



Globalization, Work and Culture: the phenomenon of “symbolic consumption”. From Neil Postman to Immanuel Wallerstein

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ABSTRACT: The article examines the relationship between globalization and culture, with an emphasis on the phenomenon of symbolic consumption. It adopts a sociological approach, starting from theoretical foundations and introducing the concept of globalization not as a simple economic process, but as a stage of late capitalism, full of contradictions and cultural rearrangements.

The basic argument is that globalization is not only about the unification of markets, but also about the systematic transformation of culture through work and consumption. In the new cultural context, goods - and the work within them - are consumed not for their practical value, but for the symbolic meaning they carry. The desire of modern man for social recognition and self-realization is channeled through consumption, which becomes an act of identity and existence.

The article concludes by linking symbolic consumption to the structural dysfunction of capitalism, as presented by Wallerstein, as well as to the ideological imposition of entertainment and progress, as analyzed by Postman. Especially through the doctrine of “**Keep up with the Joneses**”, consumption is transformed into a compulsory social practice, in which the individual participates not only to survive, but to exist.

KEY WORDS: Globalization, Culture, Symbolic consumption, Capitalism, Sociology of Work, Ideology, Baudrillard, Wallerstein, Postman, Consumerism, Signifier – signified, Image – commodity, “Keeping up with the Joneses”, Mass culture, Symbolic violence, Everyday life, Identity, Westernization

Prologue

The present work constitutes an attempt to add itself to the multiple studies carried out in recent years with the aim of deepening scientific thought on the phenomenon of globalization. Although this phenomenon is in progress, and the philosophical ‘night’ of past experience has not fallen - as Hegel would tell us - for the owl of knowledge to spread its wings ¹, the social results of the globalization process, at an economic and cultural level, are to a certain extent visible so that they can constitute the field of a study, such as the one we are attempting.

From the theory of globalization, we choose to study the field of culture, not ignoring that of the economy, but precisely on it, relying on Parsons' central position that *the goal of the economy is not the maximization of production for the individual, but the maximization of production in combination with the system. of values society* . ²More specifically, the central field of our study is

¹ Hegel : “Only when night falls does the owl of wisdom spread its wings.” [Source: Chrysis Alexandros, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* , Panteion University, Athens 2005]

²Baudrillard Jean, *The Consumer Society* , translated by Vasilis Tomanas, Nissides Publishing House, Athens 2000, p.73

consumption, especially *symbolic consumption* ³, as a way of thinking and acting in and through which man defines himself ⁴, and therefore responds as his culture, as a being responsible for his history.⁵

In the following pages we will initially introduce the reader to some definitions of globalization, culture and symbolic consumption and we will attempt to highlight the correlation of these elements, as a qualitative leap of thought for our next and central chapter entitled: *'The consumption of symbols or Keep up with the Joneses'* ⁶. There we will focus on the core of the view we are attempting, which is the doctrine of the ideology of symbolic consumption. Our study will conclude with a concluding chapter where we will present a working hypothesis for the possible relationship between consumer ideology and the idea of progress and entertainment, where we will attempt to pose the question and answer it: whether and to what extent symbolic consumption is the solution to the *eternal problem* ⁶ - the dysfunction of the capitalist system.

Import

*"Amidst the superabundance of wealth, political society
she is not rich enough... and is forced to ask
consumers outside itself"*

*Hegel*⁷

Many theorists and scholars of globalization have investigated and are investigating its phenomenon, while at the same time exposing themselves to the temptation of attempting to define it. The roots of the phenomenon in time, the *'intervals'* ⁸ that characterize globalization, its *dimensions* ⁹ and *processes* ¹⁰, are products of the latest social analyses.

Now - by most theorists on the subject - it is commonly accepted that, when we talk about globalization, we are certainly referring to a phenomenon that did not arise from nothing. On the one hand, it would be a scientific error to see globalization as a new stage in the course of humanity, succumbing to the well-known evolutionary logic of development theories ¹¹. That is, examining it under the light of the doctrine of the *self-evident nature of progress*, a doctrine identified with the cultural policy of capitalism. ¹² On the other hand, we must seek the birth of globalization, looking back to the past of the capitalist system, in the way that Roland Robertson's approach teaches us. ¹³ According to this approach, the current historical phase of globalization - which we are studying

³The term '*symbolic consumption*' will be explained in the 'Introduction' of our study. (Chapter 2)

⁴According to the sociological position of J. Baudrillard:

"We are what we consume"

⁵Cornelius Castoriadis, *'We are responsible for our history'*, translated by Teta Papadopoulou, Polis Publishing House, Athens 2000

⁶The *"eternal problem of capitalism"* according to E. Wallerstein is the fact that the worker is simultaneously a consumer. We will refer to this in more detail in the last chapter of our study. [Source: Wallerstein Emmanuel, *'Historical capitalism'*, translated by Metta Tsikrika, Themelion Publishing House, Athens 1987]

⁷Source: Papaioannou Kostas, *'State and Philosophy'*, alternative editions Commune, Athens 1990, p.62

⁸In the early 1990s, Appadurai distinguished five main periods of globalization. These are the following:

- a)ethnoscapes
- b) technoscapes
- c)finalscapes
- d)mediascapes
- e)ideoscapes.

[Source: Psimmenos Iordanis, *Lectures on Globalization*, Panteion University, Athens 2005]

⁹A. Giddens distinguishes four dimensions of globalization:

- a)global capitalist economy,
- b)international division of labor,
- c)global military order
- d)nation-state system.

[Source: Demertzis Nikos, *'The Reason for Nationalism'*, Sakkoulas Publishing House, Athens 1996, p.295]

¹⁰Robertson, globalization processes manifest in four stages:

- a)society organized in a nation-state
- b)individualized subjects
- c)international system
- d)humanity

[Source: Demertzis N., op. cit., p.297]

¹¹Demertzis N., op.d., p.275

¹²Wallerstein Em. op.p, pp.81-102

¹³The chronological historical course of analysis proposed by Robertson distinguishes five temporal phases in capitalism:

a)genetic phase {early 15th - mid 18th century }

- is the one characterized by the element of uncertainty. An uncertainty accompanied by the constant effort *to compress space and time* at all levels.¹⁴

Adopting Robertson's position and simultaneously rejecting those of Bauman and Harvey, because they see only an economic character in the phenomenon of globalization,¹⁵ in the current chapter we must conclude on the subject with the following position: globalization is above all a stage of capitalism, full of uncertainties and contradictions,¹⁶ with a simultaneous process of deregulation of traditional structures and integration of new elements¹⁷ (*glocal*¹⁸). Based on this epistemological position, we seek the impact of globalization on the cultures of all societies, and not only of the Western world.

Culture is the management of love and violence¹⁹. That is, it is reduced on the one hand to the level of directive and on the other to that of fantasy.²⁰ In late capitalism, this management of fantasy is no longer exercised by the ruling ideology with the intermittent use of physical violence, but with the incessant use of symbolic violence. This is because *symbolic violence is the one that precedes every other form of violence, but is always perceived last and with great difficulty*.²¹

The culture of symbolic violence is what we are experiencing today. That culture where all actions are reduced to their symbolic meaning and the productive forces focus their attention on the production of symbolic goods. An immense world offered with comfort, beauty and efficiency²² for the *consumer*²³, so that every consumption is carried out for the social meaning that the symbol of the good carries, and not for its use in itself. Now we can well understand why consumption, while taking place in all cultures, only in the present culture - on a truly massive scale²⁴ - has begun to appear as a *fundamental*, rather than a superficial feature of society.²⁵

In this very fundamental and at the same time globalized²⁶ omnipotence of symbols and their consumption, the present study does not stand in the moral dilemma of whether and to what extent today's mass or massified culture is true or false. What we encounter in reality is *a cataclysmic spread of culture throughout the social sphere, to the point where everything in our social life - from economic value and state power to practices, but also the very mental structures - can now be considered cultural, with a new, not*

b) opening phase {early 18th century -1870}

c) take-off phase {1870s-1920s}

d) claim for world hegemony {1920s-mid-1960s}

e) phase of uncertainty {1960-1990}

[Source: Demertzis N., op. cit., p. 284]

¹⁴The last sentence has been said by D. Harvey in his study ' *The Condition of Postmodernity* ' [Source: Panagiotopoulou Roi, ' *Television outside the walls* ', Kastaniotis Publishing House, Athens 2004, p.22]

¹⁵As Nikos Demertzis points out: " *Bauman believes that globalization is limited to the interdependent dimensions of the economy, technology and information, and that it does not concern politics, culture and the sphere of morality. [...] Essentially, for Harvey, the discussion around globalization is nothing more than a ploy to promote the necessary adjustments to the international trade system.* " [Source: Demertzis N. op. cit. pp. 277-287]

¹⁶On the issue of contradictions, we meet J. Orwell, who in his dystopia '1984' pointed out quite early on that the ruling ideology will be an ideology of contradictions. Specifically, he states: "The official ideology of the party is full of contradictions. Only by reconciling the contradictions can power be held indefinitely. In order to prevent equality forever, the prevailing mental state must be one of directed madness." [Source: Asproulis Aristides, ' *Work in Big Brother's Society* ', introduction by Psimmenos Iordanis, Panteion University, Athens 2003, p.15]

¹⁷Psimmenos Iordanis, *Lectures on Globalization*, Panteion University, Athens 2005

¹⁸The term ' *glocal* ' is a grammatical and conceptual combination of the terms *global* and *local*. According to R. Robertson, such terms originate from the field of marketing. Essentially, they mean a global perception, a perspective adapted to local conditions. [Source: Panagiotopoulou R., op. cit., p. 23]

¹⁹Paparizos Antonis, *Lectures on the Sociology of Religion*, Panteion University, Athens 2004

²⁰Robert Dunn, ' *Television, Consumption and Commodity Form* ', in ' *Society, Power and Media-theory and practice* ', ed. Komninou M.- Lyrizis Ch., trans. Defner A., Papazisis Publishing House, Athens 1989, p.191

²¹Paparizos Antonis, *Lectures on the Principles of Sociology*, Panteion University, Athens 2002

²²Baudrillard Z., op. cit., p. 19

²³The first significant analysis of the consumer phenomenon belongs to Thorstein Veblen, who introduces the term: ' *conspicuous consumer* ' (demonstrative consumer), which he also considers as the dominant consumer model. [Source: Veblen T. ' *The theory of the idle class* ', ed. C. W. Mills, ed. Dalianis G., Kalvos Publishing, Athens (xx)]

²⁴George Pleios states characteristically that " *consumerism thus becomes the promoter of a generalized cultural prostitution* ". [Source: Pleios G., ' *The Word of the Image* ', Papazisis ed., Athens 2001, p.246]

²⁵Corrigan P. [Source: Pleios G., op.cit., p.198]

²⁶The tendency of capitalism towards a globalized spread of consumption had been discerned quite early by Karl Marx. For example: "Driven by the need for the bourgeoisie to find an ever wider consumption of its products, it spreads over the entire globe" [Source: Marx K.- Engels F., ' *The Communist Manifesto* ', trans. Kordatou G. ed. Alpheios, Athens (xx), p.57]

yet theorized sense of the term ²⁷. In a sociological approach, such as the one we are attempting here, we can distinguish and we must study the social effects of contemporary culture - whatever it may be - in order to seek post hoc her identity.

Central capital:

The consumption of symbols

or

"Keeping up with the Joneses"²⁸

"We were transformed from a crazy

*body that danced on the hillsides
in a pair of eyes fixed in the darkness"*

Jim Morrison²⁹

As highlighted in our introductory chapter, consumption is an active way of relating to objects, collectivity and the world. A way of systematic activity and universal response, on which our entire cultural system is based ³⁰. This position, combined with the fact that in globalization *foreign values and beliefs are adapted to new situations - since they are selectively appropriated by indigenous cultures, and gradually mixed with pre-existing traditions and practices* - ³¹ can lead us to a safe conclusion: Through and through the synthesis of opposites at every level - social, political, economic and class - we discern the steadily increasing emergence of a 'global culture' ³²: **of the culture of consumption.**

But could a global consumer culture ever be born or stabilized based on the foundations of a consumption of basic durable goods, especially when these goods are occasionally found to be in demand? In other words, would consumption ever be established as a principle of social mobility within a social network such as that of the class differences of capitalism?

The answer is no. Not unless something had changed radically, and that is the 'point' of the commodity. *The image is the final form of the commodity*, as the laconic Debord described it ³³, and this can be explained. The image is the one part that brings the commodity to its totality, which is also completed by the part of its use as an object. They are the two sides of the same coin, as de Saussure would tell us: *the coin is the 'sign,' and its two sides are the 'signifier' and the 'signified'* ³⁴. We are now in a position to make it clear why, as we have said, the radical transubstantiation took place at the point of the commodity. The 'currency' has now fallen on one side, the side of the signified. The result of this is that there is no longer a signifier or that it is identified with the signified ³⁵. The meaning of the image has become universal, the symbol of the commodity omnipotent ^o, and because *the commodity*

²⁷Jameson Fredrick, *The Postmodern or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, trans. Varsos G., Nefeli Publishing House, Athens 1999, p. 92

²⁸Anglo-American idiom meaning: *"Let's not lag behind the Joneses"*, i.e. the neighbors.

²⁹Morrison Jim, *Gentlemen – Notes on Vision – The New Creatures*, trans. Chronas G, Panos Publishing, Athens 1995, p.25

³⁰Baudrillard Z, op. cit. p. 11

³¹Thompson John, *Modernity and Media*, ed. Karambini G. - Sokou N., Papazisis Publishing House, Athens 1999, p.283

³²By the term 'global civilization' we mean the composition of the cultures of Western societies, but also of those that are gradually 'westernizing' – urbanizing, with westernization as Tomlinson understands it: *"Westernization, Americanization, Coca-colaization"* [Source: Michalopoulou Konstantina, *Globalization and Culture, based on the study by J. Tomlinson: Global Culture: Dreams, Nightmares and Scepticism*, presentation by Demertzis Nikos, University of Athens: Department of Communication and Mass Media, Athens 2004]

³³Debord Guy, *The Society of the Spectacle*, ed. Sylvia, International Library Publishing House, Athens 2000. p. 32

³⁴F. de Saussure, Swiss linguist of the early 20th century and founder of structural linguistics. He is the one who introduced the concept of the sign and distinguished it on two levels: the signifier and the signified, which according to him should be conceived only as something unified, like the two sides of a sheet of paper. The signifier constitutes the material part of the sign, its form, and the signified is the meaning, the concept, the significance of the sign. We could say that the whole problem goes back to Plato's philosophy, where in Cratylus there is talk of the relationship between names and things, that is, to what extent the relationship between them would be characterized as causal or conventional. An equally important approach to the subject is made by Roland Barthes, in his work *Mythologies-Lesson*, trans. Hadjidemou K.-Ralli I, Rappa ed., pp.204-212

³⁵A typical example to understand the absence of the signifier in the modern West and the dominance of the signified is the fact that in America and England, the product that is most widely consumed today is the spray bottle of fake mud, for those who have Jeep-type vehicles! [Source: newspaper *To Vima*, 16-06-05, Issue No. 14490, p.49/A25 (International)]

cannot be understood in its essence Only as a universal category of the total social being ³⁶, the consumption that characterizes late Western culture - the culture of symbolic violence ³⁷ - is entirely symbolic.

And it is symbolic for another very important reason: only in this type of consumption ³⁸ is there universal participation in the market for consumer goods or, better, symbols - regardless of the position of the consumer subject in social stratification - and it emerges as a crucial lever of mass commodity culture: consumer expectations but also symbolic consumption as an act is entirely classless! Every person in the West now has, or rather is required to have, the right to consumption. As Baudrillard characteristically states, *pleasure today is forced and institutionalized not as a right or as a citizen's indulgence, but as his duty. We must enjoy. We are a business of pleasure and satisfaction.* ³⁹ **Modern man is condemned to be happy** . And although symbolic value is not static and its meaning is shaped each time by the symbolic context in which it is articulated , ⁴⁰ in the present culture we find, throughout the course of the formation of meaning, a common denominator: The consumer is anything but passive, he can be characterized as °the exact opposite: he is constantly and increasingly active. The difference with other times is that the energy of modern man gradually passes from the level of production to that of consumption. We spend an increasingly smaller part of our lives in production through work, but an increasingly larger part in the production and renewal of our needs and well-being. The symbolic consumer *unfolds and must unfold a continuous activity because he is possessed by the fear of 'losing' something*, ⁴¹ of missing out on some pleasure. This anxiety of unstoppable and unsatisfied pleasure, while touching on theories such as Marx's ⁴² *commodity fetishism* and the *discovery of McCracken's displaced meanings* , ⁴³ has in fact already surpassed them. The consumerism of symbols takes place as an ideology ⁴⁴ and reproduces itself as a system . **As an ideology in the sense that it is a network of thought, perception and action, which presents a truth, the truth of abundance °while simultaneously concealing another truth, that of the power of the signified** . And as a system since, on the one hand, needs are no longer the fruit of production, but the system of needs is the product of the productive system ⁴⁵ and, on the other hand, symbolic value, while appearing during the process of consumption, is nevertheless created during the production of the commodity ⁴⁶. Subsequently, the unconditional acceptance of the symbols of production by the consumer subject, as an existential -we would dare to say- code, causes the *symbolic value of each commodity to increase to the utmost, without at the same time almost any commodity and good remaining outside the circle of the commodity symbol* ⁴⁷. In short, **in today's era all goods tend towards their symbolism.**

But what is the doctrine of the ideology of symbolic consumption so powerful and comprehensive that it reduces it to a stable existential driving force today? Of course, the doctrine of " *Keep up with the Joneses* " , that is, " *Let's not lag behind the neighbors!* " . The only consumer today is the " *demonstrative consumer* " , exactly as we inherited his description from Veblen, ⁴⁸ who without the other - the neighbor - does not exist. In other words, without the object of his demonstrativeness and mutual symbolic competition, his existence within the social environment does not exist. In the modern conditions of the commodification of social life , *consumption emerges as a main social gesture that declares with increasing symbolic intensity the expectations and the need of the subject for social hypostasis.* ⁴⁹ Hypostasis in the sense that the subject seeks, through and through the consumption of symbols, its vital connection with an environment that constantly raises specific demands on it, to which the subject simultaneously strives to respond, not to adapt, but to hypostasis, ⁵⁰ to exist. And this existence is achieved more quickly with what Baudrillard called *the*

³⁶Georg Lukacs, 'History and Class Consciousness' , [Source: Debord G, op. cit., p. 27]

³⁷See Chapter 2, p.8

³⁸For the separation of consumption that we indicate at this point, Karapostolis explains in detail why participation in symbolic consumption became universal, while in the consumption of non-symbolized goods, this never happened: "there are substantial exclusions and inequalities to the detriment of the popular strata and there cannot be universal participation in the truly advanced market for consumer goods, but participation in symbolic consumption is promoted by all means" [Source: Karapostolis Vasilis, 'Consumerism behavior in Greek society 1960-1975' , E.K.K.E, Athens 1984, p.83]

³⁹Baudrillard Z., op. cit., p. 86

⁴⁰Pleios G., op.cit., p.224

⁴¹Baudrillard Z., op. cit., p. 87

⁴²Marx K.-Engels F., op. cit., pp. 92-94

⁴³Regarding McCracken's theory, Pleios states the following: " McCracken believes that the reason that pushes the modern consumer to seek more and more goods is the property that they have of constituting a bridge to those meanings that the consumer cannot easily acquire in the here and now. (displaced meanings) . [Source: Pleios C, op.p, p.223]

⁴⁴ "Consumer society wants to be something like a wealthy and threatened besieged Jerusalem, that is its ideology ," Jean Baudrillard, op. cit., p. 27

⁴⁵Montrillard Z., op.cit., p.79

⁴⁶Pleios G., op.cit., p.222

⁴⁷Pleios G., op.cit., p. 244

⁴⁸See Chap.2, p.8, footnote 23

⁴⁹Karapostolis B., op.cit., p.15

⁵⁰Karapostolis B., op.d., pp.16-20

*"Dialectic of Mass Culture"*⁵¹: while a product is mass-produced, that is, manufactured for everyone, at the same time the same product is promoted and ultimately secured, and therefore consumed, as unique for everyone! Thus completing another cycle in the vortex of symbolic class climbing - that is, the subject's need for a constant upgrade of the image of his social 'status' - within the modern semantic funnel of the *apotheosis of decoration and the decorative at all levels of culture*⁵².

Completing the study we conducted in the current chapter, we must, as we would for any social phenomenon under investigation, seek the space-place where symbolic consumption takes place. According to Baudrillard, the space we seek is 'everydayness'⁵³. Combining the above statement with Karapostolis' definition of everyday life, that is, *everyday life is the space-time of non-questioning*⁵⁴, we are given a complete picture of the hypothesis we have just posed. Everyday life, in the absence of questioning, needs to develop the alibi of participation in the world. Its need to experience something is desperate, since it does not question anything. Thus, in its peace it is excited and self-affirming by consuming symbolic violence or by experiencing symbolic consumption. And the more, in a culture like the Western one, reality is experienced as everyday life, the more the symbolic violence of consumption will dominate dynamically.

In conclusion, we can claim that today Western man consumes signs as symbols, certified however under the guarantee of the real. In this sense, *symbolic value is 'naturalized', it becomes something given and self-evident. Its ideological character is hidden and while symbolic value continues to have an ideological character, it is de-ideologized, otherwise is realized*⁵⁵. In conclusion, we are now able to claim that **we are experiencing the era where the sign is the signified, but this identification is only perceived as if it were the signifier.**

Epilogue : a thought on the perspective of Wallerstein and Postman.

*"Capitalism is, at the very same moment,
the best thing that ever happened to humanity,
but also the worst"*

*Fredric Jameson*⁵⁶

Every socio-cultural system contains simultaneously an ideological and a practical character. Their relationship is dialectical: one part exists and flows within and through the other, emerging at every moment one character, the one that corresponds to each system. Consequently, in the existing systemic formation, that of late capitalism, we distinguish at the ideological level the universal dominance of the idea of progress – or *'the opium of truth'*⁵⁷, as Wallerstein would tell us – and of the idea of forced entertainment according to Postman, "while at the practical level an unlimited increase in productive forces is evident, which through the first level – the ideological – *appears as a logical pursuit*"⁵⁸.

Therefore, within these processes of the late capitalist system, we will try, instead of an epilogue, to sociologically search for the deepest causes of the birth and maintenance of the phenomenon of symbolic consumption, as analyzed in the previous section. Although, as we emphasized, in reality the boundaries between the ideological and the practical do not exist - as they appear only in a simultaneous process - nevertheless, for the benefit of our study, we will initially attempt a divisive abstraction which we will, however, restore connectively, in our concluding paragraph.

Choosing to start with the level of practice, we must position ourselves by appropriating a clear position: when we talk about capitalism, we are talking first of all about a system where *the objective purpose or 'law' that prevails or governs the main economic activity is the endless accumulation of capital*⁵⁹. At the same time, however, despite the holistic dynamics of the capitalist system - as is evident from Wallerstein's definition above -, the same theorist also identifies a significant intrasystemic dysfunction, identifying at one level its solution. Specifically, the *'eternal problem'* of capitalism for Wallerstein is the fact that the worker is simultaneously a consumer. On the one hand, the existence of more and more consumers may be a vitally important requirement

⁵¹Baudrillard Z., op. cit., p. 105

⁵²Perniola M. *'The Society of Imitation'*, trans. Caenazz - Adaloglou P., Alexandria Publishing House, Athens 1991, p.28

⁵³Baudrillard Z., op.d., pp.25-26

⁵⁴See Karapostolis V., *'Symbiosis and Communication in Greece'*, Alexandria Publishing House, Athens 1999, pp.30-31 and the same *'The Self Without a Compass - Traveling'*, Alexandria Publishing House, Athens 1999, pp.122-126

⁵⁵Pleios G., op.cit., p.227

⁵⁶Jameson F., op.d., p.91

⁵⁷ *"Karl Marx said that religion is the opium of the people. Raymond Aron replied that Marxist ideas are the opium of the intellectuals. And in both polemics there is discernible insight. But is insight truth? I would like to suggest that perhaps the real opium of both the people and the intellectuals is truth,"* Wallerstein M., op. cit., p. 88

⁵⁸Kastoriadis K., op.d., p.56

⁵⁹Wallerstein Em., op.cit., p. 23

for maintaining economic flow, but on the other hand, the capitalist – whether as a class or as an individual – is faced with a huge dilemma: in the effort to develop his profit, which path should he follow? To increase the wages of workers, in the hope that they will consume more, or to reduce the prices of products, in the hope that they will be purchased more easily? In both cases, the problem will remain as it was even after the attempt to solve it. This is because, in the case that the capitalist decides to increase wages, he will be forced to raise the prices of products, and in the case that he wants to make the price of his products more affordable, he will be forced to impose wage cuts. The reason why it will be forced in both cases to make the above moves is the fact that the *capitalist economy is possessed by the rational intention to increase accumulation to the maximum extent* ⁶⁰; this is its end in itself.

In this Gordian knot of *worker-consumer*, Wallerstein is quick to seek his solution in the cheap labor of the third world, taking it for granted that *the producer who employs wage workers prefers to pay them less, everywhere and always* ⁶¹. But in a world that traces the dizzying trajectory of globalization, things are clearly more complex. Wallerstein is deeply sociological in his analyses, but his conclusions contain a dose of simplicity ⁶², at least for today's data. In an era where the trend for increasing Westernization of more and more places is galloping ⁶³, we are able to maintain our reservations about whether and to what extent the solution to the *worker-consumer problem* is the one that Wallerstein defines. The way in which Western civilization is progressing gives us solid indications that in the coming years it may not need the cheap labor of the third world to survive. Wallerstein's problem concerned consumers who were a dysfunctional cause for capitalism, because they knew what the interests of their class were and their purchases were limited to what they could acquire. However, from the moment the consumer subject learns to consume symbols and to hypostasize socially through this consumption -as we showed in chapter 3-, he alone unties the hands of the producer-capitalist. Today's worker can work at anything that is asked of him because what defines him is not what he produces, but what he consumes. **What can be the usefulness of any cheap labor today, when Western man has managed to consume signifieds to such an extent that he has even worked voluntarily for the symbol of an idea, ignoring its purely capitalist production?** The *worker-consumer* has been replaced by the *worker-consumer of symbols*, whose interests are above those corresponding to the social stratum to which he belongs, since the starting point of his existence is the development of the image of his social position. Now we can well perceive the dominant structure that characterizes modern Western societies: **a constantly expanding proletariat, whose subjects are nevertheless possessed by an ever-increasing bourgeois consciousness**.

As far as the ideological character of capitalism is concerned, things are equally complex. On the one hand, we observe the omnipotence of the idea of a law of progress ⁶⁴at every level of Western thought ⁶⁵, and on the other, the incessant entertainment as the main, if not the only, model of lifestyle. It would certainly be unfair to forget the shameful struggles of many personalities of art and science, to bring about the transition from the obscurantism of the Middle Ages to a more rational view of things - as an example, we recall the case of Galileo, who was horribly killed by the church, simply because he claimed that the earth revolves around the sun and not the other way around, as was believed until then. However, we must emphasize here that progress is above all an idea, a way of thinking, and not something whose existence is arbitrarily implied. This is obviously what Postman had in mind when he wrote that *the common consciousness has not assimilated that technology is ideology* ⁶⁶. However, in the absence of this very assimilation, the doctrine of progress within capitalism is perceived only as something self-evident, something that precedes and follows every moment. Therefore, **if there is one point that the capitalist system has achieved to a radical degree, it is that no subject of it is capable of thinking about anything beyond and outside the system itself**. Additionally, again inspired by Postman, we must note the importance of the ideology of entertainment as a dominant behavioral guideline in the modern West,

⁶⁰Wallerstein Em., op.d., p.22

⁶¹Wallerstein Em., op.cit., p.32

⁶²It is worth noting here that Wallerstein's work '*Historical Capitalism*', to which we refer in the current chapter, was written in 1983, a fact that justifies the distance of perceptions at the level of conclusions.

⁶³See Chapter 3, footnote 32, p. 8.

⁶⁴For more extensive analyses on the subject, see:

Jameson F. op. cit., p.78 and p.89,

Castoriadis K., op.cit., p.56,

Wallerstein Em., op.d., pp. 81-102 and

Postman Neil, '*Entertaining to Death - Public Discourse in the Age of the Spectacle*', translated by Rougouni F. - Tzamourani A., Dromeas Publishing House, Athens 1998, p. 171

⁶⁵"*The Harvard emblem bears the word Veritas. While it has always been accepted that no one can know the truth with certainty (and this is supposed to distinguish modern science from Western medieval philosophy), it has also been permanently accepted that the search for truth constituted the raison d'etre of the university institution and, more broadly, of all intellectual activity.*" Wallerstein, Ed., op. cit., p. 88

⁶⁶Postman N., op.d., p.171

since we do not evaluate a culture by the production of its self-evident products, but by those elements that it presents as important⁶⁷.

Since today's Western civilization can be characterized as that of progress and entertainment, symbolic consumption is inevitable to flourish within it. Through the model of entertainment, the consumption of symbols knows no moral scruples or psychological barriers; °on the contrary, it appears from a guaranteed right of the citizen to the entertainment of 'consuming', to a new way of healing the remaining problems of man! (*Shopping Therapy*). But of course, the doctrine of constant progress also frees the consumer subject from any alternative thought with its own model of logic: "I consume constantly, because I must have at every moment something newer than what I already possess, since the newest is the best!" .

Concluding our reflection on the two New York theorists we have chosen to close this study, we should emphasize that we do not consider Postman's position that *the death of civilization is a certain possibility to be valid*⁶⁸. A position which is in any case extremely contrary to the definition of civilization that we chose in our prologue⁶⁹. Nevertheless, we fully share the cry of anguish raised by this great communicator, shortly before his death: "Everything in the past has prepared us to learn to endure prison, when the doors begin to close around us. We are not indifferent to voices that are drowned out by justice. We take up arms against an ocean of problems relying on the spirit of some enlighteners. But what will happen if there are no voices of anguish to be heard? Who is willing to take up arms against the ocean of entertainment? To whom should we complain, when and in what style, when serious discourse dissolves into laughter? What is the antidote to a civilization that is drained by laughter⁷⁰?

Wallerstein tried to penetrate thoroughly into the core of the capitalist system. Postman analyzed in detail the society of entertainment and spectacle. We, in turn, attempted to describe the culture of symbolic consumption. The remarkable thing is that, in the historical moment we are going through, the objects of all three investigations that we have set out above are found in the same space-time: the modern globalized West. There, where **we consume symbols and have fun with this act, in exactly the same way that we breathe: non-stop, mainly without consciousness and without any other choice regarding our social survival.**

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⁶⁷Postman N., op.d., p.27

⁶⁸Postman N., op.d., p.170

⁶⁹see Chapter 2, p.8

⁷⁰Postman N., op.d., p. 170

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