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only a revolution of the social organization and of social relations could bring those things about. Will we return, one day, beyond the market economy, to prodigality? Instead of prodigality, we have 'consumption', forced consumption in perpetuity, twin sister to scarcity. It was social logic which brought primitive peoples the 'first' (and only) affluent society. It is our social logic which condemns us to luxurious and spectacular penury.

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Towards a Theory of Consumption

The Autopsy of *Homo oeconomicus*

A fairy story: 'Once upon a time there was a Man who lived in Scarcity. After many adventures and a long journey through Economic Science, he met the Affluent Society. They married and had lots of needs.' 'The beauty of the economic man,' as A.N. Whitehead remarked, 'was that we knew exactly what he was after.'¹ That human fossil of the Golden Age, born, in the modern era, from the happy union of Human Nature and Human Rights, is endowed with a heightened sense of formal rationality, which leads him to:

- 1 seek his own happiness without the slightest hesitation;
- 2 prefer objects which will provide him with the greatest satisfactions.

The whole discourse, lay and academic, on consumption is articulated upon this sequence, which is the mythological sequence of a folk-tale: a Man 'endowed' with wants or needs which 'lead' him towards objects which 'give' him satisfaction. Since man is, nonetheless, never satisfied (he is, indeed, criticized for this), the same story begins over and over again, with the sterile self-evidence of old fables.

Some react with perplexity: 'Needs are the most stubbornly unknown of all the unknowns with which economic science deals' (Knight). But this doubt does not stop the litany on needs being faithfully recited by all the proponents of the anthropological disciplines from Marx to Galbraith, from Robinson Crusoe to Chombart de Lauwe. For economists, the key term is 'utility': the desire for a specific good for purposes of consumption or, in other words, the destruction of its utility. Need is therefore already given its object [*finalisé*] by the available goods; preferences are orientated by the particular spread of products offered on the market: this is, basically, *effective demand*. For the psychologist, the key idea is 'motivation', a slightly more complex theory, less 'object-oriented' and more 'instinct-oriented', of a kind of pre-existent, ill-defined necessity. For sociologists and psycho-sociologists who come last in line, there is a 'socio-cultural' dimension here. The anthropological postulate of an *individual* endowed with needs and inclined by nature to satisfy them is not questioned, nor is that of the consumer as a free, conscious being who is presumed to know what he wants (sociologists are wary of 'deep

there is a 'social dynamic' of needs. Models of competition and conformity are brought in ('keeping up with the Joneses') drawn from the group context or from grand 'cultural models' relating to society at large or to history.

Roughly speaking, three positions can be identified: for Marshall, needs are interdependent and rational; for Galbraith (we shall come back to him), choices are imposed by persuasion; for Gervasi (and others), needs are interdependent and are the product of a learning process (rather than a rational calculation).

Gervasi: 'Choices are not made at random, but are socially controlled and reflect the cultural model within which they are made. It is not just any old goods which are produced or consumed: they must have some meaning with regard to a system of values.' This leads into a view of consumption in terms of integration: 'The goal of the economy is not the maximization of production for the individual, but the maximization of production linked in with the value system of the society' (Parsons). Duesenberry will claim, in this same vein, that the only choice is, in fact, to vary one's possessions as a function of one's position on the hierarchical ladder. Ultimately, it is the difference of choices between one society and another and the similarity of choices within the same society which force us to consider consumer behaviour as a social phenomenon. There is an appreciable difference between this view and that of the economists: their 'rational' choice has here become conformist choice, the choice of conformity. Needs are directed not so much towards objects as towards values, and their satisfaction initially has the sense of *striving up to those values*. The fundamental, unconscious, automatic choice of the consumer is to accept the style of life of a particular society (it is, therefore, no longer a choice(!) and the theory of the autonomy and sovereignty of the consumer is refuted).

This sociology culminates in the notion of the 'standard package', defined by Riesman as the set of goods and services which forms more or less the baseline heritage of the average American. Rising regularly, indexed to the national standard of living, it is an ideal minimum of a statistical kind, a standard model of middle-class life. Exceeded by some, only dreamt of by others, it is an *idea* in which the American way of life is encapsulated.² Here again, the 'standard package' refers not so much to the materiality of goods (TV, bathroom, car, etc.) as to the *ideal of conformity*.

All this sociology does not advance us very much. Apart from the fact that the notion of conformity has never been anything but a cover for an immense tautology (in this case: the average American defined by the 'standard package', which is itself defined by the statistical average of goods consumed. Or, to put it sociologically, a particular individual is a member of a particular group because he consumes particular goods, and he consumes particular goods because he is a member of a particular

economists is simply transferred here to the relation between the individual and the group. Conformity and satisfaction are analogous: they involve the same matching-up of a subject to objects, or a subject to a group – *these terms being posited as separate entities* – by means of a logical principle of equivalence. The concepts of 'need' and 'norm' are the expressions in the respective cases of this miraculous match-up.

Between the 'utility' of the economists and the 'conformity' of the sociologists, there is the same difference as Galbraith establishes between the pursuit of profit, the pecuniary motivation characteristic of the 'traditional' capitalist system, and the behaviour of identification and adaptation specific to the era of organization and the technostucture. The basic question which results, both for the psycho-sociologists of conformity and for Galbraith, and which (with good reason) does not arise for the economists – for whom the consumer remains an individual ideally free in his final, rational calculation – is that of the *conditioning of needs*.

Since Packard's *The Hidden Persuaders* and Dichter's *The Strategy of Desire* (not to mention a number of other works), the conditioning of needs (by advertising in particular) has become the favourite theme in the discussion of the consumer society. The celebration of affluence and the great lament over 'artificial' or 'alienated' needs are the two central strands in a single mass culture – and even in the social-scientific ideology on the question. This latter is generally rooted in an old moral and social philosophy deriving from the humanist tradition. In the case of Galbraith, it is based on more rigorous economic and political thinking. We shall therefore concentrate here on two of his works: *The Affluent Society* and *The New Industrial State*.

Summarizing his position, we may say that the basic problem of contemporary capitalism is no longer the contradiction between 'profit maximization' and the 'rationalization of production' (from the point of view of the entrepreneur), but that between a potentially unlimited productivity (at the level of the technostucture) and the need to dispose of the product. It becomes vital for the system in this phase to control not just the apparatus of production, but consumer demand; to control not just prices, but what will be demanded at those prices. The 'general effect' – either prior to the act of production (surveys, market research) or subsequent to it (advertising, marketing, packaging) – is to 'shift the locus of decision in the purchase of goods from the consumer where it is beyond control to the firm where it is subject to control'.³ More generally, 'the accommodation of the market behaviour of the individual, as well as of social attitudes in general, to the needs of producers and the goals of the technostucture is an inherent feature of the system [it would be more appropriate to say: a *logical* feature]. It becomes increasingly important with the growth of the industrial system.'⁴ This is what Galbraith calls the 'revised sequence', as opposed to the 'accepted

to impact back, through the market, on the manufacturers. In this new case, by contrast, the manufacturers control market behaviour, and guide and model social attitudes and needs. This is, at least tendentially, the total dictatorship of the order of production.

This 'revised sequence' destroys the fundamental myth of the 'accepted sequence' (it has at least that critical value): namely, that it is the individual who exercises power in the economic system. That emphasis on the power of the individual contributed largely to legitimating organization: all the dysfunctions, nuisances and inherent contradictions of the order of production are justified since they extend the scope of consumer sovereignty. It is clear, by contrast, that the whole economic and psycho-sociological apparatus of market research, motivational studies, etc., which, it is claimed, ensures that real demand and the deep wants of the consumer govern the market, exists solely to stimulate that demand in order to create further outlets for products while constantly masking this objective process by staging its opposite. 'Man only became an object of science for man when automobiles became harder to sell than to manufacture.'

So Galbraith everywhere denounces the boosting of demand by those 'artificial accelerators' the technostructure deploys in its imperialist expansion, accelerators which render any stabilization of demand impossible.⁵ Income, prestige purchases and surplus labour form a frantic vicious circle, the infernal round of consumption based on the celebration of so-called 'psychological' needs. These are differentiated from 'physiological' needs by apparently being based on 'discretionary income' and freedom of choice; they can thus be ruthlessly manipulated. Advertising clearly plays a crucial role here (this, too, has become a conventional idea). It seems attuned to the needs of the individual and to products. In fact, says Galbraith, it is attuned to the industrial system: 'It appears to place a significance on products only in so far as it is important for the system, and it upholds the importance and prestige of the technostructure from the social point of view.' Through advertising, the system appropriates social objectives for its own gain, and imposes its own goals as social objectives: 'What's good for General Motors . . .'

Once again, one can only agree with Galbraith (and others) that the freedom and sovereignty of the consumer are mystification pure and simple. This carefully sustained mystique (preserved first and foremost by economists) of individual satisfaction and choice, which is the culmination of a whole civilization of 'freedom', is the very ideology of the industrial system, justifying its arbitrary power and all the collective nuisances it generates: dirt, pollution, deculturation. In fact, the consumer is sovereign in a jungle of ugliness where *freedom of choice has been forced upon him*. The revised sequence (that is to say, the *system of*

the electoral system. The drugstore and the polling booth, the loci of individual freedom, are also the system's two mammary glands.

We have set out at length this analysis of the 'technostructural' conditioning of needs and consumption because it is all-powerful today, because it constitutes, thematized as it is in every way in the pseudo-philosophy of 'alienation', a genuine collective representation which is itself part of consumption. But it is open to some fundamental objections, all of which relate to its idealist anthropological postulates. For Galbraith, the needs of the individual can be stabilized. There is in the nature of Man something like an *economic principle* which would make him impose limits on his objectives and needs and, at the same time, on his efforts, were it not for the action of 'artificial accelerators'. In short, a tendency to a – not now maximal, but 'harmonious' – satisfaction, a satisfaction that is balanced at the individual level and which – rather than getting caught up in the vicious circle of excessive gratifications described above – should be able to articulate itself on a social organization of collective needs which is also harmonious. All this is completely utopian.

1 On the principle of 'authentic' or 'artificial' satisfactions, Galbraith rails against the 'specious' reasoning of the economists: 'There is no proof that an expensive woman obtains the same satisfaction from yet another gown as does a hungry man from a hamburger. But there is no proof that she does not. Since it cannot be proven that she does not, her desire, it is held, must be accorded equal standing with that of a poor man for meat.'⁶ 'Absurd,' says Galbraith. But, it is not absurd at all (here the classical economists are almost right to disagree with him – but, in fact, they take their stand in establishing this equivalence on the terrain of effective demand and thus sidestep all the problems). It is nonetheless true that, from the point of view of the consumer's own satisfaction, there is no basis on which to decide what is 'factitious' and what is not. The enjoyment of TV or of a second home is experienced as 'true' freedom; no one experiences these things as an alienation. Only an intellectual can say such a thing, from the depths of his moralizing idealism, but this at most marks him out as being, for his part, an alienated moralist.

2 On the 'economic principle', Galbraith says: 'What is called economic development consists in no small part in devising strategies to overcome the tendency of men to place limits on their objectives as regards income and thus on their efforts.'⁷ And he cites the example of Filipino workers in California: 'The pressure of debt, and the pressure on each to emulate the most extravagant, quickly converted these happy and easygoing people into a modern and reliable work force.'⁸ And all the underdeveloped countries, where the appearance of Western gadgets is the most reliable spur to economic growth. This theory, which we might term the theory of 'pressurizing' or economic training in con-

up forced acculturation to the processes of consumption as the *logical next stage* in the development of the industrial system, following on from the nineteenth century when workers were trained in the processes of industrial production (timekeeping, disciplined action).⁹ Having said this, we would have to explain *why* consumers 'take' the bait, why they are vulnerable to this strategy. It is too easy to appeal to a 'happy and easygoing' nature and to impute a mechanical responsibility to the system. There is no more a 'natural' tendency to be easygoing than there is to pressurized working. What Galbraith does not see – and this forces him to present individuals as mere passive victims of the system – is the whole social logic of differentiation, the distinguishing processes of class or caste which are fundamental to the social structure and are given free rein in 'democratic' society. In short, there is a whole sociological dimension of difference, status, etc., lacking here, in consequence of which all needs are reorganized around an *objective* social demand for signs and differences, a dimension no longer grounding consumption as a function of 'harmonious' individual satisfaction (which might thus be limited in terms of the ideal norms of 'nature'), but as an unlimited social activity. We shall come back to this point later.

3 'Needs are in reality the fruits of production,' says Galbraith, not realizing just how right he is. For, beneath its demystified, lucid air, this thesis, as he understands it, is merely a more subtle version of the natural 'authenticity' of certain needs, and bewitchment by the 'artificial'. Galbraith means that, without the productivist system, a great number of needs would not exist. He means that by producing particular goods and services, companies at the same time produce all the means of suggestion tailored to gaining acceptance for them and therefore, ultimately, 'produce' the needs which correspond to them. There is a serious psychological lacuna in this conception. Needs are closely specified in advance here in relation to *finite objects*. The need is simply a need for a particular object, and the consumer's psyche is, ultimately, just a shop-window or a catalogue. It is true also that, taking this simplistic view of human beings, one cannot but arrive at a crushing psychological reduction in which empirical needs are mirror-reflections of empirical objects. Now, at this level, the conditioning thesis is false. We know how consumers resist particular precise injunctions, how they rove over the gamut of objects with which they might fulfil their 'needs', how advertising is not all-powerful and sometimes induces opposite reactions, and what substitutions there can be between one object and another to meet the same 'need' etc. In short, at the empirical level, a whole complicated strategy, psychological and sociological, cuts across the strategy of production.

The truth is, not that 'needs are the fruits of production', but that **the system of needs is the product of the system of production**. This is quite different. By system of needs, we mean that needs are not pro-

as *consumption power*, as an overall propensity within the more general framework of the productive forces. It is in this sense that the techno-structure may be said to be extending its grasp. The order of production does not 'capture' the order of enjoyment (strictly speaking, such an idea is meaningless) for its own ends. It *denies* the order of enjoyment and supplants it, while reorganizing everything into a system of productive forces. Over the history of the industrial system, we may trace the following *genealogy of consumption*:

- 1 The order of production produces the machine/productive force, a technical system radically different from the traditional tool.
- 2 It produces capital/rationalized productive force, a rational system of investment and circulation, radically different from 'wealth' and from earlier modes of exchange.
- 3 It produces waged labour power, an abstract, systematized productive force, radically different from concrete labour and the traditional 'workmanship'.
- 4 And so it produces needs, the **system** of needs, demand/productive force as a rationalized, integrated, controlled whole, complementary to the three others in a process of total control of the productive forces and production processes. Needs as a **system** are also radically different from enjoyment and satisfaction. They are produced as *system elements*, not as a *relationship of an individual to an object* (just as labour power no longer has anything to do with – and even denies – the worker's relation to the product of his labour, and just as exchange-value no longer has anything to do with concrete, personal exchange, or the commodity form with real goods, etc.).

This is what Galbraith – and with him all the 'alienists' of consumption – fail to see, as they persist in demonstrating that *man's relation to objects, man's relation to himself is rigged*, bamboozled, manipulated – consuming this myth as he consumes objects – because, accepting the timeless postulate of a free, conscious subject (in order to have this resurface at the end of history in a happy ending), they cannot but attribute all the dysfunctions they uncover to a diabolical power – here the techno-structure, armed with advertising, public relations and motivational research. **This is magical thinking if ever there were such a thing. They do not see that needs, taken one by one, are *nothing* and that there is only a system of needs, or rather that needs are only *the most advanced form of the rational systematization of the productive forces at the individual level*, where 'consumption' takes over *logically* and necessarily from production.**

This may clear up a number of mysteries which are inexplicable to our pious 'alienists'. They deplore the fact, for example, that, though we are in the 'age of affluence', the puritan ethic has not been abandoned, that the old moral and self-denying Malthusianism has not been replaced by

of *Desire* is aimed at getting around and subverting these old mental structures 'from below'. And it is true: there has been no revolution of mores and the puritan ideology is still in force. In the analysis of leisure we shall see how it pervades all apparently hedonistic practices. We may assert that the puritan ethic, with all it implies in terms of sublimation, transcending of self and repression (in a word, in terms of morality), *haunts* consumption and needs. It is that ethic which drives it from the inside and gives it this compulsive, unlimited character. And the puritan ideology is itself reactivated by the process of consumption: this is indeed what makes the latter the powerful factor of integration and social control we know it to be. Now, all this remains paradoxical and inexplicable from the point of view of consumption-as-enjoyment. By contrast, all is clear if we accept that needs and consumption are in fact an *organized extension of the productive forces*: there is then nothing surprising about the fact that they should also fall under the productivist and puritan ethic which was the dominant morality of the industrial age. The generalized integration of the individual 'private' level (needs, feelings, aspirations, drives) as productive forces cannot but be accompanied by a generalized extension at this level of the patterns of repression, sublimation, concentration, systematization, rationalization – and, of course, alienation! – which for centuries, but particularly since the nineteenth century, have governed the construction of the industrial system.

Shifting Objects – Shifting Needs

Until now the whole analysis of consumption has been based on the naïve anthropology of *Homo oeconomicus*, rather than *Homo psychoeconomicus*. Within the ideological extension of classical political economy, it has been a theory of needs, objects (in the broadest sense) and satisfactions. Or, rather, it has not been a theory, but an immense tautology: 'I buy this because I need it' is equivalent to the fire which burns because of its phlogistic essence. We have shown elsewhere to what degree all this empiricist/finalist thinking (the individual taken as end, and his conscious representation taken as the logic of events) was of the same order as the magical speculation of primitive peoples (and ethnologists) around the notion of mana.¹⁰ No theory of consumption is possible at this level: the spontaneously self-evident, like analytical thinking in terms of needs, will never produce anything but a consumed reflection of consumption.

This rationalist mythology of needs and satisfactions is as naïve and helpless as traditional medicine is when faced with hysterical or psychosomatic symptoms. Let us explain this point: outside the field of its objective function, where it is irreplaceable, outside the field of its

way within the field of connotations, where it assumes sign-value. Thus the washing machine *seves* as an appliance and *acts* as an element of prestige, comfort, etc. It is strictly this latter field which is the field of consumption. All kinds of other objects may be substituted here for the washing machine as *signifying element*. In the logic of signs, as in that of symbols, objects are no longer linked in any sense to a *definite function* or need. Precisely because they are responding here to something quite different, which is either the social logic or the logic of desire, for which they function as a shifting and unconscious field of signification.

Objects and needs are here substitutable, within reason, like the symptoms of hysterical or psychosomatic conversion. They obey the same logic of slippage, transference, limitlessness and apparently arbitrary convertibility. When an illness is *organic*, there is a necessary relation between symptom and organ (similarly, when taken as an appliance or tool, there is a necessary relation between the object and its function). In hysterical or psychosomatic conversion, the symptom is, like the sign, (relatively) arbitrary: there is a chain of somatic signifiers – migraine, bowel disorder, lumbago, throat infection, general fatigue – along which the symptom 'wanders', just as there is a long sequence of signs/objects or symbols/objects over which wander not needs (which are always linked to the rational finality of the object), but desire and a further determination which is that of the unconscious social logic.

If we pin the need down to a particular spot, if, that is, we *satisfy* it by taking it literally, by taking it as it presents itself, as the need for a *particular* object, then we make the same mistake as we would in applying a traditional remedy to the organ where the symptom is located. As soon as it is cured at this one point, it will resurface at another.

The world of objects and needs might thus be seen as a world of *generalized hysteria*. Just as, in conversion, all the body's organs and functions become a gigantic paradigm for the symptom to work its way through, in consumption objects become a vast paradigm for another language to work through, for something other to speak. And we might say that this evanescence, this continual mobility to the point where it becomes impossible to define an objective specificity of the need (just as it is impossible in hysteria to define an objective specificity of the illness for the good reason that it does not exist), this flight from one signifier to another is merely the superficial reality of a *desire* which is, for its part, insatiable because it is based on lack. And that it is this forever unquenchable desire which signifies itself locally in successive objects and needs.

Sociologically – in the face of the endless, naïve confusion at the unstoppable advance and boundless renewal of needs, which is in fact irreconcilable with the rationalist theory that a satisfied need creates a state of equilibrium and resolution of tensions – we may advance the

particular object as the 'need' for difference (*the desire for the social meaning*), then it will be clear that there can never be any *achieved* satisfaction, or therefore any *definition* of need.¹¹

To the shifting nature of desire must be added, then (though is there a metaphorical relation between the two?), the shifting nature of differential significations. Between the two, individual, finite needs only assume meaning as successive foci. It is in their very substitution that they signify, yet simultaneously veil, the true spheres of signification – the spheres of lack and difference – which overflow them on all sides.

Denial of Enjoyment

The 'craving' for objects is 'objectless' (Riesman). Consumer behaviour, which is apparently focused on, and orientated towards, objects and enjoyment [*jouissance*], in fact conduces to quite other goals: that of the metaphorical or displaced expression of desire, that of production, through differential signs, of a social code of values. It is not, then, the individual function of interest across a corpus of objects which is determinant, but the immediately social function of exchange, of communication, of distribution of values across a corpus of signs.

The truth of consumption is that it is not a function of enjoyment, but a *function of production* and, hence, like all material production, not an individual function, but an *immediately and totally collective one*. Without overturning the traditional conception in this way, no theoretical analysis is possible: whatever approach one takes, one falls back into the phenomenology of enjoyment.

Consumption is a system which secures the ordering of signs and the integration of the group: it is therefore both a morality (a system of ideological values) and a communication system, a structure of exchange. It is on this basis, and on the fact that this social function and structural organization far surpass individuals and impose themselves upon them by way of an unconscious social constraint, that we can found a theoretical hypothesis that is neither a mere reciting of figures nor a descriptive metaphysics.

According to this hypothesis, paradoxical as it may seem, consumption is defined as *exclusive of enjoyment*. As social logic, the consumption system establishes itself on the basis of a denial of enjoyment. Enjoyment no longer appears there at all as finality, as rational end, but as the individual rationalization of a process whose ends lie elsewhere. Enjoyment would define consumption *for oneself*, as something autonomous and final. But consumption is never that. Enjoyment is enjoyment for one's own benefit, but consuming is something one never does alone (this is the illusion of the consumer, meticulously sustained by the whole of the *ideological* discourse on consumption). One enters, rather, into a generalized system of exchange and production of coded values where,

In this sense, consumption is an order of significations, like *language*, or like the kinship system in primitive society.

A Structural Analysis?

Let us recall here the Lévi-Straussian principle: what confers on consumption its character of being a social fact is not what it apparently preserves of nature (satisfaction, enjoyment/pleasure), but the essential procedure by which it breaks with nature (what defines it as a code, an institution, a system of organization). Just as the kinship system is in the last instance based not on consanguinity and filiation, on a natural datum, but on an arbitrary classification arrangement, so the system of consumption is in the last instance based not on need and enjoyment but on a code of signs (signs/objects) and differences.

Marriage rules are so many ways of providing for the circulation of women within the social group or, in other words, so many ways of replacing a system of consanguineous relations of a biological order by a sociological system of alliance. Marriage rules and kinship systems may thus be regarded as a kind of language or, in other words, as a set of operations aimed at ensuring a certain type of communication between individuals and groups. It is the same with consumption: there, too, a bio-functional, bio-economic system of goods and products (the bio-logical level of need and subsistence) is supplanted by a sociological system of signs (the level of consumption proper). And the basic function of the regulated circulation of objects and goods is the same as it is with women or words: ensuring a certain type of communication.

We shall come back to the differences between these various types of 'language': they have to do essentially with the mode of production of the values exchanged and the type of division of labour attaching to them. Clearly, goods are something produced, which women are not, and they are produced in a different way from words. The fact remains that, at the distribution level, goods and objects – like words and (in the past) women – form a global, arbitrary, coherent system of signs, a *cultural* system which, for the contingent world of needs and enjoyment, for the natural and biological order, substitutes a social order of values and classification.

This is not to say that there are no needs or no natural utility, etc. The point is, rather, that consumption, as a concept specific to contemporary society, is not to be defined at that level. For needs and the like are valid for all societies. What is sociologically significant for us, and which marks out our age as an age of consumption, is precisely the generalized reorganization of this primary level into a system of signs which reveals itself to be one of the specific modes, and perhaps *the* specific mode, of transition from nature to culture in our era.

The circulation, purchase, sale, appropriation of differentiated goods

which the entire society communicates and converses. Such is the structure of consumption, its language [*langue*], by comparison with which individual needs and pleasures [*jouissances*] are merely speech effects.

The Fun System or Enforced Enjoyment

One of the strongest proofs that the principle and finality of consumption is not enjoyment or pleasure is that that is now something which is forced upon us, something institutionalized, not as a right or a pleasure, but as the *duty* of the citizen.

The puritan regarded himself, his own person, as a business to be made to prosper for the greater glory of God. His 'personal' qualities, his 'character', which he spent his life producing, were for him a capital to be invested opportunely, to be managed without speculation or waste. Conversely, but in the same way, consumerist man [*l'homme-consuméteur*] regards enjoyment as an obligation; he sees himself as an enjoyment and satisfaction business. He sees it as his duty to be happy, loving, adulating/adulated, charming/charmed, participative, euphoric and dynamic. This is the principle of maximizing existence by multiplying contacts and relationships, by intense use of signs and objects, by systematic exploitation of all the potentialities of enjoyment.

There is no question for the consumer, for the modern citizen, of evading this enforced happiness and enjoyment, which is the equivalent in the new ethics of the traditional imperative to labour and produce. Modern man spends less and less of his life in production within work and more and more of it in the *production* and continual innovation of his own needs and well-being. He must constantly see to it that all his potentialities, all his consumer capacities are mobilized. If he forgets to do so, he will be gently and insistently reminded that he has no right not to be happy. It is not, then, true that he is passive. He is engaged in – has to engage in – continual activity. If not, he would run the risk of being content with what he has and becoming asocial.

Hence the revival of a *universal curiosity* (a concept to be explored further) in respect of cookery, culture, science, religion, sexuality, etc. 'Try Jesus!' runs an American slogan. You have to try *everything*, for consumerist man is haunted by the fear of 'missing' something, some form of enjoyment or other. You never know whether a particular encounter, a particular experience (Christmas in the Canaries, eel in whisky, the Prado, LSD, Japanese-style love-making) will not elicit some 'sensation'. It is no longer desire, or even 'taste', or a specific inclination that are at stake, but a generalized curiosity, driven by a vague sense of unease – it is the 'fun morality' or the imperative to enjoy oneself, to exploit to the

Consumption as the Emergence and Control of New Productive Forces

Consumption is, therefore, merely an *apparently* anomic sector, because it is not, according to the Durkheimian definition, governed by formal rules and seems open to the immoderation and individual contingency of needs. It is not at all, as is generally imagined (this is why economic 'science' is, ultimately, reluctant to discuss it), a marginal sector of indeterminacy where the individual, elsewhere constantly constrained by social rules, might at last – being left to himself in the 'private' sphere – recover a margin of freedom and personal leeway. Consumption is an active, collective behaviour: it is something enforced, a morality, an institution. It is a whole system of values, with all that expression implies in terms of group integration and social control functions.

The consumer society is also the society of learning to consume, of social training in consumption. That is to say, there is a new and specific mode of *socialization* related to the emergence of new productive forces and the monopoly restructuring of a high-productivity economic system.

Credit plays a crucial role here, even if it only partially affects spending budgets. It is an exemplary idea because, in the guise of gratification, ease of access to affluence and a hedonist mentality 'freed from the old taboos of saving, etc.', credit is in fact a systematic socio-economic training in enforced saving and economic calculation for generations of consumers who would otherwise, in a life of subsistence, have escaped demand planning and would not have been exploitable as consumption power. Credit is a disciplinary process of the extortion of savings and the regulation of demand, just as wage labour was a rational process of extortion of labour power and increases in productivity. The example quoted by Galbraith of the Puerto Ricans who have been turned from the passive, easygoing people they once were into a modern labour force by being motivated to consume is striking evidence of the tactical value of regulated, enforced, instructed, stimulated consumption within the modern socio-economic order. And this is achieved, as Marc Alexandre shows in his article 'La société de consommation', by the *mental* training of the masses through credit (with the discipline and budgetary constraints it imposes) in economic foresight, investment and 'basic' capitalist behaviour.¹² The rational and disciplinary ethics which was, according to Weber, at the origins of modern productivist capitalism, in this way invests a whole area which had previously eluded it.

It is difficult to grasp the extent to which the current training, in systematic, organized consumption is *the equivalent and extension, in the twentieth century, of the great nineteenth-century-long process of the training of rural populations for industrial work*. The same process of rationalization of productive forces which took place in the nineteenth century in the

consumption. The industrial system, having socialized the masses as labour power, had much further to go to complete its own project [s'*accomplir*] and socialize them (that is, control them) as consumption power. The small savers or anarchic consumers of the pre-war age, who were free to consume or not, no longer have any place in this system.

The whole ideology of consumption is there to persuade us that we have entered a new era and that a decisive human 'Revolution' separates the painful, heroic Age of Production from the euphoric Age of Consumption, where justice is at last done to Man and his desires. Nothing could be further from the truth. Production and consumption are part of one and the same process of expanded reproduction of the productive forces and their control. This imperative, which is that of the system, passes into daily mentalities, ethics and ideology – and here is the great trick – in its inverted form: in the form of the liberation of needs, individual self-fulfilment, enjoyment and affluence, etc. The themes of Spending, Enjoyment and Non-Calculation ('Buy now, pay later') have taken over from the 'puritan' themes of Saving, Work, and Heritage. But this is merely the semblance of a Human Revolution: in fact, it is an internal substitution, within the framework of a general process and a system which remain in all essentials unchanged, of a new system of values for an old one which has become (relatively) ineffective. What could become a new finality has become, when emptied of its real content, an enforced mediation of the reproduction of the system.

The needs and satisfactions of consumers are productive forces that have now been constrained and rationalized like the others (labour power, etc.). From all the angles we have (as yet barely) explored, consumption has thus appeared to us, by contrast with the ideology through which we experience it, as a dimension of constraint:

- 1 it is dominated by the constraint of signification at the level of structural analysis;
- 2 and by the constraint of production and of the production cycle in the strategic (socio-economico-political) analysis.

Affluence and consumption are not, then, achieved Utopia. They are a new objective situation, governed by the same basic processes, but overdetermined by a new morality – the whole corresponding to a new sphere of productive forces in process of controlled integration into the same expanded system. In this sense, there is no objective 'Progress' (nor, *a fortiori*, has there been any 'Revolution'): we have here quite simply the same thing and something else. This results in the fact, which is indeed perceptible in everyday life, of the total ambiguity of Affluence and Consumption: they are always lived as myth (the assumption of happiness beyond history and morality) and endured as an objective process of adaptation to a new type of collective behaviour.

On consumption as a civic constraint, Eisenhower stated in 1958: 'In a

encourages the efforts of individuals and private groups. The government will never spend money as profitably as an individual tax-payer would have were he freed from the burden of taxation.' It is as though consumption, while not being a direct impost, might effectively succeed taxation as a social levy. 'With nine million dollars of tax cuts,' adds *Time* magazine, 'consumers went to two million retail stores in search of prosperity . . . They realized that they could increase economic growth by replacing their fans with air-conditioners. They secured the boom of 1954 by purchasing five million miniaturized television sets, a million and a half electric carving knives etc.' In short, they performed their civic duty. 'Thrift is un-American,' said Whyte.

On needs as productive forces – the equivalent of the 'reserves of labour' of the heroic age – take this advertisement for cinema advertising: 'Thanks to its giant screens, cinema enables you to present your product *in situ*: colours, shapes, packaging. The 2,500 cinemas in our advertising network have a weekly audience of three and a half million. 67% of that audience are between 15 and 35. They are consumers at the height of their needs who want, and are able, to buy.' They are, precisely, people at the height of their (labour) powers.

The Logistical Function of the Individual

'The individual serves the industrial system not by supplying it with savings and the resulting capital; he serves it by consuming its products. On no other matter, religious, political, or moral, is he so elaborately and skillfully and expensively instructed,' writes Galbraith.¹³

The system needs people as workers (wage labour), as savers (taxes, loans, etc.), but increasingly it needs them as consumers. The productivity of labour is increasingly a matter for technology and organization and investment is increasingly left to companies themselves (cf. Paul Fabra, 'Les superbénéfices et la monopolisation de l'épargne par les grandes entreprises', *Le Monde*, 26 June 1969). Where the individual as such is required and is practically irreplaceable today is as a consumer. We may therefore predict that the heyday of the system of individualist values is just around the corner, that system whose centre of gravity is currently shifting from the individual entrepreneur and saver, those figureheads of competitive capitalism, to the individual consumer, broadening out at the same time to the totality of individuals – keeping step in this regard with the extension of the techno-bureaucratic structures.

During the competitive stage, capitalism sustained itself after a fashion with a hybrid system of individualistic and altruistic values. The fiction of an altruistic social morality (inherited from the whole of traditional spirituality) was there to smooth over the antagonism of social relations. The 'moral law' was the product of individual antagonisms, just as the

fiction of an equilibrium. Individual salvation for the community of all Christians, and individual rights limited only by the rights of others, were long-held beliefs. They are impossible today. Just as the 'free market' has virtually disappeared, to be replaced by bureaucratic, state monopoly control, so altruistic ideology is no longer sufficient to restore a minimum of social integration. No other collective ideology has arisen to take over from these values. Only the state's collective constraint is there to halt the exacerbation of individualisms. Hence the deep contradiction between political and civil society in the 'consumer society': the system is forced to produce more and more consumer individualism, which it is at the same time forced to repress ever more harshly. This can only be resolved by an added dose of altruistic ideology (itself bureaucratized: 'social lubrication' by solicitude, redistribution, gifts, hand-outs, wholesale propaganda for charitableness and human relations).¹⁴ Since this dose of altruistic ideology itself forms part of the system of consumption, it is not capable on its own of helping it attain equilibrium.

Consumption is, therefore, a powerful element of social control (by the atomization of consuming individuals), but by that very fact it brings with it a need for ever greater *bureaucratic constraint* on the processes of consumption – which will as a consequence be exalted more and more energetically as the *realm of freedom*. There is no escaping from this circle.

The automobile and traffic provide the classic example of all these contradictions: unlimited promotion of individual consumption sits alongside desperate calls for collective responsibility and social morality and increasingly severe constraints. The paradox is as follows: one cannot both repeat to the individual that 'the level of consumption is the just measure of social merit' and demand of him another kind of social responsibility since, in his individual consumption efforts, he is already taking on that social responsibility fully. Once again, consumption is *social labour*. The consumer is required and mobilized as *worker* at this level too (perhaps as much today as he is at the level of 'production'). One should not, then, ask the 'consumption worker' to sacrifice his wages (his individual satisfactions) for the good of the collectivity. Somewhere in their social subconscious, the millions of consumers have a kind of practical intuition of this new status as alienated worker. They spontaneously interpret the call for public solidarity as mystification, and their tenacious resistance on this level is merely a reflex of *political* defence. The 'fanatical egoism' of the consumer is also the subconscious rough sense of being, in spite of all the emotional rhetoric on affluence and well-being, the new exploited subject of modern times. The fact that this resistance and this 'egoism' lead the system into irresolvable contradictions to which it responds only by reinforced constraints merely confirms that consumption is a gigantic *political* field, the analysis of which – after that of production and alongside it – remains to be carried

The whole discourse on consumption aims to make the consumer Universal Man, to make him the general, ideal and definitive embodiment of the Human Race and to turn consumption into the beginnings of a 'human liberation' that is to be achieved instead of, and in spite of, the failure of political and social liberation. But the consumer has nothing of a universal being about him: he is himself a political and social being, a productive force and, as such, he breathes new life into some basic *historical* problems: of ownership of the means of consumption (not the means of production), of economic responsibility (responsibility for the *content* of production), etc. There is here a potential for deep crises and new contradictions.

The *Ego consummans*

Nowhere – or hardly anywhere – up to now have these contradictions surfaced consciously, apart from a few strikes by American housewives and the sporadic destruction of consumer goods (May 1968 and the 'No bra day', when American women publicly burned their bras). And it has to be said that everything is stacked against this happening. 'What does the consumer represent in the modern world? Nothing. What could he be? Everything, or almost everything. Because he remains alone next to millions of other solitary individuals, he is at the mercy of every vested interest' (*Le Coopérateur*, 1965). And it must be said that individualist interest plays a large part in this (even though we have seen that there are contradictions latent within it). Because it affects a collective sector, the sector of social labour, exploitation by *dispossession* (of labour power) reveals itself generative of solidarity (beyond a certain threshold). It leads to a (relative) class consciousness. The managed *possession* of consumer goods and objects is individualizing, atomizing and dehistoricizing. As a producer, by the very fact of the division of labour, the worker presupposes others: exploitation is the exploitation of all. As a consumer, man becomes solitary again, or cellular – at best, he becomes *gregarious* (watching TV with the family, part of the crowd at the stadium or the cinema, etc.). The structures of consumption are both very fluid and closed. Can one imagine car drivers organizing against road tax? Or collective action being mounted against television? Every one of millions of TV viewers may be opposed to advertising, but it will still be broadcast. The fact is that consumption is orchestrated initially as a speaking to oneself [*un discours à soi-même*], and it tends to play itself out, with its satisfactions and disappointments, in this minimal exchange. The consumer object isolates. The private sphere has no concrete negativity because it is enfolded in on its objects, which have none. It is structured from the outside by the system of production whose strategy (no longer ideological at this level, but always political) . . . whose

its monotony and its distractions. Or, alternatively, as we have seen, the consumer object produces distinction(s), produces status stratification. If, in this case, it no longer isolates, it differentiates. It *collectively assigns* consumers to a code, without, however, arousing any *collective solidarity* (in fact, it does the opposite).

Overall, then, consumers as such are lacking in consciousness and unorganized, as was often the case with workers in the early nineteenth century. It is as such that they are everywhere celebrated, praised, hymned by 'right-thinking' writers as 'Public Opinion', that mystical, providential, *sovereign* reality. Just as 'the People' is glorified by Democracy provided that it remains the people (and does not intervene on the political and social stage), so consumers are recognized as enjoying sovereignty (Katona speaks of the 'powerful consumer') so long as they do not attempt to exercise it on the social stage. The People are the workers, provided they are unorganized. The Public and Public Opinion are the consumers, provided they content themselves with consuming.

6

Personalization or the Smallest Marginal Difference

To Be or Not to Be Myself

There is no woman, however *demanding*, who cannot satisfy the tastes and *desires of her personality* with a Mercedes-Benz! From the hue of the leather, the trim and the colour of the bodywork to the hubcaps and the thousand and one comforts offered by the fittings, *standard or optional*. As for men, though mainly concerned with the technical qualities and performance of a car, they will willingly fulfil their wives' desires, since they will be equally proud to be complimented on their good taste. You can choose your Mercedes-Benz from 76 different colour styles and 697 selections of interior décor.

To have *found* your personality, to be able to assert it, is to discover the pleasure of being *truly* yourself. It often takes *very little* to achieve this. After a great deal of searching, I realized that a *little light tint* in my hair was enough to create perfect harmony with my complexion and my eyes. I found this blonde tone in the Récitral range of rinses. . . . And this Récitral blonde, which is *so natural*, has not changed me. I am *more than ever* myself.

These two pieces (there are so many one could have chosen) were taken from *Le Monde* and a minor women's weekly respectively. The prestige and social status evoked within them are worlds apart: between the magnificent Mercedes 300 SL and the 'little light tint' of the Récitral shampoo there is an enormous social gulf, and the women represented in the two pieces doubtless never meet (except perhaps at the Club Méditerranée – who knows?). They are at opposite ends of the social scale, but united by the same constraint of differentiation, *personalization*. The one is 'A', the other 'non-A', but the pattern of 'personal' value is the same for both, and for all of us beating a path through the 'personalized' jungle of 'optional' merchandise, desperately seeking the foundation cream that will reveal the naturalness of our face, the little touch that will show up our deep individual bent, the difference which will make us ourselves.

All the contradictions involved in this theme, which is basic to consumption, can be felt in the desperate gymnastics performed by the language in which it is expressed, in the constant attempt to achieve an impossible, magical synthesis. If you *are* someone, can you 'find' your personality? And where are *you* while this personality is haunting you? If you are yourself, do you have to be so 'truly'? There again, if you have a