SELVES AND SHELVES.
CONSUMER SOCIETY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN FRANCE.

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the
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By

Ioana Laura Hetel, M.A.

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The Ohio State University
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Dissertation Committee:                   Approved by

Professor Karlis Racevskis, Adviser

Professor Danielle Marx-Scouras, Adviser

Professor Jennifer Willging

Professor Fritz Graf

__________________________

Advisors
French and Italian Graduate Program
ABSTRACT

Since the late nineteenth century, France has been confronted with the rapid instauration of consumerism and its society has been shaped by the tension between the political ideal of everyone under one roof and the consumerist ideal of everything under one roof. This study investigates representations of modern shopping sites (department stores and large format retailers such as supermarkets and hypermarkets) and elucidates how representations of retail stores in literature and other textual media have been constructed based on the opposing polarities of lieux de mémoire, intentionally defined as places of identity, of social relations, and of tangible history, and non-lieux, described as unconcerned with identity, non-relational, and ahistorical. This dichotomy, I claim, is the product of a fundamental conflict between a nostalgic view of a nationalistic past and an unavoidable adoption of the modern.

Focusing on the diachronic dimension of French retail and building on McNair’s wheel of retailing, I theorize the model of the cultural wheel of retailing in order to illuminate how and why the same type of store is constructed as either a site of memory or a non-place at different time periods. Then, shifting my attention to the post-1945 period, I analyze the emergence and spread of large format retailers by successively
focusing on each of the five meaning-making loci of culture: production, consumption, regulation, identity, and representation. With these insights in mind, I move to the investigation of six postwar French novels (Christiane Rochefort’s *Les Stances à Sophie*, Georges Perec’s *Les Choses*, Simone de Beauvoir’s *Les Belles images*, J.M.G. Le Clézio’s *Les Géants*, Frédéric Beigbeder’s *99 Francs*, and Jean-Christophe Rufin’s *Globalia*) and identify the presence in them of a chronotope of dystopic consumption, a sub-surface combinational scheme that manifests itself through the presence of six synergetic themes: shopping, the happiness myth, advertising, good consumers and bad citizens, Americanization, and books and reading as antidotes to consumerism. Since large format retailers are both objects of fiction and sites for commercializing literary texts, I also investigate the problematic journey of literature from the shelves of the bookstore to the shelves of the grandes surfaces.
To Iulian
who changed my life
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This dissertation holds far more than the culmination of years of study. Its pages also reflect relationships with several inspiring scholars, colleagues, and friends who, from the inception of my project, have helped to shape it.

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VITA

2001 – 2007 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Combined undergraduate / graduate program
The Ohio State University

B.A., Summa cum laude
Majors: Political Science
World Business & Economy

M.A., French

Ph.D Candidate, French

2001 – 2007 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Teaching Assistant
The Ohio State University

2007 – 2008 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Presidential Fellow
The Ohio State University

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major field: French Studies

Twentieth century French literature and culture

Consumer society, popular culture, and advertising

Modernism and postmodernism
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION. WHAT SHELVES FOR THE FRENCH SELVES?

On February 8, 2005, the French Minister of Culture and Communication Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres inaugurates the new building of his ministry in Paris at 182 rue Saint-Honoré. The new headquarters are located in the old *Immeuble des Bons Enfants* that architects Francis Soler and Frédéric Druot have remastered into a spacious building full of modern amenities.

As this 71 million euro project was in its last stages, the percent-for-art\(^1\) budget was used to install five works of art in the building: two non-figurative media installations, a non-figurative mural painting, a diptych by Jean-Michel Sanejouand entitled *Le Laboureur*, and a triptych by Philippe Cognée entitled *Supermarchés*. The choice of these last two paintings is particularly interesting because they bring together, under the roof of a major French cultural institution, images of production and consumption, of creation and destruction, of tradition and modernity. When asked to describe his triptych, Philippe Cognée declared:

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\(^{1}\) In order to satisfy the provisions of the *Décret relatif à l’obligation de décoration des constructions publiques* (n°2002-677) of April 29, 2002, 1% of the project cost was dedicated to installing public art.
Ce sont des peintures sur le thème du supermarché. Ce sujet que j'ai plusieurs fois développé est pour moi un symbole fort de notre monde contemporain. C'est un lieu d'accumulation, d'échange et de commerce concentrant une grande partie des signes de la société. Espace populaire par excellence, il m'a semblé intéressant de l'introduire comme signe dans ce bâtiment voué à la culture. Les peintures représentent des vues en perspective de rayonnages de supermarché. La répétition du motif augmente l'idée d'accumulation de marchandises.  

Figure 1.1  Philippe Cognée, Supermarchés.


As acknowledged by the painter himself, the painting and its subject - the blurry shelves of a supermarket - create an effect of strangeness that is considerably amplified by the inclusion of this work of art in the Molière conference room of the Ministry of Culture and Communication. Moreover, the triptych seems to convey both a positive and a negative message that powerfully reinforce one another with each attempt at interpretation.

The positive message seems to be a reminder that, despite the aggressive spread of consumerism, the French government will never treat culture as a merchandise and will actively protect its citizens’ right to culture - *le droit à la culture* - as incorporated in the French Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The negative message becomes even more apparent when we consider *Bibliothèques*, an alternate series of paintings by Philippe Cognée that would have arguably constituted a more appropriate choice and would have symbolized the mission and values of the French Ministry of Culture in a more transparent manner. However, the architects and the Planning Committee for the building chose the *Supermarchés* over the *Bibliothèques* because they wanted to communicate a vision of perceived threats to the continued existence of French culture.

![Figure 1.2 Philippe Cognée, Bibliothèques.](image)


When these two triptychs are viewed together, the striking formal similarities between them are meant first to destabilize spectators by letting them focus on the

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3 I shall henceforth use this term in its widely used contemporary meaning: the belief that goods give meaning to individuals and to their roles in society and the equating of personal happiness with the purchase of goods and their consumption.
kindred geometric composition of the paintings and then to reveal abruptly to them the conceptual dichotomy they illustrate.

On one hand, the library shelves embody the quintessentially French *Je pense donc je suis* (‘I think therefore I am’) and evoke the ideal of a national identity built on the solid basis of a shared spiritual culture perpetuated by books. The book shelves signal complicities of language, of common cultural references, of living know-how that are commonly perceived to be the foundation of the shared identity of French citizens.

On the other hand, the supermarket shelves call to mind the consumerist slogan *Je dépense donc je suis* (‘I shop therefore I am’) popularized by Barbara Kruger’s iconic painting and exemplify the danger of a potentially homogenized culture that no longer characterizes or belongs exclusively to the French nation because it is perpetuated by mass produced goods and relies on the shared identity of consumers.

These two alternatives raise a fundamental question: which shelves for the French selves? The shelves of the supermarket or

![Image](image.png)

Figure 1.3
Barbara Kruger, *Untitled.*

---

As shopping has become an essential part of urban living, many artists found their inspiration in shopping sites and consumerist attitudes. This interdisciplinarity originates in the Baudelairian *flâneur* of the late nineteenth century Paris, a figure who already embodied the complex interchanges between consumer society and art. Later on, many of the Pop Art artists were designers of advertising materials that they also used as source material for their art. For an in-depth look at the crossover art of consumerism-inspired artists such as Eugène Atget, Berenice Abbott, Walker Evans, Claes Oldenburg, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Christo, Duane Hanson, Barbara Kruger, Jeff Koons, and Andreas Gursky, see Grunenberg, Christoph, and Max Hollein. *Shopping: A Century of Art and Consumer Culture.* Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002.
the shelves of the library? As France is caught in the confrontation between consumerism and culture, could it be true that, as one article in *Le Monde diplomatique* stated, "désormais, le bonheur est dans le supermarché?" Are we to accept Jacques Godbout’s acid remarks that "le pouvoir d’achat a remplacé le pouvoir politique, la société marchande libérale a remplacé la démocratie libérale, le consommateur irrité a remplacé le citoyen révolté, les barricades ont forme d’étalage. Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité sont devenues: variété, publicité, satiété"?

It cannot be denied that, with the shift in the structuring principle of Western societies from production to consumption, shopping sites have become a realm of social action, interaction, and experience that increasingly structures the everyday practices of urban people and have a significant impact on the social construction of national identity. In this study, I investigate the interaction between consumerism and national identity along four fundamental polarities illustrated in figure 1.4.

<table>
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<th>SHELVES</th>
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<td>Reading / Shopping</td>
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Figure 1.4 Selves and shelves: national identity and consumerism

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I have chosen to look at consumerism through the prism of shopping sites because, inside stores, citizens unavoidably assume the role of consumers. This tension-bearing transformation is mediated by objects and is at its most visible in the highly codified architectural environment of retailing.

Architecture and national identity have been traditionally linked in France where nationhood is seen as a ‘nation-space’, as the collective construction of a cultural space that would guarantee the perpetuation of Frenchness. In an interview related to the grands travaux he initiated in Paris, president François Mitterand gave a memorable illustration of this intimate link:

No monument, no facility is to be equated with its use alone. All of them inscribe, in space and time, a certain idea of the useful, the beautiful, of city life and the dealings of men and women among themselves. In this way do we derive the different meanings of the verb édifier in French: to build, but also to signify, to advocate certain values, certain virtues. 7

Mitterand states his belief that all architecture expresses and shapes identity, mediates between the past and the present of a community, and defines social relationships. In addition, he sees the organization of space and the founding of places inside a given social group as being a modality of collective practice that allows collectivities and those who direct them to symbolize simultaneously shared identity and social relations when handling space.

One is tempted to paraphrase Mitterand’s words and ask: what values and virtues do shopping sites advocate? Such a question is, of course, misleading. As physical objects in the material world, shopping sites do not mean, do not have a fixed meaning.

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and, in fact, only receive meaning and become objects of knowledge within discourse. It is humans who construct the meaning of shopping sites using representations. This is why, for anyone sharing Michel Foucault’s conviction that "nothing has any meaning outside discourse," a cultural analysis of retail stores should not focus on retail stores themselves, but on the production and circulation of knowledge about these shopping sites. This type of analysis has indeed the advantage of unveiling various discursive formations that are generated from and, in turn, generate sets of cultural representations and cultural practices pertaining to retailing. Also, such an approach would show us, to borrow Stuart Hall’s insight, "how the knowledge in a particular discourse connects with power, regulates conduct, makes up or constructs identities and subjectivities, and defines the way certain things are represented, thought about, practiced and studied." Last but not least, such a holistic study of French retail stores can be instrumental in structuring the great variety of meanings attached to shopping sites in a specific national context and, in the process, reveal useful methodological tools that could be applied beyond the field of French studies to the historical study of shopping and retailing in general.

One example of a deeply rooted discursive formation is the attitude of different nations towards consumerism. In the United States, for instance, high levels of consumption and the proliferation of modern retail spaces are commonly perceived to be a national virtue as they ‘keep the economy going.’ When in 1961 president Eisenhower was asked what the Americans could do to help the economic situation, his response was:

"Buy!" "Buy what?" a journalist asked, to which Eisenhower replied: "Anything!" This example illustrates how consumption is not only harmoniously integrated in the image of the United States as a world superpower, but it is also considered to be an important enabling condition for the country’s hegemonic status. Shopping is evoked in American political discourse under the most surprising circumstances. On September 12, 2001, one day after a terrorist attack destroyed the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York, mayor Rudolph Giuliani asked New Yorkers not to go to their jobs in the World Trade Center. Instead, he added: "Take a day off… Go shopping." A few months later, the belief that Americans can ‘spend their way out’ of the tense political and economic context was still widespread. An image in the *American Prospect* magazine proves that consumerism was still associated with recovery after aggression. The cartoon pictured a woman pushing a shopping cart inside a supermarket. Paraphrasing John F. Kennedy’s January 1961 inaugural address, her sweatshirt read: "Ask Not What You Can Do For Your Country. SHOP."

The relationship between consumerism and national identity is anything but harmonious, but I argue that they have at least one important feature in common: they both exhibit a Janus complex, allying both a positive and a negative vision of themselves, in a way similar to the duality of Philippe Cognée’s *Supermarchés* triptych.

Let us first consider the case of nationalist discourse in France. Its positive component ensures that the existence of the nation is asserted and reasserted by constant

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references to the normal state of economic, political, social and cultural affairs and presents the nation as a healthy, stable social body. Its negative component emphasizes perceived threats or imminent disasters that could potentially damage the nation. This latter discourse has been recently labeled as *décliniste* and it produces worst-case scenarios that, although rarely becoming true, exorcise fears during periods of transition or innovation.

Turning to the case of the French consumerist discourse, we encounter a strikingly similar dual vision as consumption is alternately presented as control or choice, global conspiracy or epitome of freedom. On one hand, global consumption and advertising are accused of flattening out diversity and difference, and of subverting national cohesion by introducing increasingly fragmented forms of social identity. Nations with free market economies and high levels of consumption are described as “cold societies” where the overwhelming dominance of rationality privileges instrumental calculations and erodes the emotional warmth that allows for the establishment of human bonds.13 Shopping, in particular, is presented as a solitary activity that inhibits the creation of social cohesion since, when shopping, people assign priority to commodities over social bonds, and ignore affiliative motives and social values in favor of materialist considerations. As bonds between individuals and their community start to erode, national identity is more and more difficult to sustain. The positive vision of consumerism, which enjoys less popularity and exposure, describes it as liberating and playful, as a vehicle providing consumers with the opportunity to create and assert their

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‘self’, alongside other identity vehicles such as gender, ethnicity, kinship and age. In this
type of discourse, consumption is even described as "the vanguard of history."\(^{14}\) In *The
Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, Jean Baudrillard has insightfully noted that
"our society thinks itself and speaks itself as a consumer society. As much as it consumes
anything, it consumes itself as consumer society, as idea"\(^{15}\) and vividly summarized the
dual dimension of consumerism when he wrote that "just as medieval society was
balanced on God and the Devil, so ours is balanced on consumption and its
denunciation."\(^{16}\)

The kindred dichotomous vision common to nationalism and consumerism is the
product of evolving economic factors and of manipulation by powerful interest groups. It
also points to the contaminating interaction between these two forces as they inevitably
overlap in periods of economic transition and identity repositioning. This intriguing
overlapping has triggered researchers’ interest in the last few decades and, as a result, old
fields of research such as literature or marketing have become sources of new insights
into consumerism in national contexts.

As early as the mid-1980s, one marketing researcher expressed his conviction that
"one can learn more... from a reasonably good novel than from a 'solid' piece of social
science research."\(^{17}\) While questionable, this affirmation is symptomatic of the birth and
expansion of the new field of literary investigation of marketing and consumer

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\(^{14}\) Miller, Daniel. *Acknowledging Consumption: A Review of New Studies*. Material cultures. London:


phenomena in the United States and the United Kingdom, a field that seems to have
developed as the sum of innovative literary criticism approaches to marketing
representations in the context of key postwar schools. Figure 1.5 shows that, due to these
interdisciplinary developments, the investigation of representations of marketing in
literature has privileged different elements of fiction that can be schematically
summarized as follows:

Figure 1.5 Literary Schools and Consumer Behavior Research

Source: Stern, Barbara B. "Literary Criticism and Consumer Research: Overview and

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While statistics and marketing studies do provide insights into national consumption phenomena, I strongly believe that the tools and techniques of literary criticism can provide additional significant insight into how the French relate to consumerism and how they conceive modern retail stores as objects of consumption and symbols (or anti-symbols) of Frenchness.

This study is therefore intended to be a contribution to the rapidly growing field of "marketing-and-literature" literature. More precisely, it deals with retail marketing in literature, that is it identifies and analyses the portrayal and use of retail marketing techniques in works of literature. While identifying, categorizing, and analyzing textual representations of events and practices that have reflected and affected the attitudes of the

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French as national subjects of consumption, I also propose new conceptual tools for translating these literary elements into categories usable for research.

In chapter 2, I begin with a diachronic look at the evolution of shopping sites in France. Building on McNair’s model of a wheel of retailing, I introduce the model of a cultural wheel of retailing using a socio-cultural integrative approach. This integrative approach lays the conceptual basis for subsequent chapters by analyzing textual representations of shopping sites from the Middle Ages to the present in the context of social reality and national identity negotiation and preservation. To this purpose, I greatly rely on Pierre Nora’s notion of *lieux de mémoire* and on Marc Augé’s concept of *non-lieux*. These polarized anthropological concepts provide a better understanding of the mechanism through which shopping sites are encoded with particular meanings and come to be regarded as encapsulating national identity or, on the contrary, threatening it.

The same integrative socio-cultural approach is used in Chapter 3, which is structured around the insights of the recent ‘turn to culture’ and around the model of the Circuit of Culture devised by Du Gay et al. in 1997. By applying this model to the study of the French *grandes surfaces*, I privilege a holistic approach based on integrating discourses generated in all five meaning-making *loci* of culture: production, consumption, regulation, identity, and representation. Chapter 3 focuses on the first four dimensions and Chapter 4 deals with representations of shopping, shopping sites, and modern consumption in literature.

Chapter 4 considers how the practice of literary representation has influenced the cultural meanings of modern shopping sites. Since the cultural connotations of these
types of stores did not arise directly from their physical existence as architectural objects, I argue that textual representations have played a crucial role in the construction and negotiation of their social meaning. Employing a structuralist approach, I interpret key literary texts of the second half of the twentieth century as both made possible and limited by an underlying system of common textual codes.

My comparative reading of six postwar novels - Christiane Rochefort’s *Les Stances à Sophie*, Georges Perec’s *Les Choses*, Simone de Beauvoir’s *Les Belles images*, J.M.G. Le Clézio’s *Les Géants*, Frédéric Beigbeder’s *99 Francs*, and Jean-Christophe Rufin’s *Globalia* – reveals the presence in them of a chronotope of dystopic consumption that, while taking shape in the second half of the nineteenth century, is typical of the post-1945 period. I identify six main motifs of this chronotope: dystopic representations of shopping sites and shopping activities, the perceived negative impact of advertising, the interrogation of the myth of happiness, the uneasy cohabitation of citizens and consumers, the critique of American-imported consumerist attitudes, and the special place assigned to books and reading as liberating antidotes and identity guardians against individually and collectively damaging consumerism. As modern shopping sites became objects of fiction, they also became places for commercializing fiction itself. In the context of the French refusal to treat culture as a commodity, the last section traces the problematic journey of books from the shelves of bookstores to the shelves of the *grandes surfaces*. 
CHAPTER 2

LIEUX DE MÉMOIRE AND NON-LIEUX.
THE CULTURAL WHEEL OF RETAILING.

The linear and cyclical modes of historical explanation are not fundamentally irreconcilable. After all, if a vehicle is to move forward... it must be borne along on wheels that turn monotonously round and round.

Arnold Toynbee, My View of History

The idea of nation-ness is a cultural artifact that arouses deep attachments based on shared images and social frameworks of collective experience. When Benedict Anderson defined the nation as "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign,"¹ he was referring to the fact that, although members of even the smallest nation will never all meet face-to-face, the image of their communion lives in their collective memory in the form of national imagining. In this sense, collective memory is a reconstruction of the past in the light of the present that allows social groups to solve present problems based on shared mental images that are very much influenced by conceptions of the past.

Being a reconstruction of what is no longer that relies on temporal continuities, history is an important source of inspiration for collective memory. As Maurice Halbwachs shows in his *La Mémoire collective*, this phenomenon of emotion that welds groups together is embedded in living societies and telescopes vague reminiscences that are subject to the dialectics of remembering and forgetting. Contrary to historical memory where the past is stored and interpreted by social institutions, collective memory is a "courant de pensée continu, d’une continuité qui n’a rien d’artificiel, puisqu’elle ne retient du passé que ce qui en est encore vivant ou capable de vivre dans la conscience du groupe qui l’entretient." In other words, in contrast to history that presents us with a "tableau de changements" that we contemplate from the outside, collective memory is a "tableau de ressemblances (...), c’est le groupe vu du dedans, et pendant une période qui ne dépasse pas la durée moyenne de la vie humaine." From this point of view, any cultural analysis of the French society of the second half of the twentieth century has the advantage of relying on both historical memory and collective memory, which are still in a privileged position of overlapping.

Suffering initially from the low status assigned to the second half of the twentieth century history as an academic specialty and from poor access to archives, the field of postwar studies was inaugurated by biographies, memoirs, and social science studies in the 1950s. These were followed in the 1960s and in subsequent years by an explosion of studies produced by historians and cultural studies theorists who were interested in diverse topics such as economic analyses, popular culture, the instauration of consumer

3 Halbwachs, Maurice. *La Mémoire collective*. 77-78.
society, decolonization, globalization, immigration and European integration. The calling into question of many postwar policies and cultural symbols fueled the interest. For instance, when the national welfare state, national planning, nationalized enterprises, Frenchness, and the cult of the Left Bank intellectual started to erode or, in many instances, disappear, the postwar era became intriguing to intellectuals due to its newly acquired quality of strangeness.

In particular, two interlocking themes emerged. The first theme is the French experience of modernization, of coping with and resisting the social and cultural changes brought on by the postwar economic growth. The second theme is national identity, the struggle of defining and protecting Frenchness in the context of an invading American culture. The relationship between these two themes has then become an object of study in itself and several recent books analyzed the way in which the French embraced or resisted modernization while debating what the essence of Frenchness is or should be.

Maurice Halbwachs insightfully points out that spatial images play a crucial part in collective memory because "chaque aspect du lieu [occupé par un groupe social] a un

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4 A special issue of French Historical Studies (spring 1991, ed. Kim Munholland) that is dedicated to "France since 1945" extensively reviews the surge of interest and publications concerning this time period.
sens qui n’est intelligible que pour les membres du groupe, parce que toutes les parties de l’espace qu’il a occupées correspondent à autant d’aspect différents de la structure et de la vie de leur société, au moins à ce qu’il y a eu en elle de stable,” 7 to the point that "il n’est point de mémoire collective qui ne se déroule dans un cadre spatial." 8 National identity is therefore structured by both spatial realities and abstract images of the nation that, through the practice of collective memory in competing spheres of political influence, form a repository of images and ideals.

Shopping sites are no exception to this process. They have played and are still playing an important role in the French imaginary because, since the Middle Ages, they have been linked to the struggle between tradition and modernity, between protecting ancient customs and adopting innovative ways of living and consuming.

In this study, I propose to investigate shopping sites as cultural artifacts that illuminate the changing nature of French national identity as expressed in the complex interaction of retail stores and their cultural representations. While my focus is primarily on the postwar period, in this chapter I adopt a broader timeline – from the Middle Ages to the present – in order to create a theoretical model that accounts for periodic shifts in the cultural connotations associated with retail stores.

Just as Philippe Cognée’s Supermarchés are better understood when read in conjunction with their counterpart work Bibliothèques, the identity connotations of modern retail spaces are better revealed when they are analyzed in conjunction with the identity connotations of traditional stores. Two developments in the field of late twentieth

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7 Halbwachs, Maurice. La Mémoire collective. 133.
8 Halbwachs, Maurice. La Mémoire collective. 146.
century history and anthropology provide us with two concepts that illustrate this opposition and will constitute the bases for our cultural wheel of retailing. These two concepts – *lieux de mémoire* and *non-lieux* – are the result of what is, without doubt, the most interesting dialogue between history and anthropology in the France of the second half of the twentieth century: the echoing works of Pierre Nora (*Lieux de mémoire*, 1984-1992) and Marc Augé (*Non-lieux*, 1992).

### 2.1 Lieux de mémoire and national patrimony

Between 1984 and 1992, one hundred French scholars under the direction of Pierre Nora produced *Les Lieux de mémoire*, a seven-volume collective work intended to be both a history of France and "a monument erected to the memory of France, an inventory of the places where France and Frenchness are electively embodied." In his *Introduction* to this voluminous work, Nora gives the following definition: "a *lieu de mémoire* is any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial

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9 Nora, Pierre, and Lawrence D. Kritzman. *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*. European perspectives. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996. I will refer to the English translation of Pierre Nora’s book by Arthur Goldhammer. This version includes a *Foreword* by Lawrence D. Kritzman, a *Preface* to the English language edition by Pierre Nora as well as his *General Introduction* to the French edition, and it concentrates the seven volumes published in French into three volumes containing, according to Nora, "what Rabelais would call *la substantifique moelle*, the very marrow of the work." Following Nora’s suggestion for the English version, I will keep the expression *lieu de mémoire* in French whenever possible to safeguard the three semantic dimensions of *lieux* in French - places, sites, causes - while occasionally substituting ‘places’ and ‘sites’ when these English words seem to capture the sense adequately.

heritage of any community (in this case, the French community)"¹¹ and exists "because there are no longer any milieux de mémoire, settings in which memory is a real part of everyday experience."¹² Sites and realms of memory such as museums, monuments, cathedrals, coats-of-arms, libraries, gastronomy are therefore all constructed as signs of "what France used to be,"¹³ they are inextricably linked to the nostalgia for a glorified past, and intentionally defined as places of identity, of social relations, and of tangible history.

If Nora inaugurates a new approach to the writing of French history that excludes chronology and teleology and concentrates on capturing representations of ‘the quintessential France’, it is because he is aware that French memory has undergone a profound metamorphosis: it is now impregnated with a deep consciousness of its threatened traditions and ways of life, of its threatened identity.

This acute consciousness of the past manifests itself as cultural melancholia and allows memory to shape history. As a result, history is seen through the focusing lens of lieux de mémoire that singles out geographical places (Lascaux, Paris, Reims, Vichy), historical figures (Joan of Arc), monuments and buildings (the Eiffel Tower, Versailles, the Chartres cathedral, the Pantheon), literary and artistic objects (Marcel Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*, Descartes’ *Discourse on Method*, Millet’s paintings, Vidal de la Blanche’s *Geography of France*), emblems (the French flag, la Marseillaise), commemorations (Bastille Day), practices (gastronomy, street naming) and symbols (the

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Hexagon). In Nora’s view, these are the realms of memory in which French collective heritage is crystallized, in which collective memory is rooted. Of particular interest to this study, in the section dedicated to gastronomy Nora includes counter-service shops such as the *boulangerie*, *charcuterie*, and *pâtisserie*, as well as the *terroir*. Offering a residual sense of continuity, they have gradually become elements of commemorative consciousness, illusions of eternity in a disenchanted modern world.

The appreciation of national patrimony is intimately linked to feelings of national continuity and patriotism. One classical example is provided by General de Gaulle’s *Mémoires de guerre* where the opening pages evoke iconic images of French patrimony in order to set up a striking contrast between a peaceful, harmonious, eternal France and a menaced France devastated by war and occupation: "as a young native of Lille living in Paris, nothing struck me more than the symbols of our glories: night falling over Notre-Dame, the majesty of evening at Versailles, the Arc de Triomphe in the sun, conquered colors shuddering in the vault of the Invalides."14

Since de Gaulle, French patrimony – formally defined as "l’ensemble des formes dont l’Etat a la garde pour leur sauvetage, leur entretien et leur résurrection"15 – has achieved an institutionally-inscribed status and has become a closely-monitored nomenclature and initiative, supervised and cultivated by political and cultural institutions. The *Journées du Patrimoine* (‘Heritage Open Days’) that are held in France each year during the third week of September are telling examples. When initiated by the French Minister of Culture Jack Lang in 1984, the festival had 600,000 participants. In

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2007, 15,000 sites across France were opened to free visiting and more than 12 million visits were registered. The current Minister of Culture Christine Albanel attributed this increase in the number of visits to the fact that patrimony has become through the years "une passion française." And, in fact, this attitude of the public is not restricted to government-sponsored events. There is evidence that the French practice a "lèche-vitrine patrimonial: la déambulation gratuite dans les églises, les jardins et les quartiers anciens," an activity that is transparent in statistics made public by the French Ministry of Culture.

This interest in national patrimony is the symptom of a process that has been long in the making. As Mircea Eliade observes, modern societies are incapable of living within real memory because the past cannot be made present through traditions and rituals, as it was made in pre-modern societies. Incapable of authentically living the past in the identification of act and meaning, these societies represent it as disembodied memories that are mere simulations. In the case of France, this process was accelerated in the twentieth century when several disruptive processes were transforming the fabric of the French society. As Pierre Nora explains,

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16 Christine Albanel in an interview for France Inter (Radio France, May 29, 2007).
17 See De Saint-Pulgent, Maryvonne. "Pour l’amour des vieilles pierres." Le Point. n° 1357, September 19, 1998. 108-109. The author shows that age and generation are important factors when it comes to the frequention of patrimony sites: adolescents and young people are high above the mean and there is a significant decrease in interest in people above 55.
18 See Donnat, Olivier. Les Pratiques culturelles des Français. Enquête 1997. Paris: La Documentation française, 1998. Designed and performed by the Département des Etudes et de la Prospective of the French Ministry of Culture, this study showed that the passion for national patrimony has unsuspected proportions: 58% of the French visit a new historical site at least once a year.
a nation that was long agricultural, providentialist, universalist, imperialist, and state-centered has passed away, and in its place has emerged a nation conscious of its diminished power, reshaped by European integration and internal regionalization, redefined by the fading national-revolutionary equation of 1789, and, finally, tested by an influx of immigrants not easily adaptable to the traditional norms of Frenchness.20

As a result of these changes, France is now experiencing a certain form of cultural melancholia whose most visible intellectual manifestation is the discours décliniste. Although déclinisme trickled to the surface in the early 1990s when the French economy was crawling forward at 1.3 per cent a year and the nation was starting to reminiscence over the economical and intellectual atmosphere of the trente glorieuses, the trend gained central stage with the publication of Nicolas Baverez’s La France qui tombe in 2003. This historian and economist of center-right denounced "the sinister continuity between the fourteen years of François Mitterrand and the twelve of Jacques Chirac, united by their talent for winning elections and ruining France”21 and criticized the inability of France to reform itself and keep pace with the rest of the Western world.

In the wave of studies that followed Baverez’s 2003 book - Le Désarroi français, L’Arrogance française, Le Malheur français, La Pensée tiède, Le Pessimisme français – image déchue du pouvoir, Le Grave malaise français22 - no area of French life was

spared: unemployment, education, immigration and emigration, football, literature, movie industry, national and foreign policy, standards of living, Europeanization, journalism, and, of course, consumption. In this context, recent French studies of modern consumption are contaminated by discourses on ‘sous-France’ and therefore rarely manage to offer new and objective insights, separate from the national auto-flagellation of the last two decades. One exception is discussed in the following section.

2.2 Non-lieux and perceptions of modernity

Due to the enormous success of Nora’s work, the expression lieu de mémoire entered the Grand dictionnaire Robert de la langue française in 1992. The very same year, the French anthropologist Marc Augé published an essay entitled Non-lieux. Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité in which he argues that French historians find it increasingly difficult to make time into a principle of intelligibility, let alone a principle of identity. Two phenomena can explain this. The first is the decline of the Sartrian and Marxist references of the 1950s and 1960s that located the truth of the specific in the analysis of the universal. The second is a certain acceleration of history, a phenomenon whose description is found in the very first paragraph of Nora’s Lieux de mémoire:


Though not really a neologism, the syntagm lieu de mémoire did not exist in French when Pierre Nora first used it. Nora adapted it from the Latin expression loci memoriae, a systematic inventory of ‘memory places’ that was an important part of the ancient and medieval tradition of mnemonic and rhetoric techniques as described by Frances Yates in her book The Art of Memory. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.
Acceleration of history: the metaphor needs to be unpacked. Things tumble with increasing rapidity into an irretrievable past. They vanish from sight, or so it is generally believed. The equilibrium between the present and the past is disrupted. What was left of experience, still lived in the warmth of tradition, in the silence of custom, in the repetition of the ancestral, has been swept away in a surge of deeply historical sensibility. Our consciousness is shaped by a sense that everything is over and done with, that something long since begun is now complete. Memory is constantly on our lips because it no longer exists.24

For Augé, this acceleration of history is made visible by three figures of excess:

(1) an overabundance of events that threatens our need to give meaning to the world, (2) an overabundance of space expressed in changes of scale and means of transportation as well as in the proliferation of imaged or imaginary references, and (3) an over-investment of meaning, an increasingly individualized production of meaning as the individual seeks to interpret information for himself and by himself. In Augé’s words,

What is new is not that the world lacks meaning, or has little meaning, or less than it used to have; it is that we seem to feel an explicit and intense daily need to give it meaning: to give meaning to the world, not just some village or lineage. This need to give a meaning to the present, if not the past, is the price we pay for the overabundance of events corresponding to a situation we could call ‘supermodern’ to express its essential quality: excess.25

Supermodernity is therefore defined by the author as "the face of a coin whose obverse represents postmodernity: the positive of a negative."26 As such, it is not concerned with the negative belief in the collapse of the idea of progress, but with the overabundance of events and space in the contemporary world and the positive demand for meaning that makes it difficult for us to understand the whole of the present and the

24 Nora, Pierre. Realms of Memory. 1. Italics belong to Nora.
past. Also, supermodernity produces non-lieux\textsuperscript{27} that Augé defines as follows: "If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place."\textsuperscript{28} To illustrate his definition, he gives examples such as shopping malls, highways, airports, to which individuals are connected in a uniform, bureaucratic manner, and where no organic social life is possible.

Augé believes that, in reaction to the supermodern imposition of non-places as "the real measure of our time,"\textsuperscript{29} the public has become increasingly interested in obsolete forms and historians have started to pay attention to themes that are traditionally considered anthropological (the family, private life, national symbols). In fact, Augé claims, "nobody expresses this point of view better than Pierre Nora"\textsuperscript{30} and his theory of lieux de mémoire.

We can now conclude with Augé that "place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally

\textsuperscript{27}Throughout my analysis, I will be mainly using the term non-lieu since its English translation of 'non-place' ignores one important semantic dimension. The space of contemporary consumption can only be entered by the economically innocent, the ones whose identity was checked when entering and leaving. The notion of non-lieu integrates this consumerist requirement of constantly proving one's innocence as it is commonly used in French in the technical juridical sense of 'no grounds for persecution' or 'recognition that the accused is innocent.'

\textsuperscript{28}Augé, Marc. Non-Places. 77-8. A similar argument was presented several years later by William Leach in his Country of Exiles: The Destruction of Place in American Life. New York: Pantheon Books, 1999. Leach argues that there are links between the corporate mergers of the 1980s and the destruction of 'place.' In their search for increased profit, these mega-corporations needed to move huge quantities of commodities through an intermodal transport system that combined planes, trains, trucks, and ships. To maximize returns, huge warehouses, mega-malls, and superstores were built at every link, break, turn and terminus of this system. These developments, in turn, replaced and erased locally distinct natural, social, cultural, and even economic features that were now seen as hindering 'progress.' As a result, the destruction of the local is followed by a commodification of the "experience of place." For instance, retailing districts hire place-producing marketers who, according to Leach, "pillage the past to impose phony meaning on a contemporary consumer space." (56-7)

\textsuperscript{29}Augé, Marc. Non-Places. 79.

\textsuperscript{30}Augé, Marc. Non-Places. 25.
completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten. Moreover, we can add that this interplay between lieux de mémoire and non-lieux forces us to re-think constantly our relationship to the past and to the present, and provides us with an axis for situating social artifacts and constructs at different historical points. Since the Middle Ages, shopping sites have acquired varied attributes along this conceptual axis that unites places and non-places. For a structured and systemic understanding of these attributes, we need to start with the first and only model of retail evolution that includes a diachronic dimension: McNair’s wheel of retailing.

2.3 McNair’s wheel of retailing

The conflict between old and new types of retail stores is a key element in the dynamics of institutional change in the retailing system. The most widely accepted model that accounts for this conflict is the model of the wheel of retailing that was proposed by Malcolm McNair in 1958. One of the very few theories originating in marketing that has a sense of the past, this theory compares the cycle of retail distribution to "a wheel [that] always revolves, sometimes slowly, sometimes more rapidly, but it does not stand still." According to McNair, the cycle usually begins with a bold new concept when an innovator has an idea for a new kind of distribution enterprise with low operating costs.

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31 Augé, Marc. Non-Places. 79.
32 McNair, Malcolm. "Significant Trends and Developments in the Post-War Period." Competitive Distribution in a Free High-Level Economy and its Implications for the University. A.B. Smith ed. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1958. 17. When he published this seminal study, McNair was a marketing professor at the Graduate School of Business Administration at Harvard University.
In the introductory stage of his new retail store, the innovator is ridiculed and scorned while his invention is perceived as illegitimate. However, although bankers and investors remain wary of the new shopping sites, the public gradually adopts them because of their attractive prices.

In the growth stage, increased profits allow for trading-up, so the appearance, the standing of the store, and the quality of the merchandise are improved. As a result, the store starts to enjoy respectability from both consumers and investors. It also manages to take considerable business away from older forms of retail stores.


As capital investment and operating costs rise, the institution enters the maturity stage where it mainly competes with other similar institutions rather than with old-line competitors. Eventually, it becomes vulnerable to the next revolution of the wheel, to the
next innovative low-cost business, and it joins the ranks of old-line institutions. And so the wheel revolves.

Although marketing scholars generally agree that the wheel of retailing model "only refers to a single aspect of change, the price-quality continuum," there are several clues in McNair’s original description of the wheel of retailing that point to a possible intended expansion of the concept beyond the categories of price and quality of products and services. Several notations leave the door open for attaching different social and cultural connotations to each stage of development. For instance, McNair notes that, in the introductory stage of the retail innovation, the innovator is "ridiculed, scorned, and condemned as illegitimate. Bankers and investors are leery of him," although his store "attracts the public on the basis of the price appeal." If and when the store reaches the growth stage, it becomes "respectable in the eyes of both consumers and investors." McNair does not specify the nature or the causes of the perceived illegitimacy and respectability. Also, he only looks at the two groups that are more susceptible to behave homogenously across high-level economies with competitive distribution systems: consumers and investors looking to maximize utility and, respectively, profit. However, the notions of legitimacy and respectability bring to mind other interrelated groups that create and orient such perceptions of retail stores: politicians, intellectuals, marketers, trade unions, shop owners, and the civil society at large. These entities introduce national variations in the perception of various types of stores since their motivations go beyond mere utility or profit considerations.

To account for this alternative vision of retailing, we need to adopt the model of a cultural wheel of retailing. This new model allows us to take into account the interplay between the creation and adoption of innovative types of retail stores and the way in which these retail stores affected and were, in turn, affected by individual and collective identity motivations as well as by government efforts to preserve a way of life associated with national identity. The cultural wheel of retailing can also explain retail outcomes where consumers move away from maximizing utility due to ideological and identity considerations.

2.4 The cultural wheel of retailing: a theoretical model

Previous sections of this chapter showed that the two anthropological concepts of lieux de mémoire and non-lieux can provide us with valuable methodological tools for the cultural study of place in general and of retail stores in particular. They also constitute the bases for our model of a cultural wheel of retailing that can explain why the same type of stores can receive diametrically opposed cultural connotations at different stages of its life cycle.

According to this proposed model, when a type of retail store is first created, it usually receives all the connotations associated with a non-lieu and is treated as an aggressive innovation that is alien to the ‘national character,’ threatening of traditional retailing, and disruptive at the level of community cohesion.
The new type of shopping site will not receive the connotations of a *lieu de mémoire* until two things happen: (1) retailers aggressively invest in marketing that positions the store as both benign innovator and dedicated perpetuator of an old menaced retailing tradition and (2) a new type of store emerges as a *non-lieux* on the retailing scene, which prompts favorable comparisons and speeds up the acceptance process of the now older type of store.

The first requirement is mainly accomplished through retromarketing, a technique of fusing old and new retailing that I will discuss at length in chapter 4. The second requirement springs from the inherent character of the *non-lieux / lieux de mémoire* ideal pair, which - as I show in figure 2.2 - is necessarily relational and differential.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old type of store</th>
<th>New type of store</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modest in its resources</td>
<td>Affluent in its resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fearful of competition, conservative</td>
<td>Aggressive competitor, innovative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sets limits on capitalist impulses</td>
<td>Unbridled capitalist logic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic concerns</td>
<td>Materialistic concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeper of values and tradition</td>
<td>Disregard for values and tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on quality and service</td>
<td>Emphasis on quantity and turnover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organic relationship with</td>
<td>Functional relationship with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>customers and employees</td>
<td>consumers and employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connotations of <em>lieu de mémoire</em></td>
<td>Connotations of <em>non-lieu</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.2 Perception of old *versus* new types of store

If we superimpose this cultural model on McNair’s economic model, we can see that a type of store is highly likely to receive *non-lieu* connotations in the market entry
phase. Later on, these connotations begin to attenuate in the trading-up phase when *lieu de mémoire* connotations start to develop, and identity ambiguity and negotiation are at their highest. In the maturity phase, economic slowdown is accompanied by a rising acceptance of the retail store as a legitimate participant in the national culture. However, the consolidation of the *lieu de mémoire* status only takes place when the wheel of retailing revolves again and a new type of retail store enters the retailing scene threatening the old store type. Only then are binary oppositions and store positioning fixed and virtually non-ambiguous.

2.5 The cultural wheel of retailing in action: a diachronic look

Let us now turn to the history of retailing in France and see how the proposed cultural wheel of retailing can provide us with a deeper and more systemic understanding of retail store development. Along the way, I will occasionally use literary examples to illustrate the evolution of certain types of stores because I believe that, although in real life the demarcations between *lieux de mémoire* and *non-lieux* are not as clear cut as Nora and Augé would lead us to believe, sites of memory and non-places can exist and do exist in literature in their ideal form.

In his study *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, Jacques le Goff describes early medieval France as a society living within the framework of a natural economy that was already struggling against the invasion of monetary economy. Also, he
shows that Christianity was condemning lucrative professions in the name of *contemptus mundi* that each Christian was expected to exhibit:

Man’s work was supposed to be in the image of God’s. God’s work, of course, was Creation. Any profession, therefore, which did not create was bad and inferior. It was imperative to create, as the peasant, for example, created the harvest, or, at least, to transform raw material, like the artisan, into an object. If there was no creation, then there should be transformation (*mutare*), modification (*emendare*), or improvement (*meliorare*). The merchant, who created nothing, was thus condemned… Medieval ideology was materialistic in the strict sense. Only production of matter had value. The abstract value defined by capitalist economy eluded its grasp, disgusted it, and was condemned by it.  

Between the ninth and the thirteenth centuries, urban expansion took place and brought along the division of labor. As new trades and socio-professional categories were born, attitudes with regard to trades were revised. Now, "only merchants who acted out of greed (*ex cupididate*) or love of profit (*lucri causa*) had to be condemned. This left a large field open to ‘good intentions’, that is, to all sorts of camouflage." Merchants could now benefit from a growing number of excuses and even expressions of respect such as the hazards of trade (*periculum sortis*) or the tying up of cash in long undertakings (*lucrum cessans*). Overall, merchants were justified by their social utility and by their service to the common good resulting from moving goods from product-abundant to product-scarce areas. This is why, from threatening entities that menaced a

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35 Le Goff, Jacques. *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980. 61. Although sanctioned by Christianity, many of these prohibitions find their origins in primitive mentalities. For instance, butchers were affected by the blood taboo while cooks, laundrymen and dyers were affected by the taboo of impurity.

36 Le Goff, Jacques. *Time, Work, and Culture in the Middle Ages*. 63. Scholasticism was critical in overthrowing the Manichaean distinctions of the previous centuries. For instance, casuistry distinguished between occupations that were illicit in themselves (*ex natura*) and occupations condemnable according to the case (*ex occasione*). In the first category, money lending was denied to Christians and this opportunity was subsequently seized by Jews who became the leaders in credit operations.
system based on strict religious precepts, small storekeepers became crucial pillars of the medieval economic system.

From the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries, throughout the ancien régime of the Valois and Bourbon dynasties, merchants adhered to fairly uniform retailing practices and the purchase of a good entailed a similar ritual. When entering a specialized store, customers had already decided to purchase a certain product. However, since prices were never marked, there was bargaining over the price and discussion of product alternatives between the merchant behind the counter and the customer who did not have free access to product shelves.

These uniform retailing micro-practices were reinforced by a guild system that also imposed standards of craftsmanship and guaranteed that no small producer or merchant impeded upon the trade of his neighbors. In addition, the guilds regulated admission to various trades and made sure that each artisan or seller was confined to one specialty and one type of store. They even set guidelines for shares of trade and procurement of supplies, could set a minimum price to prevent unfair competition, and limited advertising to street cries, street signs, and listings in almanacs.

In his 1830 novel La Maison du Chat-qui-Pelote, Honoré de Balzac describes a small shop that - although the guild or corps de métiers privileges were abolished by the Chapelier Law of 1791 proclaiming economic individualism as the norm - still perpetuates the mentality and trade practices that supported and reinforced the guild

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37 The law was introduced in the French National Assembly by Isaac René Guy Le Chapelier and was passed on June 14, 1791. While proclaiming economic individualism as the norm, the Chapelier law made any association of workers or employers illegal. More specifically, it forbade trading monopolies and it abolished guilds of artisans and merchants. It also prohibited strikes and workers’ associations. The law was annulled on May 25, 1864, when the right to associate and the right to strike were reinstated.
system. This lieu de mémoire is well-known in Parisians, although the reader is surprised to learn that it has the appearance of a "tumbledown abode [whose] every beam quivered… at the passing of the lightest vehicle."38 This "relic of the civic life of the sixteenth century" belonging to "Guillaume, successor to Master Chevrel" is, we are told, one of Paris’ most famous and respected fabric shops despite the fact that

Many a passer-by would have found it difficult to guess the class of trade carried on by Monsieur Guillaume. Between the strong iron bars which protected his shop windows on the outside, certain packages wrapped in brown linen were hardly visible, though as numerous as herrings swimming in a shoal. Notwithstanding the primitive aspect of the Gothic front, Monsieur Guillaume, of all the merchant clothiers in Paris, was the one whose stores were always the best provided, whose connections were the most extensive, and whose commercial honesty never lay under the slightest suspicion.39

This "notable upholder of ancient practices"40 lives above his store with his wife, his two daughters, his shop assistant, and his three apprentices. His trade is typical of traditional family-structured businesses that have been described by David S. Landes as "structured in a way that has generally been associated with pre-capitalist economies. They are inextricably united economically in the sense that business treasury and household purse are simply one, just as national treasuries were once inseparable from the king’s personal fortune."41

These profound social ties of the family with the firm provided an economic unity where the shop was only the material basis for the status and prestige of the family. In fact, "the business was not an end in itself, nor was it its purpose to be found in any such

independent ideal as production or service. It existed by and for the family, and the honor, the reputation, and the wealth of the one were the honor, wealth, and reputation of the other." As reflected in Master Guillaume’s business practices, the main concerns of a family firm were conservation and consolidation, both manifested in subsistence production. In a similar manner, when customers came to a small shop, they encountered not only a range of goods but, most importantly, a shop owner who knew them and their family and who could extend credit in periods of financial difficulties.

Landes summarizes this pre-capitalist ideology as follows: "every man has his place in society, should produce enough goods and services of quality to maintain his place, and has a right to the living earned in this manner. In other words, the justification of survival lies not in the ability to make a profit, but in the correct performance of a social function." A perfect illustration of this way of life, Master Guillaume lives well within his means, saves as much money as possible and makes the highest rate of profit on a given turnover. Also, he avoids the use of credit and frowns upon it since external financing could compromise the exclusive character of his firm and threaten his family’s

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42 Landes, David S. "French Business and the Businessman: a Social and Cultural Analysis." 336. Landes notes that the French word maison kept its business connotations well into the twentieth century, long after the corresponding connotations of the English word house faded.


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independence. His belief is that one is better-off turning down chances for growth and that occasional expansions should be financed out of the firm’s own reserves. He respects and is, in turn, respected by his fellow merchants, and keeps a very specialized shop so as not to impede on other merchants’ trade.

The system of ‘live and let live’ illustrated by Balzac in his *Maison du Chat-qui-Pelote* allowed very little maneuvering space for entrepreneurship, with exceptions being made only when the innovator was not impeding upon pre-existing vested interests.

There were also several informal sanction practices such as the refusal to sell or public defamation, all meant to signal disapproval towards over-enterprising merchants. However, behind the guild screen and especially after the abolishment of the guild system, attitudes of change and desires for a more competitive system were increasingly manifest and, in time, as Daniel Roche has shown, this traditional society gradually passed "from an economy of salvation, scarcity, and morality, to an economy aiming at happiness on earth, relative plenty, and utility."

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44 This philosophy is summarized in François Coppée’s poem *Petit Bourgeois*: "Je n’ai jamais compris l’ambition. Je pense / Que l’homme simple trouve en lui sa récompense, / Et le modeste sort dont je suis envieux, / Si je travaille bien et si je deviens vieux, / Sans que mon cœur du luxe ou de gloire s'affame, / C’est celui d’un vieil homme avec sa vieille femme, / Aujourd’hui bon rentiers, hier petits marchands, / Retirés tout au bout du faubourg, près des champs." (*Les Humbles*. Paris: Lemerre, 1872)

45 There were, however, at least three categories of trade that escaped the jurisdiction of the guilds. First, there were a significant number of peddlers or *colporteurs* who were selling on the streets. Second, there were the *merciers* who - although not allowed to produce any goods - were allowed to sell different types of merchandise. At the end of the eighteenth century, the *merceries* came to be known as *magasins de mode* such as the Coin de Rue, the Deux Magots, the Petit Saint-Thomas, or the famous Petit Dunkerque that all flourished during the Restoration (1814-1830). Third, there were several seasonal events such as fairs set up by groups of individual sellers, events that were only loosely regulated by guilds. The retailing system of the *ancien régime* is discussed in detail by Coornaert, Emile. *Les Corporations en France avant 1789*. Paris: Les Editions Ouvrières, 1968, and Saint-Léon, Etienne-Martin. *Histoire des corporations de métiers*. Geneva: Slatkine-Megariotis, 1976.

In *Grandeur et décadence de César Birotteau* (1837), Balzac created a character modeled on one of Paris’ famous perfumers who – although comfortably rich and esteemed by his peers – decided to pursue greater sales and employ ambitious publicity schemes.47 Owner of a retail perfumery establishment near the Place Vendôme, César Birotteau leads an existence similar to that of Guillaume in *La Maison du Chat-qui-Pelote*: he lives above his shop with his wife, his daughter, his shop assistants and his errand boy. He amassed a considerable fortune along the years and was a public servant, therefore gaining the esteem of his colleagues. However, he strays from the prescribed path when, having just been made Chevalier of the Legion of Honor, he decides to enter in a business speculation that could bring him a million francs. His wife, the voice of tradition, vainly tries to persuade him to abandon his financial and political ambitions, and César ignores her advice interspersed with sayings that embody traditional commercial wisdom: ‘a quiet life before all things’, ‘leave ambition to others’, ‘grand doings only bring ruin’, or ‘if you get your hand in the fire, you get singed.’

Birotteau’s ensuing bankruptcy is perceived as both a stain on his family’s reputation and a confirmation of the dangers of chasing higher profits outside one’s trade sphere. In the end, his rehabilitation will be made possible by Anselme Popinot, his assistant turned shop owner, who applies traditional business principles learnt from his master, amasses the capital necessary to cover Birotteau’s debt, and marries his daughter Césarine.

Expansionist practices similar to those of César Birotteau were severely criticized since trade diversification could introduce imbalance inside the retailing system. However, this is precisely what happened beginning with the 1830s when the magasins de nouveauté or drapery and fancy goods stores challenged commercial tradition in several ways, came to embody ‘modernity’ in the eyes of the French, and irrevocably relegated small shops to the position of lieux de mémoire. The history of this new type of store is best illustrated by the evolution of Bon Marché, a Parisian magasin de nouveautés later turned into a grand magasin with numerous rayons by Aristide Boucicault.49

In the market entry phase that begins in 1838, Bon Marché was a drapery and dry goods store that positioned itself as competitor of smaller counter-service shops by selling a wide range of products such as silks, woolens, shawls, lingerie, cloths, gloves, hosiery, umbrellas, furs, sewing goods, and ready-to-wear items at lower prices. Prices were kept low to encourage high turnover. This new retailing technique was made possible by the early industrialization boom in the textile field, which provided a steady


49 Son of a Catholic hatter, Aristide Boucicault was born in Bellême in 1810. He left home when he was eighteen and became the apprentice of an itinerant peddler. When he arrived in Paris, he was employed as a clerk at the Petit Saint-Thomas, a drapery and fancy goods store. He left this store in 1852 when he became co-owner of Bon Marché, a store on the left bank of the Seine. In 1863, he bought out his partner Paul Videau, therefore becoming the sole owner of the store. Starting with 1869, he transformed Bon Marché into the first department store in France and died in 1877 leaving behind him what was, at the time of his death, the largest retail business in the world.
and abundant flow of goods to cash-abundant merchants in the form of batches bought at competitive prices. In addition, advertising was regarded and used as a valuable sales tool, with a special emphasis on newspaper publicity that became largely available and affordably priced in the 1830s.\(^{50}\)

The trading-up phase begins in 1852 when the store started offering a wider variety of goods by adding rugs, furniture, toys, perfume, Chinese and Japanese goods, jewelry, hairbrushes and toothbrushes, stationary, toys, shoes, and camping ware. To accommodate all this merchandise, several wings were gradually added to the building starting in 1869 and, in contrast to the traditional display of products along merchandising lines, products were now displayed along departmental lines.\(^{51}\) In fact, when Emile Zola visited Bon Marché in 1882, the store already had thirty-six departments.

The array of innovation brought by the department store at this stage was impressive: free admission and unlimited access around the shop, fixed item pricing and explicit labeling, a wide assortment, item return, advertising, various services such as delivery and customer transportation to the store, price cuts, unique in-store displays, and salesmen paid by commissions on sales.

Boucicault wanted to seduce his (mostly female) customers and therefore transformed Bon Marché into a spectacle of impressive proportions. Nothing was left to chance. A belt of glass windows surrounded the building, allowing idle spectators to view

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\(^{51}\) Since a merchandising line carried products that were similar in design or use (such as shoes), Bouicault preferred a departmental organization – a mix of merchandising line at a single counter – in order to ensure that his customers will have covered the maximum store space even when searching for a single article.
the shopping activity inside and therefore inviting them to become customers. A huge cupola dominated the roof, the main entrance on the rue de Sèvres was monumental, while the exterior walls were decorated with statues of gods. Inside, the mix of glass and iron of which Eiffel was so fond provided a feeling of lightness and airiness. Commodities were contextualized and enhanced by using exotic backdrops, lighting, and intricate piling to connote abundance and luxury. Theatrical staircases and wide balconies were ideal places for both seeing and being seen. Viewed from the upper balconies, the layout of the main floor resembled "a French garden as designed by Le Nôtre." The reading room and the art salon provided a socially acceptable place for gallant encounters. The overall goal was therefore to cultivate a ‘shopping experience’ that both stimulated desires for goods and entertained.

The historical and economic context played an important part in the success of Aristide Boucicault’s store. The modernization of Paris by Louis Napoléon and Baron Haussmann between 1852 and 1870 profoundly changed the urban landscape of the French capital city. The old dense and irregular medieval alleys gave way to wide avenues where the Compagnie Générale des Omnibus ensured transportation for about seventy million passengers each year. Thus, the number of customers increased proportionally to their newly found mobility, and so did the floor space and the number of rayons under the careful planning of architect L.A. Boileau and engineer Gustave Eiffel. The old wings had already been entirely remodeled, so Boucicault could proudly

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declare in 1872 that he owned a store "specifically constructed and entirely intended for the great trade in nouveautés." Moreover, historians of retailing agree that "no Parisian grand magasin of the nineteenth century was as associated with the department store in the French mind as was the Bon Marché. In the years before the First World War the Bon Marché was the quintessential big store. It was the world’s largest department store." Paralleling the increase in size and purpose, the appellation of grand magasin or grand bazaar gradually replaced that of magasin de nouveautés.

When Zola decided to write a novel about department stores, he collected his information on this new form of modern commerce by frequenting Bon Marché and, based on his detailed notes, wrote The Ladies’ Paradise in 1883, before any sociological analysis of the department store was even attempted. The action of the novel takes place between 1864 and 1869 and illustrates the conflict between old and new forms of commerce. In the novelist’s own words,

*The Ladies’ Paradise* is the story of the creation of one of those big department stores... that have so shaken up and reinvigorated commerce in France. I show it at war with small commerce, which is little by little devoured by it. To do so, I introduce a rival house, an old store incarnating old-fashioned customs that is killed off by the department store.

The Ladies’ Paradise department store – that Zola modeled after Bon Marché – is a place that rivals the church and the salon and is successively described as a

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54 *Le Siècle*, 30 March 1872.
56 Retail researchers generally agree that the earliest sociological analysis of the department store is Göhre, Paul. *Das Warenhaus*. Frankfurt am Main: Rütten & Loening, 1907.
57 Zola, Émile. *Correspondances (1880-1883)*. B.H. Baker ed. Montréal: Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 1983. 329. To gather material for his novel, Zola spent several hours a day for a month in department stores such as Bon Marché, taking more than 380 pages of notes.
‘lighthouse’, a ‘devouring monster’ building its success on the cadaver of the old neighborhood, a ‘battlefield’ where small stores are killed one by one and, finally, a ‘cathedral’ where the rites of commodity worship are practiced.

The main character, Denise Baudu, arrives in Paris after spending two years as a saleswoman at Cornaille’s, the principal draper’s in the town of Valognes. Inside her uncle’s small and outdated Parisian shop, Denise feels "ill at ease; she felt an unreasonable disdain, an instinctive repugnance for this cold, icy place, the home of old-fashioned trading."58 She even compares this store whose sign board reads ‘The Old Elbeuf. Cloths, Flannels’ to a prison or a dark and damp cellar, while she is instantly fascinated by the modern, contrasting allure of Ladies’ Paradise. Her uncle Baudu, on the other hand, condemns the business practices of Octave Mouret, the entrepreneur behind the Ladies’ Paradise department store, and makes it clear that Mouret has broken all the rules of traditional small trade:

Do you think it right that a simple draper’s store should sell everything? Formerly, when trade was trade, drapers sold nothing but drapery. Now they are doing their best to snap up every branch and ruin their neighbors. The whole neighborhood complains of it… Bédoré and his sister, who keep the hosiery shop in the Rue Gallion, have already lost half their customers; Mademoiselle Tatin, at the under-linen warehouse in the Passage Choiseul, has been forced to lower her prices to be able to sell at all… Isn’t it monstrous? He even dared to add a glove department!59

The proximity to the department store is a daily torture for small shopkeepers in the neighborhood who, "when they raised their heads, perceived the piles of goods through the large plate-glass windows… And this enormous cube, this colossal bazaar,

59 Zola, Emile. The Ladies’ Paradise. 24.
shut out the sky from them, seeming to cause the cold which was making them shiver behind their frozen counters."\textsuperscript{60} Their commerce gradually declines as they cannot compete with Octave Mouret’s two main innovations – de-specialization and free service – that allow clients to anonymously touch and feel products in the store. In the end, Mouret’s success parallels the bankruptcy of the small community of shopkeepers. In this way, Zola intuitively communicates his conviction that the victory of the department store brought about not only the end of a way of life, but also the instauration of a uniform, machine-like society.

The department store was "a revolutionary grouping of what were still regarded as diverse sets of specialties" and, naturally, "almost immediately there were complaints from the tradition-minded small merchants."\textsuperscript{61} In 1843, a deputy of the French legislature was denouncing "the growth of certain stores where, how horrible, buyers can provide themselves at once with stockings, handkerchiefs, shirts, shawls, woolen fabrics, and silk fabric. That ruins the small shopkeeper."\textsuperscript{62} In a similar vein, a journalist from \textit{Le Figaro} noted in 1881:

\begin{quote}
I must confess that the great bazaar, by creating a uniformity of clothing and furniture in these little households, wounds certain undying feelings in me… We have arrived at a day when precut clothes are less expensive than uncut cloth… In the past a dress a woman made was like her biography. Now… the same design and the same cut of clothing cover women who certainly are not of the same upbringing, that is to say, of the same soul. Yes! These great bazaars are at this time a social good – but they are the premonitory symptoms of an immense phalanstery the twentieth century is preparing. For truly it is the first time I am happy that I am no longer young and I hope I will not see these enormous things
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{60} Zola, Emile. \textit{The Ladies’ Paradise}. 207.
\textsuperscript{62} Quoted in Daugan, J. \textit{Histoire et législation des patents des grands magasins}. Doctoral thesis: Université de Rennes, 1902. 52.
of the future. I am one of those who prefer the individual ownership of a pot of flowers rather than the… collective ownership of the Tuileries Gardens.⁶³

Despite these accusations against department stores, it can be argued that this new form of competition, while causing the ruin of the most outdated and inefficient shops, did not monopolize all commercial activity,⁶⁴ but has forced small shopkeepers to upgrade their services and to specialize in areas that department stores did not cover, such as luxury goods or original, unique items. In fact, the presence of a nearby department store generated a current for business as customers who couldn’t find what they wanted in the grands magasins, entered small shops and made their purchases there. In the 1900s, for instance, when department stores were under pressure to close on Sundays, small shop owners petitioned the nearby Samaritaine to remain open, fearing that the influx of customers would radically decrease.⁶⁵ This proves that many small shops actually thrived in the shadow of big department stores. In addition, stores that sold food items were

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⁶⁴ The other modern commercial form that flourished in France in the late nineteenth century was the chain store, the oldest one being the Docks Rimois founded at Reims in 1885 and having approximately five hundred stores by 1913. Like department stores, chains disposed of high levels of capital and employed rationalized business methods. The central establishment called maison mère was the ownership and operations command center of several decentralized branches, dispersed throughout France. They usually sold a variety of products: grocery goods, wine and spirits, coal, fabrics, scissors, ribbons, buttons, perfume, toys, small household products such as candles, buckets, mops, pots, but also clothing, shoes, and hats. They therefore surpassed small shopkeepers in the variety of goods offered to the public and, together with department stores, contributed to creating individual desire for goods. Their elegant display windows were filled with goods that were formerly accessible only to wealthy customers but were now accessible to lower social classes due to the lower cost resulting from mechanized and de-skilled production methods. For extended discussions of chain stores development in France, some useful resources are Gemahling, Paul, "La Concentration commerciale sans grands magasins." Revue d’Economie Politique. 2 (1929): 181; Curtil, Evariste. Des Maisons françaises d’alimentation à succursales multiples. Dijon: Imprimerie. J. Belvet, 1933; Normand, Gilles. Histoire des maisons à succursales en France. Paris: Edition de l'Union des Entreprises Modernes, 1936; and Furlough, Susan. The Consumer Cooperative Movement in France. The Politics of Consumption, 1834-1930. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.
largely unaffected by department stores until later on when they were challenged by chain stores, supermarkets, and hypermarkets.

In his study *Paris Shopkeepers and the Politics of Resentment*, Philip Nord develops this alternative explanation, arguing that department stores were not the real economic threat to small shops: in fact, the *grands magasins* were only the fundamental symbols of underlying changes in the economic structure of Paris. First, Haussmannization transformed the geography of commercial Paris, condemning certain neighborhood to isolationism while providing other *quartiers* with ideal commercial locations. Second, the deceleration of French economy in the 1880s led to the proliferation of cheaper (and sometimes foreign) mass-produced goods and therefore favored the *révolution du bon marché* carried out by large suppliers and large retailers. More than any retail initiative of department stores, it was these two developments that - according to Nord - had a negative impact on small shops catering to the lower echelons of the luxury products market.66

While Philip Nord’s argument is heavily supported by historical evidence, it still remains that small shopkeepers - who saw themselves as the last bastion of traditional values that made France great - mistook the highly visible department stores for the real cause of their economic decline and directed their resentment against these perceived *non-lieux*. Their underlying anti-modernism was enflamed by both economic hardship and the emergence of a large, dynamic rival, so the *petits commerçants* became a

distinctive group pursuing a coherent set of interest and group-pressure politics in the 1880s.

Shopkeepers associations such as the *Ligue des petits commerçants* and the *Comité de l’alimentation* denounced department store owners as a ‘new feudality’ that, by threatening the small owner and the historical *morcellisme* of commerce, was blocking social mobility and therefore undermining the principles of the Revolution. "Is there a distinction," asked a leader of the *Ligue*, "between those who once hoarded bread and drove up bread prices, and those who by their ambition deny a livelihood to millions in our own day? The first abuse led to the revolution of 1789. The second is preparing another revolution a hundred years later." Small shop owners also accused department store owners of importing cheap foreign merchandise and selling mass-produced goods to the detriment of French artisans. These accusations were only partially true, since department stores usually resisted selling mass-produced machine-made items that could offend the taste of their bourgeois customers and, in reality, less than 5 percent of their merchandise originated outside France.

As a consequence of this highly popularized conflict between small shops and department stores, a new relational and differential pair was born. Being the older form of commerce, small counter-service shops found themselves anchored in the position of *lieux de mémoire*, standing for simple, old-fashioned pleasures and virtues, for warm human bonding and community cohesion. They projected the image of independent entities valuing thrift and self-restraint, establishing authority based on the familiarity of

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their relationships, maintaining a sense of community, and creating a social group where employers and employees lived *en famille*. The *grands magasins*, on the other hand, played the role of a dangerous and corrupting *non-lieu*, of an aggressive, bureaucratic, materialistic machine that brought about immorality and decline in standards, a store that could never replace the gentle virtues of small-scale, neighborhood shopping.

Michael B. Miller has intuitively summarized the existence of a second fundamental conflict that, this time, opposed two very different sets of values within the same social class, the bourgeoisie: progress and stagnation, innovation and tradition, expansion and self-restraint. Miller writes that in the second half of the nineteenth century
The department store brought about bourgeois schizophrenia. There was a side of
the bourgeois personality that was mirrored in the grand magasin; but there was
also a side subverted by the bureaucratization of business and middle-class
carriers, and by the emergence of a mass consumer society. This was an essential
dilemma that bourgeois culture came to face... In an era where bourgeois gain
appeared to be bourgeois loss, how could this culture commit itself to change
without, in effect, relinquishing its past?68

Historical accounts show that the bourgeoisie was immediately fascinated by
department stores and adopted them as privileged sites of consumption, a phenomenon
that gradually became a way of life and led to the development of modern consumer
sensibility. However, this efflorescence of the market posed a menace to bourgeois core
values because, if the department store was the stage where modernity was acted, then
women were among the main characters of the play. In fact, "the formation of commodity
culture depended on encouraging women to define themselves through shopping."69

It is therefore not surprising that bourgeois fascination with department stores was
soon accompanied by anxiety. With "Marianne [now] in the market"70 and turned
consumer,71 domestic interior was in danger of contamination with unrestrained
individualism and dangerous desires that could erode bourgeois morality. Ancien Régime

69 Davis, Shane Adler. "Fine Cloths on the Altar: The Commodification of Late Nineteenth-Century
feminine activity can be found in Bowlby, Rachel. Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing,
and Zola. New York: Methuen, 1985; De Grazia, Victoria, and Ellen Furlough eds. The Sex of Things:
Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996; and
Schwartz, Vanessa R. Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris. Berkeley:
70 Tiersten, Lisa. Marianne in the Market: Envisioning Consumer Society in Fin-de-Siècle France.
71 The department store initiated the transformation of customers into consumers. Raymond Williams has
described this gradual process of separating the two realities and notions, noting that "the customer has
always implied some degree of regular and continuing relationship to a supplier, whereas consumer
indicates a more abstract figure in a more abstract market." (Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and
images of women as "coquettes and grisettes" still circulated in the second half of the nineteenth century, such as Marie Antoinette’s famous relationship with her marchande de mode Rose Bertin or Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s comment that, from the earliest age, women "love everything visual, mirrors, jewels, cloth." And if, as it was believed, women were ‘naturally’ attracted to luxury goods, the overwhelming presence of goods in the department store could only be seen as a dangerous catalyst and amplifier of this ‘natural’ feminine deviation.

Anxieties concerning the growth of consumerism were projected on two feminine figures: the prostitute and the kleptomaniac. The prostitute had been long representing the woman-as-commodity. The kleptomaniac, on the other hand, was "both her antithesis and her evil twin" and it stood for the woman-as-consumer whose ‘disease’ was closely scrutinized by the French medicine of the period.

The similarity between the two figures was disturbing: shoplifting in department stores was, like prostitution, a crime committed by women. However, the difference between them was downright shocking: while prostitutes operated on the margins of civil society and for material gain, kleptomaniacs were predominantly bourgeois and even aristocratic women who almost never needed the things that they stole. In his Ladies’ Paradise, Emile Zola creates a kleptomaniac character, Madame de Boves, who is said to

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suffer from a certain form of hysteria that made her steal "from a perverse desire, a new sort of nervous affection which a mad doctor had classed, proving the results of the temptation provided by the big shops."\(^{75}\) The kleptomaniac therefore appears to function as a "symbol of the two-way traffic of consumption in the aisles of the department store."\(^{76}\) Not only does she consume objects, but she also seems literally ‘consumed’ by them in the process.

Despite these challenges posed to the bourgeois identity by female consumers, the grand magasin was a very successful retail enterprise. In the 1920s, as each chain had been trying to differentiate itself from its competitors by upgrading its services and displays during its growth phase, department stores entered their maturity stage. To pay for all the upgrades that went along with this new position in the wheel of retailing, department stores managers decided to expand, and Bon Marché started to envision a regional presence. For instance, when facing growing competition from department store chains such as Nouvelles Galeries and Printemps that had already established a sound presence in the provincial market, Bon Marché decided to expand into new branch stores that complemented its Vichy location set up in 1918.

However, it soon became clear that, by allocating resources to regional growth, department store chains became even more vulnerable to new and more aggressive competitors: variety stores (magasins à prix unic), supermarkets, and hypermarkets. As a result, future attempts to expand were abandoned; department stores sold many of their

\(^{75}\) Emile Zola. The Ladies’ Paradise. 226.
\(^{76}\) Roberts, Mary Louise. "Gender, Consumption, and Commodity Culture." 818.
suburban and provincial locations, and were now confined to the downtown area of major cities.

In this maturity phase, despite economic hardships, the image of the economically threatened department store was profoundly modified as it started to be seen as a romanticized incarnation of Frenchness. In fact, historians now credit the department store with having served as a medium for the creation of a national middle-class culture.

In one respect the Bon Marché came to serve essentially the same role as the Republican school system, at least for those of middle-class means or middle-class aspirations. It became a bourgeois instrument of social homogenization, a means for disseminating the values and life style of the Parisian upper-middle-class to French middle-class society as a whole. It did this by so lowering prices that the former’s possessions became mass-consumer items. But it also did this by becoming a kind of cultural primer. The Bon Marché showed people how they should dress, how they should furnish their home, and how they should spend their leisure time. It defined the ideals and goals for the French society.77

Since the end of the Second World War, Parisian grands magasins enjoy an ever-growing popularity not with the locals, but with tourists craving Frenchness who have slowly surpassed Parisians in department store shopper statistics since the 1960s.

The case of the Galeries Lafayette is telling. Founded in 1895 as a boutique selling discounted frivolous novelties like ribbons, feathers and other decorative sewing goods on rue Lafayette in Paris, Galeries Lafayette is now the third largest department store chain in France. It has expanded to eighteen high-end stores: two of them are located in Paris and the rest of them in large cities across France. The Parisian store on boulevard Haussmann, just behind the old Paris Opera

77 Michael, Miller. The Bon Marché. Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920. 183. The store itself became an object of consumption in the bourgeois world. It was a meeting ground and a place of respectable entertainment, but also a threat to the moral fiber of this community by producing a frenzy of buying and stealing and a ground for illicit love affairs.
presents itself as the epitome of French elegance and high fashion. Under the majestic stained-glass belle époque cupola, one can find the largest perfumery in the world, upscale products in carefully designed displays, and smartly dressed salespeople to cater to each customer’s needs. The gourmet basement level is a mix of high-end grocery store, wine shop, and traditional market and contains alluring meat, patisserie, bakery, fish and cheese counters.

Lately, Galeries Lafayette marketing campaigns have positioned the store as an iconic image of Frenchness. For instance, the 2001 campaign shot by Jean-Paul Goude and entitled ‘l’événement mode’ portrayed Laeticia Casta – who, by French vote, had already been dubbed as Marianne of the year 2000 in the bust created by Deville-Chabrolle – in thirty visuals saturated with symbols of French chic and romance. In 2007, the 2001 ad in figure 2.5 was still being used on free Paris maps and guides distributed to foreign tourists.

Despite sophisticated advertising campaigns, this type of store has now resolutely entered its late maturity stage. For instance, Galeries Lafayette has lost twenty percent of its market share over the last twenty-five years78 and, as shown in figure 2.3, department stores in general held a mere 1.6 percent of the French market share in 2005.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Segment</th>
<th>Share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supermarkets, Hypermarkets &amp; Hard Discount Stores</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist Outlets</td>
<td>33.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugstores</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist Food Outlets</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postal Trade</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off Licenses</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department Stores</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repairs &amp; Alteration Outlets</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.6 French Retailing Segmentation, 2005.


If department stores now occupy the position of *lieux de mémoire*, it is both because they entered the late maturity stage of the wheel of retailing and because new types of stores were created that could fill in the differential *non-lieu* position. Indeed, in the 1920s and 1930s, many French retailers, advertisers, and producers who were looking to stimulate sales and encourage consumption started to experiment with American merchandising techniques: the implementation of rationalized and efficient large-scale operations, the extensive use of advertising in different media, the design of elaborate
product displays according to scientific methods, and the commercialization of mass-produced goods.

The epitome of this movement in interwar France were the *prix unique* stores, retailing establishments that were modeled directly on Woolworths, the American prototype for "five and dime" stores. The first *prix unique* store named *Cinq et dix* was founded by the Audibert family in 1927 at 4 rue Chauchat, near the Porte d’Orléans in Paris. The Audiberts openly admitted that they got their idea following a trip to New York, and both their store and their retailing techniques bore the influence of American merchandising. The store was rectangular, brightly lit, had no wasted space, and offered significantly fewer goods than the department store so that capital would not be tied up in slow moving products. Most of the goods offered were frequent-usage goods (grocery items, soft drinks, wine, housewares, clothing, toiletries, desk accessories, and jewelry) bought directly from producers, with no goods being produced by the *prix unique* store itself. Even the gramophone that played music in the store was an American idea and it purportedly increased sales by a third the day it was installed. 79 Being an Americanized import, *Cinq et dix* and other *prix unique* stores were immediately labeled by the press as "hopelessly foreign." In addition, where department stores connoted abundance, elegance, and exoticism, the *prix uniques* – due to their emphasis on rationalized efficiency – came to be known as "poor people's department stores" (*les grands magasins des pauvres*). 80


80 Furlough, Ellen. “Selling the American Way in Interwar France: ‘Prix Uniques’ and the Salons Des Arts Ménagers.” *Journal of Social History*. 26.3 (1993): 493-97. *Cinq et dix* started off in 1927 with a capital investment of 45,000 francs but, similar to the rapid expansion of the department store, it amassed 6,500,000 francs by 1929. Furlough points out that, although the *prix uniques* imitated an American model,
The *prix uniques* continued to grow and expand until the 1950s, which constituted their "golden age."\(^{81}\) From their introductory stage to their maturity stage, the main challenge remained the same: sourcing. In other words, since "the structure of French industries didn’t lend itself to producing quantity and quality at discounted prices… at least 50 percent [of goods] would have to be brought in from abroad, with all kinds of complications, from import regulations to nationalism, in addition to the prohibitively high cost."\(^{82}\) This is precisely the challenge that - as we shall see in chapter 3 - supermarkets and hypermarkets overcame during their introductory stage in the 1950s and the 1960s when they achieved turnover rates that were unimaginable for the *prix uniques*.

With the introduction of *grandes surfaces*, the non-lieu connotations of *prix uniques* started to fade and there are signs that they are in the process of being recast as integral part of organic neighborhood living. For instance, a 2003 monograph of a popular French *prix unique* is titled *Monoprix: au coeur de la vie, au cœur de la ville*\(^{83}\).

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82 De Grazia, Victoria. *Irresistible Empire: America’s Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe*. 169.
In contrast to the connotations of Frenchness and sophistication attached to department stores, supermarkets and hypermarkets were relegated to the position of non-*lieux* and represented as impersonal, aggressive, and routine environments, as Trojan horses for American consumer culture invading France and threatening the beloved *boutique artisanale*. Critics of the supermarket argued that shopping there was less of a social experience and more of a solitary and impersonal one: the attentive counter clerk of the small store was being replaced by the cashier just as the neighborhood storekeeper who was everyone’s friend was being replaced by aggressive business-minded managers. In Chapter 3, I investigate how and why these connotations were created and adopted by intellectual and political circles, and I explain why the leap from traditional to modern, from custom to rationality was a particularly painful one for the post-1945 French retailing system and the French society.

The negative connotations associated with supermarkets and hypermarkets have faded over time due to growing efforts in retromarketing that I will discuss at length in chapter 3. To give an idea, some examples of these techniques include the introduction of food counters with personal service and more recherché lines or the extension of non-food lines to higher-end products previously carried exclusively by small shops. As a result, these stores are increasingly perceived as consumer-friendly and ‘French’ while their non-*lieux* image has faded somewhat. However, before these shopping sites can enter the French imaginary as *lieux de mémoire*, a new contender has to enter the market, a type of retailing that would provide an antithetic image to big surface retailers and introduce new consumption modes based on a different kind of social interaction.
Although the outcome is still far from predictable, at least one serious contender can be seen at the horizon: electronic commerce. The year 2005 has marked the "réel décollage du commerce électronique" in France as "la moitié des internautes a déjà acheté sur Internet."\textsuperscript{84} Statistics show that, between the third quarter of 2005 and the third quarter of 2006, sales figures for cyber-shopping have increased by 40%. According to economic analysts, "cette croissance est comparable à celle des hypermarchés lors de leurs premières années d’existence, or l’on sait à quel point ils ont révolutionné la distribution."\textsuperscript{85}

\textsuperscript{84} Rochefort, Robert. \textit{Le Bon consommateur et le mauvais citoyen}. Paris: Odile Jacob, 2007. 51. According to a study performed by CREDOC in October 2006, out of the total adult population using the Internet in France, more than half of consumers had already bought the following products online: train or plane tickets (69%), clothing and shoes (66%), books (65%), CDs and DVDs (61%), computer accessories and software (57%), and hotel reservations (51%).

\textsuperscript{85} Rochefort, Robert. \textit{Le Bon consommateur et le mauvais citoyen}. 53.
Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law, but an interpretative one in search of meaning.

Clifford Geetz, *Interpretation of Culture*

When Clifford Geetz published his influential *Interpretation of Cultures* in 1973, he inaugurated a shift in the orientation of the study of culture by positing that social scientists should "aid us in gaining access to the conceptual world in which our subjects live so that we can, in some extended sense of the term, converse with them."\(^1\) Geertz argued that "the culture of people is an ensemble of texts,"\(^2\) i.e. a mix of belief systems, social configurations, historical events, artifacts, rituals, and symbols that need to be approached not with the goal of scientific explanation, but with the desire to describe and interpret them. Subsequently, in France, the work of Roland Barthes, Pierre Bourdieu, and Michel Foucault showed how our perception of reality is infused with shared semiotic codes or discourses and facilitated the ‘turn to culture’ of social analysis, a trend.

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that "came to dominate intellectual work in the human sciences in the latter years of [the twentieth] century."³ This approach is nowadays particularly popular in the United States and the United Kingdom where shopping malls, the body, or virtual reality are favored cultural topics.

This ‘turn to culture’ initiated in the 1970s has enhanced the status of the cultural within the social sciences.⁴ As a result, when it comes to the interaction of the cultural and the economic, culture is now seen more and more as a constitutive element of the social world and not as a mere reflection of economic and political processes as it was in Marxism. In *Economies of Signs and Place*, Lash and Urry summarize this prevailing belief that

> economic and symbolic processes are more than ever interlaced and interarticulated; that is... the economy is increasingly culturally inflected and... culture is more and more economically inflected. Thus the boundaries between the two become more and more blurred and economy and culture no longer function in regard to one another as system and environment.⁵

Three arguments support this thesis. First, since the most innovative and creative organizations are those producing and distributing cultural products, economy has become increasingly ‘culturalized’. Second, more and more consumer goods are purposely designed as cultural goods through an increasing aestheticization of previously commonplace products that are now created to fit carefully researched categories of lifestyles. As a result, the material content of commodities is now dominated by their sign

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⁴ For a comprehensive study of the history and impact of the ‘turn to culture’ and for insightful assessments of major trends in the interdisciplinary research of the 1980s and 1990s, see Bonnell, Victoria E. and Lynn Hunt eds. *Beyond the Cultural Turn. New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
or symbolic content. This development was accompanied by the creation and spread of professions whose role is to correlate production and consumption and channel the proliferation of sign values: design, marketing and advertising are all "cultural intermediary occupations"\(^6\) that link goods and services to cultural meanings and values. Third, within business organizations performing in today’s internationalized markets, signifying practices have become an important part of corporate culture and an important element of the "turn to culture" experienced by the economy as a whole.\(^7\)

If before the cultural turn culture was mainly about investigating artifacts, it is now more and more about investigating processes and practices of meaning. Taking into account this crucial development, how is one to devise a cultural study of French large format retailers? In this chapter, I investigate the *grandes surfaces* of the second half of the twentieth century through the lens of the Circuit of Culture. This model proposed by Du Gay and al. in 1997 has the merit of suggesting that frameworks of interpretation as well as meanings are "produced at several different sites and circulated through several different processes or practices."\(^8\)

3.1 The Circuit of Culture and its five meaning-making *loci*

In *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman*, Du Gay et al. suggest that there is "a sort of circuit… through which any analysis of a cultural text or artifact…

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\(^6\) Lash, Scott and John Urry. *Economies of Signs and Space*. 222.

\(^7\) Lash, Scott and John Urry. *Economies of Signs and Space*. 108.

must pass if it is to be adequately studied." Any cultural element must therefore be interpreted as the product of the articulation of five processes whose interaction produces variable and contingent outcomes. These five processes are production, consumption, identity, regulation, and representation.

![Figure 3.1 The Circuit of Culture. Source: Du Gay et al. Doing Cultural Studies. London: Sage, 1997.](image)

Applying this model to the topic of the present study, it ensues that – in order to study large format retailers in France – we need to explore how and when they were created, what mechanisms regulated their functioning and spreading, how they functioned as objects of consumptions for different strata of the French population, what social and

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10 Du Gay et al. define articulation as "the process of connecting disparate elements together to form a temporary unity… the form of the connection that can make a unity of two or more different or distinct elements, under certain conditions" (Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Walkman, 3).
cultural identities were associated with them, and how they were represented in various discourses of the period. The consideration of all these moments, actors, and practices can significantly enrich our understanding and interpretation of modern shopping sites.

3.2 Production

Il faut autant d’intelligence pour réussir en épicerie qu’en littérature.

Jules Renard, *Journal 1893-1898*

France lagged behind when it came to periodically updating its retail practices, mainly because, historically speaking, industrial production was always regarded as more important than the distribution of goods. In fact, "être détaillant était à peine un métier, et le fait de faire du profit était mal considéré. Il ne venait à l’esprit d’aucun homme d’affaires réaliste de la distribution qu’on puisse gagner de l’argent en magasin grâce à une meilleure productivité de l’exploitation."11 Traditionally, engineers were the figures of social prestige, while retailers were seen as mere movers of goods from producers to consumers. This is one of the main reasons why "le distributeur, n’a été reconnu comme rouage fondamental de l’économie française qu’à la fin des années cinquante."12 The low status of retailing was also reflected at the level of higher education curriculum where it was not until 1961 that a marketing course was offered at the *Ecole de Hautes Etudes Commerciales* (HEC), the leading French business school.13

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13 In the United States, the first marketing course was delivered at Harvard University in 1914.
As seen in chapter 2, before 1914 traditional French stores projected two contrasting images. The first was the image of a solid liquidity-drenched enterprise able to survive severe economic depressions that led to the bankruptcy of some of their more expansive counterparts in Europe and the United States. However, this virtue was coupled with a second characteristic: the French small shop lacked initiative and dynamism and showed excessive prudence when it came to adopting new business models. This second trait became a serious handicap because "once the World Wars had permanently changed France’s economic problem from one of conservation and leisurely growth to one of reconstruction and replacement, this lack of dynamism became a force of retardation and stranguation."  

The modernization of post-1945 French retailing had extrinsic roots and was triggered by the encounter with American models and their subsequent adoption. This dependence on outside models may seem surprising when we consider the fact that the French revolutionized nineteenth century commerce by creating the world’s first department store.

Postwar retailing and distribution in France were experiencing a profound crisis, with inefficiency being the biggest problem. To give an idea, here are three striking characteristics of the retail environment in the 1950s. First, the distribution system was suffering from administrative over-centralization in Paris while also being highly fragmented at store level. In 1958, there was a shopkeeper for every 54 inhabitants in France, one for every 68 in Italy, one for every 87 in Great Britain, and one for each

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100 customers in the U.S. Second, retailers practiced high prices and low turnover rates, often forming syndicates to ensure that there was little to no competition within the system. Third, while grossing on average less than $5,000 a year, shopkeepers practiced tax evasion by keeping two sets of books: the first one for themselves and the second one for tax purposes.

The situation remained almost unchanged in the early 1960s. In 1962, when questioning the inexplicably slow adoption of American-imported retail models in France, American market researchers were puzzled by the paradoxical nature of the French distribution system, which combined both a reverence for tradition and the ability to adapt its *modus operandi* when facing the challenge of international markets. On one hand, the Americans credited the French with the earliest developments of modern retailing techniques as in the case of Bon Marché, the world’s first department store. On the other hand, they saw the French as "notoriously slow in adopting such recent innovations as self-service supermarkets… Most Americans tend to consider French retail stores either exasperating anachronisms or quaint remainders of old France." To give an example, when it came to routing cuts of meat from the slaughter house to the retail outlet, the distribution system included an average chain of four middlemen who each added his profit to the price paid by consumers. In addition, the system was described as "rigid and unadventurous," highly fragmented with 60 percent more shops per 10,000 population than in the U.S., and of smaller size even when it came to

wholesaling. In fact, its most striking feature for American observers was that traditional independent shopkeepers handled 84.5 percent of retail sales in many small specialized stores which in America would be combined into one. For example, the American supermarket equals the French épicerie (groceries), plus crèmerie (dairy products, eggs), plus charcuterie (specialty meats), plus boulangerie (bread), plus pâtisserie (pastries), plus droguerie (household cleaning supplies), plus poissonnerie (fish), plus boucherie (fresh meat), etc.\(^{20}\)

France was therefore deemed to be "the paradise of the inefficient"\(^{21}\) because of its relatively low productivity, small size of most firms, low degree of mechanization, and sluggish adaptation of American retailing techniques. Ironically, the appellation of "nation of shopkeepers" once derisively applied to England by Napoleon was now being reverted to France."\(^{22}\) By the mid-1960s, however, Americans economists had to admit that the French retailing landscape was undergoing dramatic changes and American-imported innovations in retailing were starting to take roots.

The two main retailing models that France borrowed from the U.S. in the twentieth century were the self-service and the supermarket. The invention of self-service is attributed to Clarence Saunders, creator of the first Piggly Wiggly store in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1916. With its high-shelf aisles, its turnstiles marking the entrance and the exit, and its checkout counter, this store was the precursor model of the supermarket. Its layout was copied by Michael Cullen who, in 1930, opened the world’s first supermarket - the King Cullen store - in Queens, New York. This store offered lower prices for nationally advertised brands, and reduced selling costs by making all sales on a self-

\(^{21}\) The Economist, March 26, 1955. 1069.
\(^{22}\) Baum, Warren C. French Economy and the State. 230.
American supermarkets quickly multiplied in the 1930s and, with the instauration of the Great Depression and the ensuing drop in the buying power of the population, they established themselves as the dominant food-selling store in the U.S. Big Bear, one of the first supermarkets in the United States, was described in 1932 in the following terms:

a barny structure with its crude interiors fixtures made of rough pine lumber and its huge displays of merchandise in the center of attraction, with thousands of people who were swarming around them with baskets on their arms, content to wait on themselves. From the fantastic stories that were spread around the country, the prevailing opinion was that Big Bear was some kind of a circus stunt of a temporary nature, organized to get rid of surplus merchandise.23

The time gap between the creation of self-service and supermarkets in the U.S. and their adoption by French retailers is considerable. Self-service was first introduced in France in 1948 by Goulet-Turpin for one of his stores in the 18th arrondissement of Paris on rue Letort. Three years later, only 0.2 percent of French retail stores were entirely or partially self-service. Henry Toulouse, the president of Docks de France, brought the supermarket to France in 1954 when he created the first large self-service grocery store. The journal Entreprise gave a cold description of this new phenomenon, which suggests that supermarkets were still seen as a potentially unsuccessful retail experiment.

This new sales method is characterized by the presentation, for the customer’s viewing and handling, with very clear display of prices, of generally pre-packaged products. We also recommend giving the customer free access to the merchandise, free choice of articles by the consumer without the intervention of sales personnel, the provision of a container to customers to put their purchases in (trolley, basket, or paper bag), and a specially equipped check-out (generally constituted by a cash register worked by a female operator).24

Soon, the idea of selling at a discount was extended to non-food items. After visiting New York in 1954, a French store owner named Maurice Gattegno was so impressed by a midtown discount house in Manhattan that he decided to apply American discounters’ methods in his own Parisian camera shop and transform it into *Discounter Gattegno*, a yellow-fronted store near the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. There, all 650 types of goods - whether they were television sets, photographic equipment, phonographs, washing machines, or refrigerators - were sold a flat 20 percent under prices fixed by other retailers. While customers were flocking to Gattegno’s new store, the unprecedented business practice of this first French discount house was described by the press as another "French revolution" meant to shake France’s noncompetitive and highly fragmented retailing system.25

Gattegno purposely fueled this image and tried to dissociate himself from a retail system that, he said, was "living in the past." He hired more than twenty employees and declared that he paid his "full taxes. I do not have two sets of books."26 Although he declared that he was aware of the fact that his innovations are "troubling the thousand-year sleep of the French commerce,"27 Gattegno was caught off-guard by the vehement reaction of small shop owners. French retail-trade papers labeled him as "Monsieur 20%"

25 "French Revolution." *Time Magazine*. January 21, 1957. Maurice Gattegno’s discounter business grossed an unprecedented $714,000 its first year when the average yearly profit for a small store was on average $5,000. He also transgressed the unwritten rules of employee compensations. While the typical monthly wage was around $75, he paid his salesmen $250 a month.

26 "French Revolution" *Time Magazine*. January 21, 1957. One telling example of over-centralization is the case of fresh product grown around Paris. All produce was required to pass through the *Halles*, the centuries-old Parisian market that Émile Zola portrayed in 1873 as the “belly of Paris,” so even though a bunch of carrots may have been sold and consumed just a few miles away from its producer, it would have still had to go through the *Halles* due to the lack of efficient regional markets.

who was bringing "la peste américaine" to France. Moreover, many small store owners pressured manufacturers and newspapers to boycott Discounter Gattegno. As a result, the Parisian press stood behind its traditional customers and refused to advertise for Gattegno while the owners of Thomson-Houston, the biggest producer of home appliances in France, refused to sell him their products. Even smaller manufacturers who seized the opportunity of high turnover sales to a buyer who paid cash for each transaction asked Maurice Gattegno to keep their partnership a secret. In the end, he was forced out of business.

By the time Gattegno’s bankruptcy was making headlines, another French discounter was in the national spotlight because, according to journalists, he had launched "an economic battle. The great army of French shopkeepers, who form the backbone of France’s cumbersome, overloaded and expensive distribution system, is pitted against a 35-year-old grocer from Landerneau."28 As early as 1949, Edouard Leclerc, a socially minded former theological student from Brittany turned grocer, was challenging the centuries-old protectionist and uncompetitive French retailing system. Guided by a moral philosophy inspired by Ford’s concern that his workers should be able to afford the cars that they themselves produced, Leclerc decided to sell grocery products and textiles at the lowest possible prices and gain his profit from higher product turnover. He became nationally notorious in 1959 when he expanded his business to Paris in the suburb of Issy-les-Moulineaux and sold goods bought directly from producers, which were then proposed to clients at a price that was 20 percent lower than the price of his competitors.

Leclerc’s decision to circumvent the cumbersome French distribution system by avoiding the traditional chain of middlemen won him the apppellations of "traitor" and "Judas." To make the matter worse, Leclerc was also an anti-unionist who, instead of higher salaries, supported lower prices and higher purchasing power, and an anti-socialist who believed that "socialism means sharing poverty, not wealth."

In the 1960s, Edouard Leclerc was building a chain of supermarkets selling food, clothing, furniture, hardware, and gas. Because of this product diversification, he was instrumental in dismantling several monopolies despite being sued by pharmacies, cosmetics stores, gas stores, and even funeral homes who tried to prevent him from offering discounted funeral services. He was also the first to plant billboards in the French countryside and the first to challenge government’s monopoly in cigarettes. Each of these moves was highly publicized to the point that decades later he was widely known as the "discount king" of French retailing.

On December 10, 1959, Edouard Leclerc visited Annecy and gave a talk at hotel Verdun at the invitation of the Centre des jeunes patrons. Present in the audience was Marcel Fournier, owner of a dry goods store that was planning to open a supermarket in Annecy and feared Leclerc’s possible expansion to the area. That evening, Fournier reportedly told Leclerc that "ce que vous avez fait, on peut le faire et en mieux… en rajoutant le non-alimentaire, le bazaar et le textile. Ce que vous n’êtes pas près de savoir

30 “Le ‘discount king’ leads a new revolution in French retailing.” Chicago Tribune. April 7, 1985. S9F.
This bitter verbal exchange with Leclerc strengthened Fournier’s determination to open his store within the next twelve months.

Fournier’s 1960 self-service supermarket in Annecy was indeed a success, but his focus was on the creation of a new type of retail store, bigger than anything France has ever seen. His partners in this enterprise were Louis Defforey and his sons Denis and Jacques, who “contrairement à la famille Fournier, habituée à la vie urbaine… ont prospéré dans le monde rural, le monde de la terre, le monde des traditions et de la permanence. Dans la région du Bugey, ils ont contribué à l’animation d’un lieu de vie au sein de chaque village: l’épicerie.” This alliance between a magasin de nouveautés owner and a grocer yielded one of the biggest retail innovations of the twentieth century: in 1963, even before supermarkets got themselves well established in France, Fournier and his business partners created something that had no parallel in Europe or the United States. It was a kind of super-supermarket: the first French hypermarché, the Carrefour at Sainte-Geneviève-des-Bois, just outside Paris.

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32 Marcel Fournier kept his promise of opening the biggest self-service store in France with the help of his business partner Denis Defforey. When the Carrefour at Sainte-Geneviève-des-Bois opened in 1963, it was four times bigger than any other supermarket in France. It offered more than 3,500 grocery items and more than 15,000 non-food items. The area of the store was successively increased from 2,400 square meters in 1963, to 4,000 in 1968, 4,500 in 1969, 5,500 in 1971, 6,500 in 1975, and 6,700 in 1979. The first store opened by Fournier in Annecy is today the smallest Carrefour location in the world.
34 When Carrefour was opened in 1963, the giant sign on the building read « CARREFOUR GRAND MAGASIN libre-service ». The term hypermarché was only coined five years later in 1968 by Jacques Pictet, the founder of the *Libre-Service Actualités* journal. Soon after, Marcel Fournier and the Defforey were among the first who enthusiastically adopted the term.
35 When discussing the name choice for his first hypermarket, Marcel Fournier explained that "au début, je voulais appeler ce magasin « Agora » et puis je me suis dit que les gens risquaient de croire que je vendais des chats. Comme la boutique se trouvait située sur une place vers laquelle convergeaient cinq routes, j’ai opté pour « Carrefour »." (Quoted in Villermet, Jean-Marie. *Naissance de l’hypermarché*, 100)
This development took everyone by surprise. As Rachel Bowlby observed, "it was as if the French leapfrogged the middle stage of the middle-sized supermarket, jumping straight from the beginner’s self-service and small supermarket and moving on to something that was even bigger and better than its own American inspiration. Outdoing any transatlantic equivalent, let alone a European one, the store… sold things that were not found in American supermarkets, like clothes and household appliances." \[36\]

A French journalist who attended Carrefour's inauguration on June 15, 1963 wrote

> « Tout sous le même toit à prix discount ». Ce samedi de printemps, en 1963, la foule se presse à l'ouverture du premier « hangar à vendre »…. Immense: 2500 mètres carrés de linéaires. Mais la nouveauté, ce sont les 400 places de parking: la civilisation de l’automobile commence. Les 5214 premiers clients dépensent 28 francs chacun, soit trois fois plus que dans un supermarché classique et près d’un dixième du Smic. La baguette de pain vaut 43 centimes; le litre de lait, 63 centimes. Abondance, libre-service, prix bas sont les trois piliers de ce nouveau concept… Le succès est foudroyant. \[37\]

As news of this French retailing innovation spread over the Atlantic, U.S. journalists came to France and visited Carrefour. After decades of American criticism of their practices, French retailers were now ready for the spotlight. As Etienne Thil, the marketing director of Carrefour, proudly declared to *The New York Times*, "supermarket specialists in your country told us that it would not be possible to sell dresses and children’s clothing and furniture in the same store where food is sold, but we tried it and it worked. This market [the Carrefour store] has 77 checkout counters. Do you have any


such at home?" In the end, as Rachel Bowlby put it, the Americans were "effectively out-Americaned" by the birth of the hypermarket.

3.3 Regulation

Unless we ourselves take a hand now, they’ll foist a republic on us. If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change. Do you understand?

Giuseppe di Lampedusa, *The Leopard*

En France, « il faut que rien ne change afin que tout soit comme avant » du *Guépard*, c’est en somme « il faut que rien ne change afin que tout soit le moins mal possible. »

Jacques Juillard, *Le Malheur français*

A 1959 article in *The New York Times* entitled *Cut-Price Grocer Stirs France* presented Edouard Leclerc’s introduction of the supermarket soon after the end of the Second World War as a "commercial revolution that is lowering prices and raising tempers in many parts of the France." The article praised Leclerc’s efforts to reform a cumbersome, costly, and antiquated distribution system in a country where "21 percent of labor force is employed in food distribution against 7 percent in the United States", but noted that his efforts caused "consternation in business circles" and won him the appellation of "monster" of distribution.

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These attacks on Leclerc are hardly surprising. The introduction and spread of supermarkets revitalized a long-standing French tradition of defending small shop owners and, by association, the terroir and French farmers, in the name of national interest and cultural identity. The figure of the small store owner was therefore used by different interest groups after 1945 to express and orient attitudes towards modernization and to legitimize political decisions as well as their contestation. As such, the small storekeeper was invested with connotations far beyond its economic role and was cast as a highly manipulable and manipulated symbol of Frenchness.

Traditionally, the policies of the French state in its interference with private business were dominated by two opposing tendencies. On the one hand, the French government attempted to promote economic progress through the modernization of private industries, development of new production methods, and encouragement of competition. This attitude first manifested itself in the support provided by Louis XI for the establishment of a silk industry in the fifteenth century and was later mirrored in Colbert’s support for the royal factories of the seventeenth century. On the other hand, over the centuries, the state assumed the responsibility of protecting certain economic and social groups from exposure to the risks of economic progress.

The postwar period presented the French government with the necessity and challenge of simultaneously assuming both of these roles: while large format retailers were threatening the small format stores that formed the backbone of the French retailing system and were a political force that could not be ignored, these modern stores were also economically efficient and, more importantly, were helping government keep inflation
low. In its search for a solution to this loyalty dilemma, the French government oscillated from one extreme to another, rarely reaching a compromise with both these groups, which resulted in a saga of legislation that is still unfolding today around the same issues of protectionism and modernization.

In the 1930s, France was a deeply conservative society that was still recovering from the destruction of the First World War. While some modern industries were in place, the two social groups that dominated France were the peasantry and the independent middle classes that included artisans, shopkeepers, property-owners, and professionals. Therefore, when translated in economic terms, French identity relied on the trinity of the country farm, the small store, and the family firm.

After the defeat of 1940, the Vichy regime glorified and exalted the image of peasantry, a social class that, ironically, was partially discredited at the end of the war when it was accused of having taken advantage of the 1940-1944 food shortages by manipulating food rations and price controls inside black markets. The direction of French society and economy after 1945 was to be decided in the confrontation of two distinct groups within the middle class. The first group, a self-proclaimed ‘new left’ made up of salaried employees, students, and the neo-bourgeoisie of technicians and managers, was organized around Pierre Mendès-France and wanted to see France modernized and industrialized. The second group was organized around Pierre Poujade and was a right-leaning movement of shopkeepers, artisans, farmers, and small business owners that felt threatened by the increased industrialization and modernization of the French economy. In the late 1960s, Pierre Poujade and his *Union de Défense des Commerçants et Artisans*
were defeated and "the new middle classes triumphed because they carried within them both economic modernity and a style of life which was contemporaneous with this modernity."\textsuperscript{41}

Despite their ideological defeat, small shopkeepers remained an important social and cultural force in post-1945 France. They embodied "an important political meaning… Their idealized characteristics of hard-working small owners who were individualistic, patriotic, and anchored within stable communities had been projected into a vision of the very nature of French Republicanism and hence of the State itself."\textsuperscript{42} This intimate relationship to Frenchness combined with the group’s electoral strength and efficient lobbying were instrumental in bringing about state fiscal measures that protected small retailing against large format retailers as both an economic institution and a way of life.

Since the most acute economic problem after the war was inflation, the French government was desperately trying to roll back prices. However, its efforts were systematically blocked by a distribution system dominated by cartel agreements and trade associations that were fixing minimum prices on goods. The Pinay campaign of 1952 was aimed at reforming this inefficient and inflexible system by offering tax incentives for subsidiaries creation, capital mergers, and specialization in the mass production of a limited number of goods. With the same goal in mind, the 1953 Laniel decree standardized small business bookkeeping in an attempt to eliminate small shops that


relied on tax evasion or other illegal activities for their survival. In addition, this decree prohibited all explicit or implicit cartels or agreements interfering with free competition, while leaving open a loophole for cartels or agreements aimed at improving costs through rationalization and specialization. Indirectly, both of these government measures were encouraging the adoption of efficient American-style retailing.

As supermarkets were spreading in the late 1950s, small shop owners organized waves of protest that forced the *Conseil d’Etat* to abolish the Laniel decree on June 19, 1958. However, five days later, the de Gaulle government silently passed the Fontanet decree whose main provisions were similar if not harsher since "l’interdiction du refus de vente s’étendait désormais à tout « producteur » quel qu’il soit. Les demandes des acheteurs devaient être satisfaites « dans les conditions conformes aux usages commerciaux » et, enfin, la pratique habituelle de conditions discriminatoires de vente constituait un délit." New waves of protests organized by the *Conseil national du patronat français*, the *Assemblée des présidents de chambres de commerce et d’industrie*, and the *Centre national de commerce* ensued.

With the creation and multiplication of hypermarkets, tensions between small shop owners and large format retailers escalated. Forced to take sides, the Pompidou government chose to support small shop owners and passed the Royer Law in 1973. Subtitled *loi d’orientation du commerce et de l’artisanat*, this law was in fact an attempt to slow down the spread of *grandes surfaces* by requiring special building authorization

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43 Rioux, Jean-Pierre. *La France de la IVe république*. vol. 2. Paris: Seuil, 1983. 245-49. Edouard Leclerc was one of the main lobbyists for the promulgation of the 1953 Laniel decree.
forms when the surface of the store was surpassing 1,000 square meters (or 1,500 square meters in large urban areas). Authorizations were given by local Commercial Construction Commissions that included representatives of retail trade groups. Despite these measures, the spread of supermarkets and hypermarkets was only partially slowed down and their food market rose from 13.6 percent in 1970 to 21.8 percent in 1980. The provisions of the Royer law were reinforced by the Raffarin law of 1996, which demanded an authorization for any construction or expansion of a store with a surface area bigger than 300 square meters. In addition, the Galland Law of 1997 prohibited retailers from selling below the price appearing on wholesale invoices and allowed manufacturers to refuse to supply, therefore creating price floors aimed at helping small retailers compete with large retailers and encouraging diversity of supply.

Despite this "corset législatif," large format retailers have been consistently gaining market share. Supermarkets and hypermarkets had 9.0 and, respectively, 3.6 percent of the grocery market in 1970. In 1997, supermarkets accounted for 28.3 percent of the grocery market and hypermarkets for 33 percent. French small shops, on the other hand, who held 66.7 percent of the market in 1970, only accounted for 37.2 percent of it

45 Howe, Stewart. *Retailing in the European Union: Structures, Competition, and Performance*. London: Routledge, 2003. 280. The Royer Law had two wider effects. On one hand, it initiated and accelerated the internationalization of French food retailing in the 1980s. On the other hand, it encouraged German hard discounters such as Aldi and Lidl to penetrate the French market with small scale outlets during the same time period.

46 Howe, Stewart. *Retailing in the European Union: Structures, Competition, and Performance*. 47. While the Raffarin law was designed around limiting the growth and number of large format stores, it was more specifically aimed at slowing down the growth of hard discounters, particularly German, whose selling space was under the 1,000 square meters stipulated in the Royer law.


Recent political developments are bound to accelerate this trend. In the summer of 2007, President Nicolas Sarkozy—who ran for office under the appellation of président du pouvoir d’achat—created a Commission for the Liberation of Growth (CLCF) presided over by Jacques Attali, a commission that was expected to deliver a plan for making France competitive and prosperous in the twenty-first century. Among the "300 Decisions for Changing France" in its report of January 23, 2008, the Attali commission proposed the liberalization of mass retail distribution and the development of competition within the retailing system as the only ways of bringing down the price of consumer goods. This "revolution" of shopping is to be accomplished by abolishing the Royer, Raffarin, and Galland laws, which could cut inflation by half and decrease the prices of goods by 2-3 percent. The draft for the new law was presented by Economy minister Christine Lagarde on April 27, 2008. Among its main points, large French shops would mostly remain closed on Sundays, but the building of medium-sized supermarkets by hard discounters is encouraged. Also, if approved by parliament, the law would also allow wholesalers to sell goods to large retailers at preferential prices, which would in turn decrease prices and increase the purchasing power of French people. As expected, the proposal has already been opposed by the Socialist-led opposition and even members of the center-right who fear that the relaxation of competition rules and controls on shop-building will have a negative impact on the quality of urban life and on small shops in small towns.

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3.4 Consumption

Every customer presents a minor problem of psychology.

Martin H. Perry, *How to Start a Shop*, 1947

Même si on fermait à minuit, il y aurait toujours des gens pour venir faire des achats. Alors il arrive un moment où il faut s'arrêter. Les clients n'ont qu'à s'organiser.


In his *40 Idées fausses qui freinent la France*, Octave Gélinier argues that customer service and customer appreciation are two of the most neglected dimensions of French retailing and estimates that French economy needs "une sorte de révolution copernicienne qui place très clairement l’homme consommateur et usager au centre de l’économie."50 Such a revolution would, of course, imply consistently providing consumers with the best quality and the best price for a product, as these two apparently universal tenants of good retailing have not always been a combined priority for French shop owners or managers. In fact, until the mid-1980s, the common perception of customers was that small shops tended to privilege product quality and social interaction while large retailers gained their appeal based on discount pricing and shopping convenience.

The independently-owned grocery store was a staple of French retailing in the 1950s, representing 83.1 percent of the national food retailing.51 While this type of store was anything but a model of economic efficiency, it did fulfill an important social

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function in the life of the community: not only did customers consume products bought inside the store, but the store itself was an object of consumption due to its connotations of symbol of Frenchness and of organic socializing. In this process of dual consumption, both storekeepers and customers played a highly codified part. Shopkeepers were interested in keeping their loyal customers happy and in enhancing the personality of their store with the use of window displays, unique decorations and artisan products, and traditional counters. Customers were careful in choosing the store they would patronize and knew that each shopping trip was a reinforcement of their belonging to a privileged group that was well known and better served by the store owner. A representative description of a late 1950s small grocery store states that it was a

lieu de vie… Il ne s’agissait pas d’un magasin ordinaire. C’était avant tout un lieu de rencontre. L’épicier se substituait au journal local ou à la radio au cours des années cinquante… Cet homme aimable passait son temps à déambuler dans sa boutique, de la cliente au rayon, du rayon à la cliente. Il cherchait les articles l’un après l’autre. La ménagère attendait longtemps, mais elle ne s’en plaignait pas. Elle pouvait ainsi converser avec les voisines. 52

The small grocery shop was therefore praised for its "aspect familier et familial auquel les clients sont attachés" and some observers even went as far as positing that there was a "psychological incompatibility" between French shopping customs and American retailing innovations that could never play a "social function." 53 Despite these negative predictions, the French consumer did not reject or boycott self-service and supermarket stores, which led contemporary observers to believe that "ou bien il est sceptique, ou bien

il estime que ce renouvellement des méthodes et cette fièvre dans la concurrence ne peuvent que favoriser ses intérêts.”

Moreover, the early 1950s celebration of consumers’ attachment to social interaction inside stores predicted that the first customers of supermarkets would be people with low income who potentially have the biggest incentives to put price considerations above everything else. However, the opposite was true: in his Ma vie pour un combat, Edouard Leclerc recounts that "à ma stupéfaction, les premiers clients ont été des fonctionnaires, des bourgeois, des professeurs, des gens qui comptent – mais aucun ouvrier.” Leclerc’s surprise proves that even retailers expected supermarkets to bring about a new segregation of consumers as it had happened with department stores in the second half of the nineteenth century. The grands magasins underlined class distinctions and distinct meanings of gender by producing knowledge about what was a proper, tasteful bourgeois style of life. Through contextualization and advertising, products were sold there as markers of class attributes such as elegance, leisure, respectability, and being bien élevé.”

Surprisingly enough, supermarkets and hypermarkets proved to be universal environments that were both accessible and attractive to all social classes because (1) well-off customers were affected by inflation and still resented the penury of war and (2) mechanized and de-skilled production methods and their ensuing low costs of production allowed lower social classes access to goods that were formerly accessible only to well-off customers. In addition, anonymity became a valued dimension of

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shopping. After carefully researching the ideal environment for a successful supermarket, Roger Berthier – the creator of the Saveco supermarket chain – reached the conclusion that such a store must not only maintain "des prix pour attirer la foule," but also provide an unrestrained anonymous shopping experience, "car c’est dans la foule que le client se sent à l’aise pour fouiller et choisir sans être le point de mire du magasin, et c’est dans la foule qu’on passe inaperçu. Un supermarché ne devrait pas être autre chose qu’un marché transporté dans un magasin, et rien d’autre." 57

In time, large format retailers became a legitimate component of the French retailing landscape. In 1982, a journalist was pointing to a profound change in the shopping behavior of the French as "shoppers are now as fond of their gleaming new supermarchés and hypermarchés as they are of their épicier du coin, even though most can still remember when they didn’t have a French word for the American import. In the late 50s the phenomenon was known in simple franglais as le supermarket." 58 A change in consumer mentality cannot possibly account for this relatively fast change in the patterns of French domestic consumption. If consumers changed their shopping habits, it was because large format retailers quickly evolved beyond the price-centered mindset and adopted a more sophisticated approach where store identity and positioning were constructed to match consumers’ traditional affiliations and expectations. This goal was mainly accomplished with the use of retromarketing, a marketing technique that I will discuss in the following section.

3.5 Identity

Avec Carrefour, je positive!

Slogan, Carrefour

A 1972 article entitled "Spreading Supermarkets Roil the French"\(^{59}\) is emblematic of the identity clash that underlined the conflict between old and new forms of commerce. This journalistic piece gives the example of Bourges, a medieval city in the South of the Loire Valley next to the vine hills producing the famous Sancerre wine. The idyllic description of the city is meant to provide a stark contrast with modern developments taking place around it: "cut-price gasoline stations, heavy trailer trucks, discount furniture stores with grisly modern pieces in the windows, and of course the supermarket – this is the sort of landscape that has replaced those noble vines." The spread of supermarkets, hypermarkets, and discount warehouses "bulldozed from the farmland", we are told, incited shopkeeper groups to protest against the perceived sacrifice of the small shopkeeper on the altar of the checkout counter.

When it comes to portraying this victim of modernization, the author of the article uses one emblematic example: "the woman who sells corks, corkscrews, and the locally made wine pitchers in a delightfully archaic shop down the hill from the cathedral that towers over the countryside." The choice of this iconic figure is neither innocent nor random. The image of the woman implies defenselessness and sweetness of temper. She is the keeper of local traditions and her retail practices indicate a natural, effortless,

centuries-in-the-making symbiosis with local artisans. In addition, by being situated close to the historical heart of the city, which is the cathedral looking down the hill, the store conjures up the image of a rightful *intra muros* entity that is under siege by dark, illegitimate *extra muros* forces whose only goal is to disrupt and eventually destroy the organic harmony of the town.

This description nicely summarizes the initial perception of large format retailers in France. At first, reality matched perceptions as the first self-service stores were indeed not very attractive when it came to displays and store atmosphere, and relied on aggressive advertising and expansion methods. Marcel Fournier, the creator of Carrefour, confessed that in the beginning he strived to keep costs as low as possible for goods sold and store decorations alike. "Le magasin est délibérément austère. Il se veut « spartiate » déclarera Marcel Fournier, qui « ne peut ni veut jeter de l’argent par la fenêtre ». En effet, le coût de l’investissement se limite à 1,000 francs le mètre carré, quatre fois moins que pour le commerce traditionnel." 60 At this stage Fournier was merely implementing the ideas of Bernard Trujillo, a specialist in self-service and large format retailing. Trujillo, the proclaimed "pope of modern commerce," 61 was delivering his five-day seminars on Modern Marketing Methods to businessmen from all over the world in Dayton, Ohio. Marcel Fournier, Jacques Defforey and Edouard Leclerc had all attended Trujillo’s seminar in Dayton and had become familiar with his five most important precepts:

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61 Thil, Etienne. *Les Inventeurs du commerce moderne: des grands magasins aux bébés-requins*. Paris: Arthaud, 1966. 123. Trujillo was born in Bogota, Colombia, in 1920. After studying law and French in Bogota, he won a scholarship to the Sorbonne in Paris but, when the war broke out, he went to Springfield, Ohio instead. He then started working for the National Cash Registry Company which was based in Dayton, Ohio, and became instrumental in spreading the ideas of modern commerce on several continents.
At first, consumers were disoriented. When the supermarket Le Lion opened in Brussels, consumers who were used to being served by helpful assistants simply stood around waiting for someone to serve them. Eventually store managers put sweets and other treats on the bottom of baskets in order to persuade customers to pick one up and start walking among the shelves. The shock of seeing personal salesmanship being replaced by open displays of self-service did not last long as it was superseded by the fantasy quality of this new "silent salesmanship." The act of purchase was here dissociated from the act of consumption because, between entering the store and checking out, the consumer could ‘possess’ every good on the shelves. Advertising too compensated for the impersonality of this new shopping experience as it created and circulated personally-shared product experiences and extensively used slice-of-life techniques that aimed at a direct and sincere communication with the target consumer. In addition, magazines brought new lifestyle portrayals into homes and, despite increased urban anonymity, provided a sense of community cohesion and approval. While all these elements contributed to attenuating the non-lieu identity of large format retailers, the most instrumental tool used by supermarket and hypermarket managers to this purpose was retromarketing.

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64 Dipman, Carl William. Modern Food Stores. The Progressive Grocer. 7.
According to Stephen Brown, retromarketing has three main categories: *repro*, *repro nova*, and *repro de luxe*: "*Repro* pertains to reproducing the old pretty much as it was, albeit meanings may have changed. *Repro nova* refers to combining the old with the new, usually in the form of old-style styling and hi-tech technology. *Repro de luxe*, on the other hand, involves second helpings of the past, insofar as it revives or reproduces something that traded on nostalgia to start with. Neo-nostalgia, in other words."

The trajectory of the Carrefour hypermarket is representative of how managers of large format stores responded to consumers’ preoccupations and affinities with small shops by using all these three categories of retromarketing. Faced with the retro-proneness of a society that was experiencing deep economic and social transformations as well as identity dislocations produced by change, managers set out to create a shopping experience that would ally the convenience of self-service with the recaptured essence of small store shopping. The hypermarket therefore included shops-within-the-shop where traditional counter services for several product categories provided an alternative to the ready-packaged items available on shelves. The grocery area was advertised as a return to the village market where "goods are freely offered to eyes eager to see, to hands desiring to touch, to nostrils ready to smell, to ears open to noises." When Carrefour adopted a logo in 1966, Etienne Thil, its marketing and public relations director, opted for the *bleu-blanc-rouge* combination in order to reinforce the image of the store as both a French innovation and a perpetuation of French retailing traditions.

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In 1992, Carrefour felt confident enough in its image to openly position itself as a competitor of small shops when it launched its *boule bio*. Each of the details in the description of this highly advertised bread connoted traditional store quality.

Fabriquée sur place et sans additives, elle a droit à l’appellation « pain de tradition française. » Son succès réside avant tout dans sa méthode de production et la qualité de ses matières premières: levain, eau de source, sel marin non-raffiné de Guérande. La farine des Moulins Decollogne-Lecoq provient des blés issus de l’agriculture biologique, écrasés à la moule de pierre… La pâte est façonnée, puis boulée à la main. Sa fabrication se termine dans un four à sole de pierre, gage de bonne cuisson. \[67\]

Five years later, the hypermarket chain introduced several organic products aisles in accordance with its new 4B philosophy – *Bio, Bon, Beau et Bon Marché* – as well as an *Escapades gourmandes* aisle with 120 high-end products, which were meant to compete with small upscale grocery stores.

3.6 Representation

In post-1945 France, modern shopping sites have been powerful cultural images. As such, they often appear in writings about culture and, more specifically, in literature, which has led one critic to observe that "more literally than elsewhere, the history of French consumer culture is inseparable from its fictions."\[68\] Such literary representations are analyzed in the following chapter.


CHAPTER 4

CONSUMED SELVES, DYSTOPIE SHELVES.  
THE CHRONOTOPE OF DYSTOPIE CONSUMPTION.

Une marchandise paraît au premier coup d’œil quelque chose de trivial et qui se comprend de soi-même. Notre analyse a montré au contraire que c’est une chose très complexe, pleine de subtilités métaphysiques et d’arguties théologiques.

Karl Marx, *Le Capital*, I

The reason why all of us naturally began to live in France is because France has scientific methods, machines and electricity, but does not really believe that these things have anything to do with the real business of living. Life is tradition and human nature.

Gertrude Stein, *Paris France*

In the period that encompasses the Fourth Republic (1946-1958) and the Fifth Republic (1958 - to date), France underwent profound economic and social changes as it became increasingly modern. The proposed model of a cultural wheel of retailing and the investigation of the *grandes surfaces* through the lens of the five meaning-making *loci* of culture have illustrated how these changes have affected the French retailing and distribution systems, and how old types of stores such as artisan shops and other counter-service shops were threatened and partially replaced by modern types of stores such as supermarkets and hypermarkets. This change affected not only the patterns of
consumption of the French population, but also the way in which the French revalued their self-image as a nation as a result of weakened ties with the terroir and the artisanat. In addition, after the Second World War, although the economic and political influence of the United State was met with recalcitrance, the ‘American way of life’ was successfully exported to France in the sense that the French increasingly valued the purchase and possession of mass-produced goods and attached a cultural value to consumption. While France was confronted with this rapid instauration of consumerism, it also experienced a fundamental conflict between a nostalgic view of a nationalistic past and an unavoidable adoption of the modern, a conflict which was artistically expressed in literature.

As writers tried to make sense of these changes in both the economic and social environment, they transmuted their insights into new images of consumerist France and of the French as modern consumers. In this chapter, I will investigate six novels that have marked the post-1945 French imaginary and I will look at these texts through the wider-angle lens of two interlocking themes: modernization and national identity. In order to illuminate how these two themes were intertwined in narrative, I introduce a useful concept - the chronotope of dystopic consumption. If the cultural wheel of retailing can explain how economic and social factors have interacted and produced French attitudes towards modernization, this literary tool will help us not only to identify underlying literary representations of the French-as-consumers, but also to analyze several recurring literary themes in their synergetic interaction.
4.1 The chronotope as literary tool

Literary criticism involves striking texts together to see if they spark.

Frank Lentricchia, *Criticism and Social Change*

One of the most interesting tools for the study of literary representations is the notion of chronotope that was theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin. In *Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel*, the critic writes: "we will give the name *chronotope* (literally, ‘time space’) to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature."¹ The chronotope is therefore a literary category defined by its particular configuration of time and space, a category that only becomes visible if one situates his or her analysis at the level of literature as a whole.

From this perspective, the category of the novel is considered to be a meta-genre that is transformed by chronotopes. As this meta-genre developed over time, some chronotopes that endured as types affected the novel in significant ways to the point of introducing generic variety and giving birth to specific genres such as the idyll, the chivalry romance, the *bildungsroman*, or the realist novel. Other micro-chronotopes (such as the chronotope of the encounter, of the threshold, or of the fool) that exhibited great liveliness and flexibility have survived across centuries and have become recurrent motifs that survived across genres.

However diverse chronotope categories might be, their main significance lies in their representational function. As Bakhtine puts it,

what is most obvious is their meaning for narrative. They are the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel. The chronotope is the place where the knots of the narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative… The chronotope, functioning as the primary means for materializing time in space, emerges as a center for concretizing representation, as a force giving body to the entire novel. All the novel’s abstract elements – philosophical and social generalizations, ideas, analyses of cause and effect – gravitate toward the chronotope and through it take flesh and blood, permitting the imagining power of art to do its work.²

It ensues that, while this formally constitutive category of literature fuses time and space in a literary representation, it also influences the type of characters present in the novel in accordance with Bakhtin’s belief that "the image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic."³ In addition, the chronotope is a technique for reflecting and artistically processing aspects of reality since

a literary work’s artistic unity in relationship to the actual reality is defined by its chronotope. Therefore the chronotope in a work always contains within it an evaluating aspect that can be isolated from the whole artistic chronotope only in abstract analysis. In literature and art itself, temporal and spatial determinations are inseparable from one another, and always colored by emotions and values.⁴

4.2 The six dimensions of the chronotope of dystopic consumption

My goal in this study is precisely to illuminate the evaluating aspect involved in post-1945 literary representations of consumption and reveal how and why the emotions

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² The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin. 250. Italics belong to Bakhtin.
³ The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin. 85.
⁴ The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin. 243. Italics are my emphasis.
and values associated with this modern activity are negative to the point of appearing dystopic. To this end, I identified the existence of a chronotope of dystopic consumption that is recycled and built upon in six novels that marked the French imaginary after the second world war: *Les Stances à Sophie* (1963) by Christiane Rochefort, *Les Choses* (1965) by Georges Perec, *Les Belles images* (1966) by Simone de Beauvoir, *Les Géants* (1973) by J.M.G. Le Clézio, *99 francs* (2000) by Frédéric Beigbeder, and *Globalia* (2004) by Jean-Christophe Rufin. All these novels were written by widely known authors and most of them were not only best-sellers when they were first published, but also recipients of prestigious literary prizes. In addition, their impact on the French imaginary was rendered even stronger by the presence of a set of echoing consumerist themes whose meaning amplifies with each subsequent use. As a result, this accumulative intertextuality intensifies negative representations of consumerism to the point of rendering them dystopic.

Based on the analysis of these six novels, six constitutive dimensions of the chronotope of dystopic consumption become apparent. The first dimension discussed in section 4.2.1 is the extensive presence in the narrative of representations of modern retail stores and of descriptions of shopping trips as both physical and mental acts. The second dimension presented in section 4.2.2 pertains to the recurring representations and interrogations of the myth of happiness. The third dimension in section 4.2.3 relates to constant references to advertising. Not only do novelists provide readers with in-depth descriptions of advertising techniques and citations from actual marketing studies, they also create characters that are advertisers themselves and can therefore testify to the
methods and scope of advertising. In section 4.2.4 I introduce the fourth dimension, the gap between the French-as-consumers and the French-as-citizens, between seeking personal utility and fighting for social responsibility. The fifth dimension explored in section 4.2.5 pertains to the adoption of the American mass consumption attitude and how this import contradicts and even supersedes traditional French attitudes towards consumption. Finally, the uneasy cohabitation between books and consumer goods as well as between mass consumption and culture is analyzed in section 4.2.6, where I show that literature and book shelves are presented in fiction as antidotes to consumerism. My overall goal here is to show how, taken together, these six themes generate a compositional scheme, a sub-surface system of textual codes that is easily recognizable in each novel and amplified with each subsequent use.

The underlying belief of my analysis is that novels are both sites upon which discourses meet in conflict and vehicles of ideology. Looking at literature as a cultural form allowing societies to shape their sense or values and of reality, I will interpret the repeated presence of the chronotope of dystopic consumption in the many narratives that post-1945 novelists have woven about modernity as symptomatic of not only individual, but also national perceptions, attitudes, and fears related to the instauration of consumerism.

The function of the first three chapters of my study was indeed to ensure that the literary texts I will approach will not be treated – to use Arthur Marwick’s warning to cultural materialists or new historicists – as "elegant tombs to be plundered for the fine-sounding quotation exploited for literary effect, but whose exact historical significance is
From this perspective, my constant awareness of the economic and social context of the period situates my approach in opposition to the deconstructivist approach that has texts as both subjects and objects immersed in indetermination. I actively bring into my analysis both the authorship and the historical context of novels as well as my belief in the indirect referentiality of fiction. For instance, in order to make visible the implied presence of the cultural wheel of retailing as governing principle for structuring literary representations of shopping sites, I will refer to the ideal construction of the lieu de mémoire / non-lieux dichotomy in literature. Therefore, deconstructivism and Derrida’s conviction that there is "nothing outside the text" – aptly characterized by Eagleton as "unhistorical, politically evasive and in practice oblivious to language as discourse" – are not used here as tools of investigation.

However, one obvious question arises: is not the pair lieu de mémoire / non-lieux a typical example of dichotomous thought made of assumptions and absences that needs to be analyzed under the deconstructionist lens to reveal its contingency? My answer, at least when it pertains to the retailing embodiment of this pair, is no. While it is true that many cultural representations and discourses seem to privilege lieu de mémoire as incarnations of national identity and therefore emphasize the desirability of their perpetuation and reproduction, this does not necessarily imply the ascendancy of lieu de mémoire.

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8 The idea of dichotomous thought is central to the deconstructivist argument and it holds that Western thought was and is dominated by binary pairs where the first term has ascendancy over the second because it is usually associated with the phallus and/or the logos. A few examples of such binary pairs are: speech and writing, presence and absence, identity and difference, mastery and submission, life and death.

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mémoire over non-lieux. The latter remain highly interrogated and represented in the cultural realm, perhaps nowadays even more than their counterpart, and this visibility contradicts an asymmetry in the binary opposition. In addition, by constantly shifting the referents of each polarity, the cultural wheel of retailing introduces chronology and dialectics as constitutive elements of this binary pair. This dynamic structuring, in turn, makes the Derridean double séance - the search for a third concept eluding the dichotomy and displacing its terms - vain if not impossible.

4.2.1 Shopping

L'homme est une création du désir, non pas une création du besoin.

Gaston Bachelard, Psychanalyse du feu

If shopping isn’t the universal language, what is?

Ernst & Young, Global Retailing 1997

The study of shopping was traditionally confined to the field of marketing and consumer research that viewed it as a series of voluntary consumer acts: a choice leads to purchase, then use, and finally rejection or disposal of the object. Since the focus was on selling a predetermined quantity of goods to consumers, the study of shopping was linked and subordinated to this goal. From this perspective, the shopper was a mere economic agent, a "bundle of sales possibilities" whose behavior could be influenced by adjusting

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the four variables that constitute the four Ps of modern marketing: product, place, promotion, and price. The concern was here to influence consumption by adjusting the parameters of retail, but there was little to no attention paid to incorporating consumer feedback in the product or in the selling strategy.

As the structuring principle of modern society shifted from production to consumption, the consumer became the central figure of investigation and the logic of marketing was reversed: it was now the marketer’s job to know consumers intimately, to incorporate their needs into the product, and to play on their unconscious desires and impulses. As this particular research was under way in the field of marketing, the topic of consumption was occasionally appropriated by other sciences such as anthropology, material culture studies, psychology, and human geography. Despite these dispersed advances in social sciences, consumption – and especially shopping – were either being overlooked or trivialized. The general tendency was still to view these two dimensions of human activity as theoretically insignificant, which prompted one critic to write in 1990 that ”the history of consumption has no history, no community of scholars, and no tradition of scholarship.”


Despite this regrettable lag, the emerging field has rapidly expanded in the last two decades and several significant studies in the United Kingdom and the United States have proved beyond any shadow of a doubt that shopping is a phenomenon of societal and cultural significance. Daniel Miller, for instance, was the first to interrogate this "popular conceptual opposition which defines shopping and politics as non-overlapping terrain" and to note that there exists among intellectuals and politicians alike a "general distaste for what otherwise might be termed the ‘vulgarity’ of mere shopping decisions. It would seem that shopping has become about the only area of social action which is defined as clearly not politicized." And yet, Miller argues, shopping is an activity that repeatedly brings decision-making to the level of the individual while politics and political decision-making increasingly take place at a level where the average individual has very limited access and contributes even less. Therefore, adopting the shopping-politics polarity has the strange effect of implying that "the arena in which consumers..."

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13 Miller, Daniel. "Could Shopping Ever Really Matter?" The Shopping Experience, Falk, Pasi and Colin Campbell eds. London: Sage, 1997. 31-55. 31. And yet, each consumer choice comes with a set of consequences. Let’s consider for instance the purchase of a car. This act is not only an expression of the buyer’s individuality (adventurous, conservative, innovative), but it has many other impacts. The size and fuel efficiency of the car will impact the environment, its manufacturing place will impact employment and capital flows, and the act of buying a car as opposed to using public transit systems will impact the future of transportation.
have relative power is inconsequential as compared to that in which they are relatively powerless."\textsuperscript{14}

The polarity argument described by Miller conceptualizes the relationship between shopping and politics as a zero-sum game. In other words, the assumption is that, if a person is a passionate shopper, it is likely that he or she will be less active in politics and less concerned with moral issues. On the other hand, someone who is deeply involved in everyday local and global political realities will consider shopping as a mere utilitarian activity. In this section I base my analysis on a diametrically opposed point of view: shopping and politics are intimately articulated and their articulation finds its illustration in literature. Not only does consumption involve making decisions that have political and moral consequences, but it also allows shoppers to express cultural allegiances or antipathies or cultural alignment. In addition, shopping is not confined to a mere private or semi-private sphere since a choice among objects is also a choice among social relationships and philosophies of life.

When investigating shopping, several cultural studies researchers have turned to literature. The reason is simple. As Rachel Bowlby - one of the most important contemporary theorists of shopping - has aptly observed, the complexity and multidimensionality of shopping cannot possible be summed up by empirical facts and figures only. These statistical tools do not account for the possible unstatistical histories in and around the stores – the routines and dawdles and encounters and desires and decisions, all of which pass all the time through the checkout with barely a trace behind them. There might be the millions of conversations on the way there and back, disappeared out of the window of

\textsuperscript{14} Miller, Daniel. "Could Shopping Ever Really Matter?" \textit{The Shopping Experience}. 33.
millions of suburban automobiles; and the arguments at home, at work, in the papers, on TV, about the qualities or disadvantages of this or that new store, and this or that kind of shopping.  

I maintain that novels are a fertile ground for the cultural analysis of retail strategies and shopping practices, and should be used alongside historical documents and marketing studies in order to illuminate what people are actually doing, thinking and experiencing when shopping. In a similar vein, in *The Practices of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau argues that literary texts that ‘narrativize’ individual practices have scientific legitimacy as repositories of cultural practices and, therefore, "instead of being a remainder that cannot be, or has not yet been, eliminated from discourse, narrative has a necessary function in it; a theory of narration is indissociable from a theory of practices, as its condition as well as its production.” Moreover, de Certeau states,

> ways of operating enter massively into the novel or the short story... They find there a new representational space, that of fiction, populated by everyday virtuosities that science doesn’t know what to do with and which become the signatures, easily recognized by readers, of everyone’s micro-stories. Literature is transformed into a repertory of these practices... [and] provide[s] the decorative container of a narrativity for everyday practices.  

And, indeed, narratives can provide us with a valuable insight into the human interaction with objects inside shopping sites since they capture both the experiential and the reflective side of shopping, can describe shopping acts in detail and can verbalize acts of imagination that allow the self to project itself on the chosen object and ask questions that humans rarely formulate and articulate in real life such as: ‘How do I feel about this?’, ‘Am I like that?’, ‘Could this object be me?’, ‘Would I like to be like that?’ From a wider

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perspective, literary texts are a useful starting point for understanding how the French grappled with the emergence of consumerism, how they approached the dual challenge of mastering modernity and defining the nature of Frenchness, and how they perceived the new type of stores whose creation and adoption process was discussed in chapter 3.

With the exception of a commonplace Petite philosophie du shopping published in 2006, there are no French studies dedicated solely to the investigation of post-1945 shopping or shopping sites as theoretically or culturally significant. When authors such as Guy Debord, Jean Baudrillard, or Gilles Lipovetsky refer to shopping, the reference is generally meant to serve as the illustration of an insight in consumerism, but not an analysis of shopping per se. For the pre-1945 period, an impressive amount of quality studies on shopping are available, but most of the authors are not French. In fact, one would not be wrong to observe that, when considering the time period studied in these books on consumerism and shopping, the more we approach the post-war period, the less we see French researchers interested in this field of study. As a result of this indifference, the study of shopping has been relegated either to statistical insights in marketing studies or to the second-hand field of French self-help guides bearing titles such as Hyper, ton univers impitoyable, La Fièvre des achats: le syndrome des achats compulsifs, L'Enfant jackpot: protégeons notre enfant contre les abus de la société marchande,

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Consommateurs attention: savoir pour mieux acheter, or 100 petites expériences en psychologie du consommateur: pour mieux comprendre comment on vous influence.\textsuperscript{20}

Despite French researchers’ relative lack of interest in shopping as a theoretically significant phenomenon, this activity has taken center stage in several post-1945 French novels that were both widely read by the public and favorably received by literary critics. In fact, shopping must necessarily be seen as a pervasive topos in the French literature of the last six decades.

When theorizing the notion of literary topos in \textit{The Structure of the Artistic Text}, Yuri Lotman writes that "behind the description of the things and objects, in whose surroundings the characters of the text act, there arises a system of spatial relations, the structure of the topos. While serving as the principle of organization and disposition of the literary characters within the artistic continuum, the structure of the topos emerges as the language for expressing other non-spatial relations in the text."\textsuperscript{21} In other words, the text is a construction of a world where representations of concrete spaces do not have a mere referential function of anchoring the literary text in the real world; they are also self-reflexive, meaningful in themselves.

Following Lotman’s insight into the double nature of this literary tool, I will analyze the use of the shopping expedition as a topos that is both descriptive and


organizing: descriptive, because it (pre)tends to function according to the rules of referentiality, and organizing, because (1) it enables the perspective of the shopper to mediate literary constructions and (2) it serves as an anaphoric or cataphoric focal point that helps orient reading and interpretation. I will also focus on the self-reflexive dimension of this *topos* and show how store representations serve to endow non-spatial concepts such as loneliness, alienation, and manipulation, and how they question the consumerist myth of happiness.

In *Les Stances à Sophie*, Christiane Rochefort tells the story of a failed marriage. Céline Rhodes, a 27-year-old woman with no parents or possessions, marries Phillipe Aignan, a rising technocrat. Shopping expeditions play an important in Céline’s transformation from a bohemian student to the wife of a successful and ambitious *cadre*. When she enters a bourgeois world where all her new acquaintances constantly discuss and display familial acquisitions, the right place to eat and be seen, the ideal vacation spot, or the most desirable car, Céline is forced to adopt a new attitude toward consumerism and to learn its language. She quickly becomes aware that a perfect wife is defined by her choice of the ‘right objects’ both for her house (furnishings, tableware, or home decor items) and for herself (a strand of pearls or a mink coat).

When the fresh bride goes to a department store to furnish her new apartment with drapes, curtains, and cooking pans, she spends hours in the store, forcing herself to choose among the products on the shelves and comparing the store to "une entreprise de perversion du goût. Le rayon d’ameublement, c’est le musée des horreurs." 22 From

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critical spectator, Céline soon becomes aware that she is submerged by objects and incapable of making a decision. Her monologue illustrates how the simple fact of choosing the ‘right’ curtains becomes an exhausting and destabilizing experience:

Qui n’a jamais de sa vie choisi des doubles rideaux ne peut pas savoir. On n’y résiste pas. On se croit fort, mais les doubles rideaux sont encore plus forts. On les prend d’abord de haut, on fait un peu comme si c’était un autre, qu’on regarderait d’un air amusé choisir des doubles rideaux, un autre qui serait supposons votre serviteur, pas vraiment vous, vous vous ne pouvez pas vous passionner pour des doubles rideaux, vous êtes en dehors. Et puis plouc. On y est. Que s’est-il passé? On n’a pas eu le temps de se voir tomber dans le sommeil. On est tombé dans le type qui choisissait des doubles rideaux, dans le serviteur, on ne fait plus qu’un avec lui… On est englouti. Très important le choix de doubles rideaux. La couleur; le tissu; la tombée du tissu (on se met à employer de ces mots!); doublera-t-on ou pas? Très important. Tout est très important.23

Incappable of choosing among the overwhelming amount of objects, Céline asks for the shop assistant’s help. Since she doesn’t possess the proper vocabulary to describe the items she needs, she is immediately catalogued by the vendeuse as an uninformed and, therefore, manipulable consumer. In addition, Céline quickly becomes aware that, in the "dictatorship" of the market, her desires are irrelevant: "On trouve choquant que j’ose chercher ailleurs, que je sorte de la prison du verbe. Que je demande ce dont j’ai envie, et non prenne ce qu’on propose. D’où je sors, pour ne pas savoir que ce n’est pas l’offre qui répond à la demande mais la demande qui doit obéir à l’offre.”24

Department stores are represented here as temples of bourgeois convention that impose cookie-cutter patterns of consumption so that this social class can express and periodically renew its appropriateness, respectability and purchasing power. Since she does not read any of the magazines directed at the young modern bourgeois housewife

23 Rochefort, Christiane. Les Stances à Sophie. 63-64.
24 Rochefort, Christiane. Les Stances à Sophie. 65.
except to mock them, Céline doesn’t possess the knowledge or the willingness to navigate this highly codified environment of consumption and therefore returns home "épuisée, au bord des larmes, broyée par le système."  

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While Christiane Rochefort’s character never sees shopping around as a pleasurable activity and mocks its presumed identity-building playful dimension, in Perec’s *Les Choses*, Jérôme and Sylvie do not see shopping as a necessary maintenance activity.

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25 Many women magazines were created at the end of the Second World War: *Marie-France* in 1944, *Elle* in 1945, *Femmes d’aujourd’hui* in 1950. Also, *Marie-Claire* was reintroduced in 1954.

activity. Anxious to shop around, they perceive Paris as a huge shopping arena where their desires are constantly awakened.

Il existait, à côté d’eux, tout autour d’eux, tout au long des rues où ils ne pouvaient pas ne pas marcher, les offres fallacieuses, et si chaleureuses pourtant, des antiquaires, des épiciers, des papetiers. Du Palais-Royal à Saint-Germain, du Champs-de-Mars à l’étoile, du Luxembourg à Montparnasse, de l’île Saint-Louis au Marais, des Ternes à l’Opéra, de la Madeleine au parc Monceau, Paris entier était une perpétuelle tentation. Ils brûlaient d’y succomber, avec ivresse, tout de suite et à jamais.27

Shopping frenzy transforms the map of Paris and the lieux de mémoire mentioned in the paragraph above: they are not mentioned here in their quality of historical treasures and emblems of Frenchness. Instead, they become mere reference points guiding characters throughout Paris, which, in turn, has become a shopping arena whose main attractions are revealed by the regular reading of L’Express. Insensitive to the historical or human dimension of Paris, Jérôme and Sylvie move across the city following a consumerist logic: "de station en station, antiquaires, libraires, marchands de disques, cartes des restaurants, agences de voyages, chemisiers, tailleurs, fromagers, chausseurs, confiseurs, charcuteries de luxe, papetiers, leurs itinéraires composaient leur véritable univers: là reposaient leurs ambitions, leurs espoirs."28 Their consumerist journey of spectators-consumers caught in a web of visual and haptic sensations can be initiated even by a single object as "ils traversaient Paris pour aller voir un fauteuil qu’on leur avait dit parfait."29

28 Perec, Georges. "Les Choses." Georges Perec: Romans et récits. 99. Perec had a constant preoccupation with space as a reality-structuring element. After the author’s death in 1982, a draft of his autobiography was found in his apartment, which revealed that he was planning to organize the narrative of the events in his life according to the spatial schema of the places and spaces he had occupied in his life.
This initial fragmented mapping of their shopping experience seems to provide Perec’s characters with the illusion of control and the freedom of playful exploration. The only things they resent are the retailing practices of small shops, which have not adopted yet the free service philosophy, "ces petites mortifications - demander d’un ton peu assuré le prix de quelque chose, hésiter, tenter de marchander, lorgner les devantures sans oser entrer."  

However, when they discover department stores with their libre service policies, the true nature of their relationship with objects becomes visible: "ils visitèrent les grands magasins, des heures entières, émerveillés, et déjà effrayés, mais sans encore oser se le dire, sans encore oser regarder en face cette espèce d’acharnement minable qui allait devenir leur destin, leur raison d’être, leur mot d’ordre, émerveillés et presque submergés déjà par l’ampleur de leurs besoins, par la richesse étalée, par l’abondance offerte."  

This constant feeling of seduction and oppression by objects culminates in a vision the young couple has just before leaving for Tunisia in an attempt to liberate themselves: "ils imaginaient d’interminables galeries marchandes... des cités de cent étages... dans le hall central... jaillissait du cinquantième étage une cascade entre les deux escaliers d’aluminium. Des ascenseurs les emportaient... du plafond pendaient des milliers d’oriflammes et la musique suave les entourait."  

This progression in Jérôme and Sylvie’s consumerist experience illustrates on an individual level what the French society has experienced at a collective level: it went from small shops and counter-service shops to department stores to supermarkets to shopping centers.

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In an attempt to flee a world too full of things, Jérôme and Sylvie decide to take advantage of teaching opportunities in Tunisia. Instead of living in Tunis, they are assigned to Sfax, a desolate outpost in the desert where there are no opportunities for modern shopping experiences. As a result, "rien ne les attirait dans cette succession d’échoppes misérables, de magasins presque identiques, de souks confinés" and "ils n’achetaient rien. Sans doute, en partie, parce qu’ils ne savaient pas acheter et s’inquiétaient d’avoir à marchander, mais, surtout, parce qu’ils ne se sentaient pas attirés. Aucun de ces objets, pour somptueux qu’ils fussent parfois, ne leur donnait une impression de richesse." Craving the lost proximity of consumer goods, the couple returns to Paris at the end of the academic year. Here, they instantly re-enter their consumerist routine: "chaque nuit dans les rues illuminées, chaque devanture à nouveau sera une merveilleuse invite. Des étals crouleront sous les victuailles. Ils se presseront dans la cohue des grands magasins. Ils plongeront leurs mains dans les amas de soieries, caresseront les lourds flacons de parfum, effleureront les cravates."

A similar atmosphere of attachment and submission to objects reigns in Simone de Beauvoir’s *Les Belles images* where her characters seem to exist only through a close relationship to objects: they are first and foremost described as consumers attached to the material world. Whether the desired object is a recent acquisition or a trip to an exotic location, it has to conform to a vision of life that these technocrats have borrowed from magazines and it has to enable a narcissistic communion with the object as "ils caressent

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leur regards à l’image parfaite qu’ont reproduite Plaisir de France et Votre Maison.”

At the linguistic level, this conformism is apparent in the snobbish remarks that punctuate the characters’ speech: ‘une merveille!’, ‘c’est d’un banal…’, ‘c’est dépassé!’ or ‘tout le monde y va.’ The main character, Laurence, acknowledges that shopping was the usual main goal of all her urban incursions. She confesses that "j’avais ces yeux brillants; j’adorais entrer dans les boutiques, caresser du regard le foisonnement des tissus, flâner dans ces prairies soyeuses émaillées de fleurs fantastiques; dans mes mains ruisselait la tendresse du mohair et de l’agora, la fraîcheur des toiles, la grâce du linon, la tiédeur capiteuse des velours.”

In Les Belles images, just as in Les Stances à Sophie and Les Choses, shopping is not an activity restricted to women as it predominantly was in the nineteenth century. Men too are active shoppers and enjoy the proximity of goods as much as women do. Jean-Charles, Laurence’s husband, accompanies his wife in her shopping sprees such as their visits to the shops of Saint-Honoré where "lentement défilent les vitrines. Echarpes, clips, gourmettes, bijoux pour milliardaires – collerette de brillants avec pampilles de rubis, sautoir de perles noires, saphirs, émeraudes, bracelets d’or et de pierre précieuse -, fantaisies plus modestes, pierres de Tyrol, jade, pierres du Rhin, bulles de verre où dansent au gré de la lumière des rubans brillants (...) Et tous les yeux brillent de convoitise, ceux des hommes comme ceux des femmes.” Similarly, In Les Stances à Sophie, Philippe and his technocrat male friends engage in Veblenian "conspicuous

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consumption" in order to showcase their status and aggressively vie with one other to gain prestige by consuming extravagantly and keeping their wives glamorous and unemployed.39

While in the three novels by Christiane Rochefort, Georges Perec, and Simone de Beauvoir shopping sites are embossed on the cartography of French cities and other historical or public sites are still visible in the background, in J.M.G. Le Clézio’s Les Géants shopping sites have replaced and erased all other spatial reference and historical lieux de mémoire. The novel takes place in and around a supermarket that is described by several syntagms that gradually reveal its nature and purpose: ‘la blanche Hyperpolis qui brille au soleil, avec ses quatre parkings de goudron autour d’elle,’ ‘le supermarché Hyperpolis,’ ‘Hyp-Hyp-Hyper-Polis-Sssuper-Marke-tísimo,’ ‘l’Hyper Ville,’ ‘l’Hyper-Super,’ and ‘le Self-Service Supermarché.’ This supermarket is a microcosm that paradigmatically reproduces modern society with its all-encompassing control and manipulation of dazed consumers. If in the previous novels characters were still buying a few products for their use value and many more for their sign value while being engaged in "self-construction by a process of acquiring commodities of distinction and difference,"40 in Les Géants the materiality of goods is irrelevant since everything is played out at the level of product wrapping and product advertising. In Hyperpolis, "il y a des boîtes de toutes les couleurs, des boîtes bleues, des boîtes jaunes, des boîtes bleues et jaunes. Dans ces boîtes, il n’y a rien."41

Two characters in *Les Géants* have managed to escape temporarily the inexorable attraction of Hyperpolis. The first character is Bozo le Muet, a boy whose parents live in the proximity of the supermarket and who cannot help but come everyday to the parking lot of Hyperpolis just to watch the store from a distance. When he feels he is about to give in to the temptation of entering the supermarket, he goes to the nearby beach and plays with the pebbles on the shore. Unlike the mass-produced goods sold in Hyperpolis, these pebbles do not resemble one other and "ils étaient si beaux, si purs, si simples…ils ne voulaient rien, ils n’attendaient rien."\(^{42}\) The second character who resists Hyperpolis is Machines, an employee whose job is to collect shopping carts from the parking lot and return them to the store. During each of his lunch breaks, Machines finds refuge in an old gas station where an old couple and their dog live. This gas station is clearly represented as a *lieu de mémoire*:

Dans ce lieu, par miracle, il y avait toute la beauté, toute l’histoire, tout l’espace réunis en un clin d’œil. C’était comme si la peur et la haine n’avaient jamais existé, comme si la route qui passait devant la station-service ne pouvait plus meurtrier et tuer, comme si les maudits édifices des hommes, leurs gigantesques épiceries, leurs monstrueuses prisons aux fenêtres scellées, avaient fini leur règne. Ici c’était la paix, la douceur, on n’en connaissait pas d’autres.\(^{43}\)

In addition, all inscriptions in the gas station - ‘GRAISSAGE VIDANGE PNEUS ATELIER RÉPARATIONS BUREAU CAISSE ACCESSOIRES’ - are in French, easy to read and non-intrusive. Outside these purely indicative signs, no other form of visual or auditory publicity is present.

\(^{42}\) Le Clézio, J.M.G. *Les Géants*. 104.

In *99 francs*, by Frédéric Beigbeder, the main character Octave only shops for brand name goods at high-end boutiques, illustrating the message he reinforces every day at his workplace: everyone should live as in a television ad: "un costume Eric Bergère, une chemise Hedi Slimane pour Saint Laurent Rive Gauche-Hommes, des souliers Berluti, une montre Royal Oak d’Audemars Piguet (en attendant le Samsung Watch Phone qui fera aussi telephone mobile), des lunettes StarckEyes, un caleçon Banana Republic acheté à New York." The long and minute description lists of the objects possessed by Octave point to his endless searches for goods that can harmonize into the perfect image of success. In addition, the description of his apartment, a "cinq pièces à Saint-Germain-des-Prés décoré par Christian Liaigre" reminds us of Sylvie and Jérôme’s dream apartment. Unlike Perec’s young couple, Octave can afford to enter with confidence any luxury goods boutique and buy any luxury product he may want. However, his fascination lies with supermarkets where "[il] traîne pendant des heures… en souriant aux caméras de surveillance."  

Jean-Christophe Rufin’s Globalia is a federation enclosing North America, Europe and Asia, a society built by the world’s biggest corporations in order to separate the economic realm from the political realm, especially by eradicating nationalism, religion, and civil wars. It is also a one-language "security zone" that is de-differentiated, post-natural, and post-biological, and incarnates the ‘society of spectacle’ such as it was theorized by Guy Debord in 1967 when he wrote that "in societies where modern

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conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation." 47

Since national identities and traditions were here gradually erased to the profit of a more uniform Globalian identity, shopping is the only identity-building activity that survived from the pre-Globalia era and it constitutes the main pastime. At any given moment of the day, "des flots de badauds sortaient des centres commerciaux, poussant des chariots remplis de choses inutiles et douces." 48 In addition, consumerism is a tool for instilling collective and individual consent towards Globalian political practices in a society where "les chocs étaient atténués et les appétits calmés, quoique imparfaitement, à l’aide de mille amuse-gueules de la consommation de masse." 49 This "pacification of daily life" 50 theorized by Jean Baudrillard in his Consumer Society is at its most visible in the eyes of shoppers, which "avaient pris un reflet terne, un vague, un flou, une mollesse qui donnaient aux foules en Globalia un air d’hypnose collective." 51 Although consumerism already has a powerful sedative effect on the masses, the security and well-being of the masses are regularly injected with homeopathic doses of violence designed to make the economic and political status quo seem threatened, fragile and, therefore, more desirable. To achieve the maximum impact on the population, terrorist attacks are staged by the Globalian Department of Social Protection in supermarkets and shopping malls.

49 Rufin, Jean-Christophe. Globalia. 261.
51 Rufin, Jean-Christophe. Globalia. 261.
4.2.2 The happiness myth

Donnez-lui toutes les satisfactions économiques, de façon qu’il n’ait plus rien à faire qu’à dormir, avaler des brioches, et se mettre en peine de prolonger l’histoire universelle, comblez-le de tous les biens de la terre, et plongez-le dans le bonheur jusqu’à la racine des cheveux: des petites bulles crèveront à la surface de ce bonheur, comme sur de l’eau.

Fiodor Dostoïevski, *Dans mon souterrain*

These staged violent attacks carried out inside shopping centers are meant to provide a counterpart to the presumably utopian everyday life in Globalia and to ensure the continuous lure of the ‘myth of happiness’ through consumerism. As Baudrillard noted in 1970, "happiness, written in letters of fire behind the smallest advertisement for bath salts or the Canary Islands, is the absolute reference of the consumer society" and, as a vehicle of the older egalitarian myth, it has inherited its political and sociological violence as well as its search for quantifiable standards. Consequently, consumers feel compelled to accumulate goods in order to achieve and signal levels of happiness to themselves and to others.

All six novels represent and question this consumerist myth of happiness. In Rochefort’s *Les Stances à Sophie*, when Philippe tries to persuade a hesitant Céline to accept his marriage proposal, he repeats to her that she cannot possibly be happy in her current life as a poor student: ‘Est-ce que tu es heureuse comme ça?’; ‘Si tu ne veux pas

être heureuse, je ne peux tout de même pas te forcer..’ Céline vehemently denounces the constant pressure of being happy that is deeply embedded in consumerism:

à la fin ils me font chier avec leur bonheur! Le Shah est heureux, la Princesse est heureuse, l’emballer est heureux, c’est une vraie manie qu’ils ont tous. Hier, j’ai acheté du beurre, ça s’appelait Bon Beurre Porte Bonheur, non je te le jure c’est pas une blague! Il y a aussi des lampes du Bonheur, il paraît que dès qu’on les allume on est heureux. C’est la grande mode. Ils furent tous heureux et eurent beaucoup d’enfants heureux. 53

She soon realizes that happiness is a consumerist fabrication, a "machin tout constitué"54 where desire for goods is conceived as satiable and insatiable at the same time. Refusing to play the ‘happiness game,’ she divorces her husband and returns to the small studio she rented as a student, leaving behind all clothes and jewelry that were supposed to transform her into the happy wife of a technocrat.

In the first eight pages of Perec’s Les Choses, we are given the meticulous description of a luxury apartment, a catalogue fantasy of modern living where "la vie serait facile, serait simple. Toutes les obligations, tous les problèmes qu’implique la vie matérielle trouveraient une solution naturelle. (...) Ils appellerait cet équilibre bonheur."55 The scopic regime of this ‘dream apartment’ is based on what Baudrillard has termed "le système de l’intérieur moderne, qui se fonde sur une opposition: celle du RANGEMENT et de l’AMBIANCE."56 However, since the young couple does not have the means necessary to achieve these two interior design goals, the apartment is described by Perec in the conditional tense in order to suggest both the exultation of purchasing objects and the idea that there will be always more desired goods beyond the characters’

53 Rochefort, Christiane. Les Stances à Sophie. 16-17.
54 Rochefort, Christiane. Les Stances à Sophie. 7.
reach: their desires are constantly awakened and never fulfilled because "dans le monde qui était le leur, il était presque de règle de désirer toujours plus qu’on ne pouvait acquérir."\(^{57}\)

Anxious to enter the world of spending as quickly as possible, Sylvie and Jérôme gave up their university studies and accepted short-term contracts that allow them plenty of time to spend in the world of enticing goods. The only problem is that, although they are doing well financially, they are not nearly as rich as they would like to be. This is why, when the speed train takes them to Bordeaux in the final paragraph of the book, "le linge glacé, les couverts massifs, marques des armes des Wagon-Lits, les assiettes épaisses écussonnées sembleront le prélude d’un festin somptueux. Mais le repas qu’on leur servira sera franchement insipide."\(^{58}\) As Georges Perec explained, in order to be happy in the consumer society, one needs to either be born poor with no hopes of ever getting richer or be born rich with no desire or need of becoming richer. Sylvie and Jérôme come from modest families and their jobs, while allowing them to live well, cannot enable them to immediately buy and consume the objects they see in their shopping expeditions or in the glossy pages of magazines. This discrepancy between desires and means has a paralyzing effect:

Ils ne pensaient qu’en termes de tout ou rien. La bibliothèque serait de chêne clair ou ne sera pas. Elle n’était pas. (…) Entre ces rêveries trop grandes, auxquelles ils s’abandonnaient avec une complaisance étrange, et la nullité de leurs actions réelles, nul projet rationnel, qui aurait concilié les nécessités objectives et leurs possibilités financières, ne venait s’insérer. L’immensité de leurs désirs les paralysait.\(^{59}\)

In fact, the epigraph of *Les Choses* taken from Malcolm Lowry has already summarized Perec’s position for the reader: "Incalculable are the benefits civilization has brought us… without parallel the crystalline and fecund fountains of the new life which still remains closed to the thirsty lips of the people who follow in their gripping and bestial tasks." ⁶⁰

In *Les Belles images*, characters equate happiness with material possessions, particularly with luxury goods that are bought and showcased as its metonymic forms. When Jean-Claude buys an expensive necklace for Laurence, she interprets his gesture as an attempt to reinforce the happiness myth: "Jean-Charles ne me l’offrirait pas sans la dispute de ce matin. C’est une compensation, un symbole, un succédané. De quoi? De quelque chose qui n’existe plus, qui n’a peut-être jamais existé: un lien intime et chaud qui rendrait tous les cadeaux inutiles (...) Il achète la paix conjugale, les joies du foyer, l’entente, l’amour; et la fierté de soi." ⁶¹

While contrasting the multiplication of status goods in her home to the inner emptiness of her marriage, Laurence also notes the constant postponement of happiness inscribed in the system of objects. Stopping in front of a window-shop to admire a jacket, she realizes that

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cette veste n’aurait plus la même nuance ni le même velouté, séparée du trois-quarts feuille morte, des manteaux en cuir lisse, des écharpes brillantes qui l’encadrent dans la vitrine; c’est celle-ci tout entière qu’on convoite à travers chacun des objets qui y sont exposés. (...) Dans les vitrines, les objets gardent
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encore l’aura qui les nimbait sur l’image en papier glacé. Mais quand on les tient dans sa main, tout cela disparaît.62

The description of this window-shop - presented as a semiological system that must be analyzed in its own terms - is a mise en abîme representation of what Jean Baudrillard described as the "system of objects." Baudrillard presented modern consumption as a form of bricolage, an active manipulation of signs by consumers where the organization of privatized existence and its investment with meaning can only be done metonymically: an object is always consumed as part of a network of objects, as "idea of a relation" among them. Behind the glass, the jacket that Laurence wants to purchase has meaning only as part of the structure of the display. Once the object is removed from the ensemble, the bricolage is to be started all over again. For the system of consumption, this bricolage is a necessity because it constitutes a consumer activity that constantly reproduces the codes on which the system is based. However, for the consumer, it can produce - as in Laurence’s case - cognitive dissonance since, as Baudrillard put it, "the social logic of consumption… is not at all that of individual appropriation of the use value of goods and services; nor is it a logic of satisfaction. It is a logic of the production and manipulation of social signifiers."63

In 99 francs, Octave summarizes the myth of happiness in the following sentence: "produisons des millions de tonnes de produits entassés et nous serons heureux!"64 However, he immediately asks himself: "avec toutes ces choses qui t’appartiennent, et la vie confortable que tu mènes, logiquement, tu es obligé d’être heureux. Pourquoi ne l’es-

62 Beauvoir, Simone de. Les Belles images. 139.
64 Beigbeder, Frédéric. 99 francs. 23.
tu pas?" He concludes that the perpetual deferral of happiness is embedded in every consumerist gesture through the mechanism of "la déception post-achat: il vous faut d’urgence un produit, mais dès que vous le possédez, il vous en faut un autre."

Moreover, Octave observes, this deferral is a desirable feature of consumerism for both producers and advertisers. To put it simply, "personne ne souhaite votre bonheur parce que les gens heureux ne consomment pas."65

Jean-Christophe Rufin’s Globalia is designed to be a utopian society that maximizes the happiness of each of its citizens according to its motto ‘Liberty, Security, Prosperity.’ Under its huge glass cupolas, every single appetite is gratified almost instantaneously. However, persistently high levels of material comfort have undermined traditional sources of pleasure and boredom is the prevailing mood of this society. As a result, producers not only fabricate increasingly diversified products to keep Globalians interested, but also adopted planned obsolescence as intrinsic part of product design.

À peine assouvis, ces désirs artificiels seraient tous aussitôt trahis: les couleurs brillantes des vêtements se faneraient, le mécanisme des jouets tomberait en panne, les produits d’entretien se périmeraient. L’obsolescence programmée des choses faisait partie de la vie. Il était acquis qu’elle entretenait le bon fonctionnement de l’économie. Acquérir était un droit mais posséder était contraire au nécessaire renouvellement des productions. C’est pourquoi la fin des objets était élaborée avec autant de soin que le produit lui-même et contenue en lui.66

All literary representations discussed in this section illustrate the belief that the rise in the level of consumption was not matched, as it was expected, by a rise in the level of happiness. This observation is certainly not new. In 1789, reacting to Adam Smith’s

65 Beigbeder, Frédéric. 99 francs. 11.
1776 book *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Malthus wrote that "there is another inquiry, however, perhaps still more interesting, that [Smith] occasionally mixes with [his inquiry on wealth], I mean an inquiry into the causes which affect the happiness of nations."\(^{67}\) Malthus’ remark inaugurated a debate on the ‘paradoxes of happiness’ that was perpetuated in the twentieth century by well-known theorists such as Veblen, Galbraith, Baudrillard, and Lipovetsky. In the field of economics, empirical data showed in 1974 that happiness at a national level does not increase with wealth once basic needs are fulfilled, an idea that is known as the "Easterlin paradox."\(^{68}\)

Among economists working outside the field of pure economics, Tibor Scitovsky has sought to give a coherent explanation of the phenomenon of "joyless economy" by arguing that utility-maximization models - such as Adam Smith’s model - leave out of the equation the psychological concept of pleasure, a fleeting state emerging in the transition from discomfort to comfort. Adopting the insights of the Wundt curve on stimulus intensity and pleasure, Scitovsky explained that "perfect comfort and lack of stimulation are restful at first, but they soon become boring, then disturbing."\(^{69}\)

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According to Scitovsky, while both comfort and pleasure are based on the relationship between an input of stimulation and an output of satisfaction, there are also significant differences between them. Pleasure is a dynamic state where satisfaction is on the rise. Comfort is an optimal state of stimulation and cannot be improved upon since it is saturated quickly. In other words, "comfort, like a hot bath or the end of a good meal, is a state of immersion and bliss. Pleasure, in contrast, is a state of restraint, anticipation, and progression. These are two distinct hedonistic ideas. ‘Comfort’ is being. ‘Pleasure’ is becoming."  

While the postwar French society valued American-style comfort and sought out modern home appliances and cars, it also traditionally valued pleasure as an important dimension of national character, an attitude encapsulated in Philippe Delerm’s bestselling

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1997 book *La Première gorge de bière et autres plaisirs minuscules* and in commonplace French expressions such as *se faire un petit plaisir, pour le plaisir, le plaisir du texte, or fondre de plaisir*. The national importance given to pleasure may be the main reason why in the postwar period, as opposed to American advertising that was mainly focused on information and persuasion, French advertising was commonly designed to secure pleasure to its spectators. The four main characteristics that emerged in a series of qualitative interviews with French advertising creative directors are: *la séduction* (creating an advertisement that tempts and charms the consumer), *le spectacle* (incorporating excitement and drama), *l'amour* (alluding to romantic notions even to the detriment of presenting product functions), and *l'humour* (using word plays or amusing associations).

4.2.3 Advertising

> On peut faire d'aussi précieuses découvertes que dans les pensées de Pascal dans une réclame pour un savon.

*Marcel Proust, La Fugitive*

When it comes to advertising, cultural studies portray it as paradigmatic of modern consumer capitalism while mainstream economic discourses treat it as a deviation from perfect competition. This intermediary position between cultural

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71 Delerm, Philippe. *La première gorge de bière et autres plaisirs minuscules.* Paris: L’Arpenteur, 1997. For instance, one example given by Delerm that illustrates the intimate link between discomfort and pleasure is the savoring of a chocolate croissant in the street on a cold morning.

interventions and business practices is made possible by advertising’s treatment of markets as symbolically malleable entities and explains its plural treatment as psychological tool, semiotic process, communications technique, sign value production, modernist art, or ideological instrument.\textsuperscript{73}

French attitudes toward advertising were heavily influenced by Vance Packard’s 1957 study \textit{The Hidden Persuaders}. Its famous first paragraph is worth quoting at length because this is still the most popular image of advertising among French intellectuals and consumers.

This book is an attempt to explore a strange and rather exotic new area of American life. It is about the large-scale efforts being made, often with impressive success, to channel our unthinking habits, our purchasing decisions, and our thought processes by the use of insights gained from psychiatry and the social sciences. Typically these efforts take place beneath our level of awareness; so that the appeals which move us are often, in a sense, “hidden.” The result is that many of us are being influenced and manipulated, far more than we realize, in the patterns of our everyday lives.\textsuperscript{74}

The argument here is that advertising and public relations agencies ‘engineer’ consumer consent with the use of consumer motivational research tools such as depth analysis and subliminal research. As a result, the society as a whole is moving "from the genial world


\textsuperscript{74} Packard, Vance. \textit{The Hidden Persuaders}. 1.
of James Thurber into the chilling world of George Orwell and his Big Brother.\textsuperscript{75} Packard was also one of the first observers who linked the spread of consumerism with strategies for persuading consumers to rapidly expand their needs and wants by rendering them "voracious, compulsive, and wasteful."\textsuperscript{76} Ten years later, John Kenneth Galbraith noted that, in the postwar order, "the individual serves the industrial system not by supplying it with savings and the resulting capital; he serves it by consuming its products."\textsuperscript{77}

Due to their attacks on centralized power, on advertising manipulation, and on the persistence of poverty in an ‘affluent society’, Packard and Galbraith were widely translated and read in the 1960s and the 1970s. Because these two authors offered numerous concrete examples and narrated their own experiences in their books, French intellectuals used their insights as empirical support for their own speculations. The case of Jean Baudrillard is telling. In his \textit{System of Objects}, the French sociologist greatly relied on Vance Packard’s examples of the American obsession with consumer goods.\textsuperscript{78} In addition, Galbraith’s comment on the relationship between individuals and the industrial system is reformulated by Jean Baudrillard in his 1973 \textit{Mirror of Production} in which the French sociologist argues that, because more than enough goods are produced to satisfy current levels of consumption, capitalists must resort to creating more demand

\textsuperscript{75} Packard, Vance. \textit{The Hidden Persuaders}. 3.
\textsuperscript{78} A few of Packard’s examples of the American obsession with consumer goods that Baudrillard directly cites in his book are: the immense tail fins that adorned American cars, the use by fashionable Bostonians of old panes with a purplish tinge in their windows (these panes were part of a defective shipment of glass from England more than three centuries ago), and instances of planned obsolescence in the American economy.
by assigning this essential economic function to advertising. Baudrillard gives the
example of the post-1929 crash period when "the problem was no longer one of
production but one of circulation. Consumption became the strategic element; the people
were henceforth mobilized as consumers, their needs became as essential as their labor-
power." Therefore, he concludes, to stimulate consumption, post-1945 producers will
mainly turn to the ‘launching of advertising’ as a rule.79

Aside from these intellectual dialogues, the influence of advertising had already
been felt at a more concrete economic level and the French were anxious about its effect
on French culture, "both as an agent of modernity and a force of Americanization."80
American advertising agencies (in particular J. Walter Thomson Company) exported
American-style packaging and American style techniques to France.81 As these were
adopted in the 1960s and the 1970s, the common perception was that one didn’t need to
go to the United States to experience the ‘American’ way of life since it had already
invaded France. Unbridled advertising - a problem that was perceived as endemic to the
U.S. - became a central preoccupation with French intellectuals who superposed in their
analyses the current state of affairs in France and what the French landscape could
become if the ‘publicity circus’ were taken to extreme, as it had already happened across
the Atlantic.

Writers were no strangers to these fears and expressed them in literature.
Advertising as a literary subject became widespread after the Second World War, and a

succinct look at each of the six novels analyzed in this chapter will show how two common themes – the presence of advertising professionals and the representation of advertising techniques – are recycled and gradually built upon as we approach the present.

In Christiane Rochefort’s *Les Stances à Sophie*, advertisers are a hidden presence that Céline feels behind every object. This is why, when she shops, this felt presence triggers monologues in which she tries to grasp how consumers’ desires are created and manipulated so that they all consume not what they would independently choose, but what they are offered in stores as part of fashion campaigns popularized by magazines.

Ils ont décidé que cette année j’aurai des casseroles tango, pétrole ou tourterelle; tout comme les autres dames. Il n’y a pas de raison. Parce qu’enfin si on laissait les gens tranquilles ces andouilles achèteraient des casseroles une fois pour toutes et où on irait; il faut bien se défendre contre ces indolents crétins qui si on ne les secouait pas vivraient encore dans les arbres, cueillant des fruits. Il faut leur trouver sans arrêt des trucs nouveaux pour qu’ils sortent leur fric, ils sont si avarès. Les sacs, les maillots de bain sont également tango cette année je ne sais pas si vous l’avez remarqué, et si vous vous reportez à *France-Femme* vous verrez que ça y fait rage à chaque page et si vous ne vous y mettez pas vous aurez l’air d’une noix. C’est un ordre.\(^82\)

Having spent a short period as a market researcher, Georges Perec was acquainted with the language and methods of consumer research and advertising. Influenced by Roland Barthes’ *Mythologies*, Perec declared that his main goal in *Les Choses* was to explore how ‘the language of advertising is reflected in us.’ Sylvie and Jérôme’s market research positions allow them to travel throughout the booming France of the *trente glorieuses* and perform motivational studies in order to assess and quantify what the preferences and taste of French consumers are. Therefore,

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pendant quatre ans, peut-être plus, ils explorèrent, ils interviewèrent, analysèrent. Pourquoi les aspirateurs-traineaux se vendent-ils si mal? Que pense-t-on, dans les milieux de modeste extraction, de la chicorée? Aime-t-on la purée toute faite, et pourquoi? (...) Il y eut la lessive, le linge qui sèche, le repassage. Le gaz, l’électricité, le téléphone. Les enfants. Les vêtements et les sous-vêtements. La moutarde. La soupe en sachets. (...) Rien de ce qui était humain ne leur fut étranger.83

Despite their involvement with the world of marketing, the couple never manages to achieve a true critical distance and consider the advertising system from the outside. On the other hand, critical distance is precisely the defining trait of Laurence, Simone de Beauvoir’s character in Les Belles images. Laurence is a slogan-writer and a publicity editor for Publinf, an advertising firm. As her life revolves around campaigns for wood panels, laundry soap, linen, and tomato sauce, she constantly refers to the deception and falsehood that are part of an advertiser’s everyday work of promoting glossy magazine decors, the world of couturier clothes, or the right Christmas gift. According to Laurence, this world of glamour only serves as a camouflage for the vast emptiness of modern life:

> la sécurité, la gaieté, le plaisir d’être au monde. C’est tout de que je prétends vendre quand je lance un produit. Mensonge. Dans les vitrines les objets gardent encore l’aura qui les nimbait sur l’image en papier glacé. Mais quand on les tient dans sa main, on ne voit plus rien d’autre qu’une lampe, un parapluie, un appareil photographique. Inerte, froid.84

Being aware that her advertising profession deals with illusion and the bending of truth, Laurence is professionally concerned with the pursuit of falsehood and deception. She therefore gives detailed descriptions of the creative process involved in the preparation of an advertising campaign.

84 Beauvoir, Simone de. Les Belles images. 139.
Tout ce qu’elle touche se change en image. Avec des panneaux de bois vous alliez à l’élégance citadine toute la poésie des forêts (...) L’idée viendra; c’est toujours difficile au début, tant de clichés déjà usés, tant de pièges à éviter. Mais elle connaît son métier. Je ne vends pas des panneaux de bois: je vends la sécurité, la réussite, et une touche de poésie en supplément. 85

This paragraph constitutes an avant la lettre illustration of Jean Baudrillard’s argument on the four value-making processes involved in the creation of object value and on their use in advertising. 86 When creating ads, Laurence is not concerned with either the functional value of an object or its exchange value. Instead, she focuses on the symbolic and sign value of the object, the end result being that wood panels will be given more semiological than material significance.

As we move to J.M.G. Le Clézio’s Les Géants, advertisers receive ominous connotations and are referred to as Maîtres du regard or Maîtres du langage. Every single response of customers to the goods displayed has been manipulated by careful planning to the point that humans appear as zombie-like creatures who are entirely dominated by an invisible presence.

Personne ne savait ce qu’il faisait. Comment l’auraient-ils su? Ce n’était pas eux qui saisissaient la marchandise, elle se collait d’elle-même à leurs mains, elle attirait les rayons des yeux et les doigts des mains, elle entrait directement dans les bouches, traversait très vite les tubes digestifs. La nourriture n’était plus que des formes et des couleurs. Les yeux dévoraiet les couleurs rouge, blanche, verte, orange, les yeux avaient fain de sphères et de pyramides, faim de plastiques lisses et de capsules de fer-blanc. On n’allait pas au hasard. On suivait beaucoup de chemins qui avaient été tracés d’avance, par quelques hommes à l’esprit acharné. Ils avaient dessiné leur plan, ainsi, avec toutes les routes et les carrefours. 87

85 Beauvoir, Simone de. Les Belles images. 21-3.
87 Le Clézio, J.M.G. Les Géants. 53.
Le Clézio found his inspiration in Vance Packard’s *Hidden Persuaders* and his descriptions of depth analysis methods. Always hiding behind mirrors and surveillance cameras, the Masters in *Les Géants* are never to be seen. However, they constantly address consumers through loudspeakers that broadcast fragmented, subliminal messages: "Jeunesse… Beauté… Votre teint éclatant… Votre peau… Vinyl votre deuxième peau… Les couleurs diaboliques… Les seins… Les mains douces, douces… Crèmes… Les collants… L’eau pure… La, la douceur… La musique… Achetez… Fermez vos yeux… Laissez-vous prendre… Séduction… Parfum… Les couleurs froides… Les couleurs chaudes… Les couleurs qui brûlent… Beauté… Jeunesse… Beauté…" 88

As in the other novels discussed, there is here a strong intertextuality with marketing studies and advertising discourses. However, Le Clézio takes the incorporation of market research insights one step further: he transforms it into lengthy citation, such as in the following passage.

Etude de la rapidité des clignements de paupière, filmés par Vicary.
Rythme normal : 32 clignements par minute. Tension : 50 à 60 par minute.
Devant l’étal des supermarchés : 14 par minute.
Vicary : «Il s’agit là d’une transe hypnoïdale, le premier stade de l’hypnose.»
Couleurs qui endorment : le jaune, le rouge.
1960  Campagne électorale aux USA :
    l’agence Reade & Bratton pour les Républicains
    l’agence B.S. & J. pour les Démocrates
Gérard Stahl : «Il faut que l’emballage attire et hypnose une femme comme si on agitait une lampe au magnésium devant ses yeux.»
«Les gens sont extrêmement fidèles à leur marque de cigarettes, et cependant lors des tests, ils ne sont pas capables de la distinguer d’autres marques. Ils fument donc vraiment une image.» 89

Advertisers in *Les Géants* not only manipulate language, they also fabricate it in a two-step process. First, they destabilize the most basic, concrete, purely referential signs: "le langage des arbres, le langage de l’eau et du feu, le langage de la pierre." 90 Second, they replace these ‘emptied’ signs with brand names such as "Dupont, Fleischermann, Camel, Lucky Strike, Louis Cheskin, Ernest Ditcher, Rothschild, Unilever, United Fruit, C. R. Haas, Pierre Martineau, Dave Ogilvy, B.N.P., General Cigar Co., Guichard, Colgate, Gillette, Hachette, Pinoncelly, Wiggins." 91 After a while, the repetition of these brand names seems to affect characters’ ability to speak, and therefore signify. Tranquilité, a young woman who enters Hyperpolis to meet a friend working at the information booth, finds it hard to decipher the new signs that invade the supermarket and its customers each day: "K.I.N.G.S.I.Z.E. S SC SCH SCHW SCHWE SCHWEP SCHWEPP SCHWEPPE SCHWEPPES ES SOS TAN DARD MOTO ROIL BU VEZ COC COC COC OLAAA." 92

If Le Clézio’s Masters hide behind panoptic devices, in Beigbeder’s *99 francs* advertisers readily admit that they are ruling the world by manipulating desires and, therefore, consumption patterns. Octave is a 33-year old executive at an advertising company and this is how he introduces himself to the readers:

Je suis publicitaire: eh oui, je pollue l’univers. Je suis le type qui vous vend de la merde. Qui vous fait rêver de ces choses que vous n’aurez jamais. Ciel toujours bleu, nanas jamais moches, un bonheur parfait, retouché sur PhotoShop. Images léchées, musiques dans le vent. Quand, à force d’économies, vous réussirez à vous payer la bagnole de vos rêves, celle que j’ai shootée dans ma dernière

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Octave is not ashamed to admit that, as an employee of the advertising firm Rosserys & Witchcraft, "je passe ma vie à vous mentir et on me récompense grassement" and he sees advertising as being endowed with absolute, inextricable powers: it is, Octave says, the first system of domination that has managed to incorporate freedom in its structure, which renders it indestructible. He states that "plus je joue avec votre subconscient, plus vous m’obéissez… Vous croyez que vous avez votre libre arbitre, mais un jour ou l’autre, vous allez reconnaître mon produit dans le rayonnement d’un supermarché, et vous l’achèterez, comme ça, juste pour goûter, croyez-moi, je connais mon boulot." As an illustration, Octave punctuates his narrative with the steps in designing and filming a commercial for a yogurt named Maigrelette and produced by Madone, one of the largest agro-alimentary groups in the world (the allusion to Danone is barely veiled).

This novel too is based on a strong intertextuality with marketing. There are pages and pages of slogans, citations from market research studies, and numerous examples of commercials. Octave also freely cites Aldous Huxley, Alain Souchon, Charles Bukowski, and Rainer Fassbinder, but his favorite example to which he comes back again and again is publicity as it was used by Joseph Goebbels in the 1930s to convince Germans

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93 Beigbeder, Frédéric. 99 francs. 17.
94 Beigbeder, Frédéric. 99 francs. 17-8.
95 There is also a strong intertextuality with canonical texts of the French literature and philosophy: ‘je dépense, donc je suis’ (René Descartes), ‘confessions d’un enfant du millénaire’ (Alfred de Musset), ‘cultiver son jardin de marijuana’ (Voltaire), ‘revenir, là-bas, revenir! Je sens que les oiseaux ont la migraine’ (Rimbaud), ‘on avait remplacé le Logos par des logos projetés sur les parois humides de notre grotte’ (Plato), or ‘l’hédonisme n’est pas un humanisme’ (Sartre).
that Jews needed to be exterminated. Applying this example to the present, Octave concludes that "les marques ont gagné la World War III contre les humains"96 and that loyalty to brands will soon replace loyalty to political entities such as countries or nations: "bientôt les pays seront remplacés par des entreprises. On ne sera plus citoyen d’une nation mais on habitera des marques: on vivra en Microsofie ou à Mcdonaldland; on sera Calvin Kleinien ou Pradais."97

Octave’s prediction has come true in Jean-Christophe Rufin’s *Globalia*. In this presumably utopian society, the political has been erased to the profit of the economic, and information to the profit of advertising. The federation is ruled by a board of the CEOs of the biggest Globalian corporations. They control all existent channels of information and use them to promote the products of their companies. The result is that publicity has insinuated itself in all areas of life: there are promotional logos for fruit juice on the uniforms of security forces, commercial banners everywhere that also serve as surveillance cameras, and commercials are constantly broadcasted on the four television screens in the cells of the *Centres d’Aide à la Cohésion Sociale*, which are Globalia’s prisons.

After Baïkal’s staged escape to the non-zones, Kate finds work with a publicity agency where "elle participait à d’interminables reunions de creations. L’objectif, en ce moment, était de lancer une nouvelle barre chocolatée qui ne provoquait pas d’écoeurement, même à très forte dose."98 What goes on at the micro-level of Kate’s

96 Beigbeder, Frédéric. *99 francs*. 34.
97 Beigbeder, Frédéric. *99 francs*. 266.
company also goes on at the macro-level of federal government: the center of power in Globalia, the Department of Social Protection, has requested its *Bureau d’identification de la menace* to create a New Enemy which will be impersonated by Baïkal. Advertising methods are therefore applied to stage a spectacle of fear and to convince the population that Globalia is under threat. Despite all government’s efforts, Globalians are so saturated with images and commercials that they relate to the New Enemy as consumers, and their ‘civic’ response is a mere alteration of shopping habits and consumption patterns. This shows how citizens have been erased to the profit of consumers.

4.2.4 Good consumers, bad citizens

> On a tout avec l’argent, hormis des moeurs et des citoyens.
> 
> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*

> L’enfer, c’est l’erreur de se croire au paradis.
> 
> Simone Weil, *La Pesanteur et la grâce*

Vance Packard divided his influential book *The Hidden Persuaders* in two sections: ‘Persuading Us as Consumers’ and ‘Persuading Us as Citizens.’ By adopting this textual structure, he wanted to suggest that the techniques used by advertisers to manipulate consumers and induce desire for certain products find their counterpart in the manipulative techniques used by political consultants to promote politicians to the
electorate. 99 Moving beyond this methodological distinction between consumers and citizens, the last section of the book, entitled ‘In Retrospect,’ questions the morality of using mass merchandizing and depth probing in both the consumer and the political arena: "What is the morality of treating voters like customers, and child customers seeking father images at that?" 100 Or, as one politician put it, "the idea that you can merchandise candidates for high office like breakfast cereal… is the ultimate indignity to the democratic process." 101

While the intersection of political and commercial persuasion is at its most visible during electoral campaigns, consumerism and the drive to acquire goods are also necessarily embedded in the larger realm of national identity debates, civic participation, and social justice. 102 Throughout the twentieth century, intellectuals were quick to stigmatize the ‘dark side’ of consumption and denounce acquisitive consumption as unfulfilling and morally ambivalent. The common perception was (and - with few exceptions - still is) that consumerism encourages self-absorption at the expense of social responsibility. For instance, Max Weber warned of the domination of the "hedonist without heart," John Kenneth Galbraith illuminated the lag in social and public economics of the "affluent society," Herbert Marcuse theorized the "one-dimensional man," Edgar Morin and Henri Lefebvre commented on the "privatization" of everyday

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99 Application of modern advertising to political campaigns were initiated in the U.S. in the 1950s.
100 Packard, Vance. The Hidden Persuaders. 243
102 Consumerism is such a controversial topic because it contains at its core the issues of human motivations and morality. In the Middle Ages, morality long remained a key issue in microeconomic considerations as economic philosophy was intimately linked the investigation of human nature by moral theology and to the contrasting of earthly values to God’s law. As economic thinking evolved in secular directions, its main themes remained the same: explaining the interplay of selfishness and altruism in human actions and finding way to channel these human traits towards achieving the greater common good.
life as the bourgeoisie withdraws in its new comfortable domestic interiors and
depoliticizes its response to modernity, and Gilles Lipovetsky proclaimed the
disappearance of moral exigency in the post-industrial West and the correlated
instauration of the "ère du vide" and of the "crépuscule du devoir."103

In a 1992 issue of *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Lipovetsky made public the findings of
a survey on the beliefs of French people. The French philosopher’s goal was to prove to
his detractors that there was indeed a decline in collective and social values in a post-
morality France. Indeed, the results showed that, out of the three key words of the French
Republic, *fraternité* was considerably falling behind the other two: *liberté* scored 65
percent, *égalité* 21 percent, and *fraternité* only 12 percent, while 2 percent of those
interviewed were undecided. In addition, the notion of *devoir* – which Emile Durkheim
had posited as the first and foremost value of any society – came in fifteenth out of
twenty-one. The survey also showed that, with each new generation, values pertaining to
patriotism and civic duties were less and less prevalent. Overall, the data empirically
confirmed Lipovetsky’s insights that consumerism disrupts group cohesion as individuals
emerge from their social group and decreasingly rely on social ties.

103 I am referring here to the following studies: Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of
Society*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958; Marcuse, Herbert. *One-Dimensional Man; Studies in the
Paris: Grasset, 1962; Lefebvre, Henri, *Critique de la vie quotidienne, III. Pour une métaphilosophie du
In a similar vein, Robert Rochefort recently argued that the French have become "d’excellents consommateurs et de bien mauvais citoyens," a phenomenon that he explains as follows:

Figure 4.3 Esprix bas. Brigade Anti-Pub. 2003.

Dans la société consommatoire, dont l’émergence est indissociable du stade avancé d’individualisme dans lequel nous nous trouvons, l’horizon est égocentré. Pour dépenser, ce qui compte, c’est que ça n’aille pas trop mal pour soi et pour son entourage. Peu importe ce que sera le destin collectif, surtout s’il est un peu lointain. Et si l’on arrive ainsi à se retrancher dans sa bulle, on devient vite étanche à toutes les secousses de l’actualité. 104

According to Rochefort, there is a major difference between the logic of consumption and the logic of citizenship. Consumption, Rochefort claims, is an easy individual act facilitated by safe and entertaining shopping environments, extended store hours, credit cards compensating for the lack of cash, and the abundance of products. It also allows us to perform a reconciliation of opposites 105 as products mingle freely in the shopping cart. Citizenship, on the other hand, is a demanding social act complicated by the search for pertinent information, the strength necessary for expressing opinions and standing behind them, and it requires active involvement and time commitment. It also implies taking sides, expressing clear, reasoned opinions that are not interchangeable, as in the case of voting: a vote can be cast for only one candidate or party and therefore implies a rejection


105 In this sense, modern marketing conceptualizes the consumer as an enfant gâté that wants to obtain everything without sacrificing anything. Rochefort illustrates this idea with the case of low-fat products that promise the consumer the taste indulgence of the regular product version while promising not to alter the consumer’s weight.
of all other alternatives. To summarize these differences, Rochefort writes: "la consommation est immédiate et de plus en plus égocentrée. La citoyenneté est supposée réfléchie et renvoie à des responsabilités collectives. Tout se passe comme si ces deux notions appartenaient à des hémisphères cérébraux opposés : « Je me sens citoyen, je suis consommateur, mais je n’associe pas l’un à l’autre. »"  

One can easily identify in this argument the main features of what Emile Durkheim has termed anomie, i.e. a condition where social and moral norms as well as human bonds are weakened or simply not present, which leads to degrees of deviant behavior in individuals. Coined in 1885 by Jean-Marie Guyau as a play on the Kantian notion of autonomie, the term was adopted by Durkheim in 1897 when he argued that the social conditions that predispose societies to anomie are industrialization and its impact on rural life, secularization and the loss of common religious references, as well as the industrial division of labor and its accompanying decreased cooperation among specialized functions. It is therefore hardly surprising that anomie became the sociological concept in the 1960s when all these abrupt changes in the French universe of reference were intensified by the economic boom of the postwar period.

In chapter 3, I have shown how shopping performed in modern retail spaces such as supermarkets, hypermarkets, and shopping malls has been interpreted and presented as

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106 Rochefort, Robert. Le Bon consommateur et le mauvais citoyen. 97.
108 Durkheim, Emile. Le Suicide. Etude de sociologie. Paris: Alcan, 1897. The word anomie comes from Greek, namely the prefix a- ‘without’ and nomos ‘law’, so it originally denoted something or someone that was against or outside the law or a state of social and political unrest where laws were not and could not be applied. In Durkheim’s definition, anomie significantly departs from this original meaning since it now refers to a feeling of alienation and purposelessness resulting from a perceived absence or diminution of a traditional set of standards and values. Durkheim used anomie to demonstrate that the roots of suicide were not individual and based on negative events leading to depression, but social and based on a discrepancy between professed social values/standards and individual opportunities of actualizing them.
a key contributor to the modern feeling of *anomie*. As the existence of artisan and small shops was threatened by big retailers, widespread feelings of malaise were actualized in an anti-consumerist discourse that deplored the diminution of moral standards and political values. That being the case, we would expect literary representations of the 1950s and 1960s - when consumerism was at its highest - to focus on manipulated, submissive consumers and on the denunciation of consumer society, and literary representations of the 1970s to the present to contain an attenuated critique of consumerism. However, the situation is entirely reversed: as consumerist pressures attenuated, literary representations of consumption became increasingly dystopic and consumer-characters avert open social protest while immersing themselves in oblivious consumerist acts.

In Christiane Rochefort’s *Les Stances à Sophie*, Céline makes the transition from her old life as a poor student to her new life as the wife of a technocrat with a fully modernized house and a maid. When we first meet her, she has an acute social conscience. For instance, she expresses her anger at the exploitation of Simca Workers "où on déchire sa carte syndicale en entrant," at the exploitation of immigrant domestic help from Spain, and at the credit industry invented "pour que les gens qu’on ne paie pas assez puissent acheter tout de même." ¹⁰⁹ Her husband Philippe mocks her moral convictions and interprets her revolt as an attack on progress. To him, she is "une réactionnaire. Elle se dit progressiste... et en réalité elle est une farouche réactionnaire. Elle crache sur le progrès. Elle voudrait filer elle-même ses robes et faire du feu en

Céline’s reply to her husband has all the ingredients of a social and environmental responsibility speech: "je ne suis pas contre le progrès, je suis contre le mauvais usage du progrès. Le progrès, enfin le vôtre, est une entreprise de viol (...) Cette planète, c’est un vrai chantier. Vous n’avez que le bonheur des gens dans la tête et vous leur faites bouffer du poison, respirer du poison, vous les faites vivre dans la laideur."  

In Perec’s Les Choses, Sylvie and Jérôme are not politically active and blame their lack of interest in current events such as the Algerian war on a certain mal du siècle:

"des générations précédentes, se disaient-ils parfois, avaient sans doute pu parvenir à une conscience plus précise à la fois d’elles-mêmes et du monde qu’elles habitaient. Ils auraient peut-être aimé avoir vingt ans pendant la guerre d’Espagne ou la Résistance. C’était une nostalgie un peu hypocrite: la guerre d’Algérie avait commencé avec eux, elle continuait sous leurs yeux. Elle ne les affectait qu’à peine."  

Soon, once the Algerian war is over, the couple loses all traces of political consciousness as they immerse themselves in consumerism:

Des milliers d’hommes, jadis, se sont battus, et même se battent encore, pour du pain. Jérôme et Sylvie ne croyaient guère que l’on peut se battre pour des divans Chesterfield. Mais c’eût été pourtant le mot d’ordre qui les aurait le plus facilement mobilisés. Rien ne les concernait, leur semblait-il, dans les programmes, dans les plans: ils se moquaient des retraites avancées, des vacances allongées, des repas de midi gratuits, des semaines de trente heures. Ils voulaient la surabondance; ils rêvaient de platines Clément, de plages désertes pour eux seuls, de tours du monde, de palaces.  

110 Rochefort, Christiane. Les Stances à Sophie. 82.  
111 Rochefort, Christiane. Les Stances à Sophie. 82-83.  
This portrayal of Sylvie and Jérôme is unique in that it contradicts the admiration and optimism of intellectuals when it came to the youth of mid and late sixties.

In Beauvoir’s *Les Belles images*, Laurence constantly accuses the moral bankruptcy underlying the promises and glamour of consumerism. She belongs to a generation that is still haunted by the collective violence exhibited during the Second World War. However, while she wants to spare her young daughter Catherine a life of ignorance and indifference, Laurence herself has no true idealism and is unsuccessful in her search for "des valeurs, des vérités qui résistent aux modes."\(^{114}\) In 1945, the young Laurence cried at night thinking of Hiroshima and concentration camps and admired one of her teachers who would constantly remind her pupils that "il faut être un homme parmi les hommes."\(^{115}\) As an adult, she bitterly looks back at her youth and observes that "à dix-huit ans j’avais des convictions."\(^{116}\) Although she never reaches an ideological synthesis that would enable her to choose a form of *engagement*, Laurence realizes that her detachment from life comes from living in a world of superficial imagery and from political ignorance. She associates both these handicaps with the media, which repeat, multiply, and mix events until reality loses its significance and consistence. Because of this transformation of history into *faits divers*

> on voit les Actualités, les photos de *Match*, on les oublie au fur et à mesure. Quand on les retrouve toutes ensembles, ça étonne un peu. Cadavres sanglants de Blancs, de Noirs, des autocars renversés dans les ravins, vingt-cinq enfants tués, d’autres coupés en deux, des incendies, des carcasses d’avions fracassés, cent dix passagers morts sur le coup, des cyclones, des inondations, des pays entiers dévastés, des villages en flammes, des émeutes raciales, des guerres locales, des

\(^{114}\) Beauvoir, Simone de. *Les Belles images*. 100.
défilés de réfugiés hagards. C’était si lugubre qu’à la fin on avait presque envie de rire. Il faut dire qu’on assiste à toutes ces catastrophes confortablement installé dans son décor familier et il n’est pas vrai que le monde y fasse intrusion: on n’aperçoit que des *images*, proprement encadrées sur le petit écran et qui n’ont pas leur poids de réalité.117

These pretty pictures that also appear in the title of the novel symbolize an attitude of absence, a flight from everyday existence. Laurence’s life among mirrors, television screens, photographs, movies, posters or kaleidoscopes points to her separation from a reality that she senses, but from which she herself is cut off because "débitée en minces rubriques, l’actualité s’avale comme une tasse de lait; aucune aspérité, rien n’accroche, rien n’écorche."118

In Le Clézio’s *Les Géants*, historical context is completely erased and there seem to be no traces of social life outside Hyperpolis. People spend their days inside the supermarket, mindlessly piling up goods in their shopping carts and listening to the strident noise of loudspeakers that order them "Obéissez! Obéissez! Marchez, achetez, mangez! Aimez-vous! Buvez Pils! Le Drink des gens raffinés! Fumez! Vivez! Mourez!"119 Under the bright lights of neons, "il y avait tellement de lumière, tellement d’énergie, partout, tellement de couleurs, de formes, de bruits, d’odeurs, que les gens n’existaient pas. Ils étaient devenus de drôles de fantômes, avec leurs visages pâles, leurs yeux pâles, leurs vêtements gris et leurs cheveux ternes."120 Human initiative and social conscience have therefore been eradicated and replaced by the mechanism of a self-sufficient world of goods that transformed individual and collective values into

117 Beauvoir, Simone de. *Les Belles images*. 147. Italics are mine.
120 Le Clézio, J.M.G. *Les Géants*. 47.
supermarket products so that consumers do not feel compelled to look for them outside the consumerist sphere: "achetez le mot LIBERTÉ, achetez le mot AMOUR, achetez le mot VÉRITÉ".  

Octave, the advertising executive in Beigbeder’s 99 francs, regards this commercialization of social and moral values as a fait accompli and he notes that "tout s’achète: l’amour, l’art, la planète Terre, vous, moi." While confessing that "le soir, en rentrant dans mon gigantesque appartement, j’avais parfois du mal à m’endormir en pensant aux sans-logis" and giving detailed descriptions of past and current crises of violence and famine, Octave never tries to alleviate the human suffering he sees around him. Also, although implying several times that it is wrong for people to enjoy wealth and consumer goods guilt free while in other parts of the world people are living and dying in poverty, Octave never gives up any of his material possessions and continues to behave in morally reprehensible ways. Until the last pages of the book when he both reaches the climax of his advertising career and is arrested for complicity to murder, he will live according to the precept he pretended to denounce vehemently: "l’hédonisme n’est pas un humanisme: c’est du cash-flow. Sa devise ? Je dépense donc je suis."  

Jean-Christophe Rufin’s Globalia has as its mottos "In Globe We Trust" and "Liberté, Sécurité, Prosperité," which are explained in the Globalian constitution in the following terms:

121 Le Clézio, J.M.G. Les Géants. 31.
122 The most compelling argument regarding the moral responsibility of affluent people to lessen the suffering of the global poor is found in Unger, Peter. Living High and Letting Die: Our Illusion of Innocence. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
Globalia, où nous avons la chance de vivre, est une démocratie idéale. Chacun y est libre de ses actes. Or, la tendance naturelle des êtres humains est d’abuser de leur liberté, c’est-à-dire d’empiéter sur celle des autres. LA PLUS GRANDE MENACE SUR LA LIBERTÉ, C’EST LA LIBERTÉ ELLE-MÊME. Comment défendre la liberté contre elle-même ? En garantissant à tous la sécurité. La sécurité, c’est la liberté. La sécurité, c’est la protection. La protection, c’est la surveillance. LA SURVEILLANCE, C’EST LA LIBERTÉ.  

The creation of Globalia was a means of eliminating three phenomena that were interfering with the ‘invisible hand’ of the market: nations, identity, and religion. In fact, the birth act of Globalia is the Acte d’abolition de la nationalité and this document was followed by a constant fight against "les identités, l’idée d’action collective, l’engagement." Religion was abolished and religious calendars and celebrations were replaced by festivals built around the consumption of specific products. Also, the "right to History" was declared anti-democratic and was replaced by a "right to Tradition" where each person was assigned an identity according to a specific group of "standardized cultural references." Because nationality, identity and religion are extinct and cannot provide the basis for social bonds anymore, the "social cement" designed to hold Globalia together has a tripartite structure: fear of terrorism, fear of ecological catastrophes, and fear of poverty. Understandably, these three menaces do not have a strong impact on Globalians since Glabalia’s borders are highly secured, its climate is controlled with the use of "weather canons," and poverty is non-existent.

One particular feature of the six novels discussed here is that consumerist acts are embossed on the violent background of historical reality: war, famine, exile, torture. Because of these juxtapositions, consumerism appears as a series of acts of escapism to

125 Rufin, Jean-Christophe. Globalia. 334.
an artificial world of harmony and peace where the spectral images of historical reality are censured and the world of goods is endowed with authenticity. In *Les Stances à Sophie*, Céline denounces the possibility of happiness in a world of violence when she states: "C’est la grande mode. Ils furent tous heureux et eurent beaucoup d’enfants heureux. Avec la bombe atomique sur la tête. En attendant que ça tombe."  

In *Les Choses*, Pèrec maps the first shopping expeditions of Sylvie and Jérôme against the violent events of the Algerian war. In *Les Géants*, the disturbing mix of publicity messages with war news produces an effect of strangeness to the point that it is phonetically transcribed as if it were an incomprehensible language: "Ojurdwi grâd bes ó syupermarket iperlólis prôfitezâ prôfitezâ natâdepa La butey familyal doe pepskôla loe boer doe nuvelzelâ le makaroni Le frez doe Kaliforni le bwat danana trâč brizé directoemâ dlakôtdiâwar Sôldôts améríkns, süd-viètnamz, mercenôrz, montôgnards et khmôrs sont engagés depuis hiôr môtns ddes combats."  

In Rufin’s *99 francs* shifts back and forth between images of consumerism and images of social responsibility: "Coca-Cola vend un million de cannettes par heure dans le monde. Il y a vingt millions de sans-emploi en Europe. Barbie vend deux poupées par seconde sur terre. 2,8 milliards d’habitants de la planète vivent avec moins de deux dollars par jour. 70% des habitants de la planète n’ont pas de téléphone et 50% pas d’électricité. Le budget mondial des dépenses militaires dépasse 4.000 milliards de dollars, soit deux fois le montant de la dette extérieure des pays en voie de développement."  

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128 Beigbeder, Frédéric. *99 francs*. 275-76.
Globalia, news concerning the poverty and violence of the non-zones are interspersed with commercials for shampoo or for the latest plastic surgeries. This technique of mixing soothing consumerist images with violent images of past or present humanity is meant to suggest that consumer society sends out contradictory messages about ethics.

The insight into the ‘good consumers, bad citizens’ recurrent theme shows how French narratives have mirrored the preoccupation with the ‘passage du bien au bien-être’ (‘from doing good to feeling good’). It also indicates that French intellectual circles at large adhered to Gilles Lipovetsky’s classical observation in *Le Crépuscule du devoir* that

La civilisation du bien-être consommatif a été le grand fossoyeur historique de l'idéologie glorieuse du devoir. Au cours de la seconde moitié du siècle, la logique de la consommation de masse a dissous l'univers des homélies moralisatrices, elle a éradiqué les impératifs rigoristes et engendré une culture où le bonheur l'emporte sur le commandement moral, les plaisirs sur l'interdit, la séduction sur l'obligation... les jouissances du présent, le temple du moi, du corps et du confort sont devenus la nouvelle Jérusalem des temps post-moralistes.¹²⁹

And when it came to identifying the primary source of these profound changes, French intellectuals and politicians alike pointed to the United States.

4.2.5. Americanization

With the supermarket as our temple and the singing commercial as our litany, are we likely to fire the world with an irresistible vision of America's exalted purpose and inspiring way of life?

Adlai Stevenson

The reason why all of us naturally began to live in France is because France has scientific methods, machines and electricity, but does not really believe that these things have anything to do with the real business of living. Life is tradition and human nature.

Gertrude Stein, Paris France

After the end of the First World War, European intellectuals traveled to America in great numbers and were fascinated by the society they discovered across the Atlantic. One American professor observed in the early 1930s that "France, in particular, discovered us at the time of the war, and now not a month passes but some French author tells his compatriots about his individual discovery of America. Nowadays Americans visit France in such numbers that they limit themselves to a magazine article upon their return. The French who investigate us are still at the point of writing a whole book."\(^{130}\)

This American observer was right. Between 1929 and 1931, for instance, a myriad of studies on the U.S. were published in France, the most notable being Lucien Lehman's *Le Grand mirage, U.S.A.* (1929), Régis Michaud's *Ce qu'il faut connaître de l'âme américaine* (1929), Fortunat Strowski's *La Bruyère en Amérique: Les Caractères ou les

mœurs de ce siècle (1929), Paul Achard's *Un Oeil neuf sur l'Amérique* (1930), René Puaux’s *Découverte des Américains* (1930), Georges Duhamel’s *Scènes de la vie future* (1930), Paul Morand's *New York* (1930), Kadmi-Cohen’s *L'Abomination américaine* (1930), Marcel Braunschvig's *La Vie américaine et ses leçons* (1931), Claude Blanchard’s *Voilà l'Amérique* (1931), Jean Joseph-Renaud's *New York flamboie* (1931), Charles Pomaret’s *L'Amérique à la conquête de l'Europe* (1931), and Philippe de Rothschild’s *Instantanés d'Amérique* (1931). Also, the anti-capitalist American episode in Céline’s *Voyage au bout de la nuit* was instrumental in popularizing negative views of consumerism and taylorism.

The most widely read of these books was Georges Duhamel’s *Scènes de la vie future* (1930), a diatribe against the United States translated into English as *America the Menace*. According to Duhamel, the American society was a ghastly prediction of what the France society was in danger of becoming: a materialist, mediocre environment where industry and commerce "impose needs and appetites... to keep selling on credit" and where people lived in order to acquire "phonographs, radios, illustrated magazines, 

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movies, elevators, frigidaires, and automobiles. Duhamel warned his readers that, if American materialism were to spread to France, it could "eclipse" French civilization with its ceaseless selling and commodity accumulation.

After the end of the Second World War, the United States emerged as the indisputable economic and political hegemon with its aura of modernity, power, and prosperity. Its cultural influence on France was accelerating as the French enthusiastically bought American products, watched American movies, listened to blues and jazz, and adopted franglais syntagms. Beyond this literal impact, Americanization also stood for a vision of modernity that encompassed "a model of capitalist growth, a cultural configuration, and an ensemble of political and social values" that were all based on "advanced technology, promising formal equality, and unlimited mass consumption."

In Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization, Richard Kuisel shows that Georges Duhamel’s interpretation of America became even more popular after 1945 when the United States was seen as both a model and a menace: a model, because the French wanted to emulate American prosperity and economic power, and a menace, because the French were not willing to pay the social and cultural costs that accompanied modernization.

Postwar America was a model France could not ignore. The future was across the Atlantic. America was a challenge… The question [the French] asked themselves was how to attain American prosperity and power, yet keep what they believed was French. In particular, how could the French accept American economic aid and guidance; borrow American technology and economic practice; buy American products; imitate American social policy; even dress, speak, and

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(perhaps worst of all) eat like Americans and yet not lose their Frenchness? Would the pursuit of American consumerism come at the expense of French national identity? 135

The answer that gradually emerges form the six novels analyzed in this chapter is yes. As we advance in time, representations of Frenchness are gradually erased to the profit of American consumerist images. In Les Stances à Sophie, Céline tries to become a modern housewife by adopting American-inspired patterns of consumption popularized by magazines such as France-Femme. These magazines capitalized on the frustrations and unmet desires of young married couples who had a war-deprived adolescence and presented images of the perfect household with its two mandatory dimensions: impeccable hygiene and domestic appliances, the new amis de la femme. 136 In Les Choses, Sylvie and Jérôme are fascinated by all things American (clothes, furniture, cinema) and dream of building an apartment and a wardrobe for themselves based on what they see in American movies. In Les Belles images French homes are invaded by American high-tech products and cars. Jean-Charles, the young technocrat, has adopted the American "rationalization" discourse and structures both his life and his architectural projects according to it, disregarding historical and social considerations. Starting with Les Géants the potentially destabilizing aspects of Americanization take center stage. Although we know that shoppers in Hyperpolis are French, the Masters address them with American slogans and brand names, and all French artisan products are excluded from shelves and replaced with mass-produced goods with no identity connotations. In 99

francs, the advertising firm Rosserys & Witchcraft shoots French-themed commercials in Miami, Florida, and there are constant references to American corporations and mutual fund owners who exploit the world for profit. Finally, in *Globalia*, America is the power center of the Globalian federation: all major political institutions are headquartered in Washington, cultural references and languages have been standardized with the help of the anglobal, and American-style consumerism is the only custom that has survived from the pre-Global era.

4.2.6 Books and reading

Je rêve d’un monde où l’on mourrait pour une virgule.

Emil Cioran, *Syllogismes de l’amertume*, 1952

La lecture se meurt de la confusion entre lire et consommer.


In 1951, a missing sculpture of Victor Hugo in a Parisian square was temporarily replaced by a new Ford model. This event incited Louis Aragon to write a vehement reaction article for *Les Lettres françaises* where he expressed his outrage in the following terms:

A Ford automobile, the civilization of Detroit, the assembly line... here is the symbol of this subjugation to the dollar applauded even in the land of Molière; here is the white lacquered god of foreign industry, the Atlantic totem that chases away French glories with Marshall Plan stocks... The Yankee, more arrogant than the Nazi iconoclast, substitutes the machine for the poet, Coca-Cola for poetry,
American advertising for *La Légende des siècles*, the mass-manufactured car for the genius, the Ford for Victor Hugo.\textsuperscript{137}

Aragon’s diatribe against the Ford automobile mirrors the reaction of French intellectuals to the perceived debasement of literature by consumerism. With the instauration of an instant gratification frame of mind, the creation and spread of large format retailers, and the commercialization of books inside these stores, there is a general feeling that literature is being desecrated: intrinsically, because the intellectual value of books is negatively affected, and extrinsically, because books are sold by large format retailers among other products that all have one characteristic in common: cheapness. Even more disturbing, not only are books mixed with other cheap things, but romance novels, self-help guides, detective stories, cooking books, and cheap paperback versions of literary classics are all mixed on the same shelves, which – according to intellectuals – blurs the distinction between proper literature written and bought on aesthetic considerations and commercial literature written and sold on fast turnover criteria.

Two additional convictions underlie this thinking. The first conviction is that there should be separate techniques of selling and displaying mass-produced goods and books. One thing that shocked French intellectuals was that in supermarkets books were displayed not with their spine outward, as in bookstores, but with their cover outward like cereal boxes or any other rectangular good in the store. The second conviction is that supermarkets degrade culture because, simply put, they are places where people

mindlessly read standardized product labels. Therefore, a haven for such degraded literacy could never constitute a place for serious reading.\textsuperscript{138}

And yet, as Rachel Bowlby has shown, there exists an intimate relationship between large format retailers and bookstores as well as between book covers and modern packaging.

In the history of shop design, it is bookshops, strangely enough, that were the precursors of supermarkets. They, alone of all types of shop, made use of shelves that were not behind counters, with the goods arranged for casual browsing and for what was not yet called self-service. Also, when brand-name goods and their accompanying packages were non-existent or rare in the sale of food, books had covers that were designed at once to protect the content and to entice the purchaser; they were proprietary products with identifiable authors and new titles – not just any novel, but the latest by such-and-such writer.\textsuperscript{139}

These historical affinities between bookstores and self-service retailers are occulted in a post-1945 discourse that has been constructing large format retailers as the antithesis of culture, a discourse whose refrain deplores the fact that "where there was a field, academic or agricultural, now there is a supermarket."\textsuperscript{140} This discourse permeates the six novels analyzed in this chapter, which all represent characters in relation to books and writing. As it was the case with the other five themes of the chronotope of dystopic

\textsuperscript{138} The view of label reading as a degraded form of literacy is ironic since the first type of information to be preserved by writing was commercial information. In the ancient Middle East, around six thousand years ago, Sumerians invented the world’s first graphic symbols as part of their book-keeping techniques necessary for administering raw materials, market goods, workers, tributes, inventories, and incomes and expenditures. The birth of writing as a codified system of conventional marks relating immediately to articulate speech is therefore intimately linked to commerce according to Fischer, Steven Roger. \textit{A History of Writing}. London: Reaktion Books, 2001. 22.

\textsuperscript{139} Bowlby, Rachel. \textit{Carried Away. The Invention of Modern Shopping}. 193. There exists a third intimate relationship: the one between readers and shoppers. Literature and shopping are both linked to daydreaming and are nourished by a dynamic interplay between illusion and reality. It ensues that both readers and shoppers are artists of imagination. Their reading and purchasing acts imply turning away from an uninspiring reality and turning to imaginative scenarios, hence the unbridgeable gap between illusion and reality that introduces longing as the predominant state of mind.

\textsuperscript{140} Bowlby, Rachel. \textit{Carried Away. The Invention of Modern Shopping}. 188.
consumption, literary representations become increasingly dystopic as we advance chronologically. In the beginning, characters love to surround themselves with books and see reading and writing as vital parts of human existence and antidotes to consumerism. However, later on, they seem not to know how to approach, select, or critically evaluate books, and end up either aborting reading and writing or avoiding them altogether.

In Christiane Rochefort’s Les Stances à Sophie, Céline unexpectedly finds herself in front of a bookstore and realizes that, while being absorbed with acquiring goods suited for the wife of a well-off technocrat, she has forgotten about the one thing that made her happy as a student: books. She exclaims: "Une librairie. Pleine de livres. Il y a combien de siècles que je n’ai mis les pieds dans une librairie? Ah, il fut un temps où je les piquais les livres, par besoin, par frénétique besoin; par amour; et depuis que je peux les payer je ne vais plus dans les librairies! Mais quelle monstruosité! Quelle répugnante ingratitude!" 141 Céline walks into the bookstore and returns home with piles and piles of books, which irritates her husband Philippe and, in turn, inspires her to write a description of the « célino-philippien » marriage. As a result, after spending several days reading, Céline immerses herself in the creation of a Dictionnaire sémantique néobourgeois d’intérêt public, taking as a model Stendhal’s Dictionnaire des idées reçues. As her project matures, Céline dissociates herself from her husband and regains her lost independence when she moves back to the apartment she rented as a student.

In Les Choses, when Perec describes Sylvie and Jérôme’s dream apartment, two bookshelves are among the first objects that we see in the living room: "un gros divan de

141 Rochefort, Christiane. Les Stances à Sophie. 197.
cuir noir fatigué serait flanqué de deux bibliothèques en merisier pâle où des livres s’entasseraient pêle-mêle." There is another "bibliothèque pivotante" at the end of the living room and, in the bedroom, "deux étagères étroites et hautes contiendraient quelques livres inlassablement repris." Also, in the office, "les murs, de haut en bas, seraient tapissés de livres et de revues… plus à gauche encore, le long du mur, une table étroite déborderait de livres." The young couple feels that "une vie entière pourrait harmonieusement s’écouler entre ces murs couverts de livres." The representation of books in this novel starts to be problematic because, while Sylvie and Jérôme are fond of reading, they also want books to contribute to the perfect harmony of their apartment. In this sense, books become decoration items whose main purpose is to blend seamlessly with the unique furnishings in their apartment. In addition, contrary to the impression given by Perec’s initial description, the couple is more interested in the pages of *L’Express* than in cultural readings and has in fact abandoned university studies, the world of books, so that they can take part in the consumer society sooner.

In Beauvoir’s *Les Belles images* Laurence turns to books when she decides that she wants to gain a deeper understanding of the violence and unhappiness in the world. Coming from someone who is engaged in the production of ‘beautiful pictures’ for advertising purposes, this decision of turning to reading constitutes a preliminary gesture of freedom and engagement. However, Laurence gives up her project before she even opens a book. She recalls that "je me suis plantée devant la vitrine d’une grande librairie. *Masse et puissance, Bandoung, Pathologie de l’entreprise, Psychanalyse de la femme,* 142 Perec, Georges. "Les Choses." *Georges Perec: Romans et récits.* 51-55.
In *Les Géants*, Le Clézio creates a universe where books have been irretrievably commercialized: "les livres sont des grands catalogues, et les pensées sont des cendriers-réclames sur les tables des café-snack bars." Moreover, because of the proliferation of goods, referents have eroded signs and have become self-sufficient in the communication process: "il y a plus de matière, ici et là, partout, que de mots dans la langue. Alors qui ose parler de la conscience? Qui ose encore dire: « Je… », « Moi je… », « Je pense que, je dis, j’écris… »?" Since there are no literature books in Hyperpolis, Machines reads ‘poems’ from discarded customer’s receipts.

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143 Beauvoir, Simone de. *Les Belles images*. 73.
145 Le Clézio, J.M.G. *Les Géants*. 64.
146 Le Clézio, J.M.G. *Les Géants*. 142.
Also, Tranquilité – who spends her days surrounded by the publicity on loud-speakers – attempts to find her own voice by composing poems or riddles and sending them to her friends in sealed envelopes. However, she soon realizes that she has no language of her own to use: all the words she knows have been shaped and perverted by the invisible Masters of Hyperpolis.

Les mots du langage des Maîtres veulent percer, transpercer. Ils font des efforts avec leurs ondes aigues. Ils appuient de tout leur poids, ils tendent leur énergie. Ils veulent user, vider, posséder. Ils veulent entrer dans les boîtes des crânes et parler à la place du langage des hommes. Ils veulent habiter chaque mot du langage des hommes, et le rendre pervers. On voit un mot, n’importe quel mot, sur la page d’un livre, et il s’ouvre et on lit ceci:

\[
\text{CALpuissanceME}.^{147}
\]

In order to write something original, Tranquilité would need to use a language that has been purified of the Masters’ intentions. While she does indeed start to gain critical distance towards advertising discourses, her texts remain simple graphical negations of the fragmented words of the Masters.

\[
\text{Gérer les vendeurs. Contrôle par les résultats.}
\]
\[
\text{Publicité offensive et défensive dans le marketing mix.}
\]
\[
\text{Merchandisers-Promoteurs.}
\]
\[
\text{Chiffrer les stratégies}
\]
\[
\text{Test de marché Positionnement}^{148}
\]

In Beigbeder’s *99 francs*, material success and cultural ignorance go hand in hand. Alfred Dulet - the marketing director of Madone International Group - "ne lit qu’un livre par an, et en plus c’est d’Alain Duhamel." We also learn that Octave has in his apartment "une bibliothèque de Jean Prouvé contenant l’intégrale de la Pléiade (jamais

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The Pléiade collection - the ‘Rolls Royce of book publishing’ - is displayed as both an indicator of his superior buying power and a symbol of added product value created through marketing. Although Octave is aware that even the literary realm is now commercialized, he is writing a book in which he denounces the manipulation of consumption, therefore hoping to be fired from his job. However, at the end of the book, we find him in prison for complicity to murder and his literature descends into delirium.

In Rufin’s *Globalia*, one of the oldest laws of the federation has forbidden the use of any natural products by industry, so information is read on electronic screens and paper is not produced anymore except as a scarce luxury article. Since nothing is forbidden in Globalia, books still exist in electronic versions or at the headquarters of reading clubs such as the one in Seattle where Kate and Puig are given historical documents to be transported to the non-zones. Paul H. Wise, the founding president of the club, tells them that he has named his association Walden "pour que nos adhérents comprennent bien ceci: sous les apparences du rêve, ce qu’ils trouvent ici, c’est la réalité… c’est exactement le contraire de ce qu’ils peuvent voir sur les écrans." The ‘screens’ refer to an ingenious tactic used by the Globalian government to render books inoffensive: electronic proliferation. As Wise explains,

> Chaque fois que les livres sont rares, ils résistent bien. À l’extrême, si vous les interdisez, ils deviennent infiniment précieux. Interdire les livres, c’est les rendre désirables. Toutes les dictatures ont connu cette expérience. En Globalia, on a fait le contraire: on a multiplié les livres à l’infini. On les a noyés dans leur graisse jusqu’à leur ôter toute valeur, jusqu’à ce qu’ils deviennent insignifiants… Surtout

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150 Beigbeder, Frédérique. *99 francs*. 109. Jean Prouvé was a famous French designer educated at the Ecole de Nancy in the spirit of linking art and social consciousness. Member of the Resistance and creator of aluminium sheds for Africa, he designed some of the most sought after mid-century furnishings.

However, some old books and documents still remain that attest to the existence of a rich past that was carefully erased or reconstructed by the propaganda bureau of the Department of Social Protection. As such, they can potentially become powerful emancipation tools for the excluded. Déchus since "quand on étudie l’histoire, on découvre une vérité toute simple, c’est que le monde n’a pas toujours été tel qu’il nous apparaît… donc il est susceptible de changer encore radicalement." At the end of the novel, Puig and Kate’s attempt to transport subversive historical documents to the non-zones fails and books will enter a regime of even closer supervision by the Globalian government. The failure of the cultural realm in Globalia confirms Jürgen Habermas’ insight into the capitalist attempt to colonize everyday life and to organize it around acts of product accumulation. In Legitimation Crisis, Habermas has argued that the major contradictions threatening the late capitalist system are no longer found in the organization of work, but in the organization of culture: in Marxist terms, they have shifted from the base to the superstructure. The survival of capitalism is therefore menaced by questions of values and motivations: while the material benefits of labor compensate for work exploitation, the unfulfilling psychic consequences of work and, especially, consumption no longer supply the basis for adherence to the system. The need for a re-enchantment of work, consumption, and – overall – history is precisely what motivates Baïkal’s, Kate’s, and Puig’s escape to the non-zones. However, Globalia has

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152 Rufin, Jean-Christophe. Globalia. 275.
153 Rufin, Jean-Christophe. Globalia. 277.
perfected its surveillance system to the point that every act of rebellion is not only discovered, but also used by the system to its own ends. In the last pages of Rufin’s novel we find out that security forces knew all along about Paul H Wise’s plan of leaking documents to the non-zones and used his delayed denunciation to justify the imposition of harsher rules on the use of historical texts.

Despite their powerlessness in these novels, books still fascinate characters by their quality of repositories of history and realms of evasion. All six authors conceive reading as an important way for humans to relate to the world and to one another. And yet, there is a feeling that something has changed in the way we now relate to books. To measure this change, let us first consider an intellectual’s account of his relationship to books. Walter Benjamin, the most important earliest contributor to the debate about modern consumerism, has described the world of commodities as a "fetishized phantasmagoria" that both dazzles and deceives its spectators. However, despite his critique of consumption as staged spectacle in his uncompleted Passagen-Werk (The Arcades Project), Benjamin provided one separate sympathetic account of shopping. He was, of course, referring to a particular kind of shopping: shopping for books. In a short piece from his Illuminations entitled "Unpacking My Library. A Talk about Book Collecting," he fondly recounts the exhilaration of seizing an opportunity or coming across a rare find.

O bliss of the collector, bliss of the man of leisure! Of no one has less been expected, and no one has had a greater sense of well-being than the man who has been able to carry on his disreputable existence in the mask of Spitzweg’s

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‘Bookworm’. For inside him there are spirits, or at least little genii, which have seen to it that for a collector – and I mean a real collector, a collector as he ought to be – ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects. Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them. 156

Although his feeling of excitement is no different than that of any other shopper, Benjamin elevates book shopping to a highly respectable, intellectual, elite activity because a book collector is not interested in the functional, utilitarian value of books – "that is, their usefulness"157 – and his expert purchase has "very little in common with that done in a bookshop by a student getting a textbook, a man of the world buying a present for his lady, or a businessman intending to while away his next train journey."158

With the help of "money, expertise, and flair," the book collector’s most fulfilling moment arises when "he rescued a book to which he might have never given a thought, much less a wishful look, because he found it lonely and abandoned on the market place and bought it to give it its freedom – the way the prince bought a beautiful slave girl in The Arabian Nights. To a book collector, you see, the true freedom of all books is somewhere on his shelves."159

From this sensual and elitist description of the relationship of intellectuals to books, we now move to contemporary accounts. Cultural selves, we are told, form and evolve in the "global cultural supermarket," a transnational network of ideas, images, and practices circulated by modern communication technologies such as the Internet, movies,
television, and other media.\textsuperscript{160} Caught in this supermarket kaleidoscope of images and information, books are multiplied and trivialized to the point that they only offer readers a world of false choice and mediocrity. This debasement is considered particularly visible in the field of journalism, literature, and book distribution. Three favorite examples offered by cultural \textit{déclinistes} are Reader’s Digest, Michel Houellebecq, and book dispensers. The creation of the French edition of Reader’s Digest in 1947 was greeted by Edgar Morin as the creation of the first "abêtisseur de poche."\textsuperscript{161} If Baudelaire was the first French author to enter the famous Pléiades collection, Michel Houellebecq was the first to acquire the title of "Baudelaire des supermarchés"\textsuperscript{162} and flaunt his book honoraries when he declared "je pense que j’ai gagné six ou sept millions de francs avec \textit{Plateforme}. Comme avec \textit{Particules}. Ça grossit mon compte à Allied Irish Bank. C’est agréable, j’ai plus besoin de me faire cher dans la vie… je suis libre, vraiment libre."\textsuperscript{163}

In August 2005 Maxi-Livres installed five automatic book dispensers in Paris that offered passers-by twenty-five titles including literary masterpieces (Baudelaire, Homère, Oscar Wilde, Lewis Carroll, Alphonse Daudet), cook books (\textit{Les 100 bons couscous} and \textit{Le Livre du wok}), dictionaries (\textit{Dictionnaire français-anglais}, \textit{Dictionnaire de conjugaison} and \textit{Dictionnaire de dictons}), all sold for two euros a piece. Knowing that French bibliophiles "would be horrified to see their books falling into a trough like candy or soda," the CEO of Maxi-Livres Xavier Chambon congratulates himself on the idea of

\textsuperscript{162} Anderson, Perry. \textit{La Pensée tiède. Un regard critique sur la culture française}. 27.
\textsuperscript{163} \textit{Libération}, 9 novembre 2001.
installing a "mechanical arm that grabs the book and delivers it safely." While some customers were shocked to see books in a space traditionally assigned to sweets, soft drinks, or condoms, Jean-Marie Pilias – a small shop owner at Porte de Clignancourt who placed an automatic book dispenser next to his entrance door – has nicely summarized the implicit dilemma of book commercialization: "it may not be very romantic, but my turnover is up 6%.

In all these examples, books and reading are presented as the last (failing) bastion of culture against consumerism. But how do these perceptions fare when we measure them up against actual statistics gathered by the French government? The importance assigned to the material presence of books in French homes is confirmed as "il devient de plus en plus exceptionnel qu’on vive dans un foyer où le livre est totalement absent: 9% des Français ne possèdent aucun livre dans leur foyer, contre 13% en 1989 et 27% en 1973." Also, "un quart des Français disposent d’une bibliothèque personnelle comportant au moins 200 ouvrages." The study reveals a certain "effritement du noyau des forts lecteurs,

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166 Donnat, Olivier. Les pratiques culturelles des Français, enquête 1997. Paris: Ministère de la culture et de la communication, 1997. 183. There are significant differences among social classes: the cadres and those with higher education degrees own on average three times more books than less educated people working in agriculture or industry. Also, Parisians surpass all French regions in their attachment to culture: the average of books per household in Paris is 376.
notamment chez les hommes," which points to a "feminisation du lectorat." Even more surprising for a country whose literature has traditionally presented men as intellectuals and women as mindless consumers, the study reveals that it is women who constitute the predominant literary public.

C’est surtout sur la fiction que l’écart est spectaculaire: les femmes sont près de trois fois plus nombreuses que les hommes à lire des romans autres que policiers (36% contre 14%). Elles sont même désormais plus nombreuses à préférer les romans policiers (10% contre 9%), genre jusqu’alors résolument masculin. Les hommes, quand ils sont lecteurs, préfèrent les livres d’histoire, les bandes dessinées et les livres scientifiques et techniques.

Summarizing their findings, the authors of the study optimistically conclude that, overall, the French are "plus que jamais en contact avec des livres: très peu d’entre eux, désormais, vivent dans un foyer sans livre, 63% en ont acheté au moins un au cours des douze derniers mois et 21% sont inscrits dans une bibliothèque ou une médiathèque, ce qui manque une progression sensible par rapport à 1989 où ils n’étaient que 17%.”

It can also be argued that book sales in large format retailers such as supermarkets and hypermarkets did not provide a competing alternative to bookstores, but a much needed addition of readers who lacked either the time or the inclination to visit

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168 Donnat, Olivier. *Les pratiques culturelles des Français, enquête 1997*. 173. Donnat gives a tentative explanation of this feminization of the reading public and cites four important factors. First, scolarisation is higher among females and a larger percentage of women in higher education choose a literary specialization as opposed to men. Second, the phenomenon was amplified by the "feminization des médiateurs du livre" as the percentage of women-teachers or women-librarians has been constantly on the rise. Third, men - who are more technology-oriented - tend to use their spare time for exploring other media such as the Internet. And fourth, in the last two decades, reading has become predominantly utilitarian as the French increasingly privilege books that are related to their professional careers. In Donnat’s view, this last development would explain the decrease in fiction reading since 1989, with the notable exception of detective novels.
169 Donnat, Olivier. *Les pratiques culturelles des Français, enquête 1997*. 170. What makes this study both reliable and valuable, is its timeframe. Surveys were successively conducted in 1973, 1981, 1989, and 1997, which gives a useful diachronic dimension to the investigation of culture consumption.
bookstores. The Leclerc chain in particular is credited with bringing books to the *banlieues* by implementing *Espaces culture* in its supermarkets. In its campaign "La Culture est partout à sa place," an ad shows an iconic image of Baudelaire projected on the bus shelter of a French suburb in order to communicate Michel-Edouard Leclerc’s conviction that – with the commercialization and easy access to books in the *grandes surfaces* – there should be no areas of ‘French cultural desert’ left in the near future. While it still remains to be seen if this *pari de l’hypermarché* will deliver on its promises, the sales figures for books, CDs, and DVDs in hypermarkets have greatly surpassed those of FNAC and other French bookstores beginning in 2003.¹⁷⁰

While the twentieth century saw clashes of ideologies, two bloody world wars, close to five decades of cold war, and the contested emergence of the United States as the global hegemon, the primacy of political life and active citizenship at the end of the century was in sharp retreat. One observer noted the "irony of the century" to be that the real winner had "no formal philosophy, no parties, and no obvious leaders." The –ism that won the twentieth century when it came to defining public life was consumerism.¹

When trying to explain the strength of the consumer-based social system, Zygmunt Bauman insightfully wrote that "its remarkable capacity to command support or at least to incapacitate dissent is solidly grounded in its success in denigrating, marginalizing or rendering invisible all alternatives to itself… it is this success which makes the consumer incarnation of freedom so powerful and effective – and so invulnerable."² Throughout this study I have argued that this oppressive side of consumerism is coupled with a seductive side that, although practically non-represented

in literature, is more socially significant than its repressive counterpart. As shown in chapter 3, supermarket and hypermarket designers have paid close attention to discourses that criticize consumerism and the domination of alienating *non-lieux*. These critical discourses were then *récupérés*, recycled, with the result that, for instance, large format retailers that were accused of being impersonal anti-French developments are now gradually receiving *lieux de mémoire* connotations due to recent retromarketing innovations such as upscale traditional counters or the commercialization of artisan products.

This study also showed that the oppressive side of consumerism became a *sujet de prédilection* in the post-1945 French literature and investigated how small shops and modern shopping sites have become "hyper-narrated spaces"\(^3\) that provided both texts and contexts for national commemoration as well as symbols for the construction and negotiation of Frenchness. I interpreted the recurrence of the chronotope of dystopic consumption as a coping mechanism that helped French intellectuals rationalize the ongoing economic, social, and cultural changes brought about by consumerism.

My analysis also revealed how, in a surprising twist, instead of weakening consumerist practices and discrediting marketing discourses, these literary representations have in fact contributed to their consolidation. Not only did literature confirm the domination and fascination exerted by consumer society on individuals, but it also pointed to the shortcomings of consumerism. As a result, it provided the incentives for consumerist discourses and marketing practices to continuously reform themselves by

subordinating, incorporating, and recycling criticisms. More than anything else, this acquired capacity of reconciling seduction and repression - that was seen at work in the model of cultural wheel of retailing - is likely to allow an indefinite perpetuation of consumer society.
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