Goods, Power, History

latin america's material culture

Arnold J. Bauer
University of California, Davis

Cambridge University Press

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, VIC 3166, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

http://www.cambridge.org

First published 2001

Printed in the United States of America

Typeface Goudy Regular 10.5/13 pt. *System* QuarkXPress [BTS]

A catalog record for this book is auailable from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data

Bauer, Arnold J.
Goods, power, history: Latin America's material culture / Arnold J. Bauer.
p. cm. – (New approaches to the Americas)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-521-77208-7 – ISBN 0-521-77702-X (pb)
1. Consumption (Economics) – Latin America – History. 2. Material culture – Latin America. I. Title. II. Series.

HC130.C6 B38 2001
339.4′7′098 – dc21 00-064143

ISBN 0 521 77208 7 hardback
ISBN 0 521 77702 X paperback

Contents

Maps and Figures

Maps

Figures

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Why do we acquire the things we do? Behind this apparently ingenuous question are several answers, some straightforward and others rather more interesting. To feed ourselves, might be the first response, for we can easily see that we expend nearly as much energy in the quest for food as we do for sex, both as a rule required for our reproduction. Clothing and shelter, too, would be high up on the list of the most basic material requirements, although these are less urgent in the lower elevations of the tropics than in the higher latitudes. Food, clothing, and shelter, then, would seem to constitute the basic *needs* of human existence and these are the fundamental categories of goods, in their increasing complexity, that we will follow in the course of this book. But wait. Economists are inclined to talk about "wants," which are universal and limitless, rather than "needs," which are in fact almost impossible to define. We shall quickly see that from the very beginning, even in the Garden of Eden, people "want" more than they "need." This simple impulse created the ever mounting material abundance, which we are accustomed to call progress, and nearly all of the subsequent trouble on our planet.

In the beginning of our story, particularly before the European invasion in the sixteenth century brought an unanticipated range of new goods to what is now Latin America, the quantity and quality of food, clothing, or shelter for ordinary people were determined by a family's ability to produce, and the choice among goods was limited by transport costs or simple availability and, no doubt, by a modest conception of what constituted needs or were felt as wants. Further up the social scale, specialized artisans or those who organized trade acquired more elaborate cloth or pottery, while above these strata ruled the

pre-Columbian elite, which managed to command labor services or tribute to acquire a surplus of goods that mightily impressed the early Spaniards.

With only ordinary tools or knowledge, people work within the restraints of a given economic and political environment to produce a range of goods, which, of course, affects what they consume. This, among the most simple groups, may run from the prickly pear of the cactus to a coarse stone tool or simple sandals. So a "geography of production" influenced choice.[1] Even had a fifteenth-century Mexica warrior been able to dream of a steel blade, none was available at any price. Later, in colonial Latin America, the high transportation costs to import European wine or wheat flour put those commodities out of reach of all but the wealthy. Consequently, demographic change, transportation and transaction costs, markets and merchants are all fundamental in determining what we eat, drink, and wear.

All things on our planet, and for that matter even extraterrestrial "moon rocks," come to have value under certain circumstances. A hand-sized pounding stone worn smooth in a river bed or a sliver of razor-sharp obsidian was prized in regions where such tools were scarce. For a long time in the Old World and the New, these ordinary things and more sophisticated goods such as sheep's wool or baskets of maize were directly exchanged for salted fish or roofing poles. No doubt people were quick to establish relative value and inclined to haggle out of their own self-interest. But, at the same time, a great many things or objects have no exchange value until a demand or a market arises for them. The Algonquin, for example, could not imagine a price tag on the forests of tall trees until they saw English shipbuilders eyeing them for masts. Spaniards driving cattle and sheep into the Indies immediately placed a value on previously idle grasslands, which now became a commodity, to be bought, grabbed, leased, or rented. Time itself, today a prized commodity bought and sold at every moment, had a very different value to societies that organized their work around the task to be done rather than the hours, or hourly pay, required to do it.

During the last several centuries the notion of "price" (a reward paid for goods or services) and that even more abstract and symbolic marker called "money" have come to stand for the value of everything and everyone: there are "no free lunches," and, as we abundantly know,

[1] Fernand Braudel, *The Structures of Everyday Life*, trans. Sian Reynolds from the French (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), p. 324.

every man "has his price." Among pre-Columbian native Americans, however, price and money were still rudimentary concepts, whereas the invading Europeans could hardly think of anything else. But if many cultural features of contact societies were mutually incomprehensible, the inhabitants of both worlds quickly figured out the cost of one object, say, a Castilian shirt, in relation to cacao beans, and then smoothly adopted the *symbolic system* of money even where coins were not commonly used. And so, in this first approach to our question of why people acquire things, let's always keep in mind that over the past five hundred years or so in Latin America the economists have a fundamental point: relative price and supply and demand *are* important in explaining why people acquire the goods they do. But embedded in the code we call "price" are several elements that help determine our acquisition of goods. Otherwise it would be hard to explain why today, "when you offer two identical cappuccinos for sale on opposite sides of the same street, one for six dollars and the other for two, you will see people knock each other down as they flock to pay the six."[2]

A quick look around, at a teenager's jeans or an executive's yacht – or, closer to the concerns of this work, say, an Inca's spondylus ornaments or a French-style mansion in belle epoque, Rio de Janeiro – reminds us of the commonplace that many people acquire goods for display, as markers of identity and a boost to self-esteem. Some people (not everyone, not at all times) self-consciously consume food, clothing, or live in certain dwellings to express individuality or identity. Even the *way* we consume a certain dish or drink or wear a specific hat or uniform may be designed to produce a sense of uniqueness, or group, or even national, solidarity.

To complicate the matter even further, the value we attribute to an object may be largely determined by what *it means to us* – by the degree to which it "resonates with associations and meanings in our own minds." More complicated yet, we, and the historical consumers in this book, often unconsciously accept an objective "price" for certain goods when in fact our own subjective desires have established the price in the first place. We are inclined to believe that the objects or commodities we buy "dropped from heaven or sprang from the skull of Zeus fully formed," their price tags already dangling from them "like an original appendage," when in fact "the whole idea of a thing being worth,

[2] Adam Gopnik, *New Yorker*, April 26, 1999.

or equal to, two ounces of gold, or forty bucks, or a loaf of bread, is strictly a human conceit layered onto the object in question."[3]

When a Spanish woman in sixteenth-century Mexico beseeches her brother to bring with him on the next fleet to a country teeming with hogs "four cured hams from Ronda," or when a dissolute Franciscan posted to a remote village in the Amazon headwaters pleads for the Bourbon governor to send him specifically some Bramante cloth, we have evidence of the way people endow specific goods with subjective meaning.[4] We can easily imagine that once the good priest passes on, his treasured piece of cloth will lose the value he imbued it with and lie dusty and ignored in the mission church, just as the incalculable value of the narrow bed in my study, made with lathe and plane by my own hands from walnut planks sawed in my father's mill, will no doubt end up in a garage sale for a few paltry dollars. There is nothing more objectively real about the value of either cloth or bed than there is about the venerated bits of rudely carved wood hanging around the necks of the people the Portuguese found along the coast of West Africa for which they used the term *feitico*, the origin of our word "fetish."[5]

With this said, it must also be true that for many Mexicans or Peruvians, Cubans or Chileans over the past five hundred years, the rudimentary objects of daily use must hardly have been seen as reflections of one's identity or, for that matter, not given much thought at all. The ordinary hoe, a clay pot, a common woolen shawl were usually not offered for sale or their price even contemplated. They were simply used and replaced, often by home manufacture, when broken or worn out. Let's recognize that it's difficult to gauge the attitudes of ordinary people toward ordinary goods. Was an Andean herder indifferent toward his llama flock? Did a sixteenth-century blacksmith feel a greater degree of attachment to his homemade tools than does, for example, a present-day suburban husband toward his? Perhaps the easily knocked together adobe and thatch-roofed dwellings of people throughout Mexico and

[3] Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899; reprint, New York: Penguin, 1994), set out the classic view on "conspicuous consumption." For a modern and often poetic reflection on current practice, see Leah Hager Cohen, *Glass, Paper, Beans: Revelations on the Nature and Value of Ordinary Things* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), pp. 205–7.

[4] James Lockhart and Enrique Otte, eds., *Letters and People of the Spanish Indies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 136; Archivo general de Indias, Charcas, leg. 623.

[5] Cohen, *Glass, Paper, Beans*, pp. 208, 199.

the Andes mattered less to their inhabitants than do our "homes" today.[6] Or maybe not. Perhaps the layered associations of love and death, birth and the memory and joy of children's play imbued dwellings with a value not captured by the cold-eyed calculation of square footage in the modern housing market.

There are other, perhaps even less obvious, explanations for the acquisition of goods than the need for subsistence or relative price or even for display or identity. A third observation of everyday life shows that goods have other important uses. They provide, for example, the material substance in rituals that help to create and maintain social relationships – or, put another way, goods "fix public meanings." But what is "meaning"? Social meaning, in the words of a brilliant anthropologist, "flows and drifts, it is hard to grasp . . . but as in tribal society so too for us: rituals serve to contain the drift of meaning." Mary Douglas goes on to say that "more effective rituals use material things and the more costly the ritual trappings, the stronger we can assume the intention to fix the meanings to be." Human rationality presses us to make sense of the world. For example, the social universe needs to be marked off in temporal dimensions, "the calendar has to be notched for annual, quarterly, monthly, weekly, daily and shorter periodicities . . . so the passage of time can then be laden with meaning." Thus we commemorate a new year, birthdays and first Communion, weddings, a silver jubilee, a millennium, "a time for living, a time for dying, a time for loving."[7] Indeed, in recent years, our clever salesmen have made it easy for us by suggesting materials – paper, glass, silver, gold – appropriate to certain wedding anniversaries. And, as we are all acutely aware, consumption goods, including even the everyday ritual of morning coffee, are indispensable to celebrate these moments that punctuate our social universe and draw the lines of social relationships.

Moreover, our often unconscious adherence to ritual or convention with its consequent effect on *the way* we consume, can be seen in our private as well as public actions. Mary Douglas asks us to consider, for example, a solitary diner, casually standing at the fridge door reaching in for his supper. "He unthinkingly adopts the sequential rules and categories of the wider society. . . . he would never reverse the

[6] Van Young, "Material Life," pp. 51–2.

[7] Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, *The World of Goods* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), pp. 60–4.

conventional sequence, beginning with pudding and ending with soup, or eat mustard with lamb and mint with beef."[8] Even in the most rudimentary adobe and thatch dwellings in colonial Mexico and Peru, ordinary people adhered to their forms of the "rituals of dinner."

The consumption of goods is also interwoven with rule. The state, for example, can endeavor to shape consumption through sumptuary laws, an insistence on uniforms for soldiers or schoolchildren, the imposition of tariffs or the proscription of certain goods, or, say, through the control of grain prices in sixteenth-century Lima or a subsidy paid until recently to tortilla producers in Mexico. There is also a reciprocal feature in material politics. People consume their way into citizenship in the new nineteenth-century nations through the acquisition of goods such as imported, or urban or "western" clothing or food; by participating in public ceremonies such as the *fiestas patrias*; or by acquiring private property – often a requirement for voting. These purchases bring people into local and national markets or, because they're taxed, enmesh them in the new fiscal machinery, place them on property or tax rolls, make them, in the eyes of the state, "legible."[9] All this helps construct new identities that make previously marginal people socially and politically acceptable as citizens.

I also hope that this brief excursion into material culture will encourage readers to see the objects and commodities we consume today not as disembodied tools or tiles stacked on the shelves of hangar-like Home Depots or apathetic polyesters from God knows where, lying in unruly piles in the new outlet stores, but rather to imagine the makers of all these things, perhaps – at the very best – as the poet imagines the builders of Machu Picchu, "the tiller of fields, the weaver, reticent shepherd, the mason high on his treacherous scaffolding, the jeweler with crushed fingers, the farmer anxious among his seedlings."[10] For much of our story most people, in fact, produced their own foot plows or hoes, put up their own shacks or huts, wove their own cloth. Others usually bought directly from the seller, examined the farmer's onions in their own hands, scolded the underpaid construction workers, looked over the seamstress's shoulder. So the link between local goods and

[8] Ibid. (A colleague pointed out that students in a rush might constitute an exception to this statement.)

[9] James Scott, *Seeing Like the State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998).

[10] Pablo Neruda, *The Heights of Macchu Picchu*, trans. Nathaniel Tarn from the Spanish (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974), canto xii.

local producers was obvious in a way literally unimaginable today. With long-distance trade and the emergence of a world market, which began with a trickle of goods in the sixteenth century, expanded unevenly in the nineteenth, and now floods anonymously into our markets from the most distant corners of the planet, the rupture between producer and consumer has become nearly complete.

Our examination embraces those parts of the world, now known conventionally but imperfectly as Latin America, over the past several centuries with special attention, particularly in the early colonial centuries, to the core areas of Mesoamerica and the Andes. These were the sites of pre-Columbian high culture, later the centers of colonial regimes, and they remain important today. For the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, our discussion follows the expansion of European migration into the southern cone of Chile and Argentina, and the forced African diaspora into the Caribbean. Brazil, a fascinating culture on its own, is here dealt with unevenly. Everyone knows that there were – and are – class, gender, and ethnic divisions along with marked regional and even local differences throughout this large time and space. I make no claim for comprehensive treatment and even less for definitiveness. Many specialists may be astonished at my omissions and brutal generalizations.

Like everywhere else on the globe, from the very beginning of human settlement in the hemisphere, more or less discrete groups constantly came into contact with people of other cultures and goods. There is evidence, for example, of the ninth-century A.D. exchange of "thin orange pottery" from the high plateau of Mexico into the tropical lowlands of central America; of turquoise trade across the arid reaches of northern Mexico during the eleventh-century postclassic period; or even perhaps of jade figurines between Mesoamerica and the Andes 2,500 years ago. But from the sixteenth century to the present, the people of what is now called Latin America became subject to the entirely distinct material regimes of the Spanish and Portuguese empires and later, from the early nineteenth century, dependent upon the powerful industrial countries of western Europe and the United States.

Everyone acknowledges the enormous contribution of American silver, maize, chocolate, potatoes, tomatoes, and even sisal, quinine, and cocaine, to global society, but apart from these and other foods, fibers, or minerals, Latin America's contribution to global material culture is scant. Neither the Andean foot plow, *chaquitaclla*, the

three-stone sling, fine pottery, the exquisite work of silversmiths or goldsmiths, nor even the truculent llama found its way to western Europe. Later, in the industrial age, the vast array of global manufactures in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were imported *into* Latin America, none, not even bridles or shoes or woolen capes, went the other way. Nor for that matter have cooked dishes or prepared drinks crossed from west to east. There were not, and still are not, at least until very recently, *papas a la huancaína* or *mole oaxaqueño* in Madrid; no *pulque* in Chicago; no *yerba mate* in Galicia. Nor were there any tamales or enchiladas in the United States outside the population of Mexican descent, until the past forty years or so. Had the ancient Peruvians somehow found their way to Granada and imposed their rule on Ferdinand and Isabella, is it not likely that roast *cuy* (guinea pigs) and frothy *chicha* would have appeared in kitchens from Madrid to Seville? Perhaps llamas and alpacas would now be grazing in Castile alongside merino sheep, the creature the Spaniards were quick to introduce into the Americas.

In the realm of material culture then, the people of Latin America have been presented during the past five hundred years with a more abundant and a far wider range of goods from abroad, particularly manufactures, than those present in their own territories. With few exceptions, the flow of new goods has generally been into, not out of, Latin America. This is not, however, a simple matter of supply and demand or quality of product. The creation of a material regime takes place in a field of power. This is sometimes formal and direct, as in the case, for instance, of colonial sumptuary laws, which aimed (not very effectively) to control consumption, or in the frequent collusion between crown officials and colonial merchants that forced Indian villagers to purchase goods of European provenance. The effect of colonial power can also be seen in the never-ending, informal and voluntary maneuvering for new identities or positions. This took place, and was practiced by everyone, within the framework of new fashions, new "reference groups" or models of consumption, or the need to make visible and stable the categories of culture that seem to emerge with particular importance in colonial and postcolonial societies.

How, then, can one set in motion our stories of the nearly infinite number of transactions that make up the creation of the essentially occidental but still hybrid regime of goods and commodities that we see today in Latin America? Recognizing the importance of price and markets but moving beyond an excessively economistic plot, I have

taken a page from the sociologist Norbert Elias who explained changes in European *manners* as part of an inexorable "civilizing process." Here I want to show that changes in Latin American material culture were to a certain degree driven by the imposition and often eager acceptance of "civilizing *goods*" introduced by various colonial and neocolonial regimes over the past five hundred years.

From the beginning of the Iberian intrusion down through the French, English, and present-day United States material regimes, those who endeavored to *impose* consumption in Latin America, as well as those inhabitants of Latin America who *voluntarily* acquired certain goods, often came to think of themselves as part of an occidentalizing process. For the invading Spaniards in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries this was a matter of imposing *buena policía* in the new colonies; for the eighteenth century they undertook a "civilizing process," and later the nineteenth-century liberals promoted the project of "modernity." The Spanish insistence, for example, that towns be laid out in a strict gridiron pattern or that Indians wear trousers, the various decrees against "scandalous dress," and the practice of forcing Andean and Mexican villagers to buy iron goods, cloth, or mules in the eighteenth century are examples of compulsion in order "to civilize," as well as to make money. Far more important, however, were the shoes in place of sandals, wheat bread instead of maize, Asian silk off the Manila galleon rather than coarse local cotton, a piano, a mansard-roofed mansion, a Dallas Cowboys sweat shirt, and a hundred other choices that people voluntarily made and still make to establish their position in the social hierarchy, and to be seen, depending on the century, as less "barbarous," more "civilized, more "modern," or more *de onda*, more "with it."

None of this practice is unique to Latin America. But the scramble for identity, the need to redraw, or cross over, the lines of social relationships through acts of visible consumption, are perhaps rather more intense in colonial and postcolonial societies where power and the reference for fashion are often established by foreigners, while the status and prestige of people within the colony or country are strongly influenced by the jigsawed-puzzle of class and ethnicity, the negotiation of which is made all the more important because of its ambiguity.

The imposition and acceptance of "civilizing goods" is not, of course, the whole story of Latin America's material culture. In this history, successive waves of outsiders, or small dominant groups within the different countries, have endeavored to squash down upon the mass of people

a layer of goods and practices at times not in consonance with the deeper culture. Consequently, throughout these five centuries we see men and women resist the imposition of culture-altering goods. Many elements in ordinary life, in fact, remain remarkably constant over the centuries and form the deep practice of everyday life. Thousands of women continue to pat out, one at a time, the ancient tortilla for the *comal*; coca leaf remains indispensable in the Andes; adobe and thatch still provide shelter. But more commonly, it is true, along with acceptance or resistance we also see innumerable cases of the appropriation, modification, and adjustment of new goods to local conditions. This has gone on ceaselessly but with special intensity since the sixteenth-century European invasion.

The individual tortilla maker or *tortillera* is rare today; country women take their dampened flour to a local mechanical contraption, pay a fee to have the tortillas stamped out, or more commonly buy the *masa* itself, in *supermercados*. Same ancient food, different technique. At the Cuzco airport, coca leaves now show up in Lipton Tea–sized porous bags so that the traveler, gasping for breath at eleven thousand feet, may have at hand hot *mate de coca* in a Styrofoam cup. Everywhere, Mediterranean tiles or corrugated metal sheets have replaced the thatch on adobe shacks. In the end, we have a negotiated, hybrid material culture but one in which imported elements are clearly dominant.

I present six broad stages in the development of Latin America's material culture. The first begins in the centuries just before the sixteenth-century European invasion at a time when a large part of the native population had settled into sedentary agriculture organized around small hamlets, substantial villages, and even, for the age, substantial urban centers. Drawing on the complex history of several millennia, the large mass of the people, perhaps 85 to 90 percent, here as in contemporary Europe or Asia, lived an essentially rural life. With notable exceptions, this was a world of self-sufficiency and the barter of goods and services within a very small radius. Most of the goods available in the so-called postclassic period (ca. A.D. 1000–1492) were in fact present much earlier, perhaps fifteen hundred years before, when the essential elements of Meso-American and Andean diet, clothing, shelter, and tools were established. Pre-Columbian life was neither hermetic nor static. In each archaeological horizon, which is the residue of successive waves of conquest, destruction, and building, archaeologists have found a different mix of goods and evidence of changing diet.

The archaeological record establishes the presence of goods but is less eloquent on the circumstances of their circulation. Although most goods were exchanged locally, it is clear that food, cloth, building material, precious stones, metals, shells, and feathers moved through a tribute system and markets throughout Mesoamerica, and on the backs of men, women, and llamas across wide swaths of the Andes. The use of these goods, of course, was never immutable: men and women modified their diet, dress, and shelter to the environment and accepted new materials and techniques. In both the Mesoamerican and Andean worlds imperial and religious rituals impelled the consumption of goods, as did the need to cement alliances and curry favor. Gift giving was a practice as deeply imbedded in pre-Hispanic culture as it was for the future invaders.

The sixteenth-century European invasion – our second stage – shattered the societies of indigenous America and truncated the organic development of its material culture. During the first decades the relatively few Spaniards engaged in the conquest and its consolidation insisted on their own, familiar, material regime and endeavored to provision their early settlements, bringing wine and wheat flour, dried cod and imported cloth. But the introduction of European plants and animals, together with a precocious development of artisans of all kinds, soon made European commodities available not only to themselves but also to the native population and their descendants who undertook a selective appropriation of foreign goods. The process was gradual. European conquest and settlement affected first the native elites and the more urbanized populations in general, and then new goods and commodities began to spread through towns, missions, mines, and haciendas.

By the 1570s the violence of armed conquest diminished and the impact of the demographic disaster swept through the Americas. The Spaniards undertook a sweeping reorganization of the landscape, congregating the remaining native population into planned villages with Spanish-style government. Almost immediately the first generations of mixed races began to emerge. Within the new hierarchy of colonial power there arose concerns about class and ethnic identity or political and social status, leading to a scramble for survival and position that encouraged the consumption of goods of all kinds. Atlantic convoys, pack mules, and wheeled vehicles brought unimagined goods within reach of local consumers. Plows, draft animals, pulleys, whims, iron tools, and new plants and animals shifted the supply and demand of

new and old goods. Usefulness and relative price help explain the adoption or rejection of certain goods, but in the emerging colonial world of uncertain status and ambiguous values, social and cultural determinants of consumption were present as well. But let's not exaggerate. Some things changed not at all or very little. Throughout the colonial period and beyond, native men and women, in diminishing numbers, to be sure, continued to dress in homespun and home-woven cloth and to depend primarily upon the ancestral diet of native foods.

Our fourth watershed, carrying a substantial inundation of goods from abroad, begins with the independence of most of Latin America from Spain (1808–25) and reaches a flood tide in the last third of the nineteenth century when the export of food, fiber, and minerals enabled the Latin American republics to import a wide variety of commodities from the industrial countries of the Atlantic basin. Those with money in the new republics quickly embraced the arts, fashions, and superior manufactures of England and France. Imported machinery, steel rail, and steam engines permitted Latin American political and social leaders to import electric lights, trolleys, engines, rifles, and machinery in order to modernize their countries as well as buy the food, clothes, and architectural services that would set them off from their darker and less cultivated compatriots. In the upper reaches of society, the reference groups for consumption became predominately foreign. Houses built in the style of the French Second Empire lined the new avenues, and English leather and cottons and fine French textiles and wines became the vogue.

Goods, consequently have a relationship with "modernity." This becomes apparent as Latin Americans, in the nineteenth century, retained a tenuous adherence to colonial tradition while longing to be part of the emergent, Western bourgeoisie. The avid consumption of European goods, the journeys to Paris and London, contact with intellectuals, artists, and engineers "was something more than vain posturing or following the latest fashions"; it was to place one's self at the peak of the historical moment, it was to be *modern*.[11] The opera, for example, could be enjoyed by members of the emerging middle classes in similar and familiar circumstances across the board, in La Scala, Covent Gardens, the Met, Manaos, or the Teatro Municipal in Santiago. By entering the larger world of fashion, buying Charles Frederick

[11] Sergio Villalobos, *Origen y ascenso de la burguesía chilena* (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, 1987), pp. 78–9.

Worth gowns or English woolens, the new elites everywhere could *feel* European or, again, feel *modern*. Perhaps a mundane parallel in our own time can be seen in the way people of an older, manual-typewriter generation, not wanting to feel antiquated or "out of it," buy computers, get on the Internet, and can *feel* as up-to-date as the fast-track youth. We notice today, however, as technology outpaces culture, a generational inversion in which adults do not pass on experience to their apprentice children but rather strain to learn from their own offspring.

By the first years of the twentieth century, demographic growth, along with the collapse of the largely artificial belle epoque splendor gradually brought mestizo politics and culture onto center stage in the midst of a raging debate about the appropriate path of modernity. This process, our fifth stage, building from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and inevitably filled with ambiguities, involved a halting turn toward consumer nationalism. This led to the promotion of national values, the formal repudiation (but continued use) of foreign models and goods, the gradual development of import substitution industries, and the promotion of national culture. Under the rubric of *indigenismo*, urban leaders in Mexico in the l920s, Peru in the 1930s, and Guatemala and Bolivia in the 1940s and 1950s made continued attempts to occidentalize the indigenous populations, to bring people perceived as Indian into a national political and material culture, made more feasible by the accelerating rural-urban migration.

Finally, the present. From the 1970s and continuing today, governments are unceremoniously discarding the previous model and turning back to the nineteenth-century practice, never fully realized, of export-led development and free markets. Imports are restrained only by the capacity of fervent consumers to buy. Although the first wave of liberal capitalism in the last third of the nineteenth century powerfully affected the culture and consumption of Latin American elites, its effect was felt less as one moved out from the cities and into the lower reaches of the social order. During the past two or three decades of the present neoliberal epoch, consumption is still concentrated in the upper reaches of Latin American society where a visibly large share of the new wealth has come to rest. But the new orthodoxy of free trade has also created an ocean of relatively inexpensive new goods, previously unimaginable by ordinary people, that now washes into outlet stores, vast Wal-Marts and Home Depots, and even to the most remote households. For some, the gaudy malls, the grease and stench of

fast-food franchises, the tacky T-shirts, the vulgarity of Hollywood films must seem as if a global "uncivilizing" process has come round at last, sweeping away the decency and decorum that often accompanied the first, less savage, liberalism. For others, long deprived of the most basic goods, the shelves of tape, tools, steel pans, designer "bluyeanes," cheap shoes, and the democratizing informality of dress and food must seem like a consumer's heaven on earth.