

Product Placement: Literary Modernism and *Crisco*

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While the 'everyday' is not identical to the 'market,' the threads connecting daily life with buying and selling are so thoroughly snarled as to be inextricable. An indispensable feature of this knotty relationship is advertising, ubiquitous in Anglo-American life throughout the last century and a half. In *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England*, Thomas Richards claims that in the period between 1851 (the date of England's Great Exhibition) and 1914, "the commodity became and has remained the one subject of mass culture, the centerpiece of everyday life, the focal point of all representation, the dead center of the modern world."¹ Theoretical writing addressed to the definition and analysis of the everyday recognizes, even obsesses over, the centrality of the commodity and its representations through advertising. Indeed in the bleakest analyses of mass culture, those for example associated with the Frankfurt School, the consumer is dwarfed and manipulated by the rhetoric of consumption to such a degree that agency becomes an irrelevant term. Guy Debord's "society of the spectacle" is one in which the consumption of commodities is the engine of all social relations.² Other analyses, from Stuart Hall to Rachel Bowlby to William Leach and Kathy Peiss, seek to complicate that grim diagnosis and thus to rescue the consumer from the role of puppet manipulated by an unseen hand.³ In this more hopeful analysis, the buyer is aware of and chooses freely among the offerings of the marketplace, asserting agency, reinventing a product's uses, and thus momentarily outwitting the market.

Whether advertising turns the consumer into dupe or diva, it is an inescapable discourse of everyday modern life, its reach such that it can be embraced or despised but not ignored. Richards convincingly argues that from the Victorians forward, advertising becomes a form of epistemology: "advertised spectacle was not just a set of conventions governing the representation of things but a set of procedures regulating the presentation of self in everyday life. In the course of the late nineteenth century spectacle became an economy of small things completely embedded in the minutiae of everyday life. Advertising became what there was to know about the world; it became what passed for knowledge" (257). It is on this point – advertising as what there is to know about the world – that the threads of my investigation will converge. Richards' analysis is clearly relevant not just to commodity culture but also to aspects of culture that define themselves as anti-market. And indeed the relevance of market forces to the study of literary modernism is now well established. I acknowledge the salubrious effect that recent work on the marketing of modernism has had on modernist studies generally. It has been a persuasive corrective to the notion of the art object as autonomous, transcendent, extraordinary. I want however to step back from this revision to propose that the view of modernist writing as commodity might itself need adjusting.

Rita Felski has remarked that, for scholars of modernism, everyday life has "the lure of the exotic."⁴ It is a witty observation since one hardly thinks of the everyday as exotic, and yet it may be that for the academic animal, the everyday is alluring precisely because, as Maurice Blanchot memorably expresses it, "The everyday escapes."⁵ We see it in the corners of our eyes, an apparition that vanishes as we turn to face it. We find ourselves in a kind of jolly corner; tantalized by the hunt. The materiality of posters, books sales, deluxe editions, special issues of little magazines provides one way to corner the object of the chase. Further, interest among modernists in the particular mundanities of advertising, or more generally, marketing, carries the *frisson* of the counter-intuitive, furnishing something new and insightful to say about the texts that occupy us. In the 1960s and 1970s, we witnessed a similar phenomenon: the detection of Romantic elements in modernist writing. Robert Langbaum, Harold Bloom, Frank Kermode, and other distinguished critics altered the ways that modernism was understood. This criticism was appealing precisely because high modernists had so often been at pains to deny their Romantic inheritance. Current criticism has focused in a similar way

on modernist writers' supposed antipathy to commodity culture. Scholarly attention to the marketing of modernism reveals how thoroughly the artists' lives and work were affected by such quotidian matters as sales. Once again there is the pleasure of complicating our understanding of modernism and, perhaps too, the pleasure of exposing the gaps between what was said and what was done.

The strategies by which early twentieth-century modernism sought to distance itself from the marketplace are familiar – Pound's "plaster mould"; Eliot's typist with "automatic hand"; Dos Passos's sell-out Richard Savage, who prostitutes his art to advertising; Faulkner's Jason Compson, the inept businessman. Literary experiments were deemed worthy insofar as they were antithetical to marketplace values. Indeed, as Lionel Trilling wrote somewhat elegiacally in 1972, "serious" art once meant "such art as stands, overtly or by implication, in an adversary relationship to the dominant culture."⁶ That view of matters held sway until fairly recently, particularly so in anthologies and introductory literary histories, but in scholarly work revision of this assumed opposition has become a customary means of studying modernism. A short list of titles will suggest the degree to which 'marketing' modernist art and literature has attracted scholarly attention: *Marketing Modernisms* (1996); *Advertising Fictions* (1988); *The Public Face of Modernism* (2001); *Marketing Modernism Between the Two World Wars* (2003); *Literature, Money, and the Market* (2002); *Modernist Writers and the Marketplace* (1996); *Who Paid for Modernism?* (1997); *Literary Elites and Public Culture* (1998); *Making Modernism* (1995). Most of these works accord with Lawrence Rainey's assessment, in *Institutions of Modernism*, that modernism is not, as once thought, "a strategy whereby the work of art resists commodification." Rainey finds that "just the opposite would be a more accurate account: * that modernism, among other things, is a strategy whereby the work of art invites and solicits its commodification."⁷ He qualifies this assertion by noting that this commodity "is of a special sort," requiring patrons, investors and collectors. In his judgment, modernism neither entirely resists nor utterly surrenders to commodity culture; instead, it marks a "momentary equivocation"(3). The symbiotic relationship between advertising (of various sorts) and modernist writing (also of various sorts) is, however qualified, now widely accepted, and not only because of Rainey's influential book, of course. Illustrating the ways that modernism equivocates is a worthy critical enterprise, though it can itself become as routine as demonstrations of the unity of a poem when New Criticism was the critical order of the day. Why was the idea of aesthetic unity so appealing then? And why the ascendancy of the marketing-model now?

This essay examines the parallel modes of advertising obviously dissimilar products – Crisco (a cooking fat) and high modernist literature. To what end? Clearly, *The Sacred Wood* or *Nightwood* or *To The Lighthouse* bears no apparent likeness to a lard-substitute. My purpose is neither to denigrate either category nor to make merely ironic comparisons between them, but to demonstrate that *the specific modes of advertising* are adaptable to two kinds of product introduced in the early twentieth century. By focusing on the strikingly similar techniques by which the two are advertised, I confirm the relevance of the marketing-model to modernist studies and thereby reinforce what has been established elsewhere. But my comparison is also designed to suggest the limits of that model. Kevin Dettmar and Stephen Watt ask in the preface to *Marketing Modernisms*: "how is the modernist artifact altered or, even, reduced by articulation with the discourse of the commodity?"⁸ I contend that the artifact is indeed altered - in ways that clarify some matters but distort others. The distortions reveal things about the powers of commodity culture, about modernism's various self-explanatory strategies, and about the work of studying modernism.

But first, to borrow a phrase from 1950s American television, a word from our sponsor: I have drawn my analytic categories from the website of an American product called 'Crisco'.⁹ It is a hydrogenated shortening, now available in solid or liquid form – lard-like but not lard. I have chosen Crisco because it is just about the most unglamorous product I can think of and because its use in cooking makes it an everyday sort of product. Crisco first appeared in 1911, a date that coincides nicely with key moments in modernism: the 1913 Imagist "Don'ts," the 1912 founding of *Poetry* magazine, and Virginia Woolf's dividing line of December 1910. The makers of Crisco, William Procter and James Gamble, first formed their partnership in 1837; a candlemaker and a soapmaker

respectively, they were led to collaborate on the basis of shared ingredients – tallow, lard stearin, and cottonseed oil. In 1870 Procter and Gamble added “Refined Family Lard” to its product list.¹⁰

Lard is a by-product of what the Crisco website euphemistically calls the “animal processing industry.” Crisco, by contrast, represented an alternative to animal fats (even of the refined sort) and was made possible by scientific advances: hydrogenation catalysts were first patented in 1902, and the process of hydrogenation allowed P & G to solidify vegetable oil and keep it stable on shelves regardless of temperature. Money, not health, was the selling point here: vegetable oil was an inexpensive alternative to lard for both producer and consumer.

The Procter and Gamble company spent three million dollars in a carefully planned, step-by-step introduction and promotion of Crisco.¹¹ A company historian reports that, as of 1998, P & G was spending three billion dollars yearly on advertising and promotion, more than any other company in the world.¹² The website documents the firm’s aggressive marketing techniques throughout the twentieth century. P & G employed every new medium with alacrity: producing a free cookbook to accompany the product in 1912; airing its first radio advertisement in 1923; producing its first television commercial in 1949; launching its website in 1999. It stayed current with sociological and historical developments, shifting from vegetable oil to corn oil to canola oil as health issues arose, substituting glass containers for metal cans during wartime, repackaging the product as butter-like sticks for convenient use, and introducing an ‘enviro-pack’ in 1993. American middle-class consumption patterns – fat phobia, a distaste for the messy, occasional twinges of guilt about the environment – are all reflected in the evolution of its marketing.

The Crisco website enables visitors to see quite clearly certain modes of product presentation: *branding, representations of past and present, representations of use and value, the masking of business as service, and communities of users.* Students of the early twentieth century will recognize some of these categories from other contexts, such as the professionalization of various forms of work (a kind of branding) or the complex dynamic of capitalism and philanthropy (a kind of masking of business as service). It is not merely coincidence that these categories are applicable to a range of subjects: few topics in modern Anglo-American culture are untouched by the language of production and consumption. The ‘selling’ of literary modernism is part of this larger pattern of commodity culture. In what follows, I draw examples from the work of Ezra Pound, the noisiest member of the modernist sales force, to illustrate the parallels between commercial advertising of a homely product and the touting of modernist writing.

How is selling poetry like selling piecrust? How is it different? And, assuming there is a difference, why should it matter?

I Advertising Methods: A Comparison

Branding: It is the unsurprising philosophy of P & G’s marketing division that consumers buy brands, not just products. Establishing the trustworthiness of the product and the company from which it comes, the logos, packaging, colors, and slogans become over time the symbol of both the product and the buyer’s relationship to it. A brand may even (as in the case of Coca-Cola or Kleenex) become the generic name for a product of which it is a single specimen. In my own childhood, ‘Crisco’ was that sort of product. It was what you used to fry chicken and make piecrust. If there were other means of frying and flaking, they were unknown to me as a child of the American South. Crisco had long since become a household name.

The initial challenge for Crisco advertising was to dissociate the product from lard and to emphasize the purity of its contents. The first cans were wrapped in white paper and carried the product name in simple blue letters, employing an oversized ‘C’ for the first letter. The color blue and the enlarged C have remained constant even as packaging has changed. As the producers succeeded over time in distancing Crisco from the unpleasant connotations of animal processing, purity became a less urgent selling point and the white packaging gave way to blue, a more vivid color for supermarket

shelves. The solid shortening itself has remained glacially white. The insistence on purity and wholesomeness makes sense for a food-product of this period. In the first decades of the twentieth-century, fears about the adulteration of food were widespread in the United States. Publication of Upton Sinclair's muckraking novel about meat processing (*The Jungle*) and the founding of the U. S. Food and Drug Administration occurred, not coincidentally, in the same year – 1906. To a startling extent, Ezra Pound's pitches for modernist poetry a few years later echo the vocabulary of clean and wholesome food. The strictures of "A Few Don'ts," appearing in *Poetry* in 1913, amount to verbal hygiene: treat the thing directly; use no unnecessary words; suit rhythm to meaning. Poetry should be pure, it should be economical, it should be lard-free.¹³ In essays throughout the first decade of the century, Pound (and a number of his peers) urged that writers dispense with the wasteful, the impure, and the superfluous. Pound specifically emphasized in fact that poetry should not only be as well-written as prose, but also that it should be as effective as advertising: "The affairs of the intellect cannot be run in a language looser and less efficient than that needed for the affairs of the Chewing Gum Trust, the Cuspidor, Ltd., or the Amalgamated Pants Button Co."¹⁴ That each of these examples seems to suggest a bodily function (chewing, spitting, and – by extension of unbuttoning – evacuating) also suggests that the purity Pound aimed for in poetry was on a plane he considered higher than (or at least different from) the physical.

Another advertising ploy Pound adopted was the slogan or catchy name: Imagism, Vorticism, the Eziversity, Make it New. This tactic was widely employed in modernist self-promotion generally. The manifesto, a shocking color or typeface – all were means of identifying subsets of artists, distinguishing sets of practices, and most importantly enabling a kind of brand-recognition. Futurism is one thing, Surrealism another. Branding, then, like 'H. D. Imagiste' (the name Pound assigned to Hilda Doolittle as writer of the new, improved poetry) serves at least two functions – it enables a consumer to recognize a category of product and it succinctly identifies the product with a set of qualities delineated at more length by other modes of advertising. In these ways, a slogan functions similarly whatever the product.

However, there is a point beyond which this comparison is simply false. The objective of Crisco's expensive advertising was to generate an aura of trust and consistency, to get and keep as large a number of consumers as possible. To be sure, the ads appear to have little to do with the stuff you scoop out of the can. Much of the advertising seems calculated to deflect attention from the actualities of touching, smelling, or consuming the product. Nevertheless, the product is the product – essentially static whether stored in cans or glass or shaped into butter-like sticks. Crisco wants its buyer to know that it is always and fundamentally Crisco, a usable product that will produce consistent results. When the product is altered, the advertising reassures the buyer that the product is 'improved' but not transformed. By contrast, much of the rhetoric associated with modernism, even that of more diplomatic spokesmen than Pound, was often aimed at exploding precisely this sort of familiarity. Whereas the makers of Crisco have opted for an aura of longevity and continuity in product representation, modernist 'isms' and the little magazines in which they often made their first appearance were typically short-lived and courted a different sort of attention. To flash in the pan, as it were, was to demonstrate that art is not ordinary, not a replicable experience in the way that use of a dependable product is. Thus even the failure of an artistic movement could be turned to advantage: what appears to be a failure of the artist is turned into a failure of the audience. Rejected, the movement rejects the audience, as if to say, "if you want the old routine, look elsewhere." This posture towards consumer preferences is one of the many ways that modernism shows its Romantic genealogy and its distrust of market forces as arbiters of value.

When Pound announced his need for an "official organ," he was asking for a platform that other marketers purchase. I have already noted the expense of the P & G campaign. Pound wanted the advertising space without having to pay for it. When he wrote admiringly of artistic patronage, as in the *Malatesta Cantos*, he wrote of a time he well knew was past. Without the patronage that left the artist free to create (itself a naïve construct), Pound sought other ways of getting the message out. But he always occupied an ambiguous position, wanting both to imitate and to deride commercial culture.

His insistence on purity or, in the *Cantos*, sincerity, is, despite the likeness to advertising and even the conscious imitation of advertising, simultaneously critical of advertising as the debased language from which he sought to save language – a logical circularity of which he was sometimes conscious. This circularity may merely be an instance of the voracious manner in which commodity culture ingests its critics, such that even the critique becomes commodified. Or it may be that Pound's resistance is like that of the consumer who, by subverting the proscribed uses of a product, seeks to redefine the relationship between buyer and seller. Neither of these possibilities alone accounts for his vacillation between market and anti-market vocabulary. The ambivalence marks, I would argue, the position of anyone who lives in a world of commodities without full acceptance of that condition.

Past and present: Crisco's website opens with the following statement: "'Crisco. The ingredient to success.' Since its introduction in 1911, Crisco has revolutionized the way food is prepared and the way it tastes. We're proud of our past and look forward to remaining a key ingredient in kitchens everywhere." The site includes a timeline and historical artifacts: the original price list for "Refined Family Lard," discovered in the bottom of a barrel purchased at an antique auction in Indiana in the 1980s, its owner assumed to be a small grocer of the 1860s or 70s; the cover of the cookbook introduced in 1912; the cover of the first kosher cookbook, introduced in 1930; the glass jar used in wartime; and so on.¹⁵ Crisco emphasizes its longevity for obvious reasons: having stayed in business so long, it has kept the trust of what it refers to as "the Crisco community." On the other hand, as the opening quotation indicates, the company is also eager to claim its role in progress, as having revolutionized the practices of cooking and eating. And yet the introduction to the timeline seems to disavow newness even as it lays claim to progress: the time line "highlights Crisco's 'innovations'" – the noun is in quotation marks. The effect is to declare that Crisco is both progressive and conservative, changing to adapt to consumer needs but never forsaking its fundamental nature.

The contradictory impulses of modernism both to conserve and to renovate have been identified many times over. Pound's assertion that "literature is news that STAYS news" offers the same sort of mixed signal. His definition captures the two faces of high modernism, its allegiances to both tradition and innovation. Pound's most famous slogan – "Make it New" – would seem to side with innovation. But it is useful to recall that in Canto LIII the injunction is preceded by a qualifying phrase: "Day by day." The first half of the maxim emphasizes the repetitive time of the everyday, even as the second suggests rupture and change. Modernism, in this light, wants to have it both ways, to be the way forward and the way back. But another reading is possible and arguably more to the point: that the daily itself must be continually remade. Here the task is different from the mixing of old and new in the publicizing of Crisco's merits. Crisco's dual emphasis on past and present supports a narrative that moves onward and upward in a continual arc of improvement. Pound's formulation assumes that the product ('it') is always and in every case incomplete, in a constant state of evolution – there is no 'it' in an antique barrel to which one can return for evidence of origin. The work is done and undone in a continuous mode, less in keeping with minor improvements in a product than with the continual re-invention of being we might associate with Henri Bergson or William James or the "record of struggle" that is the *Cantos*.

Use and value: Among the most effective strategies for selling Crisco was the introduction of the cookbook (available free by mail once the product was purchased) and the enlisting of home economists, a then-new profession espousing the 'science' of cooking and home-making. The second edition of the cookbook ran to 615 recipes, all of which incorporated Crisco. Traveling home-economists acted as missionaries to the cooking-impaired, offering instruction in how to be a modern cook and, by extension, a modern woman.¹⁶ As with other food products of the early twentieth century, the instruction was frequently teamed with an explanation of how the product represented progress. The aura of science and professionalism in home-economics, and of course the introduction of the subject in schools, did a great deal to spread the message of modern convenience. Similar patterns held for canned foods (as opposed to home preserves), for pressure-cooking, and for frozen foods. As new products and techniques became available, a 'need' was created, often emphasizing time- and labor-saving techniques. The thrust of the message was that the product was better for health, more

economical, and, especially, more convenient. In all cases, the presentation sought to make the product 'user-friendly.'

More than any other literary movement, modernism generated its own instruction manuals, and of course Pound was prolific in this genre: *How to Read*, *ABC of Reading*, *Guide to Kulchur*, and a host of essays in various journals famous and obscure. The didactic impulse was perhaps more pronounced in Pound than in most, but the affinity between modernist texts and professional explications by university lecturers did not arise from Pound's proselytizing. Rather, as is evident from the publication and reception history of *The Waste Land*, the explanation of poetry became a regular partner of the difficult modernist poem because of the evolving history of both the professors and the poets. The work of the literary analyst resembles that of the home economist in lending the aura of professionalism. One has to be taught how to 'use' this product by someone better educated. The energies of Procter and Gamble are directed to fostering wide use of their product: profits are tied to numbers of users, and earnings are returned to the makers. But this model is only superficially appropriate to the products of literary modernism. As Rainey has noted, the particular "economic circuit" for these commodities involved "patronage, collecting, speculation, and investment" – modes of acquisition focused on what the value of a thing might *become* and thus normally limited to buyers able to risk money in the short-term (3). The profit-maker in this arrangement is not always (or even frequently) the maker of the product.

Instruction in *how* to use a commercial product is accompanied, explicitly or implicitly, by assumptions about *why* the product should be used. In the case of Crisco's marketing, questions of health, cost, and convenience are treated in tandem with questions of how to incorporate the product into the daily chore of cooking. The question of use-value with regard to the modernist text would seem to require a different set of explanations, but in fact they appear to be similar. Why read a modernist poem? Because it is good for you. Because it will give pleasure. Because the effort is rewarded by the outcome. Versions of these responses are available throughout Pound's 'instructional' texts. These are explanations appropriate to a marketing campaign and yet inadequate as an account of the experience of reading a modernist poem or novel. Nevertheless, Pound's reasons to read are appropriate and inadequate in the same way that Sidney's *Defense of Poetry* or Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* are. The proposition that the place of poetry in everyday life needs explaining, that the arts need defending, has a long history, and no explanation to date has closed the question. Some aspects of the question are, of course, more in keeping with the contemporary understanding of literature's place in culture than others. Sidney's conception of literature as sweetly therapeutic, "a medicine of cherries," seems quaint; the Romantic assertion of the poet as legislator, pompous. But, in the context of this essay, the specific details of their arguments are less significant than the existence of the apologias themselves. The perception of a disjunction between artistic work and other kinds of work has obviously seemed important over a considerable period of time, as has the notion that art has a legitimate role to play in everyday life even though (or because) it may seem to disrupt everyday life. The repetitive defenses of poetry assume that art is not a given, not normal

Communities of users: The P & G website offers access to "the Crisco community" and encourages users to correspond with one another via a Message Board. The exchanges appear to be limited to the sharing of recipes. As silly as it may seem, the mechanism encourages group affiliation by making it easy to join and learn what there is to know about Crisco. Considerably more complex is the matter of group affiliation for high modernist writing (a phrase I here use as a shorthand for the literary experiments of canonical writers like Pound, Eliot, Joyce, and Woolf). Some of the most illuminating work in modernist studies has focused on the reception of modernism, on its 'collectibility,' on its spread to the university curriculum, on its elitist tendencies, on its exclusion of certain kinds of writing and writers, and other such projects that examine 'communities' of makers and users – including the critics and teachers who championed the writing in journals and classrooms and the critics and teachers who questioned the bases of that championing. In one way or another, all these analyses take up the question of what or who is inside or outside the 'community.' The role of difficulty in the formation of

affiliates has been a repeated theme in this work.¹⁷ Making it hard having been a central effect of making it new, it has been important to investigate the attractions of what does not come naturally.

A product like Crisco would not benefit from this aura of unapproachability, but it is easy to think of commercial products that profit from the mystique of exclusivity in the way that modernism has. The concept of 'cultural capital' enables analyses of those qualities of status and identity that do not conform to quantitative measures and makes it possible to see how Pierre Bourdieu's "negative economics" is relevant. Symbolic value can be established precisely by the unmarketability of a product, a position that "demands refusal of temporal compromises and tends to establish a negative correlation between success and true artistic value."¹⁸ 'Trueness' requires a longer economic cycle to establish. Insofar as marketing models move away from profit and loss in real terms, however, 'market' begins to seem an inexact metaphor. And there is a further complication. A corollary to group-formation according to the intended purposes of the product is, of course, groups forming around uses neither intended nor imagined by the producer. A quick 'Google' search of Crisco will turn up a list of sex-play sites as readily as it does recipes. Similarly, supposing it were possible to know with certainty the intentions of a modernist artist like Pound, literary criticism would not feel encumbered by a need to accept them. The varieties of communities that proliferate around a commodity will always be fluid, likely more so if the product is of a symbolic sort, essentially an experience rather than a thing.

Masking business as service: One way business signals its relationship to a community is by 'giving back': building arts centers, sponsoring educational programs, creating foundations. Since US tax laws often drive these donations, the motives are not entirely philanthropic. Charitable donations are profitable, if only in 'symbolic capital' as a product acquires patina by association with a prestigious or admirable endeavor. Though the website makes no specific reference to a Crisco concert or sculpture park, a sponsorship that would in any case be a poor match with the general homeliness and everydayness of the product, a conglomerate like P & G is expected to do a certain amount of good works. The very existence of the Crisco website conveys the message that the company wishes to be of service to its customers. Professional code dictates that a corporation appear to be motivated not only by profit but by a sense of its duties to the community. Even in a thoroughly commercialized culture, lip service is paid to values that are not pecuniary. Similarly, when modernists distanced themselves from the market, they too sought to associate themselves with the idea of disinterestedness and dedication to 'higher' things.

But just as we are skeptical of a corporation's claims to disinterestedness, we are skeptical of modernism's manifold efforts to separate itself from the market. One way to read the scholarship that attends in detail to prize money, deluxe editions, and dickerings with publishers is as a manifestation of the view that claims of disinterestedness are at worst deceptive and at best deluded. Deflecting such a reading, Rainey introduces his work with some disavowals: "to acknowledge that modernism became at times too much like 'smart art.' . . . is not to encourage a view of the modernist movement as an extended exercise in bad faith. . . or to indulge a spurious moralism that condemns the modernists for their engagement with mundanities" (7). These are careful distinctions, but they are hard to sustain. The questions we ask will to some degree always shape the answers we get. Obviously, the approach to modernism through marketing calls into play our attitudes to the market itself. Less obviously, it calls into play the attitudes toward the market that we inherited from modernism and, before that, from Romanticism. Raymond Williams sees the idealization of art as aimed toward a revision of the idea of work. Distinguishing art from the "'ordinary business of the 'everyday world'" undeniably attempts to elevate the pursuits of a leisure class and this aspect of modernism has, rightly, received considerable attention. However, Williams also contends that another "phase of the idealization. . . was a form of oblique (and sometimes direct) protest against what work had become, within capitalist production."¹⁹ The protest sought to clear a place for and to legitimate even that work that does not generate a profit and that cannot therefore be easily assigned a measure of value.

The ideal dies hard. One cannot read books on the subject of modernism and marketing without being struck by the extent to which a subtle rhetoric of blame or disappointment enters the discourse:

the modernists were 'complicitous,' 'disingenuous.' Dettmar and Watts remark that, despite opposition to commercialism generally, the modernists' incorporation within an exchange system was "inevitable" (6). While convincing arguments have been made that consumers can tweak and subvert the market, making shops into sites of self-expression and liberation, the representation of modernists in the market lacks this celebratory tone. Modernism sold itself, found ways to make money, became a good investment. Do these successes mean that the anti-market rhetoric was window-dressing? Consider T. J. Clarke's melancholy statement in *Farewell to an Idea*: "We know we are living a new form of life. . . . And the true terror of this new order has to do with its being ruled – and obscurely felt to be ruled – by sheer concatenation of profit and loss, bid and bargains: that is, by a system without any focusing purpose to it, or any compelling image or ritualization of purpose." For Clarke, the "all-consuming world of goods" has defeated the opposition.

Is it necessary to see the modernists as 'complicit' in this defeat? The word denotes not just involvement but involvement in an *unlawful* activity. If everything is consumed by commodity culture, if even the opposition is inevitably incorporated, then 'complicity' is not a meaningful term. We need not see the modernists as heroes of renunciation nor believe that art has nothing to do with business. But can we recognize modernism's relationship to commodity culture without forfeiting attention to its efforts at resistance?

Raymond Williams suggests that the category of the aesthetic can be viewed affirmatively, not as a refusal of the everyday, but as one of several ways in which we assert ourselves in the everyday:

it is clear, historically, that the definition of 'aesthetic' response is an affirmation, directly comparable with the definition and affirmation of 'creative imagination,' of certain human meanings and values which a dominant social system reduced and even tried to exclude. Its history is in large part a protest against the forcing of all experience into instrumentality ('utility'), and of all things into commodities. This must be remembered even as we add, necessarily, that the form of this protest, within definite social and historical conditions, led almost inevitably to new kinds of privileged instrumentality and specialized commodity. The humane response was nevertheless there. (151)

Williams, too, recognizes the inevitable but spares a moment to consider motivation – what he calls "the humane response." I take this to mean an assertion of certain, perhaps merely wishful, desires to be other than producer/consumer, a momentary fending off of the inevitable. Robert Frost's famous statement that a poem offers "a momentary stay against confusion" registers the evanescence of such resistance. There may be good reasons to pit Frost, the maker of this 'stay,' against Frost's self-marketing as a plain-talking New England sage, but if we allow the latter to eclipse the former, we risk losing sight of the 'humane response' Williams describes.

An economic paradigm, though useful, potentially distorts and homogenizes modes of human exchange. The excellent scholarship on marketing and modernism has contributed significant, smart, nuanced thinking about what 'modernism' was, especially in its engagement with the facts of life in commodity culture, a life that is, after all, our shared life. But what is lost in this perspective? At the beginning of this essay, I indicated a need for adjustment of this angle of vision and said that my concerns converged on the question of epistemology, on Richards' statement that advertising was "what there was to know about the world." Modernist art supposes that is not entirely so. Recognizing that modernism was engaged in the most mundane sorts of matters – the price of paper, the number of subscribers – must not obscure its dedication to strangeness, to making the everyday strange again and again. In particular, concentration on the worldly de-emphasizes the other-worldly, which in turn gives too little weight to imaginary constructions. These mundos, as Wallace Stevens saw, are themselves part of the world, as 'real' and as ephemeral as everyday life. Without continued attention to what is other-worldly in modernism, I would miss the very thing that, were I shopping for a discipline, would have drawn me to it.

Notes

¹ Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle 1851-1914* (London: Verso, 1991), 1.

² Guy-Ernest Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1994). First French publication 1967.

³ Representative texts would include Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds. *Resistance Through Ritual: Youth Subcultures in Post War Britain* (London: Hutchinson, 1976); Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing, and Zola* (London: Methuen, 1985); William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage, 1994); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

⁴ Rita Felski, "The Invention of Everyday Life," *new formations* 39 (1999-2000): 28.

⁵ Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*. Trans. Susan Hanson (University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 241. First French publication 1969.

⁶ Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 67.

⁷ Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 3.

⁸ Kevin Dettmar and Stephen Watts, eds. *Marketing Modernisms: Self-Promotion, Canonization, Rereading* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 10.

⁹ See [Hhttp://www.crisco.com](http://www.crisco.com)H I've also chosen this product because of its webpage, which illustrates many of my points. The argument I make, however, might be made of many products mass-marketed in the first half of the twentieth-century, particularly those with the kind of longevity that Procter and Gamble has. E.I. du Pont de Menour and Company's image-management is a case in point. After a series of plant explosions in 1916, Pierre Du Pont established an in-house advertising division. By the 1930s, however, the company had come under investigation by the U. S. Senate as a "merchant of death." The company then sought the help of an outside public-relations firm to shift the perception of its products from munitions to peace-time consumables. Among the initiatives was sponsorship of the Cavalcade of America, radio biographies of high-achieving Americans. The slogan for the company – recognized all over America – was "Better Things for Better Living – Through Chemistry." In the sixties, this slogan was a favorite of drug-users with a sense of irony.

¹⁰ See [Hhttp://www.crisco.com/about/history/1870.asp](http://www.crisco.com/about/history/1870.asp)H.

¹¹ Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 5.

¹² Charles L. Decker, *P & G 99* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998).

¹³ See *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1968), 3.

¹⁴ Ezra Pound, "What America Has to Live Down," *New Age* 23/18 (29 Aug. 1918): 281.

¹⁵ See [Hhttp://www.crisco.com/about/history/index.asp](http://www.crisco.com/about/history/index.asp)H.

¹⁶ For a history of the modernization of cooking, see Laura Shapiro, *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1986).

¹⁷ For recent treatment of the 'difficulty' issue, see Leonard Diepeveen, *The Difficulties of Modernism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003).

¹⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 100.

¹⁹ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 151.