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Malaise in the consumer society Essay on Ordinary Materialism

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Back cover

Why are we (almost) all a bit materialistic? Material goods occupy an incredible place in our lives. By consuming, the individual draws the contours of his life, the model according to a pattern of his own. To consume a lot, or more than necessary, is to be materialistic. But few people accept to consider themselves as materialists. Yet in developed countries a diffuse materialism is spreading in all strata of society. It is a small step that makes us consume a little too much. We have called this small step big, ordinary materialism. The purpose of this essay is to deconstruct the workings of our relationship with our material possessions. How and why do we attach ourselves to certain objects and not to others, and why do we systematically buy a little too much material goods? What relationships exist between materialism, different forms of consumption, identity construction and the values of individuals in an uncertain social environment? What should we think about economic socialization and the societal questions posed by materialism? These are the fundamental questions posed in this essay that will allow us to highlight the logic and dynamics of ordinary materialism in everyday life.

Extensions to this work can be found at www.culture-materielle.com.

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For Anne

Summary

Summary	4
Introduction.....	6
Chapter 1: Consumption	9
The emergence of the consumer society	9
Features and utility consumption.....	10
Ostentatious and symbolic consumption	11
In pursuit of the principle of pleasure: hedonic consumption	12
Impulsive and compulsive buying.....	14
Conclusion	16
Chapter 2: Consumption and identity	17
The concept of self and identity	17
Material goods: incorporation or extension of self?	18
Attachment to material goods	20
From attachment to detachment of material goods.....	22
Identity Disasters.....	23
A few words on social comparison and mimetic desire	24
The difficulty of being oneself and the crisis of identities.....	26
Conclusion	28
Chapter 3: Materialism.....	30
Materialism as personality traits	30
Materialism as values	31
Materialism as aspirations.....	32
To have and to be	33
Conclusion	35
Chapter 4: Materialism and subjective well-being	37
The dominant perspective.....	37
The Easterlin Paradox.....	38
Socio-demographic and societal determinants of subjective well-being	40
Values and subjective well-being	41
Economic socialization: affluent society and advertising	42
Conclusion	44
Chapter 5: The inconveniences of radical materialism.....	46
Psychological background and personality.....	46
Compulsive buying and materialism.....	47
Relationship to money, credit and means of payment	48
Conclusion	50
Chapter 6: Precariousness, Frugality and Voluntary Simplicity	52
Precariousness and poverty	52
Frugality	54
Voluntary simplicity	56
Conclusion	59

Chapter 7: Ordinary Materialism.....	61
How to get out of materialism?.....	61
Materialism as a societal issue	63
The Logics of Ordinary Materialism.....	64
Conclusion	67
General Conclusion.....	69
Bibliography.....	73

Introduction

Everyone consumes. To consume is to choose. By making his choices, the individual draws the contours of his life, the model according to his own scheme. This gives him a certain uniqueness. It would be very difficult to find two individuals who consume exactly the same things, who have the same tastes and the same appetite for material things, but also the same means to access their desires. Implicitly, we are admitting here that materialism is not necessarily about possessions, but about desires.

Desires for material goods can be very qualitative and relate to a very small number of objects. They can also be very diverse. In this case, it is necessary to distinguish a person who will be very selective from a person who will want to acquire a large variety of goods in quantity. In a different way, we may encounter people who indiscriminately desire the accumulation of material goods without long deliberation. These different situations are affected by two factors: financial means and life projects or, more precisely, people's values.

Concerning financial means, the question mobilizes both the resources of individuals and debt. The principle of reality developed in psychoanalysis postulates that in his arbitrations, the individual is obliged to take into account the characteristics of the situation. A desire may be thwarted by the impossibility of facing it financially and the person may give up the desire to obtain the coveted material good, sometimes at the cost of significant frustration. But at present, the commercial society grants important payment facilities. Behind this sibylline expression lie credit and the possibility of getting into debt. If indebtedness makes it possible to respond to the immediacy of desire, it is also a limit. The possibilities of indebtedness are not unlimited and sooner or later one will have to repay. Under these conditions, indebtedness hinders the realization of future desires, by diminishing the individual's financial resources and in doing so, only postpones or even multiplies the sources of frustration. Money or available resources undoubtedly feed a reflection on materialism.

The second factor that differentiates individuals is related to what we have called life projects. This question is of infinite complexity, but we can nevertheless try to set some points of reference to this issue. The notion of life project is a notion that implies both the way of conceiving and managing one's life, but also the projects that one can make for the future, in other words the way in which the person wants to lead his or her life in the future, which may be more or less nearby. The way in which one leads one's life is a direct result of the values and goals one has set oneself. For example, values such as spirituality, conformity, or self-actualization are potentially values that may affect the importance placed on material goods (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990). Values operate as concepts or beliefs, relating to goals. They transcend specific situations and guide an individual's behavioral activity. In this sense, the choice of material goods one wishes to possess varies qualitatively with values. But there can also be a quantitative dimension, because adherence to values such as spirituality does

not necessarily imply the possession of as many material goods as adherence to other values such as success or hedonism.

Materialism can be defined in the first place as the propensity of individuals to acquire material goods. Materialism has often been stigmatized and apprehended as an excessive inclination for material goods, without really taking into account the nature of the individual's relationship with these goods. This stigmatization is generally strongly associated with ostentatious consumption. Yet it is this singular relationship that is of interest. It is too simple to think that an attachment to material goods, without differentiating between them qualitatively and quantitatively, is likely to enlighten us about the consumer society and the way in which the individual is likely to fit into it, without losing sight of the fact that society is constantly evolving and that the individual adapts to it more or less under good conditions.

Research on materialism really began in the 1980s. A change in society was in the process of being born. The advent of computers was in its infancy, big data was still a fiction. Yet the old world before computing persisted all the better as the world's production systems for material goods were operating at full capacity. More and more often relocated, these productions came to irrigate the demand. In the absence of demand, production nevertheless found outlets and Western populations could appear to be full of material goods. This was not necessarily the case for everyone, but the influx of material goods was obvious. It is difficult to dispute this, yet some people resist and try to preserve themselves from the consumer society (Trentmann, 2016).

Materialism is usually considered to be the propensity to give material goods an inconsiderate attention perceived by the entourage as excessive, bordering on pathology. Yet in many respects, everyone pays attention to material goods. This attention can certainly be more or less sustained and can vary qualitatively and quantitatively. It is very difficult to draw a boundary between a materialistic being and a being who would not be materialistic. Obviously, differences exist when one confronts extremes. But such a confrontation is relatively vain, even if we cannot escape it. It is rather a question of understanding what the nature of our relationship to the material goods that surround us, differentiating those that we possess from those that we do not possess, but that we eventually desire.

Obviously, we will not be able to achieve this objective, but it is not impossible to lay down a few milestones to question the consumer society, without a *priori*, but without concession either. Western society does not easily allow us to escape from a consumer activity considered elsewhere to be excessive or, on the contrary, desirable. Growing and developing geographical areas will not necessarily share the arguments put forward in this essay. The approach proposed here is neither totalitarian¹ nor moral. It only seeks, from a Western point of view and in developed countries, to analyze the role of material goods in people's lives and to enable an understanding of them that is as fragmentary as possible.

The idea we defend in this essay is that materialism is omnipresent and delights in abundance. Everyone is free (at least for those who can and who are not in a precarious situation), to adopt his or her own lifestyle in a society that is losing its bearings. Our point of

¹ We have not made the most complete inventory of the literature here. We have limited ourselves to citing the references that seemed to us, perhaps wrongly, the most important and enlightening on the subject.

view is that individuals face society as they can. Some, perhaps in spite of themselves, fit into a logic of radical materialism with all the disadvantages that this entails, others, more moderately materialistic, oscillate between materialism and frugality, others are simply attached to certain possessions that are precious to them because they allow them to maintain a link with their biography and people close to them. Finally, others are part of the rejection of the consumer society. Whatever these choices are, if they are indeed choices, individuals differ according to their degree of materialism and their values, and in doing so, they adopt different lifestyles. Their desires, personalities and resources are different. But do all these configurations lead to happiness and satisfaction in life? It is not certain. Some will be happy to acquire new material possessions while for others it will be a matter of structuring their identity, sometimes without success or lasting benefits in terms of subjective well-being. Everyone will recognize themselves, at one time or another, in this book and will be able to question themselves about their own life trajectory and the material conditions of their own existence.

Chapter 1: Consumption

The forms of consumption are as diverse and varied as there are different products and services, but also different individuals. The point here is not to make a complete inventory of the different forms of consumption, but simply to set out the most salient points of the different consumption patterns. The different figures we propose are not necessarily exclusive of each other. After some historical considerations on the emergence of the consumer society, we will therefore address, without necessarily dissociating them, the objects of consumption and the practices associated with them. We will first discuss the functional, symbolic and hedonic aspects of consumption, before analyzing impulsive and then compulsive consumption.

The emergence of the consumer society

The consumer society as it is currently taking shape in Western society designates, in practice, an economic, social and cultural phenomenon (Slater, 1997). The economic dimension is largely determined by the development of capitalism, the increase in industrial production (but also, correlatively, in the provision of services) and trade. Market supply becomes available. The social dimension is characterized by the increase in discretionary resources for a large part of society and access to consumer goods is made more readily available. The cultural dimension is carried by the adoption of consumption as a way of life, i.e., immersion in a society that places material goods as means of transmission or symbolic exchange at the center of living conditions. Consumer culture, through the massive use of consumer goods, structures the consumerist identity, to the detriment of an identity based on production and work.

Thus the availability, accessibility and use of goods are gradually shaping the consumer society. Although historically it is difficult to date the emergence of the consumer society, Chessel (2012) provides some pointers. Historians agree that around 1750, in Europe, the increase in household purchasing power, the rise in the production of luxury goods, the development of shops in cities, the beginnings of advertising information and the worldwide increase in the circulation of goods constituted a first stage. Mass consumption, on the other hand, only developed between 1850 and the beginning of the 20th century. Consumer goods were produced in larger quantities, but it was not until the end of the 1950s in Europe that mass consumption invaded society. This evolution towards mass consumption did not take place smoothly and certainly not in a linear way. Braudel (1985) emphasizes the coexistence of rigidities, inertia with, on the one hand, peasants living almost autonomously and, on the other, sharp and punctual movements of an expanding capitalism that spread in fits and starts to manufacture the world we live in. Braudel's story is the story of the everyday life of men. What do they eat? How do they dress? Where do they live? How do

they get their supplies²? In the 18th century, everything is in place for the awakening of mass consumption. The fairs then the stock exchanges at the top of the pyramid and at the base of the pyramid, local markets, traders and peddlers. It is on these tightly interwoven and structured distribution networks that capitalism flourished. This layer linking consumption and production remains thin and fragile, however. In terms of the market economy, it is essential to differentiate between everyday, short-distance exchanges and the large, generally international exchanges that flee from transparency and competition. For Braudel, capitalism "does not invent hierarchies, it uses them, just as it did not invent the market or consumption. He is, in the long perspective of history, the evening visitor. He arrives when everything is already in place (p. 78)".

Economists readily refer to the present era as an era of opulence (Galbraith, 1972). This idea seems to be taken for granted and is based on the comparative poverty that more or less strongly marked the periods preceding the end of the Second World War in the United States and Europe. The idea that opulence is a novelty is relative. It is not necessarily shared by economic anthropology. Sahlins (1976) shows with great finesse that traditional societies, sometimes described as archaic, are not based on subsistence alone, but that they organize themselves into societies of abundance. These primitive societies in their own living conditions actually lived "relatively free of material constraints" (p. 47). In these societies, material goods could even be seen as a burden because of the need to travel to obtain supplies. Moreover, production activities were relatively unconstrained. If opulence is measured in terms of standard of living, traditional societies were not competitive. On the other hand, if it is measured in terms of satisfying needs, they were generally relatively efficient. Ritual potlatch ceremonies attest to this abundance, when they consist of the destruction of wealth (Mauss, 1950). They are likely to respond to the need to break the mimetic desire by making certain riches inappropriate and thus to defuse the social violence that could result (Girard, 1978).

Features and utility consumption

As we have seen, mass consumption has evolved over time. A turning point began in the mid-19th and early 20th centuries. Prior to this historical period, the economy was still largely based on a subsistence economy. The resources available only allowed for a shift to the essentials. Food, clothing, housing and work were the main concerns for most of the population. In this logic, consumption is above all functional or utilitarian. For Marx (1867), capitalist production from the industrial era leads to an accumulation of commodities. All goods can be understood from the point of view of their use value and their exchange value. The exchange value is common to all goods and on this basis they are substitutable for each other in a ratio of quantity. They can thus be exchanged by taking into account the exchange value specific to each good at a given moment, in other words the exchange ratio. For Marx, part of the value lies in work. Use value is a little more complex to grasp. A good can be useful to man without it coming from his work. This is the case with air or meadows. A good can be useful and come from human work without being a commodity. Generally speaking, self-production is the fruit of work enjoyed by a person or a family and creates only personal

² Fine and Lepold (1993) propose in this sense the idea of a supply system to understand how the consumer society is organized and functions.

use value. On the other hand, to produce goods is to create use value, not for oneself, but for others. Use value satisfies a specific need sought by the consumer. Use value is created by work, and it is useful in any kind of society because for Marx it mediated "the material circulation between nature and man". When man-made products are commodities and when the individual no longer perceives the work they encapsulate, the object can be a source of fetishism. Money then fixes the exchange value and material goods are then measured at their value, a value that buyers can take advantage of.

The use value or utility that is removed from a product, however, varies not only between goods but also between consumers. The point here is not to discuss value in depth, but only to point out that use value is subjective and reflects perceived utility. Considerations related to the utility of a good are all implicitly based on its use value. In marketing, this use value is trivialized in terms of the functionality or functional characteristics of objects. It is the most basic way to characterize a material offer and many products are purchased on this simple basis. A significant number of products have a utility, i.e. one or more functions serve a purpose. Whenever they are used, a praxeological dimension needs to be emphasized (Moles, 1977). From this angle, the object is inscribed in the corporeality of the individual. It must be appropriate and truly incorporated (Warnier, 1999) for the person to optimize its use. The object becomes a tool for carrying out an action or producing something and it is supposed to meet a need. One cannot escape what, for Leroi-Gourhan (1964), constitutes an imperative of the human condition, namely that the evolution of techniques is correlative of human evolution from the earliest times of humanity, but that this evolution necessarily involves gestures and learning to produce sophisticated objects that are not always reduced to a simple functional logic.

Ostentatious and symbolic consumption

For Baudrillard (1970), the function of an object is a guarantee. It masks its significant dimension. It is Thorstein Veblen (1899) who, in an emblematic manner, will criticize functionalism by discussing ostentatious consumption and the logic of social class that it underlies. Ostentatious consumption marks people's minds by the concern of consumers to expose with their possessions their social status, their success, through a lifestyle essentially based on a consumption of symbols. The basis of this form of consumption is ownership or possession. It is on these bases that the esteem of others and the reputation will be based, even to arouse the envy of one's fellow men. Individuals are going to be part of a logic of quotation by value. Veblen then stresses that it is not enough to possess material goods; it is indispensable to exhibit them, to show one's repugnance towards productive activities and to have leisure activities that allow idleness or, more precisely, the "unproductive consumption of time". This translates into the consumption of immaterial goods such as games, sports, pets, music, but also material goods such as furniture, clothing or equipment. Good manners accompany these leisure activities as the residues of former acts of domination. Whether it is food, clothing or various accessories, consumption also specializes in quality, and the man in the leisure class must consume them as befits him. This class tends to structure itself and to produce a sophisticated system of ranks and grades, and imitation of higher ranks or grades is in order. Mimetic rivalry cannot escape this system. The sumptuary display follows social norms of good taste and any offender risks discredit. The more expensive the consumer item is, the more useless it is and the more it is appreciated.

Banality is the cruellest of sanctions, because what is banal is accessible to the greatest number and is of little interest when the consumer is a prisoner of social comparison.

A product is therefore also characterized by the meanings or symbols it conveys. Sidney Levy in 1959 opened up marketing to a function based entirely on utilitarianism by reminding us that "people buy objects not only for what they can do, but also for what they mean" (p.118). This phrase has been used on numerous occasions to recall the symbolic and signifying function of material goods that is grafted onto the functional characteristics of the object. But it is indeed a reminder, for Levy does not hesitate to suggest that this may always have been the case, joining Leroi-Gourhan in this. Don Slater (1997) reminds us in this sense that any reasoning on consumer society cannot ignore the meaning of goods.

Baudrillard (1968) will deepen the analysis. The object-function is for the author a distant memory. In contemporary society, many objects differ only marginally from each other in terms of their functions. On the other hand, they are mainly distinguished by their form, which has the advantage of personalizing them and differentiating those who possess them, which is the domain of the inessential. It can be observed that the domain of denotation (the function object) as well as that of connotation (the signifying object) are not clearly dissociable and give rise to a wide dispersion of signs (Barthes, 1957). For Baudrillard (1968), consumption is not a material practice. It is not defined by the simple accumulation of consumer objects, such as a car, a razor, clothes, etc., but by the organization of all these objects into a "signifying substance". Possessions produce a more or less coherent discourse and "consumption, in so far as it has a meaning, is an activity of systematic manipulation of signs (p. 276)". Discourses that are thus produced by combinatorics lead to social differentiation (Baudrillard, 1972). For Fine and Leopold (1993), the use value of a good is particularly elastic because of the meanings attached to it, which can be highly variable, and for the authors, it is above all advertising that associates meanings with goods.

Symbols are static markers that do not add up, but combine. While there may be a grammar of symbolic consumption, it is positioned as a codified communication device. This is how Douglas and Isherwood (1996) conceive of the consumer society. If consumption can have practical or functional purposes, it is above all a system of codes that allows individuals to exchange meanings. For the individual, consuming thus amounts to being socially inscribed in an environment that allows him to exist. Not to consume or to consume badly is a factor of social exclusion. Rather than considering in a privileged way that goods are necessary for subsistence, Douglas and Isherwood consider that they are necessary to make cultural categories visible and stable and to maintain social links, even if from a dynamic point of view, consumption constantly redraws the contours of these categories.

[In pursuit of the principle of pleasure: hedonic consumption](#)

Consumption is to some extent a source of gratification. It is guided by the principle of pleasure and can lead to happiness and well-being, but can also be a source of suffering. However, not all consumers are equal or similar in terms of the means to achieve this (Alba and Williams, 2013). These can be particularly diverse.

Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) truly initiated a detailed approach to hedonic consumption. The authors wish to emphasize the evasiveness, the emotions and the multisensory character of the consumer's experience with the product. The multisensory character of the consumption experience is part of a dynamic. First of all, the multisensory experience can be considered as immediate through the enjoyment or pleasure associated with a consumer good. For example, tasting a food product allows for a complex sensory experience associating sight, taste, smell and even touch, through the texture of the product in the mouth. But the experience does not stop there, as it is also likely to produce mental associations, reminders in memory and mobilize a personal, even intimate psychological universe. This psychological universe is for its part able to create a feeling of escape, but also more or less intense emotions. The search for experiences and emotions is quite characteristic of certain consumer activities such as reading, watching a movie, participating in a sports show or tourist experiences. The search for emotions goes beyond these specific experiences. It can also involve more ordinary consumer acts such as wearing clothing or eating. Of course, hedonic consumption concerns to a lesser extent more functional products such as detergents or toothpastes. Generally speaking, involvement in the product category is possibly a factor that promotes stimulation and a positive emotional experience. In this sense, experiences generally produce more satisfaction than possessions, because they fully engage the individual through his or her actions and in his or her corporeality. Moreover, experiences are less easy to compare than material goods that have functional characteristics that can be isolated and enumerated. Experiences, on the other hand, are more marked by their uniqueness and are difficult to compare.

In many ways the approach of Hirschman and Holbrook introduced a paradigm shift. Previously, consumer behaviour was characterized by models of rationality of consumer behaviour based on information processing processes (e.g. Howard and Sheth, 1969). Particularly deterministic, such models took little account of the dynamics of consumer behaviour and tended to obscure the affective and emotional aspects. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) countered such models with a number of propositions, namely that the objective and tangible characteristics of the offer should not overshadow its subjective and symbolic aspects, that problem solving alone cannot be taken into account and that emotional evaluation has its place, or that an exploratory approach can replace intensive information seeking. This implies considering an entire device that the authors describe as experiential consumption.

Many purchases can be part of experiential consumption even if they concern products that are considered functional or utilitarian. The simple fact of having the feeling of having made a good deal is likely to generate emotions and to inscribe the person in the imagination of a smart shopper. If smart shopping is about minimizing the time, money and energy required to make purchases, it aims to produce both utilitarian and hedonic value in the shopping experience through the feeling of having made a good deal and having a good product (Atkins and Kim, 2012). In our opinion, it is a mistake to consider that some products are functional or utilitarian and others are hedonic in nature. As we have pointed out, some products may be more or less functional and others more or less hedonic (Batra and Ahtola, 1991; Crowley et al., 1992). Differentiating goods or services in such a radical way ultimately alters the notion of experiential consumption. This notion is interesting because the product or service is constructed in the relation that the individual maintains with him and in the

sense that he confers on this relation. This is somewhat the idea of Warnier (1999) when he speaks of the construction of material society or of Marion (2016) when he conceives of the consumer as a co-producer of value. The packaging of these products or services, in other words the communication, the staging or the packaging are likely to lead to thinking about the object differently. An *a priori* functional product can become hedonic and an *a priori* hedonic product can be relegated to a simple functional use (Ladwein, 2003). There may also be a context effect. In a study on the effect of entourage on hedonic consumption, it appears that individuals who are characterized by strong social interdependence are more inclined to make purchases that they will consider hedonic in the presence of others than more socially independent individuals who will be less influenced by others and who will seek to avoid social similarity (Baek and Choo, 2015). Other context effects may appear. For example, when evaluated in isolation, a product will be chosen more if it presents hedonic characteristics than if it is presented at the same time as a product that presents more utilitarian characteristics. People operate as if they have to justify their rationality when their preferences may be for more experience (Okada, 2005).

Subjective experience and experiential packaging are determining factors and prevail over the functional or hedonic qualities or characteristics of products or services when it comes to qualifying a consumer activity (Filser, 2002).

Impulsive and compulsive buying

The various works on impulsivity converge around the idea that impulse buying is not a prior intention and is not the subject of intense deliberation. The individual is focused on immediate gratification and does not consider the possible consequences of his or her purchase. Distributors and producers seek by all means to increase impulse purchases. The techniques are very diverse, for example, point of sale design, product presentation, packaging or promotions. Several measurement scales have been developed and it is convenient to conceive of impulsiveness as a character trait or at least a lifestyle (Rook, 1987; Rook and Fisher, 1995). Much research has considered that the tendency to purchase products impulsively is the same regardless of the product category. However, it is without counting on involvement in the product category that generates interest and emotions. From this perspective, impulsivity must be seen as product-dependent (Jones et al., 2003).

In work on consumer and buyer behaviour, there is little explanation of the goods that are the subject of impulse purchases. For example, clothing or jewelry are more likely to be preferred over kitchen equipment, which is more in line with a planned purchase logic. However, many goods can be the subject of impulse purchases. Dittmar, Beattie and Friese (1996) suggest that impulse purchases lead to the purchase of goods of a symbolic nature that reflect a person's personal and social identity. This assumes that when the individual sees or perceives a gap between the current self and the ideal self, he or she will be inclined to fill that gap. Impulsive purchases are more frequently based on psychological concerns than functional considerations. In addition, there are gender differences. We observe that men are more inclined to buy leisure-related products or functional objects that reflect an activity (technological objects or sports equipment, for example), while women are more attracted to products or possessions that reveal emotional and symbolic aspects (clothing, jewelry or cosmetics). All of these goods contribute to self-expression or self-presentation

(Dittmar et al., 1995). Young people are also more likely to make impulse purchases than other age groups (Wood, 1998). This finding is ultimately consistent with the idea that adolescents and young adults are the ones most likely to experience identity problems (Erikson, 1980).

For impulsive buyers, reinforcing self-image and responding to a moody mood or a search for excitement are particularly salient features. For example, when the individual feels sad, he or she will tend to favour hedonic consumption (Garg and Lerner, 2013). It is also a way to regain self-confidence. Excessive shoppers, on the other hand, respond to other characteristics. They report important gaps between the way in which they see themselves (the current self) and the way in which they would like to see themselves (ideal self), in particular in their relations with others. They are also more materialistic, and if impulse buying has not been the subject of quality deliberation and prior intention, it can lead to regret. These may be related to the low quality of the product, its high price, or the lack of need or usefulness of the product. Financial considerations and consequences are often overlooked. Some women may feel guilty when the impulse purchase was made for themselves. In addition, such purchases are characterized by an important emotional dimension. *Conversely*, the planned purchase meets a specific need; the purchase intention is precise and has given rise to information research that has led to a detailed deliberation. In addition, the budget was also planned (Dittmar and Drury, 2000).

For Bauman (2006), the current consumer society allows dissatisfaction to become permanent, which can even lead to addiction. Compulsive buying behaviors (which need to be considered as an addiction) are not rare and could concern between 3% and 5% of the population³. O'Guinn and Faber (1989) point out that compulsive buyers do not buy for reasons related to the usefulness of the product or for the service offered by their purchases. The goal is to obtain a reward through the act of purchasing itself. Compulsive behaviours can affect the emotional balance of the person, but can also have consequences for the family, the social environment and of course the financial equilibrium, as the accumulation of debt is likely to be a problem. The problem with compulsive buying is that it is repetitive and obsessive. The individual does not immediately perceive that his or her behaviour is problematic. Through the act of buying, he obtains immediate gratification. But the repetition of this behavior leads to a loss of control. The self-esteem is often a cause and a consequence in the realization of compulsive purchases. An anxious state, a fall of the self-esteem generates the abnormal behavior and reinforces the fall of the self-esteem. In addition, the more compulsive the buyers are, the more sensitive they are to interpersonal influence and pay all the more attention to social comparison (Kukar-Kinney et al., 2016). This underscores the eminently social role of part of consumer activity. Obtaining short-term rewards thus leads to long-term negative consequences. For the compulsive buyer, it is not so much the possession of material goods that is of interest to him as envy.

Impulsive and compulsive purchases are a source of questioning. While it is necessary to distinguish between the two, because there is nothing pathological about impulse buying, while compulsive buying is part of addiction, the line is nevertheless narrow. One could imagine a form of continuity. Excessive impulse buying is the beginning of an addiction that

³ These data obviously only apply to developed countries.

can slide into compulsive⁴ buying . This shift gradually leads to the loss of all purpose. Whereas the impulsive buyer already evades the purchase of functional products, the compulsive buyer gradually sees all finality disappear, except for the repetition of the act of purchasing itself. These forms of behavior respond, as we have seen, to more or less severe forms of self-esteem. Compulsive buyers, for their part, can no longer find in this activity the means to reduce the gap between the real self and the ideal self, whether personal or social, and are confronted with severe identity disorders that can be the subject of medical or psychological treatment (Adès and Leyoyeux, 2002).

Conclusion

This chapter clarified the different and main functions of consumption. It may be noted in passing that the question of the motivation to consume, in a logic of formal and systematic treatment, has been deliberately left aside, because any activity of consumption responds to a need, i.e. an impulse or a desire, whose source may be endogenous or exogenous and which, after a more or less intense deliberative activity, is generally of a functional, symbolic or hedonic nature, or some combination of the three. As we have seen, these functions of consumption are likely to lead to the excesses that the abundance of material goods allows. Sahlins (1976) points out that "There are two possible paths that provide abundance. Needs can be "easily satisfied" by producing much, or by desiring little (p. 38)". While he demonstrates that there are societies that are likely to desire little while living in abundance, he remains more enigmatic about societies capable of producing much. What is interesting are the quotation marks Sahlins puts when he states that needs can be "easily satisfied" by producing much. An examination of these few typical figures or functions of consumption and the combinations they allow suggests that these needs are not so easily satisfied in today's affluent society. We must therefore try to understand the motives and the conditions of their expression and appearance that lead some people to want to consume more. This chapter has also opened up a breach in the existence of excessive or compulsive consumption or purchasing behavior that opens the door to the question of excess material abundance. This breach in people's normal consumption activity naturally leads us to the question of materialism in the consumer society and the meaning of material culture.

⁴ Incidentally, a curious phenomenon can occur in some cases; an impulse purchase can induce a whole series of complementary purchases to re-form a whole or a coherent whole, we then speak of companion purchases. For example, the purchase of a new piece of clothing can lead an individual to renew all or part of his wardrobe. In the same way, the purchase of a new piece of furniture for one's home can lead to the renewal of all the furniture and decoration (McCracken, 1988). In this case, the initial impulse purchase leads to compulsive purchases, but it is then difficult to foresee a pathological behaviour because these compulsive purchases have a purpose.

Chapter 2: Consumption and identity

Identity is at the heart of human nature. But for Bauman (2006), the individual seeks himself. He must produce proof of his uniqueness and his difference from others. This supposes both legitimizing or validating the self and discarding elements that risk contaminating or perverting the true self. This dynamics passes by the assimilation of a certain number of possessions and the rejection of many others. It constitutes an activity which is not without ambiguities, because the individual lives permanently a risk of disqualification. Certainly he has many aids to build his uniqueness and identity, coaches, manuals or guides, in other words, life assistants who are particularly diversified in many compartments of daily life. But this may not be enough to enable the individual to cope with what contemporary society imposes on him or her. For Bauman, the individual is besieged by an imperative of individualization in a context of progressive loosening of social ties. Yet the social fabric plays a large part in the construction of identity. The others are at the same time referents, elements of comparison and public. Generally speaking, consumer goods intervene as substitutes for relational deficiencies. They invest the social field to signify at the same time what the individual is, what he wishes to be, and ultimately, material goods contribute actively to the construction of his identity.

The concept of self and identity

The concept of self designates the representation that the individual has of himself as an acting and signifying entity. For Mead (1934), the self is a consequence of the social and requires social belonging. It is the consequence or the resultant of the interactions with the *I* and the *self*. Therefore, the self is formed in activity, in which the body is an object in the same way as others or the surrounding world, and in interactivity. For Rosenberg (1979: 23), the concept of self is characterized by various dimensions such as content, salience, consistency, stability, clarity or self-esteem. In this sense, the concept of self can be considered as a way of delimiting the notion of identity that presents characteristics that singularize the individual, at the same time as characteristics that assimilate him/her to different social entities (Mucchielli, 2015).

In a relatively basic way, one usually distinguishes the real self-concept, the ideal self-concept and the social self-concept (Rosenberg, 1979). The real self-concept of oneself characterizes the self-concept of the individual in a current or actual way. The ideal self-concept of oneself refers to the image or the representation that the person forms as being most satisfactory, in other words what the person would like to be. Lastly the concept of social self characterizes the way in which a person presents himself or herself to others or to the whole of his or her social environment. To these three initial conceptions of the concept of self, Sirgy (1982) adds the ideal social self concept, in other words the public image that a person wishes to give of himself. The self-esteem and the consistency of oneself are determinants with the concept of oneself. The self-esteem characterizes the tendency to seek situations or experiments which improve the concept of oneself, whereas the self-

consistency characterizes the tendency to behave in a coherent way with the way in which the individual sees or considers himself.

Sirgy's contribution is to reason the gap between the current self and the product from the perspective of an acquisition. In particular, he emphasizes that there is an indisputable relationship between the choice of a product and the concept of the present self, when there is congruence between the two. This is largely linked to the symbolism of the offer. If the symbolic characteristics of a product resonate with the image that the individual makes of himself, then there will be a positive congruence and the product will be likely to be bought because it reinforces the self-esteem and the consistency of the self. The contribution of a good to the identity of the individual will depend on the importance that this good has for the individual (Kleine III et al., 1993).

In addition to reasoning the congruence between the current self and the product, it is also judicious to consider that the current self does not necessarily marry a satisfactory representation of the self. It is then interesting to consider the gap which exists between the current self and the ideal self (whether personal or social). Under this perspective, the symbolic meanings of consumer goods are likely to reduce the gap between the concept of current self and the ideal self (Dittmar, 2008). Conversely, being associated with unattainable symbolic meanings, a consumer good, but also an advertising message, is likely to produce bitterness and alter one's self-image. Instead of reinforcing the congruence between the current self and the ideal self, it widens a gap which can generate suffering. Within the framework of a theory of the gap to the concept of self (*self discrepancy theory*) proposed by Higgins (1987), it appears that the emotions resulting from such a situation are variable according to the nature of the gap to the concept of self. Thus the gap between the current self and the ideal self leads to negative emotions such as disappointment, dissatisfaction or sadness. In addition a gap between the current self and the self which one imposes on oneself (to oneself or another significant person, understood as an important person of his entourage) leads to emotions such as fear, fear or agitation.

Thus we are in a logic where, on the one hand, material goods respond to the resolution of states of tension between the current self and the ideal self (whether personal or social), and on the other hand, where the concept of self and the image of the material good must converge to allow the reduction of the state of tension. This requires certain skills and resources that not all consumers have, and can lead to suffering in terms of self-esteem or envious attitudes.

Material goods: incorporation or extension of self?

Erich Fromm (1978), evoking the industrial revolution, speaks of the Great Promise of Unlimited Progress. This great promise is synonymous with the domination of nature, abundance, freedom and unlimited happiness for all. Needless to say, for the author this promise could never be kept. Radical hedonism, understood as the pleasure and satisfaction of all desires, is subjectively not achievable. It radically implies possession and, correlatively, egoism and the destruction of the environment. The question was no longer what is good or desirable for man, but what is good for growth.

For Fromm, possession is also *incorporation*. It is the assimilation of material goods. It is a way of taking power over those goods that otherwise escape the person. For this he makes the link with cannibalism. Eating another human being is a way of appropriating his powers or characteristics. Incorporation is obviously not physical. It is a psychological or symbolic (sometimes even magical) incorporation which consists in *making* material goods *oneself*. They are then inseparable from the individual who conceives and thinks of himself as one with his possessions. For Warnier (1999), material possessions can also be apprehended from the perspective of incorporation. This incorporation is obviously not physical. It is psychological in nature, but unlike Fromm, Warnier considers that incorporation is about the dynamics of the object, that is, the way it is used by the person. In other words, it is the way the object enters the individual's sphere of action that is incorporated. This presupposes a certain familiarity of the person with the object and especially an experience of handling or using the object. The more this experience is important, the more the object is incorporated.

Belk (1988), for his part, proposes the idea that material goods, possessions constitute extensions of the self. He starts from the principle that possessions have a meaning for the individual and define the sensation of self. A way of apprehending this is, for example, the consequence of an involuntary loss of possessions. The individual then feels a certain form of reduction of the feeling of oneself as a full and whole entity, and feels the loss as a wound which affects all his being. In this sense, the author suggests that the aggression of others through the destruction or appropriation of one's property is marked by the desire to attack one's identity and results in significant psychological consequences for the victim. Moreover, the more we exercise a certain control over things, the less they appear dissociated from the self. Conversely, objects can impose themselves on us. For Belk, self-extension integrates the body, ideas, experiences, places, people and possessions to which the individual is attached. Attachment and experience cannot be dissociated. In self-extension we are dealing with a dynamic that links the person to his or her activity and environment. The possessions like the extension of oneself are not simply a juxtaposition of objects which gravitate in the sphere of the person. They participate actively and fully in the definition of the acting subject.

The function of possessions varies over the course of an individual's life. During childhood, the individual constitutes himself by first considering himself distinct from his environment and then from other people. Adolescents, on the other hand, use material possessions to construct themselves and to signify an identity. Belk considers that it is the same for the adult. On the other hand, older people value objects that connect them to the past, generally to people close to them or to events, and that underline the continuity of their life trajectory.

These two approaches, which oppose incorporation and self-extension, are not necessarily incompatible. Belk repeatedly mobilizes incorporation, whereas he proposes a theory that advocates self-extension. From a psychological and cognitive point of view, the approach by incorporation seems more judicious, because it expresses more significantly the intimate relationship that the person maintains with material goods. The object is incorporated because it is closely associated with actions. On the other hand, if we reason about material goods as a means of expressing the self, the notion of extension seems more relevant as soon as we accept to situate ourselves in a logic of ostensive consumption. Ahuvia (2005) does not share Belk's (1988) idea that possessions are more or less distant from the core of

the self and that they are likely to have a more or less strong importance in a person's identity. Regardless of how one looks at material possessions, it appears that possessions are one with the individual. They are in some way indissociable to him and the individual is likely to nourish a certain attachment to these material possessions.

Attachment to material goods

If for Baudrillard (1970) or Bauman (2008) material goods are above all doomed to rapid obsolescence that should allow the consumer to replace these goods with others, supposedly more efficient, it is nonetheless true that individuals are likely to become attached to certain possessions. The reasons for this attachment are very diverse, but the fundamental reason is that possession of material goods creates value for the consumer (Holbrook, 1999). Attachment is to specific objects and not to product categories or brands, which are considered extensions of the self. There is a personal history between the individual and objects. Attachment is emotionally complex and changes over time (Kleine & Baker, 2004).

Richins (1994a) differentiates between private and public possessions and meanings. But before that, a first distinction consists in contrasting goods that are exchanged with goods that are not part of the exchange. As Godelier (1996) points out, there are goods that do not enter into the process of exchange. Sacred objects, from an institutional point of view, such as objects of worship, or in a private way, such as wedding rings or certain photographs, do not enter into the exchange. They are inalienable objects⁵. For the rest, one can distinguish objects whose meaning can be either private or public, although it is doubtful whether certain private possessions can enter into the exchange or are in any way of value in the exchange. Public meanings are what the individual says or reveals to others through the material goods he possesses. These meanings can be disseminated without his knowledge. Private meanings, on the other hand, are subjective meanings that are generally linked to history or to the relationship between the individual and the material good. However, they can also contain public meanings. Generally speaking, all these meanings contribute to a large extent to the construction of the individual's identity (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981). The meanings associated with objects are very varied and may concern self-expression, the expression of religious values, meanings associated with prestige or success, pleasure, utility, or refer to links with other people. Public and private meanings are often linked. For Richins (1994a), public meanings of a good result from the socialization and participation of the individual in various activities of a social nature. Private meanings, on the other hand, are formed in the intimate knowledge of the object and the relationship that the person has with it. In another article, Richins (1994b) explores how attachment to material possessions reveals the characteristics of their owners. Two aspects are considered. The first approach, intrinsic, is based on the way possessions encapsulate personal values. A second, extrinsic, approach refers to communication, i.e., the way in which material possessions serve as signals to express to others the values of their owners. It thus appears that the possessions valued by the individuals most attached to material goods are rather

⁵ As Godelier (1996) points out, "there cannot be a society, there cannot be an identity that crosses time and serves as a foundation for individuals and groups that make up a society, if there are no fixed points, no realities that are removed (temporarily but permanently) from the exchange of gifts or commercial exchanges" (p. 16).

socially visible goods, whereas the individuals least attached to material goods value goods that are more in the private sphere. Moreover, it appears that the individuals most attached to material goods value the utilitarian aspects of goods, appearance and social status. On the *other hand*, the individuals least attached to material goods value more the symbolic aspects and the interpersonal value of goods and their hedonic potential.

For Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981), material goods encapsulate goals, make skills manifest and shape the identity of their owners. Individuals construct their identity by creating and interacting with their material environment. The things that surround us in our daily lives are inseparable from who we are, but also connect people to each other. This close intertwining of objects and interpersonal relationships conditions role models in the sense of Mead (1934), i.e. models determined by social rules or norms to which individuals conform. The danger of focusing one's attention on material goods constitutes for the individual a risk of turning away from others and no longer cultivating interpersonal relationships.

However, material goods do not exist by themselves as abstractions. They are potentially systematically contextualized in an environment with many other objects (Kleine III and Kernan, 1991). From this perspective, it is possible to change the meaning of an object by adding other contextual objects to it. Thus, possession should not be confused with attachment. For example, an individual may own a set of golf clubs that is relegated to the back of his or her garage. Another will proudly display them in the lobby of his house. These two situations do not give the same meaning to identical objects and do not in any way prejudge their use. In practice, objects should be seen as an ecosystem that allows individuals to function in their daily lives (Moles, 1972). Thus, rather than seeing material goods as symbols to which individuals attach themselves, it is desirable to approach material goods as a system of meanings that tells the story of an individual or family, and it is the combinatorial nature of the objects possessed that qualifies identity (Hogg and Michell, 1996).

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) point out that the material goods that generate the most attachment are goods that can be described as relational. These goods maintain relationships and maintain links between generations. Attachment also involves objects that characterize ideals, absence or the past. Material goods then have an indexicality function aimed at marking the symbolism of relationships with objects (Grayson and Shulman, 2000). More concretely, indexicality characterizes the possibility that material goods have of linking a person to objects. This link is emotional and refers to strong moments in the individual's life, reminds him/her of them and allows him/her to enter into communion with these strong moments. They are objects that allow one to recall memories of important moments, life situations or relationships or people from the past, or even heroic figures who have marked the individual's life (political figures, song or film stars, etc.). Finally, individuals are attached to goods that provide pleasure and personal rewards. It is however necessary not to associate this with pure and simple hedonism which constitutes a pleasure without purpose. The pleasures or the gratifications refer to the resultant of the relation between the person and a whole of goals or finalities likely to lead to the improvement of oneself (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981: 84). Attachment to such goods is directly linked to the experience of flow, i.e. the loss of the notion of time in a

state of mental absorption in the activity or relationship with the object (Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). It may seem surprising that for these three categories of objects we have not cited a single one as an example. The reason is simple. An object can be given particularly varied meanings. An object as banal as a plant can be a gift from a loved one, an object that provides gratification through the care given to it, or can mark the absence by the memory of a recent past event of which one wants to keep track. Other authors also point out that while some goods that characterize a person's identity are related to memory and relationships with other people, others are related to the present, autonomy and self-image (Kleine et al., 1995). The goods to which the individual is attached are not numerous compared to all the goods possessed and they are inscribed in the person's biography through identity narratives that coherently structure the individual's identity (Ahuvia, 2005). Finally, it can be emphasized that attachment to possessions is distinct from possessiveness, which, as we shall see, is a matter of materialism, and that while attachment to certain material goods that fall under indexicality (people and experiences) is true in the United States, this is not the case everywhere. In Niger, for example, attachment is more focused on sumptuary goods, suggesting the existence of cultural differences (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988).

From attachment to detachment of material goods

Some consumers tend to hoard or simply accumulate material goods that they do not use but refuse to get rid of. This behaviour is motivated by a variety of factors. First of all, these objects serve as emotional connectors to events, places, people or craftsmen. Objects are better emotional markers for them than, for example, photos. They are not collectors, because they accumulate all sorts of things and are not only turned towards the past. They also express an orientation towards the future, especially in a form of historical responsibility, with the aim of showing future generations these objects that have marked eras. They are sensitive to the objects themselves, which they honor by offering them an orphanage, in the unlikely expectation that they will be able to relive, i.e. be useful again, or until they can be recycled. From a present-day perspective, they are happy to own all these objects that give them a sense of security, as they may one day be able to use any of the objects they accumulate (Cherrier and Ponnor, 2010).

In the previous example, the objects enter the focus, but do not leave. However, there is a life cycle of the object. This one is very little documented. Attachment to material goods is part of a process that leads from the object's entry into the individual's sphere until its exit (Moles, 1972). The object enters the individual sphere first through desire, envy or expectation. It can be desired long before, be the object of envious behaviour because others already have it, but it can also enter contingently without the individual really knowing whether it is likely to meet a need. Acquisition is the phenomenological birth of the object. The discovery allows the personalization of the relationship with the object, and its appropriation. Attachment is intimately linked to the individual and characterizes the discovery of the virtues and vices of the object. Habituation makes the object move back to a psychological background. Abandonment characterizes the end of life and death of the

object. It can then migrate to the cellar or attic⁶ or be simply thrown away or destroyed, but also be resold as a second hand object, in which case it enters a new life cycle, or be recycled. In some cases, it can be passed on or donated. Material obsolescence can interrupt the life cycle just as psychological obsolescence can precipitate the object towards abandonment.

Identity Disasters

Disasters are particularly interesting situations to reveal the deep nature that connects the individual to his material environment. Fires, natural disasters caused by water damage, hurricanes in North America, tsunamis in Asia are all situations that, through the human dramas that characterize them, shed light on the relationship of individuals to objects. Being a victim of a disaster often means losing everything. From an optimistic point of view, one might be led to think that the most important thing is to have succeeded in preserving one's life and that insurance will make it possible to regain a material environment with a level of comfort more or less equivalent to that before the disaster. Nothing helps, and regularly the testimonies of the victims given by the media report great dismay.

The studies that have been carried out following such events also point in this direction. For example, Sayre (1994) studied the victims of a gigantic fire. These victims suffered greatly from the loss of their material goods and despite the replacement of the goods by insurance companies, what proves to be most problematic is the disappearance of the symbols associated with the lost objects. This creates a feeling of absence. This term is actually preferred to loss or destruction. A respondent goes so far as to wonder if he or she had an identity. Another reports that he has been orphaned by his past. Identity is deeply affected by the loss of material possessions and for some, this has significant psychological consequences. Faced with an impending disaster, individuals, despite being disoriented, go through several phases. The first is the attempt to preserve their homes and possessions. But as danger approaches, evacuation is necessary and in this case, individuals find it difficult to choose the objects they will try to save. The degree of attachment to specific objects influences the intention to save them from disaster because of their symbolic significance. At the most basic level, individuals choose to preserve the papers that are characteristic of their identity (identity papers, property deeds, marriage contract, insurance, etc.) as well as the pets they consider to be part of the family. Medicines and products or objects necessary for children also figure prominently. They also look for a few items such as clothing and cell phones. Then come precious objects, a few objects such as photos, collector's items, gifts, in other words, objects that connect people to others or that fit into the logic of indexicality mentioned above. The next step consists in mourning the goods that they have not managed to save. The work of mourning focuses on the home, pets that could not be saved and irreplaceable possessions, generally those that characterize links with others such as gifts, souvenirs and that fall within the logic of indexicality. The last step consists in reconstructing the self and replacing the goods that can be replaced in a logic of narrative continuity of the self so that the life after is in the continuity of the life before (Kleine III and Kleine, 2000).

⁶ The cellar and attic are not as separated from the living space in a house as the phenomenological ruptures suggest. In these places, the object is sheltered, it remains present in the accumulation and security. Moreover, these are more or less secret places and the installation of the object in the cellar or attic can be a matter of identity. On this subject we can see Korosec-Serfaty (1984).

Overall, the strategies adopted do not differ greatly according to the individuals considered (DeLorme et al., 2004). Sayre and Horne (1996) also highlight that, after a disaster, individuals are less inclined to focus on objects whose symbolic significance is likely to serve the concept of self. Individuals seek to address emotional trauma by making gratification purchases, i.e., by giving gifts to themselves, but with products different from those they possessed before the disaster, in this case more utilitarian products.

Overall, victims of natural disasters suffer from the loss of their material possessions, especially their homes and objects characterized by a high indexicality and following the ordeal they have gone through, tend to attach less importance to their material possessions even if they buy a lot, but differently as a result of the disaster that has affected them. This reinforces the importance of material goods in the construction of the concept of self⁷.

A few words on social comparison and mimetic desire

Festinger (1954) lays the foundations for social comparison. He postulates first of all that in the absence of objective elements or non-social references, the individual will tend to compare himself to others in terms of opinions or skills. But in the absence of other people to compare themselves with, they will be in an uncomfortable psychological situation. This propensity to compare oneself to others decreases when the individual and others have similarities. On the other hand, he will prefer to compare himself to someone with whom he shares opinions or skills, because if the opinions and skills are too far removed from his own conceptions, he will not be able to produce an accurate assessment. However, if the opinions and skills are not too far removed from his or her own judgments, he or she may change his or her opinions. In general, however, he avoids comparing himself to people who are too different from him in terms of opinions and skills. When things are reasoned in terms of social groups, individuals will tend to converge their opinions. Baumeister and Leary (1995) postulate the importance of the need for social belonging. This characteristic is likely to explain this form of standardization in the consumer society. Not buying is a way of excluding oneself from this society where buying dominates as a means of accessing pleasure and well-being. Even if the combinations of brands purchased are different, they are nevertheless at the center of the device, because they carry symbols and characteristics that individuals wish to appropriate or even express. Not complying with this social prescription means not recognizing each other socially or ignoring each other. Uniformity lies not so much in the brands chosen as in the permanent concern to belong to the community through consumer activity.

Wood (1989) amended Festinger's proposals. First of all, he suggests that the individual is not necessarily rational in his self-evaluation and that he is likely to formulate biased evaluations and to want to simultaneously achieve goals of a different nature. For example, he may seek to situate or position himself socially, but he may also pursue goals of surpassing oneself through learning, or of building self-esteem. Then the social environment

⁷ Anecdotally, it can be pointed out that the temporary loss of possessions that are important from the point of view of symbolic meaning can give rise to a strategy of denial. This consists of avoiding considering injuries affecting the social and personal self and maintaining the meanings associated with lost possessions in the definition of the concept of self (Black, 2011). These findings have been highlighted in the context of airline loyalty programs and the temporary loss of privileges associated with frequent flyers.

is likely to vary and the individual will not react in the same way. Wood recounts an experience in which a recruiter looks good and leads candidates to devalue themselves compared to a situation in which the recruiter is less dashing and leads candidates to value themselves. Wood also suggests that social situations are likely to impose themselves on the individual who has no choice but to make comparisons from the perspective of self-concept assessment. Depending on who the individual is comparing with, this may result in "bottom-up" comparisons (the sense of self-improvement is increased) or "top-down" comparisons (self-esteem is degraded). In addition, the individual may sometimes choose the dimensions or attributes that are the focus of the social comparison; this may involve advertising, goods or services based on social practices. Even if the individual is singled out by his consumption and possessions, a form of standardization cannot be excluded by certain aspects. The activity of consumption is, after all, relatively conformist. This preoccupation with social comparison is associated with reflexive evaluation. This concerns in particular those possessions that have a significant symbolic significance. This reflexive evaluation of the concept of self and the way in which this one is built is done on the basis of the glance of others. Advertising also provides in a vicarious way information related to the social comparison by describing consumers who benefit from positive reinforcements because of the use of a product or a mark. In the end, consumers concerned with sensitivity to social comparison through brands or products are more likely to be compliant in their choices (Bearden and Rose, 1990).

Advertising, for example, sometimes leads to an approach based on social comparison. In Richins' (1991) work on women, for example, it appears that women tend to compare themselves relatively to advertisements featuring other particularly attractive women. These women tend to modify their standards of comparison and consequently alter the perception they have of themselves, but also of other women on average, which leads to a reduction in satisfaction. However, this does not prevent the product being advertised from being found attractive despite dissatisfaction with the current self. Following on from the work of Richins (1991), Hogg and Fragou (2003) arrive at more detailed results. The authors show that depending on the goals pursued, different results are obtained. When it comes to self-evaluation in terms of physical attractiveness, advertising has negative effects, at least temporarily. When the goal is self-improvement, the effect is positive when the advertisement inspires the individual. On the other hand, there is a negative effect on the self-esteem in the contrary case. Lastly, when the goal pursued is the reinforcement of the self-image, advertising leads to the devaluation of the concept of self. The canons conveyed in the material culture by advertising are largely idealized for both men and women and this is likely to produce envy and disappointment (Dittmar, 2008). More transversally, material culture as conveyed by television, for example, tends to distort reality significantly. Thus, the more people watch television, the more they develop erroneous beliefs regarding the possession of luxury or expensive goods. In practice, they largely overestimate the possession of such goods in the population (O'Guinn and Shrum, 1997). The problem with advertising is that while it points out the gap between the current self and the ideal self, it proposes a solution to reduce this gap through symbolic compensation that engages the individual in a consumer activity whose emotional consequences are sometimes negative (Dittmar, 2008). The effects of social comparison observed in the context of advertising are also proven for products. Thus, it appears that a consumer can become dissatisfied with a product that until then met his needs. This dissatisfaction is not related to a loss of product

performance, but to the fact that another person owns and benefits from a better product. The emotional driving force behind this social comparison lies in the individual's envy (Ackerman et al., 2000). Social comparison can also be viewed in terms of practices such as the use of digital social networks. For example, de Vries and Kühne (2015) highlight that the more individuals use social network sites, the more they feel they are experiencing negative social comparisons, which also has negative consequences on perceived social skills and physical attractiveness. These results are supported by those of Vogel et al (2015) who show that the more sensitive individuals are to social comparison, the more they use social networks. In addition, they also develop lower self-esteem and an altered perception of self-concept.

These few examples clearly show the role of social comparison in consumption practices and the way in which it participates in the person's identity dynamics (Rosenberg, 1979). However, a central issue in social comparison, implicit in all that has just been mentioned, is that of mimetic desire. It is to René Girard (1961) that we owe a fascinating theory dealing with the triangulation of mimetic desire. By hypothesis, the subject is desiring and his desire relates to an object. This object he does not necessarily find it, which means that he does not necessarily know what to desire. In Girard's approach, it is a mediator, in other words a third individual, who will designate to the subject the object of his desire. The mediator may possess the object of desire or desire it himself. Whatever the configuration, the mediator is a rival, even if he can be admired. The triangulation of desire between the subject, the mediator and the object of desire critically raises the question of envy. The desiring subject is envious of the mediator and of the object he designates to him. But envy can be a source of suffering when the subject cannot access the object of his desire, generally for financial reasons. The consumer society is very violent when the propensity to social comparison increases (Dumouchel and Dupuy, 1979). The mimetic analogy is easy to transpose to the field of advertising, as we have seen previously, and more generally to the consumer society where the abundance of goods is the source of many solicitations⁸.

These few considerations on social comparison and mimetic desire, if they cannot avoid us from considering the negative effects that they are likely to have on psychological life, are also able to shed light on the gap that can exist between the real self-concept and the ideal self-concept, and the reasons why the acquisition of certain goods, if it is possible, is likely to respond to this identity tension.

The difficulty of being oneself and the crisis of identities

According to Ehrenberg (1995), the mass consumption of the 1960s allowed the emergence of the hedonistic individual. However, the pursuit of happiness and well-being through consumption had a price, that of alienation. "Consumption diverted the working classes from their real political interests in favor of the immediate satisfaction of illusory pleasures and artificial needs, while the middle classes indulged in the comedy of status. The masses ran towards the enjoyment of the present instead of worrying about their future (p. 15). It is in these terms that Ehrenberg introduces the constraints that would later weigh on the shoulders of the individual. These constraints refer to the cult of performance, which did not

⁸ A discussion of Girard's contributions to the consumption analysis can be found in Ladwein (2015).

bring any certainty about employment, and the social elevator was broken. Paradoxically, however, the cult of the entrepreneur was born, which proposed new role models, and governance would henceforth concern the self. A new norm, that of autonomy and self-management, was emerging. Society is characterized by change, and the individual must constantly evolve and adapt, which increases the pressure on his or her shoulders. Anxiety and depression develop and living with them becomes a relatively common way of life (Ehrenberg, 1998).

Stillman and Baumeister (2009) suggest that in order for life to be meaningful, it must first be intentional through actions, which suggests that they are goal-oriented and that the individual has control over the consequences of his or her actions; second, that his or her actions are characterized by a certain effectiveness, then that they have a certain value or usefulness to him or her, and finally, that they confer a positive self-worth. The uncertain individual fails to meet these conditions and is confronted with concerns related to social belonging.

This is essentially what Dubar (2000) posits. The identity crisis is correlative to the decline of institutions (Dubet, 2002). Dubar identifies several identity crises: the family, gendered identities, professional identity, the crisis of the religious and the crisis of the political. In all of these areas, we come across individuals who are in disarray, lost, not knowing where they stand or what behaviour to adopt. For Dubar, identity embodies permanence or common belonging in difference. There is a paradox here: the individual identifies with a conceptual category that characterizes common belonging, and as an individual, he or she stands out in relation to other categories. In this sense, identity cannot exist without otherness, that is, without the existence of the other. Thus, there is identity for others and identity for oneself, both of which define the individual. The ideal situation being that these identities overlap. Returning to the notion of belonging, social structures and collectives provide frameworks in which people are likely to identify themselves in a transient or temporary way, but which are likely to give meaning to individual action. The individual identifies with a collective that confers his or her social identity. In practice, however, Dubar does not rule out the possibility that the individual may identify with multiple collectives. The crisis of identities is the crisis of social ties that become distended and disintegrated. This presupposes an individual in action, socially committed, who no longer has the resources or convictions for social engagement. It is also synonymous with a loss of values. But more fundamentally, the individual no longer recognizes himself in the institution and his role models are altered to the point where he is no longer able to function, i.e. to assume neither the status nor the roles associated or assigned to him.

It is in this context that material goods become landmarks to which one becomes attached, as they replace a community environment that is in the process of disintegration, to the benefit of a societal world in which each person has the obligation to build himself as a self (Tönnies, 1887). This obligation is not a social prescription, in the sense that it would be socially encouraged. It is an obligation because the individual cannot avoid it if he or she wants to exist, preserve himself or herself and lead a more or less normal existence. Material goods then appear as identity supplements.

Conclusion

Identity would be changing and would be constantly recomposed in response to the diversity of experiences and social interactions (Kaufmann, 2008). Can this identity that Bauman (2006) describes as liquid really be understood as such? It is not certain that the individual goes through identity states that are as fluctuating as one might think. The need for consistency and stability may lead the individual to adjust to constantly changing situations, but the existence of the flowering of multiple identities is doubtful. This does not exclude that the individual may have several identities in different compartments of life (family life, work, groups of friends, in particular). The individual would no longer be intelligible to others any more than he would be intelligible to himself. The concept of self is probably less flexible to explain this identity dynamic, but more efficient. The concept of self is stable enough to be readable and intelligible, but also fluctuating enough to accommodate contemporary society and to explain the relationships that the individual has with material goods, advertising, social games or social interactions in general. In this framework, we can accept the idea that there are identity facets in every being that are activated according to the social circumstances in which the individual finds himself. The social self should then possibly be conjugated in the plural.

The material goods to which individuals are most attached participate in the construction of identity. They are first of all goods that provide pleasure in a logic of self-improvement. Then they are especially goods that put individuals in relation or that characterize these relations. Finally, the goods to which the individuals are also very attached are those which are characterized by a strong indexicality and which connect the individuals to others, to events, places or experiences in a vicarious way. These goods cannot be replaced in the event of loss or destruction, hence the strong attachment to them.

If we accept the idea that contemporary society is losing its bearings due to the decline of institutions (Dubet, 2002) and that the liquid society as Bauman (2006) describes it leads individuals to no longer know where they really stand, we can accept the existence of an identity crisis (Dubar, 2000). This leads individuals to compare themselves socially and, moreover, they find themselves confronted with the obligation to be themselves (Ehrenberg, 1995). As Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) point out, the individual is situated in a logic that aims to differentiate and singularize himself. These two notions present nuances. Differentiation refers to otherness, in this case others, and singularization refers to oneself, to the need to construct oneself in a certain uniqueness. To this must be added the concern to be related, that is to say to be able to claim to belong to certain groups, communities or social classes that are becoming increasingly blurred. In this context, the concept of self is particularly useful to apprehend the gaps which can exist between the current self and the ideal self. The society and the social environment lead the individual, taking into account his financial means and the frustrations which can result from it, to choose or select goods to build or formulate a representation of oneself which is at least satisfactory, which does not prevent the individual from desiring more goods so that the current concept of self tends asymptotically towards the ideal self, whether it is individual or social. The concept of self is built in a society of market abundance which is likely to contribute to the development of the ideal self which does not cease escaping us so much the psychological obsolescence is important and requires its permanent reformulation. The

goods thus serve as reference marks to identify what one wishes to be individually and socially. The psychologically weakened individual in a society that has become liquid is likely to turn to material goods in an irrational way. The relationship between individuals and consumer goods "is the result of the annexation and colonization by consumer markets of the space that separates individuals (Bauman, 2008: 21)".

Chapter 3: Materialism

After attempting to shed some light on the role of material goods for the individual, especially in identity construction, we also sketched out some principles that lead individuals to want to acquire goods in a social context of identity crisis and difficulty in being oneself (Baumeister, 1987). In particular, we have shown that material goods are likely to strengthen the concept of self, especially in reducing the gap between the current and ideal self-concepts, and that individuals are likely to become attached to objects. But that does not inform us on what is materialism. The common acceptance of a materialistic individual is based on the propensity to acquire a lot of goods and to have an ostensive use of them. In this logic, a materialist individual tends to inundate us with meanings that converge around the idea of success or social ease. This logic is not necessarily appreciated and is generally not socially valued. This preliminary definition, however, tells us little about the notion of possession and, more generally, about having.

Materialism as personality traits

In today's economic landscape, selfishness and materialism are closely associated and are no longer seen as moral problems, but simply as goals and purposes in people's lives. Kasser (2002) points out that we are faced with a religion of consumerism and materialism and that many of us have converted to it. Materialism must now be discussed and defined.

Belk (1983) discusses possessiveness and the tendency or readiness to acquire from a critical perspective. The tendency to acquire is thus motivated by the possibility of considering material goods as one's own and being able to emphasize that the goods belong to us. There is a legal dimension to the acquisitive tendency. Possessiveness characterizes the tendency to retain material goods in the personal sphere and to keep some control over them so that they are not appropriated by others. These two aspects associated with material goods have been strongly criticized. The first criticism comes from the religious sphere. Generally speaking, all the most widespread religions condemn the excessive concentration of wealth. Such conceptualizations are also exclusive of charity, justice and compassion. In practice, vices, from the perspective of the seven deadly sins, are intended to discourage the appearance of envious behavior. Marxism has also been criticized. For Belk, critical philosophy, although presenting contradictory approaches, blunted the concept of consumption as a means of achieving happiness, and psychoanalysis has largely contributed to associating psychological disorders with possessiveness.

This critical analysis by Belk (1983) led him to admit the notion of materialism in the background without really positioning it centrally. He declined this analysis in a later study. Thus Belk (1984, 1985) proposed a measure of materialism based on three dimensions: possessiveness, non-generosity and envy. These different dimensions are precisely relevant to the critical discussion of the attractiveness of material possessions.

Possessiveness, as we saw earlier, refers to the tendency to exercise control over material possessions. As the author points out, possessions must be reasonably tangible. They may be material possessions that are more or less symbolic, a financial asset, or even individuals. Under this definition, individuals are likely to be affected by the loss of their possessions either through their own actions or through the actions of others. They are supposed to prefer possession to renting or lending and prefer to keep material goods rather than discard them by giving them away or throwing them away. Finally, they tend to make experiences tangible through photographs or memorabilia that can be shown or exhibited.

The second dimension is non-generosity. This dimension implies the willingness not to give or share material possessions with others. For Belk this is a distinct trait from possessiveness. For example, parents can be very possessive of their children while being generous with them. Selfishness is directly associated with non-generosity. Attitudinally, non-generosity is characterized by a certain resistance to lending or giving objects. This is also true for the sharing of time, knowledge, effort, and of course money, which are behaviors that are not valued by the individual. This dimension is possibly linked to low self-esteem and is likely to be a source of unhappiness.

The third dimension noted by Belk is envy. Envy characterizes the belief that other people are happier, more successful, have more possessions or otherwise desirable things. However, envy should not be confused with jealousy. One is jealous of what one already has. On the other hand, we are envious of things we do not yet possess. Jealousy is more akin to possessiveness. This disposition to jealousy is understood as the annoyance of seeing others buy what one desires, to be more successful than oneself. Envy is also appreciated from the angle of wanting to trade places with another person who is supposedly better off, or from the annoyance of seeing others owning what the person desires.

Materialism as values

Belk's measurements (1984, 1985) do not have exceptional psychometric qualities, but they open the way to the measurement of materialism and thus indirectly to the way of defining it. While Belk chose to qualify materialism on the basis of personality traits, Richins and Dawson (1992) took a different approach and characterized materialism as values. This assumes, as defined above, the existence of goal-oriented beliefs that guide an individual's behavioural activity (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990). This intuition arose from an earlier study (Fournier & Richins, 1991). It reveals that the purpose of material goods is to bring happiness through clothing, accessories or jewelry and to express an individual's statutory position in relation to others and to enable him or her to feel superior. Money is valued because it provides access to material goods. Material goods also allow one to calibrate one's personal value. But when it comes to evoking materialistic people, the portraits that are drawn are particularly negative. Materialistic individuals are portrayed negatively both individually and socially. For example, they attach too much importance to social status, they are condescending, envious, self-centered or lacking in principles. From a behavioural point of view, materialistic individuals are mainly preoccupied with their acquisitions. The authors justify a values-based approach because of their transversal nature and the fact that values determine the purpose of an individual's activity. The approach is innovative. The values

finally selected by Richins and Dawson (1992) are centrality, the pursuit of happiness and success.

Centrality characterizes placing possessions and acquisitions at the center of life. Centrality runs counter to the concern to keep life simple based solely on necessary goods and the general lack of importance given to material goods. On the *contrary*, centrality positively characterizes spending money on unnecessary things, finding pleasure in shopping and being attracted to luxury goods.

One of the reasons why material possessions are central to materialistic individuals is that these goods are seen as determining their well-being. It is the accumulation of material acquisitions that is the source of happiness. This pursuit of happiness characterizes the second dimension of materialism. This value is explicitly understood as regret at not being able to buy more things and as satiety in terms of material goods.

The third dimension, success, is directly related to the appreciation of social success. Material goods must reflect success. It is more a matter of demonstrating social success through material goods than of being satisfied with those goods. This dimension is not far removed from the social self-image that individuals wish to have of themselves, and this image is closely associated with possessed assets. This dimension is appreciated under the angle of the expression of oneself in terms of success and achievement.

In the previous chapter, we addressed the question of identity construction through material goods and focused heavily on attachment to material goods. This attachment to possessions is not necessarily problematic when it corresponds to certain instrumental values, i.e., means to achieve other goals, such as indexicality, the materialization of the link with other people, or when material goods contribute to self-improvement. For Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981), the question arises in other words when the possessions concern terminal values, i.e. values bearing their own finality, in this case pure and simple possession, accumulation or hedonism. When material possessions are related to terminal values, this can be problematic for the individual. We can point out here that the values of Richins and Dawson (1992), who refrain from using the distinction between instrumental and terminal values, constitute *a priori* terminal values. Material goods appear as a means of accessing happiness and a means of achieving success. The dimension relating to the centrality of purchases is also an end in itself⁹.

Materialism as aspirations

Kasser and Ryan (1993) initially propose a dimension they call "financial success" to characterize materialism. For this, they define different aspirations or desires in a relatively vast set that covers, for example, the domains of conformity, spirituality or hedonism. The authors then broaden the notion of materialism (Kasser and Ryan, 1996). They then consider materialism from the point of view of financial success, social recognition and finally image or social attractiveness.

⁹ An examination of the psychometric qualities of the measurement of centrality reveals some weaknesses. It is worth noting that Richins (2004) developed a more parsimonious version of his materialism scale. This new scale is very close to the French translation we produced (Ladwein, 2005).

Financial success characterizes financial success as well as statutory concerns or the possession of expensive assets. Social recognition is linked to the reputation or admiration of others. Finally, social image or attractiveness is characterized by being fashionable or appearing attractive in the eyes of others.

The authors characterize these aspirations as values or goals whose purpose is extrinsic. In other words, these values are subject to the appreciation of others and, hypothetically, are likely to be more problematic in the pursuit of happiness than values with an intrinsic purpose such as a sense of belonging or self-improvement. However, the theoretical bases seem less well supported than in the approaches presented above.

To have and to be

Fromm (1978) speaks of an acquisitive society to qualify a way of thinking based on "having" rather than "being". The values on which having is based are private property, profit and power. Acquiring and owning are therefore considered inalienable human rights. Private property is understood as a natural and universal conceptual category of the economy and is seen as the main concern of life. In the acquisitive society, the acquisition of material goods, their conservation and even their growth are rooted in social norms, and people who meet these criteria are supposed to be admired and envied. For Fromm, this dynamic concerns both modest and well-off people. The self is the most elementary form of the sense of ownership, but the evolution of industrial society towards a consumer society makes modest people eligible for the acquisition of material possessions. The interest in material possessions is short-term and inevitably leads to a desire to renew acquisitions with newer and supposedly more desirable goods. The object is quickly disqualified in favour of a more recent one. The logic of "having" characterizes a subject and a permanent object, because it is directly linked to the feeling of ownership. Fromm strongly criticizes this logic. Indeed, he considers that the object is not permanent. It can lose its value, be destroyed or stolen. The subject is no more permanent than the object. The individual evolves throughout his life trajectory. He can for example change his social status and consequently modify his preferences with regard to material goods. This permanence, even if it is transitory, is desired by the individual who can only conceive himself only in relation to his possessions. The individual defines himself by what he possesses, but this relation is not alive. He can consequently ask himself the question to know if it is not the objects that possess the individual and not the opposite. The result is a form of passivity of the individual in front of the world which surrounds him and a will to assert his control and his authority on the world.

The logic of "having" is opposed to that of "being". The "being" mode is characterized above all by human experience and activity. Given the dynamics of lived experience, it is difficult to describe an individual who bases his life on being. To be is also to exercise independence, freedom, criticism and attention. More fundamentally, experience is inseparable from activity. It involves the renewal, development and existence of emotional relationships and giving. The "being" mode can only arise when the "having" mode declines. Activity should not be understood here simply as the implementation of behaviors. Every individual is acting. The activity must be closely linked to the individual who develops it and must

produce a reflexive feedback on himself, in other words change it, renew it or allow it to develop as we have specified above. An alienating activity does not enter in this case. The activity must meet fundamental requirements, be ethically centered or be of a spiritual nature. The activity must not be understood as passive or routine. Being is also opposed to appearing.

In spite of the many nuances and precisions that Fromm brings to these modes of functioning that are having and being, it is no less true that one can cross these dimensions and not necessarily oppose them. It is indeed perfectly imaginable to consider four types of people and to formulate hypotheses about each of them¹⁰.

Not to have and to be. It is undoubtedly the ideal type for Fromm. We are dealing here with an individual of ascetic type who lives to the maximum the material stripping. He has a particularly rich and intense inner life. He orients his activities towards others and the gift of self. He is probably little concerned about the way others look at him. He could practice voluntary simplicity. What he sacrifices for his own comfort is intended for others as a means of avoiding the end of a world where sociality, mutual aid and social relations dominate and where the advent of a relatively prosperous world in which individual needs are limited, thus allowing the well-being of all, would be valued. Implicit in this conception are the view that resources are considered limited and must be shared as part of a sustainable approach to the environment and life in society. This figure of consumption could be that of voluntary simplicity.

Not having and not being. This type is probably the most complex to define. It excludes neither the desire to have nor the possibility of being. For this type, it is reasonable to think that the economic situation does not allow people to possess a quantity of material goods even if they would like to. The impossibility of being perhaps depends on the absence of moral and ethical considerations, or more likely we are dealing with individuals who are deficient in values and social relations because of their economic fragility. In fact, they cannot easily construct an identity. A profile of precariousness, or even social¹¹ exclusion, is taking shape here.

To have and not to be. Typically it is this combination that most obviously reflects the materialistic individual. He possesses a significant amount of material goods and has a permanent desire to acquire new ones. His attachment to objects is based on possession. Material goods are a reflection of what he wishes to be, rather than how he wishes to appear in the eyes of others. His identity and social status are entirely circumscribed by what he possesses. This can be understood both from the perspective of the incorporation of material goods or possessions considered as an extension of the self. Moreover, he can build a social identity by acquiring goods that will bring him a certain success, even if this does not

¹⁰ To identify these four types or figures, we have based ourselves on a semiotic square resulting from the opposition between "being" and "having". On this question, one can for example consult Courtés (2003)

¹¹ Fromm (1978) proposes a form of having that he qualifies as existential (p.106). These are the objects necessary to meet the most basic needs (including tools, understood as the means to produce the conditions for one's own subsistence). It can be thought that in the configuration of *not having and not being* individuals do not necessarily have all the resources necessary to satisfy the most basic needs, which is likely to be a barrier to entering the "being" mode.

correspond to his real social situation. The possessions of a materialistic person may, however, vary quantitatively according to the resources at his disposal, but it can also be thought that the possessions he wishes to acquire are generally not neutral from the point of view of self exposure. Possessions such as cars or technological objects might be particularly prized. This materialism, which can be described as radical, is decisive for these people who base their identity and their relationship to the world on their possessions.

To have and to be. Here we have a guy who is perhaps more common than one might think at first glance. Many individuals are attached to material possessions. But these do not necessarily serve the purpose of appearing. They can be used to fill the image of the real self and the ideal self. More probably these objects can be invested emotionally sometimes because they mediate the relation to the others. Such objects refer to memories or to the memory. They can also be invested emotionally because they are a means of enriching one's personal life. It is sometimes easier to acquire a book that will be difficult to find in a library, not because of the object it represents, but because of the content it conveys. Other objects allow you to stay in touch with other people, such as telephones or computers, which can also be used for artistic and knowledge production. Finally, more generally, many objects are possessed by people simply for the sake of convenience and comfort. These material possessions of convenience are not invested psychologically. There is no particular attachment and they do not contribute to the definition of the individual's identity. These possessions do not participate in the extension of self or self-presentation. They remain in periphery of the self and are solicited when a need arises, without however proving to be essential. On the other hand, other objects are likely to be incorporated, because they participate directly in the activity of the person. Tools, in the broadest sense of the term, as soon as they are at the service of what is central to the productions of individuals, fall into this category. One could qualify these individuals on the basis of a diffuse and ultimately ordinary materialism.

This typological construction has all the disadvantages of the genre. Boundaries are sometimes difficult to draw. *Not having does not* mean having nothing. *Not to be does not* mean to be deprived of any identity, any social link and any activity. Nevertheless, the typological approach allows us to point out or identify a few central points that can provide food for thought. By combining the dimensions of having, being, but also implicitly of doing (Sartre, 1943), we have identified the figures of voluntary simplicity, precariousness, radical materialism and ordinary materialism.

Conclusion

First of all, we have apprehended materialism from the different measures that allow us to characterize it. These approaches can be qualified as dimensional, because they make it possible to situate an individual on the basis of his or her degree of materialism. These approaches are those related to personality traits, values and aspirations. These various approaches to materialism, although apparently very different in terms of their objects of measurement, and therefore in terms of their theoretical presuppositions, nevertheless appear to us to be perfectly complementary. They seem to form an ideal portrait of the materialist individual. Thus the latter would be possessive, ungenerous and envious, in search of success and happiness, financial success, social recognition and social

attractiveness, and for him or her, purchasing plays a central role. In the end, these measures, taken together, provide little more than the exploratory investigations of Fournier and Richins (1991). The only notable difference is that, in terms of social consequences, the materialistic individual is socially disliked by nearly 80% of individuals.

Nevertheless, these different measures of materialism make it possible to calibrate the degree of materialism of individuals, allow for comparisons, and allow the characteristics of materialism to be related to other psychological traits or psychosocial dimensions. In this sense, they are of obvious interest.

We have also in a second step, notably on the basis of the work of Fromm (1978), adopted a categorical approach, in other words a typological analysis on the basis of the importance given to being and having. This approach enabled us to identify four figures: voluntary simplicity, precariousness, radical materialism and diffuse materialism. This approach is interesting because it suggests a number of things to us. The first is that there can be economic conditions for materialism. Current or possibly past precariousness is likely to lead to the development of materialism. On the other hand, there may be a cultural factor linked to the consumer society that conditions materialism. Next, we can stress that it is possible to subscribe to a logic of moderate materialism, which we have called ordinary, and which is likely to characterize a more or less extensible attachment to certain goods, probably mostly goods that bring a certain comfort. These goods contribute to a certain hedonism and, more generally, to the improvement of one's living conditions, and are sometimes inscribed in indexicality. Finally, from the figure of voluntary simplicity, we can emphasize that materialism is not a fatality and that if one wishes to avoid it, it is possible *a priori*.

These four figures of consumption broaden the field of materialism considered as a simple profile. This profile from the dimensions that are constitutive of materialism tend to caricature materialism as a single, socially rejected figure. The typology that we have introduced seems to us to be more nuanced by taking into account categories of people who fit into different logics and gives a more diversified reading of the relationship that people have with material possessions. We cannot be satisfied with the question of having to qualify materialism, and it seems to us necessary to mobilize the ontological question of being, which must find its place in this discussion.

Chapter 4: Materialism and subjective well-being

The relationship between materialism and well-being is an issue that is widely studied in the literature. A large body of evidence converges to establish a negative relationship between the degree of materialism and life satisfaction. We will first list a few works among the very large amount of research conducted on the issue before discussing the paradox that there is no relationship between the level of income and subjective well-being when viewed from a longitudinal perspective, that is, over time. We will then identify the main determinants of well-being, in terms of values, and put these determinants into perspective with respect to the question of materialism. Finally, we will take a look at economic socialization and its role in the development of materialism.

The dominant perspective

From the earliest works on materialism, and one naturally thinks of the work of Belk (1984, 1985) or Richins and Dawson (1992), we have the first elements to characterize what will become the dominant perspective. These authors highlight a negative relationship between the degree of materialism and happiness or satisfaction in life. The work of Kasser and Ryan (1993 and 1996) points in the same direction.

A large study has been conducted on all the work that has dealt with the relationship between measures of materialism and measures of well-being (Dittmar et al., 2014). A consistent sample of nearly 150 studies on the issue was compiled and analyzed. In general, it was found that almost all of the selected studies lead to a negative relationship between the degree of materialism and well-being. These results are observed independently of the measures of materialism and well-being used. It can be seen, however, that this negative relationship, although significant, is generally not large and there are significant variations between the different studies. Despite this reservation, which is easily understandable given the diversity of the measures used, it must be admitted that there is little doubt about the existence of this negative relationship between the degree of materialism and well-being.

Given the observed differences in the relationship between materialism and well-being, a more detailed view of the results is needed. We will first look at the socio-demographic variables. First of all, it can be pointed out that there is no impact of ethnicity and level of education. On the other hand, there is also no effect of individual income level or household income on the intensity of the relationship between materialism and well-being. The first significant relationship found is related to gender. Women are characterized by a stronger relationship between the degree of materialism and well-being, which obviously does not mean that women are more materialistic than men. The second variable that moderates the relationship between materialism and well-being is age. For people over 18, the relationship is slightly higher than for those under 18. Finally, there is an impact of respondents'

occupation. For individuals related to business, economics, trade or marketing, the negative relationship between the degree of materialism and well-being is higher than for the rest of the population.

The analysis of societal characteristics is a little more complex. Generally speaking, when studying per capita income and the degree of economic liberalism in different countries, there is no impact on the intensity of the relationship between the degree of materialism and subjective well-being. Counter-intuitively, the level of social inequality in the country affects the relationship between the degree of materialism and well-being, but it is observed that the countries with the highest inequality are also those with the weakest relationship. More logically, countries with the highest per capita income growth see a weaker negative relationship between materialism and well-being than countries with low growth.

In the end, there are relatively few sociodemographic or societal variables that moderate the negative relationship between the degree of materialism and subjective well-being. These results do not allow us to have an intelligible overall view, but they have the advantage of making this relationship little debatable. It is surprising, however, that the level of income does not affect the negative relationship between materialism and well-being. Indeed, one might think that the level of income would attenuate the negative relationship between the degree of materialism and well-being. It is also surprising that the countries with the highest inequality are also those with the weakest relationship between the degree of materialism and life satisfaction. These two results deserve attention.

The Easterlin Paradox

Easterlin (1974, 2001) suggests that aspirations are initially relatively similar among groups with the same income levels. However, the higher the income, the greater the well-being of individuals, even if these proportions are moderate. The problem becomes more complicated when looking at longitudinal data. Throughout the life cycle, aspirations for happiness increase with changes in income and thus somewhat cancel out the effect of rising incomes. As a result, life satisfaction remains constant while incomes have increased. Individuals believe that they are more satisfied in life than in the past and that they will be more satisfied in the future. But as aspirations are growing and in line with their income, life satisfaction remains the same despite the increase in income.

This phenomenon has since been called the Easterlin paradox. The 1974 study investigated the relationship between income growth and subjective well-being, using survey data from 19 countries and a cohort from 1946 to 1970. Several significant results were extracted from this study. The first result is that economic concerns are dominant in all the countries studied. It then shows that, at a given point in time, groups with high social status are more satisfied with their lot compared to groups with low social status, and this is true both for developed countries such as the United States and for less developed countries such as Niger, but in relatively modest proportions. Moreover, there is no clear relationship between the level of per capita income and a country's subjective well-being when analyzing longitudinal data, i.e. over time. In assessing their subjective degree of happiness, individuals tend to compare their current situation with a benchmark or norm, derived from their past and current social experience (Easterlin, 1974: 118). This norm evolves as economic

conditions improve due to economic socialization in the class in which the individual lives. Concretely, subjective well-being does not increase even as living conditions improve.

Easterlin's paradox has been the subject of much criticism (e.g. Veenhoven, 1991), but has also received much support and the results have been confirmed by many other works. This paradox seems to us essential here to provide a plausible explanation for the flood of studies that establish a negative relationship between the degree of materialism and subjective well-being. Indeed, if subjective well-being is linked to the environment in which the individual finds himself, there is a strong question of social comparison in the social class in which the individual finds himself and the norms that apply there. In fact, it is logical that the level of income does not moderate the negative relationship between the degree of materialism and subjective well-being, when the data are analyzed in an aggregated way, i.e. across all social classes. The aspirations of the individual, in terms of material goods, are those of the social class to which he or she belongs. It is also understandable why, in countries where inequality is highest, the negative relationship between materialism and subjective well-being is the weakest. In fact, the gaps between social classes are so great that the norm is not to gain access to higher social classes through material goods, because they are unreachable, but to be better placed in the social class to which one belongs, because social comparison is made within the class.

The Easterlin Paradox gives full importance to a relative approach to income and the possessions it enables. Individuals tend to adapt to the satisfactions of material goods as income increases. The effects of material well-being are likely to fade over time, and material goods are replaced in order to regenerate their hedonic effects. This may have little impact on overall subjective well-being, because repetition of these substitution behaviours only increases dissatisfaction despite the increase in income. If there is a relationship between income and material well-being, it admits a limit. At a certain point, absolute increases in income no longer have an effect on increases in subjective well-being¹². This leads Mentzakis and Moro (2009) to argue that adaptation effects (past income), aspirations and expectation effects (anticipation of future income) and social comparison effects are as important as the actual increase in income on subjective well-being. Furthermore, the authors consider that the notion of satisfaction with material goods, and the well-being that results from it, is very different for rich and poor people.

Pugno (2009) articulates Easterlin's paradox to social capital. Generally speaking, Easterlin's paradox is related to the weakening of social capital. It is the deterioration of social relations that prevents individuals from thriving. Individuals do not only consume material goods, but also social relations that must be produced and consumed simultaneously. The deterioration of these relations is linked to the increasing acquisition of material possessions, in a

¹² However, when subjective well-being is detailed, it appears that the negative impact of financial success (as an aspiration) on life satisfaction in general decreases with increasing income. The negative consequences of adopting financial success as an aspiration in life are mainly attributable to aspects that concern relationships with others and have a severe impact on family life (Nickerson et al., 2003). However, these results are specific to individuals with a very high social level and for whom financial success as a value is important. In a very subtle way, Boes and Winkelmann (2010) also demonstrate that, while income level has a very limited impact on life satisfaction, income has a greater impact when their impact on life dissatisfaction is analyzed.

perspective of social comparison which, as we have previously pointed out, does not produce as much subjective well-being compared to the increase in income.

These results, although elaborated by economists, resonate with the work of Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981), namely that a life based on terminal values where the consumption of material goods is an end in itself is not rewarding, contrary to the adoption of instrumental values that offer a more harmonious life. Similar principles can be found in humanistic psychology. The needs for autonomy, competence and relationships with others strongly predict well-being. Seeking to satisfy intrinsic needs such as the development of harmonious social relationships, surpassing oneself, leads to greater well-being than the satisfaction of extrinsic needs such as reputation, social image (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). This does not, however, prevent some people from being concerned about earning more and more money, in the belief that increased income will lead to greater well-being because it allows the acquisition of more material goods. The results of a large body of work suggest that this belief is likely to be misguided for the greatest number of individuals (Ahuvia and Friedman, 1998; Ahuvia, 2007).

Socio-demographic and societal determinants of subjective well-being

If neither the degree of materialism nor the level of income leads to an unequivocal and unambiguous explanation of the degree of well-being, we can only wonder about the factors that can provide well-being. Following Diener (1984), the first question that arises is the definition of well-being. First, there is a cultural approach which consists in considering well-being as the adoption of virtuous or ethical behaviours and socially recognized as such. This approach is normative. The second approach is subjective and refers to the individual's satisfaction with his or her own life as a whole. A third approach, also subjective, characterizes a balance between positive and negative emotions and is of a more conjunctural nature. It concerns more specifically life experiences. These measures are not equivalent and depend on what one wishes to demonstrate.

Diener (1984) and Diener et al. (1999) suggest that self-esteem is the best predictor of subjective well-being or life satisfaction. The other variables that predict life satisfaction are of lesser magnitude and the results are sometimes contradictory. Concerning income, the authors admit that satisfaction increases with the level of income, but only up to a certain point and only for the lowest social categories, which we have already pointed out. However, social status effects can contribute to improving subjective well-being, but are independent of income level. The social comparison hypothesis is coming back into force, and Diener (1984) points out that individuals can only assess their level of satisfaction by comparing their current situation with other individuals who are significant to them. This is also what Sirgy (1998) proposes. Indeed, he suggests that the ideal standard of living of materialistic individuals is influenced by social comparison and in particular by distant rather than close referents, which has the effect of provoking dissatisfaction with life in general. Materialistic individuals develop feelings of injustice or envy because they consider that others have more income while they do not make efforts in work. In this sense, Easterlin and Crimmins (1991) note that young people, from the early 1970s to the late 1990s, have evolved. They became more materialistic, less focused on self-actualization. They also became more sensitive to money and social status in choosing career opportunities.

Diener's (1984) findings on age, gender, or education level are highly mixed and do not really allow for any formal conclusions to be drawn about the ability to explain well-being. On the other hand, not being unemployed, having a stable family situation, adopting religious values and having a social life are likely to have a positive impact on subjective well-being. Generally speaking, it would seem that individuals who are socially inserted (regardless of the level of proxemia with the social environment, i.e. family, relatives or community) within a normative framework are more inclined to develop subjective well-being and this globally independently of the level of income.

Values and subjective well-being

The construction highlighted above refers to the values of individuals. In order to understand materialism as a system of values or aspirations and the way it operates (Richins and Dawson, 1992; Kasser and Ryan, 1993, 1996; Kasser, 2016), it is essential to situate this value system within a much broader set of values and to position these values in relation to a set of values. Burroughs and Rindfleisch (2002) chose to situate the materialism of Richins and Dawson (1992) in relation to the value system of Schwartz and Bilsky (1990, 1994). The latter is probably one of the most successful to date. It identifies eleven motivational or value domains: power (social status, prestige), self-actualization (success, ambition, influence), hedonism (pleasure, pleasant life), stimulation (excitement, novelty), autonomy (freedom, creativity, independence), universalism (wisdom, justice, open-mindedness), benevolence (respect for others), It is based on the following principles: respect for others (friendly relations, indulgence, helpfulness), spirituality (spiritual life, inner harmony), conformity (obedience, discipline, respect for elders), tradition (respect for traditions, humility, moderation), and security (social order, sense of belonging). These different values are structured around two axes: self-reinforcement (self-centered individuals) which is opposed to self-transcendence (allocentric individuals) and openness to change which is opposed to conservatism.

The study by Burroughs and Rindfleisch (2002) reinforces the now well-established findings that there is a negative relationship between the degree of materialism and happiness and satisfaction in life. In a more novel way, the authors seek to establish a relationship with some of Schwartz's values, namely religiosity, the importance of family and community¹³ values. For the latter, the authors have introduced a new measure. It is characterized by a geographical area in which individuals contribute and participate in social life. The results show that the degree of materialism is negatively related to family values, religiosity¹⁴ and

¹³ One cannot help but think here of Tönnies's work (1887) which opposes community to society. In it, the author values the community and the ties that unite its members and criticizes the emerging society, which is the site of individualism and competition among its members. This analysis takes place in a context of increasing industrialization of society, which is destined to replace the community. Although the book is old, it provides a perfect understanding of the issues associated with the notions of community and society, issues that are still relevant in a society that in turn tends to disintegrate and fragment.

¹⁴ Studies on the relationship between the degree of materialism and religiosity are particularly numerous. They almost systematically conclude that there is a negative relationship between the degree of materialism and religiosity (see, for example, La Barbera and Gürhan, 1997). This relationship is ultimately quite understandable insofar as religiosity invites the transcendental, but also privileges the community and consequently favours interpersonal relations. Although this theme is frequently addressed, we will not go into

by extension to spirituality and community values. But with reference to Schwartz (1994), it also appears that there is a negative relationship with universalism, conformity and tradition. On the other hand, power, hedonism or stimulation are positively associated with the degree of materialism. Thus the authors conclude that the adherence or the rejection of materialism are related to important values in the life of people. These results confirm the transversal reading of the findings of Diener (1984) or Diener et al. (1999), namely that normative social integration better protects the individual from materialistic behaviour. They have also been confirmed by Kilbourne and LaForge (2010) who show that values linked to surpassing oneself (equality between individuals, unity with nature, social justice, environmental protection, a world at peace) are negatively linked with materialism contrary to values linked to self-reinforcement (being influential, having success and social power, being rich and having power) which are positively linked to materialism.

Economic socialization: affluent society and advertising

Wealth creates abundance. In contemporary Western society, there is an incredible profusion of products, but also services. Goods are flooding into society, and the points of sale showcase these products. The miracle operates on the psyche as a denial of scarcity (Baudrillard, 1970). The discourse of this merchandise exhibition revolves around the idea of opulence, that there will be everything for everyone and that by buying some of it, we offer ourselves abundance. Department stores and shopping malls are establishing themselves as new cathedrals dedicated to consumption, as Zola formulated in the *Happiness of the Ladies*. The staging is spectacular by the heap, the diversity of the goods, the lighting and the lights that highlight them and give them all their magic. What we are given to see in commerce are above all signs of possible happiness and potentially accessible goods.

Socialization characterizes a permanent situation of a social and material environment in which the individual will draw references and eventually appropriate them. The environment provides and sometimes imposes references. The culture of the consumer society is diffused by consumer goods among individuals. Material goods are considered as instances that transfer meanings. The instruments of this transfer of meanings are advertising and fashion. Finally, the definition of the self passes through the appropriation of these meanings (McCracken, 1988). This process described by McCracken characterizes a process of socialization. From a very young age and throughout the stages of his life, the individual is subjected to a process of socialization. This process leads the individual, by immersing himself in his environment, to internalize norms and values from which he will build himself psychologically and socially. The presence of singular individuals (the other significant ones) will obviously play an important role during the young years, but also later in life. However, socialization is not a unidirectional process. The construction of the individual is also done through his action on the environment. From a young age, in addition to the parents and the framework of the family unit, he will socialize through educational, religious, associative institutions, relational networks, the work environment and will interact with these more or less formal institutions and thus build himself. The social space offers a cultural

it any further because the results of these different studies are relatively unambiguous and do not add much nuance.

environment, in the broadest sense, from which the individual can draw sources and reference points (John, 1999).

It is in this context that economic socialization is elaborated. It is commonly defined as the acquisition of skills related to supply assessment, distribution, promotions, advertising, as well as skills related to choice, money management, and product purchasing (Furnham, 2008). This socialization should, however, be less functional, take more height and take into account notions such as sensitivity to the risks associated with abundance, the treatment of identity tensions and the stakes of social comparison. The affluent society proposes norms and standards that individuals are likely to adopt and perfect through their actions. Economic socialization should also be the transmission of more general notions such as the idea that the satisfaction of needs is the ultimate goal of the consumer society, which is undoubtedly one of the most widespread prescriptions but which is not dealt with in the framework of economic socialization as suggested by Hessel and Morin (2011). But as Bauman (2008) points out, this is "the most terrifying of threats". Absolute satisfaction corresponds to economic stagnation, and for the system to be viable it is necessary for needs or desires to substitute endlessly for each other. But this is the unspoken. It is only half a word that one accompanies the consumer to manage psychological obsolescence, to renew his desire, but also to diversify it. But the major challenge of economic socialization lies in avoiding social disqualification (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996). In order to be socially inserted, it is essential to consume according to norms that are constantly forming and renewing themselves. Economic socialization is diffuse but pervasive. Material goods are offered for sale to those around them and, of course, for sale. Letting oneself be tempted is part of the game.

Very early on, children are subjected to the experience of advertising. While initially treated passively but playfully, later children try to understand the intentions of advertising. It is then actively exploited from a cognitive perspective, and in adolescence it can be treated critically. For John (1999), advertising is a tool for intra-generational exchange and social participation, which allows adolescents to join social groups. Adolescents will discuss advertising, have fun with it, be inspired by it or criticize it. In a comparable logic, from childhood to adolescence, knowledge of the market and exchange will pass through brands and products. It is a matter of first discriminating between products, then categorizing them and then becoming familiar with brands, with a view to forming trade-offs that will lead to social recognition. Economic socialization also involves distribution, knowledge and location of points of sale, pricing policies and everything else that is ultimately necessary to be efficient and develop real know-how in the implementation of a purchasing process. John (1999) points out that economic socialization is not without undesirable effects. Ostentatious consumption, materialism and impulsiveness are also values, skills or behaviours that are transmitted by adults, and younger people adopt them without necessarily being in a position to make the best trade-offs. For example, parents who use material possessions to express affection to their children or to change their behaviour through material rewards will change their children's behaviour when they are adults. Children will tend to adopt more materialistic values and use material goods to build their identity (Richins & Chaplin, 2015). While the degree of materialism of parents affects the degree of materialism of adolescents, it is a more powerful vector of economic socialization, which is that of peers (Flouri, 1999). In this sense, susceptibility to interpersonal influence,

associated with communication with peers on consumer issues, has a significant impact on the adolescent's degree of materialism.

Television and probably the Internet have a decisive influence on the social construction of reality, particularly with regard to the perception of the affluent society, although this construction of reality is largely biased. However, we cannot attribute them exclusively to the subjectivity of the individual, because they also relate to what television shows about itself, in other words, to the content it broadcasts. Television unambiguously distorts reality. It overestimates the probability of possessing goods in reality, particularly those that characterize a life based on luxury (luxury cars, swimming pools, wines, trips abroad, etc.). The more people watch television, the more they develop erroneous beliefs about the abundance of such goods (O'Guinn and Shrum, 1997). Beyond that, it also appears that the more individuals watch television, the more they develop materialistic values (Shrum et al., 2005). Similar results are observed among children for the impact of advertising on materialism and materialism on well-being. The results are consistent with what we have discussed so far, namely that there is a positive relationship between advertising exposure and materialism and a negative relationship between materialism and subjective well-being (Buijzen and Valkenburg, 2003).

Conclusion

Generally speaking, materialism is closely linked to the lack of satisfaction in life. Obviously this proposition must be graduated. The more materialistic one is, the less satisfied one is with one's life. One reason for this is that the most materialistic individuals are also those whose psychological needs are the least satisfied. In practice, they are also the ones who experience the least psychological gratification (Tsang et al., 2014). The question is to qualify these psychological rewards. In practice, it seems necessary to situate this question within the broader framework of social comparison and the values of individuals, which determine their lifestyles.

Incomes and the general standard of living have only a very relative impact on well-being. First of all, it can be recalled that, at an individual level, increases in income bring more well-being only up to a certain point, which we could qualify as access to convenience goods or services. Moreover, in general terms, Easterlin's paradox indicates that high incomes are moderately more satisfied in life than low incomes, and above all that there is a disconnect between subjective well-being and the increase in standard of living when these are assessed longitudinally, i.e. over time. The explanation for this phenomenon seems to lie in the fact that well-being is assessed by the individual in a relative manner by comparing his or her income with that of other people who are significant to him or her. This is the hypothesis of social comparison. Thus people judge each other, but within a framework that is above all that of their natural social environment, more so in any case than in comparison with higher social categories, because their incomes do not allow them to have access to the same panoply of goods. What these results also tell us is that the impact of income on subjective well-being is independent of that of materialism.

To this first purely financial and social comparison explanation, we must add a second one. A broader examination of the determinants of well-being suggests that individuals who are

better established in their social and family environment are less inclined to develop materialistic values, regardless of their financial situation. The study by Burroughs and Rindfleisch (2002) clearly shows that the least materialistic individuals are more focused on family, religion and overall community values and this within the framework of a territory. Proximity between people, interactions and the solidarity that can be associated with them can make it possible to respond to the emotional deficiencies suffered by the most materialistic individuals (Tsang et al., 2014). *Conversely*, the most materialistic individuals adopt values linked to power, hedonism or stimulation, which are not necessarily likely to make up for emotional deficiencies.

Economic socialization is a concept that is clearly under-researched and poorly documented among adults. We have had to focus mainly on economic socialization among youth (Furnham, 2008). The set of results we proposed indicates the role of products, brands, signs and especially advertising on the socialization process, without forgetting the role of parents and peers. It follows that materialistic values are socially diffused from the earliest age. Surprisingly, we have little information on economic socialization among adults. This socialization is likely to be diffuse and may affect the degree of materialism in some people. However, economic socialization continues when the individual becomes an adult. They continue to develop their skills and pass them on to their children. It seems to us to be a major challenge for the future of society and the prevention of materialism for individuals in a situation of suffering, but also for the transmission to children to take place on less functional (linked to the purchasing process) and more transversal (linked to values) bases. The affluent society imposes itself on individuals without us really knowing for the moment the mechanisms that lead some individuals to develop materialistic behaviors. If we have mentioned a few ideas related to identity, it is obvious that abundance of financial means does not necessarily lead to materialism. On the other hand, the adoption of community rather than societal values (Dubar, 2000; Riesman, 1964) is more likely to preserve the individual from materialism which, whatever the case, is negatively linked to subjective well-being.

Chapter 5: The inconveniences of radical materialism

Materialism, when exacerbated, can be a way for the individual to cope in a life situation that seems psychologically uncomfortable. It can then generally only be an expedient because, as we have seen previously, the degree of materialism is negatively linked to satisfaction in life. We will now turn our attention to those aspects of materialism that are likely to pose some problems for the individual. In practice, we can distinguish three areas that are well documented in the literature. There are, of course, compulsive purchases and their relationship with materialism, then the relationship to money, credit and the various means of payment, and finally the psychological aspects that structure the materialistic individual. The difficulty here lies in the fact that these three aspects are closely intertwined and it will be difficult to dissociate them without being able to establish obvious causalities.

Psychological background and personality

Subjectively perceived insecurity and deprivation during childhood have a significant impact on materialism when it is characterized as a personality trait (Ahuvia and Wong, 2002). Thus, the genesis of materialism could go back a long way in an individual's early years. But it is also the result of economic socialization by peers or parents, as we saw earlier. This being said, it is a phenomenon that cannot be ignored. As has been shown, materialism is negatively related to subjective well-being or life satisfaction. The corollary is that the adoption of materialistic values is likely to create discomfort. This malaise is linked to various psychological factors that will interfere with materialism as a value. Concretely, it is mainly personality traits or psychological imbalances that will be linked to the degree of materialism.

Burroughs and Rindfleisch (2002) found that the degree of materialism is positively related to depression, neurotic symptoms, stress and anxiety. The ambiguity here is that their results do not allow causal relationships to be established. One can simply point out that they are related to each other, forming a homogeneous block and confirming that materialistic individuals are in a state of malaise.

Clarity of self-concept and self-esteem seem to be essential determinants of well-being. Mittal (2015) shows that self-esteem is positively linked to various personality traits such as success, optimism, innovativeness, a sense of uniqueness and the search for excitement. On the other hand, the clarity of the concept of self explains more aspects related to the consumer's behavior. Thus the author highlights that the clarity of the concept of self is negatively related to the interpersonal susceptibility, materialism or shopping as a means of escape. On the other hand that it is the clarity of the concept of oneself or the self-esteem, these two concepts are positively related to the satisfaction in the life. For example, in the context of an activity such as tourism, it appears in a logic of social comparison that the congruence between the self-concept and the ideal tourist's self-concept positively explains the evaluation of the consumption experience and satisfaction (Hosany and Martin, 2012).

These results are very normative, in the sense that when the individual conceives himself as being close to the ideal or the prototype of individuals who are in the same situation as him, he maximizes his consumption experience.

When the self is empty or weakly structured (*empty self*), celebrity worship is very interesting to study from a psychological point of view. This appears to be very much linked to materialism and concerns more specifically young women. This cult of celebrities, when it is important, is closely associated with a low clarity of the concept of self and a high level of materialism. There is also a negative relationship between the degree of materialism and self-esteem and a positive relationship between materialism and compulsive shopping and the predisposition to boredom (Reeves et al., 2012). Taken together, these results tell us that individuals with an empty self have low self-esteem. This leads them to fill this emptiness by identifying with famous people and by a high level of materialism and compulsive buying. Material goods help to fill the individual's self, as does identification with celebrities. These identification practices, when extreme, are pathological.

Chang and Arkin (2002) point out that individuals can slide into materialism when faced with the uncertainty of living in contemporary society. Feeling different from others and having doubts about the self are good predictors of materialism. On the other hand, chronic self-doubt compared to a particular situation of uncertainty accentuates the phenomenon. The authors also point out that when individuals believe that society is losing its bearings or ethical norms and values, they tend to be more materialistic. Ehrenberg's (1995) uncertain individual resurfaces. His difficulties with the concept of self, as discussed earlier, therefore affect the degree of materialism. This suggests that when one is in a bad way in one's life, material goods are likely to offer some form of compensation. In this perspective, Noguti and Bokeyar (2014) have shown that when the concept of self is fragile, that is, unstable and poorly defined, the individual is more inclined to develop materialistic behaviour. Identity or self-concept would then be the missing link to explain the relationship between materialism and consumer activities. The absence of happiness, anxiety, low self-esteem or more generally the absence of well-being create a lack. The deficient individual can then look for escape routes in his environment. This environment, which is saturated with publicity, which values a quality of life based on leisure or the acquisition of material goods, can probably play a role in filling certain gaps that a person is likely to feel in his or her daily life. Under these conditions, materialism could not only be seen from a value perspective, as discussed above, but also as a means of compensating for an unsatisfactory psychological state. It is the social structures and the Western cultural environment in general that are at stake here. The lack of institutions, difficulties in establishing stable emotional relationships, individualization are all possible causes of malaise. It is in this society without stable landmarks, in this liquid society, as Bauman (2006) calls it, that the seeds of a life without real purpose, tossed from ephemeral relationships to ephemeral relationships and without well-defined perspectives, may be smouldering.

Compulsive buying and materialism

As we have seen previously, compulsive buying is an addiction characterized by a form of urgency to make purchases. While impulse buying differs from compulsive buying, both are characterized by a sense of urgency. The difference between the two is that compulsive

buying is characterized by sudden negative affects or emotions and a loss of control, whereas impulsive buying is characterized by positive affects or emotions (Flight et al., 2012). The psychological effect for impulse purchases is on the side of gratification, whereas for compulsive purchases it is more in the register of guilt or regret. Compulsive buying is also strongly associated with high anxiety and depressive symptoms (Billieux et al., 2008).

In an investigation conducted among students, Villardefrancos and Otero-Lopez (2016) show that compulsive buyers, who represent nearly 8% of the sample, obtain significantly higher scores in terms of the degree of materialism. They are also characterized by anxiety distress, symptoms of depression, obsessive feelings, hostility and somatization. They are also characterized by low self-esteem, lower life satisfaction and lack of optimism. All of these factors that characterize the obsessive buyer, when combined, create a profile of great psychological distress. Noguti and Bokeyar (2014) also highlight that there is a strong correlation between the degree of materialism and compulsive buying, insofar as the most materialistic individuals are more inclined to make compulsive purchases, but also that compulsive buying is more likely to respond to the dissonance between the current self and the ideal self (Dittmar et al., 1996). Other results support this general pattern that emerges. It appears, for example, that compulsive buying is explained by a high degree of materialism and low self-control (Claes et al., 2010). Harnish and Bridges (2015) show that compulsive buying, while related to materialism, is also associated with narcissism and irrational beliefs, i.e., misinterpretations of reality. Their results also show that compulsive buying is linked to problem avoidance and mental rigidity. A final study that we wish to share here concerns compulsive buying, materialism, fragility of the self, the tendency to accumulate goods and depression. It appears that identity confusion linked to the fragility of the self is directly linked to the degree of materialism and depression. It also appears that materialism explains compulsive purchasing and finally that materialism and especially depression characterize accumulation behaviour (Claes et al., 2016). The authors consider here the accumulation of material possessions and compulsive purchasing as identity substitutes.

We have chosen to cite only recent work here in order to benefit from the latest advances. At this stage of the analysis, it can be retained that the relationship between the degree of materialism and the propensity to compulsive buying is clearly established. Unfortunately, we do not have any indications as to the meaning of this relationship. Does the degree of materialism predict the propensity to make compulsive purchases? It may. On the other hand, are all highly materialistic individuals necessarily compulsive shoppers? This is less certain. In fact, while materialistic individuals and compulsive shoppers share a number of personality traits such as anxiety, depression, difficulty controlling oneself and the fragility of the concept of self, it is nonetheless true that compulsive shoppers are in a particularly strong state of psychological distress, which is not necessarily the case for highly materialistic individuals. In this sense, it can be assumed that radical materialists are simply more inclined to engage in compulsive buying behaviour without necessarily doing so, because, as we shall see, the relationship between materialism and compulsive buying is likely to be affected by the relationship to money.

[Relationship to money, credit and means of payment](#)

Tatzel (2002) draws up various portraits by crossing the relationship to money and the degree of materialism. The author thus contrasts avarice or miserliness, which characterizes an individual who does not like to spend money, with detachment in relation to money, which characterizes an individual who likes to spend money. He then contrasts strongly materialistic, eternally dissatisfied individuals who want more and more and who are attached to the public meaning of material goods, with weakly materialistic individuals who privilege the private meaning of material goods. By combining these two dimensions, he obtains four portraits. The first type, a combination of avarice and a high level of materialism, is an individual who is in pursuit of bargains, a hunter of opportunities, an accumulator. He takes pleasure in comparing prices. The second type, a combination of avarice and a low level of materialism, is an individual who does not spend money, is thrifty in everything, ascetic and for whom the quality of products is not important. The third type, a combination of detachment from money and a high level of materialism, is a very spendthrift, exhibitionist individual who frequently replaces his possessions and is often in debt. The fourth type, a combination of detachment from money and a low level of materialism, is a generous individual who spends money for pleasure. This Tatzel typology is interesting because it takes into account the relationship to money in the understanding of materialism. It can be noted here that money problems are particularly glaring for materialistic individuals who are also detached from money. Thus the problems raised above would only concern this type of person. But if Tatzel's approach is purely speculative, it nevertheless presents a major interest, that of the possible existence of a relationship to money or of financial skills that are likely to modify the relationship between materialism and other variables.

If there is a relationship between the degree of materialism and compulsive buying, it is likely to be mediated by the way money is managed, which characterizes the sense of financial responsibility. This is precisely what a study shows. The way money is managed relays the relationship between the degree of materialism and compulsive buying and thus the direct relationship between the degree of materialism and compulsive buying is attenuated (Donnelly et al., 2013). The most materialistic individuals are more willing to engage in compulsive buying when they develop inadequate management practices of their own resources. Conversely, the most materialistic individuals with good financial management skills are less likely to embarrass themselves if they practice compulsive buying. Financial management skills protect the individual from significant risks (Pham et al., 2012). This again raises the question of economic socialization (Furnham, 2008). This verifies what was previously suspected, namely that materialism is likely to be "controlled" by other factors that mitigate the effect of materialism on compulsive buying. But there is another factor that is likely to increase its effects, and that is the credit card. These buyers are rarely inconvenienced by the price of goods. Compulsive shoppers are less aware of their real budget when they use their card (Lo and Harvey, 2011).

Compulsive buying, as we have seen, is likely to be associated with the notion of self-control. There is indeed a strong negative relationship of high intensity between compulsive buying and self-control, but there is also a positive relationship between the loss of self-control and the level of debt. Going further in the analysis, we observe that the relationship between self-control and the level of debt is mediatized by the importance of compulsive purchases. This means that it is not the loss of self-control that is directly responsible for debts, but that

this relationship is mediated by compulsive purchases. It has also been shown that women develop more compulsive purchases than men, but with age, compulsive purchases tend to become less frequent (Achtziger et al., 2015).

For the most materialistic individuals, the relationship to money is relatively simple. Money problems are globally recurrent. In a sense, this is hardly surprising, given the implications of values, aspirations or certain personality traits associated with materialism. The degree of materialism is directly related to the level of debt and a negative balance of accounts between assets and liabilities (Nepomuceno and Laroche, 2015). At the same time, a certain frugality is positively related to a positive balance of accounts. Similar results can be found in the study by Gardarsdottir and Dittmar (2012), who show that the degree of materialism is linked to poor money management skills. These two dimensions explain the tendency to make compulsive purchases, the tendency to spend and to have financial worries. Furthermore, it can be noted that materialism more strongly explains compulsive buying, while low money management skills more strongly explain the tendency to spend and financial worries. The authors also show that materialism explains the amount of debt more than poor money management.

Richins (2011) distinguishes, from a more psychological angle, four factors that explain expectations regarding a purchase: structuring around oneself (having a better self-image, but also a better image with others), efficiency (being more efficient in one's daily life), hedonism (feeling better and enjoying the purchased object) and finally relationships (being closer to others). In a second time, Richins shows that the higher the degree of materialism, the more important the expected effects are, in particular for the self-image and the self-image with others. In a third stage, it appeared that these expected effects mediate the relationship between materialism and the abusive use of credit and the attitude towards borrowing. In other words, the expected effects relay the relationship between the degree of materialism and the measures related to the attitude towards borrowing and the misuse of credit. This study is very interesting because it does not simply relate the degree of materialism to the use of credit, which many other studies have already shown, but the underlying mechanism. Thus, it is not directly the degree of materialism that has an impact on credit, but rather the expectations or hopes of gratification that one invests in material possessions that will justify the use of credit. In this configuration, the self-image and the image of oneself with others play an essential role. We find here the idea of Dittmar (2008) according to which material goods will seek to fill the self-image to tend towards an ideal self-image.

Conclusion

From these few points, it becomes very clear that the different concepts of personality traits, compulsive activity and how to manage personal finances are closely intertwined. First of all, we can observe, in line with what the negative relationship between materialism and satisfaction in life suggests, that materialism in general is associated with psychological peculiarities that evoke subjective discomfort. Anxiety, neurotic symptoms, depression or stress are in this sense positively related to the degree of materialism. But the results presented also highlight the role of the clarity of the concept of self, or even its very substance, which are negatively linked to materialism. One of the explanations which could

be put forward is the problem of the uncertainty which reigns in the society, the need for recognition and indirectly, the weakness of the social bonds which are likely to blur the clarity of the concept of self.

Compulsive buying is also very present among the most materialistic individuals. Compulsive shoppers generally live in great psychological distress. They are characterized by significant emotional and psychological disorders and their compulsive purchases appear as identity expedients. But the question that arises is what causality can be glimpsed between materialism and identity buying. It would seem that an individual who indulges in compulsive buying is almost necessarily materialistic. On the other hand, the reverse is not necessarily true.

Indeed, when considering the relationship to money, it appears that other variables are likely to moderate the impact of materialism. If materialism is generally associated with money problems, these can be moderated or amplified depending on the circumstances. Money problems are often associated with individuals who have become compulsive buyers. Thus, financially responsible individuals see the relationship between the degree of materialism and compulsive buying attenuated. On the other hand, the use of credit cards increases the relationship between the degree of materialism and compulsive purchases. Credit and indebtedness are common among the most materialistic individuals. But it has been shown that the impact of materialism on credit is not direct. It is expectations that play a mediating role. In other words, the level of materialism incites the individual to want to acquire a new material good, but this new good encapsulates expectations such as the recognition of others or a better self-image and it is this level of expectation that will justify the use of credit. One thus finds the idea according to which the material goods play a role when it is a question of filling a gap between the self-image and the ideal self-image. One can thus directly articulate materialism to an identity problem.

Chapter 6: Precariousness, Frugality and Voluntary Simplicity

This chapter concerns *a priori* individuals who are not materialistic. These individuals inform us about certain springs that make it possible to get out of materialism. Contemporary society is diverse and certain profiles emerge and stand out in the society of abundance. We will first address the difficult problem of precariousness and poverty. We will try to clarify these two notions, which are very different. This population is very difficult to identify because, in the end, relatively few studies have been devoted to it. Nevertheless, the work we have shows us the existence of deficiencies, particularly in terms of self-esteem. If this population is not materialistic, because it can hardly afford it, it is likely to adopt materialistic values. Frugality characterizes another logic. They are not socially disruptive individuals, but they are thrifty and attentive to their possessions. They resist the temptation to consume, but do so to assert their independence and to prepare projects, including future acquisitions. Finally, we will address the case of voluntary simplicity. This social movement seems to be gaining some momentum, provided we consider that the degree of voluntary simplicity is gradual and that it can be more or less radical and characterize an act of resistance (Roux, 2007). In a transversal way, this movement rejects abundance, considering many useless goods from which individuals are separated. They claim to be profoundly anti-materialist. They adopt values linked to community and spirituality and value social ties. Incidentally for the most radical among them, they advocate social responsibility and respect for the environment.

Precariousness and poverty

Precariousness and poverty are thorny¹⁵ issues. To be precarious is a state that one wishes to be transitory¹⁶. It is an in-between. On the one hand, one can fall into poverty and on the other, into a better life. From the point of view of the consumer society, to be precarious is, according to Bauman (2008), to be a defective consumer. The latter does not fulfill his social obligations. He can hardly be tempted to acquire goods that are not indispensable or simply financially inaccessible. For Simmel (2008), poverty is a problem of social category. Individuals who receive some form of assistance are considered poor. He goes so far as to write in the concluding sentence of his small booklet: "Thus, it is not the lack of means that makes someone poor. Sociologically speaking, the poor person is the individual who receives assistance because of this lack of means. This very ambiguous statement can be interpreted in terms of acceptance. More concretely, when the individual accepts some form of assistance, he enters sociologically into the category of the poor, which means that he recognizes and accepts himself as being poor. Otherwise, even if his resources are limited,

¹⁵ We will not deal here with the issue of precariousness and poverty in developing countries. We will limit our analysis to developed Western countries.

¹⁶ Pierre Sansot (1991) calls them "people of little". This expression gives all its nobility to these categories of individuals who manage to cope with all situations even though they are extremely destitute. The originality of his approach lies in the fact that he does not structure his analysis by sociologically constituted categories but by practices and lifestyles.

the individual does not recognize himself in a pattern of poverty. Simmel also points out that this is true for all social classes because their needs are very different. While Simmel's proposal is sociologically very stimulating, it nevertheless raises the problem of minimum subsistence conditions.

In France, there is a relative poverty line. Other countries use an absolute threshold. This threshold is expressed as a monetary value corresponding to a fraction of the French standard of living¹⁷. The particularity of this index is that it evolves according to the standard of living of the French, due to its relative nature. The latter has evolved considerably over the last few decades. Contrary to Simmel's approach, poverty is decreed here. It is possible to be considered as living below the poverty line while having a rich, full and fulfilling life. Admittedly, in monetary terms, this standard of living is very modest and does not necessarily allow one to live decently, but the approach is worrying because it institutes poverty on the basis of a quantitative criterion. Thus, one does not become poor in Simmel's sense by accepting any form of assistance, but one is poor if one does not have an income considered sufficient.

Precariousness is characterized by being in a situation of economic fragility. The precarious individual lives in the uncertainty of tomorrow and one can think that he has difficulty projecting himself into the future, which does not prevent him from dreaming of a better life. But this dream will always be marred by the instability of his current life. The precarious individual may be poor from a normative point of view, but he or she may also have a modest income without, however, being considered or considering himself or herself to be poor. For Bresson (2015), precariousness is also difficult to define. It is characterized by rather modest incomes, difficulties in accessing employment or education, whereas poverty could be characterized by even less income and possibly, when poverty is extreme, difficulty in accessing housing. Thus poverty could be a manifestation of precariousness, just as precariousness could be a manifestation of poverty. As far as we are concerned, we choose to consider poverty as a possible expression of precariousness. The idea of precariousness is closely associated with the idea of a profound change in society and the individualization and uncertainty associated with it. Being precarious means having less favorable employment conditions, but also more difficult living conditions, particularly through an unstable standard of living and difficulties in accessing consumption.

Precariousness presupposes a trajectory and an identity experience. One can, for example, fall into precariousness after losing one's job. This situation will require the individual to question himself about his existence and what underlies it. His values and beliefs are likely to be shaken, or even profoundly altered. In this context, social ties play a key role. If the individual benefits from family ties in particular, he can benefit from a certain protection. On the other hand, if they have only weak ties, their new situation may prove critical and they may fall into poverty. Bresson (2015) considers that at the heart of the debate on precariousness lies the crisis of social ties and individualism. To this we would add that from an identity point of view, it is necessary to add the notions of control and self-esteem. Indeed, in a situation of uncertainty, the loss of self-control is often associated to it and that constitutes a source of suffering as well as the loss of self-esteem. In practice, it would seem

¹⁷ Very precisely, this threshold is 60% of the median standard of living.

that the weakness of the social bonds, the loss of control and self-esteem are closely intertwined. Precariousness is likely to lead to what Paugam (1991) calls a negative identity. This is maintained because of the absence of a sense of belonging to a supportive group. Precarious families wish at all costs to show that they can cope materially; for example, they want their children to be well dressed and well fed and generally speaking they take good care of them. These families want to preserve a certain social conformity and display a certain number of moral values. But in the case of extreme poverty, it is not certain that they can easily achieve this. Returning for a few moments to the way in which we defined precariousness on the basis of being and having (Chapter 3), we hypothesized that these people are situated in the non-have and the non-being. They are certainly very deprived, but they are in the possibility of having it. In the same way, they are in the possibility of being when there is less uncertainty and when they have the possibility of planning and acting with a view to self-improvement and development. But the precariousness establishes the fragility because of the impossibility to control the uncertainty and consequently, it prevents the individual from acting in the direction of the improvement and the development of oneself. One of the causes which can be mobilized is the impossibility for the individual to self-determine himself. This concerns the need to be connected or in permanent relationship with other people who are significant, the perception of control or power over one's own actions and the belief that the individual is capable of taking action and putting himself in a project and therefore in perspective (Martin and Hill, 2012). Unfortunately, the individualism and uncertainty of contemporary society make it difficult to meet all these conditions.

It seems, however, that having has a certain ascendancy over being. In other words, before one can be it is necessary to satisfy a minimum of basic needs and perhaps more. Indeed, one study has shown that the poorest children and adolescents are more materialistic than children and adolescents with more resources. Moreover, the relationship between household income level and materialism is mediated by negative self-esteem. In other words, the lack of self-esteem helps explain and accentuates the fact that children and adolescents from the poorest households in terms of income are the most materialistic. However, these results indicate a nuance, namely that this effect is strongest for adolescents who feel an intense need for self-esteem (Chaplin et al., 2014). This therefore particularly concerns individuals who are most involved in their quest for identity and for them, the acquisition of certain material goods allows for recognition and social integration (Ricoeur, 2004). Such results tell us that people from households with very modest incomes may also be subject to materialism, in a logic of desire to have, one of the main causes of which is the need for self-esteem.

Frugality

Despite the pervasiveness of consumer culture and the materialism that characterizes it, some individuals are engaged in a more frugal lifestyle. Modernity has largely ignored frugality and the study of consumer behavior has been mainly dedicated to the decision-making and acquisition process. Frugality is a lifestyle characterized both by restricting one's acquisitions and ingeniously using goods and services to achieve longer-term goals (Lastovicka et al., 1999). Frugality is rooted in the distant past, particularly through religion. A certain asceticism is conducive to spirituality. After indulging in the necessities of life, the

individual can do what he or she really wants to do. However, frugality implies, in a certain way, the denial of the pleasures linked to luxury and superfluity while satisfying basic needs. To be frugal and frugal, from a religious point of view, is also to give oneself the possibility of being charitable and above all to support the religious institution. Nowadays frugality is above all a means of deferring gratification, with a view to achieving the goals one has set oneself later on. It is not at all the same as depriving oneself, but rather sacrificing whims in order to pursue a future goal. In other words, it involves reasonable spending or buying and avoiding waste. From a psychological point of view, frugality also allows for a certain independence. Thus, frugality can first be defined as a lifestyle that leads one to take care of one's possessions, to reuse them and to be thrifty or vigilant with regard to one's own spending (Lastovicka et al., 1999).

Another approach to frugality is to think of it in terms of values, as values are supposed to structure a lifestyle (Todd & Lawson, 2003). In their study, the authors use Schwartz's (1994) slightly modified values. They compare individuals on the basis of their degree of frugality. Among the differences observed, it can be noted, for example, that the most frugal individuals are characterized by choosing their own goals, being competent, honest, polite and responsible. They are also in favor of social order, aspire to a spiritual life and inner harmony, and adhere to environmental protection. On the *other hand*, individuals who are less concerned with frugality adopt values related to authority, social power, social self-image, pleasure, excitement or social recognition. In a schematic way, we observe that the individuals most concerned by frugality are rather in registers of values based on conservatism and self-transcendence. These values partially converge with those that characterize the least materialistic individuals, unlike community concerns that have not really been measured.

The genesis of frugality is also rooted in external factors. General economic conditions and personal economic circumstances are likely to have an impact on the development of frugal behaviour, as are cultural and social influences (Goldsmith et al., 2014). Contextual factors are thus likely to have an impact. An individual who is under pressure from his family to buy a home, encouraged by his friends to do so, can, in a context of career progression and high loan rates, invest in the path of frugality in order to facilitate the success of this project. In this profile, frugality is made up of a set of behaviors mentioned above, but these behaviors can hardly be associated with values. Rather, it is a question of cyclical frugality. But these factors are not the only ones. For the authors, more psychological aspects such as the degree of materialism or the degree of independence are likely to interfere with frugality. In this type of profile, we can imagine an individual who wants to replace his or her defective car and who, given an economic context of crisis, decides to postpone the purchase, to accept these failures for a certain period of time. In this profile, frugality is more associated with values that more or less intensely orient behavior according to life circumstances. We can also consider the profile of individuals whose frugality is permanent. The adoption of this type of lifestyle is understood from the perspective of having a simpler life and being independent so that they can make the purchases they deem necessary at a later date. In this sense, it can be assumed that these individuals are weakly materialistic.

But there are cases where frugal individuals give up frugality somewhat despite their relative insensitivity to social pressure and their independence of mind. Lee (2016) shows that

depending on the social context in which they find themselves, individuals may develop different behaviours. When the individual is in a social situation, he is more inclined to conform to the prescription of the network of relationships. Thus, in a social environment characterized by relationships that are spendthrift compared to relationships that are low spendthrift, the frugal individual will tend to spend more if he is in the company of spendthrift people. However, this effect disappears if one distinguishes in the network of relationships between those characterized by a strong bond and those characterized by a weak bond. In this situation, the frugal person will only spend more if he or she is in the company of a network of relations characterized by strong ties. In other words, those closest to the frugal person are likely to modify the frugal person's behaviour in the direction of increased spending. A frugal person may thus make cyclical swings in certain contexts, as discussed above, but this is unlikely to significantly alter his or her lifestyle.

Overall, if we look closely at the relationship between frugality and other concepts, we see that the more frugal we are, the less sensitive we are to interpersonal influence, the less materialistic we are, and the less likely we are to make compulsive purchases. On the other hand, frugal individuals are also sensitive to prices and the value of things. Incidentally, it can be observed that they are not sensitive to promotion (Lastovicka et al., 1999). Furthermore, we observe that the negative relationship between materialism and frugality is confirmed, that statutory consumption and commitment to brands are also negatively linked to frugality. Finally, we observe that consumer independence (understood as the fact of complying with one's decisions independently of any form of external influence) is positively linked to frugality (Goldsmith et al., 2014). The frugal individual has little appetite for shopping. If they know the marketing tricks, they have a real aversion to shopping (Bove et al., 2009). This portrait is interesting because it shows that a frugal person is not materialistic because, as a general rule, he prefers to take care of his possessions and be frugal with a view to achieving new goals, i.e., making new acquisitions without being under pressure. He has his own goals and therefore this person is insensitive to interpersonal influence and relatively independent. From the point of view of his relationship to the market, we find this idea of control which is lacking in materialistic people in the sense that he is sensitive to the value and price of things. They do not indulge in compulsive buying, are not very sensitive to brands, know the mechanisms of marketing and, in the end, have little appetite for shopping. Behind this portrait is a person who is sure of his or her choices, generally not very influential, who knows the market and, without wanting to evade it, wants to control his or her consumption.

Frugality in general is very little studied and is somehow stifled by studies on materialism. While there are some very interesting results to date, it seems that much remains to be done. In particular, it would be interesting to know how a frugal individual structures his or her identity. The results available to us suggest that material goods have little effect on the structuring of his identity, that he is less sensitive than others to social comparison, but all of this remains to be investigated, of course.

Voluntary simplicity

Voluntary simplicity is first and foremost a lifestyle choice, whether individual or family, that leads individuals to limit their purchases of products and services and to cultivate non-

materialistic sources of satisfaction and thought. Voluntary simplicity cannot therefore be seen as the consequence of external constraints, in particular impoverishment due, for example, to the loss of a job, which would lead to limiting consumption. This choice, which consists in voluntarily limiting consumption, cannot concern the entire population. Only the middle and upper classes are concerned by this type of practice. For Shama (1981), this is also a relatively young population, working in services. They are single or newlyweds, rather Caucasian in nature. They are predominantly urban and educated. Finally, couples are generally biologically active.

The followers of voluntary simplicity are difficult to quantify and the figures that are proposed show strong disparities. The various studies agree, however, that there is nothing marginal about this movement and that the phenomenon affects many consumers, but to varying degrees.

What poses a problem for the followers of voluntary simplicity are above all material goods (Ballantine and Creery, 2010). These are considered invasive in daily life. These consumers no longer adhere to the proposition that owning more and more material goods is a source of well-being. To consume less is to consume better. This does not necessarily mean consuming less in value. It means giving importance to useful products. From this perspective, products are not purchased for their ostentatious value. The meaning given to material possessions is primarily functional. The emotional connection to objects is usually broken. Only the symbolism linked to the values these objects convey remains. The values that preside over voluntary simplicity are very diverse. The first of these are material simplicity and functionality (Ballantine and Creery, 2010). We buy and consume only what we need and not what we want. The human scale is privileged. The adept of voluntary simplicity aspires to live and work in environments on a human scale. Technologies are valued when they enable us to live in a more ecological and environmentally friendly world (Shama, 1981). The individual also aspires to be the actor of his own destiny, to control his life, to feel liberated from his material environment and to privilege his inner life. To these values is added responsible and ethical consumption.

However, the followers of voluntary simplicity are not a homogeneous population. Etzioni (1998) proposes to distinguish three cases. The first type is called "downshifter". This consumer is rather moderate in the adoption of voluntary simplicity. In practice, it can be seen that he adopts voluntary simplicity in certain compartments of his life, but not in others. They work less than in the past and spend more time for themselves and their families at the expense of material success. The second type, called "strong simplifiers", have given up a very well-paid and stressful job. In doing so, he also gave up his social status. He also chooses to retire earlier. He is taking advantage of this situation to devote more time to his family, especially his children. He may have to change jobs and find an activity that is more in line with his values. They significantly reduce their consumption. The third type called "holistic simplification" is the purest and most radical type of voluntary simplicity. He chooses to make his life conform to his values. Not only does he change jobs or activities, but he also changes his place of residence. Rather than living in rich residential suburbs, he will prefer small provincial towns or downright country living. This segment is not content to simply change their consumption patterns. It is part of a true philosophy of life. The different compartments of its life are articulated in a coherent way. The followers of radical voluntary simplicity ("strong simplifiers" or "holistic simplifiers") are of sociological interest as to the

future of the consumer society. They are above all part of a logic of deconsumerism. Emotional disengagement from the material world leads the most radical followers of voluntary simplicity not to hesitate to use second-hand products, to share the acquisition of new products and to engage in self-production. The "downshifter" segment is a broader and undoubtedly much more interesting segment. They do not wish to exit the market, but to restrict their access to the market to focus on essential goods.

Commitment to voluntary simplicity requires effort, and isolation in the process can also be a hindrance (Gorge et al., 2015). These efforts include getting rid of useless goods, breaking the attachment to certain possessions that structure the individual's identity and reducing his or her lifestyle and impact on the environment. These ecological concerns are frequently associated with voluntary simplicity (Ballantine and Creery, 2010). Voluntary simplicity is above all a question of values that are part of a certain ethic. They are marked by a concern to move away from a consumer society that is not considered a sustainable economy (Shaw and Newholm, 2002). The authors also point out that one cannot limit oneself to making a hierarchy of individuals according to their degree of voluntary simplicity. There are multiple forms of deconsumerism and it is very difficult to draw an unequivocal picture of voluntary simplicity. Some people choose to keep their car, others do not. Some are committed to healthier eating, while for others it is not the most important thing. Still others pin all their hopes on technology to solve the problems of waste recycling or reducing energy consumption, while for others it is not a solution for other followers of voluntary simplicity. Voluntary simplicity is not just about spending less, it is also about getting rid of a number of things, sorting out what is important and what is not. Furthermore, the practice of voluntary simplicity can have a cost, as with the acquisition of solar power generation equipment or water recovery devices. A significant number of voluntary simplicity advocates are committed to producing fruit or vegetables and adopt parallel supply channels or practice informal exchange. Overwhelmingly, they practice recycling (Alexander and Ussher, 2012).

In terms of motivations, it appears first of all that the degree of voluntary simplicity explains the importance of the control that individuals exercise over their desires, which in turn explains satisfaction in life. This control over desires gives media coverage to the direct relationship observed between the degree of voluntary simplicity and life satisfaction. However, we observe that these relationships are true only for individuals with modest incomes, but that these results are no longer valid for individuals with high incomes. These results support the idea that exercising control over one's own life is a source of rewards. Furthermore, the fact that these results are not verified for the most financially well-off individuals indicates that they do not feel the need to exercise any control over their desires. They aspire to satisfy them and perhaps seek to satisfy other desires such as self-esteem or the need for social belonging, desires that may require the acquisition of certain material possessions (Boujbel and d'Astous, 2012). This control can be broken down into several motivational fields. Priority is given to concerns related to the environment, the desire to have a healthier life and a certain material minimalism. Then there are motivations that refer to a social ethic or community values such as living on a more spiritual basis (not necessarily religious), being concerned about social justice, having more time for community involvement and for one's family (Alexander and Ussher, 2012). Curiously, we find here the values we have already discussed with Burroughs and Rindfleisch (2002), which are opposed to materialism and are more likely to promote subjective well-being. In a hardly different

way, Huneke (2005) identifies at the heart of voluntary simplicity values related to ecology, social responsibility, community and the maintenance of a spiritual life.

It is easy to see that values converge even if the actual practice of voluntary simplicity can be more or less radical, as Etzioni (1998) has shown. These values are clearly opposed to those that dominate among the most materialistic individuals. In many ways, the followers of voluntary simplicity may appear caricatured if one combines all the values to which they are supposed to adhere. However, the practices are rarely as successful. The "downshifter" are probably the most numerous, but in Western society, it is not impossible to see this movement gaining momentum, allowing some individuals to regain control of their own lives and find new identity references without becoming socially marginalized.

Conclusion

The work on voluntary simplicity is relatively well documented. However, there is some heterogeneity in behaviours. The only common point that does not provoke discussion among individuals claiming voluntary simplicity is the rejection of the consumer society, because it is not capable of being part of a sustainable future. The only solution is to consume less in order to consume better. Their values are relatively clear and revolve around those we had already detected as being opposed to materialism. Values related to community, interpersonal relations, spirituality, social responsibility and ecology are largely dominant, as are self-improvement and self-improvement. They are a source of subjective well-being. The question that arises is whether this movement is likely to spread and expand sufficiently to impact a political reaction. If this movement grows, it will inevitably have an impact on growth. It would then in fact be in a position to invite politicians to reconsider their economic and social thought patterns.

In many ways, frugality appears as a softened or softened form of voluntary simplicity. It is negatively related to materialism. The big difference is that frugals are self-centered. Indeed, if they are attentive to their possessions and thrifty, they nevertheless spend according to what they consider to be their needs. In practice, their lifestyle allows them to be independent (financially and in their decisions) and to plan future purchases without being oppressed by credit. Overall, they are not very sensitive to interpersonal pressure and are perfectly aware of marketing practices. This leads them not to commit themselves to brands. In addition, they do not indulge in compulsive buying and are sensitive to prices and the value of things. Individuals who practice frugality do not want to leave the market. They are there, but certainly not stuck in it. We lack a lot of information to draw a more detailed portrait of this type of individual. For example, we know little about their sociological characteristics and especially their values, some of which could possibly be shared by the followers of voluntary simplicity. Furthermore, it would also be interesting to know what projects they pursue while living in frugality.

Precariousness and poverty raise many questions. Poverty characterizes individuals who are unable to provide for their own basic needs and who accept assistance. From our perspective, precariousness characterizes resource-poor individuals in an uncertain social context. If they can become poor, they can also access a more dignified life. They are, in a way, in transit between two zones. On the one hand they leave the market and on the other

hand they return to the market. What these two populations have in common is that they cannot plan and do not have complete control over their lives, in other words, they cannot self-determine themselves. Their self-esteem is affected and their identity is weakened. While from a sociological point of view poverty and precariousness are widely discussed, a key question remains: why are these populations of such little interest for consumer behavior research? The first answer, a little too obvious, is that these populations are no longer part of the market. This answer does not satisfy us. It is a form of denial against people who are nevertheless likely to return to the market. This is all the more regrettable since a better knowledge of these populations in terms of desires, consumption, attitudes to consumption and values would probably make it possible to feed public policies towards them. The stigmatization of these populations lies precisely in the fact that they are excluded from the consumer society (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996).

Chapter 7: Ordinary Materialism

Throughout this essay, we wanted to show that materialism is not a fatality. Some individuals suffer from it, others do not. But it seems realistic to us to say that it seems difficult to get out of ordinary materialism in a massive and complete way. If this movement out of materialism is to develop, it will probably be slow and long. We wanted to show the logics of ordinary materialism and the possible suffering that accompanies it. Materialism is above all a question of subjective well-being and happiness. It is incumbent on each person to know how he or she wants to live in this society of abundance and whether it is necessary for him or her, while questioning, or not, the consequences of his or her actions in terms of societal impact. It is clear that material goods participate in the identity of the individual, but this should be seen from the perspective of attachment. It seems preferable to us that a person is attached to some objects registered in the indexicality, rather than wanting at all costs to appropriate all the novelties which he finds on his way and which will hardly contribute to structure his ideal self, if there is a gap between his current self and his ideal self. But that supposes that the individual is registered in the society, not very sensitive to the social comparison and has values which one can globally qualify as communitarian which do not make necessary the permanent reconfiguration of his ideal self.

How to get out of materialism?

Perhaps we should ask the question differently. Can we get out of materialism? From our point of view it is not necessarily indispensable and not necessarily possible. It is the freedom of each person to be or not to be materialistic or to be more or less materialistic. We have no moral considerations with regard to this question. Certainly, when the individual is suffering or when his behavior creates suffering for those close to him, he must be able to have recourse to structures that are capable of taking charge of the drifts authorized by the consumer society, on condition that the individual expresses the desire to do so. The radical materialist who is capable of managing his resources and who does not drift towards compulsive buying does not present a danger to himself or to others, which possibly does not prevent him from being in a state of significant psychological distress.

While this state is problematic, various studies have highlighted a number of recommendations to avoid or at least reduce this state of suffering (Dunn et al., 2011). The authors recommend mainly to stop purchasing material goods and to focus on experiences. Experiences make people happier than material possessions. A study by Van Boven and Gilovich (2003) shows that an experiential purchase, based on the desire to acquire life experience, makes people happier than the purchase of material possessions. Upon reflection, individuals experience more positive feelings about an experiential purchase compared to the purchase of material goods. Remembering an experiential purchase provides more satisfaction than buying a material good. It can also be pointed out that there are no clear significant differences between the socio-demographic categories, except for income. The higher the income, the more satisfying the experiential consumption is

compared to that of material goods. The authors explain their results by the fact that experiences can be positively reinterpreted, which is not necessarily possible with material goods, but also because experiences contribute more to an individual's identity than material goods¹⁸. Other explanations can also be put forward. Material goods are likely to give rise to more regrets than experiences. Individuals tend to reconsider their purchases of material goods in relation to the products they compared but did not choose. Similarly, the choice of a material good is more associated with a maximization process than an experiential purchase. In the end, it appears that it is easier to choose an experiential offer than a material good (Carter & Gilovich, 2010).

It should also be noted that individuals are more likely to define themselves by their experiences rather than by their possessions. Experiences are an integral part of their life history and they convey more information about their sense of self than materialistic possessions. By linking experiences to memory, which is mainly episodic, even if these experiences have led to some arrangements with reality through self-recording (Ladwein, 2005), individuals report greater satisfaction when buying experiences rather than materialistic goods¹⁹ (Carter & Gilovich, 2012).

Psychological gratification, understood as the recognition of oneself as a person, through the acceptance of the benevolence of others could also be a remedy against materialism, provided that the materialistic person engages in prosocial behaviour (Ricoeur, 2004). Indeed, psychological gratification is such as to allow the individual who has benefited from gratification to engage in prosocial behaviours in the future and thus initiate a virtuous circle. Psychological gratitude is positively related to subjective well-being. From a causal point of view, it is the obtaining of rewards that allows the individual to develop subjective well-being. The virtuous circle we mentioned also has the consequence of allowing the individual to develop social well-being, by motivating individuals to turn to others and to give rewards. Polak and McCullough (2006) question the development of gratitude and its impact on materialism. Indeed, individuals who have experienced gratitude are likely to represent their lives differently, feeling more secure and recognized and, by having a richer life, they are likely to be less susceptible to materialistic tendencies. The authors demonstrate the existence of a negative relationship between reward experiences and the degree of materialism. They explain this result by the fact that meaningful interpersonal relationships based on gratification and caring are likely to make people happier and correspondingly less materialistic.

If it seems that gratifying experiences are more significant than material goods in terms of the happiness procured, we cannot neglect the intrinsic satisfaction of the offer and not forget that the individual is likely to consoanant or make some small arrangements with the reality of the lived experience, but also to fit into a logic of social desirability. We cannot

¹⁸ Nicolao et al. (2009) put these results into perspective by emphasizing that they are more valid for less materialistic individuals. Moreover, the prevalence of an experiential purchase on a material good in terms of happiness is valid only when the offer has been satisfactory. This effect disappears when the offer has generated dissatisfaction. Thus the experience does not systematically have an advantage over perceived happiness compared to material goods.

¹⁹ It may be noted here that materialistic goods are distinguished from material goods by their ostentatious character. Materialistic goods are acquired with a view to possession and with the intention of expressing a status, success or a certain standard of living.

forget that individuals tend to stigmatize materialistic people who are stereotypically perceived as having undesirable personality traits and who have extrinsic motivations (material goods) rather than intrinsic motivations (living reflexive experiences), as pointed out by Van Boven et al. (2010). Thus, for them to benefit from social rewards, they must be able to radically change their behaviours. However, as Cohen and Cohen (1996) point out, contemporary Western society favours narcissism and hedonic consumption, which does not easily allow materialistic behaviours to be questioned.

Materialism as a societal issue

Materialism, however, poses a societal question. In many ways, as we have seen, the consumer society invites us to materialism. Rising incomes allow individuals to make more acquisitions and ultimately have more possessions, and the production of material goods accompanies this movement. There is probably no one to answer this question without mobilizing the creeping question of the ideology of growth. For Hessel and Morin (2011), the answer to a societal question is necessarily economic and not political, as it should be. For some, growth is necessary because it is a source of wealth and improves our well-being, while for the followers of voluntary simplicity, growth can only contribute to the destruction of the environment and the depletion of its natural resources and lead the world down a path where individualism and social malaise would be the daily lot, at least in the developed Western world (Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2011). While the followers of voluntary simplicity are generally in favour of degrowth, one can however wonder whether another, more sustainable growth is not possible? Hessel and Morin (2011) argue that growth should concern certain goods and degrowth should concern others, without falling into degrowth. For Schor (1998), the hypothesis of degrowth is, moreover, unrealistic, even if a desirable decline in consumption were to take place, which would be accompanied by a decline in employment, because individuals aspire to work less. In this social and societal critique, Raymond Aron noted the disillusionment with progress at the beginning of the second half of the 20th century (Aron, 1969). Progress was no longer able to deliver on its original promise of well-being for all. After years of growth, Aron observed excessive inequalities in income distribution, the subsistence of islands of poverty, the violence of industrial civilization through its rationalization, the destruction of nature associated with pollution, and the alienation of individuals through marketing and the accumulation of goods.

The material society as it develops is not sustainable and individuals should be particularly vigilant in their consumption of material goods and in freeing themselves from the idea that material goods are likely to produce well-being (Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2011; Scott et al., 2014). Without entering into the debate on growth and decline, however, we must point out the risks associated with the development of contemporary society (Beck, 2001). These risks are at first glance industrial risks, which are as diverse as the technologies used to produce material goods. These risks can be industrial accidents with their ecological consequences, which can give rise to chemical, nuclear, biological or bacteriological risks. There are also the computer risks of data piracy and the blocking or collapse of systems or their infrastructures. These risks are unevenly distributed. They can affect industrialized countries, but also developing countries. A boomerang effect may appear. Rich countries outsource the riskiest or most polluting activities, but in return are likely to recover contaminated or defective manufactured goods. This leads to the emergence of a new

market, that of risk prevention. But the complete eradication of risks is impossible and the prevention market is overwhelmed. At most, we can envisage containing major risks.

If this is a real social issue, it is very difficult to take a position. From our point of view, it seems indisputable that we are moving towards the exhaustion of the planet's resources and towards ecological disruption. However, society will not cease to exist for all that, even if it were in a phase of disintegration. There might be technological relays to glimpse possible futures. The digital society is in a position to propose other growth logics based more on services, but also indirectly on the Internet of things or connected objects, but also collaborative site platforms, marketplaces or social networks (Benavent, 2016). Trentmann (2016) shows, however, that the increase in digital services and services in general does not affect the consumption of material goods, which continues to grow. But this digital society also brings other pitfalls. Individualization is able to increase despite the flowering of a multitude of networks, communities and platforms. If people are able to exchange, they do not necessarily do so because they are not necessarily ready to engage in networks over which they do not feel they have any control. It is only when these connecting platforms actually bring people together that one can expect to develop relationships that are time-bound or psychologically rewarding. Similarly, are social networks those nebulae of individuals interacting for the well-being of an interconnected society, but whose ultimate design is not very clear? Lehdonvirta (2010) suggests that material culture and values related to the possession of material goods will evolve in a post-material logic making the old economy obsolete and sliding towards virtual consumption. Such idealized conceptions of society are a bit hasty and neglect the irreducibly material bases and foundations of whole sections of our lives. We have more stories about the connected society of the future than real projects. Nevertheless, we can hope that among these stories, the most promising ones in terms of well-being, environmental preservation and reduction of precariousness will come true.

Our purpose here is simply to point out that materialism is also a societal problem. Kilbourne and Pickett (2008) point out in this sense that there is a negative relationship between the degree of materialism and environmental sensitivity and concern, just as Muncy and Eastman (1998) point out that sensitivity to ethical concerns is negatively related to the degree of materialism. Such results place a significant burden on the shoulders of materialistic individuals and seem to place a heavy responsibility on them. In practice, the question seems to us to be considerably more complex, since materialism is partly the consequence of suffering resulting from the constraints, particularly identity-related, imposed by contemporary society and, more generally, by a certain ideology of consumption. Our supposedly rational choices develop within an institutional framework that conveys a paradigm that values technological development, economic growth, anthropocentrism that advocates the subjugation of nature, competition, and finally, freedom and property as the cardinal political dimension. In the end, this paradigm naturally leads to materialism and it will be very difficult to get out of it (Kilbourne and Mittelstaedt, 2011).

The Logics of Ordinary Materialism

In practice, we need to identify two logics of ordinary materialism according to whether or not it is associated with a certain psychological distress. It is indeed common to consider that the degree of materialism is associated with malaise, but this is to forget that this relationship is of low amplitude, which leaves all its place to another materialism that can be qualified as playful materialism in the sense that it is not associated with subjective malaise, without necessarily being inscribed in a radical materialism.

In the first approach, ordinary materialism is possibly associated with a certain psychological distress or at least a certain malaise, with the possible exception of narcissistic individuals. This psychological distress can take various forms ranging from stress and anxiety to more severe forms such as neurotic symptoms or depression. We are not able to formally establish the etiology of these psychological disorders. If we follow Ehrenberg (1995), these symptoms are on the rise during the second half of the 20th century. It is also during this same period that society underwent discrete but structural upheavals.

The idea defended in this essay is directly linked to the consumer society, which is probably in a historical transition. Today's consumer society is certainly not tomorrow's, as the digital society is advancing so fast. However, when we discuss the notion of materialism, there are contextual effects that we cannot avoid. Today's society has been described as a consumer society. It presupposes a society in which well-being resides in the abundance of material goods and in which acquisition and possession are the cardinal points of reference. This society thus described is only the tip of the iceberg. More deeply rooted in this society are individualism, the decline of institutions, social fragmentation, the crisis of identities, uncertainty and the difficulty of being oneself.

It is in these flaws that materialism insinuates itself. To understand how it takes its full place, it is necessary to return to the question of identity. In the current social context, it is particularly difficult to construct oneself. Starting from the concept of the concept of self, we had established a difference between the current self and the ideal self. When the two are in gap, the person seeks to reduce this differential and easily finds in his environment of what to supplement this gap. The market environment offers all that it is necessary to try to fill the gap between the current self and the ideal self. The economic socialization led the individual to think that he will find in the market universe all that will be necessary to him to fill the gap between the current self and the ideal self. He thinks that he will be able to find recognition and obtain rewards by his acquisitions when these are financially possible. Under this angle the material goods appear as substitutes to the satisfaction in life. They come to fill an existential void. A material possession, because of its symbolic value, can temporarily play this role, but in the game of social comparison psychological obsolescence will eventually catch up with the individual and will incite him to acquire other possessions supposed to provide more subjective well-being. The ideal self is subject to the pressure of perpetual change in the context of an uncertain and fluid society that is in charge of renewing the commercial offer at an accelerated pace (Slater, 1997).

The problem is that it is not certain that the person adopts the best strategy every time. When tested against the facts, the choices that are made to move towards the ideal self are not necessarily the wisest ones, as the individual may not be able to make the right choices (Alba and Williams, 2013). As a result, he or she is forced to acknowledge a certain

subjective discomfort at the tip of his or her tongue, due to the inability to reach the ideal self. Economic socialization remains discreet on this issue, or rather, it is particularly implicit and invites the renewal of material possessions. The adoption of an inadequate strategy is a source of frustration for the individual (Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2011). He will want to persevere and find new acquisitions allowing him to bridge the gap between the current self and the ideal self. Knowing how to find the material goods that are likely to realize the ideal self is a skill in its own right. It supposes an adequate evaluation of its own needs, but also of its social position when it is a question of structuring the ideal social self. If the individual does not have this competence, he will be tempted to renew the acquisitions until finding the object which will correspond to the ideal self. In a comparable way, if the individual is very sensitive to social comparison, he will frequently be in the process of remodelling his ideal self, which will mechanically lead him to renew his choices as regards material possessions.

In a motivational logic, materialism is associated with extrinsic rather than intrinsic motivations (Kasser and Ryan, 1993 and 1996). Intrinsic motivations characterize the satisfaction of psychological needs such as autonomy, competence or affiliation. Extrinsic motivations are based on obtaining positive evaluations from others or social rewards (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). We are not entirely satisfied with this hypothesis as the individual may also engage in materialistic behaviours to satisfy intrinsic motivations. An individual can multiply and renew acquisitions to meet a need for competence without this fully satisfying him or her. The same applies to autonomy. However, it seems obvious that extrinsic motivations are more conducive to developing materialistic behaviours.

More fundamentally, it is certainly through values that the adequacy of material goods with the ideal self will be established. Values work as vectors and function as concepts or beliefs that transcend specific situations and guide the behavior of individuals. It appeared that individuals who privilege community and family values, who develop spiritual aspirations and in a general way who aspire to surpass themselves are more preserved from materialism. These values do not require many material possessions to satisfy the ideal self. As Kasser (2016) has shown, these values are the opposite of the values of materialism. It is also in these values that we find individuals attached to a few material possessions whose indexicality is high and who are relatively indifferent to new things, except when these goods are likely to bring more well-being or be useful for their activities.

This logic of ordinary materialism suggests that it is difficult to get out of materialism. One does not change values with a snap of the fingers. Biographical ruptures are generally the consequence of imperatives external to the individual, such as disasters or unexpected emotional breaks, and in these situations the individual may suddenly change values. But usually, if there is to be a change in values, it is usually gradual. The individual is likely to become aware of the emptiness associated with the always renewed acquisition of material possessions. He or she may also become aware of the social and environmental consequences of materialism and gradually change his or her behaviour. They may become more frugal or even indulge in voluntary simplicity. Putting oneself on the margins of the consumer society is no longer a factor of social exclusion as Douglas and Isherwood (1996) or Bauman (2008) suggested. These are only possible life trajectories linked to a desire for change.

But the individual, if he does not suffer from materialism, can perfectly well continue to multiply his material acquisitions without any problem. Playful materialism can exist even without abundant resources. The questionings from the societal point of view then become more obvious. Playful materialism does not create suffering. Innovators, for example, are likely to fall into this category. Trying out new products, playing with them, discovering what society is capable of putting on the market are all behaviors that reflect a playful materialism. Similarly, some people play with their identity(ies). They therefore need to put in place strategies that allow them to make their current and ideal self(s) coincide. It is also in this logic that materialism has recently been considered from a motivational angle, such as the pursuit of identity goals (Shrum et al., 2012). It is then a matter of material goods mainly meeting the needs of self-esteem, biographical continuity, distinction, belonging, efficiency and meaning (Vignoles et al., 2006). Acquisitions that respond to such motivations are not necessarily linked to suffering. Such motivations are natural in the construction of identity, and the acquisition and use of material possessions can be part of a logic of playful materialism or at least of self-actualization. To our knowledge, this playful materialism is never discussed in literature, because it does not carry a moral ideology, as is the case, for example, in Kasser's work (2002), which poses as a paragon of antimaterialism.

From an individual point of view, if there can be motivational reasons of identity, this playful materialism can also be more akin to hedonic consumption, to the small pleasures that one makes for oneself or more simply to the purchases that one makes out of curiosity. These are small steps that contribute to the subjective well-being of the individual. Is it materialistic to want to spend one's money on ordinary small pleasures, even if one cannot exclude that it is the destructuring of the social context that is at the origin of such behaviour? Probably. It is the accumulation of these small steps that ultimately poses a social problem.

Another hypothesis is that some individuals see themselves as materialistic, assume it, and yet experience subjective well-being and satisfaction with their lives. These are *jouisseurs* who want to take pleasure either through the acquisition of material goods or through consumption experiences. They do not necessarily adhere very intensely to the values of materialism and have other values that go in the direction of surpassing oneself.

What is common to these two logics of ordinary materialism is that people engage a little too much in consumer activities, to the detriment of other activities oriented towards surpassing oneself. From the point of view of the sustainability of society, some do so for easily understandable reasons, while others do it more selfishly for their own pleasure.

Conclusion

We wished to show here that if materialism can be a suffering and possibly put the individual or his family in danger by uncontrolled compulsive purchases, it is not a fatality. Various works have shown that consumption experiences provide more well-being than material goods and that the rewards linked to interpersonal relationships are a source of social recognition, capable of limiting the damage caused by materialism. Also, there are

alternatives that can alleviate the discomfort of those who are likely to suffer from materialism.

Materialism also raises questions of society. There is of course a discussion to be held between those in favour of growth and those in favour of degrowth. Whatever the solution, today's society is not sustainable and logically enough it is the most materialistic individuals who attach the least importance to the environment. The resources and in general the balance of the planet are threatened. The society by increasing industrialization has also become a society of risk. These risks are likely to considerably affect the surrounding world from an ecological point of view and as a result of industrial policies. That said, the emergence and acceleration of the digital society over the last few decades is shaping a new world whose future is very difficult to foresee. If we are optimistic, we can hope that this digital society will be able to create growth and invent new models of society in which material goods are not alone in being able to produce subjective well-being and thus break the fiction that material goods are alone in being able to respond to identity aspirations (Scott et al., 2014).

Finally, we wished to retrace the logics of ordinary materialism. We have clearly situated materialism in a logic of identity. Being materialistic is not a weakness or a lack of character. To be materialistic, in the ordinary sense of the term, seems to us to be a negotiation that the person can engage in with himself. It is possibly, but not necessarily, a matter of facing a certain suffering in one's identity construction. In practice, as we have seen, it is a question of making the current self coincide with an ideal self. Material goods may be able to respond to this problem, because they have the value of signs and are of a nature to express meanings that the individual wishes to attribute to himself or to be attributed by others. But he is likely to make mistakes and to have to engage in new acquisitions. In the changing context of contemporary society, certain community-type values make it possible to protect oneself from excessive materialism. But materialism is not necessarily a source of suffering and the existence of ordinary materialism of the playful type is not to be excluded. It can also participate in the construction of identity.

General Conclusion

The relationship to material goods is complex, surprisingly diverse and involves many compartments of life (Richins and Rudmin, 1994). In contemporary society, the abundance of material goods is disturbing. Individuals consume for very different and combined reasons (utilitarian or functional, symbolic or hedonic and experiential). The logic of consumption is multiple, but it is difficult to escape from the society of abundance. Material goods are offered for all to see. Present both in points of sale and on the Internet, they are likely to be desired, sometimes bought, in a reasoned or more impulsive way, but in any case, they are omnipresent in daily life. Sometimes they are bought irrationally, i.e. compulsively. This is a sign of a malaise that questions us about the relationship between material goods and identity.

Within this framework, it appears first of all that the identity that one can approach by the concept of self is subjected to tensions. There are gaps between the real self, the ideal self and the real or ideal social self and material goods can be used to absorb this state of tension. The material goods indeed make it possible to tend towards what the person considers to be the ideal self. From this point of view, the material goods have gladly a significant aspect, for oneself or for others. These meanings are most often the mark of an attachment to particular objects. These are characterized by their indexicality, i.e. their ability to recall places, experiences or relationships with other people. This attachment to particular goods is critically revealed in the event of ecological disaster, loss, theft or destruction. This attachment to certain singular objects participates in the construction of the individual's identity and cannot be equated with materialism. But it is an essential process in the construction of identity, it is social comparison. When the individual considers goods, he will situate himself in a logic of social comparison in order to know how he would situate himself on the social scale and more particularly how he would position himself in his group of belonging. This process of comparison implies the acceptance by other significant people (who are important to the individual) of the goods that the individual would acquire, reflecting his ideal self and his ideal social self. The consequences of this process, particularly in the context of advertising, can have deleterious effects on the psychological balance of the person who is then likely to slide towards materialism. This construction is all the more difficult as the individual evolves in an uncertain social environment which forces him to be himself, to affirm his identity, whereas he evolves in a liquid society without real landmarks.

This context makes it possible to circumscribe materialism on the basis of a portrait. The materialist is an envious, possessive, ungenerous individual for whom material goods are a means to success and happiness. He is concerned about his financial success, aspiring to recognition and social attractiveness, and purchases play a central role. Obviously from this angle, no one is in a position to recognize themselves as materialistic. Based on Fromm's work on being and having, we have tried to form a typology of four figures in consumer society: precariousness, voluntary simplicity, ordinary materialism and radical materialism. These figures seem to us to be richer than a linear vision based on the degree of materialism

and which only mobilizes the question of "having". This configuration has, first of all, the advantage of reintegrating precariousness into the social space of consumption. Moreover, the distinction between ordinary materialism and radical materialism seems essential to us because it questions the role of possessions in the possibility of constructing one's "being". In one case, possessions are not indispensable to legitimize "being", while in the other, possessions probably constitute one of the rare means for the individual to structure his existence and obtain social recognition.

We have the feeling that radical materialism is limited to a limited fringe of the population, precariousness is progressing, voluntary simplicity is in the making, and the majority of individuals could be situated in varying degrees of a relatively diffuse ordinary materialism. This would explain why the relationship between the degree of materialism and subjective well-being is relatively modest, and why, in the end, the least materialistic individuals are more focused on family and community values that allow interaction with other people. However, economic socialization makes consumer society attractive, in a logic of social comparison and mimetic desire, which allows people to offer themselves certain pleasures, all the more so since the absence of consumption presents the risk of escaping from society, being stigmatized and ultimately being considered a defective consumer (Bauman, 2008).

From then on, the question of materialism is that of well-being or that of the good "being" (Burroughs and Rindfleisch, 2011). In a general and almost certain way, there is a negative, but moderate, relationship between the degree of materialism and subjective well-being. That being said, there remains a paradox in observing that, whatever the level of income, excess materialism does not make us happier, at least not above a certain level of material possessions that we are quite incapable of identifying, but which we can assume to be the satisfaction of basic needs, namely, food, clothing, shelter and care. This phenomenon is called the Easterlin paradox. It can be explained by the principle of social comparison. This principle, as we have seen, leads the individual to compare himself to his peers and not to classes or social categories too far removed from the one to which he belongs. However, this explanation proves to be insufficient. It is also necessary to consider the way in which values operate. Indeed, it is possible to think that individuals who are better inserted socially are less inclined to develop materialistic values. The mobilized works clearly show that the least materialistic individuals are more centered on family, spirituality and community values. Generally speaking, the adoption of community values seems to preserve the individual from materialism. But this is without counting on economic socialization, which indiscriminately promotes immediate pleasure and the satisfaction of all needs, against which very few discordant voices are raised to denounce this dominant discourse. On this point, there is considerable effort to be made to better understand economic socialization, particularly among adults and beyond the normative framework of basic knowledge for evolving in the market sphere.

Radical materialism is not devoid of inconveniences, some of which can be problematic. Indeed, it is very clear that compulsive behaviors, the way of managing money, personality traits are closely linked. Because of the relationship between materialism and subjective malaise, it is logical to see psychological characteristics such as stress, anxiety, neurotic symptoms and even depression associated with materialism. It also appears that individuals who indulge in compulsive shopping are almost systematically materialistic, whereas the

most materialistic individuals are only more inclined to make compulsive purchases. With regard to the relationship to money, it can be pointed out that the most materialistic individuals encounter problems related to money, but that this may be moderate for financially responsible individuals. Compulsive shoppers generally have more money-related problems, especially with the use of credit cards.

When one renounces materialism, one can be either a follower of voluntary simplicity, or simply frugal, or finally in a precarious situation. These three situations are obviously very different. The followers of voluntary simplicity are clearly anti-materialistic. They favour a sustainable future, adopt community-type values, value social responsibility and ecology. Frugality is characterized as a softer form of voluntary simplicity, but is also different in terms of its motivations. Frugal people are self-centered, attentive to their possessions and thrifty. Precariousness is more complex, because among this part of the population there are individuals who wish to preserve their dignity, and materialism is a luxury they cannot afford.

Materialism can be a pain and possibly put the individual or his family at risk if he engages in compulsive buying, but there are solutions that can help alleviate the discomfort of the situation. If materialism can be a suffering for the individual, it can also pose problems for society. Indeed, the consumer society is inundated with goods which, for their manufacture, have required the massive use of natural resources. Eventually, society will no longer be sustainable. This poses the problem of growth and how to manage it. But we have also entered a society of risk. The industrial and ecological risks are multiple. How can progress halt this dynamic? One day we will have to ask ourselves this question head-on. Furthermore, is the information society capable of producing new models of growth and consumption? Nothing is less certain from the historian's point of view (Trentmann, 2016). From our point of view, it is essential first to get out of this fiction that consists in thinking that only material goods make it possible to respond to identity needs, and we have the hope, more than the conviction, that the information society is likely to produce devices that will enable individuals to structure their identity differently, through affiliation to networks, through a more enriching community life or through interpersonal recognition.

In many ways, ordinary materialism responds to a personal and social problem in an environment saturated with goods that are so many signs allowing self-expression. But they are also signs allowing the individual to construct a representation of himself, a concept of self. If there were to be a problem, it would reside in the evolution of society, its fragmentation, the decline of institutions and the invasion by material goods. If this evolution is conjugated with the difficulties of adaptation of the individual in this destructured society, we have all the elements to understand the dynamics of ordinary materialism. One can lead one's existence in a harmonious way without necessarily possessing many material goods, with the exception of those which found our social identity (identity papers) and goods strongly marked by indexicality. These operate as identity markers. It may be recalled that identity construction does not necessarily involve the acquisition of material possessions (Scott et al., 2014). From our point of view, it is unwise to stigmatize materialism. Indeed, ordinary materialism concerns practically all of us. It can be linked to subjective discomfort, but not necessarily. When the individual does not have the values that enable him or her to guard against materialism and when the social environment

is the source of identity tensions or when the individual is sensitive to social comparison, the adoption of materialistic behaviour is logical, but the response is inadequate. Indeed, material possessions have meanings that only refer to other meanings, calling for the recurrent acquisition of new material possessions. But one cannot overlook the fact that ordinary materialism can be a source of well-being. Hedonic or experiential consumption is part of this logic, even if it is likely that consumers are vigilant to the signs conveyed by their acquisitions or experiences. This question needs to be better investigated in the future. One cannot be satisfied with results that show that the more materialistic one is and the less satisfied one is in life, within the framework of a supposedly linear relationship that is in the end relatively moderate. This raises questions, and it seems to us indispensable to dissociate individuals who belong to a playful materialism from those for whom materialism is ultimately the consequence of an identity-related malaise.

Materialism is a generic term that hides many ambiguities and contradictions and is often decried. The generic nature of the term cleverly masks the moral considerations that underlie materialism. Few people claim to be materialists, or even accept themselves as such. Why this denial? It can probably be seen as a low social desirability of the representation that one can make of a person who subscribes to radical materialism. Are so few of us ordinary materialists? We don't think so. Almost all of us, certainly to varying degrees, are part of ordinary materialism. Some suffer from it, some do not, some assume it, some do not. But, whatever the case, ordinary materialism is at the heart of consumer society, and if it threatens the future of Western society, we have to admit that everyone does what they can to fit into society, but also as they want, and no one can be the judge of that. Even if a societal reflection on extensive economic socialization is necessary, it is not on the agenda, and the dominant values of developed Western civilization do not favor the exit from materialism.

We would like to end this essay on the question of the evolution and the future of materialism. No, society does not become more materialistic, unless we consider that materialism evolves at the same time as the consumer society evolves. Since its emergence, materialism has developed in accordance with abundance and social structures as they evolve. It is enough to plunge into artistic production to appreciate how values, mechanisms of social comparison, mimicry, and identity constructions are approached. In literature, contemporary or almost contemporary authors such as Chuck Palahniuk, Montalban, Georges Perec or older authors such as Proust, Stendhal or Dostoïevski, or visual artists and photographers such as Andy Warhol, Arman or Martin Parr meticulously deconstruct the mechanisms of consumption. Literature and art in general offer a subject for thought that is ultimately little exploited and to which this essay owes a large part.

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