

## The Jouissance-value: a concept for critical of imaginary industry

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### ABSTRACT

This article aims to examine the way in which an old expression, *jouissance-value*, created by Jacques Lacan, has become a key concept in the media industry and in the field of Media studies. The hypothesis presented here is the following: in the fabrication of *jouissance-value*, the *gaze* (regard) works as *labor*, establishing an economy of scopic desire.

**Keyword:** Media, gaze, labor, *jouissance-value*, image

“Commodity is, in the first place, an object outside us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another. The nature of such wants, whether, for instance, they spring from the stomach or from fancy [fantasy], makes no difference” (MARX, 1985: 45).

Is that a spot on statement? If so, is that *still* a spot on statement? We will see.

The idea that the function (or even the pulsation) of the gaze may be understood in similar lines to the workforce in the industry of the imaginary is not exactly new; however, it is worth underlining, especially for a common sense that still classifies the image as a prop or as an accessory to communication, that commodity is, in contemporary capitalism, image rather than a physical thing. In the image of the commodity (or in its condition as image, as is the nature of the commodity itself) lies what's beyond the usefulness of the physical thing. This beyond is what, in the

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nineteenth century, Karl Marx called *fantasy*. In a nutshell, the commodity does not only *have* an image, it is not that one side of the commodity is the image, but to go beyond, it is as image that the commodity circulates and it is through image that it realizes its exchange-value. In the end, this image has become the anchor and the center of the commodity.

In other words, it is in the *fantasy* that Marx talks about that lies not only the imagistic dimension, but the actual core of the production of value. All it takes is a look around, a look around the *seeable* world: to look at the gaze that looks on the world and thus constitutes the much-vaunted spectacle of the world. The making of the image is no longer an ancillary step in the necessary process of highlighting what in the commodity is luring and fosters its consumption. The image is the main core of the commodity: the physical thing is peripheral.

The prosaic worldliness of advertising constantly demonstrates this fact. The making of the commodity's image constitutes the process whereby a specific bottle of water has a higher price – and also a higher value, as we will soon see – not because of its content (water), but because of its label. The core value of this commodity, a bottle full of mineral water, lies on the label, not in the inside of the bottle, the liquid, but in its image that is materialized on the label, shape and material of the container, and so on: in these aspects usually perceived as accessories (brand, brand presentation, associations of meaning afforded by the brand in terms of language), there is a strong component of human labor and especially of social gaze invested. Right from the outset, we're talking of value – not only of price.

The body receives the water, hence its most obvious use-value. However, the subject, at the symbolic level, where fantasy fixes its immaterial roots – wishes to quench not only his or her thirst, but also that which passes through the palate and, from the physical palate, takes flight to the psychic meanings through which he/she *drinks* the brand and the meanings afforded by it. The brand thereby exposed must beforehand answer to the subject's imaginary demand, and only then quench his or her thirst.

Turning to a more recurring example, think of the Nike brand of sporting shoes. Nike does not produce shoes – as a matter of fact, it sees no problem in outsourcing the production of footwear. The brand is the core, the heart of their business. Nike manufactures the image associated with their footwear, i.e., it produces the meaning of

goods associated with a particular sport to sell the product in the market. Much more than thinking about a shoe that favors a specific sports activity, it considers the mechanisms of emotional association that it can trigger in the consumer. For example, a basketball shoe that promotes audacity. And that's the reason, the only reason why it needs to invest in technological development, innovation and research: they result in new and unique attributes of the image.

A shoe is a shoe, of course, as a rose is a rose and a cigar is, occasionally, a cigar, but before being shoe, a shoe is the material support for the image of that commodity. The specific shoe in our example is the specific image of a shoe that is different from all other shoes around it, making it strictly a signifier. Moreover, this shoe, in particular, expresses itself as an image and, in addition to that image, as a package of articulated meanings, which do not end at the shoe, but stretch across attributes incorporated into this shoe that spill over the body - and the identity - of the subject who dares adopt it as a an article of clothing. Here's what Nike manufactures.

The manufacturing process of the commodity's image, seated on the exploitation of labor merged with the extraction of a social gaze - the gaze that enters as labor in the making of the image's value - has been a research topic for one of the authors of this article (Bucci, 2002, 2005, 2010). Through the reflection on the issue, having Haug (1997) and Debord (1997) as interlocutors, the concept of *jouissance-value* was developed in the research, a concept that results from a process of *alienation of the social gaze*.

The capital buys the gaze, measured in time as fungible work (only as fungible work). This is so because the process of signification belongs neither to the transmitter nor the receiver, but to the meeting of one with the other - therefore, external to both. Signification is a social process. Signification is not within the subjects - it is they, who, being social, are within the process of signification (...). The *jouissance-value* constitutes the sum of the gaze with the work (and there is here a means to help reflect on the gaze as a productive force, but that does not concern us). Without the employment of the social gaze, the *jouissance-value* does not exist (Bucci, 2002: 272-3).

Accordingly, in its aspect as spectacle, the outcome of the industry of the imaginary - which operates especially through the media industry, but is not limited to it - is the reputation of value built within the imagistic scope of entertainment. The promises of the images that make physical (or not physical) commodities circulate

trigger consumption and connect directly to desire, presenting itself as the imaginary object(s) that respond to the subject's desire. The physical object included in the commodity's image, therefore, functions as a device (a physical signifier) to deliver the desired meaning. The *jouissance-value* does not meet a necessity – unlike the use-value in Marx, which corresponds to a human need – it meets a desire. Thus, *fantasy* steals the scene: it is fantasy that rules over the precipitation of exchange-value. It is desire, and not need, that triggers consumption in a world mediated by images – and the making of *jouissance-value*, the value that can connect to empty desire, temporarily filling it, combines work and gaze in the sphere of language.

As has become evident by now, the term *jouissance*, as used here, has a vague psychoanalytic constitution. It was in those terms that the term *jouissance-value* occurred in 2001 to one of the authors of this article as a logical and natural formulation that hitherto had seemed unprecedented to him. It turns out that this wording was not exactly unprecedented, but only just. It befell the other author of this article to observe the previous existence of the concept in Jacques Lacan's unpublished seminars (Venancio, 2009). Indeed, in 1967, the expression *jouissance-value* had similarly occurred to Lacan, which only reinforces the relevance of the concept. From the Lacanian references, which later would be further developed by Jacques Alain Miller and Quinet, *jouissance-value* may be better sustained in psychoanalytic theory than in its possible confluences with the critical studies of the media's production of value in the Imaginary.

The purpose of this article, then, is to demonstrate not only the psychoanalytic foundation of *jouissance-value*, through a bibliographical review of Lacan's angle, but also its increasing relevance within the reflection on the gaze, as conducted in Social Communication, particularly in image-based media (television, photography, video, film).

The manufacturing of the social image – as conducted by the gaze – and the production of meaning associated to that image, which logically acquires the status of a signifier, takes place in all spheres of the culture. The meaning carried by the signifying image also includes a value – produced by labor and by the social gaze. Note that what is stated here does not suggest only that the image enhances the power of attraction of the commodity: it is argued, rather, that the commodity's image itself has economic

value, a socially manufactured value, in such a way that the value of the commodity – that which is still seen by many as strictly a physical thing or verifiable service in the arena of physical things – is not confined to the body of the thing: shoe, table, bottle of water. Herein, in this attribute of the image – of which the physical thing is a mere support – in this attribute that concentrates the *jouissance-value*, lies the center of gravity of the exchange-value of the commodity.

From this finding, we may discuss the image – now thought of as commodity itself – not only as associated to things, but to a number of phenomena, to the variety of expressions of culture and social life. There are images – endowed with *jouissance-value* – that determine the circulation of other images (or concepts) specific to the most distant spheres: from politics to science, from religion to the academic world. A political party or a specific candidate can develop for themselves a commodity-image that defines them and which determines the commodity-image put in circulation. Churches or pastors project themselves according to the same laws (of the production of signifying image that contains meaning and *jouissance-value*). This is the social production of image, which can only be synthesized from the gaze.

## **LACAN, LACANIANS AND JOUISSANCE-VALUE**

The possibility of thinking the work of the gaze – or of the gaze as work – conceptually stems from the theoretical opportunity offered by philosophy's *linguistic twist* to which belongs Psychoanalysis. From this point, arises the idea that language is no longer an action of thought, but rather, a founding factor in thought of what we call reality. Reality, therefore, is defined as discursive reality; it is necessarily discourse. Such movement can be better understood in the RSI system, developed by Jacques Lacan.

We know that in the *Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud says

the psychological considerations examined (...) require us to assume, not the existence of two systems near the motor end of the psychic apparatus, but two kinds of processes or courses taken by excitation (Freud, 1998a: 216).

Therein lies the game between the conscious and the unconscious, where “the unconscious must be accepted as the general basis of the psychic life” (Ibid.). Freud

continues: “The unconscious is the larger circle which includes the smaller circle of the conscious” (Freud, 1998a: 218).

Freud goes further when he says that

everything conscious has a preliminary unconscious stage, whereas the unconscious can stop at this stage, and yet claim to be considered a full psychic function. The unconscious is the true psychic reality (Ibid.).

This deposes the primacy of Human Reason and of Thought itself within this project, commonly referred to as Modern. The demands are no longer conscious, rational, but come from an ungovernable place and – in a way, at least for the individual – unknowable. To Freud, this post-Copernicus and post-Darwin discovery indicates when

the third and most irritating insult is flung at the human mania of greatness by present-day psychological research, which wants to prove to the “I” that it is not even master in its own home, but is dependent upon the most scanty information concerning all that goes on unconsciously in its psychic life. (Freud, 1998b: s/n).

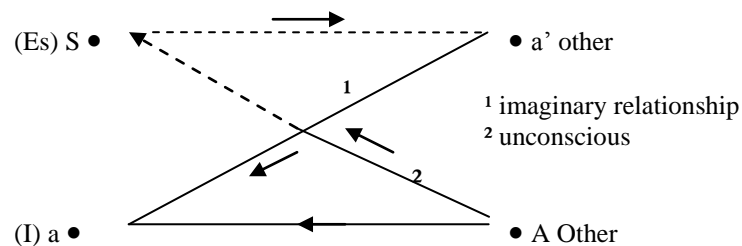
The unconscious becomes the foremost institution of man and of the reality in which he is inserted. These conclusions, however, are no longer strictly Freudian – in actual fact, they escape the Freudian discourse and push his findings to the limit, to flourish more freely in the work of Jacques Lacan. The finding here is radical because it “is the whole structure of language that the psychoanalytic experience discovers in the Unconscious” (Lacan, 2008a: 225).

Clearly, this study does not pertain to the field of psychoanalytic theory, not having the unconscious as its object. It belongs rather to the field of communication, or, more precisely, to Communication Studies with a strong connection to Language Sciences. It is possible, nonetheless, and even necessary to reclaim some passages from Psychoanalytic Theory to investigate the theoretical foundations whereby it is possible to better understand how *jouissance-value* can adhere to desire in the subject.

With Lacan, language ceases to be an action of thought – which would allow thinking to take place first and acting later, in a separate and separable moment from the moment of thought – to place itself in a prime position, both in terms of thought and of reality as a whole, especially in the sense of discourse. The Lacanian assertion sets fire to the old ships:

The language should not be confused with the various somatic and psychic functions that produce the speaking subject. The primary reason that the language with its structure predates the entry that makes it each subject at a given moment of his mental development (Lacan, 2008a: 225).

Within Lacanian tradition, such a moment of mental development is identified with the mirror stage. Its layout is the scheme called "L" (Lacan, 2008b: 60) or "Z" (Lacan, 1987: 307) which we reproduce below:



This relationship describes the entry into the Symbolic Order. Briefly, we can explain the above scheme with the following quote from Lacan:

[the subject] in its complete form, is reproduced every time the subject approaches the Other as absolute, ie as the Other who can cancel it himself, in the same way in which he can act, ie making the object to deceive you (Lacan, 2008b: 59).

We can say that *S* is

the subject, the analytical subject, ie, is not the subject in its entirety (...). It is the subject, not in its entirety, but in its opening. As usual, he does not know what it says. If he knew what he says would not be there. He would be there, bottom right [A (Other)] (Lacan, 1987: 307).

Except that *S* does not see himself in *S*.

He sees in *a*, and that's why he has an ego. I can believe that this is it, this is everyone and no way out. What the analysis tells us, moreover, is that the self is an absolutely fundamental to the constitution of objects (Lacan, 1987: 307).

However, one must be careful; the issue of objects does not end at this point. Jacques Lacan says that, "in particular, is in the form of the specular other [A] he seeth him that, for reasons that are structural, called his fellow" (Lacan, 1987: 309). Lacan continues: "This way the other has a closer relationship with your self, she will can be superimposed, and we wrote to *a'*" (Ibid.). We mark thus the plan of the mirror (*S* and

$a'$ ), the symmetrical world of the equal egos ( $S$  and  $a$ ) and of other homogeneous parts ( $A$  and  $a'$ ).

On the other hand, there is also what Lacan calls the *language wall*. “It is from the order defined by the language wall” (Lacan, 1987: 307), he says, “that the imaginary takes his false reality, which is, however, a fact verified. The self, as we understand, the other, like, all these imaginary, are objects” (Ibid.).

When the subject speaks to his fellow, speaks in ordinary language, which considers the imaginary selves as things not only ex-sistant, but real (Lacan, 1987: 308).

To Jacques Lacan, the consequence thereof is that “we address the fact of the  $A^1$ ,  $A^2$ , which is what we do not know, more real, true subjects. They are on the other side of the wall of language, there where, in principle, never overtake” (Ibid.).

Therefore,

are they fundamentally vision every time I utter one speaking true, but always reach a ', a", by reflection. Viso always true subject, and I have to content myself with the shadows. The subject is separated from the other, the true ones, by the language wall (Lacan, 1987: 308).

Thus, considering that this scheme – the entry into the Symbolic Order – is the moment of the constitution of the subject, we realize that the subject: (1) only exists in language with its own forms of self; and (2) in this instance, remembering its relation to the Unconscious, it is not master of oneself (such a notion, as we well know, had already been articulated by Freud).

Thus,

the subject is marked by a paradox: to be he must speak, but this speech is produced in the Other, which is to say that there is a fundamental disjunction between the *jouissance* of speech (the body that speaks) and the place of its production. That is what we mean when we speak of a *split subject*. (Freitas, 1992: 56).

At this point, arises the concept of the split subject, represented graphically as  $\$$ , to demonstrate the division suffered by  $S$  as it is barred.

“For the subject who speaks in language, who takes language to express himself, is already divided, or he would not speak. And he is divided by speech but also by lack. He lacks” (Bucci, 2002: 206). Thus, we speak, because we lack.



What do we lack? In psychoanalytic theory, we all lack the permanence of *jouissance*. “Because he is lacking – because he is speaking – the subject searches in the little objects of his desire – through the intricacies of language – for the wholeness that has been ripped away by the interdict” (Bucci, 2002: 206). As to the interdict, we already know that it is one of the blades that divide the subject in two.

"The movement of desire was the attempt to *find* a lost object *again*, so, it should, in fact, deal with the relationship between the subject and such part-objects" (Safatle, 2004: 161). Furthermore, "this is not simply about rediscovering an object in the representative sense of the word ‘object’, but to rediscover a ‘relational aspect’ incarnated in the kind of *affective attachment* of the subject to the breast, to the voice, to the excrements, etc." (Ibid.).

It is in this context that appears the Lacanian idea of *cloud*: it is not through objects, but through *enchanted clouds* that desire is alienated in the relationship between subject and *object little a*. It is in this type of relationship that we will find the phantasm [fantasy], graphically represented by the divided subject connected to object *little a* ( $\$ \diamond a$ ). One may even say that, if he does not forge his adherence to *object little a*, a grip that is imaginary by nature, the subject does not speak, does not move, does not express itself and does not signify.

This also explains why *object little a* is the presence of a lack of an empirical object, as we see in the assertion that this object is ‘the presence of a void, Freud tells us, which can be filled by any object’, as we are facing an: ‘eternally missing object’ (Lacan apud Safatle, 2004: 161).

The phantasm ( $\$ \diamond a$ ) is presented as a formula to glimpse the way in which the *object little a* – which disengages from the language, or, more precisely, from the incessant sliding of signifiers - will adhere to the (divided) subject that will cling to it as the empty soul attempts to trap a sense of herself. In simpler terms, “the phantasm is nothing but the junction between one who is lacking and its object, a junction that is cemented by desire. The split, barred subject, generated by the symbolic, links itself to the object that completes him imaginarily” (Bucci, 2002: 212). And yet, how does this phantasm act?

We can finally introduce here the expression of Lacanian origin: *jouissance-value*, invoked at the 14<sup>th</sup> Seminar entitled *The Logic of the Phantasm*. Lacan begins to

reflect on how to take possession of the Other, how to find the previously uninterrupted jouissance. Drawing on the framework left by Marx, Lacan points out that this “problem is of the order of value, say it all begins to unfold, giving its name to the principle that reinforces that unfolds in its structure, the value at the unconscious level” (Lacan, 1966-1967, session of April 12, 1967).

Therefore, “there is something that takes the place of exchange-value, so that their false identification to use-value follows the foundation of commodity” (Ibid.). However, this, in the perspective of identification, shows a

subject reduced to its function of range, for we realize that it is the assimilation of two different values, use-value and, why not, we'll see it always, jouissance-value. Stress jouissance-value, playing there the exchange-value (Ibid.).

To remember the economic terminology to which Lacan refers, Karl Marx said, citing Aristotle, that “every commodity presents itself through a double standpoint: use-value and exchange-value” (Marx, 1999: 57). The relationship between them is that

the use-value is the material basis where a specific economic relationship takes place – the exchange-value. The exchange-value appears first as a quantitative relationship, in which use-values are interchangeable (Ibid.: 58).

Marx observed that, as they are completely indifferent to the

specific nature of the need for which they are use-values, commodities cover each other in specific amounts, they replace each other in the exchange, they work as equivalent, and, despite their variegated appearance, have the same unity (Ibid.: 59).

Having recalled that, we can continue with our line of reasoning. Lacan states that “the jouissance-value (...) was on the principle of the unconscious economy” (1966-1967, session of April 19, 1967).

We can say that this field of the *economy of the unconscious*, as Miller commented briefly, is one of the Lacanian cornerstones, and “to reconcile the true value with the *jouissance-value* is the problem when teaching Lacan” (Miller, 2005: 52) Here is the observation of a process that makes the *economy of the unconscious* into a process of the *economy of speech*, or communication economy. This economy is grounded in the very emergence of *object little a*, a process resulting from a barred Jouissance.

This instigated Antonio Quinet to develop the concept of *surplus gaze*, which is *object little a* within the field of social relations of *jouissance*. Here, the "term emphasizes its aspect as value (derived from Marx's 'surplus-value'), which is *jouissance-value*, from which the subject is excluded, but is still caused by it" (Quinet 2002: 14). We must remember that

*object little a*, surplus of *jouissance*, is a product of the Discourse of the Master, the founding link that corresponds to the installation of the laws of civilization with their consequent exclusion of *jouissance* or, in Freudian terms, the subsequent demand of instinctual renunciation (Quinet, 2002: 14).

Thus, this becomes the driving force of social representations and, hence, of the media practices immersed in them. We can accept the proposition that the Discourse of the Master – one of the four discourses identified by Lacan, all of which about the relationship between the subject, *object little a*, knowledge and the master signifier – is the *locus* of production of the gaze in present-day society. It occupies a privileged position,

as it appears in the imperative of fame, celebrity and transparency, in the thrust-to-video (television, film, video), with the incessant production of sets manufactured by technological science, and also in police-like control in which everyone must be watched all the time (Quinet, 2002: 14).

Television is the result of "our scopic society, [which] is the producer of *surplus gaze* that, as it enters the capitalist discourse, is presented as a visual gadget as a buyable object that causes desire in the subject" (Ibid.). *Object little a* is there, for sale, for our gaze.

## **JOUISSANCE-VALUE AND THE MEDIA WORK**

In light of the above, we may venture a synthetic formulation: *jouissance-value* resides within the *object little a*, which can be manufactured by the specific mode of production of the spectacle. This *jouissance-value*, inserted in *object little a*, now a manufactured sign, becomes the central commodity (the commodity elevated to the status of full image). The question that arises now is: how can *object little a* be put up for sale?

This precise passage reveals the core role that advertising takes on in the experience of the commodity. An earlier study of the many theorized concepts of

massification (Venancio, 2011) highlights Edward Bernays's role in the consolidation of the function of advertising in shaping a new dimension of economic power.

Known as the 'Father of Spin', Edward Bernays was, interestingly enough, a nephew of Sigmund Freud's and one of the popularizers of a commercial application of psychoanalytic precepts. The so-called *Spin* or *Spin Doctors* are advertisers from different backgrounds who, through their scientific knowledge, seek to create advertisements to bend public opinion in favor of the sale of the advertised product. His book *Propaganda*, published in 1928, though called 'the first manual of mass manipulation in advertising', did not become more famous than the figure of Bernays himself. Bernays's perspective of the future of advertising was clear. "Advertising will never die" (Bernays, 2005: 168), he would say. "Intelligent men need to realize that advertising is the modern instrument through which they can fight for productive purposes and help to bring order to the chaos" (Ibid.).

Order to the chaos, as Bernays proposes it, is also clear and naturalized in a democratic setting. According to his line of reasoning, "the conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits of mass opinion is an important element in democratic society" (Bernays, 2005: 37). He continues: "Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government, which is the true power of our country" (Ibid.).

The fruits of these early advertisers are what transform, for example, a single cigarette into a symbol of sexual attraction (product placement in cinema) or even of political power. It is not a coincidence that Adorno and Horkheimer (1985) analyzed the phenomenon of Cultural Industry based mostly on this latter aspect. Adorno (2007: 98) states that, in fact, the Cultural Industry does not belong to popular domain, but rather to the possibilities of contemporary technical capabilities, as well as to administrative and economic concentration. In the Cultural Industry, more than culture becoming a commodity, it is the commodity that becomes culture, and neither one nor the other is necessarily sold or bought.

## **THE EYE THAT LEAKS THE EYE**

"Chesterfield is only the cigarette of the nation, but the radio is the spokesman of the nation" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1985: 149) teaches us in the *Dialectic of*

*Enlightenment*. “By integrating all cultural products in the sphere of commodity, the radio utterly renounces selling as commodity its own cultural products.” (Ibid.).

Nonetheless, this media work – which already benefitted from the social gaze, since this work was carried out on the membrane created by the gaze – a work of value creation, became hypertrophied after the proliferation of television (which now occupies the entirety of digital media, far beyond its primitive phase of electromagnetic waves) and its possibilities of image simulation and live (re)presentation. In the scope of image, desire has gained an automatic trigger. We live now, in effect, a time when language has become the shop floor: signs are generated in the relations of production (in the industry of the imaginary) and return, as commodity, to the market of the imaginary. It should be no surprise that the image should reach its peak – in both value and luminescence – exactly at this time, as a sign.

In a first concept related to *jouissance-value*, inspired by Wolfgang Fritz Haug, there is the reminder that, in the instance of the live image,

everything that needs to be consumed is consumed as image. The commodity gains its image and, with it, its aesthetic. The aesthetics of the commodity accelerates the creation of exchange-value, and, in return, exponentially increases its exchange-value (Bucci, 2002: 25).

Much beyond the relationship with the Lacanian perspective, this approach allows the connection with Günther Anders’s phantasm. This is the aesthetic of consumption, in which consumption is the very production of value, in other words, it transforms the imagistic tripod consumption-production-aesthetic so that the elements coincide with one another. Therefore,

everyone, so to speak, is employed as a worker doing their service at home – an unusual worker, as he performs his work – which is to transform himself into a man of the mass – by consuming the mass product that is offered to him, i.e. through the recreational [offered by television] (Anders, 1973: 416).

Moreover, this conception of *jouissance-value* provides a broader scope of the relationship between the image and the phenomenon of televised communication, as, in this scope,

the image (of the commodity or as commodity) carries a signifier and offers itself as a meaning to the subject moved by unconscious desire. It promises and delivers the imaginary *jouissance*. The image (of the commodity or as

commodity) has a *jouissance*-value that determines its exchange-value (Bucci, 2002: 26).

Television should be seen as the culmination of social relations embedded in the logic of the capital and in the dissolution of time (extension of the paradigm of visibility) and space (we can all be ubiquitous). At this stage of reification, where we take people for images – “‘that shirt is so me’, says the poor consumer” (Bucci, 2002: 268) – one cannot fail to see the imagistic chain, particularly in the instance of the electronic and live image, as (re)presentations of games that, in point of fact, take place in the fabric of society.

Thus, we come closer to the idea that the gaze is a necessary factor to the creation of meaning and not the necessary element for the ‘receiver’ to ‘receive’ the message. Common sense imagines that the purchase of the gaze sustains the reception of the message, but that’s not how it happens. It is important to insist on this point: the gaze must be there because it is in the gaze that the image (or even the language of the image) is woven, fixing signifiers in meanings. The gaze, finally, does not appear as a mere *receiver*, or the recipient of the message in a linear communication. Beyond that, it positions itself both as a production factor of *jouissance*-value within the produced object little *a* and as the tissue (the membrane, the social support) on which this change of direction takes place, generating the sign industrially manufactured that rises to the status of commodity.

The operation of buying the gaze and producing value through the use of materialized *labor* in the gaze helps to fix new meanings in the imaginary.

Régis Debray’s investigation contributes to this process:

The equation for the visual era: Visible=Real=True. A phantasmatic ontology in the sphere of unconscious desire. However, this desire is henceforth powerful and well-equipped enough to align its symptoms to a true order. (Debray, 1993: 358).

Accordingly, within this same line of reasoning, “we are the first civilization that can perceive itself to be authorized by its gadgets to believe in its own eyes” (Debray, 1993: 358). This is how Debray is authorized to declare that, now, “a photograph is more ‘believable’ than a picture and a video tape is more ‘believable’ than a good speech” (1993: 354).

The image gets incorporated into the language and, more importantly, into the language produced by the gaze+work formula. Still, there is something in the image that is beyond the sign, and there lies its power in the creation of *jouissance-value*. Let us clarify.

Although the assertion *a phantasmatic ontology in the sphere of the unconscious desire* may sound like it supports the Lacanian-inspired analysis about television, Debray's Mediology operates in a different register.

Within this register, "a symbolic function is not *ipso facto* semiotic" (Debray, 1995: 181), in other words, the "image is not language" (Ibid.). Inspired by Dina Dreyfus, Régis Debray suggests "that one should be allowed to see in the painting a meaningful and non-signifying object, since it is not likely to decompose into dependent and discrete units of a 'double-articulation system' (paradigm and syntagm)" (1995: 182). To him, the image is not a sign, and much less a composite of signs. To see the image as a sign is, to Debray, to transfer

to the image the muzzle of language, of semantics and syntaxes, as if we had always feared to see or to desire to see, as if there were something dizzying in vision, which is precisely its intimidating and monstrous silence (Debray, 1995: 187).

In this he differs from Jacques Lacan. For Mediology, the image does not pertain to the field of language, as everything does to Lacanian Psychoanalysis. Debray's phantasm is distinct from Lacan's phantasm,  $\$ \diamond a$ . The Phantasm proposed by Mediology is the acceptance of the silence of the image. According to Mediology, although we may, in certain levels, understand the linguistic implications existing in the traffic of images and in the articulations of meaning between them, an image does not boil down to nor can it be solved only in language.

This is well illustrated by Jean-Luc Godard's response when asked to write a text on the *Histoire(s) du cinéma* in order to justify the production by the French Canal+. He expressed his disappointment that

to verify the need for such a project, they required words on paper when, after all, this is about using images and sounds to tell the story of these images and sounds, the story of their marriage (in English: *married print* to define a sound copy) (Godard cited in Debray, 1995: 188).

Godard also shows his perplexity when he questioned whether it was “necessary to have the shadow of the written phrase to protect us from the naive light that comes from the screen” (Ibid.). Postulating the independence of the image in relation to the primacy of language (of words), he proclaims:

It is not necessary to create a second barrier, to quote films as if they were memories, removing from them the prodigious power that had made them into the first and only truly popular art (Ibid.).

In this perspective, the phantasm that Mediology proposes goes beyond an operation that is rooted in language. This phantasm is the one released in the image as nature and not as language. Language is a source of domination by its *idiotia*, used by Debray in the Greek sense, i.e., for its simplistic particularity. It is this “savagery and *idiotia* of image (...) that create mediological superiority. A figure is closer and more appropriate to the passage to action than is a discourse” (Debray, 1995: 190).

Debray goes further and says: “The figurative *surplus value* lies in the deficit of the code. It is its pre-semantic mutism that gives the image such exceptional powers returned to the text in such a miserly way” (Ibid.). *Phantasmatic ontology in the sphere of the unconscious desire* does not sit in the unconscious as language along with its dance of signifiers. It sits in the extra-semantic power of images when they erupt before our gaze. This is an unparalleled source of nourishment to our desire.

That explains the “moral of the tale known to all empires, from the Byzantine to the American: in order to be known in all places and to dominate the entire world, it is preferable to produce images than books” (Debray, 1995: 191). It is the medium itself that gives power to the phantasm of the imagistic. As Debray himself declares, “that which makes the message ‘irresistible’ through the image is its emotional weight and the adhesion that it causes” (Ibid.). He adds: “Fifteen centuries before advertisers were born, Christians already knew that: good catechesis does not exist without sensitive images” (Ibid.).

Even so, there is no structural contradiction between what Debray proposes and what we learn from Psychoanalytic Theory. The phantasmagoric of Mediology is also a power of desire. As in the example cited by Régis Debray, “the Jesuits, Soldiers of God, made a conscious call to the images of the places and characters of Christ’s drama, allowing not only to better know the Lord, but also to better love him and, therefore, to



better follow him” (1995: 192). Thus, the “pragmatics of the image passes through the erotic quality of the image” (Ibid.). Our connection to them and what makes them capture our gaze is a sheer libidinal drive, often strategically planned by the producers of the imagos that surround us.

Thus, even taking into account that the phantasm proposed by Mediology will never be linguistic, it does not deny the formula of Lacan’s phantasm. For the purposes of *jouissance-value*, moreover, Debray’s text reinforces the content of this article, as it places the subject in contact with forces that carry him beyond what he understands as language (or beyond necessity), and yet, or exactly for that reason, the commodity shines, in that same image, with doubled power.

He is categorical:

To try to extend the discursive logic to the empire of the images is to lose, simultaneously, its two key dimensions: the strategic and the libidinal; or to neglect its two challenges, the political and the amorous, one because of the other. (Debray, 1995: 192).

The mediologist is “one who scrutinizes the transformation that all technical invention causes in human beings” (Debray, 2003: 129). And what's more: “What they (technical inventions) change in one’s eyes, hands, and soul” (Ibid.). The phantasm is the natural element in the image that causes the capture of the gaze. The phantasm, then, is the medium itself.

Still, as noted above, these findings do not weaken the key position of *jouissance-value*, a concept that benefits from the psychoanalytic legacy within the critical studies of Social Communication. Rather, such findings complement and solidify the concept. They reinforce its organizing character focused on the social division postulated by Habermas (2012) of System and of World of Life. For better or for worse, the image is no longer only an attractive element, but a subject of public interest. Its laws – and that which, in a conciliatory framework between Lacan and Debray, one might call an outline of the linguistic laws carried in the image – are laws that regulate, in part, the environment in which we communicate (or not).

So here the image reappears from the bottom of its animism to organize the common space. It was through the image that the Cultural Industry forged, in the mid-twentieth century, its concept of massification. It was also through the negotiations of

meaning, to which images congregate, that, next to the masses, which is the degradation of the mass audience, new publics emerged. These publics, even though more democratic and positive if compared to the massive days of yore, in the end work by the same mechanism: to become visible. Consider that both *Greenpeace* and *McDonald's* are logos, just like *Nike*. The gaze has become not only the social order of the moment, but also the way in which scopical desire acts to produce financial wealth.

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