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STUDY OF SHOPPING IN A LIQUOR STORE.

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THE SOCIAL BASIS OF MASS CONSUMPTION:  
CASE STUDY OF SHOPPING IN A LIQUOR STORE

by

PAUL A. MEDINA

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate  
Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment  
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE PROBLEM AND ITS STUDY

The central problem of this study is to show how shopping as part of mass consumption is socially managed and constituted, here and now, in the United States. Throughout, I treat such shopping as the social basis, as the everyday world, of all mass consumption. The shopping I am studying takes place in a liquor store.

Since I treat shopping as part of any and all mass consumption, I am not focusing on any particular kind of commodity. Though the tastes and qualities of liquor are cited throughout as examples of characteristics of commodities, my overall concern is not with liquor as such. The quality, taste, etc., of any commodity constitute the phenomenon of shopping. The resolutions of such problems are always necessary whether or not the problems themselves are visible.

All of the difficulties encountered in shopping are concerned with what Marx referred to as the unity as well as the opposition between use and exchange values of commodities in capitalist society.<sup>1</sup> As Marx demonstrated, commodities are not produced exclusively or even mainly for immediate use. Instead they are created most of all for the sake of exchange, and exchange values are their dominant characteristics. Because of this, exchange values are "fetishized," and commodities become "social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses."<sup>2</sup>

This opposition between use value and fetishized exchange value is part of all shopping. Because customers at one and the same time both accept and resist this fetishization, the resulting opposition can be located--as I do in this thesis--in the ever-present concerns of customers with the prices, sizes, qualities, etc., of commodities. Though customers are confronted in the main only by the fetishized exchange values of commodities when they enter a store, they resist accepting those values unconditionally. Instead of readily accepting them as given, customers take varying amounts of time to approach as closely as possible the use values of what they buy.

As a result shopping is composed of a number of social frameworks which allow customers to choose amongst commodities according to the amounts of resistance they wish to put forth to the fetishized commodities that confront them. These social frameworks are the main subject of my thesis. They allow customers to make reasonable, understandable, confident, and ultimately critical choices between commodities.

Each of the social frameworks themselves, and concrete examples of them, will be discussed later.

For now it is important to realize that my concern here does not include literature on, as well as the subjects of, alcoholism,<sup>3</sup> consumer preferences for specific brand names or types of liquor,<sup>4</sup> or socio-cultural patterns of liquor consumption in a particular area.<sup>5</sup> As with all other commodities, liquor can be purchased in stores located throughout our society. And in order to shop for it one need not be an alcoholic, have a preference for a certain brand or type of liquor, buy a certain kind of liquor because "everyone" buys it or even be a drinker

at all. More important than knowing about liquor is knowing how to shop for commodities in general.

Consequently, most of my study is a naturalistic description of everyday events in a capitalist enterprise which lead to the acquisition of commodities by customers. I call it a naturalistic description because I analyze the often taken-for-granted but nevertheless familiar features of mundane social life in a natural setting. My initial goal is to show how I and my "contemporaries"<sup>6</sup> in capitalist society can gain insight into one aspect of our lives under capitalism.

This goal as a beginning point for studying mass consumption cannot be found in Marx's theory of fetishization of commodities, or in more recent critical studies.<sup>7</sup> In general, mass consumption is analyzed only at a macro-level, and only to a very small extent at a micro-level. In this larger context, to which I return in the last chapter, everyday confrontations between people and commodities are not analyzed on the micro-level I stress in most chapters of my thesis. Or they are treated as not showing any promise of resistance to capitalist modes of consumption.

To achieve my initial goal I turn, therefore, away from critical theories and Marxism. In their place I use various elements of ethnomethodology, ethnography, and phenomenology. With ethnomethodology I locate and describe familiar rules and practices for choosing commodities. With ethnography I show how a liquor store is a social microcosm of commercial life under capitalism, and how, as far as shopping is concerned, anyone can become a more or less important participant in the ongoing social world such a microcosm contains. From phenomenological

sociology I draw upon Alfred Schutz's notion of "Typical Constructs"<sup>8</sup> to explain the major social frameworks of shopping.

This combination of approaches makes possible an eventual return, in the conclusion, to Marxist critical theories. It brings me to a point where I can clearly discuss shopping as part of the larger phenomenon of mass consumption. At this point liquor in particular will no longer be important as the commodity which is used in the bulk of the study as my example, and I will discuss commodities in general. Also, using critical macro-theory becomes possible and appropriate for analysis.

So beginning with a micro-perspective on everyday life, I now turn to Harold Garfinkel. Whenever we enter a liquor store we become part of its social world. We are what Garfinkel calls members:

. . . in exactly the way that persons are members to organized affairs, they are engaged in serious and practical work of detecting, demonstrating, persuading through displays in the ordinary occasions of their interactions the appearances of consistent, coherent, chosen, planful arrangements.<sup>9</sup>

To be a member involves more than what a superficial glance into a liquor store at any particular time would tell us. A casual examination would not reveal the complexities of serving customers, of finding out what they want to buy, or of the everyday information useful to someone working there. Also overlooked would be the complex and problematic nature of the activity we call "Shopping." "Shopping" is an everyday word we use to cover a wide range of social activity.

The everyday problems of shopping, the persons who must deal with them, and the mutual strategies used in shopping by such persons lie at the core of my case study and of my research material. The persons confronted by the everyday problems of shopping and who must share the

work involved in dealing with them are the customers and the staff of the liquor store I am studying.

"Clerking" is a term I use to describe the participation of the staff of the store in "Shopping." "Clerking" is, therefore, part of "Shopping," and the social achievements of customer-clerk interactions are what define, manage, and constitute it.

Everyday problems of shopping can be located in customer-clerk conversations which occur at the front counter. Customers bring problems to the front counter like: bottles without prices, personal checks, and requests about what to buy for a friend, birthday, holiday, etc. In dealing with them, clerks call upon their previous knowledge of what people usually buy for a given occasion, what someone usually comes for, and how much money people are willing to spend.

However, one problem overshadows all the others. It is the problem of choosing from an overwhelming array of fetishized commodities. No one can ever hope to comprehend the entire selection of liquor available even in the relatively small store we are looking at. And although customers and clerks often ignore this problem, it is always part of the social reality of commercial life in capitalist society.

If we turn now to some of my research material, which is a transcript of conversation between a customer and a clerk, we will see how complicated our discussion of shopping will be.

(Note: Cu stands for customer, Cl stands for clerk)

Cu: What is the difference between this and these two?

Cl: This . . . this is a little fruitier, in other words you can taste it, fruitier than either of these.

Cu: And this is dry?

Cl: This is dry, yes sir.

How can a clerk answer, as this one does, a customer's question about taste? How do people in the store "know" what fruity, dry or sweet means?

A clerk cannot taste everything sold in the store, and even things he might have had occasion to taste may seem very different to him than they would to someone else. Nevertheless, clerks must pay attention to the responses they make because they cannot rely on guesswork or lies. Customers can and often do return to the store with complaints about what the clerks have told them.

It is obvious that clerks cannot be held responsible for defining what taste means. But in the above transcript and in other conversations I have recorded, similar questions are put to them. Customers often assume that because someone works in a liquor store he has more knowledge about taste than they have. What this assumption points to is the social basis of shopping.

No matter what response a clerk makes to a question about taste, it is taken for granted that many customers have already asked similar questions, that they have complained about a clerk's advice, that many conversations have been concerned with this problem, etc. It is also assumed that many customers and clerks work out these and other everyday problems together and that a social basis for them has arisen. Hence, the ways that clerks and customers handle everyday problems, mis-handle them, lighten the burden, avoid them and devise solutions for them make shopping socially achievable.

To understand more precisely why I call this a social achievement, rather than an individual achievement on the part of the clerk, something else should be noted here. In the above excerpt the customer asked the clerk about taste. The reverse, however, is often the case. That is, clerks often ask customers what things taste like. With new items coming in all the time, this becomes a necessity. In doing this, clerks lead many of the regular customers to offer unrequested reports about liquor in future trips to the store.

With customers reporting every day about liquor, asking how it tastes, making complaints, etc., part of the social basis of shopping is established. Consequently, when a customer asks a clerk about taste, or vice versa, many complex social expectations which are only partially revealed so far can be taken for granted.

These complex social expectations will be carefully isolated in my study. I will isolate them by analyzing how they are used as taken-for-granted understandings in what I single out as four major social frameworks for shopping. These social frameworks, or forms of shopping, I call Quick-Stop Shopping, Conventional Shopping, Multi-Item Shopping, and Connoisseur Shopping.

As we will see, each of these forms of shopping treats commodities, and the opposition between use values and exchange values, in a particular fashion. In each form customers and clerks interact in specific ways, and they have specific orientations to commodities. These orientations help customers come as close as possible to the real use values of commodities, and they help customers restrict their dealings with the overwhelming number of commodities available.

Taken together, Quick-Stop Shopping, Conventional Shopping,

Multi-Item Shopping, and Connoisseur Shopping comprise a typology of ways to achieve this task and of forms of resistance to the fetishization of commodities. In my conclusion I will analyze how each form presupposes certain ideal expectations about how shopping can be accomplished while resistance is maintained at the most optimal levels. At that point, moreover, I try to show how these are ideal forms of mass consumption which are oriented to resisting all commodities and not just the ones found in the store I have studied.

#### The Research Site and Method

The liquor store used for this study is located on Manhattan's Upper East Side in an area of expensive, high-rise apartment buildings. It is not a very large store, being about 35 feet in width and 65 in length. These dimensions, however, are sufficient for an excellent selection of wines, liqueurs and liquors.

The persons who shop in the store come from a wide range of ethnic, occupational, and income groups. Regular customers include many upper-income people, as well as many working-class people. The upper-income customers usually live near the store, and the working-class customers are usually employed in the area as janitors, doormen, maids, restaurant help, etc. The area residents tend to shop in the store during the evening hours and on weekends, while those who work in the neighborhood generally appear on weekdays during morning and early afternoon periods.

The store has two owners. They are both men in their late fifties, one of whom is my father-in-law.<sup>10</sup> These two men work in shifts and do most of the actual serving of customers. They also do almost all

of the clerical work involved in running the store. The clerical work includes duties such as ordering the basic stock from liquor distributors and salespersons, taking care of the store's overhead, and taking orders from customers for home deliveries.

There are a number of assistants working along with the owners. They are there to assist the owners behind the counter during busy periods, and to do all of the heavier work. This includes such tasks as organizing the hundreds of cases of liquor stored in the basement stocking the shelves, making deliveries and housekeeping jobs like sweeping and mopping the floors. Generally two or three assistants work in the store during busy periods and when large deliveries are expected from liquor distributors. At other times there is only one assistant and one of the owners.

These employees of the store are usually young, male college students. Since they are always part-time workers who have other commitments which draw them in and out of this particular job, there is a high turnover amongst them.

Most customers are served at the counter in the front of the store. All money is exchanged and most of the interaction between the customers and the staff of the store takes place at this counter. There is also a lot of activity away from the front counter since customers often want items located in other parts of the store, want to be shown a number of things to choose from, or want to look around. In addition, it is not unusual to walk into the store and find no one behind the front counter. This is especially the case during slack periods when few customers are expected. The staff members use the slack periods to

concentrate on other tasks and must be interrupted by customers who need their help. Interaction during these periods can begin anywhere in the store.

Dealing with customers is the one task shared by both owners and assistants. This part of their work consists of serving customers and taking part in whatever conversation is required.

I call this job "Clerking" in order to highlight the fact that all persons working in this store must be socially available to customers. When customers come into the store they are served by "Clerks" or persons available to help and advise them.

The interactions of customers and clerks are the primary focus of this study. And more specifically, we are focusing only on those interactions in which liquor is actually purchased. Hence such activities as "Window Shopping" and "Browsing Around" are not central concerns of this study. They are not important because they only tell us how customers alone may acquire information about commodities which they may or not use when actually buying something. Hence my data concern only the information actually used in and necessary to completing the task.

I have used two methods of research in my study. The first is the recording by means of an out-of-view tape recorder of the everyday conversations between clerks and customers. As I mentioned above, the front counter is where most of these conversations take place. Hence this is where I recorded twenty-five hours of conversation.

My second method of research was participant observation. I was able to conduct my research over a two-and-one-half year period while employed as one of the assistants.

Originally I began working in the store simply to earn some extra money while attending classes at the Graduate Center. But after working in the store for about six months I decided to use it as a research setting for a paper required for coursework in Ethnomethodology with Professor Lindsey Churchill. Professor Churchill was impressed with my paper and he encouraged me to do more research in the store.

Consequently this part-time job evolved into an important part of my graduate work over the next two and one-half years. Working with Lindsey Churchill I became acquainted with the work of the ethnomethodologists, in particular their emphasis on conversation, and I became adept at using a micro-perspective in my research.

However, as time passed my interest in other methodologies increased. With Professor George Fischer I became especially interested in critical theory. With his help I was able to move away from the limitations of micro-theories. This study reflects the gradual shift of my interests from ethnomethodology, to phenomenology and finally to critical theory.

While employed as an assistant in the store I familiarized myself with and became native to the setting. I learned about the commodities sold in the store. I identified the regular, irregular, and unknown customers. And I had many valuable conversations with customers, other assistants, and the owners of the store. These conversations were not formal interviews but rather they were informal conversations. Acting as an "insider" I was able to more fully appreciate the complexity of shopping. For example, I learned that shopping is more complex than we often realize, and more importantly we pay attention to that complexity

more than we admit to ourselves outside of the settings in which we shop. In addition we rely on clerks more often than we may realize, and at times we can work very closely with them if we wish to.

This combination of research methods provided me with a wealth of material for my study. My tapes allowed me to analyze the particular features of shopping. And my observations helped to piece together its ongoing character, to locate its cohesiveness and, eventually, its opposition to capitalist commodities.

What I have said so far should make clear what this study does and does not aim at. I did not seek to carry out a standard quantitative or qualitative treatment of a microsystem. Instead, as the dissertation's title and content suggest, I chose to focus on a single problem of analysis and description. That problem, the social--or everyday world--of mass consumption in our time and place, I study by means of a combination of approaches. This combination of approaches, which I come back to and augment in the conclusion, contains elements of ethnography, phenomenology, ethnomethodology, and critical social theory.

Notes

<sup>1</sup>Karl Marx, Capital, 3 vols., trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York: International Publishers, 1974), from Section 3 of Chapter 1, 1:71-84.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>3</sup>As one might find in a standard treatment of it in, for example, Don Cahalan, Problem Drinkers (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1970).

<sup>4</sup>As, for example, discussed by Charles Winick, The New People (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969), pp. 145-160.

<sup>5</sup>As one might find in David J. Pittman and Charles R. Snyder, eds., Society, Culture and Drinking Patterns (New York: John Wiley, 1962).

<sup>6</sup>Alfred Schutz, Collected Papers, Volume I, ed. Maurice Natanson (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), p. 16.

<sup>7</sup>See, for example, Herbert Marcuse, One Dimensional Man (Boston: Beacon, 1967), or Stanley Aronowitz, False Promises (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973).

<sup>8</sup>Alfred Schutz, Collected Works, Volume I, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup>Harold Garfinkel, Studies in Ethnomethodology (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967), p. 34.

<sup>10</sup>Both partners, and especially my father-in-law, made it possible for me to study a natural setting that is not often available for sociological inquiry.

## CHAPTER TWO

### QUICK-STOP SHOPPING:

#### SHOPPING AS A SIMPLE ROUTINE ACTIVITY

##### Introduction

Shopping for liquor is a task that is often easily and quickly accomplished. We just walk into a liquor store without worrying about what to do and a familiar sequence of events follows.

In this chapter I will analyze carefully this sequence of events.

In this sequence, this chapter shows, we look around for what we want, or if a clerk is available we ask him for help. If the store has what we want we pay for it and leave. If the store does not have what we want or the item is too expensive, we buy an alternative or we do not buy anything.

Greetings like "Hello," "How are you?" and "Fine, and you?" are short, terse and do not lead to further conversation. We may ask a few questions about price, quantity or quality of what we want. But we engage in little conversation with the clerk.

In a few minutes we have done our shopping and we leave the store.

I will treat this sequence of events as a short, interaction-minimizing form of shopping and call it "Quick-Stop Shopping." This term describes the simple sequence of events in which we enter a liquor

store, choose a small number of items, pay for or reject what the store offers us and leave.

My initial analysis here will focus on this limited form of interaction in order to find out what customers and clerks must know, take for granted, and work out in advance. This will eventually allow us to see that customers who do Quick-Stop Shopping regularly in this store acquire important advantages over customers who do Quick-Stop Shopping as newcomers. Regular customers, as we will see, can do Quick-Stop Shopping for a wider range of liquor than can newcomers. And regular customers can work out with clerks the most abbreviated forms of interaction.

Hence, we end this chapter with some important distinctions--between clerk-regular and clerk-newcomer interactions--useful for analyzing more complicated forms of shopping in later chapters.

### Section 1: Decision-Making

A prominent feature of Quick-Stop Shopping is the simplicity of the decision-making process. Deciding what to buy involves nothing complicated about the enormous selection of liquor found in the store. For example, a customer might walk into the store and immediately see what he wants.

In the store I am using for this study many popular wines are highly visible. They can be easily spotted by customers just after they have entered the store. All a customer has to do is pick up what he wants, take it to the front counter and pay for it. And when this happens it is not unusual for customer and clerk to say nothing to one another.

If a customer does not see what he wants immediately or shortly after entering the store, he can turn to a clerk. To describe what is desired requires at the most a few short sentences, questions and replies.

In this case customer and clerk know, understand, and anticipate what is expected of each other on the basis of little or no verbal communication.

To find out why deciding what to buy is easy in this kind of shopping we have to analyze what customers and clerks can expect each other to know, understand and anticipate. This means looking at what is communicated verbally and looking for what is not made explicit in any fashion.

For example, it is obvious that some customers have decided what they want before they enter the store. Consequently little conversation or looking around the store is necessary to get what they need. These made-in-advance decisions, however, have some important features we might easily overlook.

Most of the time only one or two items are chosen in advance, and only on rare occasions are more than three.

As we will appreciate here, and more fully in later chapters, it is usually difficult to make a decision beforehand when more than three items are needed. This is especially true if they are distinctly different items.

If someone wants a quart of Walker's Gin, a pint of Lonoff Vodka, and a half-gallon of Smirnoff 100 proof Vodka, the store often does not have one or more of these three brands, sizes, proofs, etc.,

specified by the customer. Alternatives must then be found or worked out if possible. If a case of a certain wine or imported liquor is needed, it usually has to be ordered in advance, or is sometimes no longer available.

All of these possibilities point to more conversation and looking around for things in the store than is characteristic of the Quick-Stop shopping we are studying. In short, here customers and clerks must be able to assume they will not be overwhelmed by a variety of sizes and types of liquor.

Consequently popular brands and simple types of wines, hard liquors and liqueurs are most often shopped for quickly. Generally customers do not want unusual items like hard-to-get, expensive French wines, or an Italian liqueur the store has which is made from artichokes.

Well-known domestic wines are popular, especially California wines like Gallo, Almadén and Inglenook. Amongst the liqueurs Cherry Heering, Amaretto and a few brands of coffee liqueur are popular. And with the hard liquors, Smirnoff Vodka, Dewars' White Label Scotch and Jack Daniels Bourbon are some of the popular ones. Many lesser-known brands of hard liquor and wine which the store has, like Victory wines and Jacquin's liqueurs, are popular but mainly amongst the regular customers.

These features of Quick-Stop shopping help to solve the problem of locating alternatives when the store doesn't have what a customer requests.

Clerks can assume a customer's request establishes a definite type, quantity, and price range for considering alternatives. And

since popular selling items are usually chosen, clerks can assume a customer is not buying an item for the first time and has tried the other popular items that compete with it. The customer probably knows, therefore, which other brands are "like" the one he wants.

Since these assumptions are not always correct, they are put to the test as soon as clerks suggest alternatives.

From what I have seen in the store, customers and clerks share general notions about similarities between items. For example, Inglenook Chablis is usually an acceptable substitute for Almadén Chablis, and Devonshire Scotch is usually substitutable for Dewars' White Label Scotch.

If a clerk makes a suggestion that is not accurate, a customer will say something like, "C'mon that's not like \_\_\_\_\_." Or, if a customer requests an alternative that is not like what he wanted initially, a clerk will say, "You sure you want that? It's really very different from the \_\_\_\_\_."

Customers and clerks sometimes disagree. Arguments, however, are rare since no attempt is being made to make careful comparisons or fine distinctions. These issues are avoided or ignored in Quick-Stop Shopping.

As against Quick-Stops, making comparisons and fine distinctions are, of course, involved in other types of shopping.

There are many customers who buy hard-to-get lesser-known wines as well as very expensive imports. And there are a few customers who buy exotic liqueurs. Quick-Stop Shopping for these unusual items, however, is done mostly--if at all--by regular customers.

The reason that regulars are virtually the only customers who can buy unusual items is that regulars are the customers who know the most about them. Regulars do not, however, learn about unusual items when doing Quick-Stop Shopping. Instead regulars learn about them when doing other forms of shopping. Exactly how this is done will become clear in later chapters.

At this point we can note, however, that regulars can shop quickly for unusual items without worrying about problems newcomers might encounter. For example, even if a newcomer is knowledgeable about an unusual item he cannot be sure that this particular store will have the right size bottle, proof or even have on hand the item he wants. A regular will know beforehand what is available in this store and in addition may even be able to find suitable alternatives if the item is not available.

The Quick-Stop Shopping of regulars who buy unusual items is not very significant in this store. However, the Quick-Stop Shopping of another group of regulars is a very significant part of everyday commercial life in this store.

This group consists of persons who regularly buy one item which is usually a cheap wine or some form of hard liquor. Most of the time Quick-Stop Shopping is the only form of shopping they use in this store.

We will now look more carefully at this group of regulars and at the reasons that they do so much Quick-Stop Shopping.

## Section 2: Daytime Quick-Stops by Regular Drinkers

There are many customers who live or work in the vicinity of the store who do Quick-Stop Shopping in it daily. Most of these customers are the working-class people employed in the neighborhood as doormen, maids, parking lot attendants, restaurants help, etc. Generally they come into the store on weekdays during the early morning and early afternoon periods.

Hard liquor and wine are what these regulars buy and they do not buy liquor in large quantities. Instead they take the smaller size bottles like pints, half pints and miniatures.

Not a few of these customers are alcoholics or heavy drinkers who buy two or three small bottles a day, always on separate occasions. These purchases appear to be their regular, daily "Fixes."

Most of the hard liquor customers are men and most of the wine customers are women.

The female regular drinkers generally appear during the afternoon hours. Some women who are local domestic workers, or who work in a nearby hospital, buy liquor during working hours and appear to take it to work with them. However, most female regular drinkers do not appear to be taking liquor to their jobs. Instead they seem to be taking it home and consuming it privately.

Most male regular drinkers, on the other hand, are obviously drinking during working hours at their work locations. The small bottles they purchase are usually slipped into pockets as they leave the store. Clerks usually just give them the bottles they want without bags or cash register receipts.

Regular drinkers do their shopping when they get a few minutes' escape from their work. Quick-Stop Shopping is useful to them during a coffee break, while on a short trip to get materials or supplies for their jobs, or while making deliveries.

The clerks who work in the store are aware of this and respond accordingly when regular drinkers enter the store.

They drop any other tasks they are engaged in, such as stocking the shelves or labeling bottles with prices, and help these customers as quickly as possible. For many of these customers the clerks know what to get and they walk directly to the shelf or display where the item is located. They then bring the item to the front counter where the customer is waiting.

The customers usually have their money ready and it is the exact amount required or an amount easy to make change from. Sometimes the bottle someone wants is located in the vicinity of the front counter, such as in a display case which the clerk reaches into or on a shelf behind the counter. When this happens the customer usually walks to a spot directly opposite the location of the item. This helps a clerk to remember what to give him.

The decisions about what to buy which are made in advance by regular drinkers are known not only to themselves but to the clerks as well. In addition, clerks know which alternatives--if any--are acceptable to these customers. Generally, however, regular drinkers accept no substitutes for what they usually buy.

These customers appear to be very attached to the items they purchase.

If a young Puerto Rican man who works in the hospital near the store comes in and asks for a pint of Johnnie Walker, that is the only scotch he will take. If the clerk offers him White Label or J and B, the answer is usually no. Only if he is in a hurry, or perhaps in a good mood, will he settle for anything less. Consequently it is not unusual for him to leave quickly and go to another liquor store if this particular store does not have what he wants.

Going to another store, however, does not mean he is a lost customer.

As I have found from observations and from asking the clerks, regular drinkers are very reliable customers. They are just as committed to a regular store as to a regular brand. They always come "around" and often return later in the day if the clerks promise to get what they want.

Clerks respond to regular drinkers in what appears to be a very automatic and mechanical manner.

For example, as soon as the Puerto Rican man comes in for his pint of Johnnie Walker, the clerk gets it and brings it over to him. He, in turn, has the money ready and pays for it right away. Nothing has to be said, and sometimes nothing is said, though generally there is at least a "Hello," "Hi" or "Good-by," even when only a few seconds are used for this interaction. Consequently it often looks like:

Cu: Good afternoon.

C1: Hi. [Gets what the customer wants without asking.]

Cu: 4.05. [Has money ready.]

C1: 4.05 is right . . . thank you.

This does not mean that clerks and regular drinkers become so impersonal towards one another that they never move beyond the minimal conversation used in Quick-Stop Shopping. When time is available more extensive conversation can develop. Since regular drinkers appear daily they often have or take extra time to talk about sports, current events, vacations, etc.

More important for our analysis of Quick-Stop Shopping, however, is to recognize the significance of limited interaction in the everyday commercial world of the store. For clerks and regular drinkers, Quick-Stop Shopping demonstrates their commitment to everyday, commercial life in the store.

The regular drinkers lose little time from their jobs and the clerks can return quickly to restocking the shelves, cleaning up the store, moving cases of liquor down to the basement, etc. Clerks have to do these jobs during the day because during the evening they spend most of their time helping customers.

If a clerk is helping another customer when a regular comes in, the regular often helps himself. He goes behind the counter and gets what he wants. He then leaves his money laying on the counter for the clerk to pick up. Or a clerk often says, "Excuse me a second, he just wants one thing," and quickly takes care of the regular.

These practices minimize the time regulars take away from customers who need more help with their shopping. And if a clerk and customer are engrossed in conversation when a regular drinker comes in, they minimize interference with conversation as well.

Hence clerks and regular drinkers use Quick-Stop Shopping to

manage other aspects of everyday commercial life. They use it not only when rushed, but also to allow time and space for other customers to do different kinds of shopping.

When there is a "rush" or busy period with a lot of customers in the store, regulars help to make everyone's shopping easier. They do little or no looking around for liquor, thus leaving most of the store open to customers who need or want to look around. And they return later in the day if the store is too crowded. During holiday periods, when the store is busy in the daytime as well as in the evening, these features of Quick-Stop Shopping are especially helpful.

At this point we can turn to the actual verbal exchanges between customers and clerks in Quick-Stop Shopping. We will focus on those features of verbal interaction which help clerks and customers to readily identify and maintain the particular sequences required in this form of shopping.

### Section 3: Verbal Interaction

In my observations of the store I have noted how clerks anticipate that a new customer will do Quick-Stop Shopping.

Whenever clerks see someone who appears to work in the neighborhood, they assume almost immediately that he will buy only one type of liquor and only one size bottle and will accept only one brand name. This happens especially when a male customer appears who is wearing a uniform or carrying equipment easily recognized as necessary for employment in the area.

Clerks test these assumptions by appearing to mistake him for someone else. With a puzzled look they say, "What is it again? Gordon's

or Gilbey's Gin?" The customer often laughs and states some other preference like scotch or vodka.

Clerks do this frequently and it is usually not a case of mistaken identity. It is more often an invitation to work out the steps needed for everyday Quick-Stop Shopping. If a customer accepts the invitation, all he has to do is tell the clerk his preference and come back for it regularly.

Sometimes clerks can guess correctly what someone wants because they are familiar with what other customers like him buy.

For example, there are many Spanish-speaking men who are maintenance workers in nearby high-rise apartment buildings. Many of the men come into the store to buy Pedro Domecq, a brandy imported from Spain. Consequently if a man wearing a maintenance uniform and speaking with a noticeable Spanish accent comes into the store, the clerks often assume he is one of these workmen. If he asks for brandy they automatically ask if he wants Pedro Domecq, or they turn to get it without asking.

Pedro Domecq is the only brandy stocked behind the front counter in the half pint size. The other brandies are on higher shelves or in other parts of the store. The smaller size bottles of other brandies are all located in the back area of the store.

Hence Quick-Stop Shopping has brought a few small size items close to the front counter amidst a general arrangement of larger size bottles. In addition there are two large display cases of miniature size bottles which are purchased mainly by regular drinkers.

Clerks, however, do not try to guess what female customers want. They never pretend to recognize a woman and they minimize indications they already know or suspect what she wants.

Although clerks know that female regular drinkers generally buy cheap wines and sherries, we rarely hear clerks say, "Is it Gallo or Italian Swiss Colony Hearty Burgundy?" And in handling a female regular drinker's Quick-Stop Shopping a clerk does not ask a woman if she wants her "Usual" bottle. If he does not recall what she wants he asks quickly what brand and size she wants. When she answers him she's really reminding him for the next time she comes. However, when she returns the clerk does not exclaim, "ALL RIGHT, GALLO CREAM SHERRY!"

With male regulars, on the other hand, it is common to hear a clerk say, "WHITE LABEL, OF COURSE!" A woman would never ask for her "Usual" or emphasize that the clerk should not forget it publicly.

Female regular drinkers do not want any attention brought to their drinking habits. This is an important part of their shopping which clerks pay careful attention to. In the following we see some of the ways clerks help female drinkers avoid public notice.

Cu: A pint of Old Crow.

Cl: I'm all out of Old Crow. How about taking something else?

Cu: Oh yeah! What else have you?

Cl: I got a fifth of Old Crow . . . here, this is better than Old Crow. It's a ten-year-old charcoal filtered and it costs you only 3.06 and tax. 3.30 altogether.

Cu: Noo I don't think I want that.

Cl: Why? What's wrong with this? It's an excellent bourbon. It's this one here, I think it's better than Old Crow. It's ten years old!

Cu: That doesn't make any difference. I don't know it. You know it's not for myself.

Cl: That's what I mean! You giving somebody a present? Don't worry about it. On my recommendation. It's a very smooth bourbon. Try it!

Cu: Alright.

Cl: 3.30 altogether.

Cu: Put it in one of those brown bags that you gave me before.

Cl: You want me to put it in a brown bag?

Cu: Would you please?

Cl: Surely . . . thank you.

In this instance the customer was a female regular drinker who needed her "Fix," and the clerk knew it. So he made a sales pitch about a substitute and when she denied buying liquor for herself he assumed she was buying a gift. They both knew it was a false assumption. This false assumption, however, was useful to both of them. The clerk could make a sale and the woman had a convenient "Cover" for buying her "Fix."

A second cover is used here when she asks for a paper bag. Female regular drinkers always want their purchases put in bags. Even when carrying bags of groceries which have ample space for a bottle of liquor they insist on having a bottle put into another bag.

Clerks in this store have taken advantage of this phenomenon. They buy unused bags from stores that have gone out of business. They then provide female regular drinkers with bags that camouflage as well as conceal liquor. These bags come from bakeries, hat stores, grocery stores, etc., and are clearly labeled to advertise them.

It is obvious that the Quick-Stop Shopping of female regular drinkers cannot always proceed as rapidly as that of their male

counterparts. Clerks cannot be as casual with females as with males, and they must put on displays of ignorance about, or unfamiliarity with, female regular drinkers.

Despite these problems the Quick-Stop Shopping of female regular drinkers remains a short form of shopping. Since they buy only one item at a time no time-consuming problems arise. At the most their shopping takes the amount of time required for an interaction like the one cited above.

For all regular drinkers an assumption of Quick-Stop Shopping is that no unnecessary conversation will arise. That is, talk about sports, current events and other familiar topics is not allowed. Clerks and customers use only a few or no words at all to maintain this commitment.

The easiest way to avoid conversation is not to say anything. As I have already noted, however, even for the quickest form of shopping this is rare. There is usually at least a "Hi, howarya?" or a "Bye, seeya around" from either the customer or the clerk.

When a regular drinker comes in he and the clerk usually recognize each other and exchange greetings. While exchanging greetings clerks move in the direction of or get what the customer wants. And customers count, exhibit or lay down their money on the counter. After greetings are exchanged an item is paid for.

While the clerk is accepting the money there is an opportunity to invite further conversation which either person may do. However, unless the person invited has time to talk, nothing develops. No one has to be polite about avoiding an invitation to conversation. It can be either ignored or abruptly terminated with a "Sorry, have to go!"

If a customer or clerk has something important to talk about like a repair job or a parking spot in a nearby garage, an appointment can be made for further conversation. The importance of the topic is usually announced as soon as the person enters the store.

One can often hear clerks or customers say, "Hi, I'm glad to see you. Can we talk later on?" These appointments are a feature of Quick-Stop Shopping involving all regular drinkers. It is taken for granted that appointments can be made with them because their regular appearances are such a reliable feature of everyday commercial life.

Regular drinkers, therefore, usually keep their appointments. However, if new customers make appointments they are more likely not to keep them. Clerks and new customers often agree to talk "tomorrow" or "later on," but they are usually not making real appointments. They are politely terminating conversation.

This point makes an important distinction between newcomers and regular customers. It shows us that regular customers and clerks have some ongoing expectations that are important features of everyday commercial life. Before discussing distinctions between regulars and newcomers, however, we must look more carefully at the verbal interactions found in the Quick-Stop Shopping of regulars who are not regular drinkers.

#### Section 4: Regular Customers

Clerks must be more polite with regular customers who buy a wide variety of liquor than regular drinkers buy.

For example, a regular wine customer often wants a brand or bottle size which the store does not carry or have in stock. So there

is greater likelihood of having to make substitutions. In addition these customers are likely to buy more than one item and usually have the time to convert Quick-Stop Shopping into a different, more extended form of shopping.

Therefore, after these customers have chosen an item and appear ready to pay for it, clerks normally ask them, "Is that all?" This question is used not only to invite further shopping, but also to determine what kind of shopping the customer wants to do. If he is doing Quick-Stop Shopping the answers are typically, "Yes," "Just one more," or "Two more items." When these replies are made abruptly or quickly they tell a clerk that a customer does not wish to do more than a Quick-Stop.

The rest of the interaction then usually consists of exchanging money and saying "Thanks" or "Good-by." Sometimes either the customer or the clerk tries to invite further conversation on some everyday topic like the weather or sports. A customer can terminate such conversation quickly with a "Sorry, must get going," but a clerk cannot.

Clerks cannot do this because they must always be careful to leave room for something a regular customer forgot to order, pick up, have delivered, etc. Only if someone else is waiting to be helped or if a truck just delivered a large number of cases can clerks turn away quickly.

When regular drinkers do Quick-Stop Shopping, clerks never ask, "Is that all?" They already know what is "All" in terms of what needs to be said, as well as in terms of the specific items wanted. By not asking this question the clerks assure customers that they know how much verbal interaction is required.

Clerks and many regular customers, including many regular drinkers, are more familiar with one another than Quick-Stop Shopping reveals. As we have seen with regular drinkers, interaction reaches the most minimal proportions. Verbal interactions can be so abbreviated that we cannot readily appreciate the familiarity which has arisen from previous shopping and customer-clerk interaction.

For regulars who buy a wide variety of liquor and who are not regular drinkers, their familiarity with the clerks is an especially useful part of Quick-Stop Shopping.

Clerks often help these other regulars to do Quick-Stop Shopping by using what they know about their likes, preferences, dislikes, etc. For example, if a regular wine customer chooses a bottle of wine different from what he usually likes, clerks will correct him if he makes a serious error. Thus if a customer who usually buys dry, white wine chooses something sweet, clerks will often say, "This may be too sweet for you. Why don't you take \_\_\_\_\_?" The suggested alternatives are often accepted with little hesitation or reservation because the customers already know how well the clerk can advise them.

Regular customers sometimes even rely completely on a clerk's advice and allow him to make a choice for them. This saves them time and helps to make Quick-Stop Shopping possible. Hence, I have often heard someone say, "Hi, um in a hurry. Give me a fifth of dry, Italian red for about four or five dollars."

Regular customers are able to shop for a wide variety of unusual wines and other items because they can expect more knowledgeable concern for error from a clerk. The knowledge regulars and clerks share

and use is based on previous interaction devoted to working out problems of what liquor tastes like, can be served with, mixed with, etc.

Before turning to these problems, however, we should clarify and state clearly some of the important differences between regulars and newcomers which can be located in Quick-Stop Shopping. This will help us to understand how each group deals with the more complex issues of shopping for liquor to be discussed in the next chapter.

#### Section 5: Regulars versus Newcomers

Although the interactions between clerks and regulars, and between clerks and new customers, often appear to be similar, there are important differences between them.

As I have shown there is a group of regular customers who are especially committed to Quick-Stop Shopping. They are mostly working-class regular drinkers. Clerks can rely on them to do Quick-Stop Shopping whenever they are in the store. For these customers Quick-Stop Shopping is confined to buying regularly only one type, amount and brand of liquor. Both customer and clerk know which item is always shopped for and rehearse shopping for it every day.

When regular customers who buy a wide range of liquor do Quick-Stop Shopping they can take for granted a lot of everyday familiarity with the store and the people working in it. This implies that the clerks are familiar with them in such everyday terms as knowing what kind of wines or liqueurs they like.

Whenever these regulars come in clerks do not know in advance if they will do Quick-Stop Shopping but they know other things about them which make a Quick-Stop easy to handle. Regular customers can then

shop for a wide range of liquor as well as for some of the lesser-known brands found in the store.

Hence regular customers do more Quick-Stop Shopping than newcomers can for unusual items and lesser-known brands.

New customers do not always or typically do Quick-Stop Shopping. So clerks must always ask them, "Is that all?" to see not only if Quick-Stop Shopping is what they are doing, but to see if they are sure of what they want.

If newcomers ask for or choose an unusual item clerks can try to caution them that something tastes bitter, does not mix well, etc., but they cannot prevent serious errors. Consequently newcomers avoid making errors by sticking to simple, made-in-advance decisions about what to buy. Consequently, they tend to buy the more well-known brands and types of liquor, or things they have already tried or, perhaps, shopped for as regulars elsewhere.

Newcomers sometimes allow clerks to make choices for them but they never ask a clerk to choose something as complicated as an imported Italian red wine. More typically they ask for a medium-priced rye or vodka. Or they ask for wine which fits into a simple category like cream sherry or chablis, and they limit the selection to domestic wines.

We can now summarize the distinctions between interactions between clerks and newcomers, and clerks and regulars in Quick-Stop Shopping.

Newcomers choose mainly amongst well-known, mass advertised items and avoid unusual items and lesser-known brands. Newcomers cannot take for granted, as many regulars can, previously worked out

understandings about which items they are likely to enjoy, want to serve for dinner, etc. And, therefore, clerks can provide regulars with certain forms of assistance they cannot provide to newcomers. This makes possible for regulars Quick-Stop Shopping amongst a wider variety of liquors and brands of liquor.

The Quick-Stop Shopping of newcomers is, relatively speaking, the most time consuming. Since clerks cannot always help them to easily find substitutes, they often must make their own decisions.

In this chapter I have analyzed the social basis of Quick-Stop Shopping. I have focused on what clerks and customers know in advance, assume or take for granted to make Quick-Stop Shopping possible.

In this form of shopping most decisions about the type, brand and amount of liquor to be purchased are made in advance. Only one or two items are shopped for, and only rarely are more than three. Most items shopped for are familiar to both customers and clerks and it is easy to find substitutes for items which are not available.

In the next chapter we will analyze how customers routinely buy liquor which they know much less about beforehand.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CONVENTIONAL SHOPPING: SHOPPING AS A COMPLEX ROUTINE ACTIVITY

#### Introduction

In this chapter we will analyze "Conventional Shopping."

When customers do this kind of shopping they are not rushed and they have time to consider what they want. Since they have not decided exactly what to buy beforehand, questions about prices, taste, and other qualities of liquor become important parts of shopping.

In Conventional Shopping, however, customers are not concerned with discovering the most desirable or the most unique items. Instead, they are shopping with everyday levels of expectation about prices and qualities of popular, familiar brands and types of liquor.

First, we will look at how customers and clerks develop everyday price and quality guidelines for choosing amongst the wide assortment of popular items in the store.

And second, we will analyze how they use and work within these everyday standardized guidelines.

As we will see, as long as customers buy only six or seven items at a time, they can usually get reasonable satisfaction from the commodities they buy. However, when buying large amounts of liquor customers cannot routinely do Conventional Shopping. This problem will be the subject of our next chapter.

### Section 1: Decision-Making

When we enter a store and we do not know exactly what to buy, we cannot do Quick-Stop Shopping. We must take some time to "make up our minds."

In this situation we usually ask a clerk for help and we expect him to give us useful information and advice. Although we know that clerks often try to mislead us and to get us to spend more money, etc., we still ask them for help and hope to get relevant information.

When we make requests for assistance, we try to judge how honest clerks are by using our past experience or by asking questions we already know the answers to. In addition, we make two important assumptions about what clerks should know in order to help us.

First, we expect a clerk to know generally what is available in the store or in the section he works. If he does not, there is probably an owner or supervisor present, though not necessarily available to us, who "knows the stock well." If no one can help us the store must be new, poorly managed or unconcerned with particular customers.

Second, we assume that many customers ask questions similar to ours and that clerks are already familiar with the "right answers."

These two assumptions are important for understanding why we ask for help, but they do not tell us how the information we expect to find readily available arises in everyday commercial life. They do not tell us how clerks "know the stock" in such a way that they can help us; how other questions similar to ours lead clerks to know the "right answers," or how we ourselves use whatever we know about liquor when we are shopping.

This takes us to the problem of deciding what to buy in Conventional Shopping. This problem takes numerous forms and in order to analyze it we must isolate three important aspects of it.

First, as we have just seen, customers often cannot find what they want by themselves. They ask clerks for help and work with them in trying to solve their problem.

Second, it is usually presented by customers as related to a general need or a specific occasion. For example, we often hear customers asking clerks for suggestions, advice or opinions about what to buy for a gift or a dinner gathering.

And, finally, deciding what to buy almost always involves dealing with the characteristics of different types of liquor. Customers must often decide if they need a dry or a sweet wine, or if they want a "good" scotch or one just for mixing drinks.

It is easy to see why some people are not able to decide in advance what they will buy. When shopping for gifts or for dinner wines these are often difficult choices to make. Hence customers ask clerks vague questions so they can share with them some of the exploratory work.

Exploratory work is necessary in these and in other situations because choosing even one item can be a difficult task. For example, if a customer asks for a dry, white wine, the store has many wines which fit into this category. Customer and clerk must then discuss some of the possibilities and try to reduce the number of alternatives. It is not unusual for this effort to fail and for persons to leave the store without making a purchase.

When considering items they do not normally buy or are not familiar with, customers usually ask clerks what they are "like." Customers and clerks must then use, manage or devise everyday notions of taste, dryness, etc.

These everyday notions are concerned with ambiguous qualities and characteristics of liquor which often turn out to be important in choosing a gift, dinner wine, etc. Examples of the everyday talk we are discussing can be found in the following:

1. Cu: Umm . . . I'm not sure, is this aa?  
 Cl: It's aa average.  
 Cu: It's not smooth?  
 Cl: Gold wine is . . . this . . . gold sherry is a little smoother.  
 You want a dry sherry.  
 Cu: That's what I want, not a sweet.  
 Cl: Take it . . . take, this is a little sweet, it's not as sweet as the cream.
  
2. Cu: What's the difference between this and these two?  
 Cl: This . . . this is a little fruitier, in other words you can taste it.  
 Cu: And this is dry?  
 Cl: This is dry yessir.

Hence when customers and clerks handle the problem of deciding what to buy, they are most likely to develop everyday, descriptive terms for talking about liquor, as well as to refine the terms they are already familiar with.

How this is done will become more understandable as we proceed. At this point, however, we can look at an everyday practice used by customers which will help us to begin our discussion of how choices are made possible.

In the course of my observations I have noticed that many customers try to find what they want by themselves. They browse around the displays, carefully examining numerous items, and rejecting offers of assistance from the clerks. They seem to know what they are looking for, or to feel confident enough to make their own choices. When they reach the front counter they appear to have made up their minds and are often already taking out their money to pay for an item.

However, when the clerk greets them with one of his usual phrases like, "Is that all?", they respond with statements such as "Yeah that's all. I, ahh took this because it's very dry!?" or "That's all. I only need it for a punch." Clerks often agree with them, but more importantly they often disagree or make corrections.

For example clerks might say, "Well if you want a REALLY DRY wine, the \_\_\_\_\_ is much drier," or "You're wasting money. Any cheap champagne is good enough for a punch." These corrections then lead to discussions in which many customers interact with clerks more than they might have anticipated.

This practice reveals that the problem of deciding what to buy can appear unexpectedly. And it shows us that customers often find their previous knowledge and experience insufficient to solve the problem.

Sometimes customers suspect they may be making a mistake and they want the clerks to review or correct their decisions. They reveal

their uncertainty in the tone of the statements they make, or they simply request approval by asking a clerk, "This is a dry wine, right?"

The type of liquor customers buy is also part of the problem.

As one might expect, customers shopping for wine have the most difficulty. Since there are many different kinds of wine, and the store has a large wine selection, the problem of choosing amongst them can be hard to avoid.

This is also true for brandies, sheries and liqueurs. There are many different types of sherry, quite a few flavored brandies and numerous liqueurs. And many distinctions can be made between domestic and imported ones as well.

Therefore a simple request for one of these items can raise many unanticipated problems as the following illustrates:

Cu: Hello.

Cl: Hi.

Cu: How much is your brandy?

Cl: Brandy? Straight? . . . What'd you have in mind? French . . . domestic . . . drinking.

Cu: Oh, ahh.

Cl: Those are domestic brandies [points behind himself where the brandies are located] . . . French Brandies . . . Spanish.

Cu: Oh, you can give me . . .

Cl: Or you want a sweet brandy? A blackberry brandy. [Phone rings and interrupts him. He leaves her gazing at the brandies and proceeds to take a long order over the phone.]

One of the easiest choices for a customer to make is to find a hard liquor like scotch, gin or vodka. There isn't too much variety amongst them, and a customer can easily locate all of the brands carried in the store.

At times, however, even the hard liquors are difficult to shop for. For example, during holiday periods customers are often more concerned with the quality, taste, etc., of all types of liquor than they typically are at other times. Shopping for hard liquor, therefore, can be almost as difficult as shopping for a wine, brandy, or sherry.

New customers usually have more difficulty deciding what to buy than regulars have. Regulars are more familiar with the store and often work closely with the clerks in analyzing the ambiguous features and characteristics of liquor. They know more than newcomers do about the particular selection of liquor sold in this store and they can converse more easily with clerks about the lesser-known brands of popular items included in that selection.

All customers, however, have the same orientation to the problems of taste, quality and price in Conventional Shopping. That is, regardless of how much more or less they know about this particular store, they use the same criteria for choosing anything they buy. We can now look at these general criteria.

### Section 2: Everyday Guidelines

We can understand how clerks and customers deal with problems of taste, price and quality by looking at these problems in terms of the amount of difficulty encountered. Beginning with the simplest and

virtually unproblematic forms of these problems we will move along to those which are the most difficult.

The easiest types of liquor to deal with are domestic wines. They provide us with good examples of how unproblematic Conventional Shopping can be.

Wines from California producers like Paul Masson, Inglenook and Almadén are considered by most customers to be very consistent in taste characteristics. There are few complaints about "bad bottles," and most people agree on which ones are very sweet, medium dry, etc.

In addition these wines are usually treated as interchangeable with one another. Customers and clerks find that the wines these companies produce have so many similarities that they rarely talk about differences between them.

Prices on these wines are well standardized as the following reveals:

Cu: . . . How come this price is so consistent everywhere I go?

Cl: Because.

Cu: It's fixed price on it?

Cl: This price is fixed.

Cu: No matter if you go to . . .

Cl: Some the wines are fixed . . . not all of them in New York.

But a you know.

Cu: This one?

Cl: Standard brands are fixed.

Cu: Anything you want?

Cl: Gallo wines, Italian Swiss Colony, all the, they all fixed.

Cu: Right.

Cl: You know Sherries . . . you know.

Cu: You can go into the Brooklyn ghetto or go into . . .

Cl: Right! Right . . . the same price.

California wines generally have similar names, and those which have similar names like Rosé and Chablis also taste very much alike. Only the sizes, shapes of the bottles and the labels are different.

Hence choices amongst them are not real choices. Customers who are not sure of which ones to buy rarely worry about differences in taste. Instead, they usually try to consider minor price variations or they make arbitrary choices.

When customers ask the clerks which one is the "best," it is an annoying question because most people know how similar they are. Clerks usually answer curtly that "They're all alike. You know, they're California wines." This question, therefore, often identifies customers not familiar with wines or customers who are in the store for the first time.

Unproblematic choices are also found with other wines and types of liquor. New York wines are considered to be very much alike in taste and quality, as well as in price. And Port wines produced in New York and California also follow this pattern.

Domestic hard liquors like bourbon, vodka and gin present a few more problems for clerks and customers. These problems, however, are not difficult to handle, even for newcomers.

For domestic hard liquors price and quality guidelines have to be located. This is easily accomplished by clerks and customers since

the hard liquors which have similar taste characteristics are usually similarly priced. That is, the lower-priced bourbons are, for all practical purposes, similar to one another, or the high-priced gins are likewise similar in prices and qualities.

Generally the more expensive domestic hard liquors are considered to be the most "mellow," "smooth," etc. Most customers agree with the clerks that, for example, Jack Daniels is one of the most "mellow" bourbons, or that Smirnoff is the "best" American vodka.

There are some disagreements, however, about gin and vodka. Some customers say that all gins and all vodkas are alike. They say the specific flavors of gin and vodka do not vary and that people do not drink them straight anyway. For these customers the higher-priced gins and vodkas are not "worth the money."

Mixing drinks is one practical purpose all hard liquors are often purchased for. When this is their intended use their taste characteristics are unimportant to customers and clerks. Any cheap brand is then "good enough" even for the most affluent customers. And everyone usually agrees in this situation that high prices are ridiculous.

With this in mind most customers, when not buying liquor for special purposes like gifts, etc., tend to buy the cheaper brands. Cheap brands are, to a certain extent, real "bargains" for the regulars. They can become familiar with little-known brands like Lonoff Vodka, Royal Archer Gin, London's Gin and Old Bourbon House Bourbon. New customers are less likely to risk buying these brands, but there are some well-known lower-priced items they can turn to. Examples of these are Hiram Walker's Gin, Bourbon, etc., and Austin Nichols' Rye and Bourbon.

If the newcomers are adventuresome, and many are, they can try the brands that are unknown to them. Before doing so, however, they usually ask the clerks to recommend something or to otherwise help them.

Cu: I'm just looking at some of these other brands. . . . Do you know anything about these little bit lower-priced scotches like King Charles or Ace?

Cl: Yes, some of them are good if you wanna try one, this one you got is not bad.

Cu: Well this is not bad, I've been buying this for a long time. But maybe I'll try one. Do you know any of them?

Cl: This is a good bottle a scotch, 5.59, Devonshire, and it's 86.8 proof while this is only 80.

Cu: Oh I see. Okeh, I'll try it.

Clerks typically point to the brands the regulars buy which are obviously well stocked. Newcomers can assume that brands unknown to them are kept on the shelves because someone wants them. In addition, the risks they take are further minimized by the relatively few important distinctions of taste and quality to be made between the cheap hard liquors.

There are few "rare," "very old," or "reserve" hard liquors or wines produced in the United States. The rare and unusual items we would expect someone like a "Connoisseur" to shop for are usually imports.

Customers can therefore rely on a mass-produced consistency found in most domestic products. This is especially helpful for customers who do not want to "take chances."

Most of the time no one "takes chances" with hard liquor. The lower-priced brands are considered very similar and customers usually are looking for "just a bottle of rye, gin, etc." In doing this customers and clerks do not pay much attention to price and quality ranges because what they generally expect from one another and from the products they are considering is usually sufficient.

Only during holiday seasons, and when customers shop for special occasions or gifts, do the outlines of price and quality ranges become especially clear and important in conversation. This is true for all types of liquor as the following shows:

Cu: Do you have that almond liqueur?

Cl: Amaretto?

Cu: Amaretto.

Cl: How did you know I have it?

Cu: I don't know. I said if you have it?

Cl: Because I have different brands. Which one do you like?

Cu: Frankly I don't like it . . . but my wife, she likes it so um bringing her a bottle . . . okey um comin around on Wednesday then.

Cl: I have it on special for . . .

Cu: I'll place an order an then aa you'll deliver it.

Cl: We have one for 3.49 if you want. I'll show it to you.

Cu: Um not looking for, is it good or what?

Cl: Everything we sellin here is good.

Cu: I, me, actually I don know what I'm doing.

Cl: Here . . . excuse me, over here is genuine Amaretto . . . 3.49.

Cu: Cheap for a liqueur isn't it? Very cheap!

Cl: Wanta try it?

Cu: Wellaa is there a better one?

Cl: Yeah there's one for 9.99 for 8.99, for 7.99.

Cu: Well what's the difference? They all taste about the same?

Cl: The other one is imported, sir, it pays for breakage, it and pay for theivery.

Cu: This is alright?

Cl: This . . . because this is in the United States so it's less.

Cu: Um surprised . . . it's all fixed on that?

Cl: Yeah it's 11.76.

Cu: It's all they uhh . . .

Cl: Right.

Cu: Alright. I'll be in Wednesday. I'll place an order. I'll see what else I need.

Although this customer asserts that he does not know "what he is doing," he manages to notice the low price of what the clerk is pushing. This observation leads to a discussion of prices in which it is revealed that both domestic and imported items have been included in their conversation.

When clerks and customers talk about liquor they often overlook the fact that they are including imported and domestic items in their conversations. Customers ask for a "Gin," or a "Vodka," or an "Almond Liqueur." After the clerks answer these questions with some general statements about prices, customers make their choices. Differences between imports and domestic items are not noticed or specifically recognized in conversation.

However, when customers shop for gifts, etc., they usually must consider the differences between imported and domestic products. This means they and the clerks must consider price and quality guidelines for a wide variety of items.

Returning to my discussion of price and quality guidelines for hard liquor we can see that the imports complicate the simple picture of the guidelines we have used up to this point.

For imported hard liquors there are the same low, medium and high price and quality ranges, with the addition of a very high price and quality range. In this range we find the "rare," "reserve" and other specialized versions of imported hard liquor. Examples of these are Chivas Royal Salute Scotch, Stolichnaya Vodka from the Soviet Union, and Seagram's Crown Royal Whisky from Canada.

The customers who buy these items are not necessarily "Connoisseurs." But they generally do not buy such items for mixing drinks or other ordinary purposes. Instead they buy them, most of the time, for gifts and special occasions.

The other three price ranges for the imports are comparable to the price ranges for domestic products. However, there are some basic differences. Scotch is obviously different from rye, and Canadian ryes are different from American ryes.

With imported gins and vodkas many customers insist that even for them "gins are gins," and "vodkas are vodkas." But most customers agree with the clerks that British Gins and Russian Vodka are the "real thing," and are significantly different from the American versions.

The imported hard liquors also differ amongst themselves.

There are well-known items like Cutty Sark and J and B Scotch which are two different types of scotch. And there are cheap little-known brands like King Charles Scotch and Jacquin's imported gin.

As with domestic items, the higher-priced imported items are considered smoother, mellower, etc., than the cheap imports. And within price ranges the products are usually similar to one another.

All of the imported items and the domestic items together create a wide range of choices. During holiday periods, etc., customers and clerks usually try to consider as many of them as possible. When this is done, customers and clerks must locate important differences, and decide how significant they are and whether or not the imports are worth the higher prices.

Generally, all customers, with varying amounts of assistance from the clerks, are not overwhelmed by the choices they are confronted with. Newcomers, especially during holiday periods, spend more money because they avoid unknown labels. Regulars can spend less money by buying cheaper items for general purposes, as well as on occasions for gifts, and by buying "name" brands only when absolutely necessary. There are, however, some problems with lesser-known items which we will now turn to.

Cheaper, lesser-known items are not standardized in the same ways as are well-known, mass advertised brands. We are all familiar with names like Smirnoff, J and B, and Gordons. They are "name" brands which we can expect to find in any liquor store.

The names of lesser-known domestic and imported items are not as well publicized or as consistent as the names of well-known items.

Brand names, and hence labels, on bottles of cheaper items change frequently.

Liquor companies often change labels, market different labels in different areas, or allow stores to put their own store labels on the bottles. And since wholesale prices vary from month to month, the contents of the lower-priced bottles can be expected to change as well.

Changes in bottle contents become apparent as regulars return with reports that "Lonoff used to be better," or "I tried that new London's Gin. It's just as good as Royal Archer used to be."

Regulars are most up to date on these changes as they occur in and affect a particular store. Clerks help them by announcing to them when a company has a new label, has been bought out, gone out of business, had labor problems, etc. Sometimes no one knows about these changes until reports come in from regulars on what they have purchased.

Verbal reports are the only way this information can be obtained. Customers rarely return bottles of hard liquor. I have never seen anyone do it though I have heard many complaints like "I tried the Early Times, it was awful," and "Who makes that Stranov Vodka? It has a funny taste."

Customers cannot say with hard liquor, as they can with wines, that a bottle is "bad." A simple exchange cannot solve a problem since all of the other bottles usually have the same contents. It is also hard to make complaints about taste apply to hard liquors since people usually alter their flavors by mixing them.

Regular customers and clerks, therefore, have difficulty dealing with changes affecting the prices, brands and qualities of cheap

hard liquors. Though they cannot prevent such changes from occurring, they are aware of them and try to help one another as much as possible.

Many conversations between clerks and customers trace these changes over recent time periods. When this happens they often deal with other issues that are important parts of such problems. For example, customers refer to labor problems, production scandals, etc., which they hear about in the media. And clerks try to give them "inside information" from their experiences in dealing with liquor companies and distributors.

Relations between clerks and regulars are, therefore, related to their mutual interest in keeping everyday guidelines of price and quality up to date. Regular customers eventually get to expect the clerks to show or tell them what is currently a "good buy" just as clerks can rely on regulars to report on their experiences with lesser-known brands.

The following is an example of what we are talking about:

C1: You wanta try something very good? It's two ninety-nine.

I think it's a good bottle of wine.

Cu: Alright.

C1: Try it . . . on my recommendation. I went to a wine tasting and I tasted it and I . . . I liked it.

Cu: When you're going call me willya?

C1: We get sometimes tickets. I'll give them to you. Alright I'll talk to my partner, we'll give them to ya.

Cu: Because . . . if you do . . . because I'm . . .

C1: Sure! Why not?

Cu: I'm in the market. Right now I'm down. I don't have any wine.

C1: Alright ten twenty all together. Yeah I want you to taste this bottle of wine. Make sure it's cold!

In this conversation the clerk recommends something he tried at a "Wine Tasting." These wine tastings are liquor company promotional events in which liquor store owners can try new wines before they sell them in their stores. When the wines arrive in their stores they can then assure their customers, as the clerk does in the above conversation, that they have personally tried a new item. If the customer knows a clerk well, and clerks usually only make such recommendations to customers they know well, he or she is likely to try a new wine, no matter where it is produced. Otherwise, Conventional Shoppers avoid all imported wines, unless they are well-known mass-advertised ones.

In this conversation the customer trusts the clerk and buys the wine. He also requests some tickets to a wine tasting for himself. It is not an unusual request and clerks often give tickets to regulars. They are important favors the clerks do for regulars, as well as important signs of commitment to helping regular customers find "good buys."

Hence the most updated everyday price and quality guidelines for popular items and types of liquor arise primarily through the ongoing collaborative efforts of clerks and regular customers. Newcomers also contribute to these guidelines but they do not contribute to the problem-solving activities required for lesser-known, and sometimes even for well-known, items. All customers, however, know of the existence of these guidelines and expect clerks to always be up to date on their particular features.

Other types of liquor like sheries, brandies and liqueurs are shopped for much less frequently. Customers generally buy them for special occasions during holiday periods, though some regulars buy them more frequently.

Sherries, brandies and liqueurs present many of the same problems for price and quality guidelines found with hard liquors. They come in numerous forms, which have many different labels and ever-changing prices. Imported brandies, sheries and liqueurs are usually very different from domestic products, as well as more expensive.

In addition, there is one problem not found with wines and hard liquors. Since customers buy sheries, brandies and liqueurs so infrequently, they are usually familiar with only a few of them. The ones they know something about, have heard of, or have tried are typically a few types of mass-advertised, "name" brands. Some examples of familiar items clerks can assume customers are familiar with are Christian Brothers Brandy, Cherry Heering Liqueur and Harvey's Bristol Cream Sherry.

There are, however, many different types of liqueurs, sheries and brandies which customers are not familiar with. There are "sweet," "dry" and "very mellow" sheries. There are numerous domestic and imported flavored brandies. And there are a large number of liqueurs customers do not ordinarily buy, like those made from cabbages, artichokes and blends of bananas, coconuts, vanilla and chocolate.

Sherries, brandies and liqueurs are difficult to compare since customers do not usually buy two or three versions of one of them at a time or at relatively close intervals. Also, many customers buy them

for other people, for cooking or to serve as novelties. So when shopping for them, customers usually rely on brand names, or if they are adventuresome they can buy brands they know little about.

Clerks cannot provide much reliable assistance since they are not always up to date on these items. Clerks are usually most familiar with the popular mass-advertised items or with the most recent arrivals in the store. Recent arrivals are usually exotic blends of liqueurs or even of liqueurs and brandies which adventuresome regulars are likely to try.

However, regulars will generally try them only to see how good they might be for gifts or for "company." This generates some immediate excitement or frustration about new items that is soon forgotten.

As with hard liquors, sherries, brandies and liqueurs are rarely returned. It is difficult to complain about them because there are fewer items to compare them with, and because customers are generally not very interested in them anyway. Even with many popular ones few customers purchase them so regularly that they and the clerks can work out consistent price and quality guidelines.

Despite these problems customers use everyday guidelines for sherries, brandies and liqueurs, as well as for other types of liquor, very effectively. We will now turn to why this happens.

### Section 3: Using and Working Within

#### Everyday Guidelines of Price and Quality

In Conventional Shopping customers are not concerned with clearly defining their needs and preferences or in reaching very high levels of satisfaction with commodities. They shop with everyday levels

of need and expectation. Everyday levels of expectation are simply the everyday expectations about prices and qualities of popular, familiar types of liquor which any customer has. And since most customers buy brands and types of liquor which fall into, or can be viewed as falling into, the familiar, reliable, everyday levels of low, medium and high price and quality which we have located, their needs are satisfied.

Very few customers are completely ignorant about liquor. Whether they are newcomers or regulars, they have approximately the same range of knowledge about liquor. This range of knowledge begins with complete ignorance of it and goes up to the point of familiarity with most popular and a few lesser-known brands and types of liquor.

For those who are really ignorant, however, it is not difficult to identify popular brands and types of liquor, and to locate everyday levels of price and quality. Even foreigners manage to do this easily.

Generally, most customers come close to the high point of this range of knowledge about liquor. They usually know about California wines and sherries, standard scotches like Dewars' and J&B, liqueurs like Southern Comfort and Chocolate Mint, and a few unusual items such as a particular Hungarian Riesling or a Greek Ouzo they happen to like.

There are two basic reasons why there is not much concern for high levels of satisfaction and need in Conventional Shopping.

First, customers do not have or wish to spend an inordinate amount of time doing liquor shopping. They want to shop casually, easily and relatively quickly. Most customers do not want to converse with clerks about a large and difficult-to-manage variety of commodities.

Outside of a few unusual choices or preferences, they prefer to discuss typical and familiar items which they can buy at any time or at any liquor store. Consequently when they "drop into" a liquor store to "look around," they are not looking for extremely unusual or unique items. Instead they are looking for and they expect to find items which anyone can appreciate well enough to buy.

Second, when doing Conventional Shopping, customers are often buying liquor they will not consume themselves. For some customers this means buying only cheaper items or only very expensive ones. For most customers, however, it means buying liquor which can be treated as falling into the most "correct" everyday price and quality levels for the occasions or uses for which the liquor is purchased. This commonly applies to liquor bought for serving guests or for gifts.

For example, customers buy scotch, rye or vodka that is "good enough" for guests. This means that they shop for items which satisfy the needs and tastes of a majority of guests. Low or medium price ranges usually fit their requirements.

When buying gifts, customers typically buy medium- or high-priced items and worry more about how items "look" than how they taste. In the following the shape and size of a bottle become important matters in choosing a gift:

Cu: I need Southern Comfort.

Cl: How much Southern Comfort you need?

Cu: Well definitely not the smallest cause that's a funny looking bottle it comes in. So I guess . . . What sizes do you have?

Cl: Here's the pint.

Cu: What's the next one?

Cl: A fifth. [Points to bottle.]

Cu: What's the next look like?

Cl: A little bigger.

Cu: Same thing, a little bigger?

Cl: Yeah.

Cu: I'll take the fifth, a hundred proof. . . . You have any gift wrap?

Cl: Like this?

Cu: That's beautiful!

Cl: Of course! Of course!

Cu: Is there any price on the bottle?

Cl: I took it off. . . . I know you're not buying it for yourself. You wanted to see what it looks like! If you bought it for yourself you wouldn't mind it. What the bottle looks like. Right?

Cu: Right.

Customers usually feel they have to buy impressive gifts so they buy items which have "good" brand names and "well-known" reputations. Ironically they find themselves buying, in many cases, expensive versions of types of liquor they like but would never pay so much for if they were shopping for themselves. In addition they find themselves choosing amongst numerous expensive items they do not normally consume, but strongly suspect are overpriced and overrated.

As long as only one or two gifts are shopped for, these are not problems because higher prices, at certain times, must be paid. But

as customers buy larger numbers of gifts, quality and price levels become restricted to the medium range, while the lowest range is rarely used for gifts.

The lowest range, however, is often the only one to choose from when customers buy liquor for parties and other large social gatherings. In these situations financial limitations loom large and in many cases are the only reasons for choosing anything. In the next chapter we will consider these situations more carefully since they involve large quantities of liquor and numerous items.

At this point we are concentrating on interactions in which customers can afford to buy from the price and quality levels they choose. Since they buy no more than six or seven items at a time, everyone, with few exceptions, can get what he or she wants. For most people this means choosing the "correct" price and quality levels for specific uses and occasions while trying to avoid serious errors.

Of course some customers are not worried about "correct" choices and do not care if they appear "cheap" or pretentious to others. But even these customers use the same everyday guidelines for price and quality that all customers use.

It is important to note here that the reasons customers have for choosing particular everyday price and quality levels for other people, as well as for themselves, are relevant to, but ultimately unimportant for, our present discussion. They are relevant because they illustrate how these guidelines can be used for everyday purposes like buying liquor for serving guests or to give away as gifts. They are ultimately unimportant because no one is trying to use something more or better than everyday guidelines for choosing liquor.

Customers can be conventional and buy the "correct" items or, more importantly, they can insult their guests with "cheap" ones or impress them with the "best" ones. In all cases they do not change the guidelines, and the guidelines are even used to determine what is insulting or impressive as the following indicates:

Cl: I have a guy in here who sounded off, who talks big, really talks big about gold and this and that. I don't think he ever worked in his life, but he's always making money in the market buying gold and selling gold. He talks to everybody and aa he picked the least expensive vodka. So that's all those rich guys, haha.

Cu: Yes, yes sure.

Cl: And I don't even know if he has money.

Cu: It's true. It's true. . . . I used to go with \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_, I'd go to his house and . . .

Cl: The least expensive!

Cu: Oh what you would find there!

Customers also do not move away from everyday price and quality guidelines when they buy liquor for cooking or for mixing drinks.

Generally, when customers buy liquor for these purposes they buy only cheaper items. For mixing drinks, cheap scotches, vodkas, etc., are usually considered sufficient because the poor flavors and other negative features of cheap items are hidden by other ingredients. In cooking no one expects liquor to fully reveal itself. Instead liquor is expected to blend in well with other ingredients, or to otherwise reveal itself as a contribution to something beyond itself. Hence for

cooking any price and quality range can be used because no one is trying to hide something.

All customers know, however, that any item found in the store can conceivably be cooked with, mixed in some kind of drink, used as a dessert topping, etc. Price and quality guidelines do not differentiate amongst these uses. Instead they point to the results of what everyone has already used liquor for.

These results treat particular items as specific versions of general types of liquor independently of how they have been consumed. For example, a cheap, poor-tasting bourbon may be said to be "all right" in a drink, but "in itself" it remains a cheap, poor-tasting bourbon. Or a wine may be excellent for cooking, but "in itself" be very sweet, medium dry or fruity.

Everyday guidelines treat all items as what they are if they were consumed in the forms in which they appear in the store. All commodities sold in the store are treated for all practical uses and purposes as "ends in themselves."

Regardless of how they will use or consume the liquor they buy, customers expect to know or to be able to find out if what they buy is high, medium or low in price and quality. Hence customers can easily shop for liquor they will cook with, mix in drinks, give away as gifts, drink "straight," or never taste in their lives.

Clerks are necessary to Conventional Shopping, however, because everyday price and quality guidelines are not always immediately apparent to customers. No matter how much customers know in general about liquor, they commonly need help in choosing items they do not buy

frequently. When buying liquor for guests or for gifts they often need clerks to help them refresh their memories on qualities of items and to give them the most up-to-date accounts of everyday guidelines.

In addition, clerks serve as important resources in Conventional Shopping for all customers. They have a wide range of knowledge about making punches, mixing drinks, cooking with liquor, etc. They often help customers decide which items are appropriate for specific uses.

They do not, however, really tell customers what to do with liquor, though they sometimes make confident suggestions in order to sell something.

Whenever, for example, someone asks for a "cooking wine," clerks usually point out that customers can drink what is "left over" after a bottle has been opened and a small portion of its contents has been used for cooking. Although a request for "cooking wine" is often used as a cover by a regular drinker, the clerks' responses to it point to more than cynicism about how a wine will "really" be used.

Their responses point out to customers that a particular wine is something "in itself" apart from being used in a recipe. Hence clerks sell customers wines as wines, and not wines that are necessarily for cooking, making punches or giving away as gifts.

Clerks often make this point even when discussing with customers common modes of liquor consumption such as serving white wine with fish and red wine with meat. Take, for example, the following:

Cu: Tell me something. [Customer holds up for the clerk a fish-shaped wine bottle.] This is obviously good with fish but could you have that with meat or is it inappropriate?

Cl: If nobody's looking.

Cu: C'mon, tell me is that a bad meat thing too?

Cl: Ah you could have any wine with anything.

Cu: Yeah, but what would you suggest that with?

Cl: With veal or lamb or uh . . . you know . . . chicken . . .

Fish!

Cu: So in other words . . .

Cl: Anything.

Customers can use the liquor they purchase for any purpose they choose. Ultimately only they can decide for themselves what to do with it. Hence clerks are not committed to selling liquor for any specified purposes. And indeed, customers are free to buy liquor no one will consume. Conceivably they can buy liquor to feed their pets, or they can use unopened bottles of liquor as household decorations if they want to.

Few customers, however, appear to buy liquor for purposes other than typical uses like mixing drinks or making punches. Hence the guidelines remain unaffected by these possibilities.

In this chapter we have analyzed how Conventional Shopping is possible. It is a collaborative effort of customers and clerks in which a variety of liquor is routinely dealt with. Through the use of everyday guidelines of price and quality, everyone can do this form of shopping routinely and very effectively.

Shopping for liquor, however, does not always measure up to even our minimal everyday expectations about prices and qualities of liquor. There are times when caution about qualities of items disappear

and we are left with unknown and unknowable commodities. In the next chapter we will examine how these situations arise.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### MULTI-ITEM SHOPPING: EXTENDED CONVENTIONAL SHOPPING

In this chapter we will analyze how large numbers of commodities are shopped for. We will call this task "Multi-Item Shopping."

Multi-Item Shopping is often done so easily and quickly that it resembles Quick-Stop Shopping. We simply call of a list of items to a clerk, he puts them into a bag or a box, we pay for them and leave. This resemblance, however, is very superficial because we can never be sure that Multi-Item Shopping will be as easy and smoothflowing as Quick-Stop Shopping.

The major obstacle we encounter is the management of money. When we bring along a complete "shopping list," we have no guarantee this problem will be avoided because it is often necessary to make numerous and confusing substitutions. When we use everyday price and quality guidelines, quality expectations fall to the wayside as problems with prices loom ever larger. And even if we are rich, problems with prices can still be overwhelming.

Hence no customer can worry too much about the qualities of the items he is buying. Far more important is the problem of getting the right quantities of liquor without overspending. Since customers are often buying liquor for parties and other large social gatherings, this means quite a few cases of wine or hard liquor are usually required.

Obviously the lowest price ranges frequently turn out to be the only ones they can choose from.

While often falling down to the lowest price ranges when doing Multi-Item Shopping, customers generally try to use the highest ones they can. Our analysis will show, therefore, how their situation progressively worsens. We will begin with a comparison with Quick-Stop Shopping because many customers begin Multi-Item Shopping by trying to do it routinely and quickly. This attempt cannot withstand what often becomes an avalanche of prices in a confusion of large numbers of items and many substitutions.

This chapter will complete our analysis of the most commonly used--or conventional--forms of shopping in the liquor store we are studying. In the next chapter we will analyze an unconventional form of shopping used by customers who want to be as knowledgeable about and as satisfied as possible with the items they buy.

When we observe or engage in Multi-Item Shopping there are often only two outstanding differences readily apparent to us between it and Quick-Stop Shopping. First, we can easily see that in Multi-Item Shopping we buy a larger variety of commodities. And second, in Multi-Item Shopping we buy commodities in larger numbers or quantities. Outside of these two differences, we seem to follow the same routines.

Turning to customers shopping in a liquor store we can highlight the similarities in these routines. Both types of shopping can be accomplished easily and in short periods of time. This is possible because customers and clerks put limits on their interactions. They do this by relying on decisions made in advance, mostly by customers.

Customers usually decide what to buy and how much money to spend beforehand with clerks knowing most about the advance decisions of regulars. This is done so that few problems are encountered in making choices and so that clerks cannot challenge too many choices.

Hence newcomers typically choose popular brands of well-known items while regulars can, in addition to the widely-known items, choose amongst lesser-known brands and more of the unusual types of liquor. When newcomers ask for unusual items like expensive wines or liqueurs clerks usually challenge them to see if they know what they are buying. However, if a newcomer asks for more than two unusual items, clerks stop challenging them. Newcomers and even regulars do not generally buy a large number of unusual items simultaneously unless they are already familiar with them.

Once customers and clerks start discussing larger numbers or quantities of liquor, the similarities between the two forms of shopping are no longer apparent. When customers and clerks spend some time choosing items for a party, housewarming or other purpose, Multi-Item Shopping is clearly different from Quick-Stop Shopping. This possibility that whenever we do Multi-Item Shopping it can become an involved task is the key to the major differences between it and Quick-Stop Shopping.

Many customers try to limit their interaction with clerks in Multi-Item Shopping to, for example, little more than reading their shopping lists to them. This does not always work because of numerous obstacles commonly encountered.

If customers have long lists of items with them, it is often

the case that some or many brands, quantities, and types of liquor they need are not available. Hence customers and clerks must have a sense for possible alternatives for many items. The job of making substitutions, though not necessarily more complicated in Multi-Item Shopping than in Quick-Stop Shopping, is often more extensive and time consuming. Making substitutions is time consuming in Multi-Item Shopping primarily because it is so often part of the problem of managing expenses.

In Quick-Stop Shopping customers often easily substitute an expensive item for a cheaper one. This happens when a medium- or low-priced item is similar to a much more expensive one. This is true, for example, in the case of the two-dollar difference in price between a quart of Devonshire and a quart of Dewars' scotch. Many customers treat these brands as equals and, if the store does not have the lower-priced Devonshire, the only scotch which can be substituted for it is Dewars'. If someone is only worried about one such substitution when doing either Quick-Stop or Multi-Item Shopping, he or she is often willing to spend more money.

However, many substitutions are often necessary in Multi-Item Shopping. Even if price differences are much less than two dollars per substitution, they can quickly cause large increases in overall expenditures. For example, if someone wants a case of fifths of a standard California wine like Almadén Chablis, any other similar California Chablis like Paul Masson or Inglenook will probably be a good substitute for it. These two brands, however, often cost more per bottle than Almadén. And though the difference is small, it turns out to be a seven- to ten-dollar difference on a case of wine. If someone is buying

many other items in addition to this case of wine, which happens frequently in this store, money becomes a problem.

In order to analyze how clerks and customers manage expenditures, however, we must highlight some important and often taken-for-granted features of shopping lists. These features are important because all customers and clerks make use of them in handling the task of money management.

A shopping list is never a simple collection of names of commodities. This is true whether it is written in advance, taken from memory, or worked out alone or with the help of clerks in the course of shopping. A shopping list is essentially a set of guidelines for choosing among commodities. This set of guidelines has two important features.

First, it allows the customer to estimate and control his overall expenditures. Sometimes we make a shopping list by determining how much money we can spend and then see what we can buy with that amount of money. At other times we make up a list to find out how much we have to spend. In either case we use a list to estimate overall expenses.

On rare occasions I have seen people shop for liquor without regard for prices and overall expenditures. However, they do not shop for more than nine or ten items and they never spend over one hundred dollars.

Whenever customers spend hundreds of dollars, which I have observed customers do on numerous occasions, they always have careful discussions with clerks. Generally they wait until clerks are clearly

available for extended interaction. This means that if the store is busy they must wait for a lull in activities. Customers buying large quantities either wait voluntarily or are asked by the clerks to wait until customers buying lesser amounts have been taken care of. And then, when clerks and customers work on a long list of items, they frequently move to the rear of the store where their efforts are less subject to interruption.

The second important feature of shopping lists is that they allow us to have simple criteria close at hand for making many substitutions. We do not have to stop and think about every substitution because we usually buy items which can be easily located in everyday ranges of price and quality. These price ranges are almost always in the low to medium categories with specific exceptions.

The specific exceptions are generally items we are familiar with, and are usually standard types of hard liquor or domestic wines. For example, when customers buy a lot of hard liquor for parties, they typically buy many items in the low and medium price ranges, while buying high-priced scotches or vodkas. They do this because they expect many of their guests to be scotch or vodka drinkers.

Whenever customers do Multi-Item Shopping, the exceptional items they choose are usually noticeable to clerks. Clerks often make observations like, "I thought you were having a party until you asked for this ginger wine," and, "That's expensive, you want something cheaper like the others?" Customers then explain that the items are for themselves or for some purpose other than that which would explain the guidelines they have chosen.

Sometimes customers have very unusual shopping lists which are composed of expensive hard liquors, liqueurs and wines. Most of these customers are middle- or upper-class persons. None of them buys such items in large quantities, and they can usually choose substitutes just as easily for the unusual items they want as they can for more standard items. Hence their shopping is not extremely unmanageable or unpredictable because of the atypical items they buy. The shopping lists they use are really just like everyone else's.

Both customers and clerks make careful use of the two main features of shopping lists. Customers use them to estimate overall expenses and to find out what price and quality ranges they can use to choose particular items. And once shopping is in progress, clerks can usually guess how much a customer is willing to spend as well as how he or she is using price and quality guidelines.

In most cases clerks easily help or appear to help customers manage expenses. When substitutions have to be made, clerks follow the patterns of low or medium prices set by customers when suggesting possible substitutes.

And as customers ask for more items, clerks often stop to caution them about mounting expenses. Clerks give cues to customers by saying things like, "That's almost forty dollars so far! Having a party?" and "Sure you want two half gallons of Smirnoff and two of Old Crow, that's expensive?"

These questions often cause customers to revise their shopping lists or to replace them altogether. Completely revising shopping lists is a common occurrence in Multi-Item Shopping. Customers often discover

that they can buy more or less liquor than they had anticipated. In these situations they try to revise their price and quality guidelines for particular categories of items so that they fall within or coincide with previously established limits. Sometimes this means customers can buy more expensive items if prices are lower than expected, or at other times, when prices are higher than expected, they simply have to spend more money.

Clerks are usually helpful and sympathetic when spending more money is called for. They help customers revise shopping lists and respect the limits customers try to set. Sometimes clerks are manipulative or deceptive, but usually they are only this way when they know or suspect a customer can afford to spend more money.

Since credit is not available in liquor stores, we might say this is why clerks are so sympathetic with customers. Lack of credit, however, is clearly not an insurmountable problem in the store we are studying. Customers buy large quantities of liquor there every day without worrying about money. They are usually well prepared for spending more money if necessary, or for returning to the store if they must leave to get more money.

Clerks are also helpful in Multi-Item Shopping not only because they are sympathetic but because they also get to know many features of the items customers choose. This point is illustrated in the following:

Cl: Hi!

Cu: Ohh Hi! . . . Sauterne.

Cl: Sauterne.

Cu: Sheri.

Cl: Sheri.

Cu: Cinzano.

Cl: Cinzano.

Cl: Compari.

Cu: Co . . . right!! Haha.

Cl: How'd you know?

Cu: A guess? I didn't have it for many day!

Cl: I din, oh yes you didn't have it. I know you didn't!

Cu: Know? . . . ah whiskey by [inaudible].

Cl: Okeh.

The clerk in this case is familiar with the customer. This is clear not only because he can "guess" one item, but more importantly because the customer does not mention a brand name for the sauterne or a bottle size for any item. How then does the clerk give this customer the correct five items?

We can answer this question by pointing out first that clerks are not always guessing when they surprise customers in this way. Obviously they can easily surprise many regulars. Clerks have some general knowledge of what regulars serve guests, like to have at home for themselves, or always have available for general purposes.

However, clerks can, at times, even surprise newcomers. This is possible because there are features of items customers shop for, regardless of the type of shopping they are doing, which help clerks to find or "guess" the right items. These features of items help clerks with newcomers as well as with regulars.

Whenever the store is busy we can easily see that certain quantities, varieties and brands of liquor are very popular. For example, there are numerous brands, sizes and types of sherry, sauterne and vermouth. In this store most customers buy fifths of New York sauterne, fifths of California sherry, and pints of Cinzano vermouth. When customers ask for sherry, sauterne or vermouth, clerks often say "the Almadén, eh?" or "Cinzano?" and move towards these items as they are talking.

Customers who do not want the typical brands and sizes often have to correct the clerks and name or look for the items they want. However, clerks frequently know which customers do not want the typical items. They are usually customers obviously using shopping lists that call for odd sizes or unusually large quantities. Or they are regular drinkers who, for example, often buy sherry, but they buy only the cheap Gallo or Italian Swiss Colony sherries that come in quart-sized bottles.

These features of popular items are also useful to customers. They can simply call for sherry, sauterne, Devonshire, Lonoff, etc., and get what they want. Such abbreviated requests help to make Quick-Stop Shopping short in duration, and in general help all shopping to be easier and quicker. Only in Quick-Stop Shopping, however, do these abbreviated requests really help to guarantee quick interaction.

In Multi-Item Shopping they are helpful, but interaction does not necessarily move along quickly when they are used. This is especially true when customers buy liquor for very large social gatherings. We can see why in the following:

Cu: I have to ask you because we're not sure how many people are

coming . . . and the recipe for sangria that somebody has given us says . . .

C1: Just follow the recipe!!

Cu: . . . says two gallons for thirty people.

C1: What did they tell you to mix with? Tell you to put soda in?

No!

Cu: No. A coupla people mentioned that but can't it be . . .

C1: No, no, you make it.

Cu: We're gonna put a lot of ice in it.

C1: I see, and whatever else you would like to put in.

Cu: We have a marinated fruit thing we're settin up for it.

C1: Okeh, now let's see what did we say? Ahh, two gallons?

Cu: Two gallons for thirty people.

C1: That's ten bottles, ten fifths.

Cu: Ya.

C1: For thirty people just about right.

Cu: We.

C1: In other words it would be . . . so you don't know how many people you gonna have?

Cu: Yeah. We thought twelve gallons but then we thought maybe we should get one more case. . . . If we have two hundred people show . . .

C1: If you have two hundred people, twelve gallons.

Cu: We don't know that that many people are gonna show. We think now we may have 150 but they're also selling some other seats tomorrow night.

Cl: That's twelve gallons.

Cu: They're already using one gallon to eliminate the crew, so that's an extra gallon.

Cl: That's twelve gallons . . . that's twelve gallons would be sixty bottles. Twelve times.

Cu: It doesn't come in gallon bottles?

Cl: Yeah, it comes in gallon bottles. You say ah but a, three cases would be twelve gallons, four cases . . .

Cu: Sixteen.

Cl: Sixteen gallons would be 80 bottles, would be enough for 240 people. You want it now?

Cu: Well, we're not sure. It's not till the last minute that he tells us.

Cl: Look, it starts what time?

Cu: It starts at eight. The intermission isn't until like about 9:45.

Cl: We'll be closed after ten. . . . Maybe you'll take three and a half cases?

Cu: No. Four cases is definitely right. We'll bring back whatever is left over. . . . And Gallo is the least expensive, right?

Cl: No, this particular it's not Gallo, it's made by Gallo.

Cu: Oh.

Cl: See Gallo would be about a dollar and a half more on a gallon. You don't need it!!

Cu: When you mix it up.

Cl: Everybody loves it!

In this conversation the specific item they were discussing was only briefly mentioned at its conclusion. Most of the conversation was devoted to the problem of how much liquor to buy and how to avoid buying too much of it.

This matter could not be passed over easily. Eventually a compromise was reached in which smaller bottles that are easier to measure and can be returned if unopened were purchased. Hence, although the item itself was not really mentioned by name, a long interaction nevertheless occurred in which only one aspect of it was really important--its quantity.

In Multi-Item shopping uncertainties about returning leftover liquor, and about quantities needed for punches or mixing drinks, are common. And so, many customer-clerk interactions are devoted to punch recipes, drinking preferences of guests, returning leftover items and arranging for quick delivery of more liquor if it is needed. Customers and clerks, as in the above case, usually try to calculate as closely as possible how much of each item is needed and how to be the most "thrifty."

Multi-Item Shopping, therefore, is different from other kinds of shopping because in it customers have much less certainty about what they will buy. Their uncertainty increases as they buy larger and larger amounts of liquor. It increases because more substitutions, compromises and various kinds of calculation become necessary. Routine strategies, as we have seen, cannot reduce this uncertainty.

In spite of these difficulties many customers do Multi-Item Shopping confidently. Some customers can even buy large numbers of

expensive or unusual items without much difficulty. We will now look at these customers and the Multi-Item Shopping they engage in.

It is possible for some customers to have a shopping list consisting of the following items: Wyborow Polish Vodka, Harvey's Bristol Cream Sherry from Spain, Broilly Côtes du Rhone wine from France, Wild Turkey Liqueur, Irish Mist Liqueur from Ireland and Chivas Royal Salute Scotch. These are some of the more unusual and expensive items which customers generally buy only one at a time when shopping for a few items. Not many customers buy them all at once, and no one buys large quantities of them. A fifth size bottle of each of these items would add up to about ninety dollars, and a case of each would add up to around six hundred dollars. Even rich people would never buy a case of each of these all at once.

Ironically these items present few problems with price and quality. They generally sell for well-standardized though high, prices, and each one is usually available in only one or two sizes. Most customers who know about them would say they are good, high quality items.

Hence, for those people willing to pay the prices, shopping for all of these items at once can be very easy. It is also easy because these items cannot be shopped for in large quantities or numbers.

Customers who would be interested in them cannot afford, or simply would not try to buy, enough of them for a large party. People rarely buy such items for party punches or for mixing drinks. The Polish Vodka may be an exception, but a case of it alone would be about one hundred dollars.

One hundred dollars is more than people usually spend at once on liquor for any purpose. At times customers spend one hundred, or as much as two hundred fifty, dollars on liquor. This, however, is not done frequently. Generally it happens only during holiday periods. I have seen customers spend more than two hundred fifty dollars on liquor on only a few occasions. On all of these occasions they were not buying liquor for private homes, but for office parties and other non-private purposes. In addition these extremely large expenditures were not used to buy unusual items. They were used only for standard types and brands of wine or hard liquor.

When customers buy unusual or expensive items in Multi-Item Shopping they do not encounter the problems with large quantities and money typically encountered with cheaper standard forms of liquor. Uncertainty about what will be purchased, though usually not immediately present or apparent, is not, however, eliminated. The uncertainty they encounter has to do with the limited quantities of many items they want.

The Chivas Royal Salute, for example, is very hard to get because it is produced in limited quantities. This liquor store gets only one or two cases of it per year, and as a result apportionment problems develop when too many customers ask for it. Clerks obviously have to reserve most of it for regulars.

There are many other items that are hard to find. Most of these items are imported wines that only "Connoisseurs" usually shop for. Not all of these wines are expensive and those that are cheap are often bought in large quantities by Connoisseurs.

However, large quantities of the cheap imported wines are

often just as hard to get as smaller quantities of some of the rare and very expensive items. Clerks help them with this problem by putting some items on "reserve" for regulars. Clerks routinely set aside storage areas in the rear or in the basement of the store for this purpose. Not only wines but all other items "deserving" regulars need are put in these special places.

One of the clerks who is a part-owner of the store goes to wine tastings to look not only for wines to sell everyone, but also to look for wines he will have to set aside for "deserving" or interested regulars. Before attending a wine tasting he announces to regulars when he is going and discusses with them what he will look for. Since this clerk also does most of the wine ordering for the store, is the most familiar with the various importers, and talks the most with wine regulars, he usually finds some wines only a certain few customers will really be interested in, though other customers may obviously buy them. He is also able to locate previously popular wines which have new labels or are being sold by different importers.

All of this is extremely helpful to "Connoisseurs." Connoisseurs can use his help to buy items that are hard to get. When they find wines they like they buy as much of them as they can afford or as much as the store can get. Consequently when this clerk returns from a wine tasting he usually calls or otherwise reaches a few Connoisseurs who buy large quantities of what he has found or set aside for them.

Connoisseurs, however, rarely buy a lot of "good" wine for party punches or large social gatherings. They frequently discuss using "good" wines for small social gatherings where wine is served for dinner. But they rarely talk about using them for large parties.

When buying liquor for large social gatherings they shop as everyone else does for numerous items. They choose standard wines and other forms of liquor while keeping overall costs well in view.

When Connoisseurs do Multi-Item Shopping for "good" wines they do it primarily for themselves or for occasions in which bottles of wine are served individually. In most cases they buy "good" wines simply to get them "while they last" so they can have them on hand well into the future for their own consumption.

What all of this shows is that middle- and upper-class regulars, many of whom are wine Connoisseurs, do most of the Multi-Item Shopping for unusual or expensive items in this liquor store.

There are three basic reasons why this happens.

First, as the items shopped for become more unusual and hard to find, customers must be able to rely on clerks to put things "on reserve." Hence they must be regulars.

Second, as items become more unusual and hard to find, customers must be Connoisseurs who have taken the time to locate, discover and in general do a special kind of shopping which will be discussed in the next chapter. This is especially true for imported wines, though in many cases it also applies to customers who have special interests in imported sherries, liqueurs or rare and unusual forms of hard liquor.

And third, lower-class persons are usually not interested in expensive or unusual liqueurs, sherries and especially imported wines. They may buy them occasionally, but never all at once.

Middle- and upper-class regulars, most of whom are Connoisseurs, are usually the only customers interested in expensive or unusual

assortments and types of liquor. They are also the most able to pay for a large assortment of expensive items, and the most able to buy large quantities of cheap imported wines because they know the most about them.

When we see customers buying a group of choice items like the one listed above, we can easily overlook how hard it may be to casually buy the Chivas Royal Salute and the Côtes du Rhone wine. Such items are likely to have been reserved well in advance. And when a clerk says something like, "Let me see if I have a Chivas in the back," he does not always happen to find the "last one."

If newcomers ask for previously reserved items, clerks say they are "out of stock" and try to sell them alternatives. And of course there are, at times, conflicts between regulars and clerks become apologetic:

Cu: Two more of these.

Cl: I have some but um saving some, saving a bottle, you want a couple of the Sichel instead?

Cu: Yes.

Cl: Okeh, because I'm saving some, I promised him some. I give you some you know.

Multi-Item Shopping is always an uncertain task when large numbers of items are involved no matter who purchases them. Ultimately all customers become uninformed customers because financial imitations do not allow them to pay attention to the qualities of the items they buy. No one can afford or is willing to pay the price of maintaining everyday guidelines of price and quality, and so they disappear. Customers frequently buy items they can never account for or even remember.

Hence, though Multi-Item Shopping can be an extended form of Conventional Shopping, it can easily and quickly overstep the bounds of Conventional Shopping.

Customers can avoid becoming uninformed only if they never have to buy large amounts of liquor. However, anyone, even a non-drinker, can at some time find himself buying liquor for a party at work or at home. Hence no one can say that he will never be in such a situation. For most people it is probably not an unusual situation no matter how infrequently they find themselves in it in a liquor store.

Multi-Item Shopping is the most troublesome form of shopping we have analyzed so far. Despite the problems encountered when large amounts of liquor are purchased, customers are usually not overwhelmed by it and clerks offer them effective assistance. There are three important reasons why this is possible.

First, expenses are typically easy to handle because even when not stated explicitly clerks and customers often know or have general ideas of upper limits. If no limits can be located clerks have a lot of experience with helping customers set them and with helping customers stay within them. On many occasions customers simply follow a clerk's advice on how much to spend and what to buy. And since most customers spend no more than about one hundred dollars on a party, clerks generally do not try to "sell" someone more than this amount.

Second, many social occasions are what we commonly call "office parties" or celebrations of the type which take place at work locations. The store never gets returns from these events. This is probably because leftovers are distributed amongst the participants after the party

is over, or they are given to close associates like "the crew," "the maintenance staff," etc.

In private homes, on the other hand, people are rarely very unsure of how many guests are coming and will have to be served. They can usually buy in such a fashion that a case or more of liquor will not be left over.

And third, liberal return and refund policies can be easily extended to all customers. They are easily extended because unused items can be resold and because large amounts of liquor, unless they are defective, are rarely returned anyway.

Consequently, customers and clerks can usually keep explicit as well as implicit financial limits well in view.

In sum, Multi-Item Shopping can be an extended form of Conventional Shopping, or a version of Quick-Stop Shopping. However, in the long run, it oversteps the bounds of both of these types of shopping.

In the following chapter I will analyze a form of shopping which does not, as Multi-Item Shopping does, begin with Conventional or Quick-Stop auspices.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONNOISSEUR SHOPPING: EXTENDED UNCONVENTIONAL SHOPPING

Not all customers who shop for liquor are satisfied with everyday levels of price and quality--or with any of the three, usual, standardized types of shopping analyzed so far. There are some customers who wish to have precise information about prices and qualities of liquor.

In this chapter I call these unusual customers "Connoisseurs." And the unconventional shopping they do I call "Connoisseur Shopping."

Connoisseurs can be seen daily buying one or two bottles of liquor to "test" or "try out." Most Connoisseurs are wine customers, though a few of them shop for other forms of liquor regularly.

In this chapter we will concentrate on the shopping of wine Connoisseurs since they are the most significant and noticeable group of Connoisseurs. The shopping they do involves extensive, long-term, ongoing work aimed at finding out as much as possible about wine. Clerks play a major role in this form of shopping.

Clerks and Connoisseurs continually explore the enormous variety of wines sold in the store. And they use the results of these explorations to make choices between items more understandable than is usually necessary. Consequently, the criteria they use to select wines are not generalizable and are closely related to the needs of particular customers.

This analysis will complete my study of the main forms of shopping. From here we will go on to compare them in a more critical framework in a penultimate chapter.

In the daily meetings of clerks and wine Connoisseurs there is an ongoing exploration, discovery and analysis of the qualities and characteristics of wine. This extensive exploration makes this form of shopping unconventional.

In this exploration of wines clerks and Connoisseurs act as if they can eliminate all problems with commodities. They assume that all problems with labels, prices and qualities can be comprehended. And they assume that they can clearly express their needs and choose the commodities which meet those needs.

To demonstrate this we must begin with what all customers and clerks easily acknowledge. This is that some customers know more about liquor than others, and that a few customers really know a lot about it. The members of this latter group I have already referred to as "Connoisseurs." Clerks are quick to admit that Connoisseurs know more than they do about many items. And both "ordinary" customers and clerks admire them for their "classy" discriminating taste.

The respect and admiration clerks and ordinary customers have for Connoisseurs is indicative of more than an appreciation of the knowledge they have. It points to an understanding of the kind of shopping they do.

Connoisseurs shop in ways that are oriented to overcoming more systematically and in greater depth problematic features of commodities. And the commodities Connoisseurs are specifically interested in are

the trickiest ones found in a liquor store. Hence Connoisseurs are not simply good "tasters"; in the first place they are good shoppers--closest, that is, to ideal shoppers.

The orientation to overcoming problematic features of commodities in the shopping of Connoisseurs is revealed in the care and caution they exercise when they buy wine. For example, Connoisseurs frequently buy unusual, little-known or very expensive wines. However, they do not buy large amounts of them all at once unless they are already familiar with them. They buy only one sample of an unknown wine at a time and they pay careful attention to its characteristics.

Connoisseurs also know precisely what kinds of flavors they like and, hence, exactly what to look for. They have tasted many wines and know which ones are suitable for gifts, or for various moods and occasions.

Connoisseurs use these practices to achieve two goals. First they want to overcome as many of the deceptions found in the labeling, advertising and pricing of wine as they possibly can. And second, they want items which as clearly and fully as possible meet their needs and expectations.

These two goals of shopping distinguish what Connoisseurs do from the shopping of all other, "ordinary" customers. Ordinary customers typically know about only a small variety of wines and when they buy unusual wines their mistakes are much less likely to be corrected. Taste and other qualities of wine are problems for ordinary customers, but not to the extent they are for Connoisseurs. Ordinary customers do not have the time, interest, or sometimes the money to do an ongoing analysis of their own needs and preferences, and how to satisfy them.

Connoisseurs need clerks to help them achieve their two basic goals. If they are really trying to overcome deceptive advertising and the like, they need the inside or backstage information clerks have about liquor companies and corporate practices. And if they want to express clearly their own needs as well as to meet those needs, they require clerks who are constantly on the lookout for the often hard-to-find items they want.

Clerks, therefore, must have some special knowledge and practices which complement the needs and practices of Connoisseurs. In short, they must know a lot about wines.

In this store one of the clerks, who is a part owner of the store, is especially adept at helping Connoisseurs. He can converse with them about major types of wine, important wine-growing regions and important characteristics of wine.

He is not, however, a Connoisseur or even much of a drinker. He drinks wine only occasionally and in general consumes little liquor of any kind. Since he is not a drinker he does not care about refining his own tastes, though he does have some preferences which he tells customers about.

All of this contributes to his standing as an Independent Expert. Though no customers call him an Independent Expert, this is the role he tries to play with all customers. Connoisseurs, however, especially need him in this capacity.

When acting as an Independent Expert a clerk's judgments about liquor are presumably not based on his need for liquor or upon his interpretations of the qualities of liquor. In this stance a clerk talks

about the needs of customers, or as we are discussing here, the needs of Connoisseurs in general.

When confronted by an actual Connoisseur the clerk treats this person as a particular example of a general type. The Connoisseur is a person who does not take his needs and interests in commodities for granted. Hence a clerk can only make recommendations about taste and other features of wine. Ultimately the customer defines and, in many cases, redefines his needs and preferences not on the basis of what is available but on the basis of his own choices.

To help Connoisseurs achieve their goals clerks have to give them up-to-date accounts of wines. Clerks must make refunds readily to these "special" customers. Sometimes items must be reserved or "saved" for Connoisseurs. And clerks can be expected to take the initiative in pointing out new wines, brands and importers.

Connoisseurs and clerks are usually on a first-name basis. And clerks are often well aware of the wines particular customers prefer. When Connoisseurs enter the store conversation about wine usually starts up quickly. It typically begins with talk about the wine a customer purchased on his or her last visit to the store. As a rule this talk is a report on how "good" a wine was, that is how sweet, dry, fruity, etc., as well as what it was served with and at what temperature it was served.

This type of discussion is often thorough and extensive. It is a necessary part of finding out about the unusual wines Connoisseurs shop for. Most of the wines they shop for are imports, which, for example, sometimes come from places that have not made or exported any wine previously.

I saw this happen when wines imported from Argentina were becoming available in New York for the first time. When they reached this liquor store few customers and none of the clerks knew anything about them. Even with French names like St. Emilion, Pinot Noir, and, of course, Chablis and Rosé, they were virtually unknown.

No one knew much about them because the grapes used to make them, though originally grown in France, take on different characteristics when cultivated elsewhere. So Connoisseurs had to do some work similar to what they had done to get to know about the versions of Pinot Noir, Chablis, etc., which come from Israel, Chile, and California.

In the conversations of Connoisseurs and clerks that are concerned with new wines, the language used to describe them becomes extremely problematic. Neither customers nor clerks can take for granted the meanings of such terms as sweet, dry and fruity. And they often point this out to one another.

They typically must deal with the contradictory experiences they and others have had with wine.

When, for example, Connoisseurs "try" wines at parties or in restaurants they frequently try to buy the same ones at the store. However, after getting the wines at the store they often return claiming that what they had elsewhere was completely different. They typically say they must have had a different brand, even though the label or name was similar to what they found in the store. Or, if it was definitely the same brand, it must have been from another year.

Sometimes Connoisseurs are correct when making these claims, but this is such a common occurrence they are obviously not always right.

Consequently clerks have become very careful with any customers who say they are looking for something they had in a restaurant. Clerks take care to emphasize that what they find in the store may be completely different because "Things always seem different at someone else's house," or "Anything tastes good at a party."

These cautions are also given to customers when they are looking for well-known imported wines. As I have observed, contradictory experiences occur even with wines like Lancers and Blue Nun which are known for their mass-produced consistency.

Clerks are also careful with all customers who ask for advice about wines. If a customer follows a clerk's advice he or she often holds the clerk responsible for a party punch, family gathering, etc. People return to the store angry when their expectations are not fulfilled and they sometimes blame the clerk for ruining a social occasion.

This problem is especially difficult to avoid with Connoisseurs. Since clerks and Connoisseurs are often very familiar with one another they sometimes assume they can reach agreement easily on choosing wines. This assumption, however, is quickly put to the test. And often both clerk and Connoisseur are surprised that what they thought was certainly a correct decision turned out to be very disappointing.

These kinds of errors and misunderstandings occur frequently in Connoisseur Shopping. Consequently a good deal of talk between clerks and Connoisseurs about the characteristics of wine is concerned with the errors and mistakes they both have made and hope to avoid.

This helps clerks and Connoisseurs to appreciate each other's needs and difficulties. To illustrate how this happens, we can turn to the following transcript:

Cu: Well you know when you're buying wine aa . . . you know it!  
You can take a hell of a risk! All of a sudden I ask you to  
order a couple of cases of wine.

C1: And then it . . .

Cu: I don't like it and I can't drink it.

C1: I ordered a case of Pouilly Fumé for a lady, and she tasted a  
bottle BEFORE!

Cu: Yeah.

C1: She didn't like it. She says it's sour. I had to take it  
back. She used one bottle. So that's how it is. But this  
is a very nice bottle. I want you to try it and see.

Cu: Thanks. . . . You know I had some Austin Nichols wine aa that  
they imported . . . aa they always have a pretty good selec-  
tion.

C1: They do. That's why, see when I buy wine or my partner we  
watch the sugar.

Cu: Yeah.

C1: Because some people don't like it. . . . They take it and if  
it's no good they don't take it. This . . .

Cu: Yeah.

C1: I liked it very much.

Cu: I got some well you know the last I got from you was Austin  
Nichols. I got, I don't know, all you had.

C1: What, all, aa, I can't get it any more.

Cu: You know that was reasonable in price but a good wine. . . .  
You know I'm not going to knock the trade, . . .

C1: Go ahead, you can do it!

Cu: . . . knock the business, but you know there's a lot of people who buy it by the price.

C1: That's right.

Cu: They'll look at four wines on the rack. One's four dollars, one's two dollars and one's six.

C1: What's the use of buying a bottle of wine you're not going to enjoy?

Cu: That's right, and so rather than if they don't know, they'll take the highest price and so this oh, this gotta, it's gotta taste better.

C1: No, no.

Cu: But that's all!

As the customer says at the beginning of this conversation, a lot of risk is involved in dealing with wine. Hence, the practices Connoisseurs and clerks develop for finding out about wines allow them to share the risks involved.

In the above conversation we can see that with Connoisseurs the possibility of returning items for a refund helps to cushion the impact of serious problems. It is understood that they take more risks with unusual items than most other customers do, and that liberal refund policies are required to make this possible.

Clerks, however, do not ask any Connoisseur who happens to be in the store to test any wine they need reports on, though a few customers are willing to try a wide variety of wines. Generally clerks will not, for example, show a new California Zinfandel to someone who buys only the imported versions.

Clerks and Connoisseurs also understand that one good or bad report does not say much about a wine. There are no key individuals who are always right or wrong. It is often noted in conversation that even though one Connoisseur returns a wine, another Connoisseur may come back to purchase a large quantity of it. As far as the clerks are concerned, many Connoisseurs must try a wine and report back to them on it before they will try to describe it to a particular Connoisseur who asks about it. If a Connoisseur asks a clerk what a wine is like which has not been tested sufficiently, the clerk will either say he does not know, or he will recount the few, often contradictory reports so far received.

When wines are checked out they are typically described in terms of taste characteristics. Initially terms like sweet, dry and ripe are used vaguely. And as time passes, and more work is done, they become more precise about which ones are very dry, too sweet, very heavy, etc.

Clerks and Connoisseurs do not spend much time talking about well-known wines like Blue Nun, Mateus and Bolla. With these wines there is a good deal of familiarity which all customers can be assumed to have. However, the new products from these companies must, of course, be tested like all other new products.

Middle- and upper-class persons are the most likely to be Connoisseurs. They are the customers who are most interested in imported wines, who actually buy the largest variety of wines, and who live nearby and can spend some time shopping in this store for them. In addition, they are the most likely to "read up" on them, to go to exhibitions and to find new wines while traveling in Europe.

This does not mean, however, that Connoisseurs buy only expensive wines. They often prefer some very cheap ones. And among the cheap wines many Connoisseurs prefer are Gallo Hearty Burgundy, Chablis, and a few other Gallo products. Some of the store's wealthiest customers purchase them regularly.

This may mean they are regular drinkers, or that they are using the wine only for lower-class company. However, many customers say that these particular wines are "really" very good. And Connoisseurs often assert that one does not have to be rich to be a Connoisseur.

In addition to choosing wines according to their taste characteristics, Connoisseurs often choose them on the basis of cooking qualities. When these Connoisseurs enter the store the clerks typically ask them how their beef burgundy turned out, or if they brought them one of the cherry tarts they made yesterday. Female customers do most of this kind of work.

However, during holiday periods newcomers, as well as Connoisseurs, and males as well as females, are interested in how to cook with wine. The work done by clerks and Connoisseurs then reveals its importance. Clerks easily recommend "cooking wines," and they even recommend recipes. Their confidence and competence is revealed in the following:

Cu: I came in here specifically for a quart of Bordeaux and I walked out with Hearty Burgundy!

Cl: A quart of Bordeaux.

Cu: Yes, you gave it to me.

Cl: A Hearty Burgundy is like a Bordeaux. Is that what you want?

Cu: Yeah. Why do they call it Burgundy?

Cl: What?

Cu: I wanted Bordeaux.

Cl: That's what it is!

Cu: Why call it Burgundy? Burgundy is equivalent to Bordeaux?

Cl: Bordeaux and Burgundy in Gallo, it's the same thing. You know it's a French name.

Cu: Right.

Cl: What are you going to use it for? Cooking?

Cu: For a tart.

Cl: That's what you use it for.

Cu: Sure?

Cl: Absolutely. Don't worry about it.

Cu: Okeh.

Cl: If it's no good bring it back. I'll eat the tart!

Cu: Haha.

Cl: Same thing when it comes to domestic wines, it's the same thing.

In this conversation a male clerk is telling a female customer, in effect, what kind of domestic wine to use in a tart. She is impressed with his confidence and does not really try to argue with him.

Clerks have some responsibility for knowing about everyday typifications of unusual wines, even for newcomers. Fortunately, most newcomers do not make very fine distinctions among wines. And even Connoisseurs do not expect a one-to-one correspondence between descriptive terms and the wines described. When clerks give advice to newcomers, however, they report not only on typical language used to describe wine

but on typical reactions of Connoisseurs to wine as well. Hence we often hear clerks say things like "My best customers buy the Folonari Soave," or "Most customers do not realize how good this is."

Sometimes new customers consider such statements to be made up or misleading, which they sometimes are. However, clerks make such statements every day because they are well supported by the achievements of Connoisseur Shopping. And, perhaps without realizing it, when newcomers ask for assistance they expect the competence and experience which these statements point to.

Connoisseurs help to make known and more visible less familiar wines and brands of wine. Connoisseurs often tell clerks about wines they have read about, tried or found in other places (e.g., Europe). There are a number of wines in highly visible locations throughout the store which have become popular in this fashion.

Consequently well-known brands are not always put up front where they can be easily found. Many of them are kept in hard-to-find places because they are well known. In this store Yago Sangria and Bolla Soave are two such items. Since customers usually assume that any store has these items, they ask for them if they cannot find them. This is what happens and no one appears to be discouraged by it.

Clerks and Connoisseurs are, therefore, often successful in locating "good" wines which all customers enjoy. The problems they must manage when doing this, however, are enormous. Imported wines are the most difficult commodities to shop for. And the number of them sold in this store makes Connoisseur Shopping extremely difficult.

We can appreciate what is involved here by turning to the

extremely problematic relationships between prices and qualities of items in this form of shopping.

The prices of imported wines are usually no indication of how "good" they are. For example, the store often acquires inexpensive wines which turn out to be just as "good" as those selling for higher prices. However, just when the inexpensive wines become popular, they are no longer available. Or by the time they are reacquired most people have forgotten about them.

Imported wines come from many countries and from many regions within the countries that export them. Importers move from one place to another picking out wines. Their choices are always changing and they are based on prices as well as on what is available. Hence, at a local store like the one we are studying, a Connoisseur can never be sure the wonderful two-dollar soave he had the week before will still be available the next time he goes to this store.

Prices for imported wines are higher than the prices of domestic wines. They are very expensive, as most of us are well aware, if they are "rare" items. But this store does not carry rare items, though it does have a few twenty- to thirty-dollar bottles of French wines and champagne.

Imported wines are, nevertheless, cheap and affordable for all customers since wines in general are the cheapest liquor one can buy. There are many two- and three-dollar imports which compete with similarly, though somewhat lower, priced American wines.

Wines, however, cannot be considered all at once the way hard liquors can be. When newcomers try to overlook distinctions between

imports and domestic wines problems are encountered, as the following shows:

Cu: Um . . . is this any good?

Cl: Yes!

Cu: Is it better than the Almadén Chablis?

Cl: It's different. One is a California wine, one is French.

Cu: Yeah.

Cl: And it's all a matter of taste. We've been selling it some. How could I tell you it's better? It's all a matter of taste.

Clerks avoid these questions because they complicate still more the confusions found with imported wines. Clerks can only help newcomers if they ask direct questions like the following:

Cu: Is this a dry wine?

Cl: Yes Miss.

Cu: It's not sweet?

Cl: Never with that one.

Cu: Alright, that's it.

Connoisseurs usually do not have to ask if a wine is sweet, and when they do they compare it to one they and the clerks are familiar with. When helping Connoisseurs find wines, clerks must use their knowledge of what Connoisseurs "like." That is, they must know something about the person as well as about the wine. So, if a Connoisseur examines a new version of what he usually buys, a clerk is quick to encourage or discourage him from buying it.

At this point we can summarize the main complexities of Connoisseur Shopping. They are ambiguous taste qualities of wines,

unreliable brands and numerous types of wine which no one can totally comprehend.

Many problems result from this confusion. One of them is a high rate of returns. The rear of the store is always cluttered with bottles that have been opened, their contents partially consumed and returned to the store for refunds.

Clerks are accustomed to giving refunds but they do not always give them cheerfully. They often suspect that someone did not properly store, chill or serve a wine. Or they feel customers return a wine claiming a bottle is "bad," not because it really is "bad," but because they simply do not like it. Connoisseurs often admit they have made mistakes and clerks give them refunds anyway. But with newcomers, or even with conventional shoppers who are regulars, they sometimes have loud, angry arguments.

The ongoing work of Connoisseur Shopping allows for these errors, but in some cases even with Connoisseurs there are arguments.

Connoisseurs also get angry at times when wines they like are no longer available. I observed this happen once with a wine from Chile.

A man came into the store looking for a Chilean wine he had recently purchased. He asked the clerk for it but the clerk told him it was probably sold out and that the importer no longer had that wine. The customer insisted that some of it must still be in the store. He continued looking around the store, carefully examining every bottle of Chilean wine. In addition, he waited for an assistant to explore the basement, and for the second owner of the store to come to work so that he might also be questioned. After an hour of futile attempts to find the wine, he left the store empty handed.

An endless quest for individual satisfaction is characteristic of Connoisseur Shopping. It is the main reason that relationships with clerks are so important. Connoisseurs rely on clerks to reserve wine for them so situations of this type do not develop. Unfortunately clerks cannot keep track of all Connoisseurs at all times and dissatisfaction is unavoidable in many cases.

This completes our discussion of the major forms of shopping. In the next chapter we will consider all of them more theoretically and we will focus on the goals and ideals which each form of shopping tends toward.

## CHAPTER SIX

IDEAL CONCEPTIONS OF SHOPPING: TOWARDS A THEORY  
OF THE SOCIAL BASIS OF RESISTANCE IN MASS CONSUMPTION

This final chapter of my thesis is concerned with the social core of resistance in mass consumption. It is a critical analysis of the everyday world of shopping.

Mass consumption is a necessity of modern capitalism, and it must be a dynamic and expansive part of capitalism's social universe. In the words of one critic,

. . . the primary social bond is the identification of the self-interest of the individual, intent upon maximizing the satisfaction of his needs, with the interest of society as a whole, which is to maximize total productive output. In concrete terms, the well-being of every individual is thought to be identical with the rise of the Gross National Product.<sup>1</sup>

However, a large effort is required to maintain this dynamism and expansiveness so that we do not come to doubt our "abundance." And, as another critic shows,

Appropriating the lingo and styles of the New Left, the counter-culture, feminism, neo-agrarianism, ethnicity, drug-vision and other phenomena, the advertising industry, seeking markets, reflects the spirit but not the cutting edge of this resistance.<sup>2</sup>

The "cutting edge" of our resistance is not, however, eliminated by advertising. It appears, for one, at the point at which we confront capitalist commodities. Like the pervasive fetishization of commodities under capitalism, I argue in this concluding chapter, sporadic, everyday resistance to such fetishization is an important part of the social basis of mass consumption.

Our analysis of shopping has revealed a typology of resistance in four main types of shopping: Quick-Stop Shopping, Conventional Shopping, Multi-Item Shopping, and Connoisseur Shopping. In this chapter I will treat these forms of shopping as ideal, taken-for-granted forms of mass consumption. With the help of these ideal forms, customers orient themselves to commodities in a capitalist, profit-seeking society--and to partial, sporadic resistance to it.

To put my main conclusion somewhat differently, these ideal forms each have two essential elements. First, they represent ideal forms of interaction for acquiring commodities. And second, they represent ideal forms of resistance to commodities. The bulk of this chapter is concerned with this latter element.

The preceding chapter has already set the stage for my analysis. In it we encountered the optimal and the least partial attempt on the part of customers to resist capitalist-type commodities. We found that, in Connoisseur Shopping, commodities are not passed over casually; they are examined in depth. As I noted in that chapter, the ideal Connoisseurs constitute the most ideal of all shoppers. They do not use everyday guidelines of price and quality. Instead, as much as circumstances permit, they devise their own critical standards.

Other customers admire Connoisseurs not because they "know" what is "good," but rather because no one tells them what is "good." They look at more than advertising, packaging, and prices, and they do not "settle" for anything that is "out there."

From its inception to its happy or bitter conclusion, Connoisseur Shopping resists capitalist-type commodities most of all. The

ultimate--or ideal--form of Connoisseur Shopping accepts least both capitalist commodities and the mass consumption of them necessary to maintain capitalism. It ranks freedom of choice and human needs above commodities. This is why I view it as the most ideal form of mass consumption. All customers take for granted this ideal form of mass consumption, though only Connoisseurs actually orient themselves to achieving it.

The other types of shopping preserve as much of this resistance as possible. As ideal forms of mass consumption they allow customers to put forth varying amounts of resistance to capitalist-type commodities.

In orienting themselves to these ideal forms, customers try to optimize their resistance. They use as much critical judgment as possible, and they try to avoid being drawn into the continual expansion of consumption.

In other words, none of the ideal forms is devoted to the quantitative expansion of consumption. At the most, they allow only for qualitative expansion. Consequently, much of advertising and other capitalist devices for increasing consumption tell us, and try to make us test their claims as often as possible, that commodities are "really new," or qualitatively different from what has come before them.

This is, in outline form, the culminating point of my study. Until now I have relied on the partial use of three sociological methodologies: ethnomethodology, ethnography, and phenomenology. As I show in this chapter none of these approaches by itself, or in the ways I have combined some of their elements so far, can help me analyze the larger problem of mass consumption.

A shift to macro-level analysis means that buying liquor-- liquor in particular--only serves to exemplify aspects of a larger phenomenon. In that larger phenomenon commodities in general are the material objects under consideration. And acquiring commodities throughout our society is the most important matter. Hence I will turn to Marxian theory of a critical, unorthodox kind to analyze ideal forms of mass consumption. Critical theory will allow me to locate the grounds of resistance to mass consumption. And it allows me to show how everyday economic decision-making in capitalist society may be viewed as a form of resistance to fetishizing--taking for granted--the exchange value, or the capital-producing aspect of commodities.

#### Section 1: Ideal Conceptions of Mass Consumption

Beginning with Harold Garfinkel's ethnomethodology, I viewed the problem of this study as a commonly encountered task of everyday life. This approach allowed me to demonstrate that the everyday side of mass consumption depends on taken-for-granted rules, recipes, and other strategies used by people who take part in it.

My major accomplishment in using ethnomethodology has been to show that as we proceed from Quick-Stop Shopping to Conventional Shopping and finally to Connoisseur Shopping, the rules for social relations make interaction increasingly critical of and resistant to capitalist commodities. At least ideally, in Connoisseur Shopping customers and clerks never doubt the taken-for-granted rule that all capitalist commodities must be optimally resisted.

I have not, however, placed a primary emphasis on constitutive rules as the sole source of resistance to capitalist commodities. This

is because such a focus would lead to an overemphasis on efficiency, casualness, routinization, and other uncritical features of mass consumption. Resistance is not always casual or efficient, and it is difficult to routinize as we will see later on. Consequently I have not done a complete ethnomethodology of the everyday side of mass consumption.

Another approach I used, which was ethnography, helped me to present in some detail the social microcosm of mass consumption which could be found in a particular liquor store. This liquor store has some features commonly found in other capitalist enterprises that deal with alcohol consumption.<sup>3</sup> There are many customers who are "regulars," who are familiar with the clerks and with details about how this store is operated. These customers help in many ways to operate the store and they give the everyday side of mass consumption a familiar ongoing character.

Regular drinkers are another important part of this social microcosm. They are not, however, "mass" consumers, either here or in other places. They do not account for most of, or even a large part of, this store's profit. As is well known, liquor stores, and most other capitalist enterprises, acquire the bulk of their yearly profits during holiday rush periods. At these times they are far more dependent on large numbers of newcomers than they are on regular customers, regular drinkers and even on people who live or work nearby.

Mass consumption and its relation to profit in capitalist society is a reality which no one can escape even in this relatively small store. Hence, contrary to what ethnography by itself might suggest, this store is more than a small social microcosm of clerks, regulars, and a few newcomers.

The one thing which all customers face in this store, and in all other stores, is the capitalist-type commodity. This commodity, however, is more than the simple, material object that orthodox or vulgar Marxists might make of it. In addition to its material features, it has additional features which only capitalism can give it. It has a package, a price, a brand name, and perhaps some other advertising matter attached to it. All of this is part of it, but is no indication of what it "really" is.

So far I have treated the types of social interaction used in managing the capitalist-type commodity as what the phenomenological sociologist Alfred Schutz calls "Typical Constructs."<sup>4</sup> In this section I treat these typical constructs as something more than types of shopping. I treat them as ideal forms of mass consumption.

I call them ideal forms of mass consumption because they are not directed at the particular items found in one liquor store. Instead, they are directed at the capitalist-type commodity which is found everywhere in our society. Ideal forms of mass consumption are what customers orient themselves to when dealing with the capitalist-type commodity. In thus orienting themselves, they resist up to a point the impetus to ever-increasing levels of consumption.

These ideal forms, however, are different from what Max Weber called "Ideal Types."<sup>5</sup> For Weber,

The construction of a purely rational course of action . . . serves the sociologist as a type ('ideal type') which has the merit of clear understandability and lack of ambiguity. By comparison with this it is possible to understand the ways in which action is influenced by irrational factors of all sorts, such as affects and errors, in that they account for the deviation from the line of conduct which would be expected on the hypothesis that the actions were purely rational.<sup>6</sup>

In discussing ideal forms I am, as Weber suggests, hypothesizing about social action. However, I am using hypotheses which I view as derived from the viewpoint of everyday life. They reflect Schutz's contention that "Human behavior is . . . already meaningful when it takes place, and is already intelligible at the level of daily life . . ."7

For Schutz models of social behavior must demonstrate, as I have in previous chapters by means of a focus on the social frameworks of customer-clerk interaction, the "Intersubjective"<sup>8</sup> character of social life. A researcher's models must fit into typical contexts of experience where people can bring, share in and emerge with similar perspectives.

Hence the researcher or observer cannot treat everyday life, as the Weberian model suggests, as a clash between a rational viewpoint and a less-than-rational reality. For an observer like Schutz or myself, everyday life is a meeting of, a working out of, and a creation of similar perspectives and future action. This point, however, takes me beyond Schutz as well as Weber.

Unlike both, my ideal forms of mass consumption reflect the core macro-problem of mass consumption in capitalist society: the unity and the opposition between use values and fetishized exchange values of commodities. Since consumers have no control over production, they must engage in an ongoing struggle to de-fetishize commodities. Hence at this point in time in capitalist society my ideal forms represent optimal formulas for resistance to capitalist commodities. They represent currently shared understandings about how to overcome and look beyond the material reality of capitalist commodities in whatever forms they are found.

Ideal forms of mass consumption are what Ewen refers to as a "politics of daily life."<sup>9</sup> In a mundane and uncrystallized form, they are a critical politics of the everyday side of mass consumption.

This mundane sort of critical politics is what constitutes the social basis of resistance in mass consumption.

The highest ideal of this critical politics is a form of mass consumption that actively opposes the capitalist-type commodity. It pursues the ultimate goals of all customers: it strips the capitalist-type commodity down to its essential features and lays bare all capitalist additions to human-made goods.

Commodities are stripped down in a form of interaction that allows for the persistence of deceptive prices, packages, etc., while at the same time enabling customers to uncover all attempts to deceive them. Once commodities can be seen for what they are, they can be viewed as demystified objects for consumption. Customers can then freely express their needs and preferences and confidently choose commodities which will satisfy them.

Speaking in terms of the optimal ideal form, it is important to realize that freely expressed needs and preferences are part of freely made choices. As an ideal, customers are the judges of what kinds of commodities they need, how many they need, and of what is good and bad about them. They do not make these judgments simply because commodities happen to have certain characteristics. They make these judgments because it is their prerogative to make them and because ultimately customers can expect commodities to appear which have the characteristics they want them to have. Needs are ideally perfectly satisfied in relation to the customer.

To achieve these ultimate goals, interaction requires the participation of persons who perform two ideal roles. It requires ideal consumers and ideal clerks. The ideal consumer is a Connoisseur and the ideal clerk is an Independent Expert.

A Connoisseur puts forth the highest level of resistance to the capitalist-type commodity. He does not, as we often assume, represent a high standard of "taste" which all of us can "look up to." Instead, he represents ideal levels of need and preference which cannot be wholly satisfied by capitalist-type commodities. A Connoisseur strives for levels of need and preference that can be satisfied only by products that are truly fit for consumption.

The most important part of the role of Independent Expert is that a clerk does not take the role of a particular consumer who will actually consume the product. Instead, he uses whatever he knows about capitalist-type commodities to help Connoisseurs in their struggle against them. Such clerks are perfect collaborators with Connoisseurs in their resistance to mass consumption.

In addition, clerks do not have to "push" commodities on Connoisseurs, or to trick them into spending money in order for the store to make a profit. Profits naturally result from the ideal form of interaction in which Connoisseurs find what they want. When Connoisseurs find what they want they shop regularly and frequently buy large amounts of their favorite commodities.

Hence, for the ideal form of mass consumption, if a store is to make a profit, all it needs is a lot of satisfied Connoisseurs.

In sum, we can see that when an Independent Expert and a

Connoisseur meet, they work together and each one makes a specific contribution to interaction. These contributions are complementary in that the ideal performance of each role requires the presence of at least two persons as well as the past experience of many interactions. As this daily, ongoing activity occurs in its ideal form, all capitalist-type commodities under consideration are stripped of the qualities that only capitalism can give them. When this is done there is no interference, ideally, or at least theoretically, from advertising, profit motives of liquor companies or the profit motive of the store.

Most customers are not oriented to the ideal form of mass consumption when shopping, though Connoisseurs are clearly esteemed for being so oriented. The predominant form of mass consumption is derived from Conventional Shopping. It is the form of mass consumption most customers orient themselves to when shopping.

In the ideal form of Conventional mass consumption we are no longer dealing with the highest levels of need and satisfaction. Instead we are dealing with typical levels of need, typical levels of satisfaction and, therefore, customers who are ultimately Typical Consumers.

Typical Consumers are oriented to doing what everyone can do with little difficulty. They are oriented to buying the most ordinary capitalist-type commodities which can be used in the usual, everyday ways in which most people use them. Typical Consumers readily buy unusual capitalist-type commodities but they buy few of them and generally only the ones they are already familiar with.

For Typical Consumers the essential qualities of capitalist-

type commodities are not as well isolated as they are for Connoisseurs. Qualities of commodities are instead located in general price and quality ranges which serve as everyday guidelines for deciding what to buy.

Typical Consumers are not oriented to high levels of need and preference because they are often not buying commodities for themselves. And when they are buying commodities for themselves they do not want to spend time working out high levels of need and preference as Connoisseurs do.

As nothing else does, everyday price and quality guidelines make resistance to capitalist-type commodities possible. Here the guidelines tell customers what they are getting in the cheapest as well as in the most expensive commodities. And ideally customers use the guidelines to determine what are the important distinctions among capitalist-type commodities so they can see if the most expensive ones are sufficiently distinctive as to be worth higher prices.

This means that in terms of ordinary uses all capitalist-type commodities are viewed as consumable. But why they are "in themselves" consumable is ultimately more important than how. They are consumable "in themselves," only if they answer to the needs of Typical Consumers as expressed in the guidelines.

As we have seen, clerks are essential to making customers completely aware of, and for updating them on, everyday price and quality guidelines. In addition they are helpful in telling customers how to consume capitalist-type commodities.

Here, as with Connoisseurs, clerks are viewed as experts. They have a fund of general and specific information about commodities that a wide range of customers can call upon.

Clerks are not, however, "Independent" Experts. They cannot completely meet the needs of customers of this type even though some customers expect them to. Clerks sell commodities and make money on the basis of satisfying the everyday needs of as many typical consumers as possible.

Consequently, in this ideal form of Conventional mass consumption customers do not buy large amounts of commodities. They resist capitalist-type commodities by purchasing small numbers of what are usually the most ordinary and familiar ones. Because of this, whatever Capitalism adds to these commodities is usually irrelevant to their essential characteristics.

Dissatisfaction then becomes tolerable even though it is a common occurrence. It is tolerable because errors are usually conspicuous, easily correctable and not economically damaging. And when customers limit their purchases completely to those they are thoroughly familiar with, they eliminate the immediate need to resist capitalist-type commodities. This is the case in the Quick-Stop form of mass consumption.

In Quick-Stop mass consumption the primary ideal is the efficient use of time. And ideal customers and clerks are easy to locate for it. An ideal customer is someone whose needs, preferences and orientations to commodities are unexplicated in interaction. This person may be a Connoisseur or a Typical Consumer. In either case only he knows why he wants what he is buying and what alternatives are acceptable to him. No time is ever taken to explain the reasons for making any choices or substitutions, and it is taken for granted that customers know as much as they want to know about particular commodities beforehand. The only

important information for Quick-Stop mass consumption is the quantity, price, brand name and, often, the location in the store of the commodity a customer wants.

Ideally, clerks recognize persons who are the most regular consumers. This means that as soon as a clerk sees a regular he immediately recalls the important information for a quick interaction. He gives the customer the correct brand, quantity, etc., that is required without waiting for a specific request. In an ideal interaction only one commodity is purchased and the physical movements of customer and clerk are complementary. Interaction is completed in a matter of seconds.

Quick-Stop mass consumption does not resist capitalist-type commodities in a direct fashion. Customers are not oriented to acquiring new information about commodities, and the ways they choose them are not serious concerns of interaction. Customers are oriented to an ideal of using, as routinely and as effortlessly as possible, the knowledge they already have about commodities. Mass consumption is thereby resisted because they never take chances. Customers cannot be "sold" more than they want to buy and they cannot be "sold" the "newest" commodities.

Consequently a Quick-Stop is the ideal way to "pick up" something at a store. It allows customers to fit mass consumption into restricted time periods like lunch hours and coffee breaks. They do not worry about capitalist additions like advertising and packaging. And they are, therefore, rarely dissatisfied with what they buy. The ideals of both Connoisseur and Conventional mass consumption can be easily preserved in a Quick-Stop.

In Multi-Item mass consumption, lastly, the ideals of other forms of shopping are achievable. Yet ultimately these ideals are not preservable here. The reason for this is that money problems become unmanageable.

As we have seen, each ideal form of mass consumption has an ideal form of interaction. So far, in each case, money has not been a problem. In the most ideal form of shopping money is no problem because customers do not buy large amounts of liquor and because prices are not indications of qualities of commodities. Theoretically, even poor people can be Connoisseurs. In Conventional mass consumption customers can always find out the general "ratings" of what they are buying, regardless of how much they spend. And in a Quick-Stop, no one buys something new or strange according to any criteria.

In Multi-Item mass consumption, however, there is no ideal form of interaction and there are no criteria for judging commodities. Both customers and clerks are overwhelmed by economic limits. No matter how well they manage to stay within financial limits, those limits are no indication of how well they have dealt with the problems that have appeared. The amount of money spent is no indication of how good or bad the commodities are which have been chosen. And it is no indication of how well any other problems have been handled.

Hence the only way to cope with mass consumption without resisting capitalist-type commodities is to limit the amounts of money spent as much as possible. As we have seen, in Multi-Item Shopping this is done by all customers, including the wealthiest ones.

My analysis of the ideal forms of mass consumption has reached

its conclusion. As I have argued, from it the social basis of mass consumption can be seen as a form of resistance. It is directed at capitalist commodities and at ever-increasing levels of mass consumption. We can now turn to the implications of this analysis for a theory of the social basis of resistance in mass consumption.

Section 2: Towards a Theory of the Social Basis  
of Resistance in Mass Consumption

Though the present form of social life does not allow us to escape capitalist commodities, it certainly does not prevent us from resisting them. In reality the present inhabitants of capitalist society never fully accept capitalist-type commodities. As a critic put it, ". . . the inhabitant of capitalist society is enmeshed in a web made up of commodity goods and commodity services from which there is little possibility of escape except through partial or total absence from social life as it now exists."<sup>10</sup>

Hence my purpose in this last section is twofold. First, I will show how my analysis of the ideal forms of mass consumption contradicts some of the common viewpoints found on this subject. And second, I will show how it points to a different kind of theoretical formulation.

The first problem I must deal with is an obvious one. It is clear that what I have shown in my analysis of mass consumption reveals the weak as well as the strong points of resistance to it. Hence I must begin by turning to its weak points so we can see some of the reasons why capitalism may be able to control it.

My analysis of ideal forms reveals that a major obstacle to the expression of human needs in capitalist society is the capitalist-

type commodity. By itself this kind of commodity is not very threatening. However, its seeming abundance and continual transformation are what make it an obstacle to the expression of human needs.

I am referring here to what Braverman calls a "Product Cycle."<sup>11</sup> With this term Braverman points not only to the mass production of, but to the continual invention of, new capitalist-type commodities. Hence, before long, even familiar commodities like liquor and "health food" undergo changes and, not unexpectedly, radical transformations.

As my analysis of the ideal forms of mass consumption has shown, all mass consumption begins with capitalist-type commodities and not with the free expression of human needs. In reality no one ever manages to strip down to their essential features many capitalist-type commodities beyond those that are easily and currently comprehensible to anyone.

This is true even for Connoisseurs. Connoisseurs may manage to strip many commodities down to their essential features. But as soon as this is done "new" commodities appear to replace the old ones. Connoisseurs, as well as all other consumers, never get past capitalist-type commodities to a point where needs can be freely expressed.

This predominance of capitalist-type commodities is, therefore, also a problem for Quick-Stop mass consumption. In its ideal form a Quick-Stop only preserves and does not provide any grounds for the ideals of other forms of mass consumption. So when commodities change, the concealed social basis of a Quick-Stop is made apparent. Consumers must then resort to the other forms of mass consumption and reconstitute the social basis of a Quick-Stop in them. Hence the Quick-Stop form of mass consumption does not eliminate resistance, though it does conceal it.

Resistance to capitalist-type commodities is an ongoing struggle. It is not limited to isolated encounters between clerks and Connoisseurs. Rather it is part of all encounters with capitalist-type commodities.

We can now see exactly why resistance takes place. In capitalist society human needs are subordinate to capitalist-type commodities.

No one can be a Connoisseur at all times. The seeming abundance of and the continual transformation of commodities forces consumers to orient themselves most of the time only to the most conventional expressions of need. Hence human needs are allowed only crude, if any, expression in relation to capitalist-type commodities.

Despite this, capitalism must contend with the reality that the social basis of mass consumption is oriented to a qualitative and not to a quantitative expression of human needs. This is why, as Ewen demonstrates, capitalism relies on a massive array of advertising strategies to convince us that commodities represent qualitative change. It thus puts into its commodity forms notions of progress, "improvement of the human condition" and the like.

In order to keep resistance under control these strategies are essential elements of capitalist-type commodities. Nothing can be produced that does not have them. They represent capitalism's control over the names, definitions and the very substance of the material objects that are consumed.

Ideal forms of mass consumption are necessary so that we can reconstitute as much as possible the inhuman forms that material objects

have in capitalist society. Ideal forms are used as mundane, small scale orientations of resistance. Much of the time we hardly notice how little we accept of what capitalism gives us and how we try to appropriate an optimum of social space in which to freely express our needs.

To turn now from my last section's first point to the second, a theory of the social basis of mass consumption can thus treat everyday life in capitalist society as a form of politics. It begins with analyzing how small-scale social life deals with the material reality of capitalism, and it ends with the broader political implications of this analysis.<sup>12</sup>

Hence this study has shown that theories of political and social change should not ground expressions of human need in macro-type concepts which resemble the mass-type commodities we already have. There is no real identity between people's needs and commodities. William Leiss makes this same point: ". . . the cohesiveness of the whole is maintained through the ruling socialization pattern which encourages persons to interpret their needs solely as needs for commodities."<sup>13</sup>

When we turn to the everyday side of mass consumption, we find that the small group of people whom I call Connoisseurs are radically opposed to an identity of needs and commodities. As Bruce Brown argues, small groups can, at times, play ". . . a key role since they can serve two tasks at the same time. They stand outside of the very form of life that represses and fragments individuality. And they can at the same time be both subversive and therapeutic."

Though Connoisseurs and consumers in general do not appear to

be members of the same group, the social basis of mass consumption is a social space in which consumers orient themselves to something outside of the material reality of capitalism. In terms of resistance to commodities, they stand united far more often than sociologists or social critics tend to observe. This social space, unity and resistance to commodities, can be looked for in all spheres of daily life. My study has provided us with a framework that helps us to analyze how we try to impress our needs upon commodities wherever such social space can be constituted.

This framework helps us, in short, to view differently macro- and micro-explanations of mass consumption in modern America.

As Ewen points out, resistance is recognized by the large economic forces of capitalism. Specifically, the kind of resistance I have discussed is recognized by the fact that "Ads mirror the widespread judgment that mass produced goods are junky and unhealthy."<sup>14</sup> This widespread judgment has its origins in the social basis of mass consumption.

My analysis of ideal forms links this judgment up with a larger analysis of mass consumption. I have shown that it is grounded not in "idle talk" but in all of our orientations to commodities. It is not the endpoint of our reactions to commodities but is instead the starting point of resistance.

In this way my study as a whole points towards the broader as well as more specific dimensions of mass consumption.

Notes

<sup>1</sup>William Leiss, The Limits to Satisfaction (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1976), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>Stuart Ewen, Captains of Consciousness (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), p. 218.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, Sherri Cavan, Liquor License (Chicago: Aldine, 1966), and James P. Spradley and Brenda Mann, The Cocktail Waitress (New York: John Wiley, 1975).

<sup>4</sup>Alfred Schutz, Collected Papers, Volume I, ed. Maurice Natanson (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), p. 7.

<sup>5</sup>Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, trans. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: Free Press, 1969), p. 92.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Alfred Schutz, The Phenomenology of the Social World, trans. George Walsh and Frederick Lehnert (Illinois: Northwestern University, 1967), p. 10.

<sup>8</sup>Alfred Schutz, Collected Papers, Volume I, pp. 10-14.

<sup>9</sup>Stuart Ewen, Captains of Consciousness, p. 219.

<sup>10</sup>Harry Braverman, Labor and Monopoly Capital (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), p. 281.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>William Leiss, The Limits to Satisfaction, p. 92.

<sup>13</sup>Bruce Brown, Marx, Freud, and the Critique of Everyday Life (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), p. 172. See also George Fischer, Ways to Self Rule (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1978).

<sup>14</sup>Stuart Ewen, Captains of Consciousness, p. 219.

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