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Transaesthetic Paradigms of Creativity: Artistic Capitalism as an Ideology of Consumption

Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to examine and define *artistic capitalism* as the expression of the postmodern culture of authenticity, based on the analysis that Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy dedicated to the hedonist individualism that dominates the contemporary societies of consumption, regarded not only as part of the historical civilization of the spectacle, following Debord's assumptions, but also as a new dimension of the aesthetic creativity. My thesis is that the artistic capitalism can be defined as a hybrid ideology of the society of spectacle, based on consumption and hedonism, having as effect what Lipovetsky called *trans-aesthetic individualism*, if we accept Debord's argument that *the spectacle* is *the capital* reached through such a degree of *accumulation* that it turns into *image*.

The innovative aspect of my research reveals, through an analysis that acknowledges the four ages of artistic capitalism, identified by Lipovetsky, the four ages of transaesthetic individualism, understood as postmodern phases of creativity, influenced by (1) hyperconsumerism, (2) the utility of the work of art, (3) the new social status of the artist and (4) the process of normalizing conducts, moral values and subjected desires of the Individual, in the sense of personalizing consumption. This research ends with a brief case study aiming to analyze the correspondence of these four ages of artistic capitalism with different thematic modern and postmodern constructions of the cinema, reflecting the disciplinary power of the image to create a new critique of individualism. Therefore, the last section of the article will confront Lipovetsky's and Serroy's theories from *Artistic Capitalism* with those developed in *The Global Screen*.

Keywords: artistic capitalism; consumption, society of the spectacle, de-aestheticization, transaesthetic individualism.

I. A brief definition of artistic capitalism as an ideology of consumption

The contemporary discourse about *artistic capitalism* as an ideology¹ of unifying the production of *spectacle*, *capital* and *image*, in order to identify the consumption societies, has become an accommodated critique of the post-industrial era, assuming the main following thesis: "the systems of production, distribution

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and consumption are impregnated, affected and remodeled by operations of a fundamental *aesthetic* nature" (Lipovetsky and Serroy, 2013).

After writing *The Global Screen*, as a main demonstration of the fact that the culture of consumption participates in the global dynamics of postmodernity by operating a visual decentralization of the narrative structures of the individual's self-constitution, promoted and dispersed through the phenomena of *the hyper-cinema*, Lipovetsky and Serroy transfer this pattern of creating a figurative identity of the society of the spectacle to a new argument of justifying the postmodern society as a kinesthetic one. Mainly visual, this new society, in which the production and the consumption of the events are correlated with a so-called design of self-constitution, defined as the *aestheticization of the world*, represents the origins of artistic capitalism. The two philosophers accomplish that:

"This is what we call artistic or creative-transaesthetic capitalism, characterized by the amplified importance of the sensitivity and stages of process design, through a systematic work of the stylization of goods and commercial places, generalized integration of the art, the look and the affects of the universe of consumption." (2013, 12).

On the one hand, this is the proper context in which artistic capitalism was created as an instrument for the self-constitution and self-government of the postmodern societies which propose the spectacle as a dominant model of the communitarian lifestyle, based not on "an ensemble of images, but on social interaction between persons, mediated by *images*". Therefore, how should one understand phenomena such as *consumption, aestheticization, hyperart, the hedonism, the subjectivation of the individual's desires*, in the terms of an ethical and aesthetic construction? On the other hand, the normalization of capitalism, through all these reflective contents of what Debord termed as *the society of the spectacle*², attests the socio-historical organizational power of aesthetics, getting closer to the main problem analyzed in this research: it is much easier to approach a certain strategy of interpreting the ideology of artistic capitalism if one accepts the correspondent ages of aesthetics and capitalism, in a cohabitation dedicated to *the stylization of the world*, as Lipovetsky seems to understand the issue.

Consequently, I will examine, in the first part of my paper, to what extent the four ages of *the aestheticization of the world*, identified by Lipovetsky and Serroy, represent stages of the humanization and socialization of tastes, rather than their uniform standardization, approaching the society of consumption as a phenomenal dimension of the spectacle and the spectacular. This process analysis seems to be justified by previous attempts to define *the spectacle* as *the capital* reached through such a degree of *accumulation* that it turns into *image*, following Debord's model of interpretation. My thesis is that there it is possible to approach artistic capitalism as a hybrid ideology of the society of the spectacle, based on consumption and hedonism, having as effect what Lipovetsky called *trans-aesthetic individualism*. In a postmodern era in which the ideological force of the notion of happiness does not originate in the Foucauldian practic-

es of the constitution of the self, but in a socio-historical perspective claiming that the myth of happiness and welfare concentrates, in contemporary societies, the myth of equality, artistic capitalism becomes a model for the masses' aesthetic organization. Happiness is quantifiable: therefore, the consumption is a process of measurable interpersonal communication between individuals, as well as a process of classification and social differentiation. We shall see to what extent the postmodern utopias of happiness perform a constitutive role in the rise of transaesthetic individualism and, more precisely, in strengthening the ideology of artistic capitalism.

II. Four ages of artistic capitalism regarded as transaesthetic paradigms of creativity

According to Lipovetsky, there are "four pure models organization, across history, the immemorial process of the stylization of the world" (2013, 20), validated and recognized as *ages of artistic capitalism*. The working hypothesis is that systems of production, distribution and consumption are modeled by fundamental aesthetic experiences, artistic capitalism and the „creative-transaesthetic“ society being characterized by the dominance of sensitivity, the process-design, the mechanical styling of consumption goods and commercial spaces, in order to provoke a generalized integration of art into different levels of self-constitution of the Individual, claimed by imaginary, aesthetic and emotional contents. Therefore, the problem of creativity can be approached through the logics of the four phases of artistic capitalism.

The discourse of postmodern art engages the radical opposition between culture and industry, authentic and kitsch, the culture of the masses and the art of the elites. In fact, *creativity* is a revolutionary attitude, since the industrial and commercial universe played the role of the principal engine of aestheticization in the modern world, which performed Marcuse's ideal of the society as a work of art. A mandatory clarification, prior to any development of the current analysis, concerns the general significance of aesthetic phenomena in the society of the spectacle. It is Lipovetsky's opinion that:

“Once artistic capitalism triumphs, the aesthetic phenomena are back to the minimal, peripheral and marginal worlds: integrated to a universe of production, commercialization and communication of material goods, they constitute infinite markets administrated by international economic giants. Art against industry, culture against commerce, creation against entertainment: in all these spheres, the one who is more creative wins. It is a universe of over-abundance and aesthetic inflation shaking under our eyes: a transaesthetic world, a space of hyperart, where art infests the industries, as well as all the interstition of commerce and ordinary life” (2013, 26).

The transaesthetic logic of capitalism dynamited the excessive plurality of certain styles of integration and consumption of hedonist, sensitive and imaginary experiences, as well as social representations, in which the correlated construction of request and offer is influenced by the subjectivation of a social class of individuals

revealing common tastes and personal emotions. On the one hand, the constitution of the self, assumed with all the implications rigorously aestheticized, manifests, as self-fulfillment, regarded through the criterions of superabundance and hyperconsumption adapted to the primary and socio-communitarian needs of the Individuals. On the other hand, it appears in the formula of the consumption of the self, through pleasures that quantify postmodern hedonism in the terms of the chance to create entertainment and the aestheticization of an ideal of life, which has to be accomplished by the Subject in a paradoxical social context, where it represents only a part of a (cultural) mass.

The aim of this section is to demonstrate the power of artistic capitalism and the stylization of the world to structure hyperconsumption through aesthetics and, moreover, to justify its result being the derived paradigm of *the transaesthetic individual* from the modern and common paradigm of *a homo aestheticus*. In fact, "the hypermodern aesthetic ethics", criticized by Lipovetsky, connects artistic capitalism with the consolidation of some norms of existence that are typically aesthetic; defined through *pleasure, emotion, entertainment*, they confront the aesthetics of existence with models of consumerist existence, situated "far away from the synonymy with the idea of a beautiful life, as long as they are attached to the dependence, the febricity, the subjectivation of the market models, the domination of the world by the imperatives of speed, efficiency, performance and accumulation".

The empire of images, fictional projections of the self and the narrative global screen of the Individual's self-constitution, analyzed by Lipovetsky, offer the proper context to understand that the visual pollution is caused by the simplification of the moral and aesthetic substance of life, determined by an inflation of alternatives that provide artistic capitalism with an experiential background: creating a new market of values, consumption succeeds, feverishly, in erecting an immaterial capitalism on the foundations of a material one. Intelligent, symbolic or human capital manipulates the sensitive dimension of a consumer, organizing what Lipovetsky claims to be two different alternatives of transaesthetic life, situated in a visible difference:

"one required by the total obedience to the accelerated and activists norms of consumption, and another governed by the ideal of an existence capable to remain immune to the routines of life and acquisitions, to suspend the 'dictation' of precipitated time, to taste the flavour of the world catching the time as it discovers it. The society, the consumer, the transaesthetic individual are not at the point of the ideal through which we could conceive 'a beautiful life'."

In the end, this is why the superposition of the four ages of the aestheticization of the world to the four logics of the construction of an artistic capitalism in the dimension of the social spectacle proves legitimated. But what makes this correspondence plausible?

First of all, the postmodern consumer of the work of art assists the conflict between *art* and *industry*, while marketing mechanisms and techniques are manipulating the production of the work of art, organized after Taylorist and Fordian models, in the first phase artistic capitalism. To this period, Lipovetsky attaches the logics of

integrating and generalizing the style and the aesthetic seduction of the goods of consumption, once that in this phase, “artistic capitalism proves to be the economic system functioning through the systematic aestheticization of the markets of consumption, of the goods and the ordinary environments” (2013, 45). In this terms, the only legitimate question for the Individual of the 21st century is *how the interest in the work of art is structured as an economic interest?* The answer is generated by the formula of a perverted artistic expression: the principal cause for this assimilation is represented by *the art of mass*. How can it be defined? Apparently, through everything that is not determining a *disinterested art*: it is not the art of museums, of consecrated and elitist spaces, of the specialized public. It is a sort of art subsumed by the equation production-consumption-distribution, artistic creation being destined to aestheticize living spaces, entertainment buildings, the public spheres created for the relaxation of the masses. *Interested art* and *disinterested art* – a consumerist category – are separated also because criteria such as *the aesthetic satisfaction of the public*, *the accessibility of figurative discourse* and *the aesthetic experience procuring the social transformation of taste judgments and aesthetic sensibilities at the level of the masses* are operable. Mass art is manipulated and communicated: the *Global Screen*, with its entire cultural PR, takes on the role of a Scheherazade. The commercial and fluent cinema provides a collectively consumed narrative: the mass demands, applauds and confirms if a cinematic project should receive a proper budget depending on the universal aesthetic judgment that gives value to the work of art as a work of consumption. Lipovetsky remarks here a constructive subtlety: even if the so-called *La Grande Arte*, considered by millenary traditions incontestable, has not been treated as an exterior reality of artistic capitalism, yet, more than ever, the contrast between their artistic value and the phenomena of social rejection is visible and pregnant: impressionist sketches, Zola’s vulgarity or reputed canvas are internalized in new contexts of the aesthetic cineaste reconstructions.

“Look at Dumas or Picasso! This is the reason for which it is necessary the expansion of the notion of art including the domains categorized as minor, such as the industrial design, the decorative arts, the fashion, the music of variety, the rock, the commercials, the cinema, the BD. They constitute, among the noble arts, different worlds of art belonging to transaesthetic artistic capitalism” (2013, 76).

In my opinion, this type of artistic cohabitation is necessarily followed by a *de-aestheticization of art* or a *de-definition*, barely intuited and criticized by Harold Rosenberg, representing a consistent explanation for the rivalry between interested and uninterested art. Revisited, *the de-definition of art* proves to be a suitable context for *artistic professionalization*, as well as for *the aesthetic accessibility* promoted by *the art of the masses*: we should note *the transversal creativity* developed in a field of consumption that suspended the classic opposition between *high* and *low* art. One buys, nowadays, a signature instead of a work of art. The brand, for example, which represents, in turn, a conceptualized art (dependent on a discourse), is not only the object of an individual

desire, but also the consequence of an artistic framework of creativity in which artistic capitalism fuels the democratisation of the ambition to create, dividing the artistic market into *professionals* and *amateurs*. There are the ones who create the brand and the ones who replicate it, in order to make it accessible to the society of consumption, even if the final result is interpreted as *kitsch*, an effect that Lipovetsky does not criticize in the theories dedicated to the status of the work of art and the resources of the banalization of artistic identity. In fact, Lipovetsky claims that:

“The Artist is not the Other, the prophet, the marginal, the eccentric: he can also be Me, as any Other. In belated artistic capitalism, each of us is an artist” (2013:114).

The conflict regarding the social-consumerist status between *the artist* and *the artisan* has a profound echo in the recent dispute between art and industry: a lucid interrogation aims to explain to what extent the mechanisms of the aestheticization of the world compelled the society of consumption to appreciate a work of art in terms of *utility*. In this regard, Lipovetsky argues, following Morris:

“No work of art is a work of art unless it is useful.” (2013, 166).

This is the reason for which the first age of artistic capitalism materialized the functionalism and the specificity of the work of art as a useful construct, *the design* representing the principal symbol of this new aesthetic appetite and necessity, at the same time.

Still these assumptions can easily provide the impression that transaesthetic capitalism is projected only to capitalize the investments, names and the notorious arts. My thesis, at this point, is that if artistic capitalism provokes the postmodern individual to authenticity and individuality, then it should engage a demassification movement, as a consequence of the democratization of art. Even if the spectacle is lived in community and the trends respect the public demands, consumption must be adequate, even when it comes to art, at a personal complicity of taste judgments and possibilities. This is why the aestheticization of the masses must be followed by demassification.

Secondly, creative publicity and the cohabitation of the kitsch industry with the technologies of high art and creation determine another phase of artistic capitalism, as the age when the postmodern consumer becomes “a collector of experiences,” following Toffler’s theories. In this context, *the value of the work of art* is judged through its commercial and financial appreciation, the aesthetic criterion becoming secondary.

A potential explication for this background can be suggested by the new social order that the Individual, satisfied by the movement of marketing his desires, imposes through an integral life-style that incorporated the aestheticization of the work, the industrial design and the social expansion determined by abundant consumption. Two major aspects are worthy of a suitable critique of this argument. On the one hand, the functionalist design, mentioned as the main figure of the first age of artistic capitalism, seems opposed to the social development of the individuality principle, as Lipovetsky remarks, because of its ascetic and rationalist dimension. On the other hand, “the

Fordian organization of widespread distribution played a significant role against the aestheticization of the commercial universe" (2013, 192). Therefore, rationalization and aestheticization are submitted to an inverse proportion: the prevalence of the visual, the cultural internalization of kitsch through consumption, the homogenization of the commercial dynamics as an aesthetic sense brought before the image of an individual "who lives in a Mall or in a televised screen with three dimensions", as Kowinski appreciated. Seduced by the industry of market representations, the individual prefers visual productions guided by the principles of commercial art or kitsch, pretending to be a conform replica of the real and authentic object. For each of the two previously mentioned issues, there exists a correspondent problem. Firstly, it is difficult to define *the authenticity of the work of art* since it is assumed as the result of publicity and commercials that simplify the object of consumption to *an image*. The resulting artistic representations, as figurative pleas for the object of our desires are attached to a catchy discourse through which the poetical function of language is highly capacitated. The aestheticization of commercial discourse becomes poetry in the street in terms of publicity: as a consequence, communication in this phase of artistic capitalism is created by gathering moral norms into a conventional discourse, full of sublimations and allusions. Lipovetsky remarks the manner in which this second phase of artistic capitalism, from the 1960s to the 1970s, produced publicity through mechanisms of augmentation, suggestion, humor. But publicity becomes in the last two phases of artistic capitalism a form of *anti-culture*. Secondly, "if the commercial corresponds to a moment of authoritarian-disciplinary-rigorist individualism, creative publicity is nowadays in the phase of its second revolution, individualist, hedonist, psychological and subjective, understood as a boom of the fashion-economy".

For the last two phases, the *homo aestheticus* paradigm, criticized by Luc Ferry, is representative, being regarded as the direct consequence of the individual need to aestheticize life in order to procure and conserve his authenticity, in an era in which the global narrative construction of consumption unifies social identities, cultural trends or preferences, and mass-art abolishes the classical difference between high and low forms of creation. Is the aestheticization of life necessarily followed by the de-aestheticization of art, in Rosenberg's acceptance? Moreover, how is the consumer's obsession for sensitive, immediate and comfortable aesthetic satisfaction influencing creativity and the lifestyle of the artist, regarded not as an artisan, but as a visionary of his century and a creator of spectacle?

Lipovetsky introduces the explicit differentiation between the second phase of artistic capitalism, developed until the 1970s, and the third period, starting with the 1980s, marked by the evolution of post-Fordian economy, proposing the imperative of innovation and the hyper-diversification of production, the amplification of aesthetic subjectivation, the cohabitation of kitsch with the great technologies of the century, as well as the mixture between antonymic figurative directions, such as the classical and the postmodern styles, retro fashion and the futurist paradigm.

“Phase III coincides with the end of the occidental hegemony over appearances, with the reaffirmation of the most diverse cultural origins, with the development of national and ethnical styles drawn with the lines of the modern design” (2013, 243).

Lipovestky’s remarks suggest a social and an artistic critique of this third phase of artistic capitalism. The social critique is founded on the attempt to suspend cultural specificity to a space, since globalization reshaped the occidental avant-garde and the design based on the interaction of local and universal spaces. The social design of the society of the spectacle performs the regression “from luxury to low cost” (2013, 247). It becomes legitimate to judge the market in terms of the rarity and distribution of different significant pieces of art in galleries. Traditional discrepancies recorded by high and low arts are supplied by the contrast resulting from the confrontation between high arts and decorative arts. The industrial object, as well the artistic one, complies with the modern-functionalist style. To the principle “less is bore”, signed by Charles Jencks, Lipovetsky opposes the recent and viable witticism “less is more”; and yet, cultures are performing a hybrid artistic manifestation, resulted from the application of both principles. Antique models are recycled, as the main concern of the third interval of artistic capitalism, associated with the reinterpretation of the classic functionalities performed by artistic spaces. Hegel’s postulate regarding the death of art means in postmodern societies, the major reduction of the works of art, from both a qualitative and a quantitative perspective, the latter one regaining the logics of consumption. Therefore, transaesthetic capitalism, having reached its third age, is marked by the constitutive opposition *à la mode démodé*. At this level, Lipovetsky appeals to Esslinger’s arguments, who considers that the sensitive consumerist imperative of the “form that must follow the emotion” must be replaced by a revived dictum: “the form follows the function”. Applied to the artistic creations from this period, the equivalence seems not only suitable, but also sustained by the aesthetic rationalization of objects impregnated by “a design that de-traditionalized and developed the aesthetic vision of the consumer: it contributed to the rise of the hypermodern consumer obsessed by innovation and welfare, seduced by manners of the object’s appearance. Modern design is an instrument of marketing as well as an agent of transformations applied to the ways of life, to the individuals’ relationships, in terms of consumption, times and ordinary aesthetics” (2013, 262).

In his last phase, artistic capitalism proposes the pluralization and subjectivation of styles, founded on the correspondent functionality of baroque and kitsch, as well as on the differences between postmodern and hypermodern.

A concentrated conclusion is that the four ages of artistic capitalism, identified by Lipovetsky, can easily be interpreted as the main originating sources of the four ages of transaesthetic individualism, understood as postmodern phases of creativity, influenced by (1) *hyperconsumerism*, (2) *the utility of the work of art*, (3) *the new social status of the artist* and (4) *the process of normalizing* conducts, moral values and subjected desires of the Individual, in the sense of *personalizing consumption*. Correspondences are

sustainable, from both conceptual and methodological perspectives. What are the advantages and the innovative aspects of this interpretation? The first answer is focused on exceeding current interpretations of this cultural paradigm: artistic capitalism has been studied as a formal consequence of *capitalist realism*, enforced as a cultural ideology in 1963, during the art exhibition *Demonstration for Capitalist Realism*³, organized in Dusseldorf by Gerhard Richter, Sigmar Polke, Wolf Vostell and Konrad Lueg, as the manifesto of commodity-based art, developed by societies of consumption, and the professionalization of the artists. Hence, criticizing artistic capitalism not in the socialist terms imposed by the atmosphere of the capitalism realism, for which phenomena such as the mass commercialized culture and the mandatory insertion of artistic contents into the world of advertising have priority, but in individualistic terms, might constitute a different manner of regaining postmodern privilege and the power of the value of the individual through art. The current dominating imagistic culture, identified by Baudrillard, was considered the principal cause of developing “the pastiche and simulations, the stylistic diversity and heterogeneity which lead to the loss of the referent, ‘the death of the subject’, and the end of individualism” (Featherstone 2007, 56). Therefore, artistic capitalism might have all the instruments to discourage both the thesis of the death of art and the disappearance of the Subject, by enforcing transaesthetic individualism as a new moral and aesthetic cultural paradigm based on the civilization of the *images*.

Secondly, in the light of the observations of my analysis, I strongly consider that the last two phases of artistic capitalism manifest a common pathology, based on *visual shock*: profoundly experiential, contemporary art transforms the banal into a work of art, as Danto consider. What have Duchamp, Warhol and Leger in common? Exactly the art of accessible playfulness, the confrontation of *the kitsch of visual arts* with their *social utility*. The capitalism of the third age belongs to show-exhibitions, to metaphor-museums as integrated spaces in the thematic sensational, to postmodern meta-narrations, dispersed through story-telling techniques. But it is also true that transaesthetic capitalism achieved a proper symbol in these last two phases, represented by kitsch as stimulation of artistic mass consumption. As inauthenticity, stereotypy, copy, kitsch proposes a modern and universal culture through mass consumption: therefore, the new manifest, “*Le kitsch, c’est chic*,” from Vezzoli’s *Le Monde* makes sense. One might believe that the transaesthetic character of kitsch is suggested by its hybrid nature, constituted by classic and postmodern motives and creative directions. As a matter of fact, in the equation of the society of consumption, its main role is to make social classes become more intimate despite their contrasting styles of life. It is Lipovetsky’s opinion that postmodern society is confronted with the phenomena of neokitsch, as a result of the democratization of the judgments of taste. Distinguishing between two forms of the kitsch, one signified by the art of welfare, the other one determined by the interaction of goods, the French philosopher argues that consumption is responsible for the degradation of art nowadays.

"The first kitsch reattaches to the bourgeois way of life the cult of possession, comfort, decorative emphasis: it is the style of the great magazine as a legitimate force to create models. Then, a second kitsch accompanies the society of consumption, situating a certain mentality in the middle of a completely different system of values: its source is nothing else than the ethics of consumption, the pleasure of achieving the object, the systematic organization of things functioning as ludic gadgets. The style of the supermarkets belongs to neokitsch" (Moles 1976, 21).

In my opinion, kitsch is also the form of a figurative discourse explaining the aestheticization of consumption as an equivalent operation with the subjectivation of tastes. The industrial aesthetics imposed, under globalization, the reterritorialization of the worlds of art: the mobility of tastes, hyper-choices and their quality, as well as the existence of kitsch, as accessible creation regarded in the terms of a substitution for the high art convinces about this argument. Nevertheless, the transaesthetic society identified by Lipovetsky deserves a proper analysis in a very specific paradigm, represented by the transfer of the four ages of artistic capitalism into four ages of the *cinema*, generally interpreted through *The Global Screen*.

III. The post-modern cinema. The global screen in the age of artistic capitalism: a brief analysis instead of conclusions

The working hypothesis, at this level, is that art, the industry of entertainment and the cinema become consubstantial creations, influenced by the social and spectacular behavior of a consumer seduced by technologized narrative fictions. The seventh traditional art becomes, in postmodernity, the pretext for the acquisition of a spectacle developed as a mixt, global and profound emotion; in fact, the contemporary aesthetic market regrets the trend of qualifying the sensations and aesthetic experiences of an individual in the logic of consumption promoting the multi-screen. Criticizing this visual phenomenon, Lipovetsky repeats terms such as *hyper-* and *multi-* in order to determine all the cultural references that make possible, in a society of consumption, the art of the cinema as digital art. Still, in my opinion, Lipovetsky's critique should be interpreted as a major movement of assimilating any multimedia construct in the global discourse of multiculturalism. Even if the author of *The Global Screen* recognizes that "this book was written to combat the melancholic idea of a post-cinema epoch that still sustains the critic discourse" (Lipovetsky and Serroy 2008, 8), the principal thesis is that "what announces itself is the global, fragmented, pluri-identitary, multi-cultural screen" (10).

The previous analysis of the ages of artistic capitalism can be applied as a correspondent model of interpretation to the so-called death of art explained as death of the cinema. If the neorealism and the cinema of the 1960s conceived cinematography as a very conventional art, the postmodernity offered the paradigm of the hypercinema. Why are these differentiations justified, not only following Lipovetsky's augmentative etymology?

The first argument to sustain this thesis is based on the fact that each identified age of the cinema is based on a main principle of an epochal culture. Therefore, it is easily to observe that “the first phase corresponds to the era of the mute cinema. It expressed the reality of a primitive modernity” (14). The second interval is regarded as an extension of the theatre in the cineaste background, donating artistic senses and experiences, the status and the dignity of the artistic narration that has to be primary beyond any potential Subject.

“The second phase, which is coeval with a classic modernity, one that lasts from the beginning of the 1930s till the 1950s, is the golden age of the studios. This is due, primarily, to the technical evolution of the spoken film that, rapidly prescribes the mute one, forcing the creators to be reluctant, facing what became a simple filmed theatre, domesticizing this new language, by inventing a grammar for it. (...) Framed in generic, thematic, moral and aesthetic norms, this cinema belongs to the script, to the studio productions.” (15).

The narrative gains fluidity and becomes impregnated by spectacular elements: even if the film “narrates a story that is necessarily teleological” (16), one can easily understand that the techniques of directing constitute the code of a mechanic narration. The first aesthetic rupture identified, in this logic, belongs to the French movie, which provides a neorealist approach through which the “dictatorship of the screen” and “street filming” sustain the transition to a further age. According to Lipovetsky, the third phase developed from the 1960s to the 1970s, illustrating a civilized modernity. The film adapts to the new cinema: the space (determined by a studio), the time (expressed by the atmosphere of a cultural era) and the individual, regarded as a consumer of narrations, are all conceived in this new paradigm as principal coordinates of a spectacle, reiterating Benjamin’s suspicion that, during a film, the individual mistakes his reality for a hyper-reality. Many times, the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction recommends film as an illusion of “second degree”, after the proper reality (Benjamin 2000, 122). But, in fact, the age of the screen is the glory of digital art. The hegemonic position of the work of art is tested by the exigencies of a planetary public that determines through consumption the functional communication of any narrative construction. The mass-consumption of any sort of cinematographic production represents the unique authentic feedback of any work of art. In my opinion, the cinema represents, nowadays, a democratic and commercial art that exploits a very specific *technê*.

“The *Lumière* Brothers are industrialists, not artists, and what they are filming proves it: the out of the work in a factory. The technique is the one that invents art; art cannot invent the technique. Panofsky was right when he said that the cinema is the only art developed in contrary conditions to the previous ones. Even the conditions in which it appears makes them immediately suspect.” (Lipovetsky 2008, 30-31)

As a conclusion, these are the symptoms that recommend the insertion of the film in the economy of varieties as art of the mass. Artistic capitalism seems to direct the cineaste technique to the mechanism of suspending the aesthetic distance, also recognized by Daniel Bell. Since “the avant-garde writers, the cubist and the futurists, the expressionists and the surrealists wanted to reduce the aesthetic distance between the work of art and the spectator, trying to throw the last one in the middle of a whirl of subjective sensations and direct emotions” (45), the aesthetic distance is meant to be introduced in order to distinguish the universe of the work of art and the universe of the spectator.

Two important aspects derive from this aspect. First, the technique of illusion, operated in film productions, speculates the fantastic, the miraculous and the monstrous, requalifying, in my opinion, the appliances of the traditional theories about the sublime, the beautiful and tragedy. Nowadays we witness on the reformation of the cultural paradigm of film productions in the terms of *hypercinema*. The techniques of illusion started to be applied in developing *multiplex images*, by operating principles such as the acceleration of the rhythm of artistic creations, the abandonment of unitary narrative scenarios and the exacerbation of the visual shock. But the hypercinema also means a serial production of *neo-mythologies*, maintaining moral profiles in the constitution of different typologies of heroes, the spirit of classical fictions in confronting opposing moral forces as symbols of the evil and good and the appetite for narrative adventure, internalized by the spectator through the 3D effects. Therefore, the civilization of the spectacle keeps the sense of tragedy, alternating it with the grandeur of aesthetic constructions and technical design, leaving the spectator with the illusion that his impressions are a consequence of the interaction with a sublime construct. At the same time, it is Lipovetsky’s opinion that “thanks to the hypercinema, the human body becomes sublime, transformed, super-naturalised, as Baudelaire said” (Lipovetsky 2013, 213). The perfect narrative worlds from the hyperspectacle are, in fact, perfect dimensions for exposing beauty in excess and for developing, through images, the illusion of what Hannah Arendt named “a potential immortality”. Rejecting the perishable nature of art as a symbol of death’s immediacy, the spectator tends to become himself a work of art: even if the postmodern man replaced heroes with idols and traditional aesthetic experiences with ordinary and ephemeral artistic experiences, he is still searching for values such as the beautiful and the sublime, in order to give a sense to the authenticity of his life. It is true that by treating artistic experience as consumption, we witness what Marcuse called “a controlled desublimation”, intensified by the appearance of our moral liberation from the capitalist society of alert production, from the proletarianization of our life-styles, from facing the confusion between art and reality, between the projections of our self-constitution and our real self. This does not mean that in a full era of *de-aestheticization*, traditional acceptances of the sublime, the tragic and the beautiful have disappeared; they have been subjected to a different, hypermodern approach. For example, the sublime inspired by the grandeur of a cathedral

is reinforced, nowadays, by the impression caused by the augmentation of a digital model. As a partial conclusion for this primary mention, one could argue that the operational principles of the sublime have as much applicability in an impressive technological design as the criteria of the beauty have in the aestheticization of consumption and the stylization of the ways of life.

Secondly, the last phase of the cinema, constituted by the global screen, is determined by a series of avant-gardes that confronts us with the hypothesis that the postmodern is not a suitable term for naming the contemporary cinema, and we shall see that a possible explanation for that is provided by the critique of the operated images and processes.

“This cinema has been targeted as postmodern. The diagnosis is correct, the name is not. A new rhetoric of the cinema was born, one that, far from expressing a “post” modernity or an exhausted one, proves, on the contrary, a certain exacerbation. What we see now on the screen is an ultramodern cinema. Structurally, it is characterized, indeed, by three types of fundamental and inedited images, defined by the logics of *hyper-*” (64).

I strongly consider that the next three types of processes operated by Lipovetsky to define the destitution of the postmodern cinema correspond to the three logics experimented by the French philosopher in elaborating the structure of artistic capitalism, from both a methodological and a conceptual perspective. I will briefly expose them, in order to derive a final argument for sustaining my announced thesis. The first process is hyperbolised and intervenes as an instrument for creating the excess of illusion: it is composed by *the motion-image*, *the time-image* and *the excess-image* of Deleuze. The second process involves the logic of maladjustment and formal complexification of filmic space-time constructions, and here is where the narration abuses the multiplex-image. The last process belongs to the self-referentiality: inserting the quotidian into the movie leaves the spectator with the impression of “the art without any culture” (66), providing the distance-image, because of which “the spectator is both in and out of the films, he is one of the paradoxes of the hypercinema” (70).

Therefore, the commercial hyperculture of the cinema is based on the excess-image, the multiplex-image and the distance-image, performing the evolution of the so-called seventh art through the two main actors of their era: the high and the low art. What any plausible conclusions could descend from this interpretation in order to conceive a specific approach of artistic capitalism following one of the most provocative phenomena of the society of consumption, *the cinema*? On the one hand, the taxonomy of the images previously discussed infirm the death of the author, by transferring the reality of a script to a public situation of the current reality, assumed and consumed by the individual. On the other hand, the nowadays cinema can be regarded as the compromise between the high and the low art, between “the creation and the cliché, the qual-

ity and the mediocrity" (68). If one attempts to undertake a social critique of the society of the spectacle, then, the previous analysis can define the transition from a disciplinary individualism to an expressive one, as Lipovetsky argued, inspired by the new functions of images. If a cultural critique is required, then the screen affirms multiple ways of life in a figurative representation of large circulation that becomes a form of art and, at the limit, even a confrontation between a classical *homo aestheticus* and the *homo consumericus*. However, simultaneously, it is our obligation to recognize that the cinema is still expressing a disciplinary power manipulating one of the most original, universal and social elements of the modern adventure: the narrative construct, as a production of ideals and limits. The evasion from the immediate reality to the image is called by Lipovetsky the result of a *cine-vision*, inspired by Wilde's conviction that "life imitates art to a much greater extent than art imitates nature". Remaining with this subjective diagnostic, why should artistic capitalism be something more than a simple vision of the individual regarding all the aesthetic manners to produce reality depending on any image that offers him one of the possible worlds promising happiness and welfare?

Notes

- 1 According to different partisans of Guy Debord, such as Gilman-Opalsky, capitalism, in its spectacular version, represents a personal experience: the absence of a direct interaction with a Marxist world, as well as with a communist society, made possible only a critical construction. However, this sort of worlds, societies and utopias have been imagined or observed in their capacity to suggest certain ideologies, having been subjected to criticism rather than turned into reality (see Richard Gilman-Opalsky 2011, 9). The author's perspective is relevant since it argues that any ideology works *a priori* and is based on a precipitated analysis of the potential behaviors and conducts that might be constituted as a reaction of our normative instincts. From this point of view, Opalsky sustains that conservatism, feminism, existentialism, Marxism and liberalism are equal, their ideology being one of anticipating the individual's reaction in a social collective context. Therefore, capitalism, which is not an exception, is analyzed as "an ideology of accumulation" (11). Virtues, talents and values are situated together as maximized effects of the moral discourse of capitalism, while the spectacle attempts to aesthetically define the society of consumption. In my research, Debord's spectacular approach to artistic capitalism inspires a radical critique of Lipovetsky's artistic capitalism, based on the power of the image to produce both an aesthetic and a moral discourse of this ideology. This argument also serves to establish the criterions of a theoretical construction of artistic capitalism as a proper ideology, by confronting it with similar traditions or with prejudices of the historical practices targeted at constituting and understanding the production and reproduction of reality through the work of art and the trans-historic, trans-cultural and aesthetic paradigms of individualism.
- 2 A synthetic approach to these phenomena is offered by Debord himself: "The spectacle is not a collection of images, rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images" (Debord 1994, 4).
- 3 Manfred Kuttner, Konrad Lueg, Sigmar Polke and Gerhard Richter argued: "This exhibition is not a commercial undertaking but purely a demonstration, and no gallery, museum, or

public exhibiting body would have been a suitable venue. The major attraction of the exhibition is the subject matter of the works in it. For the first time in Germany, we are showing paintings for which such terms as Pop Art, Junk Culture, Imperialist or Capitalist Realism, New Objectivity, Naturalism, German Pop and the like are appropriate." See M. Godfrey, G. Jansen, E. Evers, M. Holzhey (2014). *Living with Pop: A Reproduction of Capitalist Realism*. Köln: Walther König.

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