

Emotion, desire and daydream in the recyclable material collectors' consumption practices

Emoção, desejo e devaneio nas práticas de consumo dos catadores de materiais recicláveis

Emoción, deseo y delirio en las prácticas de consumo de los recolectores de materiales reciclables

*Josilene Barbosa do Nascimento*¹

Abstract *This article discusses the recyclable material collectors' consumption, when their aims are merely personal gratifications that are anticipated through imagination. Thus, by pointing out how the collectors' self-illusory deliriums, characteristic of modern consumption, work, we examined the way in which emotion and the individual values rule their consumption practices. In this sense, the collectors consume in order to satiate subjectively established wills: it is emotional consumption.*

Keywords: *Consumer society; Emotional consumption; Collectors of recycled materials; Hyper-consumption*

Resumo *O presente artigo aborda o consumo dos catadores de materiais recicláveis quando objetivam, meramente, gratificações pessoais antecipadas através da imaginação. Desse modo, apontando como funcionam os delírios autoilusivos dos catadores, característica do consumo moderno, perscrutamos como a emoção e os valores individuais regem suas práticas de consumo. Nesse sentido, os catadores consomem para saciar vontades subjetivamente estabelecidas: é o consumo emocional.*

Palavras-chave: *Sociedade de consumo; Consumo emocional; Catadores de materiais recicláveis; Hiperconsumo*

¹ PhD in Social Sciences from the Universidade Federal de Campina Grande [Federal University of Campina Grande] with a concentration domain in Sociology. And post-doctorate student of the Universidade Estadual da Paraíba – UEPB [University of the State of Paraíba], Campina Grande, PB, Brasil. e-mail: ninjosibn@gmail.com.

Resumen *El presente artículo aborda el consumo de los recolectores de materiales reciclables cuando pretenden, meramente, gratificaciones personales anticipadas a través de la imaginación. De ese modo, apuntando a como funcionan los delirios auto-ilusorios de los recolectores, característica del consumo moderno, investigamos como la emoción y los valores individuales rigen sus prácticas de consumo. En este sentido los recolectores consumen para saciar deseos subjetivamente establecidos: es el consumo emocional.*

Palabras-clave: *Sociedad de consumo; Consumo emocional; Recolectores de materiales reciclables; Hiperconsumo*

Date of submission: 30/4/2014

Date of acceptance: 2/7/2014

Introduction

Barbosa (2008, p. 60) relates that in Brazil there are almost no academic works the topic of which is consumption. She points out that in two of the biggest centres of postgraduate studies of Brazil – Instituto Universitário de Pesquisa do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (Iuperj) [Institute for Research] and Programa de Pós-Graduação em Antropologia Social da Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (Museu Nacional) [Postgraduate Programme in Social Anthropology of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (National Museum)] –, “both with more than 20 years of existence and with the highest total of PhD theses that are produced in relation to the other similar centres, very few theses, which are tangentially connected with consumption or approach it or even the Brazilian society as a consumer society, were registered”. The author also emphasises that studies on determined social groups, such as those of the negroes, for example, only problematise questions of “losses”, wants, that is to say that they basically emphasise “the dimension of the minority that is discriminated against and excluded from this group and from its ethnic and/or religious dimension” (idem). Thus they are denied the status of consumers. This author points out that independently of the material hardship of determined social groups, the acts of consuming and of using elements of material culture – such as resources for the construction and affirmation of identities, social differentiation and exclusion – are universal. “But still the attachment to material goods is not a characteristic of contemporary society neither of those who materially possess much. Both elements are and already were present in an intense way in other societies and social segments” (ibidem, p. 12-13). Nonetheless, what characterises “consumer society”² is exactly the urgent need for new things: consumerist insatiability. In this sense, there is no subculture or a specific way to consume for those who are economically less privileged.

² The author Barbosa (2008) presents the term “consumer society” as one of the numerous labels academics, intellectuals, etc. use in order to refer to contemporary society.

It is in this point that we believe that the studies, which discuss questions pertinent to the meanings of consumption and/or the importance of consumption to groups that belong to the urban popular strata in Brazil, are of fundamental importance. Obviously, at the present time, we perceive an increasing “popular” or “low-income” market for the consumerist sectors that are numerically significant.

According to Barros (2007), until the 1980s, in the research field of Social Sciences in Brazil, most of the studies that were carried out with low-income groups defined them, essentially on the basis of their working relationships or by means of the sign of “material hardship”.

In Marxist approaches as well as in the studies which investigated the “survival strategies” of the popular strata, the focus of the analysis was on the mechanisms the studied families used in order to guarantee their “material survival”. [...] Everything seemed to move thanks to a “practical reason” which allowed people to survive in an environment of great material scarcity. It was a real logic of “lack”, be it of goods, of work or of “class-consciousness” (BARROS, 2007, p. 104).

Inclusively, since the popular classes were not considered as possessors of “necessary” goods so that they could be included into consumer society, they were not considered as potential consumers not only in the academic studies, but also by the marketing agents. Hence the studies, which were carried out on these classes, saw them as working class on the basis of a merely productive perspective, as if the individuals that belonged to this social class were not consumers. When they consumed, their choices were regulated according to the scarcity of material goods and, for a practical reason, the motivating action would be the search for survival, always seeking the lowest expense with products that were considered appropriate to their restricted financial conditions. In this approach, the consumption practices were no more than purely objective negotiations (BARROS, 2007).

By thinking about these popular groups, that are not considered as potential consumers, we started to reflect on how consumption would be and about its importance for a group, that supposedly hardly had incomes to survive on.

In order to answer the problematics we referred to, we decided to carry out a study³ with the recyclable material collectors – we chose them precisely because of their precarious income and work conditions - who belong to the cooperatives COTRAMARE (Cooperativa de Trabalhadores em Materiais Recicláveis de Campina Grande) [Cooperative of Recyclable Material Workers of Campina Grande] and CATAMAIS (Cooperativa de Catadores e Catadoras de Materiais Recicláveis de Campina Grande Ltda.) [Cooperative of Recyclable Material Collectors of Campina Grande Ltd], both located in the municipality of Campina Grande – PB [State of Paraíba].

The choice of the cooperatives, as spaces of data collection of their members, occurred because of one reason: the access to recyclable material collectors, who are organised in a social group, that had defined place of work and working time, would be easier.

At the moment of the carrying out of the data collection, COTRAMARE had twelve associates: six men and six women. We interviewed some and collected life stories of nine of the twelve⁴ associates who were part of the cooperative at the time of the interviews.

At CATAMAIS we succeeded in interviewing eight cooperative members and in collecting their life stories – a number which corresponds to 100% of the total of associated cooperated members who worked in the cooperative at the moment of the data collection – and that of the finance secretary/director⁵ of this cooperative.

The moments of the interviews and of the presentation of the collectors' life stories (all recorded on an MP3 player) were pleasant in spite of being long, in many cases. The data collection occurred in the course of the months of 2010 and 2011. The semi-structured interviews were regu-

³ The study we refer to served to the construction of the PhD thesis in Social Sciences of the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Ciências Sociais [Postgraduate Programme in Social Sciences of the Universidade Federal de Campina Grande [Federal University of Campina Grande].

⁴ Two cooperators refused to be interviewed and one cooperator was not at work because of illness at the time we carried out the data collection.

⁵ The secretary/finance director of CATAMAIS, native of the city of São Paulo, is graduated in Engenharia Mecânica de Produção [Mechanical and Production Engineering] and, at the time of the data collection, he was working in the recycling department and he lived in the space of the CATAMAIS cooperative.

lated according to some topics, such as: the work the recyclable material collector accomplishes in the streets; the “Coleta Seletiva Solidária” [United Selective Collection] the associated collectors of the cooperatives carry out; the meaning and the importance of the recyclable material collector’s work; the meaning of the purchase act; the dreams and consumption possibilities; the justifications for consumption; the leisure practices and/or the consumption of spare time; about brand products and purchase places, etc. With respect to the life stories, we asked the collectors to relate their life trajectory by focusing and/or concentrating on the moment in which they began the work of collecting recyclable materials, the motives of their insertion in this work, difficulties, advantages and curious events.

Obviously here in this text we will only concentrate on the collectors’ discourses which concern the consumption practices that are regulated and/or justified by subjectively created necessities. In the following items let us look at the way in which this process occurs.

The collectors’ self-illusory daydreams

By investigating on the possibilities of “consumer society” in his work *The Romantic Ethic and the spirit of Modern Consumerism* in his discussions on consumption, Campbell (2001), presents influences of the romantic movement of the 18th century as a historical fact which is determinant for the comprehension of the modern consumer’s behaviour. The author demonstrates the links between the romantic values and modern consumerism and points out the deepest relationships between the modern hedonist’s insatiable behaviour and Romanticism.

Hence since consumption is a form of economic proceeding, it had to be put on the opposed side of life with relation to all that we consider “romantic”. On the contrary, there is a significant modern phenomenon which links the two things. The thesis Campbell defends is that Romanticism and/or the romantic ingredient of culture played a fundamental role in the development of the very modern consumerism, thus facilitating the formation of modern consumer society. However, in order to have modern consumption perpetuate itself, as an example, the

announcers via advertising, use “the romantic beliefs, aspirations and attitudes” in order to “induce” consumption, thus serving the interests of a “consumer society” (2001, p. 10).

Thus remembering a classic advertising in Brazil, that of the chocolate Baton, of the brand Garoto, created by W/Brasil and vehiculated in 1992, which had as a protagonist a girl who wore a bathrobe and her head was covered with a towel, who – using the “sweet” tone of voice of a child – said the following words: “My friend housewife: look fixedly at this delicious chocolate (the girl swings a chocolate Baton from one side to the other, which is tied to a thread, as if it were a hypnotising pendulum). Each time you go out with your son you will hear my voice say: buy Baton, buy Baton, your son deserves Baton. Now you will wake up (she snaps her fingers), but you will continue hearing my voice: buy Baton, buy Baton, buyyyyyyyyyyyyyy Baton...” The slogan was the following: “Baton, the chocolate of Garoto [in Portuguese, *Garoto* means “boy”] which does not get out of the mouth neither out of the head!”

This “hypnotic” advertisement, in which the little girl appeared with a pendulum of Baton hypnotising whom was on the other side of the TV screen, or joking to hypnotise the parents, with the objective to have them buy the chocolate to their children, remains in many people’s memory, especially due to the great market appeal it generated at that time. However, could an advertisement like this really induce or manipulate the consumer, compelling him/her to need, desire the product? Campbell, who does not agree with this thesis of manipulationism, affirms that the fact that an advertisement exerts influence on the search for objects by the consumer does not help to explain the origin of the needs and it does not prove either that there existed the consumer’s manipulation.

In the middle of the extremes to suggest that the consumers are submitted to the subliminal control or inclined to act hyper-suggestionably when they are presented with such simple injunctions as “Buy biscuits of Blogg”, there are those theories which make one understand that consumers are “persuaded” or even “obliged” in a way or other, through processes they are aware of, to act in a way which is against their inclinations or against their best interests, but it is of the producers’ interest (2001, p. 72).

Canclini (2008, p. 59) does not agree either with the thesis of manipulationism, in the sense that today the consumption processes are something much more complex than a relationship – hierarchical – between “manipulating means and docile audiences”. According to the author “studies on mass communication have shown that the cultural hegemony does not occur by means of vertical actions, in which the dominators would capture the receptors” (idem, p. 60). In this relationship – between each other – we must also recognise the “mediators”, such as the family, the town district and the work group. In these analyses “there is no conception either of the links between those who emit the messages and those who receive them as only domination relationships. Communication is not efficient if it does not also include interactions of *collaboration and transaction* between one another” (ibidem, the author underlines).

On this topic, Miller (2002, p. 184) defends that the subjects are not individuals *per se*, “but persons who are constantly being (re) defined by their relationships”, and therefore the consumption of merchandises is used in order to create relationships, thus interfering in them and referring again to them; like Campbell and Canclini, he does not agree with the manipulationism thesis, although he presents a different justification. According to this author, that which influences the choice of bought products is the kinship and other kinds of relationship, which proves the limited effects of marketing and of advertising in this choice. Miller emphasises “[...] how little information can be used to manipulate the buyers so that they buy things they would not normally buy” (idem, p. 178).

Campbell (2001) criticises the existent theories on modern consumption the social scientists elaborated, which deal with this question as non problematic sub-product of the exposition to the means of communication or as stimulation of emulative desires.⁶

These two factors, that is, the exposition to the means of communication or the stimulation of emulative desires, operate, when combined,

⁶ Here we can quote Veblen’s thesis, which deals with conspicuous consumption as a form of social emulation (RETONDAR, 2008).

to generate a vision of the modern consumer's behaviour as a form of conduct which is, at the same time, irrational and reprehensible. Irrational in the sense that such interminable necessity is "senseless" from the individual consumer's viewpoint, who is impelled to proceed this way by forces which are out of his control; reprehensible to the extent that the image of human nature which is invoked, when this conduct is explained, presents the individuals in an unfavourable light (CAMPBELL, 2001).

The author speaks of the necessity to create a theory, which is more appropriate to modern consumption, which considers a central question: how do individuals succeed in developing a "way of being" which always endlessly needs goods and services? According to Campbell (2006, p. 47), obviously there is a series of answers to the question "why do we consume?", or "why do we consume in a voracious, insatiable way, like a bulimic desire?"

In order to explain the origin of this insatiability for new things, Campbell presents an alteration in people's gratification pattern which occurred in the 18th century, a time in which we would have passed from traditional to modern hedonism. However Campbell's perspective points out modern hedonism as an element which is apparently responsible for the transformation of the traditional hedonism into the contemporary hedonism.

The traditional or realistic hedonism is characterised by the sensations which are obtained by means of exterior stimuli. In this sense the experiences are valorised to the extent that they generate pleasures.

Traditional hedonism involves a concern with "the pleasures" more than with "pleasure", since there is a world of difference between valorising an experience because (among other things) it gives pleasure and valorises the pleasure to which the experiences can lead. The first belongs to the ancient model and the human beings of all cultures seem to agree with a basic list of activities which are "pleasures" in this sense, such as food, drinks, sexual intercourse, sociability, singing, dance and games (CAMPBELL, 2001, p. 102).

In the case above, the main concern refers to the increase of the number of times in which the person is able to enjoy the "pleasures" of life.

That way the traditional hedonist tends to pass more and more time eating, drinking, having sex and dancing. “Hence the hedonistic index is the incidence of pleasures per life unity” (*idem*).

However, Campbell argues that, although pleasure is a quality of experience, it can, at least in principle, be judged present in all the sensations.

Consequently pleasure-seeking is theoretically a possibility which is always potentially present, provided that the individual’s attention is directed to the careful manipulation of sensation and not to the conventionally identified sources of pleasure (2001, p. 102).

Being so, the traditional hedonist’s essential objective “is to squeeze out as much of the quality of pleasure as possible of all those sensations, which he really experiences during the course of his living process” (*idem*).

In traditional hedonism, by invoking rehabilitated images of memory⁷ to consciousness, imagination creates an anticipation of the events, which functions like a fundamental process of the birth of desire. “However these images are rarely consciously elaborated by the individual, being, for the most part, only extracted from the past and used as they are” (*ibidem*, p. 114).

According to Campbell, the key for the development of modern hedonism resides in the displacement of the main concern of sensations with the emotions.

That the emotions have the potential to serve as immensely powerful sources of pleasure can be directly concluded by the fact that they are states of high stimulation: the intense cheerfulness or fear, for example, produces a series of psychological changes in the human beings which [...] exceed any thing that is generated by sensory experience (2001, p. 103).

In this sense in modern hedonism, the emotion and the desire, together with a certain degree of imagination, occupy a central place in what we could denominate nature of modern consumerism.

⁷ “The expectation of pleasure provokes desire, but that which the person ‘hopes’ to enjoy is mainly that which he/she remembers of having enjoyed” (CAMPBELL, 2001, p. 126).

Modern hedonism presents all the individuals with the possibility to be one's own despot and to exert total control over the stimuli they experience and consequently over the pleasure they obtain. [...] The modern hedonist has the very special power to evoke stimuli in the absence of any sensations which are externally generated. This control occurs through the power in imagination and provides the broadening of the pleasant experiences with greater possibilities than that which was available [...] (ibidem, p. 112).

Modern hedonism, or mentalistic hedonism, less materialist, is possible because of the self-illusory daydream, which occurs in relation with the daydream (the mechanism of the control of the imagination, that is, self-control) and therefore with the possibility for the individual to create convincing fantasies (CAMPBELL, 2001; BARBOSA, 2008).

On this topic, although it persists with the recyclable material collectors' discourse, the idea that their consumption is limited to the essentially necessary (such as the purchase of food, for example), consumption practices were manifested in these same speeches, the objective of which is mere personal gratifications, which are anticipated through imagination. Thus, let us look at the following cases, as examples of the way how this self-illusory delirium works.

CASE I: The “magic” T-shirt which transformed the frail boy into a “bombadão”

The young recyclable material collector, 26 years old, excited about his own consumer's stories, commented something which was related to the purchase of a T-shirt which, surprisingly, and even instantaneously, transformed him from “frog into prince”.

At the time in which I was quite skinny, quite dry, I bought a baby look. I always dreamt of being “bombadão” [musely], strong, handsom, you know, to “picking up” the chicks (laughing). Do you remember what a baby-look is? (the answer was: yes, those T-shirts that are sticking to the body). I bought and used, easy. Then my friends: ôxe [pronounce “oshe”; short form of “oxente”, an interjection which expresses amazement] why did you buy this? I felt like a “bombadão”. And I was, indeed. At that time

the strong guys wore it, and I with my spindly arms (laughing). But wearing it I was strong, “bombadão”, you see, I did get some chicks, indeed. But coming back to the baby-look, I skinny felt like a “bombadão” with that clothing, I felt... (AE-M, 26)⁸

The term “*bombadão*” refers to strong and muscular men, or the “*bombados*”, those, who supposedly, achieved such a body by using “*bombas*”, in this case, the anabolic steroids.

Here we have clearly the account of a daydream which contains a desire. The desire to be strong, the daydream that, being strong, the young recyclable material collector would succeed in “flirting”, or “picking up”, any woman. In this sense, the collector daydreamt about himself as a strong and attractive man and the baby-look T-shirt was the magic means through which the dream came true.

In modern hedonism [...], if a product is able to be represented as possessing unknown characteristics, it is unimpeded for whom seeks pleasure to imagine the nature of his/her satisfactions, which makes this become [...] an occasion for daydreaming. Although the hedonist uses material of his memory, he can now speculate imaginatively about the kind of satisfactions and pleasures he has at his disposal in his reserves, thus linking his favourite daydream to this real object of desire. This way imagined pleasures are added to those which were already found and a greater desire is experienced more for the unknown ones than for the known ones (CAMPBELL, 2001, p. 126).

In an anticipated way, on the basis of the daydream, the collector desired a pleasure which an experience promised to provide. Therefore in the daydream it is possible to have a dual desire: “to desire the pleasure, which is produced by daydream, as well as the one, which is associated with the contemplation of its achievement (effectively both become inseparable)” (idem, p. 125). Thus the daydream has an important dimension, that is, the excitement of anticipation, “which manifests itself when

⁸ With the intention to safeguard the secret about the speeches of the collectors we interviewed, we chose to use their identification code, which is composed of two letters, distributed this way: AA, AB, AC..., AH; BA, BB..., BI. After the indication of the two letters, we put F for the feminine gender and M for the masculine gender.

a foreseen pleasure comes near or, in other words, the ingredient of desire” (ibidem).

This pleasure is sought by means of emotional stimulation and the images, which fulfil this function, are sometimes imaginatively created and sometimes modified by the individual for self-consumption.

The collector used his imaginative and creative powers to construct mental images which he consumes because of the intrinsic pleasure they provide, that is, he daydreams.

The individual is much more an artist of imagination, someone who extracts images out of memory or of the existent circumstances and he redistributes them or improves them in his mind in another way so that they become distinctly pleasant. They are no more “received as if they were given” from the past experience, but they are elaborated for unique products, pleasure being the guiding principle (CAMPBELL, 2001, p. 115).

Thus the creation of convincing fantasies generates something which “concedes” aptitude to the subject-collector to deal with sensory data “as if” they were real, although he knows that they are actually false – that is the reason for the laughter, because his arms continued being “spindly” –, but they are felt as true – the use of the baby-look T-shirt could make him feel strong. “The individual is the author as well as the audience in his own drama, ‘his own’ in the sense that he constructed it, stands out in it and constitutes the total sum of the audience” (idem).

Obviously this does not mean that they cannot “awake to reality” or recognise the difference between their dreams and the real world that surrounds them. Actually this is appreciated more than ever. They can even censure themselves by saying that they were “only daydreaming” and that, of course, “life is not like this”. They can even attempt to “correct” their daydream by using knowledge and reason in order to construct a more “realistic” anticipation of the future events. But nothing will alter the fundamental fact that considerable pleasure was achieved, not merely with the dream, but with imagining this dream as reality (ibidem, p. 128-129).

And more than that... After this exposition, after having said how he succeeded in “picking up” more women, when he was wearing his ba-

by-look T-shirt, he remembered, almost “correcting” his delirium, that at that time he did not have any teeth – and he still does not have teeth, because he lost most of his upper teeth in a motorbike accident – and that, “gap-toothed”,⁹ even wearing the “nicest clothes of the world”, it would be difficult to “get” any woman and “luckily he had already got married”.

Maybe the collector’s subsequent disillusion is only particularly limited to the baby-look T-shirt and not to the dream (desire) to be strong and attractive for women, thus leaving open the possibility that such dream (desire) could still be linked to another object. Maybe he could still day-dream by imagining how it would be if he had his upper teeth, that is, a new possibility to become an attractive man for women.

This way the collector will be able to continuously withdraw from reality, projecting his daydreams in the future, always in time, by linking them to objects of desire and “subsequently by ‘loosening them’ from these objects while and when they are achieved and experienced” (CAMPBELL, 2001, p. 127).

The completion of desire is [...] a necessarily disenchanting experience for the modern hedonist, since it constitutes the “proof” of his daydream opposed to reality. [...] Nevertheless it is more probable, that the dream may be continued and linked to a new object of desire, so that the illusory pleasures can once more be re-experienced (idem).

Here there is an alteration of the nature of desire, in the sense that one person desired what he/she knew and had experienced in the past (traditional hedonism) and now he/she desires that which he/she had not experienced at all (modern hedonism).

The pleasures of the daydream can also be considered dual in another aspect, because there is an aesthetic pleasure to be achieved with the contemplation of the scenario, which is imagined “from outside”, as if it

⁹ And, because of this detail, the young man smiled without opening his mouth and he pressed the superior lip on the inferior lip, in an attempt to repress the laughter in the strongest possible way. He could not let it escape, because this would mean to reveal his gap-toothed mouth.

were a work of art, like the one which is achieved by being a participant that acts “from inside” (ibidem, p. 340-341).

These convincing fantasies have no commitment to reality neither have they possibilities of achievement to the extent that they do not have limits. However, the daydream, on the contrary, has a relation of possibility and probability with the latter (fantasy). It is in this point that Campbell (2001, p. 122) differentiates fantasy from daydream:

The category of main interest in this study is that we denominated “daydream” here and this daydream is considered as the form of mental activity in which future images, that are experienced positively are brought to mind [...] and they are either judged pleasant either elaborated in a way which makes them be so. [...] This exploitation can occur in a more or less “directed” way, with the individual, sometimes maybe disposed to permit the images to evolve, “as they prefer”, whereas in others they intervene in order to make “adjustments”.

Here the imagined scene becomes more pleasant to be contemplated or more in accordance with the impediments of reality.

Without being adjusted [...], the images the development of which is permitted by the pleasure they produce, are baptised as “fantasy”. On the other hand, the development of the images, which tightly conform with that which experience and comprehension lead the individual to believe to occur, which is not modified in any way in order to provide pleasure in its contemplation, will be baptised “imaginative construction” or anticipation¹⁰ (idem).

Now Campbell (2001, p. 122) informs that fantasy requests the exercise of imagination in directions which are not restricted by reality, that is to say, it can “involve impossibilities such as being invisible or portraying oneself as a historical figure, such as Christopher Columbus [...]”. At least, in principle, the fantasies seem to present greater possibilities of pleasant experiences, because there is no limitation on them “in

¹⁰ Daydream.

the circumstances and events which can be evoked” (idem, p. 124). But Campbell remembers that this advantage is counterbalanced by the loss of existence and/or by the possibility which is associated with the most extravagant scenarios:

It is for this reason that the dream of a positively modest alteration in an existing lifestyle can really provide more pleasure than the most magnificently impossible fantasy, a perception that the first can accomplish more than to compensate the theoretically greater pleasure the last concedes (ibidem).

And how does the relation between daydream, daily life and consumption occur? In modern hedonism, the goods and services as well as the advertisements transform themselves into “detonators” of daydreams. Hence the consumers do not seek the famous satisfactions of needs in the products and services, but the pleasure of the self-illusory experiences. Such as, for example, from a good one possesses, a set of pleasant associations can be made. Let us see the case of the collector AA.

CASE II: The pair of jeans, which makes the woman more “sexy” and “attractive”

The CATAMAIS collector, 27 years old, at the moment of the interview said that she urgently needed to buy a pair of jeans, but in spite of having only R\$30,00 (thirty reais [Brazil’s unit of currency: *real*, plural *reais*]) for the purchase of that article of clothing, it could not be “any trousers”.

I went, I went, I went a lot seeking a pair of trousers. I even found cheaper than thirty real, but I didn’t buy them, it was not my taste. The fact is that I am a little more corpulent (laughing a lot) and the trousers I have don’t fit anymore. Ôxe, I want a pair that lets my ass (speaking in a lower tone of voice) lifted up, you know, very sexy, I don’t just buy for buying, I don’t. It must make me look pretty so that men look (laughing a lot).

The interesting thing is that the collector lets it quite clear that she had to buy a pair of jeans, but that only the fact to need something did not justify a “hasty” purchase. The acquisition of a pair of jeans should

not be merely out of pure necessity, otherwise she would buy anyone. Now it is obvious here that the collector's objective was to experience pleasures she experienced in her imagination in real life (she mentally constructed the image of herself as a pretty woman men admire) and the product, in this case, the purchase of the pair of jeans, was perceived as providing a possibility to fulfil this desire (CAMPBELL, 2001; BARBOSA, 2008).

The essential activity of consumption is thus not the actual selection, purchase or use of products, but the imaginative pleasure-seeking to which the product image lends itself, real consumption being largely a resultant of this mentalistic hedonism (CAMPBELL, 2001, p. 130).

The collector we referred to created a convincing daydream by emphasising herself in it and by reacting subjectively to it as if it were real. She also created an illusion which she knew to be false, but which she felt as being true, because she invoked scenes which could happen.

This exploitation can occur in a more or less "directed way", with the individual, sometimes, maybe disposed to permit that the images evolve "like they prefer", whereas in other cases they "intervene", in order to make "adjustments". These can be judged necessary in order to make the imagined scene either more pleasant to be contemplated or more coincident with the embarrassments of reality (CAMPBELL, 2001, p. 122).

Without these adjustments, we will have "fantasies". We notice that the development of the images is constrained by factors which limit the possibilities of common life or of real life; it is what we saw as being "imaginative construction" or anticipation: the daydream.

A daydream can be defined as the imaginative elaboration, towards something pleasant, of a future or anticipated real event and, as a consequence, it requests that the incidents be maintained within the limits of the possible (even if highly improbable). With respect to this, the daydream involves the introduction of the principle of pleasure-seeking in the normal process of imaginative anticipation of the future or of the speculation around it (*idem*).

The imaginative pleasure also occurs at the moment of the invention and imagination of the house which is idealised by the COTRAMARE collector.

CASE III: The house he was dreaming of so much was gaining contours in the shed of the COTRAMARE cooperative

By discussing about his consumption dreams, the collector BH, 31 years old, refers to the houses which are shown in the *novelas* [soap operas] and stamped in the magazines, in order to describe his dream, which he considers as “the biggest”.

My dream, you know, bigger now, another dream I have, I will achieve it, won't I, very slowly indeed, still this year, it is to enlarge my house, you know, my house.. Because my house,.., have you already seen how is the houses there? It is small the houses. It is only a span. Six person in a house, the boy are all growing, so I have to enlarge..., because there is space. Mine is on the street corner. It is only a span, guy. It is a small living-room like this, a bathroom like this, the kitchen divided, near the living-room, like this, and there it is, you know (BH-M, 31).

And, gesticulating with his arms, using his hands, the collector is “designing” in an imaginative way the contours of his house, which he dreams of enlarging with the money he earns with his job as a collector. However it is an invisible house, he so much dreamt of and desired, which was gaining contours in the space of the shed of the cooperative.

I'll do it like this, another two rooms and the kitchen. Because there, you see, as it is, that the bathroom, where there is the bathroom, I will do what: a big living-room, won't I? Take off the bathroom, you see Make a living-room and enlarge. Because that is not a living-room. A sofa doesn't even fit in there, you see, enlarge the living-room for a sofa to fit in, the table, no, the table is in the kitchen, you see [...] My biggest dream is this. To enlarge the house. My dream is this, a house of the kind of the novela, of an artist magazine (BH-M, 31).

Campbell declares that children and adolescents can daydream about what they will be in the future or about whom they are going to marry.

But the adults can daydream about what they would do if they earned a large sum of money. The collector daydreams about his ideal house, about how it would be to live in it. The scene he created and contemplates with the eyes of his mind is considered as a real, possible, and therefore pleasant, future event, “so that the act has some of the qualities of the prevision” (2001, p. 340). In these examples, the images are elaborated with the purpose of increasing the pleasure and they contain the element of possibility which separates them from pure fantasy.

This sensation of glancing at the future helps to confer a greater taste of reality upon the images whilst it also increases the desire that the idealised events occur. In this last connection, the daydream must be considered a highly significant force, which helps to motivate the social conduct (*idem*).

Obviously here there is the case of a collector who seeks pleasure in the imaginative anticipation process of the future¹¹ or of the meditation around it, on the basis of the appreciation of house illustrations in the magazines or of houses that appear in the *telenovelas* [TV soap operas], which he will probably never be able to have – neither is it probable that he will be able to in the future, due to the limited remuneration he earns with his job as a recyclable material collector.¹²

The fact that the imaginative pleasure provided by products and services is a crucial part of contemporary consumerism reveals itself through the important place it occupies in our culture, but more through the representations of the products than through the products themselves. This does not only openly encompass the commercial advertisements and catalogues, such as magazines [...] and even works of art. In many of these, the boundary between the representation of the interests of a determined manufacturer and distributor [...] and the pictures which are mainly produced for entertainment is clearly distinguishable and it suggests that the two things fulfil the same function of facilitating the imaginative hedonism (*ibidem*, p. 134).

¹¹ According to Campbell (2001, p. 123), “memory serves as a second source of images, so that recollection and anticipation become coincident activities”. He also affirms that not all daydreams must begin in the present, “because the extrapolation can be of a future position in time” (*idem*).

¹² This case is closer to a daydream than to a fantasy, because it remains within the limits of the possible.

According to Campbell, people largely enjoy these pictures in the same way in which they enjoy a novel, a film or a soap opera. In the same way in which they look at magazines, they also appreciate shop windows in the search for merchandises, in order to compare the prices, even to “try” the merchandises and to attempt this way to investigate what can be the “best acquisition”. Hence people can surrender to the purchases, because they extract pleasure from a possibility without actually acquiring anything at all. “But above this there is the pleasure which derives from the imaginative use of the objects they see, that is, of mentally “experiencing” the examined clothes or of ‘seeing’ the furniture arranged in the living-room” (2001, p. 135).

From this observation we conclude that many of the cultural products which are put to sale in modern societies are actually consumed so that they serve as a support for the elaboration of daydreams. [...] There is a direct sensory satisfaction to be obtained from the standardised stimuli the product represents; probably the greatest pleasure must result from its frank urging in order to be used as material for the illusory pleasure. This utilisation is necessarily concealed and of individualist character and, due to its very nature, it cannot have a communal sense (idem).¹³

That which Campbell affirms here is that no experience of the product on the part of two individuals, even if they are sitting close to each other in the audience of a concert, film or theatre, will be the same, exactly in the same way as two people ever read the same novel in the same way.

That which we perceive, from this perspective, is a process of individualisation, which is possible because of the consumerist activity. It is a kind of consumption which is no more oriented towards the other and/or towards the social group, but it is oriented towards oneself, being, according to Lipovetsky (2007), an “experiential value”; a consumption with the expression of identities and subjectivities.

¹³ “To accentuate that desire depends on egocentric dreams is not to indicate that every consumption is motivated by purely selfish concerns, but only that the desire of a product is related to the consumers’ aptitude to create an imaginative, pleasant scene, in which he stands out” (ibidem, p. 342).

The hyper-consumer collectors

In his work *Paradoxical Happiness* Lipovetsky (2007): essay on hyper-consumerist society, Lipovetsky (2007) presents the three stages of consumption capitalism and/or a chronological division of consumer society:

- Stage I, which begins around 1880 and goes until the end of the Second World War;
- Stage II, mainly directed by the outstanding Fordist economy, which established itself around 1950 and presented itself as a pure model of mass consumption society;
- Stage III, developed since 1970, which the author calls hyper-consumerist society, that is precisely characterised by the consumers' insatiability.

In the stage of hyper-consumerism, the very consumption orders itself according to individual goals, tastes and criteria, in which the private motivations surpass – quite a lot – the distinctive purposes, the status. In this sense, the present hyper-consumerist “consumer society” is mainly emotional and subjective, in which the individuals desire objects in order to live and not because of their utility or necessity (LIPOVETSKY, 2007; CAMPBELL, 2001).

Hence the hyper-consumer is a *Homo consumericus*, who imposes himself as the lord of time, unadjusted, unstable, and flexible, free from the ancient class cultures, whose tastes and purchases are unforeseen. “From a consumer who is subject to the coercions of social position we passed over to a hyper-consumer who is expecting emotional experiences and greater well-being, quality of life and health, brands and authenticity, immediatism and communication” (LIPOVETSKY, 2007, p. 14). He/she desires psychic comfort and interior harmony via subjective thriving.

Hyper-consumers are eager for immediate achievements, which can be found in the merchandises that are sold on the market.

The imperative is to mercantilise all the experiences in every place, at every time and at any age, to diversify the offer adapting oneself to the buyers' expectations, to reduce the lifecycle of the products through the rapidity of the innovations, to segment the markets, to favour consumption

credit, to gain custom loyalty through differentiated commercial practices (LIPOVETSKY, 2007, p. 13).

It is important to show clearly here that the consumerist attitudes and pressures do not dwell on the boundaries of poverty.

One of the ironies of that time is that those who are excluded from consumption are a sort of hyper-consumers themselves. Destitute of real participation in the world of work, afflicted by idleness and boredom, the less favoured individuals seek compensations in consumption, in the acquisition of services and equipment goods, even if it is sometimes to the detriment of that which is more useful (LIPOVETSKY, 2007, p. 194).

According to Lipovetsky, in the present stage of consumption (that which he denominates stage III), there is a formidable socialisation machine, which disorganises the behaviour of whole categories of the population that do not succeed in adapting themselves to poverty and at the same time in resisting the urging of the mercantile offer.

Confined in their houses because of the lack of financial resources, these populations frequently pass long hours in front of the television set [...]. Hyper-consumers of serials, films and of paid games, the economically very fragile groups are, at the same time, hyper-consumers of commercial advertisements. In these conditions, the less favoured are the more excluded of consumption the more they are super-exposed to the mercantile pictures and messages. In stage III, the “have nots” do not feel poor because they sub-consume goods and leisure, but also because they super-consume the images of mercantile happiness (LIPOVETSKY, 2007, p. 194).

Lipovetsky (2007, p. 192) affirms that the obsession with consumption, which is perceptible nowadays, even in the marginalised populations, “does not only indicate the power without precedent of the mercantilisation of the ways of life, but also the new intensity of the frustrations with regard to the dominant life patterns, as well as a broadened demand for consideration and respect, which is typical of the demonstrative individualism that is supported by stage III”.

For the individual, that which is more and more important now is not to be inferiorised and affected in his dignity. It is in this sense, that

“hyper-consumerist society is marked by the progression of the feelings of social exclusion and by the accentuation of the desires of identity, of dignity and individual recognition” (idem).

Certainly in the case of the collectors, even by pointing to their frustrations with regard to the few resources available for consumption (mainly with respect to the dreams of acquiring an ideal house, a car, etc.) and by knowing that they are daily bombarded with messages that serve as material – are “detonators” – for the daydreams, the positivation of consumption is more evident in their speeches than the contrary. Belonging to a low-income group, the collectors consider the consumption practices as strategies, even if they are rare, of the enjoyment of pleasure and cheerfulness. Now “materialism accomplishes us and to possess and spend are the most passionate and generally the most imaginative tasks of modern life” (TWITCHELL, 1999, p. 286).

It is in this sense that, for most of the collectors to go shopping is a highly joyful experience. Let us see:

I like shopping. Very much! If I could I would go to the street every day to buy at least one thing. [...] I feel good. I like it, I feel very happy. Very happy. Very satisfied (BB-F, 26).

I adore shopping. But within my limit. Sometimes I go to the market to buy things. I feel mad about buying the things. I want to buy everything. Look, to buy food, I feel like buying better things, a kilo cheese, a kilo *carne de sol* [sun-dried beef], I feel foolish. *Carne de sol*, 16 real only one kilo. The guy, who cannot buy a kilo, buys half of one and half of another. Half a kilo of *carne de sol*, half a kilo of *carne de charque* [dried meat], buys a chicken which with ten real is already a whole one (BG-M, 39).

The desire to buy is evident and the scarce economic resources to satisfy these desires are also manifest, even in relation with the choices of the food. There is even the person who feels “victorious” because of the purchase of some object:

Victorious, I got it, victorious. Now. A cellular phone, for example. This cellular. The one I had was sort of weak. I wanted to get a more powerful one and I got it. It has bluetooth, camera, 2 gb memory card, infrared, it

has got internet. (infrared?) It is a thing which transmits music to another cellular phone. So, you place one cellular against and pass the song. But it must be equal; it must have the same technology. Bluetooth you must press a button to pass the music too. I always wanted to have a cellular like this, I got it. It has a camera, it takes photos. I bought it five months ago. I could pay it on hire purchase. It was 400 and a little more. I always wanted it. (She informs that she generally “hides” the cellular in order not to be robbed. In the cooperative the cellular was “presented” hanging round her neck, as if it were a jewel.) (BB-F, 26).

In the collectors’ speeches we also noticed the need to always buy clothes and trousers, even if they had “enough”.

Of clothes. That is clothes and shoes. (laughing) It is clothes and sandal. I don’t know, madam, I don’t know. (Trying to explain why she buys clothes even if she does not need any. She says that she avoids going out in order not to purchase). Mum, I’m not going today, no I’m not, otherwise I will come back with four, five bags. [...] Clothes, I’m always buying, always. Clothes and *lingerie*. Bra and slip, always (BB-F, 26).

Clothes, madam, clothes, clothes, I can’t even see clothes. I can’t even go to the centre either, I can’t even go to a second hand shop either. When I see a very nice dress in the second hand shop, I want to buy it. And sometimes I don’t even wear it. Just to have them, clothes... (BF-F, 37).

I adore clothes, my wardrobe there has no more nook to put clothes. There even came some clothes last week and I didn’t take them because there at home there is no nook to put them. I like to buy a lot of them. I adore clothes. Clothes and bonel (*boné*) [she uses an incorrect word for boné, which comes from the French word “bonnet” and means “beanie”, but in Brazil, they use the word in the meaning of “peak cap”] that is all ..., a green cap, a green blouse, there a white cap, a white blouse, red sandals, a red blouse, I like it to combine. [...] It is as I tell you, a pair of trousers, blouse. I have a blouse at home I haven’t even worn. If I could I would go to every party with a different blouse (BG-M, 39).

We perceive even though that, depending on the scarce resources for consumption, the collectors buy objects they do not exactly need

due to the “elevated” quantity of these objects they already have, such as clothes, shoes, perfumes, nail varnishes, DVDs and “pirate” CDs (falsified) etc., generally cheaper objects, which are appropriate to their spending power.

In their discourses, the desire to possess a higher income is precisely to increase their spending power too. Only one she-collector mentioned saving in order to buy a house in the future and a he-collector said that he would matriculate his children in a public school, in case he earned more and had these possibilities. None of them commented about paying a tax as autonomous worker in order to guarantee his/her retirement in the future or for healthcare, etc.

The money they got, be it scarce or not, should be “squandered” almost instantaneously with the purchase of objects: a new LDC TV set, a computer, a better motorbike, other clothes, another pair of shoes, another DVD or “pirate” CD, etc. Most part of the collectors presented an immense list of desired objects they intended to acquire. In this sense they are hyper-consumers.

It is notorious that the consumers’ unbridled and successive search for novelty, as we mentioned it above, can generate hyper-consumerisms. The speech of one the COTRAMARE she-collector very appropriately demonstrates this almost “bulimic” desire for purchases, in Campbell’s words:

To buy is a vice. It is an illness. I am a compulsive buyer I bought a perfume and I already told the girl to bring another one, [...] yesterday, from Boticário [Brazil-based beauty retailer]. I gave hundred and twenty real for one and I haven’t even finished using it. It is pure obsession. I have obsession with shopping. [...] I feel happy. To go out perfumed, to go out well-dressed, for me... (BF-F, 37).

Obviously that which characterises “consumer society”, besides the unrestrained and unrestricted individualism, is the consumers’ insatiability for consuming, buying, this eternal “to want more”: as soon as a desire or a “need” is satisfied, another one appears in an incessant and uninterrupted process “A fundamental point is that the recognition of

the importance and universality of daydream helps to explain this basic taste for novelty all the modern consumers share” (CAMPBELL, 2001, p. 136).

On the basis of the modern belief that abundance is the necessary and sufficient condition of the human being’s happiness, the hyper-consumers, possessors of the constant desire to achieve well-being and happiness, always led to insecurity and to fear, use consumption as a means of evading and vanquish ageing, anxieties, sadness disappointments. Thus the more one consumes, the more he/she wants to consume. There is the incapacity to eliminate the appetites for consumption (LIPOVETSKY, 2007).

It is in this sense that all the individuals, independently of the position they occupy in society, are exposed to consumption patterns, are influenced by them and they also construct them in the most diverse forms and in different degrees of intensity.

Final considerations

Many authors agree¹⁴ that one of the characteristics of “consumer society is the consumers’ unbridled novelty-seeking, although they present different theses for this ascertainment.

Although the recyclable material collectors point out diverse justifications for their consumption practices,¹⁵ we verified that they also experience this constant need for novelties, thus legitimising the rotating, ephemeral consumption. Now, in spite of the low income they get from their job, we cannot situate them as totally excluded from the consumption process, because they are capable of playing the role of consumers. Although these individuals experience a framework of extreme material hardship, they develop strategies which give priority to the purchase of

¹⁴ Bauman (2008) (with his thesis of the subjectivity fetish), Baudrillard (1995) (idea of sign consumption as a way of social differentiation), Campbell (2001) (about modern hedonism and self-illusory deliriums), Lipovetsky (2007) (consumption as a subjective experience, inaugurating the hyper-consumer), etc.

¹⁵ The ostentatious consumption, for the other one, as acknowledgment-seeking of the collector’s job and of himself as a collector; consumption, which involves relationships, seen as a means of discovering something about his – or our – relationships, etc.

products with the intention to guarantee personal gratification and not only the basic needs for survival.

Thus we believe that it is indispensable to qualify these consumers from another perspective and not only on the basis of the utilitarian logic of material survival and hardship. The consumers with less purchasing power also process their choices and hierarchise their options in terms of a value scale like the consumers of other social strata. Consumption in “consumer society” can create meaning for any life, independently of the quantity of resources which is available for the consumption practice. Although they do not almost any consumption power¹⁶, the recyclable material collectors have consumerist aspirations or they consume according to (and even opposed to) their purchase conditions. In this sense, “poverty is a relative category which cannot be reduced to only one axis of classification: that of material hardship” (SARTI *apud* BARROS, 2007, p. 110).

Hence in contemporary society the act of consumption cannot be destitute of subjectivity. It is important to emphasise here that the individuals’ acts of choice, by means of the act of consumption make them “agents” within the process of social identification. Thus the development and the expansion of “consumer society” permit the individual to be an effective *subject* of the social process. On the other hand, the consumption experience is singularly subjectivating. However, according to Retondar (2007, 2008, 2009), the individual is a social construction of modernity and, as such, he/she cannot be understood as a mere subject endowed with a total freedom, which is generated by his/her rationality (like the Cartesian subject, for example). Hence would the *autonomous* action, interior and reflexive, not be structurally constituted by a systemic order? Would the individual not be king (human type/agency) and simultaneously serf (social type) with relation to *his/her decisions*?

Retondar argues that it is the growth of an “objective culture” of “consumer society” on a “subjective culture” of the individual which will

¹⁶ Here it is interesting to point out the difficulty of defining what a “power” of ideal and/or sufficient consumption would be, in the same way in which it is complicated to define what poverty is. About this, Douglas and Isherwood (2009) emphasise that a definition of poverty, which is valid for all cultures, is illusory. According to these authors, poverty is a relative concept.

legitimise the necessity of the maintenance of the latter. It is for that reason that the identities can also be produced within this very consumption process, that is to say, within a social process.

Hence what is the present field of the possible experiences? The individual modes of existence are only possible because the present social order permits and stimulates the diversity, singularity and plurality of thought and of lifestyles even if we understand that this same society determines our way of saying, of thinking and of acting but it also gives us the possibility to surpass these limits. On this topic, Guattari (1996) affirms that every society produces pattern subjectivities. In the case of “consumer society”, its reproduction and/or maintenance “request” the creation of subjects and/or capitalistic subjectivities (hyper-consumers). Here “subjectivity is not susceptible of totalisation or of centralisation in the individual. [...] Subjectivity is essentially manufactured and modelled in the social register” (GUATTARI *apud* RETONDA, 2007, p. 85).

References

- BARBOSA, L. *Sociedade de consumo*. 2. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2008.
- BARROS, C. P. Hierarquia, escassez e abundância materiais: um estudo etnográfico no universo de consumo das empregadas domésticas. In: MIGUELES, C. (Org.). *Antropologia do consumo: casos brasileiros*. Rio de Janeiro: FGV, 2007. p. 101-129.
- BAUDRILLARD, J. *A sociedade de consumo*. Lisboa: Edições 70, 1995.
- BAUMAN, Z. *Vida para consumo: a transformação das pessoas em mercadoria*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2008.
- CAMPBELL, C. *A ética romântica e o espírito do consumismo moderno*. Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 2001.
- . Eu compro, logo sei que existo: as bases metafísicas do consumo moderno. In: BARBOSA, L.; CAMPBELL, C. (Orgs.) *Cultura, consumo e identidade*. Rio de Janeiro: FGV, 2006. p. 47-64.
- CANCLINI, N. G. *Consumidores e cidadãos: conflitos multiculturais da globalização*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora da UFRJ, 2008.
- DOUGLAS, M.; ISHERWOOD, B. *O mundo dos bens: para uma antropologia do consumo*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora da UFRJ, 2009.
- GUATTARI, F.; ROLNIK, S. *Micropolítica: cartografias do desejo*. 4. ed. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1996.

- LIPOVETSKY, G. *A felicidade paradoxal: ensaio sobre a sociedade de hiperconsumo*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2007.
- MILLER, D. *Teoria das compras: o que orienta as escolhas dos consumidores*. São Paulo: Nobel, 2002.
- RETONDAR, A. M. *Sociedade de consumo, modernidade e globalização*. São Paulo: Annablume; Campina Grande: EDUFCCG, 2007.
- _____. A (re)construção do indivíduo: a sociedade de consumo como “contexto social” de produção de subjetividades. In: *Sociedade & Estado*, v. 23, n. 1, p. 137-160, jan./abr. 2008.
- _____. *Da massificação à ação: algumas representações sobre “o consumidor” na teoria social contemporânea*. XIV Congresso Brasileiro de Sociologia. Rio de Janeiro, jul. 2009.
- TWITCHELL, J. B. *Lead us into temptation: the triumph of American materialism*. [Deixemos cair em tentação: o triunfo do materialismo americano.] New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.