

UNHAPPY GLAMOUR

Roxana ALEXANDRESCU*

It needed a war to change the pattern of a dying civilization. But we succeeded. We turned a “Waste Land” inhabited by “hollow men” living on “borrowed identity” into a world founded on reason and governed by sound principles. We restored order and confidence. We set priorities – increasing man’s powers of action and control, raising the material well-being. So we channelled futile restlessness into efficiency and devised strategies for enhancing production with a view to increasing consumption. This is “*Our Vision of the Perfect Balance of Power and Control.*” (Toyota)

“*Our passion for change has built the most profitable global (...) companies*” in the most prosperous consumer society that has ever been. And we keep going forward. Our watchword could well be “*Let’s make things better*” (Philips); and also let people spend “*ever more*”, as spending is a way of gaining the others’ esteem, which, in turn, acts as an infusion of self-value.

We value man. Man and his needs are our main concern. We know “human personality could be likened to an open system and system principles could be ascribed to it: it tends toward “self-actualization”(Goldstein), “self-consistency” (Lecky), “self-realization”, “self-enhancement”, and so on.” (12: 211) This is why we endeavour to create the proper ground for its “self-enhancement” – new needs and a wide range of first quality products, an increased purchasing power as well as an incessantly growing appetite for acquiring high quality goods and changing them as soon as other goods of an even higher quality are launched on the market. It’s a subtle policy that proves effective. It can’t be any other way since being aware that “*It’s time for quality and reliability ...*” every product we make is forever new and first class; moreover, it’s made to meet anyone’s particular needs. Whatever you eat or drink has the most exquisite flavour, whatever you wear is “*fresh fashion*

”(T!NAR), whatever you smoke is “*True Quality.*” (Winston) Whichever car you choose to buy is “*The ultimate driving machine*” (BMW), undoubtedly “*The best car in the world...*” “*...Always no. 1.*” Wherever you are you may “*Enjoy*” the best of our technology “*Made for business. Good for Life.*” (Ericsson) Wherever you go – and be sure you may go “*Wherever you want*” (Pan Am) – our services will offer you “*Whatever makes you happy*” (Credit Suisse): comfort – “*Our brand new rooms are designed with your comfort in mind;*” enjoyment in good company – “*a more varied menu*” (SBC Warburg) at the “*Outstanding Restaurant...*” “*where the business elite meet;*” briefly, “*Always a first-class experience*” (Lufthansa) whether you travel for business or for fun.

“*We bring good things to life*” (GE) in all domains: “*Powerful Ideas, Innovative Practice, Lasting Value*” (Stanford Graduate School of Business), as well as the “*freedom of mind*” (Flatron) that opens new perspectives – it helps you break with the past and “*Begin your own tradition.*” (Patek Philippe) So be realistic, “*This is the way we are clever*” today, and enter the business world where we are “*...creating opportunities*” (Raiffeisen Leasing), where you can “*Build your confident future.*” “*Just do it*” (Nike) and you will “*See the future at work.*” (dti)

Then “*Do you intend to map your career path following a leading?*” (IMD’s PED) All you have to do is to “*think positively*” (e.g. “*I like being a winner*”, and I’ll be one “*Because I’m worth it.*” This will “*Change your sense of the possible*” (Netjet). As for the rest, you may rely on us. “*We know “Your career deserves the best attention*” (MBA Programme)” and “*We won’t rest until we truly hit the mark*” (Diebold): turn you into a real hit – a “*Boss in movement.*” Indeed, “*Life is too short. Why not keep making a success of it?*” (Rolex)

“*Are you Coping with Change -- or Leading it?*” (OED – OAMB) “*We’ll give your ideas*

* Lecturer at the Department of Germanic Languages and Business Communication, ASE Bucharest

perspective.” (DG Bank) Are you not? Attend our courses. Within our programmes you will acquire “*Entrepreneurial spirit, excellence, international projection, innovation, ethics, flexibility*” so that you may “*Enrol as a manager, emerge as a leader.*” (ADP, London Business School) You know, “*It’s a big world. Somebody has to run it.*” (Trium MBA) Why not you? “*You can*” (Canon). We’ll see that you are guided, trained, retrained, upheld. We will keep you informed about “*All the news that’s fit to print*” (New York Times), particularly those in Financial Times (as they say it nowadays “*No FT, no comment.*”). We will help you “*Know your competitor*” (London Business School) and support you in “*Gaining you competitive edge.*” (Internationale Marketing Institute) You will steadily gain ground, will become “*European and Global – Your Keys to Success.*” (EAP) “*And*” since “*success, we believe, is contagious*” (Uijenrode University, The Netherlands Business School), “*when you’ve got it, flaunt it*” (Braniff Airlines) It will make others too embark for the front ranks which, in turn, will make you feel “*The Power of Partnership.*” (UBS Financial Service Group) As we don’t miss a thing we will also make sure you may “*Join the World’s Corporate Elite at Madison & 55th.*” And not only, for we are “*Connecting People*”. (Nokia)

This is what we mean by “*providing the future*”. (RDS)

It sounds promising. But is it true?

What an intolerable amount of frustration is lying behind the smiling mask of the successful businessman psychiatrists know only too well.

Life is not a feast – “the passion to live forever cheapened into the bauble for providing against the next day” (5: 156). As much as remained of it (“She had forgotten what life was all about.” 3: 107) is tiresome routine: “You must take the same bus at the same time on the same road each morning, hang your hat on the same book, have three pennies for the same newspaper the newspaper boy would hand you without asking.” (6:136) You must put up with striving for security in a nightmare of monotonous repetition with the gloomy hope that “tomorrow would be in all essentials similar to today” and “no other prospect than advancing for all the time to be on a road identical to the one under your feet.” (13: 23). “That was the height of the exam. That of the recognition of the city when you’d walk out of the office with your umbrella” – “no open road.” (6: 136, 57)

“*The future’s there*” (Internationale Nederlanden Group) and it baffles expectances: “The disappointment still lingered. What she was and what

she wanted to be seemed irreconcilable poles.” (3: 124-125) What has her life been, what has it brought to her? “Nothing, nothing at all, an extension of the fraud, that’s all!” (5: 91)

No wonder. He who sees competition as a game (“warding blows, dealing blows” 11:136) of trivial pursuits (“getting what you can while the going’s good” 8: 33 in “one desperate cling to stay alive” 11: 136), who has “a sense that the pursuit of money [is] an insufficient purpose in life” (1: 233) is doomed to failure (“Why had he failed?” Because of his “refusal to strive for a meaningless object” – money. 11: 5,142). Which is only your natural in an exchange world in which free enterprise, and the sales of goods, is the dominant problem. For what else is “*keeping the world moving*” (except cars, of course) than business and the money you make by it? Money is “*The Price of Freedom*”. Money “*gives sense to your life*” (Insurance Company ad) “Money. The network everywhere; no, a web, sticky and cunningly arranged.” (11:76) “It’s stupid, but where’s the alternative?” (10:151) You are compelled to stay in, induced to enjoy the inevitable enslavement to habit – obtaining a larger share of the merchant goods as well as distributing a larger share of these goods – and be annihilated (“Her thought (...) travelled always the same road of pain to the nowhere of herself, it was as far as anything seemed to go.” 6: 176). Or you may “[break] the sacred law of self-effacing, mute compliance” (11:10), refuse to “*Go with the flow*” and come to naught.

The honest truth is you may choose freedom, you are even encouraged to do so. In so far as this means buying the latest model of a Japanese car (“*Choose Freedom – Choose Toyota*”); or changing your hair style, trying another brand of cologne. Would you make spending a way of life you could find ways and means to “*Express yourself*” (Lavazza) freely, as suggested by our ads: taste “*The antidote for civilization*” (ClubMed), give up manners, if you wish – “*Lickin’ finger good*” (KFC), isn’t it? – and enjoy yourself as if you were “*Born to be mad*”. Just as the others do. It would help you get rid stress and “*unbind your mind*”.

Indeed, throw away that thwarting rubbish – religion, philosophy, poetry. “*Life is too short to waste time*” (LG) on such trifles as inner depths, lofty ideals, moral codes, quests for Holy Grails. Find your true self. “*Be you.*”

But who am I?

“You are either a spider sitting comfortably in the middle or waiting with malicious joy in hiding or you are a fly struggling amid the clinging threads.” (11:76)

There is no tinge of humour in this hideous,

disheartening image of regression to irrationality which could well be an illustration of the warning at the entrance of Dante's *Inferno*. For humour is the sound attitude of those who still have hope. Or what could man hope for in our "raw culture of success" (8) whose narrow frame of action and restrictive practices ("everything that is not to do with breathing, eating and sex is a big displacement of activities." 8: 201) are reducing him to his biological condition? He can but "live from one opportunity to the next" wishing "to be left alone to cultivate his lusts and appetites" (8:199,175). "A living body" whose pitiable "*Happiness is a cigar called Hamlet*" cannot have hopes. "The more you lingered on it, the more fantastic it grew, (...) the best was to be a green cabbage." (6: 57)

One need not be a failure in order to feel hopelessly depressed. Actually, it is just the opposite, "the highest social achievements only serve to make one more hounded by a deep sense of unworthiness." (11:74) There is often much miserliness hidden under abundance; and "there is such fearful unhappiness at the heart of all miserliness" (6:156).

However, you may try to cure your depression or anxiety travelling. Decades ago Yeats said that "the journey within is not the most important journey; it is the only journey." We have a different point of view. Why risk to be confronted with a void that would make you feel abashed or get entangled questions meant to remain unanswered when you can "*Explore freedom*" (Marlboro) safely travelling on the horizontal? What you need is to relax, have some rest and a little fun. "*Just listen to this*": Go on a trip and you won't regret it. "*We promise you our very best.*"

Indeed every trip is a fabulous opportunity to have "*an experience ultimate in intensity.*" Every place is unique, "*not the only but simply the best*"; "*you really must visit*" it. "*It would be a crime not to see*" what "*you ought to see*" in a cable car, what you could see on a "*Leader Tour*"! You may "*spend an unforgettable evening*" at "*the best(...) restaurant*" – in fact every restaurant is the best – where they offer "*meals in pure (...) country tradition*" (and every such meal is extraordinary). Every place of entertainment displays "*an incredible variety*" of "*most thrilling adventures*" – "*The Hottest Rides... The Coolest Shows*" in "*The Biggest Water Park...*" "*All in one evening. All in one place!*" "*You can't stop the feeling...*" that "*it's fantastic*", can you?

You see, "*There's something in the sky you can rely on.*" (KLM) (Supposing "something" could ever help someone do anything but flee from oneself.)

In spite of its glamorous ads the entertainment world offers "a depressing spectacle, the sight of people

failing to enjoy themselves even at this level! Frustration, weariness, and self-betrayal staring from so many faces at once" (11:226). Everywhere "*On the Road to Fun*" (Choice Hotels International) the same *ersatz* note, the feeling that one is after something or that something is missing. Enjoyment is artificial and, in most cases, fed with drink (4: 231, 71). "*Campari – Red Passion.*"

It seems "money alone cannot buy pleasure" (14: 76).

Possibly "enjoyment is a skill and an art for which we have little talent or energy" (idem). It is much more probable, however, that the avalanche of promising slogans and bright images is felt as an extension of daily boredom; besides, the excess of superlatives is, like any excess, far from convincing (when eyeglasses are stupendous and a cake sensational you can hardly believe anything is but common or fake). On the other hand it is certain that the intolerance of our pragmatic world for whatever cannot be labeled as a 'nothing-but' has come to dull our perception. In this respect the ads are right: "*Perceptions can often alter reality*" (Flatron). We have scrubbed the world of magic (14: 106), coerced life into patterns and almost congealed individuals into machines. Spiritual aspirations have been tabooed; emotions have been sterilized, pasteurized (9:14,13). There is definitely no place left for enchantment in such an environment. There is no place left for anything except the ephemeral satisfaction material comforts and status can offer. There is no denying that "*We Make Dreams a Reality*". Provided you "*Think small*" (Volkswagen).

The past century's technical developments produced a variety of mass media of great effectiveness. It is through the media that we changed the paradigm of values, which marks the sign of a cultural revolution, to paraphrase Thomas Kuhn.

It is through the media that utility and profit were acknowledged as the main, if not the only, values. It is through the media that the new culture determined what conduct will be routinized – competition, and to what end –making money. It is the media that standardized the outlook of millions of people expected to enjoy the abundance of "everything mass produced" (2:208). Obviously, uniformity is contrary to nature. "Mass-everything" (idem) is a sterile ground on which man is "alive in the way that death is alive" (2:118). Yet the media ignore his disillusion and "*game on*" (Nestlé) publicizing such "*choice offers*".

We have brought to pass a situation in which

“the language of the ad-man is becoming the principal method of communication between the leaders of society and the masses” (8:18). Advertising not only promotes products nowadays. It launches new ideas, creates a new life style, outlines the new morality and shapes the new man. Advertising is not to be blamed for exaggerating a little with a view to increasing sales. This is what it is meant for. It’s only that it insists too much, so much that it creates an atmosphere of mistrust (“we don’t know what to believe, who to believe” 8:18). However, not solely in this is advertising prejudicial to man. The ads arouse the basest human emotions: pride, ambition, covetousness, envy supposed to set into motion the money making machine, then gluttony, lust, again envy and covetousness to keep it functioning. Furthermore advertising and/or propaganda quieten man’s conscience. He will be relieved to find out that his decisions, which actually are no longer his own, are based on reason. Which is a false statement, if it’s not only a spelling mistake.

Man’s acts are not based on reason, but on reasons such as the desire of comfort. What marketing research calls reason with regard to the customer’s choice is in fact interest, which may be called ‘a reasonable reason’, not ‘reason’. If reason were not dozing man would not give free rein to his desires, nor would he unreasonably or immaturely stick to the shallow pleasures he can derive from the outside world. He would probably come of age and become aware of his infinite spiritual potential. For “to grow [up] is to know that not circumstances but consciousness make the happy and the sad.” (6:252)

Man is the only creature endowed with spiritual freedom. But only too well imbued with the concepts and values of the “utipro formula” (9) he can hardly rejoice over his unique gift. Even less can he enjoy communion with his fellow beings as the wooden language of propaganda “[led] to an estrangement at the heart of the community” (8:18). Happily the media find solutions for everything. The individuals strangers to each other (idem) revolving on some axes of their own (10:147) will be gently manipulated. With the laudable intention of giving “the restless (...) bulk that have no care for anything but itself” (6:21) a common goal and remaking the lost unity the media will incite them to strain for ever more money; though it is a commonplace that money divide. On the other hand, if man’s uncritical acceptance of the rules will turn him into an automaton or a puppet, so much the better. It’s through the puppet’s slavery to objects “*we make the world move*”. (DHL) It may sound immoral, but for the sake of profit no means will be spared.

It’s a fact that “man is a rule-following animal” (13:227). This is why indoctrination works. Unfortunately indoctrination undermines consciousness – the very essence of humanity and condition of normality for man. The normal individual is the one who exercises control over his choice and knows why he is doing things. Blind adaptation, the automatic behaviour that ensues are narrowing his consciousness. Or, the narrowness of consciousness is always the shortest way to the insane asylum, to quote Jung.

Despoiled of consciousness, of humanity, man feels more insecure than ever. He finds himself trapped by his own rule-schemes (“as if caught on a turntable” 10:152) that are no longer under his control (“he’s jammed the controls and has no idea how to correct them” 10:147). He feels confused (by “this all distant and innocent coming and going” 10:126), anxious (“alone on the naked rock of life” 8:186), and terribly unhappy. Depression follows, which leads to a growing consumption of tranquilizers; then obesity, alcohol, drugs, mental illness, accidents, suicide – as many signs of an overwhelming frustration, as many attempts to evade life. A life rich in possibility, yet defying actual achievement (“there are only ideas, possibilities, suggestions” 10:156); a life whose apparent display of fascination can by no means compensate for the terror of uncertainty (“there is only power and the marvel of power, there is only chance and the terror of chance.” 7:184).

The media will try to disguise the all-encompassing unhappiness in a rather tedious manner: an endless series of conferences, lecturers, talk shows, workshops, campaigns and commercials, ads, magazines, folders, brochures, posters intended to persuade people that they are free and responsible, self-confident yet flexible, creative, industrious, sociable, and dependable since righteous, daring but cautious, broad-minded, therefore open to change, and able to stick to it. That “*The future’s bright*” (Orange) for all, which is only natural since each is one of the world’s greatest hopes – in business or management, certainly, but this is what counts. “*Whenever Your Dreams May Fly...*”, I should add, they’ll fly over or get drowned into an ocean of platitudes telling you that you are bound to be happy. Brainwashing has been turned into a human formula (8:39). If the mechanical hollowness of such promises, meant to prevent the arousal of consciousness which alone could help man regain his status, might be called human. But perhaps what we term ‘human’ is no longer related to ‘man’ – an outdated concept – but to ‘humans’, as the slumberous money makers are ever

more often, and probably more accurately, called.

The truth is the race for security has turned into a race against ourselves and we lack the honesty to admit it. The truth is that the entire meaning framework of our civilization should be abrogated but we are afraid of change as we have neither the courage nor the strength such an undertaking would require. The truth is “truth almost always hurts a bit and that is why we [avoid] it” (7:243) diverting people’s attention

from it – the reversal of values serves this purpose quite well; or we conceal it making indefatigable efforts to offer a bright image of life as it is in a world in which “more than ever human effort seems suffocated by human misery” (12:226). Why should man become aware that he has been deceived? How could he, in fact?

Having chosen the wrong path, post-modern man is doomed to the lonely terror of agony in the dark.

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