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[Introduction to] Consuming Traditions: Modernity, Modernism, and the Commodified Authentic

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1. Introduction

Selling Authenticity

"Illusion," said Oscar Wilde, "is the first of all pleasures."[1] Wilde himself was a dexterous purveyor of such illusive pleasures, celebrating stance over character, pose over pedigree. In this he epitomized the late nineteenth-century fascination with new ways to construct illusions, and with the corresponding possibilities for reinventing the self. Over the course of the next century, dramatic changes in advertising, marketing, and shopping would encourage consumers not simply to live a life but to select among lifestyles; not to stay within the given circumstances and time of their birth but to live within multiple pasts; not to remain fixed in one identity but to perform within many. Such popular and enticing new avenues for artifice and performance predictably produced a backlash, fueling anxious efforts to recapture something "real," something authentic and genuine to set against such flux.

The two camps of artifice and authenticity are usually considered in opposition, roughly mapping onto, on the one hand, a cutting-edge modernity, and, on the other, a more conservative impulse to preservation and stability. The obvious contradiction between these camps has, however, obscured their fundamental interrelationship within a seemingly paradoxical phenomenon that was emerging amid the very changes. At the turn of the century, particularly in Britain, what began to arise was the half-hidden but pervasive desire to unite Wildean ideas of artifice and performance and continual self-fashioning with the contrary but appealing ideas of authenticity, stability, and continuity. New marketing strategies—in advertising, in store design, in emerging ideas of community planning, in novel trends in architecture—rapidly created a particular kind of commercial

hybrid that fused (or promised to fuse) artifice and authenticity. Innovative possibilities of construction and reinvention were carefully linked to ideas that would, at least at first, seem antithetical to interchangeable identities and lifestyles. New objects and places were packaged and sold as mini-representations of supposedly noncommercial values: nostalgic evocations of an English rural past; appeals to an original, genuine article; and images of a purified aesthetic free from any taint of the mass market.[2] It was not simply that marketers were appropriating areas that had traditionally been seen as noncommercial. What made these efforts so distinctive, and what contemporary critics have largely failed to recognize, is how the commercial origins were intrinsic to the allure of these objects and places. Their noncommercial aura made them appealing; their underlying commercial availability promised to make the simulation better than the original, for these new hybrids were accessible, controllable, and—in their ability to unite seemingly antithetical desires—tantalizingly modern. This noncommercial commerce was certainly a paradox, but the powerful underlying promise was that the intrinsic contradictions could be sustained rather than resolved; indeed, the paradox *was* the appeal.

We remain surrounded by the repercussions of this phenomenon. Marketers still love to sell us nostalgic forms of authentic goods. The United States offers Disneyworld's pristine Main Street U.S.A.; Cracker Barrel's general store, replete with its old-fashioned candy jars and moon pies amid a faux-rusticated interior; Pottery Barn's new distressed furniture, machine made to look old and weathered. Likewise, Britain is awash in the selling of a venerable old England, from the vine-covered cottage, to the proliferation of the heritage industry, to the opening of Dickens World in Kent, to the immensely popular Hovis Bread ads, which featured a young boy delivering loaves of fresh bread down a cobblestone street. In a different variation of the phenomenon, marketers present a refined aesthetic, one miraculously and allegedly free of the vulgar taint of commerce; here we find the soft-focus Ralph Lauren ad; the fireside scene of the L. L. Bean Christmas catalog, with its golden retriever puppies reclining on soft flannel; and the solid sophistication (with lovely wood accents) of the venerable London store Liberty. In every case, the viewer is assured that the real is "real"—and readily available for a reasonable price.

I use the term "commodified authentic" as a helpful shorthand for this enormously complex and important phenomenon. The term does not imply a search for authenticity per se but rather a search for a sustained contradiction that might allow consumers to be at once connected to a range of values roughly aligned with authenticity and yet also to be fully modern. The strategy had many expressions

that I detail later, including appeals to nostalgic nationalism, aesthetic refinement, and the genuine original article, but they all promised to deliver a vision of stability and permanence at the same time that they promised equally to be endlessly exchangeable. Instead of choosing between the past and the present, between an alluring sense of endurance and the chance to reinvent and possess, consumers might unite all these desires in one attractive package.

Most of us are suspicious about attempts to commodify seemingly noncommercial values. Indeed, the proliferation of such marketing is matched by the proliferation of critics who decry the phenomenon—or satirize it, as Julian Barnes does so brilliantly in his novel *England, England.* We usually perceive the selling of authenticity as fraud, as the inauthentic masquerading as the authentic. Accordingly, we are adept at (and often smug about) unmasking the commerce behind the facade: the distressed furniture is not really old, the soft-lit reproduction of the villager's house hides the economic hardships that were found there, and at the very least, that new soft sweater is unlikely to deliver the sophisticated atmosphere from the catalogue. Such exposure is important and ongoing critical work, but the rush to condemn (or at least ironically smirk) has limited a critical investigation of either the history of such marketing or its powerful allures. In moving so quickly to unmask, we have missed the opportunity to understand.

Consuming Traditions brings the commodified authentic center stage, arguing that this half-hidden but critically significant phenomenon is a key trope for understanding not only commodity culture but the development of both modernity and literary modernism. I trace the paradox of the commodified authentic in key areas of British culture at the moment it emerges in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century.[3] The urge to construct, buy, reproduce, package, and sell a range of images and ideas clustered around authenticity began to appear not simply in stores but in new efforts to plan model communities, to build model homes, and in new literary works that recognized, critiqued, and exploited the phenomenon for innovative literary ends. The very idea of the commodified authentic—that one might unite desires for permanence, or commercial purity, or for the absolutely original, with the promise that despite appearances such things might be endlessly remade, constructed, reproduced, and exchanged—was an astonishingly powerful paradox; efforts to align modernism or modernity with only one side of the equation (with, say, the desire to "make it new") miss how the paradox itself, with its heady promise to sustain the contradiction, functioned as a critical tool within the culture. Understanding how this tool performed is, in turn, essential for understanding the intertwined development of commodity culture, modernity, and literary modernism.

The commodified authentic by its very nature crossed boundaries, so our critical approach to it should do likewise. I thus draw on literary, commercial, and architectural examples, considering two significant clusters of activity in differing locations. The first cluster centers on the countryside, investigating how both rural villages and houses, well-established repositories of nostalgic forms of authenticity, became new sites for intense commercialization that were explicitly produced through modern industry and factory work. These developments in town planning and in architecture radically shifted the way communities were structured and the way houses were built, and the power of these transitions in turn spilled into literature, as novelists and playwrights depicted and savagely critiqued the move to construct apparently old towns and seemingly old homes. Yet surprisingly, the appetite for old-new hybrids was also shared by writers, architects, and consumers alike, who all recognized that the emerging power of commerce to produce nostalgic environments was a critical way to negotiate the difficult transition into modernity. With the second cluster, we move to the city to explore how various forms of authenticity often considered antithetical to the modern urban setting were rapidly translated into malleable images for the urban market. This second section investigates the emergence of the British department store, early twentieth-century revolutions in advertising, and the concomitant spilling of commercial possibilities from the store to the store window and out into the urban street scene, as the culture moved from having a life to creating a lifestyle. Such shifts became central to the work of early modernist writers, who quickly recognized the power of constructing objects and spaces seemingly purified of commercial taint, and of sustaining the contradiction between authenticity and its construction. The paradox of the commodified authentic lay at the heart of all these shifts, and it profoundly changed the way we shop and how we read.

The commodified authentic's rapid development in turn-of-the-century Britain was due in large part to its enticing promise to address a series of pervasive, often overlapping tensions at the moment that such tensions threatened to overwhelm public discourse. First, various forms of the commodified authentic addressed the contradiction between the desire to access the past and the heady urge to "make it new." This tension was especially acute for many people living through the anxious transition from the Victorian age to the modern one. Between the 1880s and the high-water mark of British modernism in 1922, Britain revolutionized its art, architecture, and marketing. For those coming of age in the early 1900s—the children of Victorian parents—such shifts were both exhilarating and alarming. As Virginia Woolf noted, "There should have been a generation between [my father and me] to cushion the contact," a buffer to ease the sudden transitions.[4]

In this rapidly changing environment, the commodified authentic emerged as an appealing and dexterous tool, one uniquely designed to satisfy both a longing for tradition and the urgent need to move into the modern era. Stranded between an outmoded past and a rapidly modernizing future, consumers were drawn to the commodified authentic's ability to weave temporal fragments together, sustaining the contradiction between modern imperatives and nostalgic longing while at least temporarily satisfying both. As Henry James says of "The Great Good Place," in his story of that title, "you could . . . never have said if it were the last echo of the old or the sharpest note of the modern."[5] Like James's Place, the commodified authentic combined the old and the new into a single gratifying experience, promising to bring, say, a comforting image of nineteenth-century-tinged tranquillity (updated and shorn of any drawbacks) to the modern moment. Purchase the right object, build the right building, preserve the right relic, and one might possess an appealing aura of the past, maintain a sense of authentic tradition, and, by one's very participation in the novel production of such spaces and things, simultaneously be new, up-to-date, fashionable.

The commodified authentic also worked to soothe the friction between an often elitist desire to escape the marketplace and a contradictory but powerful appetite for its spectacular bounty. It paradoxically promised to democratize the production of commercial purity and to make exclusivity universally available. In effect, the commodified authentic not only participated in the modernist dream of an autonomous aesthetic separate from mass culture and the mass market but also anticipated recent critiques of this separation. The creation of a noncommercial commerce fundamentally challenged the organizing binary that divided the authentic from the mass market, or a pure art from a sullied materialism, declaring without embarrassment that its antimarket aesthetic was exclusive and yet easily accessible. Such a union proved a potent—and lucrative—combination in early twentieth-century British culture. It also provides us with a unique lens through which to view this period, one built on the imbrication of modernity, authenticity, and commerce.

Selling Authenticity

This book explores three central manifestations of the commodified authentic that, taken together, all heralded the profound marketing shift from commodity fetishism to lifestyle design and the possibilities of performance that that move generated. Starting in early twentieth-century Britain, marketers began to focus less

on a particular object for sale at a particular price, and more on aura and setting, promising consumers not single products but new identities and new ways to live.[6] Consumers were drawn to the transformative possibilities, and also to the sense of permanence and refinement individual examples might offer. This shift was not simply a transition from formerly fixed identities or lives to the mobile flux brought by modernity, but a simultaneous embrace of modernity's promise of exchange and the equally alluring promise of authenticity. The three versions I explore here—commercialized versions of nostalgic nationalism, of originary authenticity, and of aesthetic purity—all suggested the possibility of stability and beauty, evoking a climate of pleasure and ease; the appeal lay as much in the vision of permanence as it did in the promise of access and interchange.

Timeless . . .

The late nineteenth century saw the rapid emergence of what would become one of the most popular versions of the commodified authentic: an appeal to a nostalgic, often nationalistic authenticity. Such marketing evoked an ideal English rural past, usually one that predated industrial production and modern technology, and often one that was situated in the country. This "Ye Olde England" aesthetic evoked misty images of happy craftspeople at their looms and benches, the gentle pastoral scene, the cozy domestic interior. While nostalgia for a pastoral tradition had long been a staple of British culture, the turn of the century witnessed an especially intense revival of such nostalgia, as well as its aggressive commercialization. Critic Alun Howkins describes the pervasive rise of "Englishness" in this era, a rural myth based loosely on an idealized vision of the late Elizabethan period and on ideas of southern England that involved quaint villages, cultivated land, and a sense of classlessness—or at least class harmony.[7] We can follow strains of such nostalgia in the Arts and Crafts Movement of John Ruskin and William Morris, who were forever extolling the virtues of carefully crafted handmade goods. Traditionally, this type of nostalgic authenticity had been defined in part by its separation from the mass market and the factory system; at the turn of the century, however, there was an explosion of efforts to mass-produce and market this nostalgic vision. Such marketing was reflected both in the rapid rise of town planning efforts such as the Garden City Movement and in new designs of individual domestic homes. Nostalgic authenticity with a nationalist flavor quickly became a staple of advertising and influenced such ventures as the launch of *Country Life* magazine in 1897 and the start of the *Daily Mail*'s Ideal Home Exhibition in 1908. While manifestations of this nostalgia differed in form, what united all these efforts was the central

appeal of the paradox: a constructed, marketed aesthetic of things that might be easily obtained and exchanged, infused with the contrary images of stability, permanence, and the noncommercial. Consumers might have it all: the advantages of the country image without the rigid feudal hierarchy, the pastoral without the toil, the old-looking cottage without the primitive plumbing. Late Victorian and Edwardian writers such as Bernard Shaw and E. M. Forster presented scathing critiques of such efforts of nostalgic authenticity, but they also understood how powerful and appealing such images might be, and how essential they were to a changing nation.

Nostalgic authenticity allowed an enticing manipulation of time—fracturing it, disrupting it, expanding it, condensing it. A sense of time's passage might be inscribed onto objects or architectural details, suggesting a range of past moments simultaneously available in the present for a given consumer or reader. The actual or imagined body moving through these settings inverted this, bringing a mobile representation of the modern moment to an older, "timeless," setting. This modern body toured the sites of nostalgic authenticity, bringing the present into contact with the past in a single space and time. The selling of such efforts promised to liberate time from its chronological progression and to heal the disjunction Woolf describes, assuring participants that everything and nothing had changed. Such time-play not only anticipated the modernist novel and the modern cinema—both poised at the start of the century to disrupt time, to stretch out days, and to rearrange years—but turned time into a salable item, one that might be altered, purchased, and owned.

The Genuine Article . . .

Emerging alongside commodified nostalgia was the selling of an alternative version of authenticity, one defined by innovation. This form, what I term the "originary authentic," equated authenticity with the original or the one-of-a-kind, something that was not a copy and that was not derived from previous traditions. The mystique of the originary object had long been felt, but the turn of the century saw its rapid emergence as a powerful advertising strategy. As with the nostalgic form, the originary authentic was in part defined by and valued for its alleged separation from the mass market, and it was likewise aggressively marketed in what are now familiar strategies: appeals to the coterie, to high fashion, to the limited edition. Part of the originary's allure was its evocation of the prototype. One was not buying the general but the genuine, the first model from which others might be made. The originary authentic at times had a nostalgic tint—the aura of an

original artwork, for example, might be valued in part for its evocation of a venerable past.[8] At other times, however, the authenticity that was evoked was one of novelty, of being the first, the cutting edge, the new. As with the nostalgic variety, the power of selling the originary authentic lay in its paradoxical promise: middle-class consumers might (allegedly) have both the genuine article and something that they could easily purchase, both the exclusive and the accessible, the original as the perfect reproduction.

Such appeals quickly became a popular marketing technique, and literary modernists, who were themselves often linked to a supposedly nonmarketed originary authenticity, became adept purveyors of such strategies, as I detail below. Writers and marketers alike recognized the power of boldly declaring that something had no precursors, that it was the first of its kind, beholden to no tradition, and at the same time to understand this very appeal as a deliberately and usefully constructed artifice. Efforts to promote the originary authentic were forcefully represented by the particular attractions of literal and literary versions of the modern shop window, where the glass promised simultaneously a cutting-edge availability and an out-of-reach allure, and where new design strategies introduced in the early twentieth century emphasized the single, genuine commodity.

An Exclusive Offer . . .

Alongside the nostalgic and the originary versions of the commodified authentic, there also emerged a third version, one that commercialized the supposedly pure realms of aesthetic pleasure and refinement. Commerce had long been understood as corrupting, always threatening to intrude on the realm of true art. At the turn of the century, however, both marketers and writers imagined new heights of aesthetic and sensual pleasure that were not only not sullied by their union with commerce but purified by it. New department stores such as Selfridges sought to reclaim commerce from its shadowy role as the perverter of artistic refinement, carefully recasting commerce as the powerful and appealing purveyor of bountiful aesthetic pleasures previously reserved for the upper class. Middle-class customers were suddenly promised environments and objects that evoked a high-class aesthetic refinement, where the commercial exchange was de-emphasized to imply that the spaces and objects were always already purchased and that nothing so crass as an exchange of money would be involved. At the same time, customers were invited to reproduce the refined atmosphere within their own homes by choosing from the many goods that surrounded them. Selfridges promised and largely delivered to its "guests" a hushed atmosphere of soft carpeting and beautiful displays, all within

a large department store full of a seemingly endless supply of goods. This powerful strategy should not simply be seen as another grim example of how the market was appropriating ever more realms for its material ends, or duping ever more customers by its commercial tricks. The appeal was the *union* of aesthetic refinement and commercial possibility, and the implicit promise was that the union was better than the constituent parts.

Authors such as Henry James understood the appeal of such marketing and, instead of condemning it, presented such unions as one possible way to make aesthetic pleasure and restful contemplation readily available, governed by money rather than the muse. Literary modernism itself would come to depend on the savvy marketing of a refined, noncommercial, high-art aesthetic, as recent critics have suggested.[9] The very idea of a union between aesthetic pleasure and commerce became important not simply in the marketing of modernism, however, but within modernist writing itself. Authors such as Joyce and Woolf understood the power of sustaining the contradiction between something that was constructed and marketed and yet purified and noncommercial. Such a strategy did not imply duplicity, as has often been assumed, but a dexterous deployment of the appealing contradictions that fueled modernism's growth and that were infusing ever larger parts of British culture.

Crossing the Great Divides

The imbrication of authenticity and commerce was a phenomenon that united the marketplace and the literary world, as efforts to sell authenticity overlapped and became intertwined with the early growth of modernism. In arguing these points, my work speaks to some of the persistent contradictions within modernist studies itself. In the past ten years, critical work on modernism has transformed the field, making a broad effort to revise—and revive—modernism, defending it against charges of elitism, and reconsidering critics who have condemned the modernist movement for nostalgically seeking to recapture a lost wholeness. Central to these revival efforts has been a challenge to the alleged separation between modernism and mass culture and the related division between modernism and commerce. Andreas Huyssen's formulation of "the great divide," which describes how modernism defined itself against mass culture, and Fredric Jameson's assertion that modernist writing relies on a "distinction between high and so-called mass culture"[10] have proven irresistible targets for more recent modernist critics.[11] Far from being above commerce, advertising, or even the mass market, literary

modernists must be viewed as participants in all three, and critics have productively linked writers from James to Woolf to Joyce to many different commercial concerns.[12] The newer critics tend, however, to dismantle the great divide from a similar viewpoint. Standing on the shores of modernism, they discover the various ways that modernist writers and artists have used commercial strategies—both for good and for ill. Although important contributions to modernist inquiries, these studies often neglect two critical parts of the equation: how commercial ventures in fact deployed and dismantled the vexed relationship between high and low culture, and how literary modernism developed not through a reliance on the great divide or its dismantling but on the uneasy movement between the two impulses, a movement intimately connected to the paradoxical impulse to construct authenticity. If we study only how modernists appropriate the market both within and for their works, we reify modernism as the central cultural location of these tensions, and we further risk treating "the market" as a monolithic entity, rather than as an immensely complicated set of strategies and commercial exchanges, something in fact at least as variable as modernism itself.

This book seeks to undo the circular debates surrounding modernism's vacillating commitments to high and low culture, and to the marketed and the aesthetically pure. Despite modernism's recent critical rehabilitation, the growth of modernism was, in fact, often marked by nostalgia, by a disdain for mass culture, and by attempts to purify an aesthetic from any taint of commerce. It was also, as the newer critics remind us, marked by novel uses of advertising and marketing strategies and by an embrace and celebration of popular culture. Both the older and newer critics are right—even though they contradict each other. I work to unite these historical tensions in modernist studies, arguing via the commodified authentic that the contradictions were in fact constitutive of modernism's development and of the larger culture. As the twentieth century began, both writers and consumers were not simply deciding between, on the one hand, ideas of self-fashioning, of constructed lifestyles and identities, of the urge to make it new and to discard tradition, and, on the other hand, the longing for tradition, for permanence, and for aesthetic purity. Instead, writers, marketers, architects, and consumers were searching for new ways to sustain these contradictions, to bring different sides together in new combinations that animated the many forms of the commodified authentic. It is finally the movement across the gap—by the authors, the marketers, and the critics themselves—the ability both to perform the great divide and to dismantle it when needed, the actions of this, rather than the vantage points on either side—that offers the most vital critical model for both modernism and modernity.

To investigate the symbiotic connections between modernism's growth and the commodified authentic, I consider literary works from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, examining in particular texts that lie on the cusp of modernism. I deliberately select transitional works that are hard to categorize as Victorian, Edwardian, or modernist, for such works represent a critical transitional moment. These hybrid texts, by authors such as Shaw, Wells, James, Forster, Lawrence, and early Woolf, show in stark relief the early development of modernism's vexed relationship with commodity culture. As the authors struggled to shape literature into a new form, they searched for ways to bridge the gap between an outmoded but alluring past and tantalizing modern possibilities. This search in turn led them both to criticize and to embrace efforts to sell authenticity. As they recognized the power and the perils of the emerging marketing strategies, they began to explore and develop the paradoxical desires that were intrinsic to the commodified authentic and that would become intrinsic to modernism: both nostalgia for an authentic commercial-free past, and the desire for an authentically new future, one not derived from outmoded traditions; both a dream of exclusivity and a select audience and at the same time a desire for ready accessibility and a wide market. One of the reasons that modernism itself became so notoriously difficult to define is that, like the commodified authentic, it encompasses all these contradictions. Understanding the commodified authentic both within commercial ventures and within transitional literary works in fact leads to surprising new readings of high modernist texts. In the later works by authors such as Woolf and Joyce that I consider at the end of my study, the ideas that fueled the commodified authentic became critical tools for modernism and its construction, for the very idea of a constructed authenticity, implying as it does both an innovative self-fashioning and an elegiac longing for permanence or an enduring originality, lies at the heart of iconic modernist works such as *To the Lighthouse* and *Ulysses*.

I work in this project not only to advance critical discussion of British modernism and commodity culture but also to help reintroduce the maligned concepts of authenticity and nostalgia. Only recently have literary and cultural critics been willing to discuss these themes in anything but pejorative terms.[13] In particular, relations between authenticity and modernism have increasingly been a subject of interest to scholars, leading to investigations of the authentic—and the inauthentic—in art, music, and literature.[14] Despite this renewed interest, when authenticity cavorts with that favorite bad boy, commerce, views on the relationship tend to sour. Examples of commodified authenticity have usually been considered as unholy alliances, mixing things that must not be mixed. Most critics reserve special wrath for commodified nostalgia or "heritage baiting," often perceived as

a marketing ploy that sells what is sacred, makes the authentic inauthentic, and, perhaps most disturbingly, simplifies or even invents the past and erases its painful features.[15] Such exposure is essential, and within this volume, I remain attentive to the darker elements of this type of marketing. The key thrust of my analysis, however, is not to debunk but to understand. The impulse to criticize and dismiss has prevented an investigation either of the development of such marketing within Britain or of the potent attractions—as well as the perils—of constructing notions of the authentic. The commodified authentic emerged as a powerful cultural strategy, and this project uses British literary and commercial ventures as models to shift the critical paradigm of the commodified authentic from a *thing* to be unmasked and dismissed to a *locus* of competing imperatives.

Selling Gender, Class, and Commerce

The commodified authentic had particular resonance for three groups of British shoppers: middle-class women, the middle class in general, and modern consumers who felt threatened or overwhelmed by the sheer explosion of commercial possibilities at the turn of the century. For all these groups, the commodified authentic provided a comforting new vision of commerce, one designed to ameliorate some of the specific anxieties each group might have about shopping. The commodified authentic became, in effect, a marketing plan for commerce, packaging and reselling it in a purer, calmer, and more refined form. Selling authenticity was, ironically, a self-preservation strategy, promising through shopping to soothe any anxieties caused by shopping.

For women, especially those of the middle class, the commodified authentic helped to unsettle rigid divisions between, on the one hand, women's historical associations with an "authentic" domestic sphere unsullied by commerce and, on the other, the image of a predatory public sphere of trade. The strategy promised to bridge this artificial division not by severing associations among women, authenticity, and domesticity but by presenting commerce as continuous with authentic realms, rather than separate from them. In newly sophisticated advertising and store designs, marketers began to construct environments that suggested various noncommercial settings, such as a country home or a small community, where women might allegedly remain untainted by trade while still engaging in public activities such as shopping. As actual material transactions were de-emphasized, through displays and advertisements that sold aura over object, the division between the home and the store began to waver (though the store, of course, was

presented as a bigger and more perfect version of the home). The implicit promise was that the commercialized authenticity would be preferable to the previous models, for it implied that various forms of authenticity might be performed (and thus changed and more easily controlled) rather than embodied. While hardly a recipe for liberation, the new strategies did offer women more control over *how* to create and present an "authentic" home and self, and granted a larger sphere in which "authentic" performance might be possible.

The commodified authentic likewise promised to grant new forms of mobility to the middle class, presenting appealing samples from both higher and lower economic levels. Seen through the lens of the commodified authentic, trade no longer referenced and reinforced a middle-class status but promised a way to gain appealing aspects of other classes. Customers browsing through the various departments of Selfridges department store, for example, might sample an upper-class country estate aesthetic constructed around the collection of goods on display, or tour the art section as connoisseurs, two activities formerly considered financially out of reach for the middle class. At the other end of the economic spectrum, nostalgic values associated with the laboring classes in rural England might be sampled; tourists arriving at model industrial towns like Bournville or Port Sunlight, built to look like old country villages, could walk within an idealized version of a rural pastoral community without actually being one of the workers laboring in the fields. The middle class was promised a touch of peasant dignity and the flavor of the venerable old estate, shorn of the complications that often went along with such ingredients, and without having to confront class differences. The implicit suggestion, of course, was that the distilled essences of other classes were new and improved—and easier to buy.

The commodified authentic not only promised a purified vision of commerce for women and the middle class; it also promised to soothe any consumer made anxious by the pace of modern life. Consumers at the turn of the century, awash in a sea of goods and the concomitant opportunities to create new identities, were always in danger of being overwhelmed, unable to decide among competing possibilities, and thus unable to purchase. The commodified authentic helped protect commerce from this potential backlash. Tying transformational possibilities to the opposite appeals of buying the real thing, possessing the genuine article, and being the prototype was not only desirable but necessary. Rather than being a strategy that aimed to mislead consumers, the commodified authentic in fact needed consumers to see the authenticity as something constructed. They might be attracted to the object's nostalgic references or aesthetic refinement, but they also had to see such effects as reproducible or they would not see the object as one that they

might eventually possess. Part of the brilliance of the commodified authentic as a marketing strategy—and part of the reason it remains a central strategy today—was that it provided an antidote to the very anxieties it helped create, and then in turn demanded its own critique.

Performing Authenticity

The different expressions of the commodified authentic should be considered not only through individual examples but also as performances, ones that involved both staging and acting, both carefully constructed settings and the opportunity for role-playing. Writers, architects, marketers, and consumers could move through various constructions, reinventing identities and shaping lived environments. Each iteration might suggest authenticity, a fixed identity, a nostalgic stability, or an aesthetic refinement untainted by commerce, and yet encompass multiple times, spaces, and identities and be forever open to being remade. In order to encompass the paradox that was involved in these essentially different impulses, participants had to be able to perform in different modes, to flow within images of authenticity and aesthetic refinement while maintaining the ability to acknowledge such images as constructions. The contradiction implicit in *performing* authenticity is the very contradiction that had to be upheld. Only in performance were the possibilities of the commodified authentic released, and only in action were its paradoxes sustained.

Yet part of the consumer appeal of the commodified authentic was the underlying suggestion that it delivered the real *rather* than the performance, that despite its constructed nature it could still give the temporary illusion of the actually authentic. While consumers had, on one level, to remain aware of the artificial quality of the experience in order to see it as available and exchangeable, they could nevertheless look with another lens and also see the experience as real.

What was perhaps even more enticing was the possibility that—through the right combination of clothes or furniture or architecture details—participants themselves could in turn express the originary or the nostalgic or the aesthetic; they could become, in effect, models from which copies or imitative performances might be made. Like a moving picture that freezes momentarily on an image before starting its motion again, consumers could take up the mantle of authenticity, present a particular identity or style, and then exchange it for another if they so desired.

Theorists working within the field of performance studies have traditionally focused on the subversive qualities of performances and performativity, seeing them as challenges or disruptions of existing norms. As Jon McKenzie has noted,

performance studies scholars have "long articulated" "theories of transgressive performance," often ignoring the pervasively normative dimensions of many performances.[16] Likewise, critics have traditionally studied performances as resisting the impersonal forces of commercial exchange; Richard Schechner recently observed that few theorists in performance studies "will concede that [the global forces of capital] know very well—perhaps even better than we—how to perform, in all meanings of that word."[17] The various manifestations of the commodified authentic provide potent models for investigating the interchange of commerce and performance, allowing us to explore hybrid performances where subversive possibilities were in fact inextricably linked to normative ones, and where the "global forces of capital" were certainly in play. These strategies were in some sense transgressive in that one might, for example, perform class positions different from one's own material status, playing an art connoisseur or the owner of a country estate. The performative quality of the experience not only hinted that one's own class position might be changeable but also hinted that class position itself might be at least as much about performance as it was about family history or connections. These new commercial strategies could also play normative roles, reifying a cultural and economic hierarchy that made things like country cottages and an original artwork venerable and desirable. In other words, they drew their transgressive power from their performativity, making what had been exclusive and class bound into an opportunity more widely available, and they drew their normative power from their promise to deliver, in effect, quintessentially normative expressions of authenticity, stability, and permanence.

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I organize the book spatially because the commodified authentic was a cultural and material stage on which various models of authenticity were constructed and performed. Part I, "Commodified Nostalgia and the Country Aesthetic," focuses on the marketing of the countryside, examining both literal and literary efforts to create model communities and individual domestic homes that suggested a nostalgic return to a preindustrial age—but a return that explicitly relied on commercial production. What emerged were new ways to imagine a mix between the country and the city, and new ways to bring the past—modernized—into the present. Images of commerce and industry were transformed, as both marketers and writers realized the growing commercial possibilities of a nostalgic version of rural "precommercial" England, and the inextricable link between such nostalgic visions and the commercial ventures that might create and sustain them. Part II, "Urban Authenticities," shifts to urban-based versions of the commodified

authentic, and the strategy's promise to ease distinctions not simply between the past and the present, and the city and the country, but between commerce and any sense of the noncommercial. Consumers and readers were invited to shape images of authenticity into a range of new forms and identities, and to see how commerce might deliver a luxurious aesthetic refinement, not only for elites but for everyone. The new commercial hybrids in turn became central to new literary experiments in modernism.

The first chapter in Part I, "The Past Is a Present Country: Model Towns and Commercial Utopias," explores the revolutions in town planning and community design that were inspired by the creation of model factory towns at the turn of the century, as well as by the rapid development of the Garden City Movement. While novel in many respects, model towns such as Bournville and Port Sunlight, and Garden Cities such as Letchworth, presented the illusion of an older economic and cultural time, showing a commitment to past designs that were meant to correct some of the excesses of the industrial age. These literal spaces in part made manifest ideas from a diverse set of literary utopias such as Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888) and William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890), and they also drew on the Arts and Crafts Movement. What set these places apart from these earlier efforts, however, was their deliberate reliance on the modern factory system to support the nostalgic country vision, and the emerging ways this vision was marketed to sell products from chocolate to soap. Such efforts received enormous publicity and captured the imagination of many, including Bernard Shaw. Through his plays, Shaw became the most incisive critic of the new town planning schemes but also, in ways my analysis makes clear, their surprising champion. Through both the literary and the literal model towns, long static visions of the country and the city were united into appealing new hybrids, and industry itself, rather than being the villain, was recast as the provider of new pleasures. These early efforts to imagine and create whole communities around visions of nostalgic rural lifestyles were the start of what would soon become a massive new industry in community development. Shaw's ambivalent reaction remains an incisive critique of both the dangers and the possibilities of such commercial ventures.

The next chapter, "Buying Time: E. M. Forster and the Neo-nostalgic Home," turns from the model community to the individual country dwelling, analyzing a cluster of efforts to unite modern commercial ventures to the production of the "authentic" home. The chapter examines Forster's subtle exploration of the symbiotic connections between modern industry and country life. I consider Forster's literary critique alongside both the launch of the *Daily Mail*'s Ideal Home Exhibition and new trends in British home building, most notably in the homes designed by

the architect Edwin Lutyens, who used a blend of architectural styles to create a patina of age in his work. All these efforts—though in different arenas—imagined new ways that commercial ventures might sustain nostalgic visions within the individual dwelling, and considered together, they reveal how the idea of "home" was suddenly not a given or fixed quality but something that could be deliberately and carefully constructed. The concept of the home makeover, so central to current conceptions of domestic space, was just emerging, and this chapter traces the importance of these early developments through different aspects of the culture.

Town planners, architects, and writers all saw the value (in every sense of the word) of incarnating the passage of time in architectural features, providing an arena in which individuals might experience a visible connection with the past without abandoning the present or a sense of being thoroughly modern. And so they constructed objects that implied time's flow: buildings that combined different styles from different eras, or communities that united a country vision associated with the past, with a city vision of modern amenities. This temporal play in turn allowed for the literal buying of time, for if time could be "applied," like a coat of paint, to objects or dwellings, it could also then be packaged and sold. Blending architectural styles from different eras was not a new trend; what made the architectural spaces of a Bournville, a Howards End, or a *Daily Mail* ideal home unique was their self-consciously constructed nature. The resulting structures not only bore marks of continuity with the past but crucially made an often frank avowal that the very idyllic, "authentic," and noncommercial aura was in fact sustained by modern commerce. It is this contradictory move—to recognize the value of continuity while foregrounding the constructed and commodified nature of this continuity—that allowed these architectural sites to become stages for performances at once modern and nostalgic. To inscribe temporality on new and marketable objects and spaces, and turn time and nostalgic visions into commodities, can be seen as the hallmark of a society particularly anxious both to preserve traditions and to be fully modern. Instead of an outmoded past or a dirty, industrial present, the commodified authentic promised a better hybrid, one that would bring select parts of the past into an updated setting.

Part II of the book, "Urban Authenticities," shifts to somewhat later versions of the commodified authentic that unfolded within the city and that were marked by efforts to manufacture a modern aesthetic refinement. In contrast to a Bournville or a Howards End, which tended to reinforce a hierarchical model of community relations and to emphasize a nostalgic return to an authentic country aesthetic, these urban versions developed a more flexible and more democratic model presented to

a broader market, infusing popular culture with highbrow ideas of noncommercial purity.

The first chapter in this section, "The Vanishing Act of Commercialism: Selfridges, Modernity, and the Purified Marketplace," concerns the radical innovations in British retail initiated by the London opening of Selfridges department store, which offered an unprecedented setting for authentic performance and provided its customers a complete education in creating and maintaining different kinds of authentic goods and spaces. In its advertisements, displays, and interior and exterior design, Selfridges worked to redefine shopping by systematically erasing distinctions between commerce and areas most Londoners would have assumed were separate from commercial concerns. On a grand scale, Selfridges perfected the various forms of the commodified authentic, bringing a dash of English country flavoring into the city (and a city sophistication into the country), and providing a hushed atmosphere of aestheticized luxury where customers might escape the press of modern life and commercial frenzy, and where visitors might relax as if they were in an improved version of their own home. At the same time, customers might select among vast numbers of seemingly endless goods. The implications were not simply that customers could have it all, but that these new commercial blends were in fact superior to the previous forms. Selfridges' use of the commodified authentic quickly changed the commercial climate of London, inspiring other stores rapidly to develop a similar approach. The discussion of Selfridges allows new readings of works by Henry James and H. G. Wells, writers who, in their contradictory efforts to revel in and to unmask the commodification of authenticity, captured the powerful and unsettling consequences of commerce's steady advance into ever more areas of the culture.

The next chapter, "'Lustrous behind Glass': Woolf, Window Shopping, and Authentic Display," moves from the store out into the urban street. Focusing on the individual consumer gaze, I analyze literary depictions of window shopping, particularly in the early work of Virginia Woolf, alongside new methods of window display in Britain just before and during World War I. Both the fictional and the actual displays left behind the crowded, though often lavish, arrangements of the Victorian shop window to present less cluttered exhibits with clean lines and single objects—a transformation paralleled in Selfridges' print advertising by a shift in emphasis from price and quantity to a more austere and image-focused modernist aesthetic. A consumer could perform a kind of authenticity and aesthetic refinement that both alluded to and elided its own commercial construction and that, remarkably, even promised after the war to bridge the temporal and cultural gap between pre- and postwar society. Selfridges, Woolf, and the new

window displays satisfied in different ways some of the contradictory desires of the modern subject: the longing for the noncommercial, the pleasure in distinguishing between high and low culture, and a modern wish to acknowledge and even celebrate the constructed nature of this satisfaction. These very desires became a critical part of the modernist project, as such strategies promised to transcend distinctions between the "authentic" and the mass-produced, between an aesthetic modernism and a commercial modernity.

As I argue in my final chapter, "Modernist Excursions," tracing the history and development of the commodified authentic is key to understanding later works of high modernism, as well as our own contemporary moment, with its strangely hybridized blend of nostalgia and modernity. This concluding chapter investigates how the commodified authentic became a critical modernist tool, analyzing the way authors such as Lawrence, Woolf, and Joyce deployed the strategy to capture some of the contradictions at the heart of modernism itself. The commodified authentic remains a powerful marketing technique and cultural strategy. Indeed, it derives its continuing strength and relevance from its promise to capture and resolve many current tensions: The desire for a simple, commercial-free space away from the malls and the sprawl overlaps with the wish to be cutting-edge and immersed in the latest thing; the appeal of the coterie, with its exclusivity and select audience, flows into the attraction of celebrity, with its ready reproducibility and mass-market appeal. From Merchant-Ivory films to new heritage villages to Restoration Hardware, the commodified authentic continues to promise a temporary antidote to these conflicts, always leaving, of course, the desire for another dose.