

From *Plus-de-Jouir* to *Hyper-Jouir*

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Born in 1944, Gilles Lipovetsky, a philosopher often qualified as a maverick [*d'électron libre*], has professed after more than twenty years a relative optimism that contrasts with the alarming titles of his previous works: *The Era of the Void*, *The Empire of the Ephemeral*, *The Twilight of Duty*.¹ The revolution is over, but it has been succeeded by a system centered on hedonistic individualism and paradoxical happiness. This operates without any apparent constraint. Duty is in decline. Ethics is becoming painless [*indolore*], more consumed than imposed. We have entered into *hyperconsumption*, *hypermodernity*, and also *hypernarcissism*.

Far from pillorying hypermodern society, Lipovetsky, the author of *Paradoxical Happiness*,² sees something eminent there, criticizable from some perspectives, but globally positive. Because man is “made of contrarities,”³ as Pascal wrote, and therefore of paradoxes.

From the Postmodern to Hyperconsumption

Modernity, these are the great systems and great utopias, the refusal of the past, hope in the future, celebration of revolution, of rupture, and likewise of progress. The postmodern, dear to Jean-François Lyotard, is the end of systems, it is generalized communication, the “anything goes” of the *.Com*, the reign of relativism, and the *museal* more than historical celebration of the present or of the past. It is the Reign also of Dionysus and of immediate *jouissance*, in the absence of a limit and above all the decline of disciplinary powers. What matters today, in hypermodernism, is speed, but also and, above all, emotion and feeling [*sentiment*]. This senti-mentality is supposed to limit and justify an unprecedented acceleration of consumption and of the ephemeral. The “jolts of sense” of the *hyper* succeed the void of the *post*. The acceleration of time is accompanied by a taste for paradox that holds in concert the unimpeded consumption of objects and the concern for the future, the generalized fear of risk, the respect for values,

the exaltation of human relations and of the rights of man. As another paradox, the fragility of social and affective relations valorizes all the more the strength of human ties [*liens*]. It is that they have become a rare commodity. “Hyperconsumption” is consumption arrived at the reflexive stage of consciousness which—surprise!—discovers that its secret aim is the quest for emotion. This emotion at once replaces and prevents the raw enjoyment [*le jouir brut*] of the body, dear to the postmodern. If the century is thus more sensual than intellectual, the truth of sense reveals itself, however, as a jolting, discontinuous, instantaneous, but always calculated sensation.

May of 1968 saw the end of modern times, times when one could risk one’s life for an idea. In the postmodern era, one risks an empty life, without idea or feeling. In hyper-modern times, one lives a life without risk, but full of sensations. Privatization, sensation, individualism, but also *sentimentalization*, become the master-signifiers of the hyper. The future, ignored in the postmodern in favor of the past, has henceforth become disturbing. But, according to this author, it would be to be constructed anew by plunging into traditions and practicing a generalized and *synaesthetic* hybridization.

Consumption surged in a serious way with Taylorization and Fordism: it was a matter, then, of selling mass-produced objects. With the passage to the *Affluent Society*,⁴ it is a matter of producing what will sell. Consumption determines production. The object becomes then a representative [*représentant*] of the series, a series that has only luxury as an exceptional outside, outside of the series.⁵ This luxury outside of the series is what makes the law for the *hyperconsumed* object. By giving to the consumer an unprecedented autonomy, the supermarket was the instrument of a consumption capable of suppressing any human intermediary between the subject and the object consumed. The first hypermarket opened in France in 1963. The frantic system of fashion [*de la mode*] was substituted little by little for the “system of objects,”⁶ those that formerly contained within themselves, in an immaterial state, the stable system of civilization. In 1970, Jean Baudrillard pointed out that the necessity to consume a supposed producing of fragile objects, the system had to destroy what it produced.

According to Lipovetsky, fashion [*la mode*] will ensure ever more this reign of the ephemeral, of the fragile, and of generalized obsolescence. The hyper is the triumph of luxury.⁷

The accelerated privatization of modes of life and their diversification—facilitated by the crisis of the *Establishment* and of the State in the sixties—favored and accompanied this absolute reign of fashion and of consumption. Hyperconsumption necessitates the end of the reign of disciplinary society and of the authoritarian State, for it implies a multiple mode of life and, consequently, the end of norms. The revolt against consumption of the *sixties* will have in fact ended with the revolt itself being consumed. New products, the brands or labels, support the free and individualistic mode of life wanted by the *baby boomers* [in English]. If, in the sixties, the object was the carrier of *standing* [in English]—the social link, that is—or of “distinction” (Pierre Bourdieu), it is, today, the instrument of a narcissistic pleasure, aliment of a “personalization” where “society” as a unit no longer exists as a fixed referent.

Hypersense and Consu-emotion: Invisible and Multiple Difference

Sensual experience must accompany the gesture of consumption of the object, must even supplant the object itself in the experience of the purchase.

Various excesses are perceived as pathological (bulimias and various addictions). They are no more than the limits, rather poorly seen, of a general, reasonable attitude, a Zen and a calculating one. The Dionysian orgies of the eighties are behind us. If the body remains in the foreground, it is no longer a matter of extracting *jouissance* from it by excess—an adolescent position—but of doing good to it. This feminine, all-caring-for-the-body attitude of *care* [in English] and of pleasure, contrasts with the paradox of the permanent demand [*exigence*] for performance, particularly in the domain of work. Private Zen is often the price paid for the *hardcore* [in English] at work. If private life is feminized, it doesn't go the same for the world of work.

Pleasure and *jouissance* thus become one, without true opposition or distinction. If it is not that good old raw *jouir*, it

is no longer in fashion. The *hyper-jouir* is not an excess but a beyond. The hopes of socialization via parties and collective gatherings—of the *Mondial 1998* type—are also outdated. Participative, *bottom-up* [in English] re-socialization no longer tears anyone from individualism. Volunteerism [*Le bénévolat*], which is spreading, misses the Other, reducing itself to participating in the construction of the same, of a solitary and compassionate individual identity.

On the other hand, the fear of a society made uniform by mass consumption, David Riesman's "lonely crowd," disappears to the profit of an always more intense diversification of objects and of fashions, without the effect of a stable tribe. What dominates the social hyper is invisible difference and the act of selling experience, "the lived, the unexpected, and the extraordinary capable of generating emotion, some link, affects, sensations."⁸ But always in mini doses, for one must avoid too strong emotions.

Without giving it too much weight, Lipovetsky examines the contemporary effect in spite of everything of the wicked goddesses that are *Penia* and *Nemesis*. If he underscores the negative consequences of poverty and under-consumption, he remarks that in our societies material poverty is above all badly lived in terms of its psychological and social consequences. True poverty is social: scorn or non-recognition is much less easily tolerated than under-consumption.

The inevitable disappointment and dissatisfaction produced by the objects of consumption do not lead to discrediting the objects. The excess—or above all the inadequacy [*défaut*—of consumption produces a dissatisfaction which is transferred, not onto the objects, or even onto the social system, but onto the subject himself. The disappointment in enjoyment (the *jouir*) becomes disappointment in the self, lived more as anxiety and uncertainty than as depression and guilt. "God is dead, Marx is dead, Freud is dead, and I'm not feeling too good myself"—this witticism attributed to Woody Allen still applies [*est toujours d'actualité*].

Therapy by Hyperconsumption?

In the era of consumption without relation, the human relation remains the fragile and threatened landmark value. The disarray, the disappointment, the disenchantment of the contemporary subject bears more on the immaterial than on the material: "Penia is concretized less in the unalterable thirst for objects than in the difficulty of being, less in the relationship to things than in the misfortunes of the relation to others and to the self."⁹ Edward Luttwak has shown how hyperconsumption serves as therapy in face of the destruction of family ties [*lien*] linked to *turbo-capitalism*.¹⁰ The emotion of the purchase is substituted for that of true ties. It constitutes the external limit of consumerist avidity and the extimate heart of what is aimed for in the object consumed. This tendency goes very well with the compassionate and the religious, who--they too--can become consumables. Evangelism is to the Church what the hypermarket is to the grocery store. There is not so much the return of the spiritual as there are inventions of emotive and *merchandisable* spiritualities.

Lipovetsky underscores it: the reign of envy as the funeral march of democracy, foreseen by Toqueville, is not verified. This was before the two-hundred-dollar barrel and the future war over water! What is verified is the forced social promotion of a happiness each of us doubts: according to the polls, hyperconsumers say they are happy, but they think their *alter ego* is [in English] unhappy.

Hypermodern hedonism opposes itself to the one who enjoys, *Carpe Diem* [*Carpe Diem jouisseur*] of the end of the twentieth century. One must manage one's life with parsimony, wager on the future and durable *jouissance*. Thus, Knock comes back into fashion, for health is the keyword of the hypermodern. It, too, is consumed. Private happiness more and more opposes itself to public insecurity. One asks more of health institutions, of education, of the police without always being able to decide if these sectors must in their turn re-enter into the consumable and into mercantile internationalism [*la mondialisation marchande*], or else remain an exception, sheltered from the market.

Liquidity of the *Hyper-jouir*

The effect of anxiety that Lacan linked in 1970 to the rising to the zenith of the object *a*¹¹ is much more perceptible today. The *plus-de-jouir*, as a logical function to which one is very susceptible [*sensible*] today, is quite well supported. But the subject sees poorly how the being he is as object *a* could lodge itself in this narrow, mobile, and liquid place of an always more rushed [*pressé*] surplus enjoyment (*plus-de-jouir*). Concerning this, one can refer to J.-A. Miller's intervention at Comandatuba.¹² This rupture between the shared *plus-de-jouir* and the object *a* incarnate the fact that the *speakingbeing* is rendered still more uncomfortable by the *hyper-jouir*. What Zygmunt Bauman underscores ironically concerning things could be applied here to the subject: "Things would do better to be 'like merchandise,' and [it] is fitting to consider them with suspicion, and even to reject or avoid them, if they refuse to conform to the model of the object of consumption."¹³ The object *a* is not an effect of industrial production or consumption. At this level, the familial seems the reserve where the subject can make himself be, so as to support his being with an inimitable object *a*, at times with Freud's help. Lipovetsky seems to not believe too much in the return of a disciplinarianism that would exploit contemporary anxiety. The risk and insecurity lead, however, to the avoidance of the other and segregation. As the invisible ransom of the disappearance of solidary emancipations, this segregation re-enforces the anxiety of the unknown. The unknown is not only that which does not consume, but that which is without rights, without papers, even without affiliation, that which bears the real and which reflects the expulsion of the subject as object *a*. The freedom of the manners (*moeurs*) of tomorrow could very well be imagined as that wherein each of us chooses his object, its usage, his life, but where, also, each of us is, in fact, muzzled, hypersurveilled, conditioned. Equally as sellable and consumable, risk can be resolved by the privatization of the forces of security and protection (police, firemen, emergency services, hospitals . . .).

If fashion no longer suffices to insure the infernal cycle and the obsolescence of objects, destruction can take support from war and great catastrophes.¹⁴ To bring into dialogue

Lipovetsky and Bauman, there where the latter sees a false remedy for the destruction of the social link in unbridled consumption,¹⁵ the former sees in the liquidity of the link the necessary condition for a consumption governed by obsolescence. Lipovetsky notices, however, that fashion no longer creates innovative fashions of life, it diffuses them and reflects a society more dependent today on the spectacle.¹⁶ The “Artialization” of society feeds fashion.

Consumption is in part developed thanks to the destruction of the limitative values of the old modern world. The care for the social link, for the quality of human relations with, at heart, love and family ties, becomes the last refuge [*carré*] of the more and more threatened and reduced political sphere. Here it is verified that the “unconscious is political” [*l'inconscient, c'est la politique*],¹⁷ politics to be distinguished from merchandise. For the unconscious does politics in its fashion and the reign of the consumed object does not efface it. The psychoanalyst is responsible for leaving to the unconscious its opening. The only politics that remain, faced with *consumotion* and *hypersense*, is the type of emotion involved in the love of the unconscious and the surprise of the contingency of the real that it attests to.

Translated by Jack W. Stone

Endnotes

¹Cf. Lipovetsky, G.: *L'ère du vide*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. NRF / essais, 1989; *L'empire de l'éphémère. La mode et son destin dans les sociétés modernes*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. Folio / essais, 1991; *Le crépuscule du devoir. L'éthique indolore des nouveaux temps démocratiques*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. Folio, 2000.

²Cf. Lipovetsky, G., *Le bonheur paradoxal. Essai sur la société d'hyperconsommation*, Paris, Gallimard, 2006.

³Pascal, B. *Pensées*, chapter VII.

⁴Cf. Galbraith, J. K., *The Affluent Society*, Boston, Mass., Houghton Mifflin, 1958.

⁵Cf. Baudrillard, J., *La société de consommation*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. Folio, 1986; *Carnaval Cannibale*, followed by *Le mal ventriloque*, Paris, L'Herne, 2008.

⁶Cf. Baudrillard, J., *Le système des objets. La consommation de signes*, Paris, Denoël-Gonthier, 1968.

⁷Cf. Lipovetsky, G., Roux É., *Le luxe éternel*, Paris, Gallimard, 1983.

⁸Cf. Lipovetsky, G., *Le bonheur paradoxal*, *op. cit.*, p.8.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 172.

¹⁰Cf. Luttwak, E. N., *Turbo-Capitalism: Winners and Losers in the Global Economy*, New York, Harper Collins Publishers, 1999.

¹¹Cf. Lacan, J., “Radiophonie,” *Autre écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 2001, p. 414.

¹²Cf. Miller, J.-A., “Une fantaisie,” *Mental*, n° 15, Bruxelles, février 2005, p. 9-27.

¹³Cf. Bauman, Z., *La vie liquide*, Rodez, Le Rouergue–Chambon, 2006.

¹⁴Cf. Klein, N., *No Space, No Choice, No Jobs, No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*, New York, Picador USA, 2000 & *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, New York, Picador, 2008.

¹⁵Cf. Bauman, Z., *La vie liquide*, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

¹⁶Cf. Wolf, M., *The Entertainment Economy*, New York, Times Books, 1999.

¹⁷Lacan, J., *Le Séminaire, livre XIV*, “La logique du fantasme,” lesson of May10, forthcoming with Seuil (Paris).