

Homo Consumens

Consumer society is a result of civilizational and cultural development in the era of democracy and free market economy. It is based on a functional model of social structures and individual engagement of identity around goods and services. Consumerism, as the dominant ideology of post-modernism, has replaced great novels with market mechanisms. It has oriented all human activity on values providing easy satisfaction, seeming freedom and social prestige, at the same time minimizing the decision making process. On the other hand, consumerism integrates and stabilizes social structures, aids communication (Mary Douglas), helps define social roles (Erving Goffman), supports stratification (Stanisław Ossowski), creates new meanings and negotiates norms (Grant McCracken), paves the way for cognitive activity and defines points of reference for inquiry (Jean Baudrillard), neutralizes individual and social fears (Erich Fromm), socializes (Pierre Bourdieu), defines identity (Jean Baudrillard, Marek Krajewski, Zygmunt Bauman, Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens) and creates new forms for holding power.

Macrosocial determinants of consumerism fit its adaptation on an individual level. Firstly, as a lifestyle it favours natural human tendency to aim for convenience and welfare instead of effort and confrontation. Secondly, man, having limited possibilities to evaluate information, becomes all the more sceptical in view of media broadcasts and their credibility, or he becomes passive, or *cognitively safe*. Thirdly, post-modernism, and with it – consumerism, make available, entirely new and unknown before self-realization possibilities unrelated to professional activity. One such possibility is the organization of free time. People, all the more so, more rarely go on holiday, are impatient to return to work but are less disciplined in terms of spending their money. Fourthly, consumerism, as an ideology of feeling unsatisfied, fits man's natural need for aspiration. Citing Robert Merton's terminology, Małgorzata Bogunia-Borowska states¹: "People, in order to obtain a satisfactory level of consumption choose one of three options: conformism (consumption similar to others in their social class), innovation (looking for new ways and methods for satisfying one's consumption needs, originality and innovation), or ritualism (consumption on a level that one can afford, limited aspirations and attempts to increase it). Some people reject consumption; their goal is either to withdraw (consumption asceticism) or rebel (anti-consumerism)".

Consumerism is a global trend characteristic of which is an *escalation of consumer needs*. Man, entangled in market mechanisms is constantly subjected to advanced marketing tricks with a goal to increase consumption or to create a new goal in consumer aspirations. Resulting, transmission dynamics and acquisition of market values become dominant and marginalize other norms and values. Family, in this context, is especially important as it is an environment of initial socialisation. The effort that parents make in upbringing based on traditional values becomes re-oriented on effectiveness, not necessarily the goal of parenting but a side effect of parents' activity, dominant in inter generation relations. In consequence, people, from the very beginning, are dominated by consumer behaviour which becomes the basic mechanism of self-definition². Initially

¹ M. Bogunia-Borowska, M. Śleboda, *Globalizacja i konsumpcja. Dwa dylematy współczesności*, Kraków 2003, p. 301.

² Cf. M.F. Rogers, *Barbie jako ikona kultury*, Warszawa 2003.

obtained habits, according to Pierre Bourdieu, determine people's activity in social relations later on. If material satisfaction is a predominant goal, it results in asocial behaviour – egotism – erroneously understood as meeting one's goals and named individualism but, in reality, meaning a withdrawal from any forms of group life in favour of individual privacy.

In consumer societies, an overriding factor delineating one's place within the structure is involvement. It is a predominant consumer behaviour which eliminates the feeling of loss as a result of reflection on the moral aspects of life. The consumer is fully engaged in his activities, he is in a permanent state of making choices, he does not have the time nor the motivation to review his hierarchy of values. His fundamental goal is consumption, without looking back on factors that do not directly influence it.

In post-modern pluralism, each and every dominating tendency quickly gains its alternative form. Hence, developed were initiatives which, in Merton's terminology, can be considered alternative to expanding consumerism. They are based on community values and human solidarity. One such initiative is the volunteering movement. It aims to help, free of charge, those that need it. Volunteering has become an antidote for those who do not identify themselves with consumption ideology.

One new form of creating individual identity, based on consumerism values, is metrosexuality. Mark Simpson³, the author of the term, used it in order to describe masculinity created by media for market needs. According to him, a metrosexual man is, on the one hand, the result of swift marketing manipulation and, on the other, an ideal consumer for whom the market and the media are a natural environment necessary in the process of self realization as tools for transmission of consumer trends and a sphere for the creation of new meanings and ideals.

In order to analyse metrosexuality from the consumerism and marketing perspective, a Marks classification could be used, later modified by Bogunia-Borowska based on post-modern socio-cultural determinants. The three categories are reification, fetishization and alienation.

From the Marxist perspective, society is, “an internally intertwined entity where all relationships exist simultaneously and mutually support each other [...] are all part of one body [...] with different spheres of human activity (creativity, ‘exchange and consumption’, ‘social system’, politics, social consciousness, etc.), they can be looked at as a whole or independently of each other, or tied by invisible spirit, ideas, consciousness”⁴. *Exchange and consumption* are based on three premises – man feeling like an object, fetishization of goods and alienation of worker in the production process.

Marx, in his analysis of early capitalism and its place in the production process, noticed a paradox, “with increasing value of goods in the world, there is an inversely proportional depreciation of the human world, in consequence it leads to loss of article and becoming its slave” (Bogunia-Borowska, Śleboda⁵). Marx describes alienation and in consequence, reification as characteristic of capitalist relationships. Changes on the structural level influence the quality of interpersonal relationships and the way man perceives his own self.

Marx devoted a lot of attention to goods fetishization. In his analysis of product, he created an important classification. In its initial meaning a product was the effect of creative activity but as a *good* it became something entirely different, “it is no longer a regular product but becomes an extraordinary object, but not as a result of its useful

³ M. Simpson, *Here Come the Mirror Man*, “The Independent” 1994, nr 15/11.

⁴ J. Szacki, *Historia myśli socjologicznej*, Warszawa, 2002, p. 219.

⁵ M. Bogunia-Borowska, M. Śleboda, *Globalizacja i konsumpcja...*, p. 181.

value”⁶. The non-product value of a good, according to Marx, became its fundamental one in social sphere. This product phenomenon, first pointed out by Marx, gained many analysts such as Jean Baudrillard⁷ and Zygmunt Bauman⁸.

Reification

Reification, as an analytical concept, regardless its initial historical context, can successfully be used in evaluation of the modern world. It is macro structural phenomenon existing in social, economic and political spheres, based on limiting the perspective of perceiving man solely in terms of his productivity and effectiveness on the market. Man, feeling like a object, losses his subjectivity and becomes conformist, meaning unconditional acceptance of consumption standards.

New class of slackers

In 1934 published was for the first time Thorstein Veblen’s *Theory of slacker class* as an analysis of early capitalist society. Veblen, in his work, in order to discuss the dominant in American culture *ostentatious consumption* and *slacking for show* cited anthropologic studies’ research on primitive cultures. Based on these, he distinguished two classes – *working and slacking*, identifying the first with women and the second – with men. According to Veblen, in traditional cultures women’s tasks included those, in more developed societies, named productive while men’s activity was limited to those later defined as slacking. Veblen’s aim was not to focus on the differences between the sexes but it was a natural consequence of task division in primitive cultures.

With evolution of social forms, the division noticed by Veblen became all the more apparent. A sedentary lifestyle, technological progress and more free time resulted in man accumulating goods and sensations. This resulted in new forms of competition, earlier present only in hunting and leadership. With time, owning things has become a dominating element of building individual status⁹.

Veblen’s *slacker class* theory became the background for his criticism of American society at the turn of the XIX and XX century, with key phrases - *ostentatious slacking (for show)* and *ostentatious consumption*. Ostentatious slacking meant, according to Veblen, inactivity or idleness equivalent to not doing any kind of productive work combined with knowing the rules of etiquette as the most effective way of manifesting social status, measured by the amount of time spent on doing nothing. Veblen states, “the goal of consumption is not just practical needs or looking for convenience. It is a prestige game. Consumption of better or higher quality products equals wealth, is honourable, while inability to consume higher quality goods in quantity desired leads man to feel inferior and discredits him”¹⁰.

Satisfaction from owning goods, according to Veblen, is conditioned by others’ reactions. “In order to gain and keep people’s respect, it is not enough to be wealthy or powerful. One must show off his wealth and power since prestige is gained by showing it. This way we convince others of our importance and we want to keep them under this impression [...] this is equally imperative to our own self evaluation and a condition for personal satisfaction”¹¹. In addition, key is consumer competence, or knowledge of

⁶ Ibidem, p. 182.

⁷ J. Baudrillard, *Procesja symulaków*, [in:] *Postmodernizm. Antologia przekładów*, ed. R. Nycz, Kraków 1997.

⁸ Z. Bauman, *Ciało i przemoc w obliczu ponowoczesności*, Toruń 1995, idem, *Globalizacja. I co z tego dla ludzi wynika*, Warszawa 2000; idem, *Ponowoczesność jako źródło cierpień*, Warszawa 2000.

⁹ T. Veblen, *Teoria klasy próżniaczej*, Warszawa 1971.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 68.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 67.

specific social codes which enable us to manifest our belonging to a certain class, to express an ideology in accordance with a chosen lifestyle and one's identity.

Ostentatious slacking, paradoxically, requires extensive means and energy all to create the impression of casual and carefree manner. Verblen writes¹², "as a result of this requirement to consume goods for show, the mechanism of home life has become complicated and difficult to upkeep. In order to maintain life at a certain level; place of living, furniture, numerous antiques, clothes, dining, etc., the consumers of all these goods cannot do without help." In this situation, created is a *secondary slacker class* which aids the primary slacker class in maintaining this type of consumption life style. Various types and levels of housekeeping maintenance do not carry out any type of productive activity but devote all their time and effort to maintain the proper impression.

Post-modern culture, within this context, is the most highly organized form of ostentatious consumption. Specific use of goods and services determines one's belonging to a certain class, delineates borders between us and them. Although defining social status based on a particular good is not possible on a scale such as in Verblen's times, still there are certain trademarks and logos considered exclusive.

Metrosexuality, so visibly advertised lately, is part of consumerism ideology with its ostentation and goods exposition. Metrosexuality is about exposing one's body and generally keeping it eternally young and relaxed. In this context, proper seems what Bauman said, "today the human body is predominantly an organ of consumption, the measure of its state is its ability to intake and assimilate all that the consumer society has to offer". This constant disposition, the metrosexual way of looking at the body, is directly tied to the necessity of creating the impression of slacking and consuming as discussed by Verblen.

Covert consumption

Erving Goffman's¹³ drama theory is based on an analogy of a drama scene and social life. Its main assumption is that people are *social actors* who play their *roles* in order to create a desired effect. Man, in his life, creates many roles engaging various predispositions and skills. Social role, as Goffman understands it, is complex, comprised of many elements which correlate with personality and the actor's engagement.

Referring to Verblen's theory, Goffman describes the phenomenon of *covert consumption*. In his theory, it is an opposite trend to that of Verblen's *ostentatious consumption*. It is the social actors' reaction to consumer conformism. Man, subjected to norms within public sphere, refuses to conform in his private life. While *ostentatious consumption* requires 'an audience', *covert consumption* takes place in the privacy of one's home.

Goffman, in his deliberations, strongly accepts individual motivation to create and play out certain roles. It could be, for example, the need to create a good impression of oneself in the eyes of others. Public acting out of roles is often dictated by culture pressures and not by one's individual needs.

The phenomenon of covert consumption is mentioned in Verblen's works as well. In his assessment of the slacker class he distinguishes a clear division between the public and the private sphere. He writes, "most people's home lives are rather modest in comparison to the splendour of their public lives in the eyes of others."¹⁴ Using Goffman's terminology, *consumption in the privacy of one's home* is the backstage of public life which requires numerous changes of '*props*' and *behaviour repertoire*.

¹² Ibidem, p. 61.

¹³ E. Goffman, *Człowiek w teatrze życia codziennego*, Warszawa 1981.

¹⁴ T. Veblen, *Teoria klasy...*, p. 102.

For Goffman, it was clear that man's public life is very engaging and unrewarding, being delineated by firm regulations while in the home one can focus on doing what he really needs to. The essence of ostentatious consumption is in following the rules and using reaction models adequate to situation and the desired effect. The process of acquiring models is consumerism's greatest taboo. The elevation that one strives for as a result of public consumption takes place only when the audience is convinced that this consumption is natural or inborn, if one's effort is visible, the effect is spoiled.

Consumer's *habitus*

For Pierre Bourdieu, man is an element of social structure. In comparison to Bourdieu, Goffman's social acting is at the opposite end of the continuum of human nature assessment.

Bourdieu is convinced of the necessity of man's positioning within social structure. Human thoughts and all his choices are determined by possibilities available within culture. This sphere of available but, what is imperative, non-conscious choices in which man functions is his *habitus*. Within his *habitus* man is, on the one hand, predictable and, on the other, limited.

Habitus is a structured sphere, with precisely delineated borders for available choices. It enables us to function safely and effectively, "if a particular repertoire is known and understood by every member of a given class, it is highly probable to predict behaviour, thought patterns, reactions, etc., and this gives people a feeling of familiarity. Man, in his daily choices and actions has the possibility to present himself to others and to specify his place in the world"¹⁵. By limiting spontaneity of choice, we obtain a feeling of safety.

Behaviour within *habitus* is subconscious. It is not ostentatious, as Verblen wrote, and is not acted out, as Goffman stated. In social practice, behaviour takes the form of gestures, signs, mimics, habits, etc., "habitus, as a structured sphere, engages into practice and thinking practical patterns learned by the body during the historical process of socialisation [...], social structures that are a result of historic actions of entire generations"¹⁶. *Habitus* patterns are repeated automatically but they are not inborn impulses. *Habitus*, according to Bourdieu, is not an element of human nature but is a complex system, established in culture, of reactions to certain situations and behaviours. Hence, this social order is based on patterns established by individual social practices. Each individual *habitus* realization has an impact on social structure.

In social situations, *habitus* patterns support intentional behaviour if it is learned or acquired through imitation. This type of aspiration behaviour over competences is particularly frequent in consumerism. The least bit of arrogance or consumer inadequacy results in spoiling of the created image. Consumerism as an ideology based on image and impression includes stiff borderlines between the elite and the masses; between those who have created an impeccable image and are destined to serve as an ideal to follow and those who will always aspire to reach what is inaccessible to them.

Choices that people make within *habitus* are, according to Bourdieu, their subjective tastes, acquired in everyday life. The character and quality of these practices are directly influenced by social structure. Taste is a tool which enables us to specify, based on the choices we make, established class divisions. Life styles are determined by social class which subconsciously recreate *habitus*, sustaining the existing divisions.

Pattern internalisation within *habitus* is rather permanent as it takes place during the socialisation process within basic reference groups, "without ingrained *habitus* an

¹⁵ M. Bogunia-Borowska, M. Śleboda, *Globalizacja i konsumpcja...*, p. 210.

¹⁶ P. Bourdieu, J.D. Loic Wacquant, *Zaproszenie do socjologii refleksyjnej*, Warszawa 2001, p. 127.

individual may feel lost and insecure as he lacks basic instruction patterns which enable him in to take action in particular situations”¹⁷. Hence, habitus modification results in loss of identity. Man feels uncomfortable outside his primordial context. These types of actions require a redefinition of not only all known thought patterns but also behaviour similar to impulses.

In his analysis of consumer society, Bourdieu also focused on the issue of capital. The quality of people’s social lives is determined by symbolic capital which is comprised or material, social and cultural capital. Man, in order to obtain a satisfactory social position, can use any and all of the three. Material capital is understood as substantial things that one owns, consumer goods, real estate, financial reserves. Social capital are contacts that one possesses, people he knows and can use to aid him if necessary. Finally, cultural capital is knowledge and competences which enable man to take part in cultural events. The third type of capital is directly tied to habitus realization, which is form for content for the possessed cultural resources.

Both, Goffman’s drama theory and Bourdieu’s habitus reflect the dynamics of post-modern consumerism. Social sphere is the stage with an ongoing play where actors act their roles perfectly to make the desired impression. For Goffman it was clear that for modern man public life has become his most engaging activity. Man as an actor in the role of the consumer is always only a step away from obsession about the created by him images. Post-modern culture, on the consumption level, is all about the verification of market competences clearly delineated in order to separate elitist behaviour from that of the masses. This division is sustained by those who within habitus are in superior positions and also by those who have surpassed its limitations and have chosen the splendour life instead of living in harmony with themselves.

Metrosexuality as a life style in the post most modern world fits in with both drama and habitus theories. If a man declares metrosexuality as a dominant feature of his identity he will engage nearly all his activity on creating an image of himself in accordance with metrosexuality ideals. A metrosexual man exists predominantly within the public sphere, through it he creates himself, in it he is identified and he considers it his natural habitat. Metrosexuality is inexorably tied to intimacy deficit and Goffman’s covert consumerism is rejected as a symbol of cracking of ideal consumer’s role. A metrosexual man will not leave the stage with his new identity until he needs to play a new one – that of man in crisis¹⁸.

Another aspect of metrosexuality, as defined by Goffman, is defining one’s lifestyle through things we own. Metrosexual identity is predominantly based on fetishes – objects which, within specific context, have gained meaning. Masculinity defined this way is, for example, owning a particular car (best if it is a *Bugatti* or *Porsche*), designer suits (preferably *Armani*), accessories by *Abercrombie & Finch* just like those that David Beckham, Brad Pitt or Lenny Kravitz wear, underwear by *Calvin Klein* and a partner celebrity. This kind of flawless package is a perfect project of the *New Man* who has no difficulty in acting out his role that of being a member of metrosexual avant-garde. In this sense, habitus, as defined by Bourdieu, and using feminist terminology, is a type of glass ceiling. Habitus determination begins by outlining the horizon of choices which then limits aspirations and revises metrosexual adequacy. The level of symbolic capital which a

¹⁷ M. Bogunia-Borowska, M. Śleboda, *Globalizacja i konsumpcja...*, p. 214–215.

¹⁸ Cf. P. Biddulph, *Męskość*, Poznań 2004; Z. Bly, *Żelazny Jan. Rzecz o mężczyznach*, Poznań 2004; P. Fanning, M. McKay, *Być mężczyzną we współczesnym zwariowanym świecie*, Gdańsk 2003.

man possesses determines his status in a permanent way so that the realization of social ambitions becomes a tiresome project lasting long years.

Fetishization of sexuality

Fetishization, or conferring upon objects specific meaning, has been ever present in our culture. Referring to evolutionism (the works of John Lubbock among others), fetishism can be considered one stage in the development of sacred culture.

Post modern fetishization is tied to the expansion of consumerism, of which a constitutive characteristic is the creation of new senses in marketing activity. Referring to reification, fetishization seems to be its inevitable consequence.

Hyperreal consumption sphere

It was Jean Baudrillard who developed the Marxist product fetishization within the context of post-modernism. He focused on the dynamics of the *subject – object* relation. In his assessment, consumer society has drastically redefined this relation. As a result objects have come in to play the dominant role, they started to live their own lives and, as Marx noted, are expanding against human autonomy, overtaking more and more spheres in people's lives. Man, convinced of his autonomy, enters into an innocent and pleasant game with the world of objects. In reality, this illusion reinforces his passiveness against the expansion of meanings and allows for an even more effective manipulation.

In Baudrillard's assessment of this relation, object activity has resulted in the degradation of human subjectivity and growing reification. Man, the consumer, is seduced by fetishes, and has become limited to passive reading of meanings and conventional reactions, "it is objects which choose their customers, they look for them, they identify their clients, differentiating one from another, the potential buyer does not have to do anything [...] as in their strategy objects always offer an attractive price – an extraordinary and one and only opportunity to buy"¹⁹.

In defining consumer culture Baudrillard referred to Saussure's structuralism developed based on Barthes' sign theory. Analysing language structures, Baudrillard pointed to the analogy between the language plain and the phenomenon of consumption. According to him, consumption is a sphere where mutual correlations take place between objects and their meanings. It is structurally identical to language in which there are correlations between signs and meanings. Individual acts of consumerism can be treated analogously to what in linguistics is called individual speech realizations (*parole*).

This new understanding of consumerism dominated Baudrillard's theory. According to him psychological and economic interpretations miss the essence of the phenomenon since consumption is not a natural human need. In capitalist society, consumer needs are a social creation. "Modern man is forced to live in a constant state of deprivation. [...] There is no state of satisfaction, the goal is to continue consumption and not to own objects or be satisfied. A state of satiation is not possible to achieve, when we satisfy some needs, immediately there are new ones. There is no such thing as a happy and satisfied consumer"²⁰. This constant deprivation is because in modern consumption culture products are inferior to meanings. Man is immersed in meanings chaos which he increasingly cannot control.

In Baudrillard's assessment, post modern reality has become dominated by illusions and simulations. What is more, this tendency has led to a *simulacrum*, an unreal world, indifferent to imagination and any differentiation between what is real and what is imagined. The reality is constructed based on relations between the meaning and its

¹⁹ K. Wilkoszewska, *Wariacje na postmodernizm*, Kraków 2000, p. 78.

²⁰ From M. Bogunia-Borowska, M. Śleboda, *Globalizacja i konsumpcja...*, p. 225.

reference. “*simulacrum* originates from the equivalence rule, from radical negation of symbol as a value, originates from symbol regaining all rights after the death of all reference”²¹. The capitalist system favours the development of simulacrum, establishing conditions for ‘marketing’ of everything. Every dimension of reality, not excluding values, can become the object of consumerism. Resulting, we are dealing with meanings chaos which leads to an inflation of senses.

Man’s condition in post modern reality is predominantly determined by the expansion of consumer ideology. According to Baudrillard, the market is a sphere of humans’ greatest activity but it is not activity stemming from autonomy or independent decision making. Human activity as the consumer is a result of structurally conditioned and created by the market needs.

Transmission of meanings

Reification, according to McCracken, is attributing to people meanings previously ascribed to products. This process, also known as the transfer of meanings, takes place between culture, product and consumer. This transfer takes place via specific channels such as fashion or consumption rituals and, in particular, order. It is the world of culture that is the source of meanings creation. It is here where created are new senses which are then transferred to the sphere of consumer goods and finally – the individual recipient.

Barthes was the first to write about this mechanism in his theory of semantisation of uses. He discussed the process of attributing additional, non-use, meanings to products and transferring them over to the consumer in the social act of consumption.

In McCracken’s concept, the most important element of the triad is culture as the reservoir of meanings. The market uses it, mainly through marketing campaigns in order to reach the consumer who is passive in this process and whose only role is to react.

Bogunia-Borowska’s criticism of McCracken’s theory seems to point out its key shortcomings. She points out the limitations resulting from encompassing the transfer of meanings as a one way process, “I do not believe that the only way to describe the ongoing process is from culture via product to the consumer, as McCracken proposed. It seems right to also analyse a reverse relation – from the consumer through product to culture”²². Secondly, the role of consumer rituals cannot be boiled down to the function of transmission of culture content, she writes²³, “marketing is the means but also the background where and thanks to which there are artificially created meanings in consumer societies [...] There is also a risk that values [...] will become deformed and used by marketing in the wrong way”. Limiting the role of the market to an instrumental function is an illusion similar to the one in which a consumer autonomously makes his choices. Thirdly, there is also a criticism of the role of the consumer in the process of meanings transmission. Minimalisation of product senses creation in the last stage becomes replaced by man absolute passiveness. Borowska writes²⁴, “this is due to McCracken’s arbitrarily chosen way of transferring meaning. The consumer can be active and he does have the ability to rate products. [...] He does not have to perceive meanings which are transferred without prior negotiation. Recipient has the opportunity to change or reject them when he rejects to buy a product”.

Despite the fact that the consumer can be active in his choice of product, with its meaning, acceptance or rejection, the market dynamics do not give him time for

²¹ J. Baudrillard, *Procesja symulaków...*, p. 181.

²² M. Bogunia-Borowska, M. Śleboda, *Globalizacja i konsumpcja...*, p. 239.

²³ Ibidem, p. 239–240.

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 241.

consideration. A priority of consumerism is effectiveness, that is why there are marketing tricks not only to convince the customer to buy but to also buy within the shortest time.

Body impression

For Bauman, the post modern culture is a theatre of consumption where everyone is to play the role of *consumer the collector of sensations*. He writes, “the interest that object arouse, their ability to catch people’s attention and create excitement proves that objects are matched to experiences that people look for or there is a search for experiences that people seek which is then matched to necessary objects [...], within social sphere people continually pursuit new experiences and sensations, more and more intensive than the previous”²⁵:

Consumerism, according to Bauman, is the most visible form of post modern man’s struggle for coherent identity²⁶. This man, *collector of sensations*, is in a permanent state of making choices from which he cannot free himself. His only autonomous sphere is the act of making a decision from among the choices offered by the market. Anthony Giddens, similarly describes man’s role in the post modern world, being limited to that of choosing from what is proposed to him, “ man’s routine actions can be reflected upon and can change as a result of change of individual identity. These are small, everyday decisions such as what to wear, what to eat, how to behave, who to meet with. All these types of choices [...] are not only decisions about what to do but who to be”²⁷.

Post modern fetishization is not limited to Marxist attribution of meaning to individual objects due to which they gain value. In the modern world, it is also sets, projects, dimensions and styles that undergo fetishization. One product itself means little, it is fetishized when it gains value as a good, within concrete context, “the game in which consumers take part is not just about the craving to buy and own, or to amass goods in a material sense [...] it is about experiencing new, unknown before, sensations”²⁸. Man does not collect objects but sensations, hence the vicious circle of consumer unending satisfaction. The fulfilment one feels is short and fleeting that is why, with time, man becomes permanently focused on desiring new potential sensations. The joy one gets from consumption is replaced by the desire to possess new experiences. Consumer ideology, initiated and sustained by marketing activity puts man in the constant state of choosing. As Bauman puts it, “consumer cannot stay in place, man by nature is constantly on the move and he must remain this way”²⁹.

According to Bauman, characteristic to post modern world is the fetishization of sexuality. “The post modern body is the predominant recipient of sensations. It consumes and digests them. It is pleasure tool as it is naturally built to react to stimuli. If it can fulfil those functions, it is considered fit. If it cannot, the opposite is true. It can be called apathy, indifference to life, discouragement, lack of desires, sluggishness in reaction to stimuli or lack of reaction to temptation. Lower fitness means lower than average ability to absorb new experiences and sensations. If we keep the body fit, it means excitement at the sight of temptation and joy from its consumption. [...] A fit body reacts, is focused and absorbs all types of pleasures – sexual, culinary, visual and auditory but most of all it obtains gratification from the body absorbing the above pleasures. It is not just about what

²⁵ Z. Bauman, *Ciało i przemoc...*, p. 104.

²⁶ Cf. A. Giddens, *Nowoczesność i tożsamość. „Ja” i społeczeństwo w epoce późnej nowoczesności*, Warszawa 2001.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 113.

²⁸ Z. Bauman, *Globalizacja. I co z tego...*, p. 99.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 101.

feats the body is capable of but what sensations it experiences during the process. These sensations should be ‘exciting’, ‘charming’, ‘delightful’ and ‘ecstatic’³⁰.

This new vision of body as a product which accumulates meanings to a degree unknown before is, according to Bauman, the result of redefined consumerism which each dimension of human existence evaluates via the prism of market values. In this context, the metrosexual man is, according to Simpson, the *ideal consumer*³¹. Subordinating the entire identity project to the body and its care is the answer to marketing strategies of creating a new segment of consumers. A consequence of multiplication of meanings resulting from these strategies is semiotic chaos and general lack of concentration and focus. The last point of reference that is somewhat stable is the body. That it why, as Bauman noticed³², the body has become the fetish of all fetishes in post modern culture dominated by consumerism.

Ownership *modus*

The last of basic tendencies which, according to Marx, proved human degradation within the capitalist system, was alienation. Isaiah Berlin³³ in his commentary of Marxist anthropology writes, “a typical symptom of alienation is the attribution of authority to an impersonal power such as the law of supply and demand which capitalism bases on, or imaginary powers – gods, churches, kings, priests or other masked forms of exploitation due to which people separate themselves from a ‘natural’ way of life.”

Marx’s concept of alienation was further studied by Erich Fromm³⁴. His assessment was more complete, it regarded the man’s physical and spiritual condition in modern capitalism. According to Fromm³⁵, modern man yielded to consumerism. His engagement and activity have become limited to consumer goods at the cost of other spheres of life in which he has become passive and apathetic. The market, as a macrostructure has become oriented on effectiveness and this resulted in the dehumanisation of man and relationships between people.

In culture, the human condition is measured based on the continuum of *being and owning*. Fromm calls it a domination of the *being modus* over the *ownership modus*. In his assessment, the modern culture has become dominated by the *ownership modus*. He writes³⁶, “in a world where the dominant existential trait is ownership, the motto is: ‘I am what I own’. It is manifested by hyper consumerism which, on the individual level, takes the form of an egotistic drive to possess, purchase and own. *Homo consumens*, as he calls modern man, consumes everything – sexuality, material goods and emotions. In his *Psychoanalytic Review*³⁷, he states, “The entire world in its wealth has become transformed into a consumer good. In the act of consumption the man is passive [...] Objects of consumption [...] are not seen as something that man has created but as things that are to be owned and used. Consumption is an alienated form of maintaining contact with the world which is no longer of interest or worry to man but the goal of his greed”. For Fromm, consumerism is a synonym for man’s superficiality, subjectivity and passiveness. The individual possessed by the *ownership modus* treats life as a possessing process, ownership becomes the central focus of his activity. What is more, uncritically he

³⁰ Ibidem, *Ciało i przemoc...*, p. 90–91.

³¹ M. Simpson, *Here Come...*

³² Z. Bauman, *Ciało i przemoc...*

³³ I. Berlin, *Karol Markp. Jego życie i środowisko*, Warszawa 1999, p. 119.

³⁴ E. Fromm, *Ucieczka od wolności*, Warszawa 2000; tenże, *O sztuce istnienia*, Poznań 2001.

³⁵ Idem, *O sztuce...*

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 130.

³⁷ E. Fromm, *Rewizja psychoanalizy*, Warszawa–Wrocław 1998, p. 80.

takes the competition stance which seems to be a natural state for realizing one's ambitions.

In his *Art of Existence*, Fromm delineated the basic differences between the *being modus* and the *ownership modus*. Being, in his understanding, is inseparable from living authentic experiences, the passion of life, freedom despite limitations and reflectiveness. Man who *is*, is creative in viewing himself. He sees his life as made for development. The *being modus*, in contrast to the *ownership modus* is synchronic, it is oriented on *here and now* while the other one is a constant revision of the past and worries about the future, man in the *ownership modus* is a slave of time.

Fromm states that, firstly, the popularization of the consumer life style was determined by the macroeconomic system based on the rule of maximizing profit. Secondly, consumption for modern man is the most accessible form of manifesting his independence and autonomy of decision making. The fact that this is an illusion, as Baudrillard noticed, is irrelevant since what is really imperative to man is the feeling of being in control of his own life. Each consumer decision is an act of self elevation. Man is convinced of his own importance as a consumer especially when he is underestimated in other social roles, the role of the consumer can compensate failures and deficits on other levels. Moreover, purchasing is an activity which is carried out instantly, the impulse is fulfilled as soon as it is created and this gives people a feeling of power, consumption is a type of compensation or minimization of fears. In modern culture it is a defence mechanism. Fromm refers to psychoanalytic theories according to which consumption is not just a source of pleasure but also a strategy for avoiding distress. He who is active in consumption reduces his fear of loneliness. As a consumer, he feels a bond with other consumers who buy the same products, at the same prices and in the same shops. Moreover, as mentioned above, man who is fulfilled as a consumer ignores frustrations in other areas of his activity.

Referring to the differentiation between the *being modus* and the *ownership modus*, Fromm distinguishes two types of needs which steer man's behaviours – constructive and destructive. The first favours self realisation and increases the feeling of self worth, it enables critical consumption. The other orients man on himself, making him the only centre field for all decisions. "Consumption should be a process automatically controlled. Both production and advertising should serve man's goals and aspirations, they should simulate man's development of aesthetic and social needs, not his destructive ones"³⁸.

Fromm does not criticise the existence of consumption as is. He attempts to assess it as a type culture formation which is neither good or bad but most of all inevitable. If modern man must be a consumer as well, he should strive for all his behaviour to be affirmative in this area. Fromm states that the most positive aspect of consumerism is popularisation of meanings which creates new levels of interpersonal communication.

The ontological relation between man and objects which, according to Baudrillard seduce people, in Fromm's analysis is portrayed as a permanent struggle for subjectivity, which, in the consumer society, is constantly questioned. Fromm's man is all the more so assessed in categories characteristic to objects – through his market value. His beliefs and predispositions become elastic, depending on the situation and requirements that the market creates. In *ownership* culture, man has exchanged the ego which integrates personality to reflected ego in which the only form of self assessment is shaped by interpretation of others. Presently, the determining structure of self cognition is how we are seen and judged by others. Paradoxically, a pluralization of social life has strengthened the conformism mechanism for which the determining function seems priceless to the elementary feeling of safety. Expectations and regulations of social status

³⁸ J. Koziolowski, *Człowiek wielowymiarowy*, Warszawa 1998, p. 172.

are so precise that the individual must almost perfectly fit into them. Therefore, man, as a product should *be how other wish to see him*.

Fromm's reflections on the human condition in modern culture were in attempt to find out how he creates his identity. In the 1980s, he wrote about an identity crisis as a result of *overabundance*. The expectations that man faces result in him being without any kinds of roots (geographic, axio-normative, emotional) which should aid him in determining his individual identity. Man, without a stable frame of reference, behaves like a schizophrenic³⁹ lacking a coherent image of himself and the surrounding world. The only thing that he cares about is for his reactions to be adequate and meeting the expectations of others. Fromm's final conclusions are pessimistic. The consumer/collector of sensations game is played at the highest stakes – for genuine experiencing of one's own humanity.

In the post-modern world man “is convinced that he is the source of all answers and questions, that he himself chooses his frame of reference [...], that he does not need any culture world, or that culture world boils down to his opinions, behaviour and definitions [...] he has given into the temptation to live freely, with pure form without content”⁴⁰. Without having an outside, independent from one's decisions point of reference, man has become *the slave of the reflected ego* addicted to feeling approved by others and the internal need to confirm his status. Modern man's consumer identity⁴¹ is “an illusion since he thinks he knows what he wants but in reality he only wants what others expect”⁴². This type of pseudo identity as a permanent answer to others' expectations lead to “an individual feeling safe only if others approve of his behaviour and actions”⁴³.

Post modern identity is based on the obligation to own generally accepted goods and to achieve an artificially constructed life style, consumerism has replaced a proper development of identity. Instead of essence, there is simulation. Bauman⁴⁴ was correct in his assessment of the nature of these transformations. “The individual need for personal autonomy, self identity, authentic life and individual perfection was replaced by the need to own and consume goods offered by the market. This transformation regards the seeming value of goods and not their factual usefulness values. In reality, this transformation turns against itself as it only leads to a temporary satisfaction from meeting needs and a more permanent frustration from unfulfilled needs. [...] This disparity between a man's needs and individual wants is a result of market domination. The market thrives on lack of happiness which it generates itself, the evoked fears, anxieties and suffering tied to personal imperfections create consumer behaviour necessary to its further functioning”.

For Giddens, Bauman's simulation is only an introduction to what he calls *marketisation of the identity project*, particularly conditioned by intermediated experience. “The mass media routinely show life style models which should be achieved, which everyone should aspire to lead. The life styles of wealthy people are put on for public show and presented as models to follow. However, a more imperative factor is the effect of media narration. They indirectly suggest concrete life styles in the way they present reality and by coherent narration with which people can identify themselves”⁴⁵. Post

³⁹ Cf. F. Jameson, *Postmodernizm i społeczeństwo konsumpcyjne*, [in:] *Postmodernizm. Antologia...*

⁴⁰ C. Millon-Delsol, *Esej o człowieku późnej nowoczesności*, Kraków 2003, p. 67–73, 93.

⁴¹ Cf. G. Mathews, *Supermarket kultury. Globalna kultura a tożsamość jednostki*, Warszawa 2003.

⁴² E. Fromm, *Ucieczka...*, p. 236–237.

⁴³ A. Giddens, *Nowoczesność i tożsamość...*, p. 261.

⁴⁴ Z. Bauman, *Prawodawcy i tłumacze*, Warszawa 1998, p. 245–246.

⁴⁵ A. Giddens, *Nowoczesność i tożsamość...*, p. 271.

modern culture shapes man in product fashion, orientates him onto the market of goods and services. Man should be able to absorb and react to a whole range of sensations since “lack of consumer adequacy is perceived as a crisis requiring intervention”⁴⁶.

⁴⁶ Z. Bauman, *Ciało i przemoc...*, p. 54–55.