller area of America. He doesn't like the crowded areas and said that the West is like the real America for him.

Disneyland was described by tourists as a marvelous place to bring the family. Still, a tourist at a Midwestern historical museum stressed:

> "It is important to get away from such commercial places and learn about real history." (wm, 50s)

The type of place viewed as quintessentially sacred varies with the informant, but the function of sacred places in vacation pilgrimages remains constant. These places potentiate experience of the sacred by embodying hierophany and kratophany, by enabling communitas, and by being limned with myth by their promoters, as with Disney World (Kottak 1982).

Tourists also regarded as quintessentially sacred those places that they have visited that are exceptionally natural, uncrowded, and unspoiled by other tourists. One woman made such a discovery on her vacation with her husband, as described in this field note excerpt:

> They had not planned to go to Prince Edward Island but heard so many people in Nova Scotia say good things about it that they decided to go. In fact, it was one of their favorite parts of the trip. One 12-mile stretch of the beach was the most beautiful place she had ever been. She said it looked like "God had reached down his hand and touched it." (wf, 60s)

Such places are sacred not only because they are perceived as authentic and unspoiled; there is also some naturism or reverence for nature reflected. An emically driven interpretation is that visiting this place showed the family's resourcefulness in discovering its quintessential beauty and made the family members special and unique for having been there, further singularizing their own sacredness.

Although the intuitive feel for the condition of quintessence may be right, additional work is needed to explore fully the range of such human-object relations (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; van Imwagen forthcoming; Wallendorf and Arnould 1988). In this regard, Scarry (1985) notes that apart from attachments to objects that come to represent connections to particular people (a singularized, sacred object), we also are comforted by anonymous and mass-produced objects. They are regarded in many ways as alive, as the bearers of the message, "Whoever you are, and whether or not I personally like or even know you, in at least this small way, be well" (Scarry 1985, p. 292). Quintessential objects bind us culturally, societally, and even globally to a sense of sacred uniformity, which coexists with our desires for individuation (Boorstin 1973; Breen 1988).

Sacralization Through Gift-Giving. Informants identified a fourth means for sacralizing an object, namely through gift-giving. Gifts often have special meaning, and selection of gifts to give to others is clearly different from a commodity purchase. The sacred/profane distinction is evident in Malinowski's (1922) continuum with pure gifts at one end (no thought of return is involved) and pure trade at the other, and in Mauss's (1925) distinction between pure gifts and pure commodities. When informants purchased objects as gifts, they engaged in one phase of a sacralizing process. Consumers take gift objects from the profane world where they are purchased, systematically remove price markers, and decoratively wrap them (Waits 1978). They ritually exchange these gifts in a ceremony that may involve the mandatory presence of others, decorations, and special clothing (Belk 1979; Caplow 1984; Sherry 1983). These actions separate items from the profane world of commerce, singularize them (Kopytoff 1986), and turn them into gifts.

Since a gift is usually an expression of connection between people, it may take on sacred status. However, some gifts, such as the "free gifts" received in return for purchases or charge account applications, remain profane commodities. Not all gifts are sacred, and not all gifts are equally sacred.

Gifts are hallowed by connection to other sacred elements of life. Tourist sites provide consumers an opportunity to capture the sacredness of the site by buying a gift for those at home, or a souvenir for oneself. In the range of sites we sampled, gift shops were abundantly present: at cheese factories, restaurants, battlefields, castles, theatres, truck stops, recreation vehicle parks, and almost all other tourist sites encountered. Pre- or pseudo-singularized objects (i.e., mass produced artifacts ennobled by the label "gift") available at these shops were purchased and resacralized by consumers; the objects were transformed into gifts or souvenirs. To indicate where the object was obtained and to sacralize it further, the name of the site was often inscribed on it (Gordon 1986; Stewart 1984), as with t-shirts imprinted with images of the Statue of Liberty bought by two elderly informants for their grandchildren. Alternatively, metonyms—objects so closely linked with an experience that they literally embody it (Lakoff and Johnson 1980)—were selected for souvenirs, as with the inexpensive Indian jewelry bought for friends at home by a Japanese college student touring the American Southwest. This contamination by a sacred site visited on a pilgrimage enhances the sacredness of the transformed object (Kelley 1987).

Another type of gift that is often sacralized is one imbued with handwork and labor. Shortly before she died, one informant's grandmother sewed her a sampler; it is a gift that the granddaughter deeply cherishes. It is not the literal content of the poem on the sampler, which the informant could not recall from memory, but rather its symbolic content that makes it sacred for her. Because the sampler was given to her as a surprise, it is more sacred than the crafts she asks her mother to make. These latter items are closer to commodities, and she refers to these requests as "placing an order." Because she asks for them, they are not as cherished as the gift of the sampler.

In this pattern of meanings, the value-expressive, self-symbolizing character of the sacred is evident. If one of the functions of defining something as sacred is increased social cohesion (Durkheim 1915) or societal integration (Parsons and Shils 1951), then what is selected to be regarded as sacred may be value-expressive for the social group, as well as self-expressive for the individual. This multivocality gives sacred objects much of their symbolic efficacy. Such objects are different from the purely instrumental objects of the

profane world. They are not uniform commodities, but are individually singularized (Kopytoff 1986) and collectively expressive. Turner (1967, p. 108) views the central cluster of sacra as the "symbolic template of the whole system of beliefs and values in a given culture."

From the data presented thus far, we might speculate that handmade gifts uniformly express the values of craft and labor. But this is not completely borne out in the rest of the data. In fact, handmade gifts were considered profane by a woman in her sixties who recalled her youth in the rural Midwest.

> She talked about how things were when she was a child. . . . The others thought she was spoiled because she got things that they didn't get to have. She got to have a "boughten" doll and they only had rag dolls. She got to have some "boughten" dresses, although most of them were made at home. She remembers one dress that she had when she was about 4 or 5 years old. It was a "boughten" dress that was very light and had a very full skirt. Her mother put it on her one time and she remembers going out after it rained and playing in the water in it and that dress floated all around her and it felt very nice. She is not sure why she remembers that, but she does.

This would have been during the time when store-bought gifts began to supplant handmade gifts, aided by advertising supporting their appropriateness as gifts (Snyder 1985; Waits 1978). The handmade dresses were profane, while those that were "boughten" in a store were, at that time, considered sacred. The informant recalled a transcendent, magical experience that occurred while wearing the purchased dress. In light of our discussion of department stores as cathedrals of consumption, it is understandable that a "boughten" gift would engender just such an experience for a rural consumer. This experience also suggests that the cultural frames for goods employed by North American consumers (described as an evolutionary sequence by Leiss et al. 1986, p. 279—idolatry, iconology, narcissism, and totemism) may be regionally as well as temporally bounded. There is often a time lag in the diffusion of cultural frames from core to periphery, as well as in adaptation of these frames to local realities. Culture change occurs on a regional basis in such multicultural settings as the contemporary United States.

Gifts indicate the value-expressive nature of the sacred. Gifts handcrafted by the giver allow the giver and recipient to celebrate the values of friendship and singularizing labor. However, when "handmade" represents everyday toil expended to meet profane needs, manufactured goods may become glorified, in part because they represent the belief that technology provides a more comfortable life for consumers. Hand labor is appreciated for specially crafted items, but is superfluous for most of our needs. Technology is valued for providing the advances that give us "boughten" goods. We observed tourists riding in air-conditioned buses arrive at a large swap meet in Amish country, ready to "visit" the land of farmers who don't use contemporary technology, "sample" the foods prepared by the farm women, and buy these "simple folk's" crafts as handmade gifts to take back home. Yet, the tourists gladly boarded the air-conditioned buses at the end of a hot summer day of shopping out-of-doors to return to their everyday lives of technology and "boughten" goods. This dialectic between self and other drives much tourism. We found that both labor and labor-saving technology are more than just core values in our secular world. They are vehicles of hierophany, commitment, and flow. The sacred status of gifts derives from their multivocal ability to express these contrasting values as well as social connections.

Gifts are kratophanous in their ability to separate us from the material world and simultaneously bind us to it. The same woman who described the "boughten" dress discussed the changing role of gifts at Christmas:

> She doesn't really remember Christmas gift giving. For her husband, a good Christmas was one when he would get 25 cents worth of candy. She thinks that perhaps Christmas was more of a family celebration then and not so much of a gift-giving time.

Gifts are not as sacred as the connections between people that they are used to signify. They provide the contemporary material basis for kindred interaction once provided by other sources, such as the "kinship work" of writing letters and making phone calls, organizing gatherings, and communal labor formerly involved in the social reproduction of intimacy (Cheal 1987). For a younger generation, however, the affiliation with the material world is seen more positively. This is true even for an Amish boy growing up in an anti-materialistic religious community.

> John's favorite toy is a wooden truck which is about 18 inches long and about 10 inches high. It was given to him as a Christmas present, but he doesn't know where it came from (whether it was bought or made). What John likes most about Christmas is getting gifts. (wm, 8)

The giving and getting, rather than the gift per se—although in our Amish case, the rustic simplicity of the gift itself is telling—are especially significant (Baudrillard 1981) of the sanctity of domestic affiliations.

So gifts acquire sacred status as expressions of deeply held cultural values. Sharing these values, givers and recipients are bound together in a ritual celebration creating and reinforcing social integration. Other gift-giving instances encountered confirm our understanding of this means by which objects attain sacred status. A boy (wm, 12) on vacation at a na-

tional historic site with his extended family bought a gift for a family member who did not come on the trip, using money he had earned doing odd jobs for neighbors:

> "How does it make you feel to be in a place like this; kind of fun? old?"
> "Yeah, it makes me feel old; it makes me feel like going back into history. It makes you feel old. It makes you feel like you are in that time."
> "What will it feel like when you wear your belt buckle?"
> "I don't know. I guess it will feel (pause) make me feel like I'm a soldier or somethin' like that. Or it could give you some sort of, I can't explain. You know how you feel sort of proud? The Civil War makes you feel like you're a General or something like that; like you are in the army. . . ."
> "So you will wear your belt buckle and that will kind of bring back what this place is like?"
> "Well, the belt buckle's not for me."
> "Oh, its not?"
> "The belt buckle's for my uncle. So he gets the belt buckle. If I were to have it, I'd probably feel proud."

This gift selection episode creates a nostalgic image of a self-reliant and patriotic boy, proud of imagined military service, enmeshed in neighborhood and familial ties. Through the gift and his adolescent description of what it evokes, he celebrates the meaning of these cultural values using the object as a projectible field (Leiss et al. 1986).

Not all gifts are meaning-laden expressions of cultural values or love. Many are profane objects bought and given in an obligatory fashion. Many such gifts are soon forgotten, put aside, or discarded. Those who are in the business of producing objects to be sold as gifts are not unaware of these issues. One informant was in the business of making and selling dolls of St. Nicholas, Santa Claus, and Father Christmas. She used antique fabric to make the doll clothing as a means of recapturing the past.

> She began making these because she had always loved Christmas. She has had great success and can't keep up with the demand even though she claims to work 18 hours per day. She says she enjoys it. Despite the pressure, she has a representative and is trying to sell her work to gift stores through two major metropolitan merchandise marts. She is concerned that people won't see them as unique and handcrafted at a gift store the way they do at an antique sale (where she now sells them).

Some gift objects echo the values expressed by other kinds of sacred objects, such as the connection to the past of heirlooms, the sense of completion and mastery of collections, or the symbolism of true gifts of the self. This was often found to be the basis for the search for a gift to give on return from a trip. For this gift-giving occasion, the general expectation is that some object will be carried back from the sites visited during the pilgrimage. This ritual is a virtual reenactment of the archetypal monomyth of the heroic quest (Campbell 1949; Sherry 1987a). Buying a gift upon one's return would be inappropriate because it would not transfer any of the sacredness of the vacation to those who did not go. It would fail to allow others to participate in contamination by the sacred places and times that occurred during the vacation. Instead, it would offer them a profane commodity from their everyday world.

Sacralization Through Collecting. A fifth way objects are sacralized is by inclusion in a collection (Belk et al. 1988). Even though each item may not be unique, as with one informant's collection of Hummel figurines, together they are additionally singularized by formation into a collection. Taken as a whole, collections are regarded by their owners as special, unique, and separate from the everyday items they have and use. The collection is revered and respected by collectors based on a series of superlatives most often involving its size and completeness and the energy and effort that went into assembling it.

Items that are offered for sale, even as collectibles, exist as profane commodities. Once included in a collection, an object acquires sacredness by adding to the completeness of the collection. It is ennobled by its connection to the other items and by adherence to the principles of No-Two-Alike and Unity-in-Diversity (Danet and Katriel 1987). It is also sacralized through the rituals of the hunt and enshrinement in an ordered display. The collection as a whole is sacred partially because it symbolizes attempted completeness and comprehensiveness, neither of which is ever attainable. The collector generally strives to have one perfect example of each kind of a particular item. In categories that are infinitely expansive, the collector gradually narrows the focus (e.g., all "retired" Precious Moments figurines).

Only those objects that somehow add to the completeness of the collection in the eyes of the collector are selected for this conversion. Search may assume proportions of a grail quest, indicating the scarcity of appropriate objects for inclusion. The informant who collects elephant replicas searches for them when he is on vacation, and at flea markets and garage sales, all situations with a possibility of treasure-finding. Once found for a collection, objects then take on meaning beyond their individual existence. They are now part of a set, an element in a larger scheme.

Items in collections may also attain sacred status by being bought in a state of disrepair and then transformed through labor into fine specimens. For example, one informant, an antique collector (wf, 40s), bought a table in disrepair for $3 at an auction. She planned to spend hours restoring it to its once fine condition. Through her investment of personal labor, it would be transformed into a part of a collection.

Another collector did this by repairing pocketwatches. Sacredness in collections thus may derive not only from adding some completeness to the set, but also through the investment of oneself (Belk 1988b). This labor theory of value is an "elementary folk theory with deep existential roots" (Cheal 1987, p. 157).

Collectors often sacralize objects by finding and rescuing them from those who do not understand the objects' worth or value. For example, a collector of Mickey Mouse items (wm, 40s) found some original Disney display backdrops at a swap meet, where they were being used as tarps to cover and protect other merchandise that was considered valuable. He was proud to have rescued them and was now using them "appropriately" as backdrops to draw attention to the Disney items he sells. He priced the backdrops at $500 because he did not want to sell them. Folk narratives of such salvations from lucky finds are so common among collectors and swap meet habitués that the stories may be considered collectively as market mythology (Beards 1987) drawing from the theme of religious salvation and conversion.

Rather than being purchased or received in trade, some items in collections are received as gifts. This was true of all of the Hummel figurines of one collector and for some of the items owned by the elephant collector mentioned earlier. Here the object has already entered the realm of the sacred through gift-giving and remains in that realm by joining a collection. Significantly, for the elephant collector, some items were received as gifts from friends and others who had visited the museum, giving the collection a broader social significance for him. He said that he got "mushy and misty-eyed" as he thought about these gifts from museum visitors, some of whom previously had been strangers and one of whom was a movie star. The sacredness of this collection and its signification of his connection to others is enhanced by enshrinement of the gifts in the elephant museum he runs. Visitors to the museum and its related gift shop participate in further sacralization by stopping to pay homage to the significance of elephants, and by their purchases and comments. In the museum, each piece given by someone as a gift is marked with a hand-lettered sign commemorating its origin, as with donations and loans to art collections displayed in art museums. The sacralization of a collection is intensified also by drawing from the sacredness of gift-giving and museums.

Collections are often begun with objects that were given to the collector as a gift. The following excerpt from fieldnotes illustrates the way in which an object is sacralized through gift exchange:

> I talked to one woman (wf, 20s) and her mother (wf, 50s) who are looking for a particular "collectible" figurine in the Precious Moments series. She bought one last year when she was here on vacation and now is having the salesclerk see if they have a particular one in stock. She has all of the "retired" figurines (a total of about 20). She got started collecting them when her brother gave her the first one. He also started a collection for his girlfriend. As a gift, he pays for her to buy the "club selections." Sometimes she gives this type of figurine to him as a gift.

This collection began with connections to mystery, since the nature of a gift is initially not known, and ritual, since the role prescriptions incumbent on a gift recipient are observed (Caplow 1984; Sherry 1983). The starter gift nature of this collection is not unlike the friendship symbolized by starter recipes (e.g., sourdough bread, yogurt, brandied fruit) in which the original gift grows to produce more.

However, despite the sacred status of gifts and the sacredness of collections, collectors are not always pleased to receive gifts of the items they collect, as illustrated by the sentiments of a 13-year-old girl who collects Mickey Mouse figures as well as keychains:

> Her collection of Mickey Mouse items was started by someone who returned from Disneyland and brought her a gift. She can't remember who it was who gave it to her (later, off camera, her father tells her it was him). Often people will give her gifts of key chains or Mickey Mouse items. Although she appreciates the gifts, she would prefer to pick out the things for her collection herself. That way she can pick out the things that she likes. She doesn't know how to explain which ones she likes, but does know them when she sees them.

Collections may also be sacred because they are an expression of self. The personal acquisition of collectibles is an investment of self as well as a demonstration of one's hunting ability and persistence in searching for items for the collection. Since vacation travel takes people to new locales, it is often a time to search for additions to collections. Receiving items as gifts for a collection can deny one the opportunity to demonstrate hunting ability and self-expressiveness, and so such gifts may not be desired.

Some collections may be further sacralized because they are based on a more explicit expression of self, as with an informant nicknamed Bunny (wf, 30s), who also collects bunny replicas. This collection serves as a totemic representation of her individual (rather than tribal) identity. It connects the natural category of bunnies to the cultural element of an individual (Levi-Strauss 1962; Sahlins 1976). Through her collection, she simultaneously celebrates herself and nature. Similarly, other informants, women whose husbands are policemen, bought humorous-looking pig doorstops, which served to connect their husbands to a profession and to the animal kingdom. In both cases, the collection serves as a totemic expression of identity.

Finally, collectors sacralize collections by systematically labeling, arranging, and displaying the collection. This quasi-scientific or quasi-artistic activity sa-

cralizes and legitimizes what might otherwise be seen as mere acquisitiveness by giving it a more noble apparent purpose.

Sacralization Through Inheritance. Objects may achieve sacred status through inheritance as family heirlooms (Shammas, Salmon, and Dahlin 1987). Removed from the world of commerce and increasingly singularized, in part by their age, these objects gain uniqueness and contaminating sacredness by their sentimental associations with the owner's past history. Such artifacts are repositories of family continuity (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Rochberg-Halton 1986). Their history helps define who the inheritors are, where they came from, and where they are going.

Heirlooms that were handmade, that were worn close to the body (such as jewelry), or that denoted ties to a native land were frequently mentioned by Odyssey informants. In the case of items worn close to the body, there is more contamination and symbolization of the self. Preservation of these closely worn items partakes of positive sacred contamination. Similarly, items from one's native land are from a sacred place, if not a sacred time as well (Belk 1988b). Thus, heirlooms move from the profane realm in which they (or their materials) were purchased into the sacred realm through connection to deceased (primarily same-sex) family members. This sacralization intensifies if accompanied by meanings connecting it to the person's physical body or the symbolic body of the person's native land, as with one informant's cameos from her mother's homeland.

Like collections, heirlooms represent completeness. They indicate that family ties have not been broken by death. In this sense, heirlooms are gifts to the living from the dead and represent the continuity of one generation to the other. Characteristic of the short histories and the nuclear family orientation of Americans, few heirlooms linked to the family longer than from the prior two generations were mentioned by informants. It is not history and long lineage that is being celebrated by heirlooms, but rather the completeness and continuation of the family—the formal celebration of which is particularly important to upper class families (Bossard and Boll 1950). Even so, as McCracken (1988) speculates, caring for family heirlooms may be decreasingly common as societies become more mobile and materialistic. The logistics of maintenance, storage, display, and dispersal may dictate less curatorial forms of familial ritual.

Sacralization Through External Sanction. An object may be sacralized through sanction by an external authority. The enshrinement of a piece in a museum is one indicator of such recognition and the most common encountered during the Odyssey. That tourists bowed to the external authority of museums was evident in their quiet, reverential tones and formal conversations concerning the importance of relics on display—whether farm implements of the nineteenth century, possessions of Ellis Island immigrants, artworks and mansions of turn-of-the-century robber barons, or even elephant replicas.

In mansions of the nouveaux riches, such as those at Newport, Rhode Island, preserved furnishings showed that the former owners had sought the blessing of famous architects and artists. Often rooms and furnishings had been moved en masse from castles and chateaux. Treasures of European cathedrals and royalty had been purchased to sacralize and cleanse the often ruthlessly attained wealth of the nouveaux riches. During the owners' lives, some art treasures were further sacralized by external authorities through loans to museums and world expositions. When the mansions became public museums, heirs received the additional blessing of historical societies, art curators, and guides, who interpret these wonders for tourists.

Summary of Ways of Achieving Sacredness. In summary, sacredness adheres in certain aspects of consumption through seven different processes: ritual, pilgrimage, quintessence, gift-giving, collecting, inheritance, and external sanction. With the exceptions of quintessence and external sanction, these sacralizing processes are enacted purposively by consumers in an effort to create sacred meaning in their lives. Whether social or individual in nature, each sacralizing process separates objects, people, and experiences from the world of the profane and imbues them with precious, positive sacredness. Other processes then serve to maintain the sacred status and prevent the encroachment of the profane.

Perpetuating Sacredness

Ecstatic as one might feel upon having contact with the sacred through an object, person, place, or experience, sacred status may be lost through habituation, forgetting, or encroachment of the profane. To prevent this loss, ongoing efforts are required to maintain sacredness. Four means for maintaining sacredness in consumption that emerged from analysis of our data are separation of the sacred from the profane, performance of sustaining rituals, continuation through inheritance, and tangibilized contamination. For each, there is a related avenue of desacralization that these maintenance activities are designed to prevent.

Separation of Sacred from Profane. Often we found the sacred separated, either temporally or spatially, from the profane to minimize the likelihood of unwanted contamination. Collections were separated from other objects to reinforce their sacred, non-utilitarian status and to prevent their entrance into the profane world where they might be consumed or used. The elephant collection was in a museum ad-

joining a gift shop filled with elephant replicas for sale. This separation prevented any confusion that items in the collection might be for sale. As a test of this notion, we asked the collector if he ever moves anything out of the museum collection and places it for sale in the gift shop. He responded:

> "Never."
> "Why not?"
> "I wouldn't want to do that. I just don't want to do that. It would be, like, I don't know, like it would be *wrong*. It would seem wrong to me. It really would."
> "What would that do? What would that do to the collection; what would that do to you?"
> "I think it would lose some of its grandeur or something. It would not be as important if I was able to just put this elephant out in the store and sell it. People would say, 'Well, my heavens, he just sells what he wants to whenever he wants to.' But I don't want to do that. When I buy a piece, it's because I really want it for the collection. I have had people offer me some nice sums for pieces in here, I mean, at times when I really could have used a nice sum, and it was difficult to say, 'No.' But I said, 'No'; if I liked it that well and I bought it, then it must be important to the collection, so I am going to keep it there."
> "So once a piece joins the collection, then it stays with the collection?"
> ". . . it becomes the collection. It's part of it. It's going to stay there, *period.*"

This collector's behavior may be somewhat extreme, but it gives bold relief to similar separations that other people employed to preserve the sacred status of certain possessions. When an item is sacred to someone, it is regarded as beyond price and will not be sold under any circumstances (Stewart 1984). Compliance with the self-imposed rule of "never sell" applied so absolutely to sacred objects that informants were surprised we would even ask if they would consider selling them. This logic explains the behavior of a Mickey Mouse collector/dealer and an antique collector/dealer who found it unthinkable that they would use items from their collections at home as merchandise. The only collector/dealers who mixed their merchandise with their own collections were two novice dealers who each had a mental understanding, if not a spatial representation, of things that were not for sale.

Artists selling their work separated the sacred creation from the profane sale in several ways. The male sculptor mentioned in the opening vignettes did not discuss the price or sale of his work; instead, his sister handled the business end of things. The woman at a swap meet selling handcrafted dolls, which she called her "babies," used different inflection and voice tone to refer to the dolls as commodities versus the dolls as babies. She kissed the "baby" as she sold the doll (one object with two communicative voices) and personified the transaction as sending her children into the world to bring happiness to someone who would love the "baby." In so doing, she emotionally, if not physically, separated the sacred from the profane.

Similarly, a painter/sculptor (wf, 50s) was willing to sell some of her works, but regarded other pieces as part of a serial collection in which she possessed items sequentially rather than simultaneously. She didn't want to part with her work until she had enjoyed it sufficiently. To prevent premature sale, she posted prohibitive prices on certain works and raised the price if she received serious inquiries. The collector/dealer of Mickey Mouse memorabilia followed the same tactic, and each time someone showed an interest in buying one of his favorite pieces, he raised the price. This pricing structure protects the sacred by preventing its entry into the profane world of commerce. Exorbitantly high prices confirm the sacred value of these artifacts, and the sacrifice of not accepting a high price offer is a further means by which the collector/dealer pays reverence to the sacredness of these objects.

Breen (1988) shows how rituals of non-consumption in the mass consumer boycotts of English goods were instrumental both in giving American colonists a sense of nation and in precipitating the American Revolution. Boycotts serve to avoid sacralizing profane consumption objects by mixing them with sacred objects in the home. By refusing to continue to enshrine English goods in their homes and in their lives, boycotting colonists refused to accept the authority of the British Crown as either divine or legitimate to rule over them.

Home is a sacred space that provides separation from the profane everyday world, although certain areas within the home are viewed as more sacred than others (Altman and Chemers 1984). Societies differ with respect to whether communal public space or individual private space is more sacred (Tuan 1982). In contemporary Western society, the sacredness of the individual and of privacy or separation from others have gained dominance. Rochberg-Halton (1984) found that the room regarded as most special differed among three generations. About half of the children ages nine to 14 cited their bedrooms, whereas adults were likely to cite the living room where social life is enacted. Older adults (70+) cited their bedrooms, presumably because they increasingly lived their lives there. What is sacred, then, in home life is not necessarily a family gathered around the radio or hearth, as in a Norman Rockwell painting. Instead, the oldest and youngest generations in the United States are likely to harbor private treasures in their individual rooms.

Sacred possessions were separated from more functional (but similar appearing) profane objects in informants' homes. Some heirloom spoons in one home were hanging on the wall to indicate that these spoons were for viewing, not use. In another home with a bunny collection, ceramic bunny soup tureens

were displayed to indicate they were not used for serving soup, at least not on ordinary occasions. Similarly, a woman who collected functional but fragile black amethyst glassware stored it on a plate rail above the kitchen cabinets, where she kept dishes that were used everyday. A grocery store owner who collected antique product packages kept them in display cases in his office, locked away from the salable grocery products that filled the shelves of the store. Collectors who sometimes used items from their collections were careful to do so only on special occasions. For example, car collectors showed these sacred possessions only at car shows or drove them in special parades and car club outings. All of these strategies maintain sacredness by separating the sacred from the profane.

Another way of maintaining object sacredness is to separate it from the profane by designating a particular space for it, creating, in effect, an enshrinement. This is evident in the elephant collection housed in a museum created for this purpose. Another informant (wf, mid-30s) preferred a separate place of honor on her bedroom wall for a sampler made by her grandmother, while non-family-made samplers could be decoratively clustered together. Fragile collections are often stored behind glass-doored cabinets in living and dining rooms that are often treated as tabernacles by adults. The items are ritually enshrined and placed in prominent areas of the house to be revered and to cast their spells on the inhabitants, while also being separated from the profane. The collector/dealer of Mickey Mouse items used to keep his collection in its own room at home, but his seven-year-old son was frightened to go into "the Mickey room," illustrating the kratophany of the sacred and acknowledging its potentially destructive power. This collector also acknowledged the "ruin and destruction" that occurs when collecting overpowers the collector and becomes addictive. By keeping the collection locked away, this kratophanous power is kept under control and separated from everyday life.

When people move from one home to another, they often become concerned about the safety of their sacred objects, which are used as vessels to transfer sacredness from one home to another. Their concern emerges, in part, because the sacredness housed in these objects must pass successfully through the profane, everyday world before reestablishment in the new home. This is reminiscent of Aeneas's flight from his home with his household gods on his back (*Aeneid,* III: 15–19). The items moved may be valuable or breakable, as with ceramic figurines and a fragile heirloom doll, or ordinary-appearing, such as an old washboard. Sometimes, people live for an interim period in a liminal house before moving into the home destination. This was the case with one couple moving out of a farmhouse to live in a small summer kitchen building for a year while a new dwelling, a reconstructed log house, was completed. The interim house was not imbued with sacredness. In fact, like another couple interviewed, they planned to keep many possessions in storage during the interim time. However, the sacred assemblage will later be brought together to transform and sacralize the newly built space. The couple was preparing for this interim period by sorting and reconsidering the status of the wide variety of objects they had acquired in their life together.

In a number of informants' homes, sacred objects were assembled together in decorative shrines, often on the mantle above the hearth, as with one young couple who noticed during the interview that all of the items displayed on the mantle had been wedding gifts. In homes without a hearth, such assemblages may be displayed in the front room on the television set. For example, one collector of native American replicas clustered an American Indian statuary lamp, family photographs, an American Indian whirligig gift, a crocheted afghan, and a crying Christ head together in the front room. Likewise, an informant who is a passionate writer/researcher and jazz collector has a room in his home that contains his jazz records, his Steinway baby grand piano, and his current writing work. Similarly, a woman who had moved across the country for a one-year period described her preservation strategy.

> "Did you ship the watermelon collection out here?"
> "No. Those kind of things I was kind of afraid to. That's the kind of stuff that *means* (touches heart) something to me: things we've collected, like on our honeymoon, or whatever. I would be real upset. I'd rather live without them for a year than risk having it all get busted." (wf, late 20s)

As with people who do not use sacred items for fear of breakage, this couple lived without some special things for a year rather than risk profaning them through breakage or loss. Their fears were realistic because some expensive but profane possessions, such as a microwave oven, were broken in the move.

In summary, spatial and temporal separation of the profane from the sacred was evident across contexts. There was no evidence that the sacred and profane can mix with impunity and maintain sacredness. The boundaries are permeable, but well guarded. Nevertheless, there were some instances of deliberate termination of sacred status, accomplished through mixing the sacred with the profane.

Somewhat ironically, given the elevated place of money in contemporary society, the most general way the sacred is desacralized is to turn it into a salable commodity, and thus desingularize it. This explains the exuberance of one informant upon selling her ex-husband's left-handed golf clubs at a swap meet. She had desingularized the last remaining object that symbolized him, and converted it into a

commodity. Entrance into the world of commerce through conversion to cash commodifies what was previously sacred.

Our language in referring to dwellings makes this separation between (profane) housing—"a commodity . . . produced primarily for profit"—and (sacred) dwelling—which is "without economic value in any direct sense" (Saegert 1985, p. 295). Dovey (1985, pp. 53–54) also separates the profane house and the sacred home on the basis of the consideration of money:

> In the modern world, the house is a commodity involving substantial economic commitment. It is an investment of economic resources that yields profit and power. As such, the house has become increasingly similar to other products—being bought and sold, used and discarded like a car or washing machine. Home, on the other hand, involves a commitment not of money, but of time and emotion. It is the place where we invest dreams, hopes, and care. Although we can buy the props and freedom that make such an investment possible and secure, the phenomenon of home itself cannot be commoditized. . . . Yet the increasing commoditization of the house engenders a confusion between house and home because it is the image of home that is bought and sold in the marketplace.

Kopytoff (1986), like Marx (1972/orig. 1867), sees a general "drive to commoditization" in capitalist society. It is disturbing to many that everything can be bought and sold, leaving little that is sacred. However, informants were quick to point out what they would not sell. A show horse owner (wf, 20s) explained to us that her horse is "not a business," meaning that it was removed from the profane world of commerce.

Yet the language of commoditization is pervasive. Fromm (1947) argued that even people are commoditized when we market ourselves and take on "market personalities." Hyde (1983) cautions that when artists and scholars turn from presenting their work as a gift, and instead make profit a primary goal, they sow the seeds of destruction of their own creativity because no sacred soul remains in the work. Haug (1986) is among the many Marxist writers who see marketing as appropriating the sacred for selling purposes, leaving little that remains sacred after such appropriation.

The controversy attending the recent "Baby M" case, which has prompted a consideration of the propriety of commercial surrogate motherhood, illustrates the concern over commoditization (Kingsley 1987). It is difficult for many to accept that the sacred concept of motherhood is not above money. Believing that sacredness is a situational rather than absolute attribute whose boundary is inherently dangerous, van Gennep (1909) viewed *rites de passage* as protective rituals that define entrance to a new status. In a world in which surrogate mothers can be hired to bear one's children, the notion of such sacralizing and desacralizing rites is all but lost.

Although money can desacralize, this is not always the case in contemporary society. As Real (1975, p. 40) notes:

> When Duke Snider, center-fielder for the Brooklyn Dodgers, published an article in the *Saturday Evening Post* in the middle 1950s admitting "I Play Baseball for Money," there was a tremor of scandal that ran through the American public, as if a clergyman had said he did not much care for God but he liked the amenities of clerical life. But when Mercury Morris was asked on national television after the Dolphins' one-sided Super Bowl VIII victory, "Was it fun?" he replied, "It was work," and no one batted an eye.

A possible interpretation here is that the focus on money has desacralized sports. However, it appears that, like quintessential objects in the marketplace and artworks that are sacralized by a high purchase price, sports stars are no longer desacralized by high salaries and may even be sacralized by them. If players were interchangeable robots, commoditization would result and fans would no longer view them as sacred heroes.

So money is not a sufficient indicant of commoditization in contemporary Western culture. Desmonde (1962) traces the flow of sacred symbols from religious to secular contexts by showing how traditional religious symbols were transferred to one essential component of a consumption-venerating society: money. In consumer culture, "mammon" retains its etymological denotation of "that in which one places one's trust," as well as its biblical connotation of "disorder" (Haughey 1986). Money is so strongly symbolic that it presents an intriguing dialectic between good-sacred and evil-sacred. In contemporary society, money is never merely profane or ordinary; it has a kratophanous power that at alternate times serves both beneficent and evil ends. Money can singularize as well as commoditize.

Because mixing the sacred with the profane threatens to destroy the sacred, advertising is often seen as a threat, having the potential to trivialize the sacred by its copresence. For example, on commercial TV in Great Britain, the juxtaposition of advertising with broadcasts of royalty and religion are two such threats (Laski 1959). Legislation enacted in 1954 prohibits advertising within two minutes before and after any broadcast of royal occasions. With religion, as with art, advertising threatens to banish the ecstasy achieved in formerly sacred contexts. The other threat is that commodities seek to appropriate the sacredness of royalty, art, or religion through contamination. This appears to be the concern of critics such as Berger (1972), Hudson (1987), and Williamson (1986), who find it offensive that advertising should feature art masterpieces or religious figures. Outrage

at the use of Beatles music in television commercials for Nike shoes echoes this concern.

Experiencing what was previously considered sacred as now mixed with the profane produces emotional reactions of loss. For example, certain actors and actresses have their names imprinted on stars on a Hollywood sidewalk, but one informant was disappointed by recent choices.

> "I was amazed at the Walk of Fame that they give stars to anyone. They had a star, I mean like Peter Frampton. I mean he was famous for like fifteen minutes. Now he's got a star for all eternity. You know, that's like real strange." (wm, late 20s)

He was disturbed because the inclusion of these supposed stars profaned what he had considered a sacred context. He lamented the loss of this illusion.

Desacralization by mixing the sacred and the profane occurs through two related phenomena: kitsch and decontextualization. Kitsch refers to decorative objects of bad taste that are popular with the masses, as with one informant's whimsical decorative pink flamingo. Discussions of kitsch imply that such objects are an offense to something sacred (e.g., Highet 1972); however, the precise nature of this offense is seldom agreed upon. In the case of religious kitsch, such as a sentimental rendering of Christ or a picture of the Virgin Mary painted on a seashell, the offense seems to be an inappropriate mixing of the sacred and the profane. Dorfles (1969) and Pawek (1969) worry that religious kitsch lead the faithful away from religion rather than toward it. In other cases, the offense seems to be the trivial nature of these pieces that makes them disposable rather than timeless (Schroeder 1977). In the case of kitsch souvenirs, the offense has been characterized as taking an object out of context inappropriately and turning it into a mere commodity (Gregotti 1969). This reflects both the commoditization discussed previously and decontextualization discussed next. Given the proprietary attitude of the upper class toward fine arts as a class marker (Lynes 1980), kitsch may represent to them a threat to desacralize fine art and may elicit an elitist fear of disenfranchisement.

Perhaps the most telling interpretation of the offense entailed in kitsch is the argument that it is inauthentic (Stewart 1984). Kitsch is charged with dealing with superficiality rather than substance (Brown 1975), with being turned out mechanically (Greenberg 1946), and with offering spurious value (Giesz 1969). The charge of inauthenticity is similar to charges of forgery or reproduction in art (see Belk 1987b) and to MacCannell's (1976) arguments concerning the "staged authenticity" experienced by the tourist. Inauthenticity charges that kitsch lacks the magic and power of the truly sacred, but pretends to sacredness through its associative representations and use.

A related desacralizing mixture of the sacred and the profane is decontextualization. This offense against the sacred involves removing it from its context or place of origin. Arnheim (1987) speaks of sculptures and paintings being "kidnapped" by museums and "torn from (their) moorings in space and time" (Arnheim 1987, p. 682). What seems to be threatened here is the sacredness of the time and place in which the art originated rather than the sacredness of the art object per se. Putting the London Bridge in Arizona may or may not lessen the sacredness of the bridge itself, but it does threaten to lessen the sacredness of old London. The outpouring of emotion, much of it outrage, in connection with the restorative cleaning of the Sistine Chapel ceiling, which is literally shedding new light on Michelangelo's paintings (Pope-Hennessy 1987), is another example of the power of decontextualization.

Sustaining Rituals to Prevent Rationalization and Habituation. Because sacred objects may begin to seem ordinary and profane over time, ritual maintenance is sometimes needed to preserve and revivify their sacred status. Meals, holidays, vacations, and other such family rituals not only sacralize the objects they involve, they do much to maintain the sacred status of the family.

The elephant replicas collector has performed a number of rituals to preserve the sacred status of his collection. Each time he has moved, he has packed the whole collection carefully. Before he started the Elephant Museum, he kept some things in boxes, rather than risk breaking them in the unpacking. He has been through three floods and has unpacked and repacked all of the items each time with no losses. It was this packing and unpacking that convinced him to open the museum, where he could share the collection with others. He feels that he preserves the sacred status of his collection through sharing it with those who visit the museum. He mentioned that elephant families stay together for life. In a sense it is a form of eternal life that he is trying to ensure for the collection and, by extension, for himself, through these rituals.

For an informant with some monogrammed heirloom silver spoons, sacredness-maintaining rituals include cleaning, repair, and display. The soft, silver spoons had some dents that she had removed after receiving the spoons from her mother-in-law. She then had the spoons mounted and framed to hang in her dining room. Another informant had restored an heirloom quilt from her mother, as described in this fieldnote excerpt.

> The woman selling raffle tickets . . . had restored her mother's patchwork quilt and uses it in her home. It is draped over a quilt rack and used on a bed when it is needed. It had been mildewed from being packed away and a number of pieces had to be replaced. She anticipates that her daughter will take this quilt and keep it in the family.

Through her investment of labor and care in the object, she prevented it from becoming profane junk and restored its sacred status, which will be preserved by passing it on to her daughter. This fetishistic investment of labor in an object recompenses its neglect over the years. Once its sacred status is restored, it must then be preserved, having come dangerously close to vanishing. Similar levels of attention to a sacred heirloom in disrepair were reported by other informants who stripped furniture, sewed dolls back together, and oiled tools. These are not sacralizing actions, but rather are rituals that restore and maintain sacredness.

This type of restoration was described by an informant who has an heirloom that she had refinished to allow its sacred nature to shine through:

> "I have a tea wagon . . . in the dining room, . . . a little teacart that my coffee service is on, that belonged to my grandmother, that I just had refinished. It had been painted when that antiquing look was in that you painted furniture, and then you rubbed that sort of black paint over it to make it look old. And it had several layers of paint on it. I did not do the refinishing, but I decided that it is a pretty enough piece that I'd have it refinished. So that's kind of a special piece." (wf, early 30s)

Through a cleansing ritual, the once-sacred heirloom was restored. It is as if through this act of duty, the cart's glory can now shine through, as it could not when the black paint was profaning it. Oddly, for the relative who chose to put the black antiquing paint on, this was probably seen as a way of making an ugly piece more attractive. It seems odd that someone would "antique" an antique, but this too was probably done to try to resingularize the piece. This woman's refinishing of the piece restores its sacred status for her.

However, preserving sacred status in heirlooms does not always mean restoring items to their original condition. It may involve maintaining the imperfect condition of an object when imperfections serve as sacred marks of use by family members. One woman explained the logic of this approach, as noted in this fieldnote excerpt:

> Rene had a commode at home that was passed down to her by her mother who got it from her mother (Rene's grandmother). It has been used by each of her children as a dresser in their rooms. Her husband refinished it and took nine coats of paint off of it. He was trying to take off the cigarette stains from when her brother had it, but she told him not to take those off because "those make it even more precious." (wf, 40s)

Maintenance of an heirloom's sacredness then does not always mean preservation in the way that a museum or seller might approach the object. Unlike the marks of a famous person, these do not increase the object's economic value. However, preserving the cigarette marks makes the object more sentimentally valuable and sacred by preserving the extended self of a family member.

The sacredness of other heirlooms is maintained by ritual prohibitions against use. To use these objects would desacralize them by making them mere utilitarian commodities. During one interview, a woman in her mid-thirties corrected the interviewer who mentioned some toys in the living room.

> "I noticed a number of toys around. In the family room, there were toys, and in the library you called it, there were some toys. But in the *living room* there were some toys. There were some dolls . . ."
>
> "Oh (eyebrows raised and knowing smile comes to face—emphatically), there are not. They're not toys! There should not be toys in there. They're just sort of collectibles I guess . . . There's an old piece in there; a bed in there that was his grandmother's that has a doll; a chaise bed of sorts. So that's in there, and its got some dolls on it, but they're not for play. And there are some stuffed animals in there that used to be my husband's when he was a child. So they're kind of fond favorites, I guess." (wf, mid-30s)

The items are, in fact, antique toys, but are now viewed by the informant as decorative objects removed from the profane world in which they might be used in play. Here the owners ritually comply with the self-imposed rule of "Never Use."

Some heirlooms are used, but only on ritual occasions. That is, they are separated temporally from the profane and are employed ritually. One informant (wf, mid-30s) has a lace tablecloth that was passed on to her by her grandmother. She uses it on holidays (sacred times when the family is brought together for ritual behavior) and on other "special occasions," but never for everyday use. The continuation of tradition in this way sustains the sacred status of the tablecloth as it further enhances it.

The sacredness of a place is also maintained by adherence to ritual behaviors. For example, informants at a weight loss resort were concerned about how they would be able to transfer their rituals at the resort to their home life. Many thought they would try, but would probably not be successful. They in essence admitted that the magic resides in the place and all that occurs there. They were not hopeful that they would be able to recreate this magic at home. The magical transformation that they hoped would occur was a result of their ritualistic exercise, dieting, and massages during their stay. Their daily regimen involved the abundant use of water (drinking it, swimming in it) making them feel cleansed in the transformation and intensifying their regard for the resort as a sacred place and their stay as a sacred time. For one woman, the resort "feels like home" because she has the same room each year and over time has come to know many of the others who come here. To her, the place exemplifies the American dream of achievement of

one's goals, the importance of physical perfection, and stability over time. It is a place of baptism and rebirth, sacrifice and salvation. Through ritual, it maintains sacredness that is too fragile to transfer to the everyday world.

Gift-giving is a ritual that may be used not only to sacralize, as discussed earlier, but also to maintain the sacredness of personal goods, as with some informants' gifts to us intended to preserve our close connections to them. When we sometimes offered reciprocal gifts, they were refused, as they would have commoditized the interaction. We were given gifts of postcards to use as interview stimuli, candy, a handcrafted leather flyswatter, rides to get gasoline when we had run out, and dinners prepared in our honor.

The informants traveling by covered wagon had grown accustomed to being photographed by curious tourists, and a sign beside their wagon read, "Donations Appreciated for your Photos." As we had stopped, photographed them, conducted a video interview and come to know them rather well, it was unclear whether they would expect payment from us. When we mentioned that we would like to give them something for the rich insights they had given us, they refused the cash offer saying, "You don't have to do that!" When we responded by saying, "We know we don't *have* to do it, we just want to," the interaction returned to the sphere of gift-giving. The verbal exchange was a desanctifying and reconsecrating ritual to preserve the friendship while still permitting the economic transfer. Under other circumstances, no amount of ritualistic framing can excuse irreverence. Clearly, for example, one should not accept a dinner invitation from friends and then leave a cash payment. The only acceptable "payment" is a reciprocal social offering that keeps the interaction in the sacred social realm rather than in the profane, commercial realm.

Despite numerous rituals designed to maintain sacredness, habituation and rationalization constantly threaten to desacralize the sacred. In habituation, movement from the sacred to the profane occurs in a way that is gradual enough to be little noticed as some objects become worn and familiar. But time may also restore objects to a sacred status, as was explained in this fieldnote excerpt by one antique dealer/collector:

> What is interesting to her is that the nice pie safes, which are popular as living room cupboards now, used to be kitchen pieces, but many of them are now found out in chicken coops. Her business brings them back into the house.

Initially, the object loses its sacredness and is relegated to more profane areas of the home. But then, when it is old enough to become appealing to antique collectors, it moves through the world of commerce into a more sacred position than that which it initially held (Thompson 1979). We observed the same movement with other old, functional pieces, such as carpet beaters now hung on the wall as decorative items and a tramp's cupboard that hung above one informant's desk. While newness may initially sacralize an object as being quintessential, irreverence creeps in with time. Later, someone again sees the object's potential for sacredness and saves it from obscurity.

Rituals also attempt to prevent rationalization, which may desacralize the sacred in two ways. The first is that to bring rational argument to bear on the sacred is to rob it of its essential mystery and hierophanous power. For example, this was seen by Weber (1958/orig. 1904) to have occurred when science split from art, producing the "disenchantment of the world." It occurs when the scientist dissipates the beauty of the rainbow by dismissing it as light reflected and refracted in air-suspended water droplets (Belk 1986). It is the same diminution of magic thought to occur when the Santa Claus myth is exploded for the child. Such rationalized views are seldom capable of retaining the mystery, ritual, and power of former understandings and, thus, are likely to diminish sacredness.

A second way rationalization desacralizes is by offering principled excuses for ignoring, discarding, or otherwise failing to treat something with the "proper" respect. One of our informants, who raises mice to sell to pet stores or give to "good homes," rationalizes that she takes only "the mice with lousy dispositions or poor personalities" to feed to her snakes. Several small-scale pet breeders we interviewed rationalized the sale of their beloved animals by assuring us that they made sure that the animals were going only to good homes. There was undoubtedly some sincerity in this desire, but there was also an element of rationalization in turning these living beings into salable commodities. They avoided acknowledging this transformation by viewing the sale as a ritual to continue the love and affection given to the animal.

Similarly, informants discarding or selling sacred heirloom furniture or memory-laden baby clothes often suggested that someone else would make better use of them. There was an element of truth in this claim, but the need to offer such explanations suggests an element of rationalization as well. Explaining that something is the "logical thing to do under the circumstances" demystifies behavior and moves the object out of the realm of the sacred. Similarly, while the collection as a whole is sacred, some collectors are willing to convert particular items from the collection into profane, salable commodities, provided that they first find a replacement item that is "better" (e.g., a plate from a manufactured collectors' series to replace a similar, chipped plate already in the collection).

Sacred consumption may be profaned when consumers are not sufficiently reverential and do not follow prescribed rituals. MacCannell (1976, p. 43) describes tourist crowding at natural wonders as "profaning the place" in the eyes of other (presumably more serious) tourists. The burning or dragging of a flag through the streets is an act of intentional desecration of a sacred symbol, just as an overly stylized performance of the national anthem may be seen as irreverent (Rook 1984). Several informants mentioned that children weren't allowed in particular areas of their houses for fear certain items might be damaged or marred by fingerprints.

Rituals existed for some intentional desacralizations we observed. These transformation rituals are used to redefine the object's status with respect to the sacred/profane dimension. Because these rituals often preceded the disposition of formerly sacred items, they may be seen as the divestment rituals that McCracken (1986) speculated might exist. For example, a woman mentioned earlier gladly sold her ex-husband's golf clubs at a swap meet as a ritualistic way of cleansing herself of his presence in her life. By moving the golf clubs into the realm of the profane, she cleared him out of her life. She was quite cognizant of this, and she and her women friends did a little dance of joy after the sale, saying, "That's the end of him."

In summary, ritual maintains the separation between sacred and profane, ensuring that what is to remain in the sacred realm does not slip away. Other rituals transform that which was previously sacred into its now appropriate profane state, ensuring that only that which is marked by the ritual passes through the transformation.

Bequests. Bequests are a third mechanism found for preserving the sacred status of certain consumption objects and experiences. Some collectors attempt to ensure the continued sacred status of their collections after their death by planning to will them to descendants as heirlooms. For example, the collector of elephant replicas plans to leave his collection to his granddaughter, who was only a year old at the time of our interview. He wants to preserve "the grandeur" of the collection by bequeathing it in such a way that it will become an heirloom. If the collection remains intact, he "imagines history will stand in awe of what he did." Through his will, he hopes to invoke wider compliance to the "Never Sell" rule mentioned earlier.

A woman in a quilt-making group believes there are bequest "rules" that protect a family's heirlooms, as mentioned in this fieldnote excerpt:

> She says that the rule is to give sons property and money and to give daughters possessions and heirlooms, because they will stay in the family and be passed on to granddaughters that way; otherwise the son's wife may get a hold of them and this is not desirable, presumably because in case of divorce they might take them, and the family tradition would stop.

We can interpret this statement as implying that heirlooms will be passed matrilineally, whereas wealth will be passed patrilineally, an interesting hypothesis, particularly in light of the complexity of contemporary family structures. This rule also suggests that women nurture relationships and the heirlooms that symbolize these relationships, as has been found in other research (e.g., Wallendorf and Arnould 1988). It also suggests the converse, namely that women, in the image of a termagant, have the power to willfully destroy family traditions through appropriation of its symbols. Thus, when sacred heirlooms are prevented from entering the profane world by keeping them in the family, the family is nurtured and preserved.

There was wide understanding and acceptance of such rules among informants. The woman whose mother had furniture made for her from walnut trees cut down at their horse farm has placed that furniture only in certain rooms of her house. A piece inscribed with her initials is in the living room, a space reserved for adults. A set of four-poster beds is used in her four-year-old daughter's room, but not in the room used by her stepdaughter when she visits. Even by their placement in the house, these objects speak of "real" family connections.

We also encountered heirloom preservation by males. When the heirloom furniture handcrafted by an informant's deceased father was damaged in a flood, he chose to work on restoring these pieces and his father's tools before reclaiming anything else in the house. An antique collector (bm, early 40s) who was also becoming a dealer, had some pieces that were heirlooms. Although he was anxious to get his business started, he said he would never sell the family heirlooms. And a man with three garages full of accumulated, usable objects to share with neighbors also had some heirloom tools that had belonged to his father. These were substantially more significant to him and would be passed on to his male heirs. Although not universal, there does appear to be a general pattern of maintaining the sacredness of connection to same-sex parents and family members through heirlooms.

The counterpart to maintaining sacredness through inheritance is losing sacred reverence for objects through lack of an appreciative heir. This was a frequent concern of collectors. The collector of elephant replicas does not want to leave his collection to his wife or daughter because he doesn't expect that either of them would carry on the museum after he dies. His fear is that the collection would be sold piece by piece on an auction block. Therefore, although the granddaughter is very young, he thinks she already enjoys elephants and hopes to bequeath the collection to her.

Why should heirs reject the responsibility of caring for the collection of a close family member? More than disinterest seems to be involved. Because collections are almost always the focus of intense attention in accumulating, classifying, maintaining, and displaying the assembled items, they normally take a great deal of the collector's time. Family members who do not share an interest in the collection may come to see it as a rival in winning their loved one's time, devotion, and attention. Resentment, perhaps unspoken, is to be expected under such conditions. Thus, to care for a deceased collector's objects of devotion may be seen as tantamount to caring for a spouse's or parent's mistress or lover.

Tangibilized Contamination. Besides rituals that allow objects to become associated with the owners and their histories, the sacredness of fleeting experiences and once-encountered places is preserved, it is hoped, through souvenirs and photographs. This is a process of tangibilizing contamination through an object. When places visited are regarded as sacred, the time spent there is also sacred (MacCannell 1976). In addition, items overtly intended as souvenirs, as well as more idiosyncratic mementos, may be regarded as sacred. They hold the contagious property of the sacred (Stewart 1984). Gordon (1986) notes five types of sacred souvenir icons:

1. Pictorial images (e.g., photographs, postcards);
2. Pieces–of–the–rock (e.g., seashells, pinecones);
3. Symbolic shorthand (e.g., miniature Eiffel Tower, toy Loch Ness monster);
4. Markers (e.g., "Grand Canyon" t–shirt, restaurant matchbook cover); and
5. Local product (e.g., olive oil from Greece, local clothing).

In each case, some logical or symbolic reminder is sought in order that the memories attached to the visit will remain vivid and "real." Evidently there is also a status motive, since such souvenirs often visibly proclaim the visit to others. We may also include in the category of tangibilized contamination the personal memento, such as pressed flowers from a suitor, wine bottle labels from a significant meal, and ticket stubs from a concert attended. Souvenirs may also represent sacred persons who touched, autographed, or owned the item. This is illuminated by home buyers in Beverly Hills who are willing to pay more for houses that formerly belonged to prominent stars, an indication that used goods are sometimes worth more than new goods and that sacredness may be reflected in price.

The experience of being in a special place, such as a vacation site, is preserved through mementoes, souvenirs, and photographs for later savoring and enjoyment. Tourists do not seem to mind that their photographs will be exactly like those of all other tourists. In fact, this duplication is viewed as a mark of authenticity, confirming the validity of the tourist's experience (MacCannell 1976). At some sites, tourists gleefully cluster with their cameras around places designated as photo opportunities.

Since we travelled to a number of tourist sites on the Odyssey, the use of photography in preserving the sacred became a recurring theme. The role of photographs in sustaining sacred experiences and relationships also was evident in photographs people carried with them or enshrined in their homes. Some consumers' houses and vehicles were so sacred to them that they carried photos of these things with them on their travels. Often photos of loved family members, pets, and favorite objects and places were enshrined in the home on mantles, bureaus, and other places of reverent display. Photos of the past were also given prominent status in historical museums, where they were a tangible link with the past these museums were sacralizing.

Two professional photographers we interviewed differed in the extent to which they see their works as preserving the sacred. One photographer sees the work in which he helped preserve others' sacred moments—wedding and bar mitzvah photos—as totally unrewarding work. He prefers taking pictures of stars like Perry Como because the subject is sacred to him and allows him to preserve the memory of his contact with such entertainment gods. The other photographer specializes in anthropological travel and nature photos, and sells prints at art shows. He has somewhat mixed feelings about selling these photographs to the public. He was pleased by one purchaser who was also a photographer and who promised that the purchased print would be hung "in a place of honor." In general, the photos themselves (i.e., his negatives) are clearly sacred to him and help preserve memories of meaningful experiences.

At a Renaissance Festival, we observed that people were able to experience the magical aspects of time travel and the romantic fantasy of being a part of another world. Through souvenir dragon-slaying swords and flowered wreaths for the hair, people attempted to transport an element of this experience back to their everyday lives. The tangible sacredness of such sites was often preserved in artifacts acquired there in the form of gifts, souvenirs, and photographs. One woman bought charms for a seldom-worn, but still cherished charm bracelet memorializing each vacation. She has a charm from Niagara Falls (from her current vacation) and one from Yellowstone Park (last year's vacation). She does not have one from her hometown. Although her own home is sacred, she feels no need symbolically to bring the hometown with her, since she is usually there. Similarly, a beauty

queen representing a particular city, who is therefore herself an incarnation of that place, recalled as she looked over some souvenir pins on her sash the ethnic festival where she bought each pin, rather than the country which is supposedly symbolized by each of them. Through souvenirs and photographs, consumers tangibilize contamination of their contact with sacred consumption.

Just as the sacred can be made manifest and preserved in tangible objects, the loss of such objects threatens to desacralize. For example, collections sometimes irreverently move from the world of the sacred into the world of the profane in ways that deeply disturb people. An informant who moved across the country had a little watermelon dish broken in the move. This bothered her because she collects watermelon replicas and because her collection represents preservation and continuity, elements that are tenuous in her life at present. A man interviewed lost a $10,000 collection of books and records in a flood. A worker at a Small Business Administration Disaster Field Office talked with us about the effect of losing collections. It was her sense that young people bounce back faster than older people. Probably this is because the old have collected more and have more memories to lose.

Of course, the loss of collections or possessions in a disaster pales compared to the loss of life. The loss of a decedent's physical remains, a particularly wrenching casualty in the flood described by one informant, is more devastating still. But the loss of a collection or possessions can be unsettling nonetheless. The man who lost the books and records sustained other extensive property loss as well. He was deeply angered by these losses, even though we interviewed him six weeks after the flood. Such an occasion is disturbing because it destroys the possibility of eternal life for possessions that are closely connected to self. More important than the destruction of the items in collections is the destruction of the value that was being invested and expressed, namely continued existence of the self through the collection.

Losing a gift is another irreverent way of profaning it. Such an incident was described to us by a customer at a swap meet jewelry stand. The operators of this stand had been informants, and two of us had become close enough with them to help out with customers at their stall. As the customer looked over the wares, she explained that she once had a heart necklace that her father had given her, but its clasp broke, and she lost it. The loss was a source of great anxiety. Through such objects, one has the sacred experience of joy and connection. To lose a keepsake is irreverent and shows insufficient ritual care.

Summary of Ways of Maintaining Sacredness. Four distinct ways of preserving or maintaining the sacred status of times, places, people, things, and experiences were encountered. These were the separation of the sacred from the profane, ritual, bequests, and tangibilized contamination. In each case, we found corresponding ways that desacralization can occur. Lack of separation of the sacred from the profane, especially through commoditization, results in desacralization, and when rationalization and routinization supplant ritual, another form of desacralization occurs. Sometimes intentional divestment rituals are employed to desacralize items. And when sacred objects are lost or cannot find caring heirs, again desacralization occurs.

Interpretive Summary of Processes Involving the Sacred

We have explored the consumer behavior processes through which sacralization, preservation of sanctity, and sometimes deconsecration occur. Such rituals as contamination, gift-giving, and collecting, and various sacra such as souvenirs and heirlooms were explored in ethnographic detail to provide the reader with a feel for the many consumption settings in which sacred/profane transformations occur. Our remaining task is to provide some closure for our thesis, and to speculate upon its further significance for the field of consumer behavior research.

CONCLUSION

We have documented the properties of sacredness that consumers invest in material and experiential consumption, and have examined the ways the boundary between sacred and profane is strategically manipulated. Specifically, we have tracked the ways sacralization is initiated, sustained, and terminated. Using literatures from the social sciences and humanities, we have explored the personal, social, and cultural significance of the transformations consumers effect between sacred and profane domains of experience.

In Berman's (1984) opinion, mind or spirit has been evacuated gradually from our relationships with phenomena. The transformation of Western epistemology from participating consciousness (knowledge acquisition via merger with nature) to nonparticipating consciousness (knowledge acquisition via separation and distance from nature)—that is, from dialectical to Cartesian rationality (Wallendorf 1987a)—has deprived consumer researchers of a potentially valuable perspective. We have sought to restore some semblance of balance by employing naturalistic, interdisciplinary team research to examine a fundamental yet heretofore inaccessible consumption phenomenon.

Consumers accord sacred status to a variety of objects, places, and times that are value expressive. By expressing these values through their consumption,

they participate in a celebration of their connection to the society as a whole and to particular individuals. For society, defining as sacred certain artifacts that are value-expressive provides social cohesion and societal integration. For the individual, participating in these expressions provides meaning in life and a mechanism for experiencing stability, joy, and occasionally ecstasy through connection.

There are apparent benefits to the individual from participating in the sacred as a means of giving one's life purpose. Partly for these psychological reasons, it is generally societally approved that someone should collect something, or treasure historical sites, or avidly follow sports, for such activities focus one's life and seemingly make one happy. But there are other reasons why pursuing sacred consumption is generally societally approved.

Just as Karl Marx once proclaimed that religion is the opium of the masses, sacred consumption also has the ability to channel consumer energies into a focus that may preclude revolutionary thought and action. This channeling may be dialectically cast. Homeownership has long been seen as a commitment to the community, but it may also be seen as the confinement of women to the realm of consumption to maximize economic growth in an industrialized society (Galbraith 1973). Sports fanaticism can be seen to promote community identification and spirit, but also to separate family members with differing tastes. Just as sports fans see themselves as a unified community during sacred sports moments, so do gift exchangers, heirloom-passing generations, and collectors. Acquirers of quintessential objects and souvenirs may feel a sense of community in admiring one another's consumption objects, but may be viewed as materialistic or acquisitive by others. Pet ownership may promote good citizenship by kindling emotions that allow for greater empathy with others and decrease the probability of vandalism or other antisocial behaviors. However, pet ownership also allows and fosters the expression of domination (Tuan 1984). Although we recognize the potential pathologies of self-absorption, miserliness, and narrowness that may occur within sacred consumption, we generally believe that participation in sacredness in some area of consumption is superior to a complete lack of contact with the sacred. Singularizing the self so one is not treated as a mere commodity, even if through one's possessions, involves consumers with the sacred, especially in collecting and experiences recalled through some tangible artifact.

What remains unanswered is the cultural consequence of the sacralizing processes we have examined. Sacredness exists at a cultural level to ensure the ongoing integrity of the culture itself. Through definitions of sacredness, culture hallows itself, working to compel belief. Intimations of this consequence are latent in theories of fetishism, especially in Baudrillard's (1981) critique of the "paleo-Marxist dramaturgy" that interprets commodity fetishism as mere object sanctification. Instead, the significance of fetishism is ultimately semiotic and consists in the reinforcement of cultural ideology. Through fetishism, the "closed perfection" of the system is celebrated and preserved (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 93). Through such ritualization, an individual becomes preferentially imprinted by an object while a culture simultaneously reproduces its critical structural categories. This is accomplished in large part by the sacralizing processes we have recounted in detail here.

We have chosen to adopt a clinical rather than critical perspective in describing the ways in which profane consumption is transfigured and made sacred. Divining the teleological and moral implications of secular sacralization is left to additional work adopting a theological or cultural criticism perspective. We hope such efforts will be aided by our clinical analysis. What is apparent is the capacity of consumer culture to facilitate expression of the sacred as it reproduces itself.

The behavioral complex we have described as sacralizing and desacralizing various dimensions of human experience is the ritual substratum of much consumer behavior. We have adopted the idiom of ritual to counter the "tyranny of paradigms" and the "constraining nature" of metaphors (Arndt 1985a, 1985b) characteristic of traditional consumer research. Our use of the constructs "sacred" and "profane" emerges from the interface of the subjective world and liberating paradigms described by Arndt (1985a, 1985b). By merging the phenomenological approach to consumer experience of the former paradigm with the criticistic or constructivistic orientation of the latter, a richer conceptual vocabulary for describing consumer behavior has been created.

Consider two of the metaphors that shape and reflect much inquiry in consumer research: involvement and loyalty. These two conditions or experiences suggest something of the talismanic relationship consumers form with that which is consumed. Yet, researchers have restricted their discussion of these constructs to the narrowly cognitive. Involvement has been glossed as focused activation (Cohen 1983), whether its duration is situational or enduring (Bloch and Richins 1983). Even when it has been considered as more than merely repeat purchase, loyalty is reduced to a function of decision-making, utilitarian, evaluative processes (Jacoby and Kyner 1973). Combined, these constructs deal with the arousal associated with personal meaningfulness, yet neither contends with the process of meaning investment or the cultural matrix from which that process ultimately emanates. We have described the sacred and the profane as conceptual categories that animate certain consumer behaviors. We have incorporated the spirit of these constructs into a more inclusive and

culturally grounded process in which consumers routinely harness the forces of material and mental culture to achieve transcendent experience.

In his discussion of the political essence of the contemporary crisis of spirit in the Judeo-Christian tradition, Harrington (1983, p. 197) asks:

> Can Western society create transcendental common values in its everyday experience? Values which are not based upon—yet not counterposed to—the supernatural?

While the integrating consciousness affirmed by Harrington to be a potential solution to this question—namely, democratic socialism—may not appeal to many consumer researchers, certainly the question and corollary propositions he poses are of special interest. According to Harrington (1983), Western society *needs* transcendence. Like it or not, to our benefit or peril, consumption has become such a transcendental vehicle for many.

The processes used by marketers to attempt to singularize, and occasionally sacralize, a commodity so it becomes a differentiated, branded product have been described (Gardner and Levy 1955; Levitt 1984; Levy 1978). Processes that allow brands to function in unison on the social level as a constellation (Solomon and Assael 1987) to communicate status or on the cultural level as a brandscape (Sherry 1986b) to form a significant part of the built environment (Rapaport 1982) have been explored only recently.

Often quite apart from marketer efforts and considerations of brand, consumers themselves sacralize consumption objects and thereby create transcendent meaning in their lives. However, the processes used by consumers to remove an object or experience from a principally economic orbit and insert it into a personal pantheon, so that the object or experience becomes so highly infused with significance (*orenda, wakan, mana*) that it becomes a transcendental vehicle, have gone surprisingly undocumented given their frequent occurrence. While this oversight is partially a function of the impoverished technical vocabulary of traditional consumer research, it is also largely due to methodological preferences, which make the direct encounter of researcher with consumer in a naturalistic setting a rare occurrence. Participant observation and situationally appropriate depth interviews permit less restricted access to the consumer's moral economy. By laying the foundation for an understanding of the sacred in consumption, we hope we have demonstrated how rich such a direct approach can be.

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