

Shopping Cheap

Empty-feeling in this full-discount store,
I notice others trancing by, glaze-eyed,
behind their clinking lop-wheeled carts.
Lured, are they, by the hook of free?
Hypnotized by the hype of cheap?
I wander hapless and mapless
through thingful, clerkless aisles
and chafe inside at where things aren't.

PA speakers storewide
announce who-cares specials,
demand urgent price checks,
summon somebodies to the front, then
resume happy snippets of syrupy sambas.

Ah! A rare tagged *homo employus*--
I'll catch him and be out of here.
"Where are the reading glasses?" I ask
his back before he can escape.

He gives robotic directions to Aisle 5,
cinched with a "Can't miss 'em."

Remember when store clerks
would ask if they could help you,
and lead you to your product,
then stick around to make sure
it was really what you needed?

Remember customers? Service?

Within this barn of bargains
harried service-counter girls refund
to waiting lines for slipshod quality,
murmuring memorized apologies
to jaded ears, then "Step up, please."

Remember quality? Cordiality?

Absent is any quality counter
to make up for poor service
at the service counter.

Employees hired here
for ho-hum per hour
evade frazzled shoppers who,
from all different wealths,
squander the numbered
heartbeats of their lives
to search for bargains
planted cleverly near
high-margin impulse racks.

Remember joy? Hilarity?

Blindly, the free market (an
oxymoron to the credit-card poor)
ratchets money up to our
finely-computered investors
who downwardly squeeze
more work for equal pay
out of fewer desperates who
hate the jobs they have
which earn the scratch they need
to take out bigger loans.

Remember philanthropy? Altruism?

No reading glasses found in Aisle 5.
Did miss 'em.

Aimless now in Aisle 7,
I stop my cart to ask within:
How might people market goods
with love instead of greed?
Is selfishness the ultimate?

As if an angel had the mike,
the PA system broadcasts
"Follow the blue light..",
crackles, and goes silent.