



REVIEWS

Review of *To Live and Think Like Pigs*  
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# To Live and Like Pigs!



***“Let it be understood that I have nothing against pigs, it’s just that I hate the  
gluttony of the formal middle class of the postindustrial era”.***

Text by Hamish Win

So begins Gilles Châtelet’s brilliantly satirical analysis of contemporary culture, now out in a newly translated edition by Robin Mackay, through the collaborative effort of Urbanomic Media and Sequence Press.

Initially published in 1998, Châtelet’s text has lost nothing of its edge, in fact you might suggest that its prescience has finally caught up with it, perhaps even more so as most readers of *White Fungus* will instantly recognise just how much Châtelet’s key characters, a certain Bécassine Turbo-Diesel and instantly familiar Gideon-Cyber Plus, have become so firmly entrenched, if not intrinsically at home in the millennial era.

The book itself opens with the breakdown of Parisian nightlife, and more specifically, the romance of the 1970s nightclub and its promotion of pan-sexual subculture that moulds not just libertine values, but also, in a sublimely fatalistic way, all the hallmarks that Châtelet then begins to unpack in what quickly melts down into a roll call of middle-class complacency. Subsequently we meet again in the Mitterrand era of comprise, a whole host of what Châtelet calls little consumer Robinsons, avowedly after Crusoe’s independent élan but nothing at all like, or everything like it in terms of costumed appearance, anything it would seem, so long as it can be bought, and so

long as it can be as equally meaningless. Which is why such falsely liberational appeals to the average citizen equate these little consumer Robinsons as the statistical cannon fodder of what I might as well call market democracies; the book after all is sub-titled, “the incitement of envy and boredom in market democracies”.

“But where are the pigs?” I hear you say. Everywhere and nowhere. And yes, it’s true, pigs appear very little throughout. In fact the later appearance of Gideon-Cyber Plus is a duck.

So there you go. But one can see that pigs are a kind of formal gesture that doesn’t just kick off the sensibility of the book, but bleeds a wry humour throughout Châtelet’s analysis, that’s at times so acute one wants to put down the book and apologise for a course of action one has already taken. Much like writing this review!

But uh, yeah. I don’t wanna be falsely liberating here, and maybe I should break down a few more key proponents of the narrative, but maybe it’s just easier if I give you an example of how Châtelet anticipates our actions under an informatic culture. For instance there’s what he calls the “Postmodern Conjugality” clause in which Turbo-Bécassine’s (oh yeah right, so Bécassine relates to a French comic, but really it’s easier to think of her like a Theory of a Young Girl, except she’s turbo-ised because she’s differentiated from her mother’s petroleum-based economy, and yet not entirely), anyway her hair dryer is broken, and even though she knows Cyber-Gideon (the networked duck) can fix it, she can’t just outwardly ask him. That would both risk rejection and also the possibility she would become indebted to a duck! What unfolds then is a kind of parlour game in which the broken hair dryer is left asunder, so that Cyber-Gideon may interpret the scene as a ‘little game’, something fun to do, or not. Of course that seems like such a small little incident, but it’s not. Not when it is embedded in a Châtelet historical arc of the post-industrial era, from the disco clubs of the late 70s to the informatics of statistical fodder right through to populist and managerial rhetoric of control and liberation. So yeah. I can’t recommend this book highly enough.

It’s not just pertinent to our era, but it’s also extremely funny. It’s smart, its wry, and in many ways I think it’ll become a benchmark text for our era.