
LIPOVETSKY, GILLES E SERROY, JEAN (2014). O CAPITALISMO ESTÉTICO NA ERA DA GLOBALIZAÇÃO, LISBOA: EDIÇÕES 70

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By means of notorious chameleonic and metamorphic abilities, capitalism modifies societies, through silent historical pathways, indelible processes and accurate objectives. Following its nature, capitalism appropriates the formerly autonomous realm of arts, until then ruled by the independence and specific rules of the artists, bearers of control instruments, and specific mechanisms of choice and selection. The primal incompatibility between the artistic field and capitalism move into a stage where societies are steadily transformed in the consecration of an ‘artsy’ world, present in multiple dimensions, from the fashion industry to architecture, cinema and shopping malls, uttered in tasteless and swift changes.

The authors reflect on the existence of a society based on hybridity, a constant search for pleasure, seduction and novelty, enterprising an impoverished artistic economy, disconnected from the erudite culture which reaches its climax in the ‘hypermodern epoch’, being characterised by ‘trans-aesthetic capitalism’ globally.

Gilles Lipovetsky is a Philosophy professor at the University of Grenoble. Since his book “L’Ère du vide: essais sur l’individualisme contemporain”, published in 1983, Lipovetsky, using a methodological analysis field of the XX Century, initiates a reflection upon the historical process of the Western society, focusing his attention on the transition between the industrial and the post-industrial societies.

Jean Serroy, is also a professor at the University of Grenoble, authoring several pieces of work on cinema and literature of the XVIII Century. Together with Lipovetsky, Serroy published “The global screen” (2007), a comprehensive approach on the proliferation and impacts of screens in societies; and “The world-culture” (2010), a book that explores the concepts of globalisation of culture, hyper-modernisation of the culture industry and ‘techno-scientification’ in the contemporary society.

In the present work, the authors unveil the behavioural changes leading to the phenomenon of individuality, stressing the presence of the postmodern society. To Lipovetsky, the cult of the novel and fashion as social devices, personified on the eager consumer in a constant search of seduction, gives way to a hedonistic lifestyle, aesthete and ludic, transforming individuals and disrupting their utopian revolutionary ideals that used to fulfil modernity.

The thematic is presented to the reader following the evolutionary process of the artistic field, grasped as a problem. This trajectory can be divided in four stages. Opens with the “ritual artlisation”, where there is art but not the artist. Followed by the “aristocratic

aesthetisation”, heir of the classics, and existing between the Renaissance period and the end of the XVIII Century, which glimpses the notion of imperfection and the authority of the creator. The signature draws a line between the artist and the artisan, with the aesthetic values ascending to a “new social dignity and relevance” (p. 23).

Since the “modern ‘aesthisation’ of the world”, whose amplexness happens in the Modern Age, between the XVIII and the XIX Centuries, art frees itself from all other authorities and imposes its autonomy, “its laws, values, and its own legitimise principles” throughout self-regulation instances of “selection and consecration” (p. 24). Here, a distinction is made between “pure art”, avant-guard, independent, proud of itself and detached; and “marketable art”, manufactured to the economic world, driven by “profit, (...) swift success, and briefness (...), adjusted to public demands” (p. 25). These two creations oppose two radically different ways of production, exposed by “art and market, culture and industry, pure and impure, authentic and *kistch*, high art and mass culture” (p. 25). Modernity introduces the “radical aesthetisation of pure art” (p. 30), given, at the same time, birth to a “non-aesthetisation process” (p. 29) with clear echoes on architecture and urbanism.

There is a confrontation, from this moment on, between a luxury artistic production with a “high creative value”, and an art for the mass, “produced industrially in chain” (p. 30) that was merged in the “trans-aesthetic age”, period where the “avant-gardism is incorporated in the economic sphere” (p. 31). There is an end to the great past oppositions and prevails, from now on, the proliferation of creative solution ruled by emotions where the most important aspect is “to feel, to live the pleasurable moments of encounter or elusion” (p. 35). There is the promotion of a society whose identity is the differentiation, hence emerging an individual equally consumer and nonconformist, “obsessed with the dispensable” (p. 36) and with the mutable beauty.

The idea of capitalism gripping the world of arts through the cinematographic acting, invokes immediately the ‘goffmanian’ dramaturgy, where individuals obey to an acting role, in which the character recognises, throughout the acting, the signs and rituals valued by other individuals or groups, in order to obtain the best possible result in the performance. Nevertheless, in Goffman, the actors are free to get in and out of stage. In the present work, the six chapters of the book explore a naturalised notion of dramaturgy with holistic properties, where the aesthetic capitalism entangles the whole existence, and where individuals are unaware of its power veil.

The first chapter of the book explains and deconstruct the Ford-Taylor perspective, which conveys the “notion of an alliance between capitalism and art” in order to understand the traditional artistic capitalism. This artistic capitalism, existent in the hastily ephemeral fashion, in the gigantism of the ‘cold’ architecture, in the ‘massification’ and in the copy as model, in the explosion of art and tasteless places, makes use of “contractual flexibility” and “atypical jobs”, promoting the “individualisation and multiplication of forms” (p. 72) that reshapes both the spheres of leisure, culture and art.

The establishment of an integrated whole from (i) the style, the seduction and the emotion; (ii) the generalisation of the business dimension of fashion industries as a

distinctive world; (iii) the “committed groups on the production of pieces with an artistic component”; and iv) the unsettling of the “old artistic and cultural hierarchies” promote a new reinterpretation, which now operates according to “hybridisation processes”, resulting from the mixture of all that was once apart and divided (pp. 49-53). An enhanced and hyperbolic logic, discerned into a “prolific diversity” of the “immaterial capital”, surpass the postmodern notion of the “knowledge society”, moving into a new phase of capitalism, where prevails “the intelligence” based on assumptions of “creative innovation”, expressed in the “imagination”, possession of “expressive skills and cooperatives”, “emotional qualities” and the “collection of human knowledge, including intuition” (p. 49).

The second chapter enunciates the overall conditions for the appearance of the artistic capitalism, emerging from the liberal economy. After the Second World War, the autonomy of the economic sphere arose. The goods start to communicate and there is a flourishing of large warehouses, design, high-fashion, packaging, advertising, cinema, music industry, all promoters of the “mass production revolution”. In this ravenous agglutination, there is a transition from an extended capitalism to the triumph of the trans-aesthetic dimension where, in addition to intersections, there is a widening of the system starting to function according to the canons of “bigger, hyper, and planetarium” (p. 155).

The shift on the scale and the architecture multiply the large aesthetic spaces, places where “everything is opposed as if it was sterilised” (p. 221), from location, to “acclimatisation, and artificial lighting” (p. 221), where trading become a “pharaonic display”, without missing the “consumption cathedrals” (p. 168) subject to the “aesthetic seduction logics” (p. 171) from which fashion and high-fashion are subordinated, unable to detached themselves from the “spectacle, the fairy-like staging of the trade creations” (p. 175). The notion of copy gains prominence and the original work, as predicted by Walter Benjamin, vanishes in the reproduction forest. This idea starts to be used in cinema that absorbs and overrides the copyright of multiple writers, through a standardised production based on an “entertainment that actually works like fashion with its pieces in constant mutability” (p. 233).

The third chapter looks at new uses of design and its changes until becoming an essential piece in the artistic capitalism gearing. Together with other notions subsumed by the economy, the design is everywhere all over the world, either in the “decorative” or in the “expressive subjective” (p. 263), with a renewal of the concept globally. The fusion of genres and the reutilisation produce a new universe where kitsch prevails, as a result of a “hybrid culture”. With extended borders, arises a “type of design made of overlaps, interpenetrations, and transversally” (p. 280). The Ford-Taylor production system is invaded by the obligation of granting variety, increasing the release pace.

The masses trade gives place to “micro trades” and “increasingly diverse needs” (p. 265), in a process of constant and enhanced renewal of the offer, which changes avant-gardism to retro. Even the new themes arising with environmentalism are invaded by the idea of sustainable design (p. 298) which, simultaneously, contests the “productionism” destroyer of biosphere and, promotes a solid profusion of new environmentally friendly products that entered our domestic life.

The transformation that opposes the “spectacle society” described by Guy Debord and the “hyper-spectacle era” (p. 301), throughout a mutation linked to the flourishing of the “creative industries” – new name given the criticism of the “cultural industries” from the Frankfurt School – is covered by the fourth chapter. This new society is intersected by eight axes: i) the television’s society with an incipient show is replaced by the screen’s society, characterised by an “overabundant media”, generating a “hyper-tele viewer, interactive and permanent” (p. 305); ii) without time and space restrictions, great changes are produced in consumption patterns, un-ritualising the collective practice and promoting the individual consumption, where the tele-viewer becomes an “autonomous programmer” (p. 305); iii) the detachment, main condition of the spectacle’s society, gives place to a “de-differentiation” (p. 306), mixed with twists and transverses; iv) the public adopt an acting posture, and contrary to what the School of Frankfurt imagined, they are not passive and handled beings, but rather manipulators of the show business; v) this spectacle does not begin by chance, is not used to impress neither to promote mental escapes from everyday life, helping the survival throughout illusion, but rather to generate “lived experience” and an “economy of experience” (p. 307), widening reality and hyperbolising existence; vi) everything has increased in size, in a “hypertrophic of the best offer” logics, where scandal, brightness, transgression, the surprise of the unthoughtful accomplished, work according to a “hyper-logic” (p. 309), in which there are no limits; viii) a ‘vedettism’, until then only accessible to superstars, is now extended to all societal areas and groups. There is a globalisation of the “start’s economy” (p. 309) and the start system is transversal to the entire culture; viii) the classic historic-religious plays that exalted Gods are vanished, being replaced by “touristic amusement, dreams, and instant pleasure” where the “excrescence of means (...) promotes a marketable society for the join of masses” (p. 310).

Trans-aesthetic capitalism is full of surprises, with a constant ability to astonish and indulging the individual’s predisposition to the unknown apparently unimaginable. Through shock, gigantism, incitement, reality becomes a celebrity show, producing a “spectacle inside the spectacle” (p. 321), where the sensational and the abject coexist in the “amusing experience of the different” (p. 325), where the Kitsch is pluralised and maximised shamelessly, exhibit throughout individualism where each individual build and re-build itself permanently.

The authors used chapter five to discourse about cities’ incursion by the aesthetic capitalism, introducing the “shopping city” or “leisure city” traits and new consumption habits that appeared in the meanwhile. Whereas the mall’s corridors look identical to city streets, the cities recreate the mall’s atmosphere, with the signposting, the shops show-cases, and the “brand-buildings that spread their visual identity” in a reformation of the urban landscape centred on the “requalification and aesthisation” (p. 367), in a context of intensify competition between cities to attract attention, as if places were an everlasting beauty pageant contests.

Contrary to the industrial city, the hypermodern city does not glorify material work. The metamorphosis is rooted in pleasure, entertainment and amusement from

non-productive activities, based on the “immaterial”, in the “ludic” and in the “cultural”. Historical heritage crumbles the neighbourhoods’ society promoting a re-translated trade and the increase of the “aesthetic consumption enlargement” (p. 379), where *homo aestheticus* is born and established. Subdue by the trans-aesthetic, shaped by the search for pleasure and emotions, this new figuration of the individual is a result of a “cultural de-formalisation” (p. 389), detached from the aesthetic of the society moulded by “strict social norms (...) that lead to theatrical, ornamentation, and social outlook” (p. 389) in the palace society shaped by Norbert Elias.

Hypermodern epoch envisages variations of the *homo aestheticus* and, both the *homo festivus* and the *homo consumans*, are perceived as beings representing the ideals of beauty based on thinness and tallness of the body. The “I” leads the different spheres of fashion, body shape, individualised looks, creating a “new type of self-portrait” (p. 431) free from conventions, profusely disseminated, shared and commented, in a permanent invocation of the immediate.

What are the limits of the trans-aesthetic society? This is the question shaping the sixth and last chapter of the book. The origins of the trans-aesthetic capitalism are in line with the end of the ascetic moral, according the Weberian notion of capitalism in modern times, where the hedonist aesthetic is a result of “battles conducted by the romantic counterculture of the sixties” of the XX Century that fought collectively against economic capitalism of the time centred on “alienation and conformism of bourgeois life” (p. 448). From that moment on, there is the establishment of a “broad liberal civilisation” which promoted the emancipation of the cultural sphere, freeing it of entrenched morals.

With the development of a culture grounded on experience, pleasure and self-accomplishment, there was another Weberian concept that emerged: “the paradox of consequences”. Aesthetic life befall religious life, something that shapes the “un-traditionalisation” (p. 449) for the benefit of “experimentalisation” as the “high value of a life-style” free of obligations and obedience to any rule. The hyper-modern logics destroys the “puritan conception of the world”, which characterises industrial capitalism “ruled by diametrically opposed principles” (p. 452) between economics and culture.

The authors avoid leaving any trace that could lead to the idea that trans-aesthetic capitalism could be the end of the line or a field of battle between good and evil. Despite its individualistic characteristics, the aesthetic ethic does not equal to a “hegemonic ideal” which closes individuals in themselves, “condemned to an exponential nihilism” (p. 477). The need for moral obligations in individual feelings persists, in the sense that there is a requirement to the trans-aesthetic society to “evolve into something noble and better to detain the fever of always looking for more” (p. 486). The triumphant individualism should not be mistaken with a “nonexistence of values” (p. 477). Humanity insists in its principles through actions of protest, contributions to causes, and solidary gestures, “the indignation towards paucity” and the “ideals of solidarity and mutual assistance” (pp. 475-477). By means of articulacy, resistances to the hastened world are refined, and the critics to the consumption maximisation continue to follow. Artistic capitalism falls within the “humankind adventure” (p. 485) in the search of a better existence and the beauty of life.

One faces a book profusely illustrated with examples articulated between theory and philosophical essays, sociological statistics and results of experiments from the field of Social Psychology; triangulated in pertinent reflexions and diverse theoretical interpretations, used as evidence, in a profuse and overwhelming reflection, agent of socio-historical configurations and presented to the reader according to a new interpretative view of the hyper-modern society. Lipovetsky is an author that makes use of a systematic paradoxical statement to place the examined themes into the becoming ontological field, presenting individuals as crucial beings with changeable inner and outer features.

The hedonism individualistic, pleasurable, closely connected to the immediate then ephemeral, being defined by the undefined, rules the world culture, expressed in the intensity and hastening of the permanent change. Emotions and the hunt for feelings, life without constraints, replace obedience times, within the limits of submission to the stratified order. The fusion of what was immiscible, result of the hybridism and idiosyncrasy of hyper-modern societies spreads out, inclusively, to the profusion of techniques, methods and schools convened by narrative, giving way to a nuanced work, architected in a complex built from diversities.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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