consumerism

Hypermodernism

If postmodernism's objective was to announce the end of modernity, then, according to Gilles Lipovetsky, it is now redundant. Modernity, for Lipovetsky, did not come to an end. Rather, it is undergoing its consummation, and the name Lipovetsky suggests for this new phase of the modern is 'hypermodernity'. Postmodernism was characterized by an essentially liberal impulse – a concerted effort towards deregulation in the aesthetic, philosophical, ethical, and political spheres. But, invigorating though these developments may have been, they have been outstripped by the accompanying trend towards the liberalization and deregulation of the market. The unfettered logic of market forces has put paid to postmodernism's enthusiastic ambitions, and has even crept into the institutions of state, church, and family that withstood many of the onslaughts of postmodernism. The result, says Lipovetsky, is an endemic and unbridled consumerism, giving rise to a cult of excess – hence his choice of the prefix 'hyper-' to designate a culture that is ever demanding more and more. This view is in broad agreement with the position of Jeffrey T. Nealon in Part One, who regards post-postmodernism as deriving from an economic intensification of the power of the market and of consumerism.

This consumerism does not always manifest itself simply as a naked consumerism, but rather as an extreme form of individualism. The hypermodern individual lives a life characterized by flexibility, adaptability, and a demand for continuous improvement, both in the workplace and throughout his or her general life. But Lipovetsky is quick to point out a paradox here: the drive towards flexibility and improvement is something that is demanded of the hypermodern individual, as well as something that the hypermodern individual demands as a consumer. Thus, a contradiction underpins hypermodernity: the sense of freedom, luxury, convenience, and plenitude purveyed by hypermodern culture conditions consumers to demand a more flexible lifestyle (for example), or to consume more luxury goods, while it is this very demand for freedom that imposes more invasive

working patterns on their crowded lives, and also this very demand for consumer goods that constrains their economic behaviour. Thus, hyperindividualism and hyperconsumerism turn out, in hypermodernism, to be different aspects of the same logic.

The hypermodern, however, is not just a new sociological trend that manifests itself in our behaviour and our economics. Lipovetsky suggests that it actually involves a deep-seated transformation in our everyday experience of space and time. This is effected by, for example, the opportunities and pressures of a 24-hour culture, or of 'flexitime' working patterns, and the new possibilities for communication and consumption that are afforded as globalization and digital technologies break down the geographical obstacles to the availability of people and commodities. More than anything else, though, Lipovetsky argues that the hypermodern involves a preoccupation with time, as ever greater demands are made on the present, and as (once again paradoxically) we take refuge from it in the nostalgia for memories from the cultural past, giving rise to a massive upsurge in the heritage industry, or in 'traditional' handicrafts and cookery, or in the current obsession with all things 'vintage' and 'retro'.

A superficial reading of Lipovetsky's prose might yield the impression that it is hallmarked by the very same weaknesses as the classic French theorists of postmodernism that he claims to supplant. That is, his writing displays the same strategy of implying (though not pursuing) surprising connections between seemingly disparate phenomena, the same tendency towards unsubstantiated generalizations, and the same culmination in aphoristic or gnomic summary that one finds in certain unguarded moments of Lyotard, in some of Deleuze's less disciplined work, and throughout most of the writings of Baudrillard. But such a reading is, indeed, superficial: Lipovetsky is in fact a refreshingly undogmatic thinker, who remains genuinely ambivalent and open-minded about both the positive and negative features of the hypermodern era. Hypermodernism's emphasis on individualism may indeed mark a new phase in the pursuit of freedom and self-fulfilment, while its emphasis on consumerism may just as easily lead in the very opposite direction. For Lipovetsky, it is important to take both possibilities equally seriously, rather than to rush to judgment.

Hypermodernism is cited approvingly by Alan Kirby in his formulation of digimodernism, where he argues that both share a grounding in a more or less consonant critique of consumerism. Similarly, Nicolas Bourriaud's altermodernism is rooted in a vision of a new relationship between time and space that redefines contemporary culture. However, it is arguably Robert Samuels's notion of

automodernism that has the strongest affinity with Lipovetsky's hypermodernism, because, while recognizing similar patterns in the changing relationship between space and time that arise from information and communication technologies, Samuels maintains the same judicious ambivalence about them, seeing in them both the possibility of enhanced individual autonomy, and the threat they simultaneously pose to individual freedom and expression, and indeed to culture and freedom more broadly conceived – an argument very similar in structure to Lipovetsky's diagnosis of hypermodernity.

The extract is from Gilles Lipovetsky, *Hypermodern Times*, trans. Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), pp. 29–35; pp. 48–53; pp. 56–7; pp. 62–71. Originally published as *Les Temps Hypermodernes* (Paris: Grasset, 2004).

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Time Against Time, or The Hypermodern Society

Gilles Lipovetsky

Around the end of the 1970s, the notion of postmodernity emerged on to the intellectual scene, with the aim of describing the new cultural state of developed societies. First appearing in architectural discourse in reaction against the international style, it was rapidly taken up and used to designate, on the one hand, the shaking of the absolute foundations of rationality and the bankruptcy of the great ideologies of history and, on the other, the powerful dynamic of individualization and pluralization within our societies. Over and above the different interpretations put forward, the idea gained acceptance that we were dealing with a more diverse society, one with less compulsion and less laden with expectations of the future. The enthusiastic visions of historical progress were succeeded by narrower horizons, a temporality dominated by precariousness and ephemerality. Inseparably associated with the collapse of earlier heroic constructions of the future and the concomitant triumph of consumerist norms centred on living in the present, the postmodern period indicated the advent of an unprecedented social temporality marked by the primacy of the here-and-now.

The neologism 'postmodern' had one merit: that of bringing out a change of course, a profound reorganization in the way that advanced democratic societies worked, both socially and culturally. The dramatic rise in consumption and mass communication, the waning of authoritarian and disciplinary norms, the rising tide of individualism, the primary role now accorded to hedonism and psychologism, the loss of faith in a revolutionary future, the disaffection with political passions and militant positions: some name had indeed to be found for the formidable transformation that was being played out on the stage of opulent societies disburdened of the great futuristic utopias of modernity at its inception.

But at the same time, the expression 'postmodern' was ambiguous, clumsy, not to say loose. It was, of course, a modernity of a new kind that was taking shape, not any surpassing of modernity. Hence the legitimate hesitation that people showed with regard to the prefix 'post'. We can add this: twenty years ago, the concept 'postmodern' was a breath of fresh air, it suggested something new, a

major change of direction. It now seems vaguely old-fashioned. The postmodern cycle unfolded under the sign of the 'cool' decompression of the social realm; these days, we feel that the times are hardening again, laden as they are with dark clouds. We experienced a brief moment during which social constraints and impositions were reduced: now they are reappearing in the foreground, albeit in new shapes. Now that genetic technologies, liberal globalization and human rights are triumphing, the label 'postmodern' is starting to look old; it has exhausted its capacities to express the world now coming into being.

The 'post' of postmodern still directed people's attentions to a past that was assumed to be dead; it suggested that something had disappeared without specifying what was becoming of us as a result, as if it were a question of preserving a newly conquered freedom in the wake of the dissolution of social, political and ideological frameworks.[1] Hence the success with which it met. That era is now ended. Hypercapitalism, hyperclass, hyperpower, hyperterrorism, hyperindividualism, hypermarket, hypertext – is there anything that isn't 'hyper'? Is there anything now that does not reveal a modernity raised to the nth power? The climate of epilogue is being followed by the awareness of a headlong rush forwards, of unbridled modernization comprised of galloping commercialization, economic deregulation, and technical and scientific developments being unleashed with effects that are heavy with threats as well as promises. It all happened very quickly: the owl of Minerva was announcing the birth of the postmodern just as the hypermodernization of the world was already coming into being.

Far from modernity having passed away, what we are seeing is its consummation, which takes the concrete form of a globalized liberalism, the quasi-general commercialization of lifestyles, the exploitation 'to death' of instrumental reason, and rampant individualism. Previously, the functioning of modernity was framed or shackled by a whole set of counterweights, alternative models and alternative values. The spirit of tradition continued to live on in different social groups; the division of roles between the sexes was still structurally unequal; the Church still held a tight grip on people's consciences; revolutionary parties were promising a different society, freed from capitalism and class conflict; the ideal of the Nation gave legitimacy to the supreme sacrifice of individuals; the State administered numerous activities in economic life. But now, everything has changed.

The society that is coming into being is one in which the forces opposing democratic, liberal and individualistic modernity are ineffectual, in which the

great alternative visions have collapsed, in which modernization no longer meets with any strong organizational or ideological resistance. Not all pre-modern elements have evaporated, but they themselves function in accordance with a modern logic that is deregulated and de-institutionalized. Even social classes and class cultures are fading away before the principle of autonomous individuality. The State is on the retreat, religion and the family are being privatized, a market society is imposing itself: the cult of economic and democratic competition, technocratic ambition, and the rights of the individual all go unchallenged. A second modernity, deregulated and globalized, has shot into orbit: it has no opposite, and is absolutely modern, resting essentially on three axiomatic elements constitutive of modernity itself: the market, technocratic efficiency and the individual. We had a limited modernity: now is the time of consummate modernity.

In this context, the most diverse spheres are seeing a rising tide of extremism, in thrall to a boundless dynamic, a hyperbolic spiral.[2] Thus we are witnessing a formidable expansion in the size and number of financial and stock-market activities, an acceleration in the speed of economic operations that now function in real time, and a phenomenal explosion in the volume of capital circulating across the planet. For a long time, the consumer society paraded its own excess and the profusion of its merchandise: this has become even more so, thanks to hypermarkets and shopping centres that are increasingly gigantic and offer a whole plethora of all kinds of products, brands and services. In every domain there is a certain excessiveness, one that oversteps all limits, like an excrescence: witness different technologies and the mind-blowing ways in which they have overthrown the boundaries of death, food or procreation. The same thing can be seen in the images of the body produced in the hyperrealism of porn; television and the shows it broadcasts that play with the idea of total transparency; the Internet galaxy and its deluge of digital streams: millions of sites, billions of pages and characters, doubling in numbers every year; tourism and its cohorts of holiday-makers; urban agglomerations and their over-populated, asphyxiated, tentacular megalopolises. In the fight against terrorism and crime, millions of cameras and other electronic means of surveillance and citizen identification have already been installed in the streets, shopping centres, public transport and businesses: taking over from the old disciplinary and totalitarian society, the society of hypersurveillance is on the march. The frenzied escalation of 'more, always more' has now infiltrated every sphere of collective life.

Even individual behaviour is caught up in the machinery of excess: witness the mania for consumption, the practice of drug-taking in athletics, the vogue for extreme sports, the phenomenon of serial killers, bulimia and anorexia, obesity, compulsions and addictions. Two opposite trends can be discerned. On the one hand, more than ever, individuals are taking care of their bodies, are obsessed by health and hygiene, and obey medical guide-lines. On the other hand, individual pathologies are proliferating, together with the consumption characteristic of *anomie*, and anarchic behaviour. Hypercapitalism is accompanied by its double: a detached hyperindividualism, legislating for itself but sometimes prudent and calculating, sometimes unrestrained, unbalanced and chaotic. In the functional universe of technology, dysfunctional behaviour is on the increase. Hyperindividualism does not coincide merely with the interiorization of the model of *homo oeconomicus*, pursuing the maximization of his own interests in most spheres of life (education, sexuality, procreation, religion, politics, trades union activities), but also with the destructuring of the old social forms by which behaviour was regulated, with a rising tide of pathological problems, psychological disturbances and excessive behaviour. Through its operations of technocratic normalization and the loosening of social bonds, the hypermodern age simultaneously manufactures order and disorder, subjective independence and dependence, moderation and excess.

The first version of modernity was extreme in ideological and political terms; the new modernity is extreme in a way that goes beyond the political – extreme in terms of technologies, media, economics, town planning, consumption, and individual pathology. Pretty much everywhere, hyperbolic and sub-political processes now comprise the new face of liberal democracies. Not everything is dancing to the tune of excess, but nothing is safe, one way or another, from the logic of the extreme.

It is just as if we had moved from the 'post' era to the 'hyper' era. A new society of modernity is coming into being. It is no longer a matter of emerging from the world of tradition to reach the stage of modern rationality, but of modernizing modernity itself[3] and rationalizing rationalization: in other words, destroying 'archaic survivals' and bureaucratic routines, putting an end to institutional rigidities and protectionist shackles, privatizing everything and freeing it from dependency on local conditions, while sharpening competition. The heroic will to create a 'radiant future' has been replaced by managerial activism: a vast enthusiasm for change, reform and adaptation that is deprived of any confident horizon or grand historical vision. Everywhere the emphasis has been placed on

the need to keep moving, on hyperchange unburdened of any utopian aims, dictated by the demands of efficiency and the need to survive. In hypermodernity, there is no longer any choice or alternative other than that of constantly developing, accelerating the movement so as not to be overtaken by 'evolution': the cult of technocratic modernization has won out over the glorification of ends and ideals. The less foreseeable the future, the more we need to be mobile, flexible, ready to react, permanently prepared to change, supermodern, more modern than the moderns of the heroic period. The mythology of a radical break with the past has been replaced by the culture of the fastest and the 'ever more': more profitability, more performance, more flexibility, more innovation.[4] It remains to be seen whether this really means blind modernization, technocratic commodity nihilism, a process spinning round and round in a vacuum without aim or meaning.

The modernity of the second sort[5] is the one which, at peace with its basic principles (democracy, human rights, the market) has no credible model to be set against it, and never stops recycling within its own system the pre-modern elements that were once objects to be eradicated. The modernity from which we are emerging negated its other: supermodernity integrates it. No longer the destruction of the past but its reintegration, its reformulation in the framework of the modern logic of the market, of consumption and individuality. When even the non-modern reveals the primacy of the self and functions in accordance with a post-traditional process, when the culture of the past no longer poses any obstacle to individualistic and free-market modernization, a new phase of modernity appears. From 'post' to 'hyper': postmodernity will have been merely a transitional stage, a short-lived moment. It is no longer ours.

These are all major upheavals which invite us to examine a little more closely the way social time is organized so as to govern the age in which we live. The past is resurfacing. Anxieties about the future are replacing the mystique of progress. The present is assuming an increasing importance as an effect of the development of financial markets, the electronic techniques of information, individualistic lifestyles and free time. Everywhere the speed of operations and exchanges is accelerating; time is short and becomes a problem looming at the heart of new social conflicts. The ability to choose your time, flexitime, leisure time, the time of youth, the time of the elderly and the very old: hypermodernity has multiplied divergent temporalities. To the deregulations of neocapitalism there corresponds an immense deregulation and individualization of time. While the cult of the present makes its presence felt ever more sharply, what is the

exact shape it is taking, and what are its links with the other temporal axes? How, on this axis, is the relation to future and past articulated? We need to reopen the dossier on social time: more than ever it requires investigation. To go beyond the way postmodernism envisaged these questions, and to reconceptualize the temporal organization that is being put into place: this is the object of the present study.

[...]

Time in conflict, and chrono-reflexivity

As Marx demonstrated clearly, in his masterly analyses, the economy of time is at the basis of the way modern capitalism works. Capitalism endeavours to reduce working time to a maximum even when it poses working time as the source of wealth: it is a system which rests on a major temporal contradiction that excludes man from his own work. These contradictions, as everyone knows, have not stopped growing. Simultaneously, now that everything is centred on the organization of working time, we have shifted from a world marked by an increase in the different kinds of social time, by way of the development of heterogeneous temporalities (free time, consumption, leisure, holidays, health, education, variable working hours, retirement age) that are accompanied by unprecedented tensions.[6] Hence the accumulation of problems in the organization and management of social time, as well as the new demands for flexible hours – for reorganization and greater elasticity, to be achieved by personalized arrangements that encourage people to choose their own timetables. The modern obsession with time is no longer given concrete form merely in the sphere of work, submitted as it is to the criteria of productivity: it has extended into every aspect of life. Hypermodern society appears as the society in which time is increasingly experienced as a major preoccupation, one in which an increasing pressure on time is exerted in ever wider ways.

These temporal contradictions are echoed in everyday life and cannot be explained exclusively by the principle of economy and profitability transposed from production to the other spheres of social life. When we privilege the future, we have the feeling that we are missing out on 'real' life. Should we enjoy pleasures as they come, or else ensure that we will still have enough vitality for the years to come (health, figure, beauty)? Should we give time to our children or to our career? There is not just an acceleration in the rhythms of life, but also a subjective

conflict that arises in our relation to time. Class antagonisms have lost their edge, while personal, temporal tensions are growing sharper and more general. It is no longer class against class, but time against time, future against present, present against future, present against present, present against past. What are we to choose as most important, and how can we fail to regret this or that option, when time has been torn away from tradition and made a matter for individual choice? The reduction in working hours, the growth of leisure, and the process of individualization have led to the escalation of themes and conflicts linked to time. The current trend is for singularized time-wars fought in the arena of subjective experience. The objective contradictions of productivist society are now accompanied by a spiral in existential contradictions.

The state of war against time implies that individuals are less and less trapped in the present alone: the dynamic of individualization and the means of information function as instruments of distancing, introspection and an inward-looking attitude.[7] Hypermodernity is not the same as a 'process without subject'; it is inseparable from self-expression, self-consciousness and consciousness-raising among individuals, paradoxically accentuated by the ephemeral action of the media. On the one hand, we are increasingly subjected to the constraints of rapid time, and on the other hand there is a growth in people's independence, and in their ability to make subjective choices and reflect on themselves. In individualized societies, freed from tradition, nothing can be taken for granted any more: the organization of existence and timetables demands arbitration and rectification, forecasts and information. We need to think of modernity as a metamodernity, based on a chrono-reflexivity.

Accelerated time and time regained

One of the most perceptible consequences of the power of the presentist agenda is the climate of pressure that it exerts on the lives of organizations and individual people. Several executives have pointed out what a frenzied rhythm dominates the mechanism of life in a company, now that global competition and the diktats of financial logic are the order of the day. There are ever more demands for short-term results, and an insistence on doing more in the shortest possible time and acting without delay: the race for profits leads to the urgent being prioritized over the important, immediate action over reflection, the accessory over the essential. It also leads to creating an atmosphere of dramatization, of permanent

stress – as well as a whole host of psychosomatic disorders. Hence the idea that hypermodernity is distinguished by the way the reign of urgency has become ubiquitous and turned into an ideological matter.[8] The effects induced by the new order of time go far beyond the world of work: they find concrete expression in people's relation to everyday life, to themselves and others. Thus it is that an increasing number of people –women more than men, thanks to the constraints of the 'double day' – complain about being overwhelmed, of 'running to stand still', of being overworked. And now there is no age category that seems to be able to escape this headlong rush: pensioners and children too now have an overloaded timetable. The faster we go, the less time we have. Modernity was built around the critique of the exploitation of working time; hypermodern time registers a feeling that time is being increasingly rarefied. These days, we are more aware of the lack of time than we are of a widening in the number of possibilities entailed by the growth of individualization; we complain less about being short of money or freedom than about being short of time.

But while some people never have enough time, others (the unemployed, or young people in jail) have too *much* time. On the one hand we have the enterprising, hyperactive individual, enjoying the speed and intensity of time; on the other the individual with nothing better to do, crushed by the empty periods of his or her life.[9] It is hardly debatable that our ways of experiencing time are, as this suggests, twofold: what we are witnessing is the reinforcing of new forms of social inequality with regard to time. These new forms should not, however, conceal the global dynamic which, beyond specific groups or classes, has transformed from top to bottom the relationship of individuals to social time. By creating a hypermarket of lifestyles, the world of consumption, leisure, and (now) of new technologies has made possible a growing independence from collective temporal constraints: as a result, individual activities, rhythms and itineraries have become de-synchronized. The reign of the social present acts as a vector for the individualization of aspirations and behaviour, and it is accompanied by out-of-step rhythms and more personalized ways of constructing one's timetable. Individualism has become polarized – as excess or lack – and can assert itself only against the background of this now ubiquitous pluralization and individualization in the way we manage time. In this sense, hypermodernity is inseparable from the breakdown in traditional and institutional frameworks and the growing individualization of our relation to time, an overall phenomenon which, transcending as it does differences of class or group, goes far beyond the world of the victors in the struggle. The new sense of enslavement to accelerated

time occurs only in parallel with a greater ability on the part of individuals to organize their own lives.

This is a new relationship to time, one that is also illustrated by consumerist passions. There is no doubt that shopaholics have found, in many cases, a mere second-best, a way of consoling themselves for the miseries of existence, of filling in the emptiness of their present and future. The presentist compulsion to consume and the shrinkage in the temporal horizon of our societies go hand in hand. But is this compulsion merely derivative, a Pascalian diversion, a flight from a world deprived of any imaginable future – one that has become chaotic and uncertain? In fact, the escalation of consumerism is nourished both by existential distress and by the pleasure associated with change, by the desire to intensify and reintensify, without end, the course of daily life. Perhaps this is where the fundamental desire of the hypermodern consumer lies: to rejuvenate his or her experience of time, to revivify it by novelties that present themselves as so many fresh starts. We need to think of hyperconsumption as an emotional rejuvenating experience, one that can start all over again an indefinite number of times. This does not exactly mean that it is Orwell's 'perpetual present' that defines us, but rather a desire for perpetual self-renewal and the renewal of the present. The consumerist fury expresses a rejection of time that has become worn-out and repetitive, a struggle against that ageing of the feelings that ordinarily accompanies our days. It is less the repression of death and finitude than an anguish at the prospect of becoming mummified, repeating one's life and not really feeling alive. To the question 'what is modernity?', Kant replied: growing out of one's state as a minor, becoming adult. In hypermodernity it is just as if a new priority were arising: that of perpetually becoming 'young' again. Our neo-philiac instinct is first and foremost a way of warding off the ageing of our subjective experience: the de-institutionalized, volatile individual, in thrall to hyperconsumption, is the person who dreams of resembling a Phoenix of the emotions.

[. . .]

The past revisited

The 'return' of the future is not the only phenomenon which undermines the idea that the social present has eyes only for itself: the revival of the past that we are witnessing also suggests that we ought to rectify such an idea.

It is undeniable that, in celebrating the pleasures of the here-and-now and the latest thing, consumerist society is continually endeavouring to make collective memory wither away, to accelerate the loss of continuity and the abolition of any repetition of the ancestral. The fact remains that, far from being locked up in a self-enclosed present, our age is the scene of a frenzy of commemorative activities based on our heritage and a growth in national and regional, ethnic and religious identities. The more our societies are dedicated followers of fashion, focused on the present, the more they are accompanied by a groundswell of memory. The moderns wanted to make a *tabula rasa* of the past, but we are rehabilitating it; their ideal was to break away from the grip of traditions, but those traditions have acquired a new social dignity. Celebrating the slightest object from the past, invoking the duties of memory, remobilizing religious traditions, hypermodernity is not structured by an absolute present, it is structured by a *paradoxical present*, a present that ceaselessly exhumes and 'rediscovers' the past.

[...]

Identity and spirituality

The way the past has come back into favour goes way beyond the mimicry of antiques and the cult of heritage and its commemorations. It finds concrete form, with even greater intensity, in the awakening of spiritualities and the new quest for identity. Religious renewal, national and regional demands, the ethnic revival: in all these guises, contemporary societies are witnessing a rise in the importance of guide-lines that point back to the past, a need for continuity between past and present, a longing to find one's roots and discover one's history. Technological and commercial globalization may be bringing about a homogenized temporality, but the fact remains that this occurs in tandem with a process of cultural and religious fragmentation that mobilizes myths and foundation stories, symbolic inheritances, and historical and traditional values.

It is well known how, in several cases, the reactivation of historical memory functions in frontal opposition to the principles of liberal modernity – witness the upsurge in religious trends which reject secular modernity, the neo-nationalist and ethnic and religious movements that lead to dictatorships, wars of identity, and genocidal massacres. The end of the division of the world into blocs, the ideological vacuum, the globalization of the economy, and the weakening of state power have led to the rise of a multitude of local conflicts based on ethnic,

religious or national factors, together with separatist movements and wars between communities. Neonationalist and ethnic and religious upsurges, rejecting the pluralism of open societies, cleansing society of all 'heterogeneous' elements, and closing communities in on themselves, are in one place accompanied by the struggle against Westernization, in another by devastating wars, repression and politico-religious terrorism. Is this the reawakening of old demons? But it would be wrong to interpret these phenomena as resurgences or repetitions of the past, whether that past be tribal or totalitarian. Even if people are falling back on an identity politics that means reviving older mentalities, it is unprecedented forms of conflict, nationalism and democracy that are starting to appear. Behind appeals to the preservation of national or religious identity, tyrannies of a new kind are being set up, together with combinations of democracy and ethnicity, frustrated modernization and all-conquering 'fundamentalism' – combinations which Fareed Zakaria quite rightly calls 'illiberal democracies'.[10]

This being so, all movements that rekindle the flame of the sacred or seek for roots are very far from being similar, or from having the same links with liberal modernity. On the contrary, many of them in the West present themselves as having characteristics that are perfectly in accord with a liberal culture in which the individual legislates for his or her own life. Proof of this is provided by those *à la carte* religions, those groups and networks that combine the spiritual traditions of East and West, and use the religious tradition as a means for their adepts to find self-fulfilment. Here there is no antinomy with individualist modernity, since the tradition is handed over to the initiative of individuals, 'cobbled together' in a DIY manner, mobilized for self-realization and integration into a community. The hypermodern age does not put an end to the need to appeal to traditions of sacred meaning: it merely revamps them to give them greater individuality, a wider spread, and a more intensely emotional set of beliefs and practices. With the pre-eminence granted to the axis of the present, we see a rise in the number of deregulated religions and post-traditional identities.

Instrumental rationality is extending its domain, but this eliminates neither religious belief nor the need to refer to the authority of a tradition. On the one side, the process of rationalization forces the grip of religion on social life to weaken more and more; on the other, it re-creates, of its own momentum, demands for religiosity and a need for roots in a 'line of descent of believers'. Here, too, we should beware of seeing new spiritualities as a residual phenomenon,

a regression or a pre-modern archaism. In fact, it is from *within* the hypermodern cosmos that the religious domain is reproduced, in so far as the hypermodern generates insecurity, the loss of fixed guide-lines, the disappearance of secular utopias, and an individualist disintegration of the social bond. In the uncertain, chaotic, atomized universe of modernity, new needs for unity and meaning, for security and a sense of belonging, arise: this is a new opportunity for religions. In any case, the march of secularization does not lead to an entirely rationalized world in which the social influence of religion is in a state of continual decline. Secularization is not irreligion; it is also a process which creates a new form of the religious domain in the sphere of worldly autonomy, a religious domain that is de-institutionalized, subjective and focused on the emotions.[11]

This remobilization of memory is inseparable from a new kind of collective identification. In societies ruled by tradition, religious and cultural identity was experienced as something self-evident, received and intangible, excluding individual choices. This is no longer the case. In the present situation, one's sense of identity and belonging is anything but instantaneous, given once and for all: it is a problem, a claim, an object for individuals to appropriate for themselves. Belonging to a community is a means of constructing oneself and saying who one is, a way of affirming oneself and gaining recognition: it is thus, inseparably, a means of self-definition and self-questioning. We are no longer Jewish, Muslim or Basque 'as easily as breathing'; we question our identities, we examine them, we want to appropriate for ourselves something which had hitherto gone without saying.[12] Cultural identity used to be institutional: now it has become open and reflexive, an individual gamble in which the dice can be thrown again and again.

The upsurge of particularist demands means that we need to correct the simplistic readings that reduce hyper-individualism to a frenzy of consumerist and competitive passions. While hyper-individualism cannot be separated from the consecration of private pleasures and individual merit, we are obliged to note that it is equally inseparable from a great increase in demands for public recognition, and also in demands for different cultures to be equally respected. It is no longer enough to be recognized by what we do, or as free citizens equal to everyone else: it is a question of being recognized by what we are in our specificity as part of a community and a history, by that which distinguishes us from other groups. This is the proof, among other things, that modernity of the second kind is not exhausted by the solipsistic torrent of consumerist appetites: in fact, it bears within itself a broadening of the ideal of equal respect, a desire for

hyper-recognition which, rejecting every form of the contempt, depreciation or sense of inferiority under which one might suffer, demands the recognition of the other as equal in his or her difference. The reign of the hypermodern present is, to be sure, that of the immediate satisfaction of needs, but it is also that of a moral demand for recognition broadened to identities based on gender, sexual orientation or historical memory.

This process of hyper-recognition is not unlinked to a mass society of individualist well-being. It is this society which, in Western democracies, has contributed to a decline in the value placed on the abstract principles of citizenship in favour of poles of identity that are more immediate and particularist in character. In a hyper-individualist society, we invest our emotions in what is closest to us, in links based on resemblance and common origin, since universalist values and great political ideals appear as principles that are too abstract, too general or remote.[13] By destroying revolutionary hopes, and focusing life on private happiness, the civilization of the present moment has paradoxically unleashed a desire for the recognition of the specific identity conferred by collective roots.

It is also the culture of individualist well-being that, by giving a new importance to the need for self-esteem and esteem for others, has made it impossible to accept suffering engendered by collective negative images imposed by dominant groups. In the era of happiness, everything which inculcates a negative image of oneself, or withholds recognition, is deemed illegitimate, and appears as a symbolic form of oppression or violence incompatible with the ideal of full self-realization. Hence the multiplication of demands for reparation in the case of collective offences, the expectation that everyone will be granted public recognition, and the ever-more-frequent clamourings for victim status. While demands for particularist recognition are inseparable from the modern democratic ideal of human dignity, it is, none the less, our presentist civilization which has made 'the politics of recognition' possible,[14] a politics that acts as an instrument of self-esteem, inculcates new responsibilities *vis-à-vis* the past, and fuels the new controversial debates over memory.

The contemporary galaxy of identities is also an opportunity for taking another look at the rich analyses of high modernity put forward by Ulrich Beck. According to this German sociologist, we have moved from a first stage of modernization based on the opposition between tradition and modernity to a second modernization, self-reflexive and self-critical in nature. In this latest phase, it is modernization itself which is considered as a problem attacking the

spread of a scientistic mentality as well as the working bases of industrial society. Hence the idea of a new modernity, self-referential in type.[15]

This description is correct, but we need to take it further and make it more general. What we really need to point out is that the second cycle of modernity is not merely self-referential: it is marked by the return of traditional landmarks and of ethnic and religious demands based on types of symbolic heritage that go back a very long way and stem from diverse origins. In other words, all the memories, all the universes of meaning, all the forms of the collective imaginary that refer to the past and that can be drawn on and redeployed to construct identities and enable individuals to find self-fulfilment. Ultra-modern self-consciousness does not merely affect technological risks, scientific rationality or the division of sexual roles, it imbues all the repositories of meaning, all the traditions of East and West, all the different kinds of knowledge and belief, including the most irrational and the least orthodox: astrology, reincarnation, marginal sciences, etc. What defines hypermodernity is not exclusively the self-critique of modern institutions and forms of knowledge, but also revisionary memory, the remobilization of traditional beliefs, and the individualist hybridization of past and modernity. It is no longer a question merely of the deconstruction of traditions, but of the way they are used without any institutional backing, being perpetually reworked in accordance with the principle of individual sovereignty. If hypermodernity is meta-modernity, it also manifests itself in the guise of a meta-traditionality and a meta-religiosity without bounds.

There is no lack of phenomena which might justify a relativistic or nihilistic interpretation of the hypermodern universe. The dissolution of the unquestioned bases of knowledge, the primacy of pragmatism and the reign of money, the sense of the equal worth of all opinions and all cultures – these are all elements which feed into the idea that scepticism and the disappearance of higher ideals constitute a major characteristic of our epoch. Does observable reality in fact suggest that such a paradigm is correct?

While it is undeniable that many cultural landmarks have been displaced, and that a technocratic and commercial dynamic now organizes whole sectors of our societies, the fact remains that the collapse of meaning has not been taken to its logical conclusion, since that meaning continues to deploy itself against the background of a strong and broad consensus about the ethical and political foundations of liberal modernity. Beyond the 'war of the gods' and the growing power of the market, a hard core of shared values continues to assert itself, one which fixes strict limits to the steamroller advance of operational rationality. Our

entire ethical and political heritage has not been eradicated: there are still checks and balances that prevent us from accepting the radical interpretation of hypermodern nihilism – in particular, ethical protests and commitments. The new consecration of human rights puts these right at the ideological centre of gravity as an omnipresent organizational norm of collective actions. It is not true that money and efficiency have become the motive force and ultimate aim of all social relations. How, if this were true, could we understand the value accorded to love and friendship? How could we explain the indignant reactions to new forms of slavery and barbarity? What gives rise to new demands for an ethical attitude in economic activity, the media and political life? Even if our epoch is the stage on which are played out the conflicts between a whole variety of different conceptions of the good, it is marked, at the same time, by an unprecedented reconciliation with its basic humanist foundations: never have these enjoyed such an unquestioned legitimacy. Not all values, not all benchmarks of meaning, have been blown apart: hypermodernity is not a question of 'ever greater instrumental performance, and therefore ever fewer values that have the force of obligations', but a technocratic and market-driven spiral that is accompanied by a unanimous endorsement of the common roots of humanist and democratic values.

No one will argue with the fact that the way the world is going arouses more anxiety than unbridled optimism: the gulf between North and South is widening, social inequalities are increasing, all minds are obsessed by insecurity, and the globalized market is reducing the power of democracies to govern themselves. But does this enable us to diagnose a process of world-wide 'rebarbarization' in which democracy is no longer anything more than a 'pseudo-democracy' and a 'decorative spectacle'?[16] This would be to underestimate the powers of self-critique and self-correction that continue to dwell in the liberal democratic universe. The presentist age is anything but closed, wrapped up in itself, doomed to an exponential nihilism. Because the depreciation of supreme values is not limitless, the future remains open. Democratic and market-led hypermodernity has not uttered its final word: it is merely at the start of its historic adventure.

Notes

1   Krzysztof Pomian, 'Post – ou comment l'appeler?', *Le débat*, 60 (1990).
2   On excess as a figure of ultra-modernity, see Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, tr. John Howe (London: Verso, 1995); Jean

Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, tr. Philip Beitchman and W. G. J. Niesluchowksi, ed. Jim Fleming (New York: Semiotext(e); London: Pluto, 1990); Paul Virilio, *Vitesse et politique* (Paris: Galilee, 1977).

3   Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, tr. Mark Ritter (London: Sage, 1992).

4   Pierre-André Taguieff, *Résister au bougisme* (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2001), pp. 75–85. See also Jean-Pierre Le Goff, *La Barbarie douce* (Paris: La Découvert, 1999).

5   The cycle that I have called the 'second individualist revolution' is analysed in *Ère du Vide* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983).

6   Roger Sue, *Temps et ordre social* (Paris: PUF, 1994).

7   I am radically opposed to the arguments that see in our temporal regime nothing more than 'impoverishing traps', 'a whirlwind flight', 'the mutilation of duration' that make any distance and any mediation impossible, as well as any 'reversibility of thought'; cf. Chesneaux, *Habiter le temps*.

8   Nicole Aubert, *Le Culte de l'urgence* (Paris: Flammarion, 2003).

9   Robert Castel, *Les Métamorphoses de la question sociale* (Paris: Fayard, 1995), pp. 461–74.

10 Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

11 I am here drawing on the fine studies by Daniele Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, tr. Simon Lee (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), and *Le Pélerin et la converti* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999).

12 Dominique Schnapper, *La France de l'integration* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), pp. 307–10.

13 Bela Farago, 'La démocratie et le problème des minorités nationales', *Le débat*, 76 (1993), pp. 16–17.

14 Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition': An Essay*, with a commentary by Amy Gutman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

15 Beck, *Risk Society*.

16 Taguieff, *Résister au bougisme*, p. 123.