

In search of happiness

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*A felicidade paradoxal:
ensaio sobre a sociedade de hiperconsumo*
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ABSTRACT

The happiness is the supreme ideal of new phase of capitalism in which we live. It's in search of happiness which is developing the hyperconsumption, concept presented by French philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky. In this scenario, the author points the paradoxes of current society, showing through data, several aspects of our lives such as family relationships, love, sex, work, leisure, politics, religion, media, aesthetics and ethics. Throughout the work emerge many questions for reflection, some questions with possible answers and others in the air.

Palavras-chave: Society, Consumption, Happiness.

RESUMO

A felicidade é o ideal supremo da nova fase do capitalismo em que estamos vivendo. É em busca dela que se desenvolve o hiperconsumo, noção apresentada pelo filósofo francês Gilles Lipovetsky. Nesse cenário, o autor aponta os paradoxos da sociedade atual, evidenciando através de dados, vários aspectos da nossa vida tais como as relações familiares, o amor, o sexo, o trabalho, o lazer, a política, a religião, a mídia, a estética, a ética. Ao longo de toda a obra são trazidas à tona inúmeras questões para reflexão, algumas com possíveis respostas, outras ficando apenas em suspensão.

Key words: sociedade, consumo, felicidade

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IN 2007, GILLES Lipovetsky, French philosopher, professor of philosophy in the University of Grenoble in France, published two works in Brazil called *A sociedade da decepção* (Manole, 2007) and *A felicidade paradoxal*. The first is an interview published as a book and the second is about the society of hyperconsumption. The link of these two works is the analysis of the paradoxes of current society. This society is considered by the author in other publications such as *O império do efêmero* (Companhia das Letras, 1989) about the phenomenon of fashion, *Os tempos hipermodernos* (Barcarolla, 2004) which shows the transition from post-modern to hypermodern phase, *O luxo eterno* (Companhia das Letras, 2005) that shows the universe of superfluous, *A sociedade pós-moralista* (Manole, 2005) that points out the moral, *A era do vazio* (Manole, 2005) that points out the individualism, *A terceira mulher* (Companhia das Letras, 2000) that emphasizes the values women, *Metamorfoses da cultura liberal* (Sulina, 2004) that points out the ethics in business and liberal democracy.

The book *A felicidade paradoxal* the tonic is in the paradoxical relationship happiness and consumption. The question that guides the author's journey is: the consumption brings happiness? There is another seemingly simple question: are you happy? According Lipovetsky, the answer, suggests for most people, in searches, the positive answer that the person is happy. However this person shows dissatisfied with the professional or personal life. The paradox began in this moment.

The book is divided in two parts. The first part, *A sociedade de hiperconsumo*, is composed of six chapters that present the characteristics of three eras of capitalism demarcated by Lipovetsky, always guided by its main authors of inspiration as Michel Houellebecq, Friedrich Nietzsche, Blaise Pascal and Alexis de Tocqueville.

The first phase of capitalism begins in the years 1880 and perdures until World War II. The author pointed out the features this throughout the chapters: production on a large scale; profit through volume, mass marketing; famous brands and large stores.

Phase II starts around 1950 and ended in 1970 and is characterized by the continuation of production on a large scale, raising of level of labour productivity, wage progression; period of expansion of theft; marketing segment; biggest advertising investment; price low (discounts); cult of well-being; consumption ordered by the family.

The third stage, the object of study author, is revealed from the late 1970 and is expressed as a time of hyperconsumption. Society of hyperconsumption is a company of over-consumption. There are too, another characteristics as a logical deinstitutionalized, subjective and emotional; more private motivations and

less distinctive purposes; period of strong growth in crime and violent crime; market goods at the service of the person; consumption as a function identity; emotional consumption; sensory marketing; medicalization life; innovation; consumption ordered by the individual; enjoyment private, public discomfort; socialization by consumption.

The philosopher pointed out the change in sociability, because of new technologies, especially with the advent of the Internet. The presence relations (real) share space with the virtual. This is a "sociability expanded", according to the author.

Lipovetsky has been often labeled as an optimistic philosopher, and perhaps for that reason, already in this first part of the book, said "These tests are not meant to exonerate the phase III of consumption. Take it easy, I'm not fully the threats that it is planar on us. Only I think it effort to avoid the facilities of the complaint apocalyptic" (p. 148).

The second part of the work is entitled to Prazeres privados, felicidade ferida, composed of five chapters. With a particular taste for mythological figures, the author builds a large inventory on the five paradigmatic models that guide the inviolability of happiness and pleasure in current society. Each chapter refers to a figure of mythology, with the exception of Narciso.

In a brief, the author presents the following figures as a way of illustration: Penía, Dionysius, Superman, Nêmesis and Narciso.

Penía (poverty): more there is happiness, more grace.

Here the advertising occupies a special place, bombard consumers, creates unnecessary needs, shows image of happiness, promise of beauty and health, dreams, desires, ideal model of life. It is a spectacle euphoric. Even with this accusation, the author said it "[...] the advertising appears to be more moderate to a power that a totalitarian domination" (p. 180).

The second mythological figure is Dionysius (pleasures): that moving are the desires, the pleasure, the here and now, the unlimited excitement, the collective sensibilities.

The third model is interpreted by Superman (power, performance): demonstration of power, overcoming self.

The fourth model it's Nêmesis (revenge): feelings of envy, jealousy and hatred, competitiveness, rivalry.

To attest that you don't is happy, is a proof of failure. On the other hand, to talk that you is happy sounds like a way to convince themselves that despite the sorrow, life has its good things. It's a reality, however a paradox.

The fifth is emblematic figure Narciso (image): extreme individualization of ways of life and aspirations (p. 155).

Overall, the work of Lipovetsky is pervaded by a wealth of exemplifications, facilitating the understanding of the whole. They are also brought several data, but the majority is of French origin, without mention of sources. There are many issues for reflection, with some possible answers, leaving other matter.

In the first part, to characterize the stages of capitalism, Lipovetsky moved the evolution of marketing (marketing and mass segment) that is not his *métier*. In this case, seeking support in French authors like Richard Tedlow, ignoring the roots marketing with the American authors like Peter Drucker (1954), Theodore Levitt (1962) and Philip Kotler (1967).

If the book *O luxo eterno* the new luxury is emotional, A felicidade paradoxal the consumption is also emotional. In that sense, realizes that the traditional model of creating advertising copy termed as strategy (repetition of messages about the benefits of the product) seems to be the strategy adopted by Lipovetsky therefore brings passages of his other books, such as "[...] The snobbism, the taste of shine, to classify themselves and differentiate themselves not disappeared in any way [...] (p. 47), comes from the book *O luxo eterno* or even the idea that the importance of property not marketable as love, beauty, prestige, success, power remains unchanged, while that of physical goods decreases, expressed in the book *A sociedade da decepção*.

Lipovetsky still dissert, without proper care, in a question with large discussion among theorists of the administration and communication: the advertising creates needs superfluous. For many people, thinking that way is committing a heresy, since all living beings born with needs. The function of advertising and marketing is to create the desire for that a necessity will be satisfied through a product.

Finally, we never talk so much in environmental preservation; we never polluted and waste so much. We never talk in health how nowadays; never had so many obese, anorexic and bulimics. We never consume too much; we never had the rates of depression so high. We never had access to possess; we never aspire being so much.

For Lipovetsky "[...] will come the day that the looking for happiness in consumption will not longer have the same power of attraction, the same positive [...]" (p. 368) because "The man changes along life and not always expect the same satisfactions of existence" (p. 370). After the reading, it was concluded that happiness is an eternal quest and has no price, no deadline. When will we reach the stage of post- hyperconsumption? **M**