

## Executive Summary

In the mid-twentieth century, nurtured with Marxist theories, the Frankfurt School was created. Its thinkers undertook series of stimulating critical theories. Building on the heritage of this intellectual movement, this essay discusses myths and realities, criticisms and limitations encompassed by the *trendy* concept of ‘consumer culture’. Of particular interest will be the inclusion of the producer culture. On an ideological level it set the first grounds to approach how the ‘social individual’ conceives, defines and thinks about freedom, transcendence and intellectual emancipation within the particular framework and issues related to the 20th- and 21<sup>st</sup>- centuries. On a practical level, it investigates the existing modes of domination or power in Western societies and the way they unconsciously and pervasively infiltrate everybody’s private spheres in order to maintain a ‘*Status Quo*’.

The author suggests that Western society has sown the seeds of its own destruction but also possesses the potential to create a *better world*. This article attempts to create a new discourse for citizens, consumers and workers and advances that collective action is only possible through individual consciousness and praxis. It purposefully engages the reader with the idea that changes in mentalities and behaviors became the necessary prerequisites for our societies to be livable, human and sustainable.

This research is conducted with the ambition to contribute to the early mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Critical theory. Often overlooked within the Business and Economics Education, this section will set the context and detail this specific theoretical approach. After we have introduced the reader with the notion of “*Critical theory*”, this section will detail the relevance and significance of such an essay.

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# **1. Introduction**

## **1. Thesis Statement**

Starting our argument with the analysis of consumer culture, we will define the relevance of such a notion in the maintain of Status Quo<sup>1</sup>. In this sense, we will value the *weight* of external *pressures* such as marketing, advertising or public relations, as forces able to shape individuals' consciousness and ability to enact social change.

How real, or relevant, is the notion of consumer culture? How materialist are individuals? Are we consuming slaves? Can individuals still imagine a better world and then enact this world through their individual activities? Are individuals critical or reflexive enough to question and challenge the existing order of economic, political, and social structures? Which level of consciousness have individuals reached and how is it related to their level of consumption? Are there other relevant factors?

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<sup>1</sup> By 'Status Quo', one can also understand a situation which needs and requires individuals to accept and adapt to the existing conditions rather than to change oppressive conditions (Murray and Ozanne, 1991).

## 2. Relevance and Significance of the essay

### A. Relevance of this research.

Although critical theory dates back to 1930 when the philosopher Max Horkheimer became director of the Society for Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany, few of the many students or personnel of the teaching staff involved into the business studies field have been exposed to the tradition of Critical theory. It is puzzling to note that Critical theory does not enjoy the same growth and support that we find with traditional theory or research. Therefore, one can find relevant to demystify and provide a concrete interpretation of critical theorists findings. This essay is designed to get students, professors and researchers excited about starting critical projects.

### B. Significance of this research.

Any reference to the term ‘consumer culture’ or ‘consumerism’ will immediately expose one to the risk of being accused of jumping on a “*lieu commun*” analysis, of perpetuating a rather shallow and meaningless intellectual fad. As Wright (2003) put it, the popularity of this field of inquiry makes efforts to simplistically categorize and summarize various positions problematic, though both these volumes contain attempts to do so which are in turn useful and controversial. One of the problems is that the term is at once fashionable yet irritatingly elusive to define (Adaptation of Featherstone, 2007). Consumption studies face the practical problem that consumption is a huge topic that overlaps different institutional areas and both the public and private spheres. It is impossible to devise a single analytic framework to grasp its many historical forms and influence or the diverse theoretical perspectives that either praise or condemn it (Zukin and Maguire, 2004). However, it is the intention of this paper to provide the reader with too-often overlooked arguments – namely Critical theory. This paper is written with the belief that a majority of individuals conceive<sup>2</sup> their life as free from any form of alienation or domination. It will question the foundation of such a notion. It will show that despite the promotion of ethical, sustainable, free and egalitarian speech, the ‘system’ does not offer such an existence to individuals, trapped into a powerful and lasting propaganda. It is strikingly obvious that such an *ideal* situation is still far from existing. The significance of this essay lies in its effort to deconstruct arguments reducing *human potential* and *critical thinking*. It also emphasizes the necessity to combine ideological insights with practical (*praxis*) actions.

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<sup>2</sup> As we will argue, individuals are rather ‘lead to conceive’.

### 3. Thesis Structure

This thesis is articulated around the following structure. After that the reader has been introduced to core ideas of this essay, this paper will focus mainly on two chapters.

The first chapter investigates the notion of consumer culture. In this chapter, we will challenge consumer culture critiques and analyze if *common sense* gives, or not, too much credit to the *realized power* of marketing, advertising and Public Relations. Failing to observe or to be able to witness a shift in subjectivity, we will observe that ‘*pure consumerism*’ is only applicable to twenty to twenty-six percent of the population - British population. Although we will not reject all critiques, we will have to consider the fact that a change in behavior does not necessarily result from a change in one’s inner self - or subjectivity. Within this framework, we will give a particular attention to the research of Lodziak (2002) and Martin (1999). We will realize that this *consuming self* is more sensitive to changes in *survival costs* than in external stimuli - marketing, advertising and Public relations.

Acknowledging for the invalidity, or partial validity relative to the consumer culture argument, we will inquiry on the existence of a more *realistic* reason in favor of a weakening in *critical thinking*. In the second chapter, we will study the importance of *work* in our everyday lives. Starting our analysis with striking paradoxes such as automation and free-time (Marcuse, 1964; Gorz, 1982) or even *post-work* and *work-centered* societies (Bowring, 1999), this chapter will put the emphasis on what we consider to be the real causes and consequences of the existing *Status Quo*.

Finally, we will conclude and consider the limitations of such an essay.

## 4. Preliminary requirements: Introduction to Critical Theory

### A. Aims and foundations

Critical theory is an interdisciplinary<sup>3</sup> perspective that aims to help people imagine alternative social organizations that facilitate the development of human potential free from constraints (Murray and Ozanne, 1991). Within this framework, it assumes that awareness, debate and participatory democracy may reduce self-deceptions or falsifying consciousness ultimately leading to meaningful social change (Murray and Ozanne, 2006). The second foundation consists in the belief that all social relations and arrangements entail some form of domination and the critical-emancipatory interest seeks to change these relations of superordination and subordination. The third foundation lies in the study of society as a historical construction. Domination is most effective when people lose a sense of history and their potential to act in history. If people understand that society is a product of a specific set of interests, then they are better able to critique these interests and act to change society. Reflection constitutes their fourth foundation in that it can restore the *almighty* sense of history. According to Horkheimer, reflection is an important method used to challenge and contest domination. As a fifth foundation, critical theorists assume that society is constructed on the basis of a dialogue (*dialectic*) between individuals acting in their own best interests and social structures that control or repress certain actions. Thus, democratic debate is an important way to explore the dialectical tension between people's ideas about society and the social ideas that get fixed in social structures and policies.

*“Creative ideas for change then diffuse to opinion leaders who encourage interpretation and public debate, and then finally, the outcome of this debate might be a new social movement that is more strategic in advancing social change.”* (Murray and Ozanne, 2006)

Finally, it is the hopeful act of imagination that completes the critical paradigm bringing foundations altogether as part of an interlocking perspective:

*“Critical theory is a normative theory that prompts reflection on domination restoring a sense of history and the dialectical imagination.”* (Murray and Ozanne, 2006)

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<sup>3</sup> Scientific research would serve and be guided by the concerns and orientation of social philosophy, which in turn would be influenced and transformed by the results of such research. It requires the cooperative efforts of philosophers, psychologists, political scientists, sociologists, economists, and historians, whose work would focus on tracing the linkages among the various realms that comprise the social world (Alvesson, 1995).

## B. Critical Theory and Traditional Theory

Critical theory is social theory oriented toward criticizing and changing society as a whole, in contrast to traditional theory oriented only to understanding or explaining it (Horkheimer, 1937).

*“Traditional and Critical Theories differ mainly in regard to the subject’s, that is, the scientist-scholar’s attitude toward his society.” (Tar, 1997)*

*“[Unlike traditional theory] A critical theory approach seeks to make social actors aware of domination or oppressive social structures.” (Murray and Ozanne, 2006)*

“Traditional theory” is bent on the preservation and gradual reformation of society to achieve a better functioning of the social structure as a whole or of any of its particular elements. Its intention is to eliminate the abuses and disturbing or dysfunctional elements. This attitude is based on the premise that

*“The individual as a rule must simply accept the basic conditions of his existence as given and strive to fulfill them; he finds his satisfaction and praise in accomplishing as well as he can the tasks connected with this place in society and in courageously doing his duty despite all the sharp criticism he may choose to exercise in particular matters.” (Adorno, 1975)*

Horkheimer’s reluctance towards traditional theory is transparently expressed in his writings. In an essay written in 1937, he wrote

*“Traditional theory fails to recognize its own social determinants and functions. Its activities and achievements serve to conserve and reproduce the status quo, and the strict separations it maintains between knowledge and action, fact and value, and subject and object reinforce and legitimize that state of affairs.” (Horkheimer, 1937)*

In Horkheimer's estimation traditional theory uncritically reproduces bourgeois society (Alway, 1995). This insistence on a necessary distance from any system of thought will allow the critical theorists freely to adopt and to incorporate ideas from a variety of sources into their analyses of contemporary society (Always, 1995). Critical theory is not motivated by an interest in improving the logical consistency of conceptual systems or in developing a more comprehensive framework under which the facts may be subsumed. Rather, it is motivated by the effort to

*"[...] Transcend the tension and abolish the opposition between the individual's purposefulness, spontaneity, and rationality, and those work-process relationships upon which the society it built."*

Borrowing Murray and Ozanne's qualification, this research should focus on both a critique of society (i.e., the structure of authority, the emergence of mass culture, the existence of power relations) and the way in which society is known. This mentioned critique has both a negative and positive interpretation (Connerton, 1976). It covers a reflection on a system of constraints that are humanly produced (negative) and the rational reconstruction of the conditions that make language, cognition, and action possible (positive)<sup>4</sup>.

"Critical theory" considers the "abuses" or "dysfunctional aspects" of [capitalist] society "as necessarily connected with the way in which the social structure is organized. It does not intend to achieve a better functioning of class society by perfecting and promoting dominant social arrangements. Critical theory concerned with a radical transformation of existing social arrangements is proposed in opposition to the system-maintaining "Traditional Theory". This is, of course, the Lukacsian problem of the possibilities for revolutionary consciousness in a reified world. It is this problem that will inform the critical theorists' interest in how and why an irrational order persists and where hope for transcendence might still reside. Their studies on authority the authoritarian state, mass society, the culture industry, and the family will reflect their general concern with the decline of critical, independent thinking; so too, will their interest in how the attitudes and impulses of individuals are controlled and manipulated by the social order (Always, 1995). The critical theorists will concentrate their efforts in the search for possible forms of resistance to total domination. It is interested in the radical transformation of society and human emancipation, and it conceives of itself as an active element in a process leading to new social forms, forms that will result from and be based in the creativity, spontaneity, and consciousness of free individuals (Alway, 1995).

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<sup>4</sup> The negative moment is the critique of actions that contradict fundamental values. The positive moment is the creative imagining of possible alternatives (Murray and Ozanne, 2006).

Thus Critical theory is permeated by the idea of a future society as a community of *free* men, which is possible through *technical means already at hand*.

*“Specific possibilities exist for the amelioration of human life and specific ways and means of realizing these possibilities.” (Marcuse, 1964)*

Its aim is to “*transcend the tension and to abolish the opposition between the individual’s purposefulness, spontaneity, and rationality, and those work-process relationships on which society is built*”<sup>5</sup>. Finally Critical theory argues that there is no one group or individual which can represent the interests of its stance toward the social world.

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<sup>5</sup> Lucien Goldmann, Immanuel Kant, London, 1971

### C. The normative structure of Critical theory

In this section, Critical theory's guiding assumptions and goals are discussed. Before detailing these six concepts, it is necessary to understand what normative stands for.

*"Critical theory unites the empirical analysis of 'what is'<sup>6</sup> with normative theorizing about 'what ought to be'" (Murray and Ozanne, 2006)*

First, *ontological*<sup>7</sup> assumptions are discussed. As far as the '*nature of reality*' is concerned one can refer to Jay's developments (1973). According to Hay,

*Critical theory focuses on the "force field" or constant interplay between subject (meanings) and object (social structures). Thus, reality is socially produced through social interaction. However, once constructed, it 'acts back'.*

Critical theory sees man as neither the subject nor object but as the *activity* that produces the tension between the subject and the object (Fuhrman, 1979). Critical theorists specifically point to and study the tensions or inconsistencies between subject and object. These inconsistencies or contradictions are the source of change. At any moment, contradictions provide the impetus and direction for creating a better society (Murray and Ozanne, 1991). Indeed, if people become aware that their ideas about reality are not congruent with reality, this awareness may serve as an impetus for rational social development and change (Murray and Ozanne, 1991).

As far as the '*nature of social beings*' is concerned, one can view humans are neither completely reactive - extreme positivism - nor completely proactive - extreme interpretivism. Social actors are able to affect their social world, but this influence is mediated through the historical totality. To rephrase, because past social creations constrain us, we are not freewheeling creators of our future. Critical theorists nevertheless assume that humans have the potential to become anything they wish since we can never know the fundamental nature of humans.

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<sup>6</sup> Descriptive analysis.

<sup>7</sup> Ontology: The branch of metaphysics that studies the nature of existence or being as such.  
Reference: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/ontological>

Second, *terminal* and *instrumental* goals are presented. Under the *terminal* perspective, critical theory begins with two value judgments (Marcuse, 1964). First, human life is worth living. Second, human life can be improved. Thus, the terminal goal for Critical theory is a form of social organization that makes possible freedom, justice and reason. Critical theory cultivates speculation about the possibilities of a future society. In Habermas' work, for example, he focuses on the ideal truth-speaking model as a basis from which to analyze not only distorted discourse but also for exposing the lack of rational public opinion. Under the *instrumental goals*, one can view Habermas' theory of communicative as a mean - an instrument - to reach those ends - goals. Habermas states that a rational consensus can be reached only if there is a '*symmetrical distribution of chances to select and employ speech acts*' (McCarthy, 1978). General symmetry refers to a situation in which all people have an equal opportunity to engage in discourse unconstrained by authority, tradition, or dogma. In addition to the *ideal speech situation*, all participants must have the same chance to employ regulative and representative speech acts. This requirement ensures that no assertion will be exempt from critique, no single participant will gain privilege, and the participants will be truthful so that their inner natures will become transparent to others. Habermas' identification of an ideal speech situation provides the grounds for the critique of distorted communication<sup>8</sup>. Criticism reconstructs a communicative competence that, in turn, leads to a rational consensus. Thus, the ideal speech situation anticipates an ideal social structure that makes possible freedom, justice and reason (Murray and Ozanne, 1991).

Finally *epistemological*<sup>9</sup> assumptions are outlined, including the *nature of knowledge* generated, the *view of causality*, and the *relationship the researcher* has with the social actor. As far as '*knowledge generated*' is concerned, one can understand the kind of knowledge that is legitimized as "scientific" varies a great deal depending on the approach. Positivists, who focus on revealing underlying regularities, generally do not question social reality. Social structures are reified; they are treated as objects, independent of the social actors who created them. People are alienated from their creations and are unable to see themselves as actors capable of changing those social structures that make up society. Interpretivists also tend to reinforce the status quo. They take a nonjudgmental stance, which assumes that all groups and cultures are equal. Consequently, they offer no way to envision a better society (Fuhrman and Snizek 1979/1980). Over time, both of these approaches to social science generate knowledge that becomes an integral part of the existing society instead of a

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<sup>8</sup> Shroyer (1973) defines it a 'distorted communication' as a communication that reproduces those belief systems that could not be validated if subjected to rational discourse.

<sup>9</sup> Epistemology: a branch of philosophy that investigates the origin, nature, methods, and limits of human knowledge.  
Reference: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/epistemological%20>

means of critique and renewal (Landmann, 1977). Critical theorists, on the other hand, first form an understanding of the present historical formation, then strive to move beyond this understanding to reveal avenues of change that are imminent in the present order. Changes will be possible if contradictions are revealed between the interpretive understanding of the subject and the historical-empirical conditions of the object (Comstock, 1982). In this way, the knowledge generated by Critical theory is forward-looking (recall Marcuse's second value judgment, that human life can be improved), imaginative (according to Adorno, one must not only see the old in the new, but also the new in the old), critical and unmasking (Habermas suggests that ways of communicating or social structures that contradict general symmetry need to be revealed), and practical (according to Horkheimer, Critical theory mediates theory and practice) (Murray and Ozanne, 1991).

If one turns to the '*view of causality*' one can understand the fact that social actors are influenced by constraining social structures; however, this influence is mediated by the actors' meanings and understandings. Prediction may be possible if these meanings are stable. This view of causality is motivated by and illustrates Critical theory's ontology. Humans are confined by social structures, which are real, independent, and measurable (determinism). At the same time, they are the architects of these social structures (voluntarism). Furthermore, these causes and effects can only be understood relative to the historical totality from which they emerged. A critical theorist might identify social pressure as the immediate cause of an individual's [decisions]. The [individual] decision must be understood as a response not only to the individual's own perceptions and motivations, but also to general trends in society [...]. It is the inconsistencies between subjective understandings and historical-empirical conditions that directly underlie the critical theorists' view of causality. This view is rooted in their theory of social change. They propose that through reflection, participants are able to identify constraints on general symmetry. These "constraints" are in the forms of distorted communication, contradictions between meanings and social conditions, contradictions between values and motives of different stakeholder groups, authority, dogma, tradition, bounded rationality, myth, rules, and so on. Dialogue or critical discourse exposes constraints to those groups who are constrained. In time, this exposure may lead to social tension and reform. This reconstruction permits a nearer approximation to the ideal speech situation. The new organization will facilitate critique since discourse is freer and more open. Reflection must, nevertheless, remain an ongoing process (Murray and Ozanne, 1991).

Finally, if one views the '*research relationship*', one can think of the impossibility to separate the social organization of knowledge production from the knowledge itself. Scientists are involved in the creation of social conditions; thus, their research is influenced by political action and vice versa (Comstock 1982; Sewart 1978). The researcher cannot be divided into two beings: a nonpolitical, scientific theorizer and a political, philosophical participator - who votes in political elections, speaks out at city council meetings, works on policy in academic committees, etc. Critical theory holds that, because scientific theorizing is inseparable from political action, the researcher should take into account who benefits from the research. Research should be emancipatory, designed not only to reveal empirical and interpretive understanding but also to free social actors who are constrained. Researchers should move beyond mere observation of subjects or participation in the informants' social reality and attempt through dialogue to reveal constraints, thereby motivating informants to engage in conscious political action (praxis<sup>10</sup>) (Murray and Ozanne, 1991).

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<sup>10</sup> Praxis is the free, universal creative activity through which humans create and shape their historical human world and themselves (Petrovic, 1983). The term is often used to describe practical knowledge (bringing theory and action together) that is constructive and life enhancing.

#### D. Cognitive superiority claims

Critical theory claims the intellectual inheritance of Marx – and thus, its Marx’s claim to cognitive superiority<sup>11</sup>. Critical theorists, like Horkheimer and Adorno, strive to keep the cognitive claim of superiority established by Marx but had thrown away the original basis of that claim<sup>12</sup>. According to Fuhrman (1979), Critical theory claims the existence of three sciences. Among them, critical theorists account ‘exact sciences’, which stress certainty and control; ‘hermeneutical<sup>13</sup> sciences’, which accentuate the extension of intersubjective understanding; ‘critical sciences’, which centralize their efforts on emancipatory interests and social change. Herein resides the first superiority claim. Second, Critical theory [...] tries to show that conventional social theory presupposes distinct moral and consequently epistemological disadvantages for the human species (Fuhrman, 1979). Critical theory launches its critique against other social theories from their ‘agnostic-potential’ image of man. Thus, it seems necessary to force our attention on this ‘more positivistic view’ on man<sup>14</sup>. The third argument lies in its political convictions and implications (praxis). Although all theories of society contain political motivations, Critical theory was superior because it was explicit about this (Horkheimer, 1972). Four, Critical theory not only analyze societal contradictions but also sought to become a ‘*force within it to stimulate change*’ (Horkheimer, 1972). Five, Critical theory does not commit itself with any particular ‘class’. Critical theory, which must promote critical consciousness in the masses, cannot afford to align with any class (Fuhrman, 1979). Indeed, if the proletariat fails in its quest for revolution then the critical theorists who have aligned themselves with this class will fall into pessimism and quietude. Such an attitude is not permissible for critical theorists (Horkheimer, 1972). Finally, critical science bases its cognitive interest on emancipation. As Habermas (1974) put it, critique understands that its claim to validity can be verified only in the successful process of enlightenment, and that means: in the practical discourse of those concerned. Critique renounces the contemplative claims of theories constructed in monologic form [...].

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<sup>11</sup> [My reading of] Critical theory shows to be clearly a more political philosophy [theory] and as such not open to empirical refutation. Their claim to cognitive superiority is based on, in my view, a superior moral image of man (Fuhrman, 1979).

<sup>12</sup> That claim being the proletariat revolution. It was based on the idea that the proletariat because of its historically alienated position would revolutionize the world.

<sup>13</sup> The term hermeneutics covers both the first order art and the second order theory of understanding and interpretation of linguistic and non-linguistic expressions. However, most critical theorists left unchanged the belief that the superstructure is the pivotal point of ‘false consciousness’ and, consequently, of social change.

References: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermeneutics/>

<sup>14</sup> The analysis of normative structure of Critical theory highlighted the belief in man and self-reflection.

## 2. Consumer Culture: Myths and Realities.

### A. Introducing 'Consumer culture'

Consuming basic goods is as ancient as human society. Consumption is essential to any social order. To reproduce themselves, as identifiable ways of life and social structures, societies require material and symbolic resources that are used to sustain bodies, interactions, institutions, and organizations (Slater, 1997). To talk of a '*consumer culture*', however, is generally to make a much stronger set of claims: that initially in the modern West, but now increasingly as a global phenomenon, consumption was separated out from other social processes to become an identifiably separate sphere with recognizable institutions, values and identities (Ritzer, 2005).

In the past twenty-five years, there has been a flowering of literature on consumption across a wide range of disciplines. These contributions have enormously enhanced scholars' understandings of the emergence and growth of consumer society; how consumers experience their consumption activities and goods, subcultures, consumer agency, and meanings (Schor, 2007). Conventionally, this consumer research has been overwhelmed by the dominating ideology that both marketing and advertising are responsible of shaping individuals' values, behaviors and thinking (Alvesson, 1993; Applbaum, 1998; Firat, 1995; Firat et al., 1993; O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2002; Marchand, 1985; McKendrick et al., 1982, Shah et al., 2007; Tse et al., 1989; Soper, 2006; Holt, 2002; Solomon, 1986; Harms and Kellner, 1990; Shankar et al., 2006; Cherrier and Murray, 2004; Pennington, 2002; Schroeder and Borgeson, Unknown date).

Within a certain traditional *Common Sense*<sup>15</sup>, numerous are the studies acknowledging for the existence of a consumer culture originating from major social or historical discourses. Among those studies, one can rely on Firat and Venkantesh (1995) and Shankar et al. (2006). According to their observations a consumer culture has emerged from (1) consumers' perceptions of living a life of rising expectations, (2) various public discourses, (3) the relentless activism of marketing and advertising in creating new wants and needs that did not exist before and, (4) the establishment of a new narratives of identities (Firat and Venkantesh, 1995; Shankar et al., 2006). Others such as Appadurai (1996) and Zukin and Maguire (1994) developed a complementary analysis.

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<sup>15</sup> Here, we refer to Gramscian's notion of 'common sense': a cultural universe where the dominant ideology is practiced and spread.

Sources: <http://www.theory.org.uk/ctr-gram.htm#hege>

In his research, he identified a ‘*generalized shift*’ in social practices and mentality that unleashes desires to express individuality, directs these desires to consumer products, and creates new spaces where these products can be sampled, purchased, and enjoyed:

*“ Historically, these changes depend not only on the development of markets for the exchange of goods but also on the **weakening of state, religious, or other normative controls over material means of expression, and the rise of new, independent rationalities** [...]. These changes seem to have occurred rapidly in our time with the shift from socialism to a market economy[...]. In each country, state [and party] officials decide to modernize the economy by introducing **market incentives**, allowing individual property ownership, and encouraging the production of goods to satisfy consumer desires. Other **structural changes** facilitating the development of a consumer society include a movement of population, especially to cities, an increase in single-child families, and an explosion of innovation, tied not only to the creation of new products and efficiencies, but also to commercial initiatives and individual self-expression. In Western Europe, changes in the **dominant forms of Christianity** after the Middle Ages and the post-medieval disappearance of sumptuary laws eased the way toward conspicuous consumption by all social classes. In China and Eastern Europe, the introduction of a consumer society likewise depended on **ideological and legal changes**: encouragement of self-expression through consumption practices, tolerance of visible signs of luxury and comfort, and the shifting of goods and services (such as housing, transportation, medical care, and meals) from collective provision by the work unit to individual provision on the open, and often unregulated, market.” (Zukin and Maguire, 2004)*

In the context of this traditional approach, consumption can be regarded as having become one of the many technologies of self, a site of self-creation, or self-care:

*“As “consumers” people are encouraged to shape their lives by the use of their purchasing power and to make sense of their existence by exercising their freedom to choose in a market . . . Within the discourse of enterprise/excellence consumers are constituted as a autonomous, self-regulating and self-actualizing individual actors seeking to maximize their “quality of life” – in other words to optimize the worth of their existence to themselves – by assembling a lifestyle or lifestyles through personalized acts of choice in the marketplace . . . freedom and independence emanate not from civil rights but from individual choices exercised in the market”(Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Rose, 1998).*

From this perspective, consumers could thus be enmeshed in relations of power with producers (brand owners, market research agencies, advertisers, etc.) who through a seductive process, shape the consuming subject. And Shah adds that

*“People are misled by an overly materialistic mass culture, mainly in the form of commercialized mass media, to focus on the superficial and synthetic. The resulting consumer culture emphasizes acquisitiveness and individualism [...]”* (Shah et al., 2007)

Within this conventional or traditional perspective, identities of people as consumers have been substantially defined by the neo-liberal project and the discursive practices of marketing such as those of advertising, branding and other promotional discourses.

*“These discourses have provided the standards of norms and have colonized many aspects of our daily life, glimpses of possible selves to aspire to and emulate through consumption. Once upon a time the primary agents of socialization were institutions like the family, school, church, etc. but now consumption is a prime socialization agent whereby people are taught how and learn to be consumers”* (Shankar et al, 2006)

Most of these studies end up blaming a passive, feckless and irresponsible consuming subject *philosophically* engaged into an hedonistic life, driven by uncontrollable desires or false needs, themselves created by dogmatic forces of marketing, advertising and others politics of consumption responding to economic growth requirements.

To us, it is dubious to claim that fixation of a particular subjectivity, meaning a subject whose thinking and behavior are overwhelmed by consumerist considerations, solely results from external sources of pressure such as the ones promoted by mass media. Dean’s argument supports this view:

*“The forms of identity promoted and presupposed by various practices and programmes should not be confused with a real subject, subjectivity or subject position [...]. Regimes of government do not determine forms of subjectivity. They elicit, promote, facilitate, foster and attribute various capacities, qualities and statuses to particular agents.”* (Dean, 1999)

In this paper, our expectations rely more on individuals' existential questioning, or internal and personal awareness, than in the abolition of those dogmatic external sources of domination. Here, one can find similarities with Foucault's concept of power. Butler (1997) clearly summarizes his thoughts. According to Foucault, it is no longer external threats or constraints that enforce disciplinary power:

*"We are used to thinking of power as what presses on the subject from the outside [...]. But if, following Foucault, we understand power as forming the subject as well [...] then power is not simply what we oppose but also [...] what we depend on for our existence."* (Butler, 1997).

In the context of marketing and consumption, this Foucauldian account suggests that people, up to a certain extent, have become disciplined as consumers through the effect of knowledge systems exercised via governmentality. Nevertheless, this is not to say that power remains a top-down exercise for disciplining docile subjects. The individual himself gives sense to the pre-programmed rules. The incorporation or the embodiment of such *normal* or *average* behaviors and actions are a mandatory condition for such governmentality. It has to be induced or created but also accepted or assimilated. Laclau (1990) observes that subjects viewed as the product of top-down structures infer a deterministic view of social relations. Foucault himself regarded this deterministic standpoint as problematic in relation to political resistance.

It seems to us that as long as we stay engaged in this commonly shared view developed by traditional researchers, fundamental and dominant ideologies affecting individuals' consciousness, thinking, imagination and actions remain unchallenged. As we have shown, one cannot completely dismiss external influences on individuals'. Here one can consider the gradual progression from external control, to control and discipline exercised by individuals upon themselves:

*"Individuals increasingly experiences their lives as an exercise in which their own actions dictate success or failure. This outcome is achieved through recourse to similar knowledge systems and the process represents a theoretical attempt to join macro-level politics to the micro-level of the individual. Rather than external discipline then, Foucault argues that it is the pursuit and creation of knowledge itself, which, by creating norms and standards, helps form a disciplined subject."* (Shankar et al., 2006)

However, it is our opinion that (1) accounting for shifts in self-narratives<sup>16</sup> (Lasch, 1979; Cushman, 1990), and thus, linking identity or personality solely with consumption; and, (2) considering the omnipotence of mass media still results in a scientific contribution whose implications in terms of social policy stay weak. This means that acknowledging only for consumption – or consumer culture criticisms – keeps us from considering further and deeper *paradoxes* – such as post-work society and alienation, life as an act of survival<sup>17</sup>, well-being and the reproduction of meaningless everyday life activities. Of particular interest will be the elicitation of the most pervasive ideologies internally accepted; or using Foucault's terminology, the technologies of the self, which the individuals believe to be existentially meaningful.

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<sup>16</sup> In their works, Lasch and Cushman have emphasized the individuals' predisposition towards self-emptiness and narcissism.

<sup>17</sup> These paradoxes will be developed in the coming chapter

## B. A critical analysis of ‘Consumer culture’.

In this section, we will attempt to demonstrate that common criticisms of consumer culture, namely the theses of “*consumption-oriented economy*” and “*marketing-oriented consumption*”, are disoriented. This division will demonstrate that market ideologies, supported by the ideological manipulation induced by marketing and advertising forces, cannot give a complete picture of consumer culture.

First, we will attempt to give a clearer view of the weakness of ‘*subjectification*’ arguments. We will observe that evidences contradict arguments that consist in proving the relationships between marketing, advertising and a shift in subjectivity, or, better say, the change in economic behavior induced by external stimuli. As we will see, the change in subjectivity, in the strict economical sense, did not happen. The increase in consumption that one can observe, for the last decades, does not translate a consumer enslaved by manipulated and falsified wants or desires (as opposed to needs) but, rather, a bondage to a system that imposes increasing costs of survival needs.

Second, using Lodziak’s (2002) observations, we will undertake the first step of a critical analysis of consumer culture. Unlike common reflections on this topic<sup>18</sup>, we will argue that this belief misses the central point in that (1) it does not *entirely* reveal the *fundamental roots* of consumer culture and (2) fails to provide the reader with a critical reading of Western capitalist societies. We develop the idea that consumption *naturally* comes out from the very fact of being engaged into a *capitalist system*. This will bring us toward more radical or critical conclusions.

According to arguments developed in the first section of this paper (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Shankar et al., 2006), individuals evolve in a capitalist system that:

“ [...] No longer required an insistent ethic of work and asceticism in order to accumulate the capital to build an industrial infrastructure. Instead, corporate leaders needed consumers. An ethic that encouraged the purchase of consumer products also fostered an acceptance of pleasure, self-gratification, and personal satisfaction, a perspective easily translated to the province of sex.” (D’Emilio and Freedman, 1988)

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<sup>18</sup> Such as “In order for the economy to thrive [American] society requires individuals who experience a strong ‘need’ for consumer products and in fact demand them.” (Henry, 1963)

This perspective stems from the particular historical and economical perspectives emerging in 1920's and the post-War era. At those moments, it was a common thinking to advance that the productive capacity can supply new kinds of goods faster than society in the mass learns to crave these goods or to regard them as necessities (Potter, 1958). Galbraith (1967) detailed that the individual served the industrial system not by supplying it with savings and the resulting capital; he serves it by consuming its products. The means of production have apparently been made, and hence less savings are required to form necessary capital. Anyway, more than enough goods are produced to satisfy existing wants: potential supply outstrips demand. So capitalists must create more demand.

*"If this new capacity is to be used, the imperative must fall upon consumption and the society must be adjusted to a new set of drives and values in which consumption is paramount." Now advertising "begins to fulfill a really essential economic function ... to create a demand." (Galbraith, 1967)*

And Ewen to confirm this common reasoning:

*"The expansion of capitalist production, especially after the boost received from scientific management and 'Fordism', around the turn of the century, it is held, necessitated the construction of new markets and the 'education' of publics to become consumers through advertising and other media (Ewen, 1976).*

However, it seems that reality contradicts the theory. To summarize,

*"Far from indicating a turn toward hedonistic, self-fulfilling desire, advertising in the 1920s indicated a turn toward an obsession with social standing and sterility. Far from being desiring subjects, 1920s consumers (as constructed by the advertisers) seem to have been exceptionally other-directed. Indeed, the assumption that advertising works by inciting individual desires, which was part of the manipulationist thesis arising in the 1950s, does not jibe with the then contemporary accounts that peer pressure was an essential part of consumer culture. Commentators such as Whyte and Riesman argued that because of neighborhood/group definitions as to what constituted the "proper" goods to have, and a pressure toward conformity and away from conspicuous consumption, dealers assumed an increasingly passive role." (Martin, 1999)*

Nevertheless, even if capitalism did not encourage a desiring subjectivity through advertising, it is still possible that advertising was used by capitalists to solve problems of overproduction by creating needs for otherwise unneeded goods. But as Colin Campbell stated, *"Whether or not advertisements can lead someone to develop a desire for a product, it is altogether obscure as to how they could lead to the changing of that person's basic motivational structure"*. It would seem

that advertisements could only latch onto it (Campbell, 1987). Nor is advertising as powerful as the consumption economy thesis assumes.

*Economic studies find minor effects at best of advertising on general demand. In fact, the causality seems to go the other way, as advertising expenditures are more closely correlated with past sales than future sales.*  
(Martin, 1999)

After a broad empirical investigation, John Levi Martin demonstrated that individuals did not show any significant change in *subjectivity*<sup>19</sup>. Although he sets the first grounds of a potential challenging thinking, his personal contribution is very limited. On the one hand, he clearly dismissed the relationship between marketing and hedonism-seeking selves. On the other hand, he leaves the reader with an exclusive theory, without advancing any significant theoretical arguments. He ends his research arguing that:

*“This is not to deny that there were important economic changes; there were, but they had little to do with changing ‘economic imperatives’, being rooted in a simpler shift - economic growth [...]. There was a remarkable tripling (in constant prices) of how much people consumed from around 1875 to 1930. This was not simply due to increased debt purchasing, but to actual enrichment due largely to increased productivity of labor. More money of course means more stuff one can buy [...], hence more demand, and therefore more markets. More money is also compatible with increased attention to consumption on the part of such a buyer. Many of the changes in subjectivity misunderstood as stemming from the hedonism required by the consumption economy probably stem from the experiences of a changing middle class in a world of cheaper products, not from the conversion of workers into consumers.”* (Martin, 1999)

One may find further support in favor of Martin’s arguments with Lodziak’s research. Contrary to contemporary consumer research, we believe that Lodziak did not fall into those aforementioned “*lieux communs*”<sup>20</sup> analysis. He successfully combined the theoretical insights developed by the Frankfurt School with empirical evidences. His observations represent a controversial and insightful input. Unlike traditional researcher, Lodziak prefers constructing a figure inescapably caught up in capitalist social relationships based on ruling class<sup>21</sup> and a subordinated class.

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<sup>19</sup> He evaluated the change the change in terms of economic behavior, meaning a shift in consumption levels.

<sup>20</sup> Or ‘conventional thinking’

<sup>21</sup> According to his estimations, the ruling class represents a minority of 20 to 25 per cent of the population.

Lodziak pertinently deconstructs the myth of the *Affluent society* - and its relation with consumption. Here, referring to Hutton's observations<sup>22</sup>, Lodziak justifies this disregard by advancing that the real scope for unnecessary consumption<sup>23</sup> is consistent to only 65 per cent of the 'privileged group<sup>24</sup>', or 26 per cent of the population.

Lodziak re-actualizes Hutton's calculations and observes that this 'privileged group' is already reduced to 20 per cent of the population. In his view, 75 to 80 per cent of the British population has far less scope for unnecessary consumption, the type of consumption stressed in our understanding of consumer culture, than one can be led to believe.

*"It is evident that the images of affluence that we are constantly supplied with are contradicted by the harsher realities experienced by at least three-quarters of the populations of the advanced capitalist societies [...]. That most people in the advanced capitalist societies are able to afford little treats, sometimes by compromising the satisfaction of survival needs, is, it would seem, reason enough to [...] pretend to be blind to what is emerging before our eyes: a world in which **finance capital and major companies** have carved out an enclave of affluence for a **minority**, and in which the **majority** are mere fodder **to be abused as disposable labor** with no alternative to buy basic necessities by this same minority."* (Lodziak, 2007)

In his opinion, too many academics reduced consumer culture as the result of the manipulative ideological power of advertising and the mass media. To him, the significant purchases of the majority do not represent *post-necessity* choices but rather choices that are externally induced. He mentions that:

*"Employment reinforces the consumption dependence by resourcing individuals, via income, for consumption, and, by devouring time and energy, under-resourcing individuals, for autonomy<sup>25</sup>."* (Lodziak, 2002)

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<sup>22</sup> Hutton bases his analysis of employment status, on income and employee's right in Great Britain. His objectives are to emphasize the real scope for 'unnecessary consumption'.

<sup>23</sup> Unnecessary consumption can thus be understood as consumption that occurs after having taken care of necessity and as the penetration of post-necessity values into the taking care of money. It is then function on the income level. "According to one's time and energy, unnecessary consumption takes a cheaper or a more expensive form." (Lodziak, 2002)

<sup>24</sup> The 'privileged group' is made up of full-time, fairly secure employees and the permanently self-employed.

<sup>25</sup> The concept of autonomy is drawn forth by Gorz's views who sees it as the right to use one's autonomy for socially desirable ends, rather than allowing that autonomy to be the price paid by capital to enable the fragmentation of the labor movement, the extension of generalized insecurity and, [...] the transformation of civil society into a realm of unprecedented media manipulation and consumerism (Bowring, 2005).

This is the primary sense in which he means that the capitalist system, through its control of labor and dictatorship over the means of survival, makes consumption compulsory. As he argues, the potential is much inferior to the fact that we are forced to consume as a consequence of the alienation of labor and employment (Lodziak, 2002).

More precisely, he advances that:

*“ To argue that we are forced to consume as a consequence of the alienation of labor does not imply that individuals are duped by ideological manipulation [...]. It is an acknowledgement of the powerlessness of individuals as individuals to act in ways that effectively oppose the capitalist system’s control over the role of labor.”* (Lodziak, 2002)

In this, he is very similar to Gorz’s approach. André Gorz conceptualized a working class being transformed into passive functionaries of a system-driven accumulation regime. Radical and progressive currents in capitalist society, he argued, would have to question the dominant norms and the established political vocabulary of that society, including the hegemonic status of ‘labor’ (Bowring, 2005):

*“ The passive and ‘massified’ consumer required by capitalist production ... is not created by capitalism altogether by means of advertising, fashion, and ‘human relations’, [...] on the contrary, capitalism already creates him within the relationships of production and the work situation by cutting off the producer from his product [...]. ”* (Gorz, 1967)

In other words, a sociological analysis of consumer culture requires not just a reading of advertisements and appeals to buy goods; it demands familiarity with the standard tools of social history as well as a careful look at the evolution of specific products (Zukin and Maguire, 2004). In this sense, Lodziak seems to be much closer to the ‘*correct*’ interpretation of critical theorists, and more particularly Marcuse (1964), than the majority of consumer researchers:

*“ We overrate greatly the indoctrinating power of the media [...]. The objection misses the point. The preconditioning does not start with the mass production of radio and television and with the centralization of their control.<sup>26</sup> ”* (Marcuse, 1964)

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<sup>26</sup> However, one can find limitations of this argument by considering the creation and steep increase in credit cards development. This extension of basic income provides free-space for the expression of consumerist behaviors.

Therefore, one should contemplate that the manipulation of needs and consumptions occurs in the realm of material manipulations rather than the ideological dimensions of marketing and advertising.

*“ Under the alienation of labor, doing what it takes to survive translates, for most people, into the need for employment. For the production of consumption perspective the power of advertising and the media to manipulate consumption pales into insignificance when compared with the material manipulations [required by the system]. People do not act on the basis of precise conceptual distinctions, but on the basis of priorities [...]. Priorities suggest a more immediate and precise relevance for action than [...] general beliefs or values [...]. Precisely because of the priority given to being employed, and the control of labor time by employers, employment determines the time available for self-production, reproduction<sup>27</sup> and individuals’ autonomy. Indeed, projects that require lengthy tracts of uninterrupted time cannot even be contemplated. If autonomy is in many respects the opposite of consumption, it is capitalism’s enemy.” (Lodziak, 2002)*

Further, he argues that

*“We are materially manipulated to fit this model by circumstances beyond our control. We are entrapped in a system, the consumer society, that closes off practical alternatives, a system into which we are conscripted as individuals to play the only game in tow”.*

Furthermore, the more constricting work in its intensity and hours, the less workers are able to conceive of life as an end in itself. In this respect, one can better assess his observations on the irrelevance of media power in the production of consumption<sup>28</sup>, the manipulated ‘*unnecessary needs*’ and the dismissal of individuals’ autonomy argument.

According to the author, the *employees*, by the very fact of their employment, reduce their potential. Indeed, Lodziak consider the employment subordination as a twofold structuration. The primary structuration covers the access to an income. Being employed means that one can ensure a *safe way* of obtaining money to satisfy basic needs. As Lodziak (2007) put it:

*“In social conditions [the alienation of labor] in which most people do not have direct access to all the means necessary to their own survival, employment for a sufficient income becomes an experienced need. In other*

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<sup>27</sup> In the author’s terms, one has to appreciate the argument that money reign supreme and exerts dehumanizing distortions on the socialization of future generations.

<sup>28</sup> To fully perceive what Lodziak means by the production of consumption, one has to infer the capitalist requirements and its consequences on the individuals, namely the workers and employees.

*words, the alienation of labor ensures that most people do not possess the resources that enable them to produce for their own needs. Therefore, survival needs, for the vast majority, can be addressed only by the purchase of the relevant goods.”*

Second, besides to dehumanizing distortions induced by money-seeking activities, Lodziak blames also the very system that controls employment in its attempts to colonize the free time that it has already destroyed by addressing our ‘recuperating’ needs that it has generated. Indeed, the priority given to employment, which automatically reduces our time, also ensures that ‘free time’ is compromised. Here, the author refers to the entertainment industry. He mentions that:

*“It is of no particular merit in the sense that it can deliver escape, diversion, pleasure, fun and amusement that require no effort from the consumer. The entertainment is merely the means used for buying audiences for advertisers. It is a tool of advertising, and enables marketing to invade every home through television and radio.”*

At this point, it could seem controversial to mention the existence of *unnecessary consumption* in a section entitled to highlight the production of consumption through the lenses of capitalism – and not through the shared opinion of marketing and advertising. In that perspective, one can question the relevance of *unnecessary consumption*. In reality, this is consistent with Lodziak’s repetitive emphasis on the inexistence of *consumerism*. Consequently, it is necessary to detail Lodziak’s understanding of ‘*external choices imposition*’. Far from questioning our previous comment on the modification of the individual’s subjectivity, Lodziak demonstrates how individuals, while remaining *identical*, are lead to consume more or differently. Here, one has to understand the *external imposition* as inducing a change in behavior<sup>29</sup> – not of the *inner self*.

What Lodziak brightly emphasizes is the increase in what he calls *survival needs* and their related *survival costs*. He points out that this increase is attributable, either directly or indirectly, to the profit motive. This argument lies in the decline of state-provided services and facilities. The early post-war period was one in which almost of the advanced capitalist societies developed welfare systems that more or less produced all sorts of survival-relevant guarantees. At least from the 1980’s onward, however, these guarantees, including sufficient pension provision, subsidized housing, free schooling, subsidized services and utilities, unemployment benefic and so on, have been progressively withdrawn. According to Lodziak’s viewpoint:

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<sup>29</sup> This behavior being or not in accordance with the individual’s subjectivity.

*“This has opened up opportunities for profit in a wide range of areas such as health education, transport, recreation, communication, energy and so on [...]. [Therefore] What was at one time considered to be more a right than a commodity, for example, health, pensions and education, has, in recent times become commodified and thus open to profitable exploitation and with it an unparalleled escalation in survival costs. ‘Marketization’, and thus commodification, it would seem, know no boundaries and are part and parcel of the increasing commercialization of everyday life [...]. During a period when governments are urging individuals to address their future survival on a privatized basis, policies have been enacted that make the impossible for all but a minority.” (Lodziak, 2002)*

Here, his focus is threefold. First, he mentions the integration of the superfluous<sup>30</sup> within basic commodities. He argues that primary function of this incorporation is that of increasing the cost of the product. As Gorz notes,

*“The usefulness of an object becomes the **pretext** for selling superfluous things that are built into the product and multiply its price. The ‘pretext’ is, of course, what enchants and totally absorbs the ideology of consumerism.”*

And Bowring (1999) elaborates:

*“The superfluous and the necessary have become inextricable components of today’s commodities, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the billions of ours wasted in promoting goods which are, in their essence, quite necessary (food, drink, clothes, washing powder, even cars). There is no doubt that people need these products. What people do not need is the sophisticated processes by which nominally identical products are superficially embellished, symbolically differentiated and regularly upgraded, with reciprocally escalating costs, in order to lure customers away from possible competitors.”*

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<sup>30</sup> This incorporated superficiality can take a variety of forms, from unnecessary gadgetry to packaging.

Second, he criticizes the strategy that consists in planning product obsolescence. Here, the author advances that the incorporation of the superfluous into basic necessities does, by increasing the chances of a product's failure contribute to the *planned obsolescence* of the product<sup>31</sup>:

*"Clearly it is in the interests of producers to produce goods that reliably serve the functions for which they are purchased. But it is not in the interests of producers to make things that are so durable and reliable that they will never need to be replaced. Thus a product's limited life is purposefully planned in order to ensure frequent purchases. No product is exempt from planned obsolescence."*

Reported annual increases in consumer spending is, in Lodziak's viewpoint, attributable not to increasing affluence, not to an insatiable desire to consume, but because *goods have unnecessarily restricted life*. Another growing practice, he mentions, consists in producing goods that cannot be repaired, or where the high cost of repairs acts as an inducement to replaced the product. In recent times this has taken on a new dimension<sup>32</sup>:

*"Manufacturers nowadays are, through advertising, attempting to make a virtue out of disposability by linking it with fashion, and by promoting the 'latest fashion' as 'the ultimate'". (Lodziak, 2002)*

However, this does not mean that people are driven by the desire to be '*fashionable*'. But since the fact that the '*fashionable*' is built into products that people need, they *often* have no alternative but to buy the latest fashionable product because nothing else is available.

*"This often results in the disappearance, and thus the obsolescence, of their products, replacement parts and repair services, and thus generates the need to buy a new product."* (Lodziak, 2002)

Finally, it is crucial that one conceives the following discussion on '*evolutionary needs*'. The social and environmental context in which we live does have a significant influence on how we address survival needs and on what can be regarded as basic necessities.

*"There is little doubt that changes to our social and physical environment have actually **imposed** on individuals costlier means of addressing survival needs. I am referring to the extra costs that are **necessarily***

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<sup>31</sup> Planned obsolescence refers to the various ways in which producers produce goods that are less durable than they could be.

<sup>32</sup> Here, one can understand the use of '*Perceived obsolescence*'.

*incurred as a consequence of survival in today's environment **that from the standpoint of the individual make practical and economic sense.***

Again, one can find in Lodziak analysis, a resentful criticism of the capitalist system:

*[Unfortunately it seems that] the capitalist system has elaborated and extended the common observation that what you are given, increased wages, with one hand, the system takes back, increased prices, with the other. [Therefore] Cashing in on the priority that people give to survival needs has always been one of the principal ways in which the capitalist system controls people's lives. [This is reinforced when] Increasing spending in consumption, for a majority, does not result in a corresponding improvement to their lives, but it does benefit the **capitalist system**. Increases in incomes have got swallowed up, mainly in housing and transport costs, including the costs of interest on loans. Employment, which is increasingly experienced as an imposition, provides an income that is increasingly used to pay out for these imposed costs."* (Lodziak, 2002)

To some extent, one could summarize Lodziak's concept of consumer culture as the intrusion of capitalist culture, and its associated unnecessary needs, into individuals' private sphere, and, more precisely in the sphere of actions and reflections. Here, the individuals are mainly driven by obligations – *unnecessary consumption* – that its employment lays on him. *Needless to say, this emphasis does paint a picture of the advanced capitalist societies that radically departs from portrayed in the latest ideology of consumerism* (Lodziak, 2002). The individual seems to be caught up in a vicious circle, and kept there for fear of putting survival in jeopardy. This fear tends to discipline a free individual into a pragmatic compliance with a senseless system. By senseless system, one can understand a capitalist system that only benefits too few *grantees*. Lodziak also brings fine reservation towards privatization moves, characterized by its profit-seeking, and the related scarcity of individuals' wealth. This first introduction is fruitful for later questioning of the relevance and nature of domination and power in democratic societies.

Here, we have demonstrated that consumer culture is the most visible and manifest culture – therefore the most easily questionable - among the various form of alienating and subordinating cultures. As long as one gives it too much credit, one cannot engage into a holistic critique of the *system*. In the coming chapter, we will detail major paradoxes of nowadays societies, and attempt to understand how the individual-consumers are kept from questioning them. This will help us to elicit more pervasive, powerful and discreet manifestations of too-seldom if ever challenged dominant cultures.

## 2. Producer Culture: Same Fetishes, Same Lies

*“Good M. Chagot, sweet M. Schneider, give us work, it is not hunger, but the passion for work which torments us”. And these wretches, who have scarcely the strength to stand upright, sell twelve and fourteen hours of work twice as cheap as when they had bread on the table. And the philanthropists of industry profit by their lockouts to manufacture at lower cost.” (Lafargue, 1848)*

Advocating that consumerism critiques<sup>33</sup> fail to approach and tackle one of the most pervasive and powerful ideologies held by political and industrial leaders – the most influential authorities, this section will attempt to shed light on the *modus operandi* preventing individuals from questioning what we previously called the ‘*capitalist system*’. Bearing this objective in mind, this section highlights the construction and reproduction of ‘*popular superstition*’ or ‘*common sense*’ with respect to the notion of *work*<sup>34</sup>. One will observe that *work*, firstly a vector of human activity and creativity, can also be viewed under a different perspective. In this essay, *work* refers to a successful but shifty mean of massive exhaustion, *moronization* and manipulation. Daring the suggestion of a value judgment, one can also contemplate what could be considered as one of the major paradox in our contemporary societies: life as being an act of survival.

Starting its argument with striking paradoxes such as automation and free-time (Marcuse, 1964; Gorz, 1982) or even *post-work* and *work-centered* societies (Bowring, 1999), this chapter will put the emphasis on the causes and consequences of the existing *Status Quo*. Second, one will find a critique of the *capitalist everyday life* as developed by Perlman (1969). This analysis, combined with the insights developed in the first chapter, will set the theoretical grounds necessary for the development of the macro- and microscopic transformations as developed in our conclusions.

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<sup>33</sup> Among many manifest contemporary paradoxes; one could note the contradictions between consumption and morality (Slater, 1997), consumption and freedom (Murray and Ozzane, 1991) or materialism and well-being (Durning, 1993).

<sup>34</sup> Our understanding of ‘work’ refers to the remunerated activity which consists in one’s employment into the production of goods or services necessary for one’s survival. Here we exclude the artisan class or any activity involving a genuine and spontaneous envy expressed by an individual.

## 2.1 Automation and “Post-Work” Society

With the arrival and development of mechanization and automation, both aiming at the same cost-oriented and profit-related objectives, it was a common belief that the quantity and intensity of physical energy expended in labor would be reduced.

*Complete automation in the realm of necessity would open the dimension of free time [...]. This would be the historical transcendence toward a new civilization (Marcuse, 1964).*

Referring to the prediction that the abundance made possible by technological advance, Marcuse probably expected that the modern organization of work would have resulted in the emergence of ‘post-materialist’, post-work and post-scarcity humans (Marcuse, 1964; Lodziak, 2002). In his words, people existing on a higher plane, where their cultural, intellectual and spiritual powers are refined (Marcuse, 1964). He probably saw a society transformed by the fruits of sustained growth in which humankind, freed of the chore of making a living, would devote itself to activities that are truly fulfilling (Hamilton and Denniss, 2005).

Despite laudatory promises, reality contradicts these expectations. Now the ever-more-complete mechanization of labor in advanced capitalism, while sustaining exploitation, modifies the attitude and the status of the *exploited*. Within the technological ensemble, mechanized work in which automatic and semi-automatic reactions fill the larger part, if not the whole, of labor time remains, as a life-long occupation, exhausting, stupefying, inhuman slavery even more exhausting because of increased speed-up, control of the machine operators (rather than of the product), and isolation of the workers from each other (Denby, 1900).

These changes in the character of work and the instruments of production change the attitude and the consciousness of the laborer. In the present situation, the negative features of automation are predominant: speed-up, technological unemployment, strengthening of the position of management, increasing impotence and resignation on the part of the workers (Walker, 1955). One could also note the *eagerness* on the part of the workers *to share in the solution of production problems, a desire to join actively in applying their own brains to technical and production problems which clearly fitted in with the technology* (Walker, 1955).

The new technological work-world thus enforces a weakening of the negative position of the working class: the latter no longer appears to be the living contradiction to the established society:

*Domination is transfigured into administration. The capitalist bosses and owners are losing their identity as responsible agents; they are assuming the function of bureaucrats in a corporate machine. However, with these technical progresses as its instruments, unfreedom, in the sense of man's subjection to his productive apparatus, is perpetuated and intensified in the form of many liberties and comforts. The slaves of developed industrial, capitalist and post-capitalist civilization are sublimated slaves, but they are slaves. This is a pure form of servitude: to exist as an instrument, as a thing. Arguing in favor of a more liberated life or less constrained labor, industrial owners have succeeded in imposing a new model of development through automation. However, the results led to higher profits for production means owners and more precarious and unstable jobs for those who used to work for them (Marcuse, 1964).*

Naturally, questions emerge. Why did 'those' arguing in favor of more automation not hold their promises? How come more and more time is still allocated to work? How come are individuals induced not to challenge this reality?

One can find an answer to this question in the work developed by Gorz (1982).

*The model in which we are engaged, or forced to engage in, is the one of an economy that never ceases to encompass new fields of activity as working time is freed from activities that it occupied before. This extension will, in accordance with its own rationality, lead to new economies of time. 'Economiciser' or, put differently, incorporating new means in the economy domain which beforehand were excluded from it; means that the Economic Reason, generator of amount of time, will gain ground and set free increasing amount of available time. The surplus amount of time is the explicit goal of suggested innovations. (Gorz, 1982)*

Therefore, the question lies in acknowledging the purpose and the content resulting from these free-times.

*This, the Economic Reason is fundamentally incapable of doing. The field extension of this Economic Reason, made possible by time economies, drives to time economies until activities that it could not have accounted for. We find ourselves in a social system which cannot share, manage nor employ freed time; which is afraid of its growth while aiming at its aggrandizement; and which can finally only attempt to capitalize on it, to turn it into works, to 'économiciser' under more and more specialized market services, until those activities that remained free and autonomous and which could have given it some sense (Gorz, 1982).*

In the end, the automation allows for a decrease in overall costs because it reduces human labor workforce. However, 'those' who will experience an increase in their purchasing power will obviously not be those who have been expelled from the production but 'those' whose high-paid employments have been preserved. *Only them* will be unable to benefit from market services - *services marchands*. The others, the lower management or production staff, will be forced to serve the cause of *privileged classes* that benefited from this automation. Underlying is the argument that this unfair work, revenues and free-time distribution in the economic sphere - made possible through technical and technological innovations - drive a minority of *so-called elites* to buy complementary free-time to others, considered as less productive and/or less capable of generating wealth. The latter being obligated to be employed by the former (Gorz, 1988).

Within a framework of Master-Servant relationship; where productivity, solvency and efficiency of the wealthiest gives us more reasons to understand how the time of the *servants time* has to be allocated to economic activities where it is still valued. Therefore, one can witness the development and growth of an economy which promotes a certain *type* of managers, directors or planners while excluding, or allowing at its periphery, another class of workers, less *able* or less *productive*. However, now that we can answer first two answers of the previous questioning, the third questioning requires a more critical development. Through a critique of everyday life in *capitalist society*, the following section attempts to do so.

## 2. Work, Politics and Common Sense: A critique of everyday life in capitalist society.

### A. Introduction

Conventionally, politicians and policy makers view full employment as a justifiable goal. It is widely argued that paid work is society's most effective means of generating civility, solidarity and inclusion (Bowring, 1999). To them, employment binds people to the dominant structures, rhythms and goals of mainstream society. It is supposed to constitute a framework for daily behavior and patterns of interaction because it imposes disciplines and regularities (Wilson, 1997). It is in work that people find their connection to the wider society, that they find a sense of purpose and self-respect (Leadbeater and Mulgan, 1997). Without work, people are deprived of a primary source of identity and meaning, and are increasingly susceptible to ill-health, family breakdown, drug abuse and criminal behavior (Philpott, 1996).

Where one could find many other examples of this dominant ideology in others mainstream scholar essays or other widely public discourses, we decide not to go any further. The reason lies in the existing paradox that allows for the conciliation of *passion for work* with the *existential vacuity* it requires and, secondly, imposes. The section of this chapter will attempt to provide an answer to the second and third questions. With this objective, it will take the concept of *work* and its application in individual's *everyday life* as the starting points of its critique.

Here, our theoretical grounds find their roots in Gorz (1982) and Lafargue's (1848) legacies. In their understanding of Gorz's development, Vincent and Negri (1992) state that *nowadays work* cannot be a vector of sense nor human creativity. The capitalist developed has annihilates the *société du travail* at the very moment it turned *work* into a *measurable activity* responding to efficiency, profitability, productivity and competitiveness standards – excluding every *free development* of its individuals and groups. To them, this capitalist development, arguing in favor of *work productivity*, resulted into a *dual society* where *instrumentalizing* logics of profits and permanent reproduction of exclusion, alienation and violence (Negri and Vincement, 1992; Gorz, 1982).

However, if interested into a harsh analysis of *work*<sup>35</sup>, one can find in Paul Lafargue's work, *The Right to be Lazy* (1848), a critique which may still be considered as applicable.

*A strange delusion possesses the working classes of the nations where capitalist civilization holds its sway. This delusion drags in its train the individual and social woes which for two centuries have tortured sad humanity. This delusion is the love of work, the furious passion for work, pushed even to the exhaustion of the vital force of the individual and his progeny. Instead of opposing this mental aberration, the priests, the economists and the moralists have cast a sacred halo over work. Blind and finite men, they have wished to be wiser than their God; weak and contemptible men, they have presumed to rehabilitate what their God had cursed (Lafargue, 1848).*

According to Lafargue, capitalist system intends to relate with the early cleric requirements. These obligations lied in the necessary submission of individuals to the profit of the holy social machine.

*I wish to make the influence of the clergy all powerful because I count upon it to propagate that good philosophy which teaches man that he is here below to suffer, and not that other philosophy which on the contrary bids man to enjoy. Capitalist ethics, a pitiful parody on Christian ethics, strikes with its anathema the flesh of the laborer; its ideal is to reduce the producer to the smallest number of needs, to suppress his joys and his passions and to condemn him to play the part of a machine turning out work without respite and without thanks. [...] And the economists go on repeating to the laborers, "Work, to increase social wealth". But deafened and stupefied by their own howlings, the economists answer: "Work, always work, to create your prosperity" Work, work, proletarians, to increase social wealth and your individual poverty; work, work, in order that becoming poorer, you may have more reason to work and become miserable. Such is the inexorable law of capitalist production. (Lafargue, 1848)*

In his view, the fallacious argument invoked by the "*Haute Bourgeoisie*" indirectly restores *manufactured manipulating values* - in subordinating oneself for the good of a *so-called* social order, prerequisite and insurance of their *material patrimony*. The paradox lies in the fact that this minority, *or economic elite*, promotes a lifestyle in which it does not believe in, nor takes part in.

*By working you make your poverty increase and your poverty releases us from imposing work upon you by force of law. The legal imposition of work "gives too much trouble, requires too much violence and makes too much noise. Hunger, on the contrary, is not only a pressure which is peaceful, silent and incessant, but as it is the most natural motive for work and industry, it also provokes to the most powerful efforts. (Lafargue, 1848)*

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<sup>35</sup> The tripalium is an instrument of torture. Labor means 'suffering'. We are unwise to forget the origin of the words 'travail' and 'labour' (Vaneigem, 1992).

Those *so-called* philanthropists *idle* and too-often *poorly cultivated bourgeois*, are now considered as the most virtuous men as they give the *poor* the opportunity to earn a living, the possibility to sublimate their *primitive origins*. In their great almightiness, they allow other to work, to steal a portion of their wealth. And Lafargue to argue:

*What a miserable abortion of the revolutionary principles of the bourgeoisie! What woeful gifts from its god Progress! The philanthropists hail as benefactors of humanity those who having done nothing to become rich, give work to the poor. Far better were it to scatter pestilence and to poison the springs than to erect a capitalist factory in the midst of a rural population. Introduce factory work, and farewell joy, health and liberty; farewell to all that makes life beautiful and worth living.*

One can witness recent, and still virulent, critique of this *work* in Vaneigem's work (1992). In his view, the dictatorship of productive work stepped into the breach. It's mission is physically to weaken the majority of men, collectively to castrate and stupefy them in order to make them receptive to the least pregnant, least virile, most senile ideologies in the entire history of falsehood. Productive labor is part and parcel of the technology of law and order. He goes further and argues that human consequences are rarely acknowledged.

*In an industrial society which confuses work and productivity, the necessity of producing has always been an enemy of the desire to create. What spark of humanity, of a possible creativity, can remain alive in a being dragged out of sleep at six every morning, jolted about in suburban trains, deafened by the racket of machinery, bleached and steamed by meaningless sounds and gestures, spun dry by statistical controls, and tossed out at the end of the day into the entrance halls of railway stations, those cathedrals of departure for the hell of weekdays and the nugatory paradise of weekends, where the crowd communes in weariness and boredom? (Vaneigem, 1992)*

By failing to assign a human purpose and meaning to the development of post-industrial society, to seize and fulfill the future it promises, we are, in effect, denying individuals and communities a sense of common direction and value. There are limits to how much everyday life can be subject to commercial and organization imperatives, to the monetization and formalization of human conduct. These limits are breached only at the cost of eroding people's capacity to *render meaningful* their own actions and relationships and thus, in turn, at the cost impairing society's collective ability to confer meaning, give direction and assign a human goal, to the development of modernity. These limits often constitute resistance to the forces of economic growth. But as yet they have not

engendered a positive movement capable of capitalizing on the fault lines that have emerged (Bowring, 1999).

Here, we realize how *easy* it became for governments to prevent individuals, more particularly, workers and employees from engaging into ‘*Social Change Thinking*’. As developed earlier<sup>36</sup>, States have witnessed a decreasing influence of its *Left-Hand*<sup>37</sup> (Bourdieu, 1993) in its governmental affairs. Many governments across the advanced capitalist world are shifting towards forms of welfare provision that involve greater levels of conditionality. Among them, one can observe that the eligibility for benefits is conditional on citizens meeting specified behavioral standards, standards often connected with searching and preparing for employment (White, 2004). Here, this change stands for the transformation of the Welfare into a Workfare<sup>38</sup> State. As stated by Schmidt and Hersh (2006), this is related to the twin strategies of industrial paths and social policies resulting from an ever-increasing power of *Transnational Capitalist Class*<sup>39</sup> made possible through intensive Corporate Political Activity (CPA) itself being facilitated thanks to the process of globalization (Oberman, 2004; Sklair, 1999 and 2002, Robinson and Harris, 2000)<sup>40</sup>.

Societies in which *meritocracy*, explicitly translating the shift of a Welfare State into a Workfare State (see Bowring, 1999), slavish of vested interests of a minority and victim of the laws dictated, but accepted, by the Labor Market made ways for legitimacy of such omniscient, omnipresent et omnipotent inhuman dimensions. Combining both dynamics of reward - *employment sacralization* -

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<sup>36</sup> Earlier in this work, one has observed that “the early post-war period was one in which almost of the advanced capitalist societies developed welfare systems that more or less produced all sorts of survival-relevant guarantees. At least from the 1980’s onward, however, these guarantees, including sufficient pension provision, subsidized housing, free schooling, subsidized services and utilities, unemployment benefit and so on, have been progressively withdrawn” (Lodziak, 2002).

<sup>37</sup> The Left-Hand of the State is often associated to Maternal Obligations of Governments. Here one can refer to Health, Pensions and Education. Broadly speaking, it covers all Institutions whose main concerns is care.

<sup>38</sup> However, it is worthwhile to note, as detailed in Attas and De-Shalit (2004) that there are various workfare programmes in different countries and cities. Therefore, we here refer to the general idea that people who receive financial aid and other services either for themselves or for their offspring through welfare are required to perform or participate in mandatory labour or services in order to qualify for the benefits they receive. As defined by Anderson (2004) a Workfare State is a State that considers the justice of requiring employment as a condition of receiving public assistance.

<sup>39</sup> According to Sklair, effective power is in the hands of four fractions: (1) those who own and control the major corporations and their local affiliates, (2) globalizing bureaucrats and politicians, (3) globalizing professionals, and (4) consumerist elites.

<sup>40</sup> Acknowledging for the necessity to keep this essay as simple as possible, one can turn to Sklair (1999, 2000) and Femia (1981) developments of Gramsci’s thoughts for further analysis of such issues.

and punishment - *unemployment stigmatization* - this *system* has succeeded in turning what could have been considered as a genuine, productive, human activity into a fundamental pillar for social identity, usefulness and, worse, a survival activity meant to meet governmental and financial requirements.

## B. Poverty, Reproduction and Revolution of Everyday Life

*Because of its increasing triviality, everyday life has gradually become our central preoccupation. No illusion, sacred or deconsecrated, collective or individual, can hide the poverty of our daily actions any longer. The enrichment of life calls inexorably for the analysis of the new forms taken by poverty, and the perfection of the old weapons of refusal (Vaneigem, 1992).*

In order to escape from a somehow abstract thinking, which may inhibit the occurrence of necessary practical implications of this essay, or a genuine *praxis*, one can find in the following paragraphs an attempt to consider a more pragmatic, even though critical, analysis. The observations developed by Perlman (1969) serve as the fundamental basis of our thinking. Bearing in mind the insightful philosophical discourse based on power, domination and servitude within the capitalist system; it is our belief that he brightly combined an everyday life critique. In this section, our reflections intend to emphasize the inconsistencies of our daily practices under a too-often *obstacled* critical perspective. We will oppose two major ideologies. On the one hand, the task of capitalist ideology which maintains the veil keeping people from seeing that their own activities reproduce the form of their daily life. On the other hand, it becomes the task of critical (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1974; Marcuse, 1964) and non-conventional theory<sup>41</sup> (Onfray, 1997; Vaneigem, 1992) to focus and unveil these same activities, render them transparent and make this reproduction more visible.

In his view, Perlman sees the practical everyday activity of wage-workers as a reproduction of wage labor and capital. *“Modern men, like tribesmen and slaves, reproduce the inhabitants, the social relations and the ideas of their society; they reproduce the social form of daily life. Like the tribe and the slave system, the capitalist system is neither the natural nor the final form of human society; like the earlier social forms, capitalism is a specific response to material and historical conditions.”*

Unlike earlier forms of social activity, everyday life in capitalist society *systematically* transforms the material conditions to which capitalism originally responded. Some of the material limits to human activity come gradually under human control. At a high level of industrialization, practical activity creates its own material conditions as well as its social form. Thus the subject of analysis is not only how practical activity in capitalist society reproduces capitalist society, but also how this

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<sup>41</sup> At this stage of the development, we will refer to Michel Onfray's Hedonistic Philosophy and Situationist theory of Raoul Vaneigem.

activity itself eliminates the material conditions to which capitalism is a response, turning capitalism into a holistic, a-temporal and final solution.

In the performance of their daily activities, the members of capitalist society simultaneously carry out two processes. Not only do they reproduce the form of their activities, and they eliminate the material conditions to which this form of activity initially responded. But they also do not know that they carry out these processes; their own activities are not transparent to them. They are under the illusion that their activities are responses to natural conditions beyond their control and do not see that they are themselves authors of those conditions.

Daily life consists of related activities which reproduce and expand the capitalist form of social activity. The sale of labor-time for a price, a wage; the embodiment of labor-time in commodities, salable goods, both tangible and intangible; the consumption of tangible and intangible commodities, such as consumer goods and spectacles; these activities which characterize daily life under capitalism are not manifestations of *human nature* nor are they imposed on men by forces beyond their control.

Creative activity takes the form of commodity production, namely production of marketable goods, and the results of human activity take the form of commodities. Marketability or salability is the universal characteristic of all practical activity and all products. The products of human activity, which are necessary for survival, have the form of salable goods: they are only available in exchange for money. And money is only available in exchange for commodities. If a large number of men accept the legitimacy of these conventions, if they accept the convention that commodities are a prerequisite for money, and that money is a prerequisite for survival, then they find themselves locked into a vicious circle.

As soon as men accept money as an equivalent for life, the sale of living activity becomes a condition for their physical and social survival. Life is exchanged for survival. Creation and production come to mean sold activity. *A man's activity is productive, useful to society, only when it is sold activity. And the man himself is a productive member of society only if the activities of his daily life are sold activities.* As soon as people accept the terms of this exchange, daily activity takes the form of universal prostitution. Unlike prostitutes, however, for whom the renting out of one's body, regardless of the ultimate interests or goals it may serve, is always implicitly an act of violation and direct commodification of self, the site of post-Fordist worker's alienation is not the physical body, which for the most part retains its integrity, so much as the *social body* – that is the

broader cultural resources, relations and conflucts which set the parameters of selfhood, authenticity, and justice (Bowring, 2002).

The sold creative power, or sold daily activity, takes the form of labor. Labor is a historically specific form of human activity. Labor is abstract activity which has only one property: it is marketable, it can be sold for a given quantity of money. Labor is also quantifiable, measurable and can thus meet productivity, solvency, and efficiency standards. Labor is indifferent activity: indifferent to the particular task performed and indifferent to the particular subject to which the task is directed. Digging, printing and carving are different activities, but all three are labor in capitalist society. Labor is simply *earning money*. Living activity which takes the form of labor is a means to earn money and, consequently, life becomes an act of survival.

This ironic reversal is not the dramatic climax of an imaginative novel; it is a fact of daily life in capitalist society. Survival, namely self-preservation and reproduction, is not the means to creative practical activity, but precisely the other way around. Creative activity in the form of labor, namely sold activity, is a painful necessity for survival; labor is the means to self-preservation and reproduction.

The sale of living activity brings about another reversal. Through sale, the labor of an individual becomes the *property* of another, it is appropriated by another, it comes under the control of another. In other words, a person's activity becomes the activity of another, the activity of its owner; it becomes alien to the person who performs it. Thus one's life, the accomplishments of an individual in the world, the difference which his life makes in the life of humanity, are not only transformed into labor, a painful condition for survival; they are transformed into alien activity, activity performed by the buyer of that labor.

In exchange for his sold activity, the worker gets money, the conventionally accepted means of survival in capitalist society. With this money he can buy commodities, things, but he cannot buy back his activity. This reveals a peculiar "gap" in money as the "universal equivalent." A person can sell commodities for money, and he can buy the same commodities with money. He can sell his living activity for money, but he cannot buy his living activity for money. He does not exist in the world as an active agent who transforms it. but as a helpless impotent spectator he may call this state of powerless admiration "happiness," and since labor is painful, he may desire to be "happy," namely inactive, all his life (a condition similar to being born dead). The commodities, the spectacles, consume him; he uses up living energy in passive admiration; he is consumed by things.

In this sense, the '*having equation*' is *proportionally inverse to the 'being equation'*. An individual could surmount this death-in-life through marginal creative activity; but the population cannot, except by abolishing the capitalist form of practical activity, by abolishing wage-labor and thus dealienating creative activity. As long as he accepts that work is the only activity that can ensure his existence, the individual will not escape from it. The factory, the workplace, then cease to be the main arena of the central conflict. The battle lines of that conflict will be everywhere information, language, modes of life, tastes and fashions are produced and shaped by the forces of capital, commerce, the state and the media; in other words, everywhere the subjectivity and '*identity*' of individuals, their values and their images of themselves and the world, are being continually structured, manufactured and shaped (Bowring, 2002).

Within this dimension, one can now better assess Onfray's development in what he names *Industrial Utopia*. In his view, this Industrial Utopia, or its planners, promised its *underling* that the development of its productive forces and the expansion of the economic sphere would free the *humanité* from scarcity, injustice and *bad-being*; that it will give, with the sovereign power to dominate nature, the sovereign power to dominate itself; that it will turn *work* as a *démiurgique* and *autopoiétique* activity in which the accomplishment of each of its agents would be recognized. From this utopia, nothing remains. This does not mean that everything is vain and that this induces the necessity to subordinate to *the nature of things*. That *simply*<sup>42</sup> means that we have to change this utopia because as long as we will be its prisoner, we remain incapable of perceiving our potential of liberation. Thus, we will need to deliver ourselves from this alienating activity that we call *work* in order to find *higher* and more fulfilling activities.

Acknowledging for the insights developed in the previous chapters, we can undertake our conclusions. These can be found in the next chapter.

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<sup>42</sup> By simply we consider more the ability to consider, imagine and think – as opposed to realize or make concrete.

### 3. Conclusions

#### 1. Thinking about ‘Status Quo’

*“Using all the means at its disposal, the existing System strives to prevent us from introducing those conditions in which men can live creative lives without war, hunger, and repressive work.” (Dutschke, 1969)*

In my research of factors participating in the department of Status Quo, we have rapidly dismissed the relevance of *Consumer Culture arguments*. Recalling Lodziak’s argument, one has observed that the increase in expenses is less justified by a *shifting consumerist subjectivity* than in the increase in survival costs. Thanks to the arguments of Perlman (1969), Lafargue (1848) and Gorz (1982), I have established that the negated individuality finds its justification in the social imposition of its ability to be both productive and generator of wealth – if *it* wants to prove *its* social utility.

On the one hand, one may have witnessed the occurrence of an ever-increasing competitive world – allowed by the application of liberal policies, themselves urging for a *Workfare State* – leading to a permanent state of Warfare where our environment is not only *unsecurizing* but also *unsecured* – be it through economic or *bodily primitive* uses of violence. In my view, this resulted in the conception of life as an act of survival – due to the increasing proximity with precariousness<sup>43</sup>. Equally important are the influences of the *Politics/Practices of Fear* (Altheide, 2003) put in combination with the *Politics/Practices of Boredom* (Ferrell, 2004) promoted by the most advanced capitalist – if not post-capitalist – societies.

Consequently, microscopic transformations, at the individual level, gave free space for further mutations in its own *subjectivity* – the transformation of a subject into a *subject-object*. As stated by Onfray (1997), this *subject-object* is less defined by its free conscious than by a manufactured, rewarded and promoted submissive indebtedness. It is my belief that such a disastrous situation originated from both macroscopic and microscopic mutations. More pervasive, this *subject-object* is *a-historical*, or incapable to consider both its<sup>44</sup> past - which has been repudiated – and future – which is feared thanks to the elimination of the historical and material conditions of this capitalist

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<sup>43</sup> Or, as Lodziak put it, the increase of survival costs.

<sup>44</sup> The use of “it” responds to the proximity of this individual with its object state.

system<sup>45</sup> and the *Politics of Fear*. This argument found its justification in Perlman's critique (1969) of the *Reproduction* everyday life in capitalist society. In a *reproductive mode*, the *subject-object* neither is capable to *remind* nor *imagine* a different situation because of its manifest lack of its natural questioning. As Marcuse (1964) stated, "*Confronted with the total character of the achievements of advanced industrial society, critical theory is left without the rational for transcending this society*". The individual must be destroyed, then, recycled and integrated into a community purveyor of sense. It is the very basic of social contract theories: end of the indivisible being, abandon of its own body and advent of the social corpse, the only empowered to claim responsibility for the indivisibility and unity, usually associated to the individual, to determine and define the utility of this negated individual, to impose its rules in favor of this so-called *Social Order*.

*From prince to manager, from priest to expert, from father confessor to social worker, it is always the principle of useful suffering and willing sacrifice which forms the most solid base for hierarchical power. (Vaneigem, 1992)*

Here, I mean that the unity of the manipulated collectivity, commiserating with social constraints, rests upon the negation of this individual. By subduing itself to the world, the individual learned the order and fastly internalized the *vérité générale* to the *pensée organisatrice* (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1974). This social utility – providing to these negated *subject-objects* with necessary values of self-accomplishment and social realization – is easily acknowledgeable if one analyzes the *productivist discourses* of political and economic leaders – sacralizing work and stigmatizing unemployment (Wacquant, 2003<sup>46</sup>). This *subject-object* is reduced to the economic reason (Gorz, 1982), through the activity of its employment. Therefore, politics succeeded in realizing the mutation of the individual into an object. Object of a larger mechanisms in which he *passively* takes part, this *object-subject* defines itself in relation with the Institutions which allows its existence, its *raison de vivre*<sup>47</sup>, hence the allowance to the distinction between good and bad, bright and unimpressive, beneficiary and freeloader, deserving and aided *object-subjects*, that is to say between those who consent to the principle of submission and the others (Onfray, 1997).

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<sup>46</sup> <http://sourisverteamiens.ouvaton.org/politique/index.php?2008/10/26/110-loic-waquant-et-la-remise-en-cause-du-travail-productiviste>

<sup>47</sup> Some may say its *raison de survivre*.

Run by such ideologies, its *Reason* became totalitarian:

*“Every thing which is not conform to calculus criteria and utility is suspect to its Reason. For this same Reason, what is not divisible by a number [...] is pure illusion. This Reason behaves with reality as a dictator behaves with men: he knows them to the extent that he can manipulate them [...]. On their path to modern science, men renounced to their senses. Their knowledge, synonym of power, now faces no limits neither in the slavery in which this creature is reduced nor in its complacency towards the ‘Master of this World’. What matters lies less in the satisfaction found in ultimate Truth than in execution, the efficient method; the ends and mission of science does not lie in plausible dignified discourses nor in any straightforward argumentation but in the ‘action’, work and in the discovery of unknown details allowing for a better adjustment of its existence [...] Its supreme promise is an ever-more-comfortable life for an ever-growing number of people who, in a strict sense, cannot imagine a qualitatively different universe of discourse and action, for the capacity to contain and manipulate subversive imagination and effort is an integral part of the given society. [...] A society in which subjects as well as objects constitute instrumentalities in a whole that has its raison d’être in the accomplishments of its overpowering productivity.*

(Extracts from Horkheimer and Adorno, 1974 and Marcuse: 1964)

The development of a critical thinking becomes even more difficult to restore if one evolves in an environment combining punishment practices, permitted by the increasing pressure of *Panopticon-oriented means* promoted by the *Big-Brother State* and the promotion of what could call *human knowledge compartementalization and expertise*. Within this dimension, there is no difference between, for example, *Taylorist* or *Fordist* workers and highly *skilled* employee in the sense that they are *only* competent at performing one single basic task – often poorly relevant in terms of existential meanings it brings to their life – in their field of *activity* – except if they are led to be more *responsive* to market demands and show the expected *flexibility* required from any *good* worker or employee – to the detriment of learning new and relevant knowledge or gaining experience outside their specialty. The point of this argument is that the *global moronization* lies more in its ability to create *a-historical, disposable and interchangeable* individuals than in the fallacious argument justifying the necessity to have a well-oiled social system. It is within this perspective that I articulated my understanding of the factors promoting the *Status Quo*<sup>48</sup>. In other words, reality is enacted or socially produced, but in time social structures become stubborn, resist social change, and thus become constraining. Unless reflection occurs, the meanings people attribute to social structures change more slowly than the structures themselves.

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<sup>48</sup> By ‘Status Quo’, one can also understand a situation which needs and requires individuals to accept and adapt to the existing conditions rather than to change oppressive conditions (Murray and Ozanne, 1991).

As suggested in this paper, minor changes have been performed from the 18<sup>th</sup> century of Rousseau. Once used with leaders, dictators or other *symbols of power*, be them legitimate or not, the majority of individuals is not used to think by themselves, at least politically and culturally.

*They must be "forced to be free." to "see objects as they are, and sometimes as they ought to appear. They must be shown the "good road" they are in search of (Rousseau, 1762).*

And Marcuse to complement that

*Society must create the material prerequisites of freedom for all its members before it can be a free society; it must first create the wealth before being able to distribute it according to the freely developing needs of the individual; it must first enable its slaves to learn and see and think before they know what is going on and what they themselves can do to change it. And, to the degree to which the slaves have been preconditioned to exist as slaves and be content in that role, their liberation necessarily appears to come from without and from above. (Marcuse, 1964)*

In order to re-open the debate, I still believe in the existence of Social Change. Within the perspective of this essay, I think that the *reason* should be de-institutionalized to better unleash our potential to realize ourselves – and thus, a *new* society. Here, I developed the Institutions of Consumption and Production. I undertook an understanding of those *activities* – *consumerism and productivism* – as *institutional* in the sense that they are *established* or can be declined into *a set of organizational activities whom practices require the respect – or subordination – to clear, but implicit, rules to a global audience.*

*The break with the logic of productivism could only be made by those 'recalcitrant to the sacralization of work', whose interests represent 'a negation and rejection of law and order, power and authority, in the name of the inalienable right to control one's own life' (Gorz, 1982).*

Solutions have already been imagined but as long as our *reasoning* is *colonized* (Latouche, 2007) by the same Institutions, individuals' imagination will remain in the domain of *Utopia*. In this sense, I have articulated my arguments around the *super-imposed conditions* determining the extent and limits to which one can pretend controlling one's life in our societies and have found in theoretical insights developed the *essential* requirements and criticisms to *re-think* or *re-imagine* a kind of society where emancipation and transcendence would be possible. Here, I think, one can better think about the questions articulating the enjoyment of personal liberty and collective equality. How

egalitarian is this *capitalist system*? Which kind of equality do we want – access, use and distribution of productive assets, wealth, education, health and social cares? Is equality the solution? How legitimate is the principle of *governmentality* underlying many of the ruling Institutions? How different, from that specific perspective, is democracy from any other forms of government? How totalitarian or libertarian is the concept of *representativeness*? How *unidimensional* do those Institutions behave? How *imaginative* are policy-makers? Which are their intentions? Who profits from their policies? What has to be done with those used to and appreciative of this system?

Acknowledging for the development of this essay, how can one conceive the *philosophical* notions of authenticity, autonomy and liberty? How possible is it to think about personal emancipation or transcendence in current societies? Far from giving a final – maybe even a beginning of it – answer to this non-exhaustive list of questions, I believe that this essay contributes to their development if one engages in a personal investigation. Within this perspective, one should consider an attempt to raise pertinent, critical, sometimes radical questions rather than the willingness to impose any indisputable responses.

## 2. Limitations

This work involves a great deal of limitations. Among them, one can acknowledge for the following ones.

The first limitation is the problem of implementation. In other words, how does one move from abstract theory to concrete social change? This work contains all the *practical* or *materialist* limitations due to the *idealism* style in which it is written. Notions of freedom, authenticity and autonomy for example still find contradictory answers according to the reader's understanding, experience and constraints – practical or *real life* constraints. Moreover, practical implications are often, if not always, impossible, at least at short and middle term. It requires that one not only form a subjective and objective understanding, but also a program of actions. Such an enterprise cannot be accomplished in a single study and might require involvement with groups outside of academia. Such an attempt requires a longer research horizon and a deeper commitment to the substantive problems. Although the problem of implementation does not reveal a flaw with critical theory, given existing tenure and promotion policies, the number of researchers who can afford to engage in critical research may be limited (Murray and Ozanne, 1991).

The second problem is rooted in the critical theorists' claim that all knowledge is historical. If this is so, how can a researcher step out of this historicity and offer a critique of society by a transcendent rational standard? It is difficult to defend the existence of historical knowledge while at the same time suggesting that an ahistorical basis for critique exists. Each member of the Frankfurt School, including Habermas, has wrestled with this issue (Murray and Ozanne, 1991).

More serious is the limitation relative to '*theories competition*'. Within this concept, Fuhrman states, "*competing theories in sociology are attempts not only to win arguments but converts as well. Therefore [...], every theory attempts to assert its cognitive superiority. That is, there may be no agreements as to what constitutes superiority; there are, however, appeals made for that superiority. Therefore, when different theorists claim superiority, this claim must also be understood in light of what good theory ought to be* (Fuhrman, 1979).

Moreover, the inclusion of many *generalizations* and, especially, concerning the *capitalist system*. While it is a common belief that we share a general understanding of this concept, one can notice the inapplicability of this notion within whole Western countries. Various forms of *neo-liberal capitalism* may be found and many political and economic leaders do not make use of it as criticized in this work. The same critique goes for the notion of *consumerism* and *work*.

Finally, it has been the tendency of this paper to consider any of the citizens, consumers or producers as behaving – thinking, imagining, acting, practicing – in a very *unidimensional, un-critical and alienable* way. Although *alienation* such as *needs, desires* or *consciousness* are easily blamable, they still remain in the personal sphere of individuals. In this sense, what could be perceived as a subjective critique from the author could also be irrelevant within the individual's life. Therefore, it is not the intention of this paper to *impose* any final definition, observations or conclusions. Rather, one could consider them as a *mean* to engaged into a deep investigation of our *everyday life activities, thinking and imagination*.

## 5. References

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***'De ceux là, que je ne veux pas comprendre, mieux vaut n'être pas compris'***

(Vaneigem, 1992)