

# Paradoxes of (dis)possession: capitalism, ambivalences and magic dimensions of consumption on contemporaneity<sup>1</sup>

## *Paradoxos da (des)possessão: capitalismo, ambivalências e dimensões mágicas do consumo na contemporaneidade*

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### RESUMO

O artigo aborda ambivalências e paradoxos dos processos de consumo na contemporaneidade, analisando-os desde uma perspectiva comunicacional. Epistemologicamente, dialoga com os marcadores da *impureza*, da *bastardia* e do *tensivo* para problematizá-los. Corroborando as entonações de Jesús Martín-Barbero, do consumo como forma de dominação chega-se à dominação como uma forma de consumo. Nessa direção, os paradoxos da (des)possessão são chaves de análise do capitalismo, no qual uma ordem de consumo sideralizada e afetual é posta em circulação, ancorada, como advogado por Paul Preciado, na produção e disseminação em larga escala de medicamentos e audiovisualidades cujo objetivo é designar modos *corretos* e compulsórios de *gozar*.

**Palavras-chave:** Consumo, comunicação, capitalismo, possessão

### ABSTRACT

The article discusses ambivalences and paradoxes of contemporary consumption processes, from a communication perspective. Epistemologically, it dialogues with markers of *impurity*, of *bastardy* and of *tensive* to problematize them. Reinforcing Jesus Martín-Barbero's notes, the idea that consumption as a form of domination reaches domination as a form of consumption. In this direction, (dis)possession paradoxes are central to the analysis of capitalism, in which a sideralized and affectionate consumption order is put into motion, based, as Paul Preciado advocated, on large-scale production and dissemination of medicine and audiovisual products whose goal is to designate *correct* and compulsory ways of *enjoyment*.

**Keywords:** Consumption; communication; capitalism; possession.

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<sup>2</sup>To Maria Aparecida Baccega, who presented me the studies of consumption. To Carminha Lévy, who introduced me to shamanism.

### INTRODUCTORY NOTES<sup>2</sup>

**W**HICH EPISTEMIC LOCATION should be adopted in order to think about consumption? As it will be argued throughout this article, we defend that it belongs to the field of bastardies (Rincón, 2015), of contaminations and paradoxes, of blurring (Martín-Barbero, 2004) and of counter-current. That also implies the consideration of consumption as narrative and engine of capital promoting inclusion and exclusion simultaneously. The condominium walls (Dunker, 2015) are translucent so we can see the difference between the inside and the outside, and we can equally maintain the mechanisms of looking to *others* active. Avoidable or even rejected alterities and inspirational or idolized differences dance in the bubble walls. However, beyond and through the cultivated divisions, interesting crafting devices emerge.

This article aims at presenting, in a relatively synthetic way, a reflexive perspective that contributes for the construction of a consumption theory under some specific emphases. Firstly, dimensioning it as a process whose expression and communicational base are essential. As a principle, the epistemic place is also a political place, implying and demanding attitude. As proposed by Prado (2015), communication itself is defined as a tensile field. Thus, traditional marketing or advertising theories are not enough to associate consumption and communication. We do not intend to, as we have been elucidating in different writings in the last decade (Rocha, 2012), reduce the consumption phenomenon to mere cultural expression of capitalism that arises with modernity. Before we shared the Jamesonian school of thought, to whom cultural logic *is* the late capitalism, and images *are* the new nature.

This means saying that there is a structuring cultural dimension of post-industrial capitalism and a related sensitivity (or an order of the sensitive) that has a peculiar temporal characteristic—presentification—that entices production and consumption of commodities and experiences marked by the rapture of the receptor/user/consumer and by a representation crisis, once the distinction between real and imaginary tend to be blurred with the naturalized explosion of technologic audiovisual products, experienced as if they were objective data to guide us. In a complementary way, materialities of consumption remain coated with a phantasmatic aura, composed by affections coming from performed abstraction.

In a convergent direction, it is understood that this wide and complex sociocultural fact strictly surpasses economic, productive and mechanic dimensions. To achieve the analysis and problematization goals, it is necessary to have a critical reading of contemporary capitalism, which is associated to a nuclear dynamic, called, in this study, paradoxes of (dis)possession. This

capitalism that promotes possession and property as maximum values is the same that encourages, by connivance or interest, numberless dispossessions: of work, housing, city, body. Articulated to the idea of possession, another ambivalence is noticeable. To consumption as narrative and vector of capital, we have involuntary possessions, subjectifying, as in addition, in consumerism, in compulsive pornographic frenzy, where one does not desire the possession of objects, but derives it in hallucinatory flows of consumption. However, going against the current, social subjects propose and practice voluntary (re)possessions: of the city, of bodies, of sexualities, evoking a post-modern neo-shamanism that dives and disassemble subjectivist and mediatized expressions of capitalism in financial structuration, globalized, which powerful techno-scientific networks are structured in-between.

Not fortuitously, Preciado (2014) proposes that insidious and tentacular networks of western globalized capitalism are sustained by pharma-pornographic logics in large-scale production and dissemination of medicine and audiovisual products whose objective is not to alienate, but, in an intense and ostensive way, to control, designating correct and compulsory ways of enjoyment. Agencies, industries, institutions and pharma-pornographic products, according to what can be empirically attested, and extensively documented by Preciado (2014), directly impact the libidinal constitution of women and men, in their different generational and gender experiences. Making it in a meta-narrative and subliminal way, but touching deeper: skin, organs, sexualities. This perspective evidences intrinsic incompleteness to functionalist/behaviorist-based researches, recurring in determined attempts of mapping and prospecting, for example, consumption tendencies and consumer behavior.

Therefore, using this *culture(s) of consumption* technology is not sufficient in this case. On the contrary, there is a generalized logic of consumption guiding social and economic relations, destroying at the same time as they produce, and a cultural agency of our libidos, bodies and subjectivities that are incessantly invited to *enjoy in boxes* and intentionally make it. In a convergent direction, we get closer to Prado's (2015) reading of Dunker (2015), understanding that in a world of barriers, passwords and avoidances (condominium logic), there are some productive indeterminations worth exploring and appreciating.

The reflexive terrain is the multi-focality, and in this ground, as an analyst listens to their patient's narratives, it is up to the communication (and consumption) researcher to identify geographies of crossroads, recurring *points of capiton*, significant knots and intertwining. We defend that the (dis)possession is one of the core of meaning that reveals central aspects of contemporary capitalism, with its sideralized consumption, and from which communication

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processes are articulated and managed—communication as tensive dynamic linked to affections and emotions, not only languages and materialities.

When considering the binomial possession/dispossession, central corollaries of western capitalism (technocentric and fictional), we aim to equally emphasize the possession centrality (private, individual, oligarchic) as institutional value—in consumerism, in real estate speculation, in patriarchy, in the defense of private property—and as an insurgent flag—in the (re)possession of bodies and cities, streets and sexualities. The ambivalent (dis)possession, impinged or addicted—in consumption, consumerism or violent expropriation of goods, values and subjectivities—can equally refer to dynamics or forms of resistance, as in activist occupations and in libertarian trances. Established capitalists and counter-current owners face each other and negotiate their places in this ground of paradox and dispute.

The link between demonic possession and capitalism, explored through Taussig (2010) propositions, imply not only moral and ethical struggles. Georges Bataille insists, in his work, in an unusual derivation: there is a cursed and transgressive part in consumption. This is revealed in the passional and unmeasured waste, but one can add the devouring and colonization of bodies through the dictations of capital, being a predator to subjectivities, making us—icons of post-modern scene—true zombies. In consumption as devouring, remembering the idea of eating icons from Baitello (2005) or the consumed consumer by Flusser (1972), managing subjectification in a delirious, excessive spiral remaining in other situations and practices of programmatic consumption, religious-rational, in which devotion is a rule and performance is the technique.

In this sacred-profane ambivalence, we notice a non-repressive tuning fork, regulating enjoyment, or, more specifically, dictating the right way to do it, and making it through pharmacologic and audiovisual ways (according to Preciado, 2014). Problematizing the contributions of Marxist, Freudian and Freudian-Marxist literatures, especially those referring to libidinal implications articulated to goods and to objectification of bodies, it is necessary to ask the exact place of objects in this liturgy. We propose, in an exploratory base, taking back some Benjaminian affirmations, particularly questions about the possibilities of merging the organic to the inorganic, that modernity presents since its birth. This merger unfolds in a double direction: points, on the one hand, to magic regimes of linking, as in shamanic cosmogony, and in an imagistic consumption experience. On the other hand, we have to consider dark and disjunctive synthesis, with a risk to suppression or subsumption (to objects and to attributes)

In a weave of paradox, consumption is constituted in layers: sacred, coopted sacred, profane, programmatic, useless, unproductive, unmeasured, ritualistic, sacrificial. Now, we will explore some of these layers.

## IMPURE, BASTARD, POROUS: CONSUMPTION AND THE PLACE OF INTERPRETATION

About this people, people would say they were apathetic, wasted land and would not interest in profit. When they acquired goods, it was only to give them up in a ceremony as the *potlatch*. The few who associated to banana plantations and became visibly more prosperous in the work were considered members of a new society of witches. (Taussig, 2010: 46)

Would it be in mythical “irrationalism”, and not in the dialectics of reason, that would lie the redemptive forces of modernity? (Felinto, 2008: 91)

Two central perspectives guide this study. One of them is contextual and epistemological, referring to a consumption approach that articulates ambivalences, blurrings and bastardies, highlighting as relevant historical marker the path modernity makes until post-industrial societies, in which path consumption is centrally a communicational subject, with the related *imprintings* of technicities. The other refers to a method issue, focusing in the proposition of a key of scene reading that articulates and is articulated by practices, materialities and narratives of consumption.

The suggested conceptual operator associates some historic conditions of capitalism to anthropologic constitutions of subjects, in the expressive emphasis of its imaginary capillarity, psychism, sensitivity and meanings. There are significant studies from this perspective based in Freudian, Freudian-Marxist and Lacanian literature. We will not be detained in these contributions, and we did not have the intention of doing so. We actually take as inspiration a shamanic point of view in the interaction with some of the aimed perspectives coming from Amerindian perspectives. We equally take back authors and theoretical conceptions that seek to understand consumption and capitalist logics that considers agency of magical and fictional aspects, acting and regulating processes and affections implicated there.

Let us begin with the first argument. As basal presupposition, the analysis of the relation between communication and consumption demands epistemological referential admittedly *impure*. Therefore, the triad beauty/order/purity is faced

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and distanced, an inheritance of a modern project considered by Bauman (1998) as the origin of the post-modernity discontents. The feeling of discomfort and fugacity, resonating the double meaning of the expression *discontent*, diagnoses our infantilized and fearful condition before all of that could seem like a disorder, deviation and crisis, and it is a splendid place of the most different and brutal initiatives of *strange* annulation, in that it faces the legion of *equals/normal* people.

Therefore, if before, in the emerging Freudian reading of modernity, discontent would be originated from forced and civilizing contention of drive, now it is the ground of impermanence that responds the discomfort. There is a paradox there, and it precisely resonates with the post-modern statute. To remain in impermanence is the medicine and the venom of *traditional bourgeoisie*. We live with a strange relativism, in which *anything goes* walks alongside *nothing goes*. That is how we justify either the punishment of alterity, the free combinatory actions, or the iconoclasts. As Bauman (1998:9) said, “our time is of deregulation. The principle of reality, today, has to defend itself in the court where the principle of pleasure is the judge.”

In complementary direction, the post-modern dilemmas of the critique crisis and the risks of intellectual cooptation, to give in to neoliberal seduction, are not less important for the proposed reflexive *demarche*. It is important to seriously consider the moral dilemmas and the ethical crossroads present to researchers who intent to develop studies on consumption and communication in industrial and massive contexts, and, later, in post-industrial and post-massive contexts, who try to escape reproductivism to schematism and distortion, not fearing contamination and paradox, dedicating themselves to *smaller* objects and themes, getting interested in *scraps*, banalities and *bad taste*.

The dialogue called *southern epistemology*<sup>3</sup> puts us in full tune with Barberian propositions (Martín-Barbero, 2004), particularly when he talks about the contemporary emergency of blurring places and forms, amalgam of flows and terrains of crossroads. Blurriness helps us think about the current consumption configuration—in its social happening, in its production paths and in its everyday appropriation—as space-time of fluid and complex intertwinings, and not only as what institutes immutable principles and marks rigids frontiers between, for example, classes and people, parody and pastiche, success and failure, diversity and intolerance, identity and subjection, humanist values and individualism.

As it will become clearer throughout this argument, we analyze consumption dynamics—evidently nuclear to the functioning of the capitalist system—from a fast-paced post of observation underground/surface, interested and implied in the emergency of counter-hegemonic discourses and in unforeseen leaks of what it should be hidden by the capitalist rhetoric, going against its programmatic order:

<sup>3</sup> I am aware of the boldness of proposing the share of a reading such as this when analyzing consumption in a non-dogmatic way, considering it as theoretic object and readings with the intention to criticize them. Refusing to refuse, I feel faithful to narratives and perceptions of many of my young informers, astute crafts that are, at the same time, strong critics of capitalism and consumerism and heavy users of technology and accessibility, for example. Recently, under the international network protection of researchers, in which I take part, we can locate similar postures, with de-colonial principles mobilized in the analysis of communicational practices and youth politics that technologic mediation and post-massive ambiance are determining.

What is lastly necessary to abandon is a mechanist conception of social, which reduces the superstructure to reflection the economic basis, and an idealist conception—as materialistic it proclaims it—which subjects the ideologic process in terms of conscience of content. (Ibid.: 54)

We do not intent to deny any critical theories that sustain the analysis in ideologic roots, stigmatizing and excluding capital narratives, from which the consumption of tangible and intangible is, without a doubt, tributary. However, what interests us, specifically, is to analyze and pursue the consumption molecularity, its moveable states and fragments, its plasticity, much more than its declared, articulated and well-established principles. We drive through its shadows, much more than its lights. Thus, there is a “multivocality of processes and logics” (Ibid.: 15) to investigate, and it is up to the researcher to identify, as a psychoanalyst facing the elliptical narratives of their patient, the main geographies of crossroads. (Dis)possession, as we will see in the following core of our reflection, is revealed as one of these *points of capiton*.

In a complementary sense, we indicate a reflexive conception that follows the suggestion made by Omar Rincón (2015), in which he radicalizes the inheritances of Martín-Barbero and García Canclíni. The notion of *bastardy*<sup>4</sup>, which Rincón (2015) attributes to the theories of communication and presents as an analysis strategy of his objects, is of an astute irreverence, quite proper to the theoretic perspective assumed here. With that in mind, we can walk in the problematization of libidinous dimensions of consumption, of desire communicational characteristics and bastard frictions between consumption, communication and consummation. Reinforcing the Barberian intonations, we move from consumption as a form of domination to domination as a form of consumption<sup>5</sup>.

In contemporary western societies, we fully live the surpassing horizon of massive communication dictation by the post-massive phenomenon, turned exponential by the digitalization, robotization and ubiquity effects. The massive consumption and cultural industries enter in mutation, giving place to a post-industrial capitalism, a polycentric communication and a sideralized consumption, constituting orbits of products, images and feelings shared in post-global, post-utopic and post-autochthonous context. In such reality, the consumption of communication and its media materialities is so central to the spirit of time understanding as to the artillery of geopolitical colonizers.

If in fact we live in a test, between “technologic optimism and capitalist cynicism,” in “democracies of *personalism* and *celebrities*,” “there are hopes in the logic of signification and politization called new sensitivities (feminism,

<sup>4</sup>“First comes the *popular*, soon came the *bastard* (or these illegitimacies that constitute our taste) to then arrive to the celebrity (or these pop-litical ways of existence). [...] The popular is many things at once: Popular, more than comprising a pure and sanitized way of existing, is an experience of *bastardy*. [...] Popular cultures are bastards, degenerate heir of good cult cultures (Illustration), dense traditions (Identity), folklore (people), media (entertainment and spectacle), connection (internet and mobile) [...] Within these communicational citizenships, there is something that interest me: celebrity citizenship. These citizenships that develop the desire to be in screen of public self-esteem (media and networks) with their own voice, face, history and aesthetics” (Rincón, 2015: 23, 26-27, 36, our translation). In the original: “Primero viene lo *popular*, luego lo *bastardo* (o esas ilegitimidades que nos constituyen el gusto) para llegar a lo *celebrity* (o esas maneras pop-líticas de existir). [...] Lo popular es muchas cosas a la vez: lo popular más que dar cuenta de una sola manera pura e higienizada de existir, es una experiencia de *bastardia*. [...] las culturas populares son *bastardas*, unas ‘degeneradas’ herederas de las buenas culturas cultas (Ilustración), las tradiciones densas (Identidad), lo folclórico (pueblo), lo mediático (entretenimiento y espectáculo), lo conectivo (internet y celular). [...] Y dentro de estas *ciudadanías comunicativas*, está la que me interesa aquí: las *ciudadanías celebrities*. Esas que desarrollan el querer estar en las pantallas de la autoestima pública (medios y redes) con voz, rostro, historia y estética propia.”

<sup>5</sup> Here, we refer to the classic inversion of Jesús Martín-Barbero: instead of communication as process of domination, he suggests domination as a process of communication.

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<sup>6</sup>The original: “optimismo tecnológico y cinismo capitalista”, “democracias de personismos y celebrities” “hay esperanzas en las lógicas de significación y politización llamadas nuevas sensibilidades (feminismo, indígenas, medio ambiente, sexualidades emergentes) con sus agendas de diversidad y estéticas para explorar”. This and other translations of the author.

<sup>7</sup>Important references of this type of approach are Mario Perniola (1993), with the idea of “already felt” and Christoph Türcke (2010), with his “philosophy of feeling”. Muniz Sodré (2006) also mentions this debate in his analysis of “sensitive strategies,” that articulates politics, media and affections.

<sup>8</sup>Here I quote the positions assumed by Jacques Rancière and some of his Brazilian researchers, such as José Luiz Aídar Prado.

<sup>9</sup>Distinction proposed by Ann Kaplan analyzing different branches and postures of post-modern researchers. It is important to remember that the author considers Baudrillard as one of the most coopted post-modern intellectuals. See Kaplan (1993).

indigenous, environment, emerging sexualities) with diversity agendas and aesthetics to explore”<sup>6</sup> (Amado; Rincón, 2015: 6, our highlights). This strategic redirection—in the sense of the term *strategy*, as conceptualized by Certeau (1980)—can also be identified in studies that are proposed to analyze the communication through emotion and affection<sup>7</sup>, presupposition which we adopted from Spinoza, such as the reflections about the consumption of audiovisual communication and life of images, and the apprehension of orders centrality of o the sensitive<sup>8</sup> and different aesthetic experiences in contemporary forms of political action.

How to position oneself without being lightly coopted or being necessarily utopic?<sup>9</sup> Jean Baudrillard (1992) used unusual images, named *chaotic*, when talking about the degeneracy of critics and subject in technocentric and trans-political settings, and for reasons such as this, our apocalyptic prophet chased metaphor as the *strange attractor and the evil genius of objects*. It is up to the theory, according to Baudrillard (1992), to become a perfect crime. To the subject, vanishes the fatal and seductive attraction of objectualities, specially the triumphant technologic objects. With surrealist inspirations he did not fight against the *strike of events*. He would give in to the scene, lurking distractions of the real, to perhaps surprise it.

There is always a gamble there, suggests Baudrillard (1992), and we see a deep similarity between this typically post-modern inflection and one of the perspectives we propose to use in this reflexive apprehension of consumption, resulting in an analytical (a form of interpreting, building it as a relevant theoretical object), or a pragmatic performative (an intentional use, proper and specific, an appropriation or voluntary resignification). First, keep in mind that consumption (of objects, merchandise, imaginaries and lifestyles, from varied narratives, sounds and image, smells and textures) is inexorably realized in contexts of unpredictability. That is how it is listed in the deontology of advertisement communication about which the anti-tobacco advertisement would increase cigarette consumption.

A totalizing and infallible linearity that would link the production to the reception—assuring a principle of Orwellian determination to the consumption cycle—do not resist reality tests, and that is precisely because consumption comprises non-programmable bindings susceptible to error among real subjects and beings that have different families and experiences, including virtual, digital and invisible forms. However, despite the fallibility of maximum and unrestricted domination theories, the unpredictability is not a synonym for autonomy, nor an indetermination of a libertarian seal. Therefore, even if the billiard ball model was dismantled a long time ago, consumption remains as a

pillar of the bourgeois societies and the globalized capitalism, following their mutations, crises and adjustments. The so-called *society of consumers* is not the useful innocent this time. To its associates, the prize of prosumers was attributed, a sad name adopted to soften the potential contained in the explosion of the production and reception poles and to minimize the evil effects that can be generated by this proximity.

In the core of this type of mutation, it is noticed that consumption increasingly operates in a non-repressive tuning fork, which stimulates enjoyment, limitless pleasure, and it is precisely in this (modern) union between communication and consumption, which is exponentially updated. Its language (or ideology, according to Arthur Kroker) is entertainment. Communication seems to have a double role. On the one hand is the romantic task of endlessly entertain its peer, as an acrobatic and shallow Sherazade. On the other hand, it has the management of a technocentric, voluptuous and intensive rationality, assuring the endless promotion of creating enjoyment, either in its partner or everyone else.

Authors such as Rincón (2006), however, are not pessimistic about the narrative—and metanarrative—potential managed by media and different massive cultural products, as cinema, music, television, journalism and advertisement. According to him, the narration is a form of imagining other possible worlds and purge miseries: the instant affection option appears as a contrast to meaningless excess. However, it also ponders that the precariousness can predominate in media production of meaning, leading to the ideologic dimension impersonation of meaning in favor of its styling, to the point of leading a fight of taste and not of classes, with the entertainment republic imposing itself as an explanatory matrix. According to him, with the vital promise that every life can be fun, “media communication is inventing its own world of life—entertaining and ephemeral—and its own cultural subject—individualistic and exhibitionist”<sup>10</sup> (Rincón, 2006: 41).

Therefore, it is not about a direct accusation to entertainment or to mass media in itself. Rincón is concerned, in fact, with the existential and political risks of media self-referentiality, the maximum and hypertelic degree of the modern individualistic project, converting life into a spectacle, sensibilities in a frivolous excitement, and dogmatically incapsulating the forms of narrating, even more than the implicated content in the stories.

In a society that became used to inhabit the appearance, in a public space without structure, occupied with presentified perspectives, there is an open space for the valorization of what he calls light philosophy and light thinking, linked to the good vibes, immediate affections, and avoiding, gracefully, the density (according to Rincón, 2006). If the reality-politics is the metaphor chosen

<sup>10</sup>In the original: “la comunicación mediática está inventando su propio mundo de la vida –entretenido y efímero– y su propio sujeto cultural –individualista y exhibicionista”.

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by Rincón to mirror contemporary democracies, we could suggest celebrity-intellectuals as privileged actors of the statistic-science, in which the number of quotations correspond to the number of stars given in the hall of fame.

The *impure* thought and the *frictional* paradigm, which we referred in the beginning of this topic, reach capitalism in an opposite direction; the compulsory enjoyment as an end and driving force, social glue, high tech symbolic cement; the addition as destination-deviation. Control lived as a Narcissistic omnipotence: televised surveillance converted in repeated shots of self-image in the *selfie* culture. Where to look? With what eyes? All that *melts into air* is now the *new solid*. What implications would that have? We recur, for now, to a proposition of Peter Sloterdijk: dive! But do not sink.

### **THE POSSESSION GODDESS AND THE CONSUMERIST DEVIL: PROPERTY, TRANSCENDENCE AND POWER IN CULTURE AND CONSUMPTION**

Here, we arrive to another point of the argument. We now bring the concept of possession as a key for problematizing specific aspects of consumption practices nowadays, also bringing back to the *modus operandi* of its narratives. In this case, we question the logics through which they give support about the effectiveness or transposition of capital logics to the social body, either to what is referred to its imaginary magma or, very concretely, to its ways of making someone feel, think and act.

To take possession and its opposition as corollaries of capitalism means to face a delicate reflexive journey to recognize permanencies, transformations, mutilations and inventions carried out through this powerful system, exploring, furthermore, how the most archaic elements in human life are organized and dissipated there, and in a primordial way, their relationship with the sacred, the death, the similarity and the differences. To consider the transgressive dimension of (dis)possession is a similar challenge. Once again, we bring back the idea of medicine and poison. The magnitude of these issues lead us to assume the most modest of positions in this brief writing space. Having such care as a guide, we begin.

One of the most evident characteristics of the bourgeoisie project advance was to take instability, fluidity and abstraction and turn them into reliable topologies—the modern tradition of the new, so well analyzed by Gay (1989)—something that was already foreseen in the metaphor created by *all that is solid melts into air* and the concept of *commodity fetishism* in Marxism. In this direction we create the relation between possession as established value (in the

world of reactionary capitalists, and in the prototypical and slightly *démodé* consumers' life) and as an insurgent flag (to take possession of what is yours, your body, for example); and the experience of ambivalent possession (being taken by spirits—for good and for evil—or succumbing to addictions) and the excluding (dis)possession (to suffer from expropriation processes; of self, of what belongs to you; the city, etc.).

Walking as a diving bell in a rhizomatic jungle that is established in this axiology and its related experience levels, we locate, especially in anthropologic literature, different remissions to pacts or demonic possessions as forms of achieving success and prosperity in the secularized industrial and post-industrial environments. In addition to expropriation and dispossession as engines of the devouring monster of capitalism, there are equally macabre agreements that one can do to possess. Then, to take possession of goods and acquiring rights may imply, throughout time, to lose the dominion of skills and giving up principles.

It would not be uncommon in these diabolic agreements to use the dispossession given to others, usurping or expropriating bodies, lives or values. The hierarchic position obtained by *possessing their own things*, configuring mechanisms of social distinction, implies to deny others the right of possessing these things. The exclusion created by structured social and economic systems based on (private) property, which authorize expropriation, suppose the criminalization of insurgencies, especially those configuring fights for the right to possession that will be campaigned by the expropriated.

The approximation with the work of Michael Taussig (2010) has been fundamental in the theoretical articulation between the idea of (dis)possession and consumption, which makes an explicit mention to “consumption theories” (Ibid.: 344) in an analytical view that will think about them in the opposite direction of conventional reflexive flows or mainstream cultural dynamics. Taussig (2010), on the contrary, studies the capitalist system from the inside out, analyzing it in its peripheral view in the perception of its productive relationships impact regarding rural groups of Colombia and Bolivia.

The shock between the productivist rationality of the worldly capitalism and the traditional logics of these communities is the place where one observes the emergency of magic explanations—and the use of the devil's image—as a way to mediate the conflicting encounter between both universes. Confronting the form of capitalistic mystification with pre-capitalism popular mysticism, the devil is always present in the pacts a worker does to have advantages in the exercise of their functions in the capitalist productive system, but it also appears, later, in the negotiations of the capitalists, so they can keep themselves at the top of profitability. Not fortuitously, the narrative created by Taussig (2010)

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incorporates, gradually, the dynamics of illegal coca plantations, the incipient circuits of drug trafficking and the daily life of people expropriated from their land and their bodies. “The word *sómbi* means [among the bakweri] to pawn or to mortgage; then, under the new conditions of a monoculture economy, they believed family members would become puppets or objects to pawn, so a small group could gather a fortune” (Ibid.: 46).

The naturalization of the capitalistic culture, as devastating as serial plantation, based in the use of agro-chemicals and cut between land/producer/production, is in the core of the critique operated by the anthropologist, analytically rendering “the phantom objectivity with which the capitalistic culture coats their social creations” (Ibid.: 24)

The animated appearance of commodities evidences the objectified appearance of people, and both dissolve when the mercantile inspiration of definitions of men and society is reinforced. [...]

In its mercantile form, society engenders such fictional reality; thus, we are forced to deal and understand the world from these symbols and abstractions. (Ibid.: 30-31)

In these terms, there is a “market mentality” in constant standby: “the market put itself amongst people, mediating the direct conscience of social relationships through abstract laws that guide the relationship amongst the commodities” (Ibid.: 52). Fetishism and reification are the most obvious references of the journey created by the author. Quoting Marx, Adorno, Benjamin and Bataille, he reaches the meaning of consumption per se. Then, having already defended the clear marking of what would be a pre-capitalist fetishism (which presupposes the union between people and their products) and capitalist fetishism (in which people are subordinated to things), his consumption theory implies that he is in perspective with his magical expressions. This magic aspect applied is revealed as it generates demonic pacts of cooptation, but it is also present in diabolic interpretations of resistance. Equally, consumption can be associated to the experience of transgression. We will later get back to this *evil part*, which is circumscribed in Bataille’s work, and also mentioned by Jean Baudrillard (1992) in his analysis of the so-called malignant genius of objects and the contemporary incapacity to enunciate evil.

Talking more directly about the union between communication/consumption, the oxymoronic complementarity that composes the duo possession/dispossession can be observed in some specific episodes, very mundane, strongly spectacularized and considered exemplary of the subjective capture by classificatory systems

characteristic of the capitalism owned by media and videoclips (Pelbart, 2000). Thus, we are interested in looking to events that origin and form of expression refer to standard-media guidance, which operate and are intentionally mobilized in the regulation of existence and in the dynamics of social visibility. It is not fortuitous that such strategies are anchored in a double articulation basis, extremely technical, programmatic, with strong religious and/or magical appeal. We call attention to the recurrence with which Brazilian female instant celebrities, whose notoriety was obtained through incessant and excessive exhibition of their modelled, modified and modular bodies, have been converted to different evangelic religions.

At times, the neo-converts seek salvation through public and spectacular purge of sins attributed to their previous life. That was what happened with a former Miss *Bumbum*, named Andressa Urach, which almost died due to complications caused by the excess of hydrogel injected in her thighs, causing necrosis. After (miraculously?) recovering from the misfortunes of an involuntary degeneration, she announces her conversion. She says goodbye to a body, so she could regenerate into a *person*, although obviously not giving up the celebrity aspect. Urach will then declare that she used to apply black magic to achieve success. She would say, “when I came back from my coma, death spirits lurked around my bed and my mother saw them. There were noises, screams, it was an awful feeling” (DECLARAÇÕES..., 2015). In other moments, she holds entities accountable for her previous life, that one that, once she converted, she says was promiscuous: “I used to make crazy things in bed invoking the spirit of *pomba gira*<sup>11</sup>. I used to scream and kiss a lot, a rare act among prostitutes. I even earned more than thirty thousand reais per month working from Monday to Saturday (POSSUÍDA..., 2015). The redemptive suffering becomes not only an autobiographic matrix, but it will be the conducting wire that holds together the new project of self. A curious existential derivation: consume me so I cannot be consumed. Devour me so I can remain.

Projective and performative, the narrated suffering is a privileged discursive form in media coverage of entertainment and documental melodramas of non-paid and paid TV reality shows, in which we see the voice of recovering addicts, with the aesthetic of overcoming and exceeding all limits—now, in a positive way. As Dunker (2015) observes, in condominium capitalism “the suffering narratives are always transversal, linking moral, medical, economic, aesthetic, clinical and psychopathologic categories” (Ibid.: 273)<sup>12</sup>. The own management of discomfort becomes a business, structuring a cycle of stimulus (excessive consumption; production and promotion of self; visibility and excitement) and punishment (to deviant, immoral or libertine addicts).

<sup>11</sup>N.T.: *Pomba gira* (*Pombo Njila* in *bantu*) is the name of an Afro-Brazilian feminine spirit evoked by practitioners of Umbanda and Quimbanda in Brazil.

<sup>12</sup>Dialoging with Amerindian perspectivism, and revisiting the proposition of Lévi-Strauss, who refers to the psychoanalyst as a shaman.

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<sup>13</sup>The same author, in a disturbing inversion, takes the praise of *pornô* and the voluntary contamination as tools to elaborate his theoretical interpretation and his own experience—that would not be set apart or divided.

<sup>14</sup>In the original: “La industria farmacéutica y la industria audiovisual del sexo son los dos pilares sobre los que se apoya el capitalismo contemporáneo, los dos tentáculos de un gigantesco y viscoso circuito integrado”.

According to Paul Beatriz Preciado<sup>13</sup>, “the pharmaceutical industry and the audiovisual industry of sex are two pillars over which the contemporary capitalism is supported, two tentacles of a giant, viscous integrated circuit<sup>14</sup>” (2014: 48)

Maybe it was why Preciado aims his critique not at the objects, but at images and the oppression of bodies—for excitement and contention, continued and circular. Paroxysmal totemism in which we relate (in equality and difference) man-shapes and image-shapes.

Edgar Morin (1997, 2000), in many of his works, would say that the culture of masses (and advertisement) became, since the end of the 1950s, polycentric in terms of its power and shapes, being a privileged observatory of human resources in negotiation with the end, death, alterity and the unknown. In a clear Benjaminian inspiration, he would perceive in the cinema consumption and in the star system, practices of appropriation and resignification that escape and even diverge from the so-called initial ideological vocation programmed for movies or for their stars. The regimen of connection noted by him highlights the subjective tactics of devouring, or the cannibalism, of these admirable figures and their stellar lives, making it hard, in this case, to know who is in charge; instead of power, subjection.

Either as a voluntary action or as an involuntary energy, the *becoming-expectator* derives into a *becoming-expectant* revealing *iconofagic* gears—and here we pay tribute to Norval Baitello (2005)—of culture serialization and the market of distinction. Ironic strategies arise from receptor subjects, being anthropophagic and iconofagic, an insubordination that Jean Baudrillard (1992) will later attribute to facts and objects. What may remain unconscious and related, in this aspect, with the Adornian critique is the constitutive farce of the aesthetic arm of capitalism, that, when showing itself as a lie, an indistinction, an anecdote, remains affirming itself as an empirical reference to truth and objectivity. Perfect copy syndrome. Checkmate.

As can be noticed, the proposed debate refers to paradigmatic fights of modernity—the tensions between secularization and permanence of the sacred—between the illuminist project of enlightenment and instrumental rationality, as some of the most important ones. Felinto (2008: 14) refers to the modern “as a passage, a moment of an oxymoronic combination between a sacred world and a profane one” (Ibid.: 14), and it is recurring to the magic dimension of language that it will face the crisis and “the generalized void of meaning in *post-modernity*” (Ibid.: 15, our highlight).

Even though Mike Featherstone (1995) did not make an incisive difference, what appears to be fundamental, between consumption and consumerism<sup>15</sup>, he is an important reference among those who were interested in thinking about

<sup>15</sup>Featherstone says, in an approximation that I consider extremely permissive between the concepts of sacred, religion and religiosity. That, however, doesn't harm the main course of his analysis..

the conditions of religiousness appearance and the maintenance of the sacred in a post-modern culture of consumption. At first, it would be a contradiction of terms, once western societies privilege hedonism and an extremely operational rationality:

Generally, the culture of consumption is presented as something extremely destructive for religion, in terms of its emphasis on hedonism, in the search for pleasure here and now, in the elaboration of expressive lifestyles, in the development of Narcissistic and egotistical types of personality. (Ibid.: 159)

However, as the author shows, “consumerism continues to support a religious dimension” (Ibid.). The place of sacred acquires unsuspected proximity with the fields of leisure and spectacle, and it would not be much to notice how the style of identities respond to a rigid reading of cults and cultivations. Featherstone writes in the beginning of the 1990s, and, almost thirty years later, bibles multiplied. On the one hand are those who attend to the frivolous intertwining between mystic experiences and self-help literature. On the other hand, victory protocols available by celebrities who demonstrate how to apply oneself to a spartan daily diet (feeding exclusively of selfies, nudes, egg whites and protein shakes) to obtain the bliss of media attention.

The profitability logic is a designed mind setter introjected in subjective servitude. “The subject is no longer subjected to rules, but they invest them, as if it was a financial investment,” observes Peter Pál Pelbart (2000: 34).

There is no more factory-restricted production, or leisure restricted to leisure environments, or consumption restricted to consumption environments; when we produce, we are, at the same time, consuming and entertaining ourselves, or vice-versa. [...]

Neo-capitalism erases national, ethnic, cultural, ideologic, private barriers. [...] Globalized economy would constitute the apex of this inclusive tendency, in which we abolish any enclave or exteriority. [...] We call empire this form of sovereignty that has eaten everything. (Ibid.: 30)

Does anything escape to the cannibalistic lust of this *inclusive tendency*? According to Featherstone (1995: 163), “it is necessary to investigate in which specific ways believers, especially those produced by specialists if symbolic production, such as priests, intellectuals and artists, play a central role of integration in daily life”, and perceiving that, in certain contexts, commodities “are

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de-marketized and acquire a symbolic meaning (above and beyond advertisers had intended) which makes them sacred to their users” (Ibid.: 168). Events and parties receive in their rituals the experience of media, showing themselves on television, in all media star system digitally gathered, and also in the varied intersections with which Sibilía (2008) would name the “me show”.

This sacred-profane ambivalence would not be necessarily something to be negativized. That is how Featherstone (1995) sees it, referring to different counter-cultural experiences, with its potential of pacific conviviality and in the state of suspension and creative exceptionality, which would be characteristic<sup>16</sup>. Even though we partially agree with this interpretation, once it casts a light to the power contained in cultural uses and reinventions, we must have some reservations to the world of breaches. The market of faith and the market of sex are close, in a continuous flirtation, as cold as it is lustful. And that does not relate, per se, with transgressive dimensions of the magic experience, nor the permanence of the sacred in the daily microphysics. This association, it is important to say, can fall into mandatory syncretism, bringing us back to the compulsive appetite previously enunciated by Pelbart.

Although we do not focus in a more in-depth explanation of Jean Baudrillard’s contribution for the field of communication and consumption studies, as we seek to elaborate, it is important to remember that two of his studies (*The Transparency of Evil* and *Symbolic Exchange and Death*) explicitly articulate the system of objects and, later, symbolic exchange and death to capital’s unfolding. According to its interpretative school of thought, it is “a new generation of signs and objects that raise with the Industrial Revolution” (Baudrillard, 1996: 71).

Let us look at objects that are tools, but also priests; objects that can become voodooos, that can clarify something about this magic, complex and contradictory agency that I chase in my writings, such as a strange attractor, the same one that allows the rupture with the designations of capital and signals—in a devouring state, parasite by the wire of dominant elite—the offer of settled smoothness, in the comfort of transcendent explanations applied to a demented daily experience.

A very recurring critique to consumerism, either in common sense or in academic speeches, is supported in the supposed evil adherence, provoked and fed by capitalism, between humans and objects, which conjunction would gain outlines of indistinction. Therefore, depending on the conditions of the addicted and the time of the addiction, human subjectivity would sink into a triumph of objects, as *Frankenstein*. The man who becomes a standard-worker in a new car, the young woman who becomes a type of automatic mannequin serving to pieces of clothing and pairs of shoes, the teenager who turns his eyes

<sup>16</sup>It will not be possible to do an in-depth remission of what Michel Maffesoli proposes in books as *Le temps des Tribus* and *La part du diable*. But there we find, without a doubt, possible paths of dialogue about reconfiguration and the omnipresence of the sacred and the myth of post-modern everyday life. We bring this observation in this moment due to the fact that Maffesoli, as Featherstone, identified these trails in phenomena such as rock concerts or raves. Another absence in this article, which appears in my research studies, is some books by Muniz Sodré and Vilém Flusser.

over the world and himself in response to the unsaid and the possibilities of his state-of-the-art iPhone would be iconic examples of this argument.

Even though there is not a lack of empirical sustenance, something escapes this interpretation. In the path of Marxist theories about commodity fetishism, more attentive critiques to the cultural and psychic complexity of the act of consumption choose as main alienation and corruption vector of the subject the evil machinery that gives objects a soul, a libidinous balm that charms us, as the flute of the illusionist operates with the snake. This reading also remains incomplete. Walter Benjamin have already thought about the necessary gaze transmutation in the understanding of objects theater architected with so much care by the bourgeois project. That is because he realized something more than an effrontery scene in this apparent puppet show.

The big transformations of productive forces configuring 19th century capitalism trigger original sensitivity regimes, which Walter Benjamin (2006) relates to the phantom of the market. In his incursions of this phantasmatic world of unsuspect animation, Benjamin turns to new cultural and historic experiences that are supported in capitalism through the duality past/present, alive/dead, animate/inanimate, perceiving how in the most modern of experiences—in fashion, for example—there is a group of meanings and worship rituals of the inanimate. Benjamin, seeing the parallels between fashion, baroque and modernity, elaborates the concept of sex appeal of the inorganic, which contains, modifying and widening it, the fetish in its Marxist and Freudian characterization.

He talks about an unprecedented fetishism, marked by the ability of eliminating barriers that separate the organic from the inorganic, making everyone feel “at home,” both in the inanimate and in the “real” world (Matos, 2010: 7). This appeal implies a hallucinatory, libidinal and magic regimen of links between humans, commodities and phantoms. Thus, nature becomes marketable, money becomes sensual, body becomes monetized and objects bring and contain desires, in an erotica of capital and in an excitement—programmatic and passionate—of subjects.

Massimo Canevacci (2008), in one of his most original and academic studies, dialogues with these perspectives to think about city, body, images and objects, presenting the “visual fetishisms” concept, and that, as proposed years before (Rocha, 2009), comprised the subtle and deep turn of the screw that characterizes the passage from an industrial regimen to a paroxysmal step of a financial, narrative and media-driven capitalism, whose field live culture mundialization, productive system internationalization, and the mandatory account share of an intrinsic and endemic crisis.

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We, then, arrive at a provisional synthesis: the problem is less in the connection with objects, since it obviously excludes some pathological manifestations, but rather in situations which symbolic objects and systems work at an atomization project, domestication of bodies and agency of imaginaries. Therefore, in line with what Paul B. Preciado (2014) proposes, nothing against fetishes, they are even very useful in form of toys of erotic and sexual (dis)assembly. All criticisms to the invasive custody and interference in our bodies on behalf of pharmapornographic industries and states.

In this issue, it is important to refer to the pioneer study of Everardo Rocha (2010), bigger version of his master's thesis, defended in the late 1970s. Rocha was wrongly associated with a conformist literature regarding consumption and especially publicity, and then we realized the permanence, or more precisely the update, in the narrative of capital in primal forms of links between sapiens and the level of imaginary meanings and symbolic negotiations, activating individual psychism, but also the collective magma. According to what he proposes, there is a type of totemic system in the bourgeois school of thought and a totemic operator in advertisement consumption. Quoting Lévi-Strauss, Rocha names the totemic function that will associate to advertisement narratives, which sacralize everyday moments:

As in the myths of tribal societies, also in advertisements where animals talk, and magic events are constant. To me, it is fascinating the mystery that makes us not fear the economy of its symbolic game. Among us, from the society of "reason", there is a silent, implicit commitment in believing the impossible. Therefore, the advertisement sews another reality that, based in the concrete relations of life in its social actors, produces an idealized world. As a magic mirror, it reflects aspects of the society that feeds the illusion of an ideology that wants to be permanent in its project. (Ibid.: 31)

And what does neo-shamanic say to us? In them, the mediator (or shaman) transits through different levels and interacts with different experiences. Soul forces, in this function of negotiating or, in some cases, of giving voice or embarrassing, occupy both the place of the other who people seek, and follow the shaman in its spiritual trips or in its everyday practice—offering protection, intensifying healing powers or acting in transmutations. The object forces are not less important, constituting, along with herbs and other elements of nature (crystals, stones), the instrument that helps the shaman in his activities, both in a symbolic perspective (in the access to other consciousness plans, for example), and in present exercises of exorcism, cleaning or physical and spiritual counseling.

Deleuze and Guattari, approaching conditions of subjectivation in the order of capitalism, made explicit references to experiences in witchcraft and the universe of myths, and here we will specially highlight the particular reading of those authors made by Viveiros de Castro (2015). Viveiros focuses in the definition of becoming, fundamental to the arguments of the authors of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, and with that, we have the formulation of the “concept of alliance as a disjunctive synthesis” (Viveiros de Castro, 2015: 183). Becoming a derivation and an escape reveals an “economy of trans-specific affections that ignore the natural order of species and its limitative synthesis” (Ibid.: 187) articulated by the own “magic-real element of becoming” (Ibid.: 193). Thus, in the encounter between the Amerindian perspectivism, Amazonian shamanism and Deleuze-Guattarian impostures, the author allows us some considerations about the communicational dimension of shamanism, in which we evidence the mediating function of the shaman, but singularly the emergency of a world of obscure, unforeseen, confused, counternatural and, in its disjunctive dimension, producing meaning.

The shamanic spin enables, on one aspect, the understanding of something unexpected present in the interaction mediated by the communication and consumption, in which Everardo Rocha (2010) would exclusively associate to totemism and the narrative construction of the advertisement communication. But it is also where we can critically look to the post-industrial view in its praise for object-subject *soul* commutation. More than a passage from production to consumption, from objects to signs, the post-consumption is a subject of fusion and indistinction between objects, humans and signs to the point that it is no longer possible that one perceives what sets him apart from the other. And, in this case, it might imply the loss of the magic perspective, with the end of negotiation and the rise of the “virtual audiovisual connections”<sup>17</sup> empire (Preciado, 2014: 48):

The pharma-pornographic bio-capitalism does not produce things. It produces mobile ideas, living organs, symbols, desires, chemical reactions and states of soul. In biotechnology and in porno-communication, there is no object to produce, it is about *inventing* a subject and producing it in a global scale<sup>18</sup>. (Ibid.: 49, highlight made in the original)

The critical reading presented locates consumption as a map of tensions, subjected to unforeseen combinations that may blur barriers of class, identity and even subvert dynamics of distinction that conspicuously regulate what we understand as desirable excess and scarcity. The war of tastes, as Rincón

<sup>17</sup>In the original: “conexiones virtuales audiovisuales”.

<sup>18</sup>In the original: “El biocapitalismo farmacopornográfico no produce cosas. Produce ideas móviles, órganos vivos, símbolos, deseos, reacciones químicas y estados del alma. En biotecnología y em pornocomunicación no hay objeto que producir, se trata de *inventar* un sujeto y producirlo a escala global”.

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(2006) would say. War of enjoyment would reply Preciado (2014). As a place of impurity and immeasurability, voice of the capital and also the unsaid of the fictional capitalism, we open in layers: a sacred voice, the coopted sacred, a profane voice, a programmatic voice. What surprises us is to notice that in this complex dynamic of enunciation, activated by the consumption, the problem is not exactly the excess. There is even a thesis by Taussig (2010: 324) that says that the sacred and evil excess are able to transgress capitalist regulation, evidencing the “meaning of loss, as well as it manifests the lust of winning”:

Would it be the transgressive pact—which equally produces luxurious generosity, demand and consumption and brings death and infertility—a pact that we can locate in the limit of modernity, in which Benjamin wants to establish a line that would set apart the ability objects have to bring back memories? Would it be the contract with the devil, before anything, the rite that obliterates what Benjamin calls “experience in the strict sense of the term”? [...]

Would it take us to the center of the strange contribution of George Bataille for the 20<sup>th</sup> century thought, when he intertwines excess to transgression to create a history of political economy, of radically different capitalism and consumerism, focused not only in the production, but on expenditure—what we call “unproductive expenses: luxury, war, cults, the construction of sanctuary monuments, games, spectacles, arts, perverse sexual activities [...] End in themselves” (Bataille, 1985b, p.118) (Ibid.: 323-324)

The evil part of consumption praises the useless, the excessive, the lavish spending, the unproductive expenditure:

[Therefore] consumption should be divided into two parts: the first “represented by the use of the minimum necessary for the conservation of life and continuity of the productive activity of an individual of a given society”, but the other part (the evil part, “evil” meaning also sacred as in latin, *sacer*) is consumption as unproductive spending. (Ibid.: 345)

The ambivalent force of consumption (possession/dispossession) guarantees and subverts the capitalist dynamic and affects the perspectives of subjectivation. In the mystic of consumption, when we own an object it also owns us; or more: it wants to be possessed, unlimitedly possessed. As in the ironic genius present in the self-mistake narcissistic-selfless, in which a man with a fit body in his luxurious car says: “I only do this for myself”; “I bought this car because I

love its performance, not the brand.” As in the undisciplined affirmation of the young activist that says: “I consume affection”; “I spend my time with my friends, enjoying the pleasure of the encounter.” As in the speech of the addict, capable of “spending whatever it takes to have the most modern cellphone.” Scarcity in the excess. Excess in scarcity. But, still, beyond any totemic function, the consumption is considered a sacrificial rite, not only to the other, but to the subject itself.

Before the mirror, one feels the magical illusion of omnipotence and the phantasmatic fascination of completion. As *daímones*, humanity is sacrificed in benefit of a supposed immortality. Tattooing subjects with a set of dead signs or remaining, *ad infinitum*, in the limbo of techno-pharma-porno-society, zombies, digitalized images, cemeteries of cars, environmental trash, deleted emails, inactive profiles of social networks, records of surveillance videos, headless dolls, words that we do not use anymore, silicon, gossip, lies, false titles, vanities. ■

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