

## Chapitre Deux

### Excess of Anxiety : Hypermodernity and the Ambivalence of Freedom

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In this short contribution on hypermodernity, its excess of anxiety and the ambivalence of freedom I will try to give an introduction to the concept of hypermodernity and to illuminate the human condition attached to it. When asking people in the *Western World* in what sort of time or era we are currently living in, one probably will meet a multitude of answers, such as *modernity*, *postmodernity*, *second modernity*, or maybe *supermodernity*, *hypermodernity* or even *transmodernity*. But what is meant with modernity or by terms that indicate we already might have transgressed it ? The search for clarity is complicated by the fact that depending on different disciplines the term *modernity* might stand for different phenomena, like for instance in the realm of the history of arts or the social sciences. Furthermore, enough times modernity is perceived in normative terms and linked to the notion of progress, indicating a period in human history superior to all hitherto existing ages. Here, however, I will mainly be concerned with the philosophical concept of modernity or hypermodernity, respectively, relating to the work of

Gilles Lipovetsky who is one of the core theorists when it comes to *Hypermodern Times*, that is the name of one of his books, published in 2004 together with Sebastien Charles. But before discussing his ideas on hypermodernity as some sort of new or second modernity, I would like to immerse into the very idea of modernity itself.

## I. MODERNITY AS OPEN HORIZON AND THE DAWNING OF ANXIETY

What is the nature of modernity or our modern age ? Is it the technical assistances we use every day ranging from motorized transport to modern health care systems and modern warfare technology ? Or is it the contemporary working environments ? The diversification of societies in ethnical, religious and cultural terms ? Even though all of this in way or another is interrelated with modernity, it is not yet touching upon the very core of it : the *human condition* affected by these sorts of shifts and radical changes. If there is one concept able to characterize best the modern consciousness it is Peter L. Berger's dictum of modernity as a movement from *fate* to *choice*. Other than their forefathers and foremothers who for maybe hundreds of thousand of years pictured themselves as integrated into a higher cosmic or religious order and derived from it their specific social and moral norms taken for granted, people endowed with this peculiar consciousness of the modern age – generally speaking – no longer feel (exclusively) determined by this sort of former, *natural* stability. Berger explains : "Fate previously determined almost all phases of life, the individual moved from phase to phase according to predetermined patterns, childhood, rites of passage, employment, marriage, child rearing, aging, illness an death."<sup>1</sup> The main reason for this development emerging in the course of early

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1. BERGER, Peter L. / LUCKMANN, Thomas, *Modernity, Pluralism and the Crisis of Meaning. The Orientation of Modern Man*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Foundation Publishers, 1995, p. 44.

modern period – in historical terms – and the enlightenment – in terms of the history of ideas – is the decrease in efficacy of certain paradigmatic notions, first of all the idea of God as an authoritative, guiding and redeeming instance. According to Friedrich Nietzsche, who famously proclaimed the death of this idea, the metaphysical central theme of a *real* world beyond this material, temporal one, has been turned into a “fable” by modern science, positivism and philosophical critique.<sup>2</sup>

Along with the loss of traditional beliefs and authorities new liberties arose – hard-earned by those claiming that in the end it is the individual who is responsible for his or her life, convictions and enjoyments. In that sense the dawn of modernity is often described as a horizon opening up and releasing man into the unknown and unventured. In his *The Gay Science*, for instance, Nietzsche writes about “the horizon of the infinite” : “We have left the land and have embarked. We have burned our bridges behind us – indeed, we have gone farther and destroyed the land behind us. Now, little ship, look out ! Beside you is the ocean : to be sure, it does not always roar, and at times it lies spread out like silk and gold and reveries of graciousness. But hours will come when you will realize that it is infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity. Oh, the poor bird that felt free and now strikes the walls of this cage ! Woe, when you feel homesick for the land as if it had offered more *freedom* – and there is no longer any ‘land.’”<sup>3</sup>

The ambivalence of freedom is already indicated here and later will be famously expressed by Jean-Paul Sartre as man’s condemnation

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2. NIETZSCHE, Friedrich, *Twilight of the Idols*. Hertfordshire : Wordsworth Editions, 2007, p. 22.

3. NIETZSCHE, Friedrich, *The gay science*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 19.

to freedom.<sup>4</sup> When there is no longer any land, that is, stable points of reference and securities descending from restraints – the shunned shore – those modern minds sailing the open sea have to erect islands under their own power. – Something Nietzsche considered some sort of *super-human* task. This ambivalence of freedom in terms of opened horizons and novel opportunities on the one hand side and the burden of freedom on the other is also emphasised by Anthony Giddens who describes modernity as a double-edged phenomenon and who stresses its “polar, paradoxical features.”<sup>5</sup> Likewise Berger who equates modernity with “the loss of the taken-for-granted”<sup>6</sup> and ultimately “homelessness”.<sup>7</sup> The majority of people, so Berger, would feel “insecure and lost in a confusing world full of possibilities and interpretation of which some are linked to alternative ways of life.”<sup>8</sup> Not least because there is no escape from the burden of choice : “[I]t has become impossible to close ones eyes to the fact that a decision that one makes could also have been made differently.”<sup>9</sup> According to him, this sort of modern anxiety was bound to occur in particular in the course of the death of religious meta-narratives that resulted in a serious debilitation of those definitions of reality that were meant to make life endurable. In this regard, the modern condition is the source of a peculiar sort of mental agony.<sup>10</sup>

It is, however, important to notice that this kind of modernity in terms of overcoming premodern societies’ consciousness – I am

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4. SARTRE, Jean-Paul, *Being and Nothingness*. London : Taylor & Francis, 1969, p. 485.

5. GIDDENS, Anthony, *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford : Stanford University Press, 1990, p. 149 ; see also p. 7ff.

6. BERGER, Peter L. / LUCKMANN, Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

7. BERGER, Peter L. / BERGER, Brigitte / KELLNER, Hansfried, *Das Unbehagen in der Modernität*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1987, p. 159.

8. BERGER, Peter L. / LUCKMANN, Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

10. BERGER, Peter L. / BERGER, Brigitte / KELLNER, Hansfried, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

using this terms in a mere descriptive sense – by means of secularization, scientification, the trust in *reason* and *progress* is typical of the European civilization and those territories it's power extended to. The modern human condition therefore is not universal and even today, in the globalized world we live in, remains contested – not least by religious worldviews gaining in strength – and sometimes even is referred to as an exception alienating *the West* from all the rest of humanity. But also within Western societies the premodern condition did not totally vanish and persists in various, in particular rural “enclaves” where traditional lifestyles appear almost unaffected by the burden as well as the opportunities of modernity's open horizon.

## II. HYPERMODERNITY AS OPEN SEA AND THE EXCESS OF ANXIETY

However, according to the French writer and philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky this modernity has been succeeded by a short period of postmodernity followed by another type of modernity he tries to grasp by means of the prefix-*hyper*. This hypermodernity we are living in today, Lipovetsky identifies as a radicalization of modernity, a state where nothing is safe from “the logic of the extreme.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, hypermodern times are characterized by unleashed capitalism (*hypermarkets*), extreme emphasis on the flexible, self-managing, hedonistic individual (*hyperindividualism* or *hypernarcism*) and the guiding principle of technocratic efficiency pushed to extremes. “The first version of modernity”, says Lipovetsky, “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.”<sup>12</sup>

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11. LIPOVETSKY, Gilles, *Hypermodern Times*. Cambridge : Polity Press, 2005, p. 33.

12. *Ibid.*

Also individual behavior, Lipovetsky points out, is “caught up in the machinery of excess.”<sup>13</sup> Hypermodernity according to his diagnosis first of all is an era of anxiety : “The only real question now is that of protection, security and the defense of social benefits, of urgent humanitarian aid and safeguarding the planet. In short, *damage limitation*.”<sup>14</sup> The hypermodern individual illustrated by Lipovetsky is one utterly aware of modernity’s ambivalence of freedom : “Instead of being lightened, our burden has become heavier ; hedonism is on the retreat before our fears, the servitudes of the present seem more significant than the opening up of possibilities.”<sup>15</sup> The future, although in crisis due to the loss of utopias and the dissolution of the “mystique of progress”<sup>16</sup>, lies “at the heart of contemporary anxieties.”<sup>17</sup> This is just one of hypermodernity’s paradoxes Lipovetsky accentuates. Another one for instance would be a renouncement of liberties in regard to relationships. Lipovetsky writes : “Hypermodern society has led to our demand for durability gaining new lease of life as a counterweight to the anxieties brought about by the reign of ephemerality.”<sup>18</sup> In total, his hypermodernity turns out to be “a paradoxical combination of frivolity and anxiety, euphoria and vulnerability, playfulness and dread.”<sup>19</sup>

### **A. Post-postmodernity ?**

Reflecting Lipovetsky’s concept of hypermodern times, several questions come to my mind. The first one concerns the status of hypermodernity vis-à-vis modernity and postmodernity, respecti-

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13. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

vely. Without denying that hypermodernity is a suitable theoretical frame to express certain manners of a radicalization or intensification of modernity, one could, however, remain skeptical towards Lipovetsky's view of postmodernity as a "transitional stage"<sup>20</sup>, a concept that "now seems vaguely old-fashioned [and] [...] has exhausted its capacities to express the world now coming into being."<sup>21</sup>

The term *postmodernism* has most prominently been coined by Jean-François Lyotard who defines the "postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives."<sup>22</sup> Meant by metanarratives are all sorts of overarching interpretations of being and their endowment of life with meaning. "The narrative function", Lyotard writes, "is loosing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal."<sup>23</sup> It is especially the metanarratives of modernity itself that have lost their legitimizing power, such as the idea of rationality, scientific or civilizational progress, universal morals or a universal history of humanity. The reason for this can be found with Giddens in form of the *reflexivity* so peculiar to modernity.<sup>24</sup> That reflexivity did not remain confined to the old meta-narratives, such as the idea of God and divinely justified governance, and questioned their foundations and legitimising functions, but in the course of its evolvment inevitably came to challenge the fundamentals of modernity itself. Once critical reason is let loose its reflexivity even extends to itself and as a result "the reflexivity of modernity actually subverts reason."<sup>25</sup> It is exactly this nexus that makes clear that "the

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20. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

22. LYOTARD, Jean-Francois, *The Postmodern Condition*. Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1984, p. xxiv.

23. *Ibid.*

24. GIDDENS, Anthony, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

seeds of nihilism were there in Enlightenment thought from the beginning.”<sup>26</sup>

What postmodernity finally expresses is not – and this was part of the criticism against Lyotard – a new period of human history superseding modernity;<sup>27</sup> rather it is best understood as a new *perspective* within the realm of the very same modern consciousness. According to this understanding of postmodernity, we are not *post* modernity, but *post* the euphoria or hope this modernity in its early stages has generated with respect to the ability of man to take his fate into his own hands and to bestow meaning upon existence without the reference to metaphysical assumptions and traditional norms and imperatives. The human condition as such in terms of modernity’s open field of vision did not change in course of an alleged transition from modernity to postmodernity. What might have changed is our interpretation of it exactly in the manner Nietzsche has indicated in his description of the modern horizon and its awesome infinity. If the modern condition can be compared with an open horizon, the hypermodern condition is the open sea. This change in perspective is also related to Nietzsche’s description of the full realization of the death of the idea of God which takes place gradually, its full consequences evading the imagination of the multitude. Or in the words of Giddens: “Rather than entering a period of post-modernity, we are moving into one in which the consequences of modernity are becoming more radicalised and universalised than before.”<sup>28</sup> Therefore one could say: Our human condition is still the modern one.

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26. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

27. According to Giddens the inaccurate application of the term postmodernity “results primarily from the sense many of us have of being caught up in a universe of events we do not fully understand, and which seems in large parts outside of our control” (*ibid.*, p. 2f.). The coining of new terms as such, however, was not helpful – not least without a thorough investigation of (the consequences of) modernity.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 31.



But at the same time it is neither the modernity of Voltaire nor of Lenin. We have – generally speaking – lost a great deal of trust in reason and science – not least in course of the tragedies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – and are therefore beyond the early-modern expectations as well as trivializations.

Further, I would not only argue that the postmodern perspective has not been overturned by what Lipovetsky calls hypermodernity but also state that hypermodern times and postmodern consciousness even belong together. Because the anxiety of the hypermodern individual largely stems from the loss of grand narratives, first of all the grand narrative of a happy ending – be it religious in terms of an otherworldly salvation or secular in terms of a man-made earthly paradise gained by means of science and progress. To acknowledge the postmodern elements within hypermodernity would also enable us to explain or understand the crisis of the future Lipovetsky refers to that then would seem less paradoxical indeed.

## **B. Ubiquitous excess ?**

A second question that might be posed regarding Lipovetsky's conception of hypermodernity concerns his comprehensive attribution of excessiveness. For him, hypermodern times feature excesses in nearly every domain of life. As examples he mentions : “the mania of consumption, the practice of drug-taking in athletics, the vogue for extreme sports, the phenomena of serial killers, bulimia and anorexia, obesity, compulsions and addictions.”<sup>29</sup> I am not sure whether this bunch of phenomena is typical of the excess of hypermodernity and I am afraid that this use of the category of excess is rather unapt. Certainly we would find enough excessive behavior in premodern times as well, the excess of corporal punishment for instance or the excess of asceticism. However, I would not advocate abandoning

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29. LIPOVETSKY, Gilles, *op. cit.*, p. 32f.

the category of excess entirely but rather suggest applying it where it covers a precise occurrence and that is, according to my understanding, the peculiar hypermodern anxiety. This excess of anxiety is the fruit, so to speak, of the modern insight that we are called upon to take care for ourselves – since ultimately no fate or divine order is responsible for us.

Lipovetsky exemplifies this sort of excessive anxiety by pointing out the cases of health and education. According to his analysis, we are facing an increasing “medicalization of existence”<sup>30</sup> and a “narcissistic obsession with health and longevity.”<sup>31</sup> He writes : “Medicine is [no] longer content with treating the sick ; it intervenes long before and symptoms appear, informs us about the risks we run, encourages us to go for check-ups, take tests, and change our lifestyles.”<sup>32</sup> Also in the domain of education and career management Lipovetsky identifies the same sort of anxieties when it comes to a more and more precarious future : “These days, young people start to become anxious about their choice of studies and the jobs those studies might lead to at a very early age [...]. Parents too have taken on board the threats linked to hypermodern deregulation [...], hence the rise, in particular, of educational consumerism, private lessens, and non-basic activities outside school.”<sup>33</sup>

Of course one could ask whether an excess of anxiety is truly characteristic for radicalized or advanced modernity. What is, for example, with the anxieties of medieval folks dreading eternal punishment in hell or awaiting apocalypse ? Weren't their endeavors such as buying of indulgences, self-flagellation or undertaking dangerous pilgrimages or crusades – that from today's point of view can hardly be described in terms other than fearful delusion – the result of

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30. *Ibid.*, p. 47

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*, 46.

genuine and *excessive* anxieties ? “Religious beliefs”, Giddens points out, “can be a source of extreme anxiety or despair – so much so that they must be included as one of the main parameters of (experienced) risk and danger in many pre-modern settings.”<sup>34</sup> But there exists one essential difference regarding modern and premodern anxieties. Religious worldviews, irrespective of the anxieties they may fuel or wake, grant that sort of “ontological security”<sup>35</sup> to their followers that finally enables them to handle their anxieties. “They typically inject reliability into the experience of events and situations and form a framework in terms of which these can be explained and responded to.”<sup>36</sup> However excessive premodern anxieties might be – they can not reach up to the excessiveness of modern anxieties since they no longer relate to objects of fear within a stable framework but to the framework itself that now has become unstable, that is dubious.

### C. Tracing the roots of the excess of anxiety

The core question in that regard, as far as my understanding is concerned, is : Where does this anxiety actually originate from and why is there such an intensification of the modern human condition in hypermodern times ? Lipovetsky is not too concerned with that issue, maybe because he assumes the answer to be self-evident. However, I will suggest two main parameters regarding this excess of anxiety. The first one has been already mentioned : the (postmodern) disillusionment pertaining to the grand narrative of a happy ending. When the real world, as Nietzsche put it, that is the nonmaterial, nontemporal world, became a fable, people evermore started to feel at home in the one and only world there is : ours. This type of

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34. GIDDENS, Anthony, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

secularization on an existential level necessarily involves the creation of substitutes in terms of the provision of meaning. But of course, these provisions in the form of this-worldly joys, such as economic development and increasing standards of living, consumption or the fortune of future generations granted by political religions, in the long run could not withstand the gnawing of nihilism – that is, as we have learned from Nietzsche, modernity's central attendant phenomenon. In that sense, hypermodernity's anxiety constitutes a logical outcome of the evolvement of the modern consciousness that ultimately comes to the conclusion : We have everything to lose and have nothing to gain except the pleasure of the very present that is constantly threatened and uncertain.

Referring back to Lipovetsky's example of the increasing medicalization, it becomes quite clear to what extent this tendency is depended upon our rootedness in this world and our increasing readiness to seize all sorts of measures promising to prolong our continuance in it. But, on the other hand side, this existential secularization is no sufficient condition to explain the intensification of the modern human condition in terms of an excess of anxiety. If, as has been pointed out in the beginning, modernity is characterized by a shift of consciousness from fate to choice, the amplification of selection options would be likely to radicalize the (hyper-)modern condition. And that is exactly what is happening in various fields of life – due to technical-scientific progress and also the liberalization and pluralization of societies. The former can be demonstrated on the basis of the medicalization case study. Even if an individual in the 19th century would have been endowed with a consciousness containing the previously mentioned existential secularization, the dimension of his or her anxiety probably would not have reached today's excess, simply because the medical possibilities to prevent diseases and to prolong life were relatively basic whereas the medical progress of our days *forces* the informed individual to care or to

worry about considerably more circumstances. Think, for example, of the vast information spread via media every day regarding the benefit or damaging effects of certain articles of food, nutritional supplements or lifestyle habits. Think of the vast amount of guide-books luring with clues in order to avoid certain diseases by means of self-management in matters of health. If tomatoes reduce the risk of certain types of cancer and if regularly testing might help detecting cancer in a stage still curable that means something *can be done* – done by the autonomous, responsible individual concerned with his or her life-span or life quality. A life span, by the way, that is constantly expanding, and hence converting an *early* death into an ever greater tragedy. The increase of knowledge and technology makes it increasingly difficult for us to *take life as it comes*. Every manifestation of idleness, of carelessness could have fatal consequences and worse – would be self-inflicted for we could have known, we could have acted. This is also emphasized by Niklas Luhmann who observed that thus far as society expects from its members decisions and maneuverability no dangers exist any more that are imputed to them exclusively externally.<sup>37</sup> Because they actually have the choice and can make a difference, the burden of responsibility accompanies their decisions and actions just like their shadow.

A telling example of the dilemmas emerging from this intensified modern condition is the growing medical opportunities when it comes to prenatal diagnostics. If a child is born today with a genetic disease, it is no longer a fateful event since this disease in the majority of the cases could have been detected prior to the delivery – and the latter could have been *avoided*, that is to say the unborn child could have been (legally) aborted. The scientific-medical progress establishes possibilities that can not but make a future

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37. LUHMANN, Niklas, *Beobachtungen der Moderne*. Opladen : Westdeutscher Verlag, 1992, p. 143.

mother anxious : She not only has to decide whether or not she wants to know, that is to carry out the prenatal testing and thereby turn the abstract risk into a certainty (that – to make it worse – is never a true certainty at all) ; she also has to decide about life and death in case the unborn child is likely to suffer from disease or disability. The options of future mothers or parents are further expanded by preimplantation genetics diagnosis that – though contested and statutorily regulated differently in various countries – enables parents or mothers, respectively, to select the embryo *in vitro* before it is implanted into the uterus. This is usually practiced in order to avoid implanting future life with high risk of major disease, but could – and this is the main reason for its objection on behalf of its critics – also be used for further, non-medically indicated selection, such as concerning sex, eye-color and so on. If one's child no longer is the product of fortune – expressed by the notion of storks or God as bringers or originators of children – but the result of one's very own preferences and customized instead, the natural contingency has been exchanged with man-made contingency. The burden of this sort of contingency then finds expression in nothing less than excessive anxiety.

Even if all this anxiety previous to birth is overcome and endured, anxiety persists when it comes to infant development which turns out to be a science of its own : How can the growing evidence that supposedly minor affairs, such as the consumption of certain food or even emotions on part of the mother, can have weighty effects on the development of the child, its brain size and even its character, not make an expectant mother anxious ? For comparison only : Less than hundredfifty years ago an average mother in Western Europe would have attributed every outcome of her childbirth, including death or handicap, most probably to fate or the will of God.

In case of reproduction and motherhood the anxiety originating from the condemnation to choice is increased by the circumstance

according to which women in Western societies due to contraceptives, in particular the pill – another anxiety-boosting epochal shift from fate to choice –, in general have fewer children than their mothers and grandmothers. Hence, parental expectations on the child's development and future career are literally laid onto one pair of shoulders and not two, three, four or more. In families with many children the *failure* of one single child, or maybe even its death or illness, is certainly suffered to the same extent. Nevertheless, the mothers or parents of many children can relocate their hopes and expectations and subsequently also their anxieties to the rest of their progeny. Single-child-families, on the other hand, unavoidably have to impose their anxieties onto the one and only child there is. – A child who is meant to be successful, intelligent, attractive, able to cope with all the demands of modern life, or simply : *perfect*.

A more general parameter likely to intensify the excess of anxiety in hypermodern times is the fact that the accumulation of knowledge does not necessarily correspond to its advanced reliability. The modern loss of the taken for granted also extends to scientific *truth* that is, as far as philosophy of science in recent times came to realize, never certain in the strict sense of the word, but only provisionally confirmed. Giddens writes : “We are abroad in a world which is thoroughly constituted through reflexively applied knowledge, but where at the same time we can never be sure that any given element of that knowledge will not be revised.”<sup>38</sup> With this in mind, he asks : “How can one manage to eat ‘healthily’, for example, when all kinds of food are said to have toxic qualities of one sort or another and when what is held to be ‘good for you’ by nutritional experts varies with the shifting state of scientific knowledge ?”<sup>39</sup>

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38. GIDDENS, Anthony, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

This sort of anxiety arising from the loss of trust in authorities – it scientific or political – can also be observed on a broader collective level since the process of globalization raises peoples’ awareness that in the end they are but one extended family inhabiting one vulnerable planet. In hypermodern times like these, the conviction that the leaders of the world, so to speak, know exactly what they are doing or even are guided by higher power or wisdom – even if they would claim it – will be held by the fewest contemporaries, not only in times of economic crisis. If, apparently, there is no final destination of human kind granted to us and predestined, and if our knowledge is finite and there is no other, anxiety is consentaneous : “The possibility of nuclear war, ecological calamity, uncontrollable population explosion, the collapse of global economic exchange, and other potential global catastrophes provide an unnerving horizon of dangers for everyone.”<sup>40</sup> Because these “globalized risks” are risks and no emanation of fate, we can do something about it – change it for the better or the worse. In this sense modern societies experience their future in form of risks of decisions.<sup>41</sup> Or as Giddens puts it : “We are left with questions where once there appeared to be answers, and I shall argue subsequently that it is not only philosophers who realise this. A general awareness of the phenomenon filters into anxieties which press in on everyone.”<sup>42</sup>

Hence, the ambivalence of freedom in hypermodern times can be read in the following way : At the same time the *freedom to* is expanding and we are able to realize more possibilities than ever before the *freedom from* – anxieties, the burden of responsibility etc.– is decreasing. This paradox is also touched upon by Lipovetsky who notices that : “The more socially mobile the individual is, the more we witness signs of exhaustion and subjective *breakdowns* ;

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40. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

41. LUHMANN, Niklas, *op. cit.*, p. 141f.

42. p. 49.



the more freely and intensely people wish to love, the more we hear them saying how difficult life can be.”<sup>43</sup>

#### **D. The hypermodern condition : Universally endured and shared ?**

Thus, it comes as no surprise that the mental overload hypermodern individuals are exposed to fosters the desire of freeing oneself from that existential freedom typical of the modern human condition that is constantly getting intensified. This development is well described by Berger who diagnoses various counter-movements to modernity<sup>44</sup> and is also acknowledged by Lipovetsky when he speaks of the growing “importance of guidelines that point back to the past.”<sup>45</sup> Strangely enough, he nevertheless is convinced that there is no serious ideological counter-concept to Western (hyper-)modernity : “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.”<sup>46</sup> What reminds of Francis Fukuyama’s vision of the *end of history* is implausible in so far as it seems to overlook that all over the globe various kinds of world-views and systems of beliefs are deploying that try to satisfy the need for orientation and regulation stemming from the profound unease with the modern condition and the ambivalence of freedom. But on the other hand side – and this is the second last question I assume worth asking in regard to hypermodernity’s excess of anxiety – we have to acknowledge that certain individuals or

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43. LIPOVETSKY, Gilles, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

44. BERGER, Peter L. / BERGER, Brigitte / KELLNER, Hansfried, *op. cit.*, p. 162f.

45. LIPOVETSKY, Gilles, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

groups remain seemingly unaffected by any anxiety about the future and their responsibility for it. Just imagine for instance excessive self-destruction prevalent in various youth cultures or the disturbing over-all neglectfulness of many parents from the lower classes. Are these just some of hypermodernity's paradoxes emphasized by Lipovetsky and his colleague Charles? Are these people simply deniers? Is their behavior best interpreted as acts of resistance or are they already victims of hypermodernity's challenging lifestyle? This non-universality of hypermodern anxiety poses the question why there are people or groups of people more affected by it than others. Maybe in the end the excess of anxiety is not the condition of *the* hypermodern individual, but the hypermodern middle class or upper class individual threatened by losing a standard of living so many others still have to rise up to?

### III. CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

In this contribution I tried to argue that rather than being perceived as a new stage of human history hypermodernity should be interpreted as radicalized, advanced modernity. This radicalization arises both from scientific progress and the increasing liberalization, individualization and existential secularization in terms of rootedness in this world. Summarizing, one can say that excess as such is not characteristic of hypermodern times, nor are anxieties which are not entirely alien to the premodern human condition and which have prevailed also in former ages. What indeed is peculiar to hypermodernity, however, is an anxiety that not only relates to objects within certain stabilizing frameworks of meaning but pertains to any such framework itself. Therefore, these anxieties are inherently excessive to the effect they have no confinement in themselves. I have tried to highlight the excess of anxiety by drawing to examples of modern lifestyles, such as reproduction, child rearing, health and

nutrition. But of course the diagnosis of an excess of anxiety can be applied to several other fields of life and definitely will come into sharper relief in the course of modernity advancing.

So far I have restricted my analysis to the realm of description but of course the diagnosis of hypermodernity's excess of anxiety – given it is accurate in general – also raises questions as to whether this human condition is desirable in the end or rather should be overcome. What definitely is not possible, as far as I see it, is to collectively go back beyond the dawn of modern consciousness and to suddenly forget what we have come to learn about ourselves as autonomous, self-responsible, free beings. Thus, the question has to be reformulated on the basis of the acceptance of the modern human condition and not its denial. In the tradition of the philosophy of the art of living concerned with the search for the good life this question can be put in the following way: How can we ease the profound anxiety in hypermodern times without on the ~~hand~~ other side falling prey to the shadows of premodern absolutes and the illusions emanating from them?