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Abstract

This article develops a critique of Hamilton and Dennis's book Affluenza. In recognising many of the strengths of the book in terms of its focus on Australia's consumerist culture, the article nonetheless outlines a range of significant shortcomings in its argument, not least the tendency to overstate the prevalence of consumerist values, the narrow interpretation of what constitutes 'consumerism', the flawed assumptions over marketing, savings and 'downsizing', and the range of culturally loaded assumptions that underpin the text. In asserting that affluence rather than poverty is the main issue in Australia, Hamilton and Dennis tend to sweep aside deep and prolonged inequities that are characteristic of contemporary Australian society.

Keywords: Consumerism, Downshifting, Affluence, Poverty, Australia

Introduction

This article offers a critical reading of Hamilton and Dennis's (2005) book, *Affluenza*. We argue that despite its popularity and immensely seductive line of argument the book reveals a deep obsession with consumption and consumerism that ultimately fails to fully capture the supposed realities of everyday life in Australia. Moreover, in concerning themselves with the culture of consumption Hamilton and Dennis exhibit a disregard for the entrenched nature of socio-economic inequalities and power differentials in Australian society, ignoring for instance the differentiated nature of income and wealth inequalities. In essence, *Affluenza* is a middle class baby-boomer's manual for personal redemption that turns a blind eye to those populations on the economic margins of Australian society. It suggests choice and freedom for those who can afford it, and glosses over entrenched inequities in Australia as irrelevant to the anti-excess culture and political struggle (especially in relation to the ideological orientations of the Australian Labour Party). Also, Hamilton and Dennis largely ignore Indigenous Australia and construct a somewhat patriarchal and ethnocentric view of family life that privileges the nuclear family over other family formations. Their thesis fits neatly into a

tradition of cultural scepticism and aesthetic critique offering little in terms of how an alternative world might be constructed. Before examining Hamilton and Dennis's thesis in a little more detail we briefly examine the system of production and consumption, and associated cultural nexus that they are attacking.

Consumption and capitalism?

One of the most remarkable and enduring features of market capitalism (and its more recent corporate manifestations) – that is, the socio-economic system of privately owned, decentralised production based on the pursuit of profit – has been its ability to withstand the many critical assaults upon it. At times, the system has buckled through recession and depression, peaks and troughs, and doubt and ridicule. Only rarely has capitalism collapsed entirely under the weight of revolutionary ferment and the impassioned desire for change. Revolutions, counter-cultural movements and individual and collective resistances of various kinds have served to highlight the antipathies to which capitalism has been subjected. But despite this, the current alliances forged between government, multinational corporations and the corporate media, and the complex architecture of myths, images and symbols have served to give the new globalised version of capitalism its current strength and form .

Over the years, critical assaults on capitalism have come in many different forms, ranging from the apparent material contradictions and spiritual malaise identified in the nineteenth century by Karl Marx and others, through to more recent commentaries on the hidden and yet persuasive aspects of consumerism, the promotion of individualism, the tendency to excess and waste, and, of course, significant harm to the environment – which, incidentally, is *not* a problem of capitalism *per se*. Yet it is in the domain of personal ethics, aesthetics and spiritual life that critics have most successfully identified shortcomings in the *cultural nexus* of market capitalism.

By cultural nexus we refer to the ways in which the mandarins of market capitalism – ideologues, politicians, corporate chiefs, media moguls and so forth - have successfully ensured our active engagement with the present system, despite the resistance of many to it. Our engagement with this system, our relationship with it, is of course contingent on our own ideologies and values, our pragmatic desires, and what we think of a system based on liberal notions of 'freedom' and 'liberty' (Klein, 2007). The emergence of the New Right in the early 1980s took these antiquated notions and re-packaged them into an aggressive individualism that found expression in many western

countries, including Australia. Here we find the market elevated to a sacred place befitting the demands and expectations of high octane global capitalism (Elliott & Lemert 2005). Yet notwithstanding proclamations about the 'end of history' (Fukuyama 1992) and claims that 'there is no alternative' (Thatcher 1983) to the capitalist way of life, it appears opposition to this system in terms of its general and specific effects has gathered pace over recent times (Klein, 2007).

From the current work of commentators like Ross Gittins (2007) and Richard Eckersley (2005) through to the philosophical forays of Charles Taylor (2004) and the Dalai Lama (The Dalai Lama 1989) to the promoters of the 'slow' and 'anti-globalisation' movements (see Klein, 2007), we witness criticism heaped on the ability of market capitalism to deliver happiness, sense of community and personal and social fulfilment. To the contrary: this system is blamed for producing the very conditions that draw us apart: fragmented communities, eroded meaningful relationships, denuded spiritual connectedness and precious little purpose and meaning (Schor 1998).

But crucially, it is the enculturation and internalisation of those aspects of 'the system', its individualism, its celebration of (over)consumption and excess, its call to acquisition and competition that most attracts the ire of critics (Schor 1998; Tan, P 2004). Accordingly, capitalist culture is considered to have imported into the collective soul values and beliefs that mould our identities, shape who we are, and how we relate to each other and the wider world (Etzioni 1998; York 2004). Its advocates steer us, cleverly and compellingly, into a 'hyper reality' in which the world is created as internalised myths, images and symbols that delineate who we are or who we think we ought to be (Etzioni 1998). It is a system also that is often predicated on the repression of threading or resistant populations and which accumulates vast differentiated wealth through the violent process of dispossession (Klein 2007).

The emergence over the past few decades of new age, personal growth, self development and other movements of 'self awareness' and 'spiritual enlightenment' suggest the search for meaning and purpose, and happiness and fulfilment, are very much present in the social body (Etzioni 1998; Schor 1998; Tan, P 2004). Equally, in private domains we negotiate meanings of materialism and acquisition and make sense of these through our relationships with others and ourselves (Etzioni 1998). We are not robotic dopes or cultural sponges. Yet at the same time, much as we might be opposed to the cultural nexus of market capitalism we are absorbed by it, we indulge in it, live in and through it (Etzioni 1998; Schor 1998; Tan, P 2004). What appears as rebellious – punk, eco-friendly toilets and even 'downshifting' – soon

becomes the vehicle for the development of new 'wants' and 'needs', and therefore new expanded consumerist markets. It often feels as if there is no real escape for most of us, rather constant process of realignment or re-positioning in relation to the lure and challenges of a rapacious system. Few of us ever really drop out; rather, we drop into other places and cultural spaces only to discover that we have not escaped at all. There are also all those existential conundrums: what do we consider essential in our lives, who is prepared to give up what for what, or do we just live with what we have and try to not to over-indulge in the material world? What about those who need and want more? Where are the lines of living less materially to be drawn?

Post-modernism has in many ways compounded our collective and individual uncertainties by casting doubt on notions of truth, by evoking relativism through a submission to endless difference – all without really offering us an ethics for engagement with each other or a means of addressing the injustices present in our world. Indeed, post modernism has been both a liberating and deeply conservative body of thought for some that has also generally not served to offer a lived counterpoint to many of the materialist values associated with market capitalism for others and is criticised because its proponents often refuse to defend or justify it (Chomsky 1995). Despite all the theoretical play, the elitist and obscure language, the radicalism of endless difference, it appears that the inequalities and injustices in the world continue unabated (Best & Kellner 1991).

More depressing perhaps are the links drawn between capitalism, secularism and humanism by sociologist John Carroll (2001) who sees in the current state of things a deep, nihilistic and possibly terminal void of materialist values and beliefs. Carroll considers western values as the harbinger of all sorts of nasty possibilities, including that of terrorism (2002). But Carroll, like many other cultural conservatives, offers no real or credible answers to the material and spiritual challenges posed by market capitalism other than to appeal to nebulous higher order. And herein is *the* problem that confronts perhaps most of those who oppose market capitalism and all that it entails: there is little or no clarity about how another world might be constituted. Another world *is* possible but what the hell does it look like? Moreover, there is little agreement about how or whether we should engage the astonishing capacity of market capitalism to produce and consume, and how we might develop alternative arrangements that are more equitable, fair and just – and more attuned to human worth and happiness (Monbiot 2003).

Enter Clive Hamilton

Clive Hamilton is an economist turned sociologist, turned cultural sceptic, and now self-appointed evangelist for an anti-materialist new order. Through his leadership of the Australian Institute and numerous public presentations and publications (Hamilton, C & Dennis, R 2005; Hamilton & Mail 2003) he has helped expose the apparent obsession in Australia and elsewhere with consumerism and consumption. Hamilton is never less than hostile to his critics and always insistent on the correctness of his case, even when attacking the apparently like-minded (Hamilton 2006). He is also no stranger to controversy, suggesting at one stage that the symbolic bastion of consumerism, the Westfield shopping Centre at Bondi Junction, should be flattened, and that those with big mortgages deserve no sympathy (Hamilton, C & Dennis, R 2005). And yet there can be little doubt, especially given the sales of his two main books *Growth Fetish* and *Affluenza*, that Hamilton has touched a raw nerve in *some* sections of the Australian public. Ironically of course, it has taken the very consumption that he questions to elevate his books up the best selling lists! Nonetheless, Hamilton is an important figure on the current cultural landscape.

He has succeeded in alerting us to aspects of current life that require critical attention. Yet despite all the accumulated evidence, and notwithstanding his evangelism, Hamilton has not been able to offer us a way out of the malaise that he describes, other than to appeal to 'downshifting' and some vague notion of 'well being'.

Hamilton is not opposed to consumption *per se* but argues that this value orientation should figure less prominently in our lives, and that other things should matter more (Hamilton, C & Dennis, R 2005). Thus, we should give less attention to consuming things sold to us; things many of us equate with status and privilege, and instead give more attention to relationships, fun and pleasure. However, the fact is that Hamilton is not saying anything that is especially new. We have had similar arguments articulated by economists recently and long ago (Galbraith 1996; Gittins 2007). Hamilton is however a person of his time, a public intellectual bent on exposing the failings of our branded culture and calling for something different (Hamilton, C & Dennis, R 2005).

The making of a condition

There is much in *Affluenza* with which one can agree (Hamilton, C & Dennis, R. 2005). The very definition of 'Affluenza' in the preface to the book is an example which 'strikes a chord' wherein the authors describe this 'modern disease' as:

'(1)The bloated, sluggish and unfulfilled feeling that results from efforts to keep up with the Jones's. (2) An epidemic of stress, overwork, waste and indebtedness caused by the dogged pursuit of the Australian dream. (3) An unsustainable addiction to economic growth' (Hamilton, C & Dennis, R. 2005 1).

Undoubtedly, Australians are overworking themselves and are finding less time to spend with family and friends than ever before (Mackay 2007). This is something that has been highlighted in many studies, most notably in Australia in the work of Barbara Pocock (Allen 2004; Pocock 2005).

The fact, highlighted in *Affluenza* (Hamilton, C & Dennis, R 2005), that in 1970 the average new house had 40 square metres of space for each occupant, compared to 85 square metres per occupant today is an environmental concern of the utmost importance. Another is the fact that that 'although nearly two-thirds of Australians say they cannot afford to buy everything they really need, they admit to spending a total of \$10.5 billion every year on goods they do not use' (Hamilton, C & Dennis, R 2005). Clearly, this has many sustainability implications that require close attention. After all this \$10.5 billion amounts to \$1226 per household and it is 'more than the total government spending on universities, pharmaceuticals or roads' combined (Hamilton, C & Dennis, R 2005).

It is undoubtedly of concern that the 62 percent of Australians believe they cannot afford to buy everything they need, even when a lot of the things considered necessary include a pair of \$350 Bolle' sunglasses for example. Also the fact that 75 percent of all Australians are carrying a sizeable debt on their credit card is of concern particularly in the event of an economic downturn. In light of such pressures and the discovery for many that wealth or high income does not bring happiness or contentment there is a growing desire to consider and discover alternative ways of living. Yet, despite its powerful expose of the extent of consumerism in Australian society, *Affluenza* expresses concerns about consumption and excess in ways that seem to be overtly moralistic. As a result there is something uncomfortably utopian about the kind of world the authors envision. Disturbingly, it seems to be a world that looks backwards to some ideal of the past rather than forwards to what we

could be and, even then, very little is said about how we can practically change things for the better. We will come back to these issues below. But firstly we address a number of assertions and claims in *Affluenza* that have been weakened by a fundamental lack of attention to detail, or show a misunderstanding of the facts. These undoubtedly open the book up to more trenchant criticism from those more ideologically aligned to economic rationalist and market fundamentalist viewpoints – criticisms which could have been easily avoided. We will highlight just three of these areas.

All ‘marketing’ is evil

In the chapter titled ‘Spreading the Virus’ the authors point out that ‘the working lives of Australia’s best paid psychologists are not devoted to treating the distress of people with psychological problems: they are devoted to developing ways of increasing consumers’ insecurity, vulnerability and obsessiveness. They work in marketing’ (Hamilton, C & Dennis, R 2005 36). The authors then focus on one very small aspect of the discipline of marketing, namely advertising. We can accept many members of society equate all marketing with advertising and as such often think they are experts on it. But we find it hard to accept that two well published economists and trained social scientists do not know advertising is but a very small part of the promotions mix of marketing, and the promotions mix itself is either one quarter, one seventh or one eighth of the overall marketing mix depending on which marketing textbook you are reading. What the authors have done is akin to criticising an entire discipline on the basis of one tiny proportion of it.

The authors go on to highlight many examples of morally dubious advertising, all designed to separate consumers from their hard earned cash, often for things they in all probability do not really need. It is indeed the case that there are many examples of dubious advertising. One only has to think of the types of advertising targeted at children during the time slots allocated to children’s TV to know this. McDonalds, KFC, Cocoa-Cola, Amatil, Cottees, Cadbury-Schweppes to name just a few, all have strong cases to answer when issues of childhood obesity and category 2 diabetes are considered (Marks, Coyne & Pang 2001).

But Hamilton and Dennis (2005) tend to take what we call the ‘paraquat approach’ to advertising. Because of what the authors consider to be the all-encompassing badness of advertising the ‘all purpose killer’ needs to be used. Accordingly, all advertising is in itself tainted and needs to be either eliminated or at least strongly regulated because advertisers make us feel

‘deprived, inadequate or anxious’ (Hamilton, C & Dennis, R 2005 37). Nowhere in the book is any recognition given to the ability of advertising to carry positive messages of significant social importance. Consider the following phrases; ‘Click Clack, Front and Back,’ ‘Slip, Slap, Slop’, ‘Drink, Drive—you’re a bloody idiot’ and, yes, even ‘Not Happy Jan’ from the Yellow Pages advertising. All promote important social or information campaigns and all are now part of Australia’s vernacular. The advertising industry’s efforts have had a positive impact in such cases, particularly on road accidents figures for example, over the past 30 years. The Australian Transport Safety Bureau found that between 1970 and 2000 ‘the fatality rate dropped from 30.4 to 9.5 deaths per 100,000 population’. This reduction has been achieved in spite of a huge increase in motor vehicle use. From 1970 to 1999, the fatality rate per 10,000 registered vehicles dropped from 8.0 to 1.4 (Barns 2003).

Therefore while we might agree on the need to regulate forms of advertising that have a negative effect on society as a whole – childhood obesity and alcohol consumption fall into this category, it is important to acknowledge that advertising can produce bad and good outcomes. The arguments in *Affluenza* are weakened by a failure to take account of this.

We now want to analyze the arguments relating to debt and savings in *Affluenza* with a particular focus on the latter.

Savings

Hamilton and Dennis (2005, p. 71) rightly point out that ‘banks and financial institutions engaged in the marketing of debt have made millions by redefining the way Australians understand and use debt’ (2005, 71) making ‘debt an essential element of the cycle of affluenza’ (2005, 72). Personal debt, other than for housing, has increased four fold from 1996 to 2004 via credit cards, personal loans and store credit schemes and personal savings have dropped accordingly (Hamilton & Dennis 2005, p. 73).

All of which is broadly true. However nowhere is there any mention of the savings accumulated via superannuation schemes, particularly the industry-based ones that forcibly save nine percent of all employees’ wages and salaries each and every pay-day. According to the 2006 Australian Bureau of Statistics report Australian Social Trends (1) ‘balances in superannuation funds were the largest financial asset held by households. Superannuation has become much more widely held in the last 15 years with accumulating

superannuation promoted by government policy. In 2003–04, around three-quarters (75percent) of all households had some superannuation assets (2). The average value was \$87,000 for these households; however, half had assets under \$35,000' (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006).

Any discussion of debt has to also discuss assets, in other words both sides of the 'ledger' must be assessed. One other area where the authors leave themselves open to criticism is in their uncritical adoption of the 'successes' of the downshifting phenomenon.

Downshifting as a saviour?

Hamilton and Dennis (2005) argue that 'downshifting', or 'voluntary simplicity' as it is also sometimes known shows that many Australians are actively opting out of the world of Affluenza. There is no doubt that the choice to downshift, or to make 'a conscious decision to accept a lower income and a lower level of consumption in order to pursue other life goals' is becoming increasingly popular (Hamilton, C & Dennis, R. 2005 p. 153). A survey by Hamilton and Mail (2003), carried out for them by Newspoll in 2002, 'found that 23 percent of adults in their 30's, 40's or 50's had downshifted in the preceding ten years' (Hamilton and Dennis 2005, p. 154).

The authors hold up downshifting as solid evidence that there is a way to address what they call 'deferred happiness syndrome' (Hamilton & Dennis 2005, p. 176). But before addressing this it is important to clarify the issue of just who downshifters are.

There is very little in the way of solid empirical evidence in Australia outside of Hamilton and Mail's (2003) survey on the question of downshifting. One of the present authors undertook a qualitative study of 12 'sea changers' who had moved to the Coffs Coast region and discovered that all were also downshifters, not always of their own choice (Cairncross, Buultjens & Crowe 2005).

It is important to note this especially because Hamilton and Dennis (2005) fall into the trap of aggregating all downshifters into one homogenous category. Tan, (2004) identified five main types of downshifters:

Plateauers: who chose to remain at a particular level or position within an organisation, avoiding and refusing promotions or greater responsibilities.

Backtrackers: who choose to take a few steps down the ladder.

Career shifters: who use the skills they already have acquired in a new setting with less emphasis on a traditional fast track.

The self-employed: who leave organisations to work for themselves doing similar work.

Urban escapees: who set up well-considered viable businesses in a small town or regional centre.

Hamilton and Mail (2003) ignore the last two categories for example, but they lump the first three groups together. It is important to note here that they had strong grounds to do so pointing to a flaw in this classification as it implied all three types of simplifiers were in a position to reduce their level of consumption due to their original affluent position. This assertion was supported by research conducted in Australia, which revealed that downshifting occurs across the income spectrum and was just as likely to include low-income and blue-collar workers (Hamilton and Mail, 2003).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that lumping all downshifter into a single category has its dangers because when it comes to assessing why downshifter succeed or fail their previous backgrounds become very important (Tan 2004). Hamilton and Dennis (2005) tend to adopt downshifting as an all encompassing answer to the ills of contemporary life yet it is unclear how successful it has been. By Hamilton and Dennis's own admission not everyone is a successful downshifter particularly when people seachange to achieve their downshift because some of the issues experienced when moving to a regional area include the lack of medical facilities/doctors/specialists, higher petrol prices, lack of infrastructure and cultural amenities, limited choice of shops, banks and tradespeople, distance from relatives, lack of employment opportunities and a lack of choice in schools and further education. However, Hamilton and Dennis (2005) barely scratch the surface in regard to these issues.

Hetro family bias

A significant problem with Hamilton and Dennis' vision for change is their all-encompassing adoption of the 'dad as breadwinner, mom as homemaker, two kids and a dog with white picket fence' family. Same-sex couples are mentioned only once; alternatives to the 'classical couple' are not mentioned

at all. This leads the authors to conclude that parenthood is 'one of the most profoundly human experiences which unlocks emotions that otherwise remain untapped' (Hamilton, C & Dennis, R 2005 145). While we might broadly agree with this sentiment it seems, from the Hamilton and Dennis's vantage point, that those who cannot, or who choose not, to become parents are unimportant to them. The 'naturalness' of both parenthood and the feelings attached to it are asserted as being indisputably more valid than the lives of those who are childless through choice or otherwise. This was highlighted by Dean Durber of the University of Tasmania in his review of *Affluenza* in which he stated that 'one has to question what kinds of real alternative lives are on offer to us when this framework of he-she-child 'family' is seen to be in desperate trouble, in need of repair, and yet is the answer to all our ills' (Durber 2005 p. 1).

And for those of us who want to become parents, Hamilton and Dennis (2005) have an extra warning; don't consider the cost of having a child before becoming parents because if you do think that way then you may not be a suitable parent after all (143). One has to wonder what the authors think then of parents who give no thought at all about how best to support their children through life. To Durber 'such a judgement assumes a superior position that this book adopts throughout' (2005, p.1). To which we would add that it is a patriarchal based superior position since by failing to consider alternative family formations and life choices the authors also fail to consider a number of issues very relevant to dealing with affluenza as an affliction; choosing to become a house father while one's partner works for example.

The authors also argue that without the immediacy of parents children have nobody to provide commentary on what they see and view And here we concur with Durber (2005, 2):

The attack is clearly against the media. And while we do not believe the media should be seen as some god above suspicion and critique, the opposite argument that it is feeding children meaningless crap is also a bit tiresome and useless. The suggestion that children are influenced by the media and therefore need protection from it, pornographic media included, (151) is but a conservative reaction to the power of the media. Who is to say that parents can provide better education than the media? What makes parents so fundamentally 'good'? The suggestion that children are incapable of negotiating the world without the assistance of their parents denies the importance of non-parental influences in their lives. It also undermines the children's own social awareness.'

Another weakness in *Affluenza* is the lack of analysis given to Indigenous Australians and other ethnic groups who make up a large part of Australian

society. Other than one mention of Indigenous Australians, stating that they 'seem to be suffering all the sickness of affluenza but few of the benefits', there is no other mention of them in the book. Nor is there any analysis of some of the cultural traits and aspects that the one in four Australians who are immigrants bring to Australia, some of which may be very important in learning to deal with affluenza.

Final comment

Affluenza is a very important book. Its arguments should be taken seriously. Generally however, the analysis contained in its pages exhibit an ethnocentric Anglo-Celtic viewpoint that often looks backwards to a 'grand past' rather than forward to a newer world, perhaps free of many of the afflictions of affluenza. Perhaps the main challenge that *Affluenza* attempts to address is how to balance the enormous wealth generated by market capitalism with what might be broadly termed 'quality of life'. Yet the arguments presented by Hamilton and Dennis tend to smack of class elitism in so far as they marginalize the very real problems that beset many people in Australia. The two million or so Australians who experience relative poverty - roughly 12 percent of the population, the growing numbers seeking help from charities, the hundreds of thousands of homeless people, and disadvantaged populations: Indigenous people, jobless people, single parents and older people are shadow figures in a world apparently shrouded by consumerism (Brotherhood of St Laurence 2002). But these people are understandably interested in making ends meet, perhaps *up-shifting* and participating more actively in the community. Hamilton and Dennis tell us that, although the poor and disadvantaged are important, they should not constitute the core concern of any movement toward political change (2005). Affluence is the problem, not deprivation. There is little or no talk in Hamilton and Dennis's book about the redistribution of wealth and income, fairness and social justice. There is no real discussion of how people in the margins might access desired services and resources, how they might participate more actively in community life, and how they might obtain equitable life chances and opportunities. Nor is there any discussion about the actual, lived detrimental effects of poverty, especially in relation to Indigenous people. Somehow these economic refugees do not quite fit into arguments about affluenza; they are an awkward spectre on the cultural landscape. More worrying as far as Hamilton and Dennis are concerned, is their rather one-dimensional assessment of 'affluence' and their evident inability to think more expansively about what this might mean in the contemporary world. Perhaps the challenge for all of us is to reclaim the meaning of affluence, to talk about a quality of life that values the social and

personal over the economic but which recognizes the real contribution that material safety, security and comfort can and do make to our everyday existence and quality of life.

Perhaps affluence should be measured more in terms of the equitable distribution of wealth and income, the quality of relationships and community, the degree of peace, respect, kindness and care that resides between people and groups, the degree to which the principles of social justice and human rights inform our everyday lives. Our view is that Hamilton and Dennis's call for downshifting will appeal to the more affluent, baby boomer sections of Australian society but will do little to contribute to a broader debate about how our world might be reshaped and what a decent and respectful society might look like in the twenty-first century and beyond. It is far more likely that the most pressing issue of our time, climate change, will force the hand of all of us to change our consuming ways as we contemplate the conditions for alternative ways of living.

The challenge that faces academics and policy makers alike is to think hard about how to help steer public debate in a direction that is less literal about materialism, less reactive to the modernist imperatives of consumption, and more embracing of other ways of being, and of engaging. We should perhaps not seek a counter evangelism but rather a dialogue that engages aspects of life that are more spiritually and emotionally enhancing, peaceful and sustainable and more thoughtful in terms of what materiality means in terms of sustenance and identity to *everyone* around the world. *Affluenza*, as far as we are aware, is not a disease present in many other parts of the world, particularly in the so-called 'developing' nations where the absence of basic provisions such as food and water are often the main concerns. This of course raises a broader debate (beyond the scope of this article) about the nature of the concerns that underpin *Affleunza* and its somewhat sectional, inward looking and ethnocentric orientations.

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