

Foreword

by *Massimiliano Valerii** and *Francesco Maietta***

There are beliefs that are timeless. They endure, despite being rejected by the social behaviours of millions of people, especially when they take the form of moralistic epithets. The demonization of consumption is one such belief, often relegated to a pathological practice where material objects reign over man through perverse commodification.

However, the economic crisis of 2008 brought changes to the age of compulsive consumerism. Today, the relentless drive for ever-greater growth according to the logic that “more is always better,” allows us to look at the profound relationship we have with consumption with a fresh perspective, and discover its true social and collective meaning.

This book by Francesco Morace offers a powerful contribution to such a pertinent theme, primarily because it chooses an approach – that of the generational nuclei – that places us in a privileged position to analyse and interpret the processes. The fact that, today, different generations are no longer in open conflict, allows us to retrace the essential components of our social behaviours.

The classification of generational nuclei is not a marketing gimmick, but a vital interpretative tool that allows us to focus on the dynamics destined to shape the future. It is a courageous piece of social research that allows us to find a tangible reference point in a reality that has become fluid, elusive and non-compliant to pre-established patterns. The methodological choice also allows us to follow the flow of phenomenology with-

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out being trampled upon, to form interpretations standing on the crest of the waves; for this reading the text proves the best option.

The generational and phenomenological approach are essential to interpret a context in which the power of subjectivity rules. This push towards individual freedom has choice as its primary form of expression. From food and clothing to holidays, what Morace calls “personal and family networks [...] the creative diversity of each and everyone” dominates.

In this way, consumption is freed from its negative pathological connotations of compulsion and excess with overflowing pantries and wardrobes. Instead, it becomes re-defined as a vehicle of wellbeing, values and relations; sobriety marks the new paradigm of choices and consumption patterns geared towards discernment, selection and sustainability.

The rhetoric of impersonal consumerism, that undermines values and controls minds, gives way to consumption as an expression of individuality in the broadest sense, of values and expectations, of people in relation to others and the context in which they live. By fighting against clichés and false prophecies, Morace helps us to understand that consumption in the era of neo-sobriety can be a ‘good growth’ and the only alternative to degrowth.

The strength of mature subjectivity generates new opportunities and is also likely to define the sense of place, with smart and individual use of contexts. Morace cleverly demonstrates the fate of these so-called non-places that for too long have been seen as depersonalizing contexts, devoted to turning individuals into clones of compulsive consumers. Instead they are increasingly the scenes of a multiple uses by different generations that fill them with their original, subjective meaning: relationships between adolescents, the location of family leisure time, or the everyday life of many elderly individuals. Indeed, the idea of shopping malls that some naively imagine as sterile places, emptied of humanity and only spaces for consumption junkies, is disproved.

On the other hand, people’s attention to the distinctiveness of local products and places increases. For food, this reaches its highest point with the demand for traceability. However, it is a constitutive component in purchasing and consumption choices in all sectors. We want to learn the history of what we consume: the real origin, the stories of the communities involved, the environmental and social trace left in its path. If such information is not provided we search for it with dogged stubbornness. We no longer want to be anonymous consumers of ever cheaper, homogenised

and interchangeable products without history, but mature and aware individuals able to bend consumption to our constellation of values, tastes and preferences.

Although not yet the materialization of ‘power to the people’, this is proof that some of the structural factors of Italian development are far from obsolete. It can start from the idea that change can only come from the grassroots, an intentional expression of millions of people who explain their own subjectivity and transform actions in the direction of improving their condition.

If this unleashing of these forces that generated the great saga of Italian development; that extraordinary journey to wealth and prosperity that marked Italy’s post war history until the recent economic crisis. Today we need to take advantage of the new signs of potential growth, a growth that is able to make people happy by empowering them to change their lives for the better.

The reading of the phenomena and the unveiling of commonplaces perhaps paves the way for the book’s most valuable contribution: the strength of individuals, and their ability to penetrate objects and contexts, and so indelibly marking the course of growth completed in relational value. It is in relationships with others that we express our individual identity, the true alternative to traditional hierarchical communities, open to those who escape from traditional bonds, and that stand as the “great protagonists of a large number of hopefully satisfactory relations [...where] personal happiness is also a direct consequence of the nature and quality of these relations.”

Here we see the true value of Francesco Morace’s analysis: the strength of subjectivity has historically changed the lives of Italians and has established itself in every sphere as the enzyme of growth and change, followed by pathological twists – from consumption to the deregulation of individual behaviours –, but able to take note of degeneration and limits, transforming the latter into a new strength, taking on behaviours based on values and practices of social and environmental sustainability. This mature and conscious subjectivity perceived in a relational nature at every level, is an unavoidable mechanism of self-realization. Thus, the multiplication of platforms and networks of relationships becomes the most formidable tool for growth and a higher quality of individual and community life.

In this guise, the Internet is not a tool that crystallizes distance between isolated monads, but a vehicle for a new sociality, that brings together,

combines, generates, exchanges and creates new combinations, and, as a result, stimulates and promotes change.

Perhaps the secret to a new happy growth is here: following the era of the erosion of social and cultural ties operating as boulders of containment for individual freedom, we are now in an era of relationships between people and communities, which facilitates and completes individual freedom, becoming a multiplier of the strength of the individual.

From this perspective, the book is a pleasant and surprising guided tour to a future that is already here.

Preface. Beyond liquidity, Degrowth and non-places

The ConsumAuthor concept marks a new role for people in the dynamics of purchasing, and liberates consumption from the alleged demons of consumerism. The ConsumAuthors of all generations are individuals aware of their everyday choices. They free consumption from the negative and distorted characterisations espoused by anti-globalization movements and old-Marxist perspectives. Their decision-making power starts to become visible, traceable, and verifiable – though not as they imagined. It is a power that changes its very nature by adopting indirectly constructed modes, while still managing to disavow critical theories of the past decade: liquid modernity, happy degrowth, and the invasion of non-places. Even if other problems arise – such as the possible dependence on omnipresent digital platforms – it is not an exclusive, oriented, hierarchic power but a dimension more similar to the potential – in Italy often hesitant – to affect reality. So we dedicate this premise to a synthetic reflection on three concepts that in our hypothesis should be de-constructed: the dissolution of ties in the liquid society,¹ the therapy of happy degrowth,² and the invasion of non-places³.

¹ See the work of Zygmunt Bauman where he transformed modern liquidity into true sociological success, including *Liquid Modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2000; *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds*, Polity Press Cambridge, 2003; *Liquid Life*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2005.

² See the work of Serge Latouche, including *Le Pari de la décroissance*, Paris, Fayard, 2006 and *Petit traité de la décroissance sereine*, Fayard, Paris, 2007.

³ See the work of Marc Augé, including *Non-Lieux, introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*, Le Seuil, Paris, 1992.

Human warmth creates a liquid society, which means more freedom.

There is no doubt that the future is liquid. This renders the concepts of potential and emergency of upmost importance: within this premise we will see under which terms. The liquid society implies the heat of liquefaction, directly proportional to the rate of freedom present in the social system. If Italian society was more liquid, we might be able to dissolve the “solid” encrustations that characterize the mafia and clientelism. We primarily talk of a liquefaction of power, as Moisés Naim brilliantly recounts in his book *The End of Power*.⁴ Hierarchies are eroded by the ConsumAuthors, which limit their influence. Their role is to stem the control and influence of those who have always exercised power. The weakening of power in its traditional form is caused by three revolutions. First, the revolution of permanent growth: more states, more protagonists, more influencers, and more controllers. Secondly, the nomadic revolution, supported by mental and physical mobility and the ability to compare views. By moving between different situations and conditions, people are no longer willing to passively accept local traditions with which they have become accustomed to. Lastly, the revolution of mind-set. Even children – as we will see in just a few pages – no longer accept the authority of adults without reflection and discussion, as they have now gained the tools to do so. Critical consciousness prevails, even online where it is often overrated in this regard.

These three revolutions change the cards on the dynamics of the debate – they shape and define expectations. To find the solution to the problem we have to understand the source of liquefaction, namely human warmth, which some have named *human touch*. This book will discuss human warmth at length; its understanding and intergenerational influences. It is on this basis that the revolution of generational nuclei is founded. Warmth, as we see in our everyday experience, always flows from hot to cold items. A cold spoon in a hot cup of tea becomes hot, as Carlo Rovelli explains in the sixth lesson of his unexpected bestseller *Sette brevi lezioni di fisica*.⁵ Human warmth – a particular delineation of physical warmth – is difficult to stimulate in a fearful and distrustful society. But, when it manages to overcome these barriers, it becomes powerful and contagious. Physical

⁴ Moisés Naim, *The End of Power: From Boardrooms to Battlefields and Churches to States, Why Being in Charge Isn't What It Used to Be*, Basic Books, New York, 2013.

⁵ Carlo Rovelli, *Sette brevi lezioni di fisica*, Adelphi, Milan, 2014.

warmth implies movement and dynamism. In the laws of thermodynamics it is the movement of atoms that produce heat; it is the movement of individuals who manage their *Emergenza*,⁶ as Maurizio Ferraris explains in his short book of the same title. Also, for this reason, the hot and the cold are related with the past and the future, as Levi Strauss⁷ sensed when he introduced into cultural anthropology the concept of cold society (those that are primitive and slow to change) and hot societies (those that are modern where traditions are dismantled or reshaped).

As Rovelli explains: “In all the cases in which heat is not exchanged, we see that the future behaves exactly as the past. As soon as there is heat, the future is different from the past. The difference between past and future exists only when there is heat.”⁸ This is the main theme of our liquid society. It has dissolved due to a particularly high degree of heat due to the increasingly frantic movement of individuals who are gradually disengaging from traditional and cold dynamics, and are embracing a new freedom of aims and behaviours. Uncoupling from the coldness of authority follows generational logics that this book will outline.

We should understand that this is not a bad thing. Inevitably it involves risks that we must accept, but it allows us to live an extraordinary state of freedom that involves increasing responsibility, opening the door to absolutely vital experiences: reshaping and reviving the concept of human warmth and taking upon itself all the risks involved. Here the ethical premise that fights social liquidity at the heart of Zygmunt Baumann’s critical view falls down. Much of the analysis of the Polish sociologist is correct, but the theoretical assumption that identifies social liquidity as a problem is deeply misleading. Just as with happy degrowth, a controversial therapy for a correct diagnosis: the model of growth pursued so far is not sustainable.

Changing the perspective, Happy Growth is possible

Instead of taking refuge in the welcoming folds of degrowth, the vital challenge of imagining the future and managing the warmth of human

⁶ Maurizio Ferraris, *Emergenza*, Einaudi, Turin, 2016.

⁷ See the work of the father of anthropology, Claude Levi Strauss, in particular *Anthropologie structurale*, Plon, Paris, 1958.

⁸ Rovelli, *op. cit.*

relations, implies the courage to face the themes of generativity, magnetism, and circularity, rather than investigating the intuitions of “crescita felice”⁹. A new path of social reflection, that took shape with the Festival della Crescita launched in Milan in October 2015 and touring Italy in 2016 with editions in Rome, Bologna, Turin, Lucca, Syracuse, Civitanova Marche, Florence, Bari, Venice and Brescia arriving back to Milan for the release of this book, dedicated to people, the protagonists of the coming revolution. A revolution is already in place, one that sees a looming post-capitalist society¹⁰ driven forward by the younger generational nuclei. The last to understand the changing dynamics are likely to be anti-capitalist, “degrowth,” and “non-place” supporters.

We can restart, therefore, from a generative dimension: human warmth cannot be imposed or prescribed, but only generated through the growing dynamic of relationships. Online and offline: social networks, like them or not, generate relational heat, exponentially increasing the number of contacts and exchanges with our friends and digital followers. But very often these correspond to people that we know, appreciate and listen to in the real world.

In this new world the most important professions are those that involve a particularly pronounced relational dynamism, both in the interpersonal sphere of care and education, as well as in the digital sphere that emerges from social networks. In the moment in which the relational importance of our being social animals becomes clearer, the need (and opportunity) emerges to develop talents and skills in services for people, not only functional but increasingly intellectual and emotional. In this sense two emblematic examples are the often ignored: the worlds of carers and kindergarten teachers, both are to be observed carefully, as well as all professions related to health and therapeutic care. This will also include an increasing number of courses designed to help teach adults the craft of parenting. For this reason each of the 16 generational nuclei that we will explore, will also contain an indication of “profession,” alongside new professions and activities that the particular generational category could perform.¹¹

⁹ Francesco Morace, *Crescita Felice*, Egea, Milan, 2015.

¹⁰ In this regard see Paul Mason, *Postcapitalism: A Guide to our Future*, Allen Lane, London, 2015.

¹¹ For contributions relating to new professions, I would especially like to thank the magazine *Millionaire*, which, since 2014, has featured my column on the subject.

The digitization and automation of many industrial production activities leads to an inversion in the balance of power between advanced industry and services that will inevitably become the driving force for future work. *Humanities for Change*¹² represents the challenge that awaits us all, both in its digital version and in the purely analogue and material. The very basis of happy growth and *Homo Pluralis*,¹³ that Luca de Biase thoughtfully describes in his book of the same title, is light years away from *One Dimensional Man*¹⁴ by Herbert Marcuse, which has been much debated over the last 50 years.

On other occasions we have often explained how human activity is governed by a very special moral focus: the desire to do a job well. Taking care of things as a prelude to taking care of people. Both activities are care work in the broadest sense because they are founded on explicit moral principles in interpersonal relationships, in comparison to products we have become accustomed to through consumption practices. Creating value, can then, have a lot to do with the art of conversation, through the patient building of human relations. Happy growth can pass through these human dimensions without the demonization of goods and material well-being, and, if strengthened, keep wars and fanaticism at bay. As we will explain in the conclusion, this conveys a sense of recognition and gratitude to the crucial role of our structures of relationships. To learn an artisan form of love, care and devotion, exercised with subtle grace, creativity and imagination to the extent that the way in which people become objects of care, and that the objects become subjects of relations, blend imperceptibly in the fullness of life. Recently, at a hospital in Preston – a small town in Lancashire, England – young Italian nurses, who now constitute a recognized community, are particularly appreciated for their work. Here is a prime example of the art of interpersonal relations in a context that is normally marked by the great vulnerability in people. But even the simplest activity of the merchant or the sales person, a forgotten skill is lacking: empathy. The warm relationship looks to the future because it gathers new energies and generates a new social fabric from which we can hope to restart in these

¹² In this regard we mention Jeffrey T. Schnapp, *Digital humanities*, Egea, Milan, 2015 (or. ed. 2014).

¹³ Luca de Biase, *Homo Pluralis*, Codice, Genova, 2015.

¹⁴ Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1964.

difficult times, by focusing on happy growth and driving away the ghosts of commodification espoused in the apocalyptic vision of the old-Marxists that should have irrevocably stolen our soul.

The ghost of reification

Let us try to extend this thought to three dimensions that are often regarded as being in contrast: relationships, objects and emotions. Contrary to popular consensus, objects preserve and possess, welcome and express emotions that accompany them. Objects are magical: they are talismans that in many primitive cultures ward off evil; bottles that contain genies; clothes that shape the age of the wearer and enchant even the sceptics; furniture that preserves a trace of grandparents and grandchildren. They exude great power and impact on our emotions. This can be considered warmth, though not exactly interpersonal: objects become mediators of relationships, like books or artefacts. What counts is the dynamism in this triangulation between people-objects-emotions that can be passed easily to others, creating happy growth. Again, the problem does not lie in the material goods, or in their power to falsify feelings, but in people's heads.

The generational analysis that we propose includes research on how each of the 16 generational nuclei is expressed through the material objects they own and/or use, and about what these things express in the life of everyone. Exploring the role of objects in the relationships we have with others and with ourselves. The first consideration concerns a false perspective popular in recent decades: the mistake of thinking that our relationship with objects induces us to be more superficial and materialistic, reducing the time and energy we dedicate to relationships and people. The strength of Marxist ideology that invented the misleading concept of commodification (another thing and far more serious is the theory of alienation in the workplace) has alienated us from a millennial truth, known by the talismanic cultures of our forefathers: that objects are extraordinary bearers of memory, relationships, inspiration and magic. The emotional proximity of objects amplifies our profound relationship with others, with life's experiences and contexts, allowing us to cherish happy, shared moments. The happy resonance of objects accompanies happy memories with loved ones, children, friends and partners. The problem is not replacing people

with objects, but placing them side-by-side. This does not depend on the objects; it depends on our mental and personal equilibrium.

And so there emerges a second thesis: the alternative to a traditional community and to the social hierarchies is not the postmodern individual, crushed by its “embarrassing” freedom, that escapes from the bonds, isolated and capable only of weak thoughts. Instead it is a collective of individuals capable of a large number of healthy and positive relationships with both other people and with “objects” – as evidenced by the great tradition of anthropological studies¹⁵ – that often transmit and amplify feelings, emotions and happy memories. Thus creating a warmer, and more fluid, world, but no less rewarding or satisfying.

Personal happiness is often the direct result of the nature and quality of these relationships. Material objects are an integral and inseparable part of all relationships. In this way the central role of material culture for the sociology of relations emerges. Whatever a person does, the order of material things in time and space strengthens basic beliefs about the natural order of the world. Our orientation towards everyday objects is one of the main reasons why we accept certain routines and life expectations as natural and unquestionable. Routines and expectations that increasingly include all generations (beyond our belonging), as in the time of generational conflict, driven by legitimate and often unavoidable ideological clashes, has ended. Today the paradigms¹⁶ of sustainability, conviviality, timeliness, and uniqueness, are the common thread among all the nuclei, often creating positive meetings between grandparents and grandchildren, mothers and children, colleagues and acquaintances of different ages.

We can therefore come to our first conclusion: material culture is important because material objects fashion our lives and our personal and social identity. There is nothing alienating in this dynamic, no reification or commodification. On the contrary, there emerges the magic and richness of mixing social dynamics between objects, people, feelings and emotions, of human and material culture, distributed in a intriguing way through various generations. The relationship with objects in a post-opulent soci-

¹⁵ In particular see Daniel Miller, *The Comfort of Things*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2008.

¹⁶ For more information on the theory of the four paradigms see Francesco Morace, *I paradigmi del futuro*, Nomos Edizioni, Busto Arsizio, 2010; *Che cos'è il futuro*, Mind Edizioni, Milan, 2013; with Barbara Santoro, *Italian factor*, Egea, Milan, 2014.

ety is organized according to personal and family systems that are much richer and more expressed than in the past. Thus they are less homogenized and disengaged from the traditional community, but are also less class based ideological visions. The focus shifts towards the creative diversity of each individual instead of an orderly culture constructed on social hierarchies. Liquidity, in this case, corresponds to freedom, and material well-being to happy growth. Is this more difficult to achieve? Yes, but its vastly more fascinating.

Non-places: an out of place theory

In this new perspective it is necessary to revise some stereotypes of critical thinking that have historically played a significant role in sociological thought, but today are becoming out-dated. Indeed, the responses of social sciences have been problematic: anthropology has often produced a cultural determinism, psychology a family determinism, and economics a liberal determinism. This is the case with Marc Augé's theory of non-places, a critical reading of the early 1990's – the time of burgeoning globalization – in relation to places of consumption and commercial retail which were considered as homogenising and disrespectful of territorial differences. In reality, as the great Italian geographer, Franco Farinelli, explains in his passionate reflection on globalization,¹⁷ the advent of the Internet created the space for modernity to disappear, giving way to places and the difficult task of re-thinking the world as a sphere.

Faced with this daunting task in recent years, people – distributed in different generational nuclei – have proved more intelligent than we could have imagined, continuing to grow freely in life experiences through their relationships with others, along with objects and places, to re-define material culture by passing through shopping malls, airports and stations. In reality, these potential non-places are transforming into experimental places. The great mistake of the post-modern age was to believe that the decline of the Great Tales (revealingly described by Lyotard¹⁸ and many

¹⁷ See for example Franco Farinelli, *La crisi della ragione cartografica*, Einaudi, Turin, 2009.

¹⁸ Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir*, Minuit, Paris, 1979.

others) would lead to a disorderly fragmentation of society. On the contrary, today individuals and families who – almost always without their knowledge – burden themselves with the responsibility of creating an order, produce one that is manufactured by the ideology and traditions of the grassroots. In doing so, they are expressing the revolution of generational nuclei to which this book is dedicated.

Such a moral and aesthetic order remains authentic, even if individuals create it over a number of years, instead of inheriting it as a tradition or custom. Through strengthening various “emergencies,” certain traits and styles develop that characterize people as individuals and as networks of relationships. In combination with the diversity of the Internet, it unwittingly reproduces the spherical world, defined in 2001 as “The Hummingbird Strategy.”¹⁹ This produces new personal aesthetics and new relations with places and life events.

People who no longer follow cultural and religious traditions still exhibit certain values in their relationships: this is a style that is recognized as “our own,” of which people take profound possession. In many cases this style with its repetitions and freedom, provides people with a comfort similar to religions and rites in traditional societies, as Durkheim argues.²⁰ For the same reason, it can also be a burden, a constraint and a mystery.

Today, individuals have to independently create the principles and economic practices that was once the task of the community. The creative possibilities of tiny social cells or distinct generational nuclei have nothing to envy from the diversity produced by a society traditionally studied by anthropologists. Our increasing resources guarantee us creative autonomy: from this comes the definition of ConsumAuthors.²¹ If we mix cultural and family influences, social orders and other ingredients, individual households become similar to micro-societies and able to create a network more or less tied to broader cultural norms. The dimension of specific occasions and moments allows a de-coupling from classic macro-economic and socio-cultural analysis, from which we still adopt the out-dated logics of economic status, and the representation of oneself according to

¹⁹ See Francesco Morace, *La strategia del colibri* [*The Hummingbird Strategy*], Sperling & Kupfer, Milan, 2001.

²⁰ See Emile Durkheim, *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, PUF, Paris, 1912.

²¹ From 2014, the author hosts the weekly radio slot *Il ConsumAutore* [*ConsumAuthors*] within the show, *Essere e Avere*, by Maria Luisa Pezzali on Radio24.

the rules of social distinction. In this sense, the rhetoric of non-places and demonization of commercial distribution is obsolete. People decide the time and place of their happy experiences, and no one can deny the validity or accuse them of conformism as they have now surpassed old traditions. Paradoxically, the only conformism that survives are theories that claim to interpret the world through pre-constituted critical schemas.

However, the alternative to conformism is not the isolated individual, crushed by a mass of indigestible goods, but individual ConsumAuthors who strive to create authentic, original, unique and unrepeatable relationships, both in terms of places and people, in search of a maximum intensity. For example, in an emblematic campaign by *Google* society is defined by micro-happy moments: “People all over the world are trying to make the most of every moment.” Everyone tries to make the best of every moment of life: is there something wrong with this? Today, society is operating under these dynamics, often reflected by social networks. These relationships can include rituals, routines and habits that can also give much consolation: it comes down to learning to swim in a sea of freedom, especially in consumption. According to the logic of responsibility that Mauro Magatti defined as “deponenza”²²: neither arrogance nor helplessness and passive acceptance of external diktat. Conscious freedom to be placed into a fabric of constraints, of social norms and behaviours that allow recognition and at the same time critical discussion in *medias res*. It is from this theoretical assumption that a regenerated physiology of generations is born which constitutes the weave of the revolution for an unexpected value that we will present in conclusion: gratitude. The impervious and fascinating navigation of our human condition has in recent years faced and achieved apocalyptic passages and hypotheses that you will find mentioned below as in a menu of dire prophecies, to instead arrive in the midst of a regenerating revolution which will be discussed in the following pages: the revolution of generational nuclei.

²² Mauro Magatti, *Prepotenza, Impotenza, Deponenza*, Marcianum Press, Milan, 2015.

The menu of dire prophecies

**11 apocalyptic
predictions,
all wrong**

1

The bonds will lengthen and the human factor will disappear: machines and technologies will take over in a world dominated by technocrats.

5

Places will all be the same and the experience will be disengaged from territories. The uniqueness of nations, languages and religions will be lost.

4

The image society will prevail and we will all become simulacra, protagonists of a mediated world where one can not distinguish between reality and simulation.

9

Cities will be overrun by car traffic – also flying – that will make the air un-breathable and movement on foot or by bicycle impossible.

8

Fresh food will be replaced by synthetic products, taken in pill form.

2

The physical will be less and less relevant, we will become the shadow of ourselves, we will lose the use and pleasure of the senses.

6

Consumerism and goods will replace the world of feelings and relations. Material goods and status will be the only things that count.

10

We will witness the death of books, theatre and writing; each and everyone will live in equipped and connected niches.

3

A digital space will exist – cyberspace – in which we will live in a parallel and disembodied way, losing touch with reality.

7

We will live alone, surrounded by computer screens, and each of us will think exclusively about ourselves and our survival in a hostile world.

11

The overwhelming desire for unconstrained growth will lead us to a constant and irreversible degradation, dragging us into a neo-primitive condition.

Introduction.

The revolution of generational nuclei

Through the research undertaken by the Future Concept Lab that I co-founded with Linda Gobbi in 1989 – partner in life and work – an on-going analysis of different consumer generations has been conducted, defining their identity, desires, values and behaviours.

The ethnographic research projects, qualitative and quantitative, conducted in 40 cities across 25 countries, have allowed us to collect a wealth of knowledge that, in 2008, was organised into a global analysis defined as Generational Targets and which constitutes one of the Institute's main research programs. Through this approach, it was possible to identify generational nuclei that were able to influence other generations and other family members. This is not “clustered” segmentation according to quantitative variables, but an analysis of future orientation, starting from the new physiology of the generations that in our working hypothesis leads to a submerged revolution, without open war. The revolution is not of armed nuclei, but generational nuclei, complete with an exclamation mark as on the front cover.

To clarify this interpretation, we will outline a few historical references to introduce the 20th century concept of social generation with reference to contemporary sociological and statistical studies. Until then a generation was merely considered as a succession of phases within biological life. Considering the average life span, generations followed one another approximately every thirty years. With the advent of modernity, the concept of generation took shape as a “group of persons, men and women, belonging to different families, whose unity emerges from a specific mentality”¹

¹ Yves Renouard, *Il concetto di generazione nella storia*, *International Congress of Historical Science*, Paris, 1950.

that is formed because of their similar age and limited to a certain period of time. To explain the evolution of humanity, scholars have increasingly made use of the concept of “generation” to understand the context that dynamic forces operate in society. A recent historical example is the study of the “baby boomers” where it has been possible to analyse the transition from the post-war period to the second industrialization, and define the post-modern paradigm.

The author who first formulated the concept of generations in sociology was Karl Mannheim². In demography the concept indicates all those alive in a given period of time. In sociology, thanks to the conceptual vision of Mannheim, a generation of individuals is united not only by their age, but also by the socio-cultural context during their adolescence: a life stage that is the most receptive to social phenomena. As a result, “generational units” of groups of individuals born within a narrow time frame are formed. They become the true bearers of the contemporary content of a particular demographic generation. Thus, generational links emerge that allow us to better identify the common aspects of certain subsets of individuals within generational diversity.

The concept of generation, therefore, influences each individual from a “starting” date: that of his or her birth. But this concept is not exhaustive. The series of events and innovations (far more accelerated in this new millennium) clearly does not affect everyone. Demographers and statisticians have calculated what percentage of the total population is considered the core group in a generation. Such calculations are important for understanding the macro-dynamics. But the micros are more complex. For this, the study of biographies is helpful. Unique opinions are reflected in the small number of “peers”: in the description of each generational group we will present case studies and examples, illustrating the main drivers that define and orient them. Macro social phenomena and micro life stories, allow us to identify both a more detailed articulation of the generations, and the lines of demarcation between the generations that, in the contemporary context, are much more complex. Due to the fact that over the last decade we have experienced a true change of epoch, we propose a new spectrum of Generational nuclei. These analyse and interpret the “minorities” within each social generation. It is in reference to these

² Karl Mannheim, *Das Problem der Generationen*, in *Kölner Vierteljahrshefte für Soziologie* 7 (1928), S. 157-185, 309-330.

standard-bearers that new targets were defined for generational “filiation” in the research so far conducted. The analysis of the generational nuclei therefore, proposes new players in society and the market, with which institutions and companies will increasingly have to deal with. They are individuals with increasingly demanding expectations and needs in every field. From fashion, technology and the media, to everyday consumption, travel and leisure.

The generational nuclei are like those in atoms: structural dimensions held together by “strong forces” which attract through their positive charge. In its scientific definition, the nucleus is the dense, central part of an atom, which possesses a positive charge, and attracts and releases a “binding energy.” The generational nucleus cannot be so precisely quantified, but its activity can be observed and tested just as the atomic nuclei. The generational nuclei are identified through ethno-anthropological observation and produce an enormous amount of attractive energy towards others, both of their own generation and others. Each nucleus contains all of a generation’s positive charge, just like the atomic nucleus. The generational nucleus thus releases a power that shapes values and future behaviours. To study generational nuclei means to define a concept of dynamic segmentation, extending the brand’s areas of attractiveness through the “bonding forces” of the nuclei. It therefore becomes possible to use the generational nucleus as the core target: not as a cage or a military target, but rather as a step towards other generations. In this new perspective, it becomes crucial to understand the relationships between generations and to identify inter-generational links, starting from the nuclei. Entrepreneurs and managers will be able to assess the opportunities for convergence between sectors, using generational nuclei to facilitate new partnerships. Companies and universities may also adapt the generational nuclei to different countries, and evaluate the specific differences in global terms, perhaps using specific countries as experimental laboratories for testing generational nuclei. There are 16 generational nuclei proposed in this book, covering all generations and, in some cases, overlapping in terms of age. The logic is not exclusively that of segmentation, but also that of strange attractors.

In this book each nucleus is described through:

- a story that explores its origins, values and behaviours
- a hypothesis of potential future profession(s), complete with a specific case study

- four iconic examples of companies or activities that express these characteristics
- several drivers that in terms of consumption, communication and retail, act as a guide to knowledge
- a number of strategic guidelines in terms of creativity and design.

The Performance Age

The analysis presented here is thus dedicated to the generational nuclei that gather around certain experiences, both decisive and relevant, which mark their character. It starts with the profound changes that new technologies have helped create, along with different perceptions in different markets, and in different sectors. In fact, demographic dynamics and the age of consumers worldwide, when analysed according to a precise geometric progression, threaten to upset both society and the financial markets in the near future. In this regard, many theoretical and marketing contributions are coming from the USA through the growing wave of Big Data, even if some major demographic phenomena are present in Italy (the aging population, the cohabitation of grown children and parents under the same roof, the lowest birth rate in the world). For example, ten years ago in the United States, great importance was given to the vision of Ken Dychtwald the author of the book, *Age Power*³, dedicated to redefining the pension age. For the first time, America proposed a multi-generational hypothesis of society and no longer segmented according to generational marketing. The baby-boomers became seniors citizens and proposed a completely new concept of old age, in which they studied, started business or pursued an adventurous lifestyle (traveling six months a year). In this way, the seniors are much closer to the behaviours and values of their children and grandchildren. We'll return to this topic in part four of the book, presenting them in the section dedicated to the long-lived – Boomers and super-adults – the two targets of Pleasure Growers and Job Players.

This working hypothesis has been embraced over the last decade by many theorists. The first, *Ageless Marketing*⁴, by David B. Wolfe, argues that the values which shape a new relational society has shocked marketing plans

³ Ken Dychtwald, *Age power*, Tarcher Putnam, New York, 2000.

⁴ David B. Wolfe, *Ageless Marketing*, Kaplan Publishing, New York, 2003.

based on segmentation. Particularly enlightening is his discussion on the aging baby-boomers who rediscover their civil values, mediated by their experience and maturity. In this way the traditional phases of life – education/work/leisure – are undermined and replaced with a layered model in which the three cycles follow one another and overlap at different ages (why stop studying at 25? Why not gain work experience at 16?). It repeats itself as if it were part of a multi-layered cake, changing the mechanisms of motivation and personal happiness according to the principles of alternance and not complete change. In the USA – and now also in Italy – for example, many retirees are committed to creating new businesses.

The title we have chosen for this passage – The Performance Age – stresses the importance of age as a performative element to consider in new ways, but also a concept of performance which is not limited to its economic connotation, but embraces its artistic sense, linked to intuition, talent and creative improvisation based on the expertise that each and everyone can achieve at a different age, so transforming into ConsumAuthors. They are authors of their own lives, redesigning people power. It is from this perspective that creators of new aesthetics acquire great importance. Depending on their age and location, they can become drivers of the global economy and an intergenerational society. In the coming years, Italian adolescents, Japanese teenagers, young Chinese, Thai girls, women in South America, or Americans in their sixties, will be able to produce styles, languages and aesthetics that become reference points for governments and companies. The generational groups we will present in this book are, therefore, not simply market targets but architects of a re-generated global society founded on human diversity in the search of new forms of coexistence.

ConsumAuthors and new models of thought

Based on these reflections, we will try to close the circle between creativity, talent, technology and new consumption models. The prediction that the new economy will revolutionize our essential values and the relationship with oneself in a single direction, transforming us into isolated information terminals, while imposing the superficiality of existence, and encouraging territorialisation and indifference towards places, has proved almost completely wrong. Starting in the mid 1990's, strong counterten-

dencies manifested, rediscovering and reassessing memory, origins, roots, territory, narratives, as well as sharing and expressive experimentation. This is true for people in both their private and public lives, in the search for new meaning. In the workplace, only now are doubts and misgivings beginning to emerge towards the performative and accelerated model imposed in the 1990's as the new standard of professionalism.

However, new technologies have helped to change “mental” behaviours (since 1995 we define them as mindstyles) that has been universally absorbed as new parameters of thought, decision making and evaluating. The ability and the typical passion of the “creative cut and paste,” the interactive speed of WhatsApp, the concept of file sharing, the narrative depth of multiplayer gaming, personalized exploration made possible by geolocation, heightened selective memory through digital devices, forms of convivial do-it-yourself typical of digital video-photography (from Instagram to Pinterest) or the expressive experimentation of Video Jockys, to the sharing of social networks capable of measuring personal recognition through Likes and Followers, have pointed out the way forward, starting from the reality of life practices and the proposed strength of new thought patterns. These patterns suggest a shift towards people power and the central role of ConsumAuthors, with all the risks and limitations that any revolution entails.

This occurs with particular clarity in the experience of the younger generations that are exposed to digital content and become digitally literate from a young age. In the corporate world people often have to abandon their increasingly sophisticated strategies of knowledge management that they learned through daily life, in favour of schemes and hierarchical, functional and defensive models, that still characterize the majority of companies in most sectors. Thus squandering an intelligent social heritage which could in turn lead many companies to make that long-awaited breakthrough: the social conquest of the business. On paper this is a paradoxical innovation; it only occurs in training courses and often creates a sense of frustration and disillusionment in managers seeking excellence. The answer, then, is to start from simple, concrete, everyday practices that follow the same logic and seem to guide the consumer today: “combinatorial consumption” as the ability to creatively shuffle the cards and information; “immediate fascination” as the courage to leave room for intuition; the “project partnership” as a recognition of the value of others and their ideas, and the availability of sharing and co-creation supported by collab-

orative protocols; “narrative nutrition,” the need to rediscover ones own stories, of people and companies who can make their mark; “tailored territory,” the ability to listen and for targeted relations, to meet ambitious targets; “memory and self respect” as reflexive vocation, to re-discover ones own unique paths; “oneself to ourselves” and “ourselves to oneself” as the discovery of reciprocity and the extraordinary power of mutual aid: and finally “expressive experimentation” as a challenge to develop one’s own talents, creativity and original point of view even if it means to not always be understood and appreciated. It is a set of values and behaviours which involve a great deal of rationality and choice, with an ability to choose even at the cost of being wrong. The ConsumAuthors have learned the lesson companies tend to avoid, transforming it into a creative enterprise, aware of a power that they have learned to exercise. A power they will exercise in the future, with consequences yet to be evaluated.

The sixteen generational nuclei

The new generational scenario that follows the evolution towards people power focuses on our analysis of 16 nuclei, each representing a group of individuals born within the same date range. Each category is characterized by a strong similarity in the way they think and act in a social context, beyond merely 15-year biological or demographic cycles. Except, for the 4 nuclei in the youngest timeframe who are quite different. Technological innovation and demographic perspectives, alongside decreasing birth rates, are the most influential structural variables. Collective imaginary, micro and macro trends are the variables that enrich the analysis and deepen each individual generational profile. With the young adults the time frame of the 4 nuclei is extended to 20 years – and 30 years for the old adults.

The identified generational nuclei, which cover all stages of life, are:

- The 4 pre-adult nuclei are spread over 15 years, from 5 to 19 years old: Lively Kids (5-8 year olds); TechTweens (9-12 year olds); Ex-poTeens (13-15 year olds); ExperTeens (16-19 year olds).
- The 4 young adult nuclei, that we define as post-capitalist, are spread over two decades, from 20 to 40 years old: CreActives (20-25 year olds); ProActives (25-30 year olds); ProFamilies (30-35 year olds); ProTasters (35-40 year olds).

- The 4 mature adult nuclei, that we define as post-ideological, are spread over 3 decades, from 40 to 70 years old: New Normals (40-50 year olds); Singular Women (40-60 year olds); Mind Builders (50-60 year olds); Premium Seekers (50-70 year olds).

Finally, the 4 long-lived nuclei that we define as super adults, from 65 years old and above: Job Players (65-75 year olds); Pleasure Growers (65-80 year olds); Family Activists (65-80 year olds); Health Challengers (75-90 year olds).