



Is this the end for the twittering classes?

ONE OF THE MOST unnerving things about the long boom is the way in which vulgar people; great masses of them in fact, took to luxury consumption like ducks to water. Of course, owning telephones and flying in aeroplanes became old hat some time ago, along with fitted carpets, central heating and double-glazing. This has placed the really refined and discerning amongst us in something of a quandary. No sooner had one thought of a way of distinguishing oneself from the swinish multitude, when the masses would pour in hard on one's heels, ruining everything. Spoiling leisurely journeys to Venice or the Algarve with budget flights, coach trips and time shares, they even spoiled walking on the Derbyshire hills with their penchant for friendly club outings, plastic map holders, Eurohike rucksacks and Berghaus windcheaters; great noisy muddy crowds, inundating villages, and destroying the tranquillity and sense of adventure that was the Pennine Way.

Nothing was sacred. The boom years have created a culture of entitlement in which the idea that the vulgar were as good as the refined, the uncouth as good as the couth, took root, destroying even the last vestiges of distinction that had somehow survived the cultural upheavals of the sixties and seventies. There was a time when installation of a bidet would set one apart, but now not even *en suite* bedrooms distinguish

one. Every second home seems to come fully equipped with two lavatories, a bath and a well-appointed shower. Wet rooms can't be far behind. Indeed, it is not unknown for student bedsits to come *en suite*. Which reminds one, of course, that when every second person boasts a university degree, what hope is there for the genuinely cultured to shine?

This is the Burberry Syndrome writ large. Years and years of full employment, easy credit, and mass consumption, have violated traditional social norms making it exceedingly difficult for the seriously discriminating to avoid looking like somebody far too common to even deserve the tags *nouveau riche* or *arriviste*. Chavs, after all, could not be called either, and you do have to know something to earn the soubriquet, *Philistine*. However, Burberry has been fighting back with its *Burberry Prorsum* range. This is a new collection that expresses the company's "true heritage" which is apparently gentle in mood, relaxed, romantic "and about a quiet sense of luxury". Wan young boys and girls, waifs evidently just down from Cambridge, model the soft-toned crumpled fabrics, putting as much distance as they can between themselves and the ostentation of those for whom prosperity is still a novelty.

"Burberry Prorsum" is apparently Latin for *Burberry Forward* which I suppose is one way of attempting to keep the chavs at bay. School mottos and dead languages are not a chav sort of thing, are they? As their ad for the Cinda Burberry check saddle bag reveals: "The one and only way to wear Burberry without looking like a chav is to pick the least Burberry-looking item from the Prorsum range. How's that for irony. But come on, it's much nicer than a cap, isn't it?" Well, they're right about that, and retailing at £445 the Cinda saddle bag is probably beyond the price range of all but the flushiest of chavs.

Some people are hoping, no doubt, that the era in which a quarter of the population seems to be sporting Louis Vuitton, wearing Dolce & Gabbana, saving up for a pair of Jimmy Choo's, and taking transatlantic

flights, is rapidly coming to an end. For the authentic glitterarti this is the recession's silver lining. While *hoi polloi* become reacquainted with Butlins, Bisto and fish fingers, they hope they will be able to resume their proper role as the thoroughly legitimate aficionados of "a quiet sense of luxury". Some of them will, no doubt, go under, losing everything, but most will hope to survive without surrendering to the undistinguished and workaday.

For those strapped for cash twittering is still an option. Twittering has, until this weekend, remained the preserve of the twitterarti, the technically savvy and those in the know, or as those in the know would put it: the cognoscenti. Twittering can still be indulged in and be regarded as a mark of distinction. While three and a half billion people have a mobile phone, and absolutely everybody in the lands favoured by God sends emails and has a Facebook account, twittering was as of last Friday still an elite activity.

Not to be confused with gossip, twittering is a form of endless chattering composed of tweets in which you use your computer or phone to tell a large number of people exactly what you're up to or what you're thinking at any given moment. Restricted to 140 characters your tweets have to be brief, so brief and banal in fact that the initiated have dubbed their mini-communications "Haiku-style" in the hope that the discipline and elegance of seventeenth century Japanese poetry will conceal the intrinsic triviality of the enterprise. A mere six million people are at the time of writing twittering, led by a band of celebrities and politicians, but the moment at which this activity will become common knowledge and then commonplace is almost at hand.

Recently, Greg Grunberg (better known as Matt Parkman in *Heroes*) sent a confusing tweet to 20,000 of his fans that led them to believe that the series might be cancelled. Three minutes later the horrified Grunberg had to tweet and twitter for all he was worth to reassure vast flocks of twitterers that all was well –

Heroes is safe in the hands of Grunberg and momentarily disconcerted studio executives.

What is evident from this incident is that the cognoscenti are rapidly going to lose their grip on this exciting new form of micro-blogging. As of this weekend around a quarter of a million Facebook users have added a Twitter application to their profiles and this has alerted the bosses at Facebook, the über-portal of social networking, to the need to smarten up their act. On Facebook mere mortals can only have 5,000 friends. This is about to change as Facebook, after failing to buy Twitter.com, is moving into micro-blogging or tweeting in a big way. The hope is that the longer people stay on their page the larger Facebook's advertising revenue is likely to become, and this is a matter of life or death for a company with around 200 million customers that has yet to declare a profit.

Indeed Twitter.com refused to sell out to Facebook, because they were not at all certain how much Facebook shares were actually worth. This, of course, is a problem that Twitter with a mere six million users and only 55 million visitors, has in common with Facebook. In the wacky world of virtual capitalism, just like banking and finance, nobody knows what anybody or anything is actually worth. And, to cap it all the masses are again snapping at the heels of the technologically smart-set turning their finely honed Haiku texts into so much bubble-trash. Now that Queen Elizabeth II has started tweeting the discerning twitterer must surely know that the game is up – they will have to move ever onwards and upwards in their desperate struggle to stay ahead of the pack.