A number of works have taken a more nuanced view of the new hedonistic directions taken by commercial societies. Cohn Campbell saw its roots in British romanticism. Chandra Mukerji traced the mixture of hedonism and asceticism to the Renaissance.

Many others point to the dawn of the twentieth century. Thomas Jackson Lears has shown for the United States how during the last two decades of the nineteenth century commercial culture promoted the secularization of the protestant ethic. The emergence of a new type of ethic that blended hedonism and asceticism created a climate particularly favourable to consumption: the ‘therapeutic ethic of self-realization’ that pushed actors to try to develop themselves through goods and services dealing with health and physical appearance. Thus in commercially mediated leisure spaces, especially in the United States after the First world war, it became a virtual duty to ‘have fun’ and enjoy yourself, i.e. in using one’s body as a vehicle of gratification and pleasure. The body thereby became an arena that had to be explored and was visualized and appropriated for profit. This new ethic took hold of the middle classes. A ‘quest for disciplined vitality and ‘for intense experience’ was further stimulated by promotion of a variety of new goods (cosmetics, deodorants, make-up, etc.) and services (hairdressers, beauty salon, gyms, etc.). Here was an instance of a larger cultural trend by which commercially mediated objects and techniques were created and deployed to rediscover the body in all its aspects. The body was conceived as a meeting point where the unconscious found expression and external demands repressed it. Whilst still predicated on body-mind/self dualistic premises, this trend opened the way to incorporating into western consumer culture Eastern notions of subjectivity that sought to transcend this very dualism.