

Spectacle, communication and communism in Guy Debord

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ABSTRACT

The present work is oriented by the hypothesis that Guy Debord's reflection on language and criticism of the commodity fetishism are inseparable aspects of a single and same point of departure of the critique of "the society of the spectacle", centred on the criticism of language and commodity-form. Debord holds the view of a transition, concerning the horizon of the aesthetic and social reflection on language, which is the transition of the concept of expression to that of communication or dialogue. He seeks to compile and maintain, but also surpassing, the critical characteristic of uncommunicative expression (and, therefore, refractory to the "pseudo-communication" of the bourgeois society), as it was conceived and experienced by modern art and the vanguards of the beginning of the 20th century, formulating the social critical perspective of the direct communication.

Keywords: Reification; Language; Expression; Communication.

The language of an absolute lonely man is lyrical; it is monological. This loneliness isn't simply the drunkenness of the soul imprisoned by fate and converted into music, but also the torment of the creature condemned to isolation and that yearns for community.

LUKÁCS, G. A. *The Theory of the novel*.

Published in 1967, the book *The Society of the Spectacle*, by Guy Debord (1931-1994), in the late years, has been the topic of discussion in several different disciplinary areas of the humanities, mainly in the so called cultural studies. Even when it is not the very subject at issue, its main concept – the "spectacle" – is incorporated in diverse reflections, although quite frequently at the expense of its specific conceptual meaning. In considerations of this concept most often sociological, what is frequently lost is the central pretension, announced by the author, in various occasions, to articulating an up-do-date approach to the criticism of the political economy. This approach takes in not only the experience and the reflection on language, very typical of the vanguards and the modern art, but also the resumption, in vogue at the beginning of the 1960's, in France, of a philosophical reflection on Marxism, promoted in that period

by the publication, in French language, of *The Theory of the Novel* and *History and Class Consciousness*, both written by G. Lukács, and *Marxism and Philosophy*, by K. Korsch.¹

Founding member of the Situationist International, Guy Debord received the publications of the works above mentioned - which were central to the philosophical discussion in the context of the theoretical criticism of society, in the years 1920-1930 – on the basis of a claim from the experience of the interwar artistic vanguards, proposing, thus, the issue of the currentness of the vanguards' programme under the conditions of the second post-war capitalism. What follows from this reflection is the proposition of a critical theory of the late capitalism, in which, according to Marxian concepts of alienation, commodity fetishism and reification, the social and aesthetic experience of language takes the central place. Based on this interpretation, I intend to present in this article the conceptual articulation between the critique of the commodity-form and the critique of the reified language, under the hypothesis that such an articulation constitutes the centre of the critical theory of "the society of the spectacle". In this way, I shall conclude by discussing how an emancipatory perspective results from it, considering that in this perspective the overcoming of reification and the supersession of the art form are inseparable from both a communicative conception of language and the social praxis.

Spectacle, Contemplation and Loss of Communication

The basis of the critical theory proposed by Guy Debord is an ascertainment, in the contemporary capitalism, of the everyday life, immediately phenomenical, of the abstract logic of commodity-form. This ascertainment is central to the debordian concept of "spectacle", precisely with regard to the transformations of appearance of the capitalist system. Indeed, under the concept of spectacle, the economy period in which the commodity would have reached the "total occupation of daily life", the situationist writer sought for unifying and explaining, according to him, a diversity of "apparent phenomena", which are, they themselves, "appearances of a socially organized appearance" (*SdS*, § 10).² What does this mean? This question asks about something fundamental to his concept of spectacle. To explain it, it is necessary, above all, to consider that the concept of appearance in this critique does not refer, at first, to the sensory-visible appearance, but rather to the categories, of Hegelian origin, of appearance (*Schein*) and apparation (*Erscheinung*), in which Marx places the trades of equivalents in the first chapters of *Capital*, which deal with the circulation of

¹ "It was necessary for us to resume the critique of the political economy understanding it in an accurate manner and combating 'the society of the spectacle'", says Debord (Notes pour servir à l'histoire de l'I. S. de 1969 à 1971, p. 95). To this affirmation, we have to add another, in which Debord bases his theory on the internal discussion about the vanguards of the World War II. "Fifteen years previously, in 1952, four or five scarcely recommendable people from Paris decided to search for the supersession of art (...) The supersession of art is the 'North West Passage' of the geography of *vraie vie* that had so often been sought for more than a century, beginning especially with auto-destructive modern poetry." (DEBORD. Préface à la quatrième édition italienne de *La société du spectacle* [1979], in: *Commentaires sur la société du spectacle* [1988], p. 130-131).

² DEBORD. *La société du spectacle*. From this point onwards the references of this book will be made along the text itself, with the indication of the initials in brackets and of the paragraph in question.

commodities and money. In the Marxian exposition of the critique of political economy, the concepts of “sphere of circulation” and “appearance” are found articulated, precisely because they concern the immediate and daily experience of the market trade, a condition of the capitalist production which is, nevertheless, presented by the capital itself and is constituted, therefore, in “the apparition form of capital.”³

It is already in this apparent instance of capitalist production, an instance constituted by the exchange of commodities and money, being equivalents in the sphere of circulation, that Marx sees the manifestation of a fetishist objectivity which, nucleated by the law of value, escapes from man’s control and it imposes on him as “a relation among things”. In an express mode, Marx conceives the fetishist character of the commodity-form determined neither by the “physical nature” of the products, nor by the “material relations” present at the practical exchange among individuals during their production, but, exclusively, by the *social order* of that exchange, as a mercantile exchange; therefore, that one does not concern the sensitive appearance, but concerns the “objective appearance of the social determinations of work”.⁴ It is this objective appearance of the mercantile exchange which constitutes a phantasmagoric objectivity, for it presents itself to men, in his practical experience, as a natural relationship, constitutive of the things themselves, although it is a determination of the historical form of the social relations. However, it is a necessary appearance for it is the constitutive law of the value that in itself appears, exactly in the sphere of circulation, with the objectivity and with the need for a natural law. Thus, for Marx, a phantasmagoric and fetishist nature of the commodity-form, not being determined by its sensorial form, does not constitute, consequently, a unilateral illusion of the conscience, but an illusion that we could rather say objective, in so far as everyday experience of the monetary-mercantile exchanges, being exchanges of equivalents, “veils, instead of revealing, the social character of the private labours and, therefore, the social relations among the private producers.”⁵ It is in this sense that the conscience of “the private producers only reflects [mirrors, spiegelt] “(...) those forms which appear in the practical circulation, in the product exchanges (...)”.⁶ In other words, the daily conscience mirrors “nothing less than the determined social relation among men themselves that for them assumes here the phantasmal form of a relationship among things.”⁷

It is this fetishist social appearance, formed by the circulation of commodities and money, which, according to Debord, extends its logic to the set of activities and daily relationships in the spectacular capitalism, producing and organizing the “appearances, “the apparent phenomena”, these being sensorily

³ MARX. *O capital*, p. 125, t. I/1. As appearance of capital, the circulation of commodities and money is not the false aspect, to which there opposes a genuine instance (in this case, the production of capital), as a simplistic metaphysical concept would be supposed. For Marx, “It is therefore impossible that outside the sphere of circulation, a producer of commodities can, without coming into contact with other commodity-owners, expand value, and consequently convert money or commodities into capital. //It is therefore impossible for capital to be produced by circulation, and it is equally impossible for it to originate apart from circulation. It must have its origin both in circulation and yet not in circulation” (p. 138). It is precisely in this sense that the sphere of circulation is the form of the apparition of capital, the apparent instance which necessarily composes it.

⁴ MARX. *O capital*, p. 71, t. I/1.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 73.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 72.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 71.

visible, immediately present, in the individuals' social experience. The objective appearance of the mercantile exchange, of which Marx categorically affirms autonomy and independence in the face of "physical nature" and "the material relations" of the production of use-value, has now become physically apparent, sensitively visible. It becomes a socially organized appearance which is manifested, in the spectacular capitalism, in sensorily apparent phenomena, thanks to the extension of the mercantile relations to the whole of the daily life. Precisely so, autonomy, concerning the individuals, from the appearance of fetishist exchanges of values, starts to sovereignly constitute, subjected to its abstract logic, a series of apparent visible phenomena, which thus become, they themselves, also autonomous in relation to the individuals.

In his work *Capital*, Marx refers to the commodity as a "physically metaphysical thing". In his analysis of the contemporary capitalism, Debord observes a speculative movement of this abstraction constitutive of the economic value, towards the sensitive, movement through which, however, this economic value does not have its material autonomy restored, but, quite the contrary, it is completely subsumed to the abstraction of the value. In his theoretical critique of the spectacular capitalism, Debord rightly understands that the exchange value, having reached such a level of autonomy, by means of the superaccumulation of capital and, jointly, through the extension of his logic to the dual dimension of space-time lived, may be presented in the totality immediateness of the use-values, and in such a way that his abstract logic not only becomes immediately visible, but also the unique thing which makes itself be seen. Thus, the individuals' everyday experiences, situated in the apparent sphere of the system which is constituted by the mercantile-monetary circulation, become, they themselves, as experiences subsumed into the logic of the exchange of equivalents, apparent phenomena of the capitalist production.

This automation of the apparent phenomena of the abstraction's economic value is named by Debord as "world of the autonomized image" (*SdS*, § 2). However, this is not about – as Mario Perniola critically appreciates – "of an iconoclast attitude which considers the visible forms with suspicion".⁸ The spectacle would not be, says Debord, "a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images" (*SdS* § 4). In the use of the concept of image, Debord does not primarily do a narrow reference to the sensitive vision, but rather to a "mode of production" of which the spectacle would be, not a "supplement", or an "added decoration", but, precisely as a "form of appearance of capital" (Marx) "the omnipresent affirmation of the choices that have already made in the sphere of production and its corollary consumption" (*SdS* § 6) What Debord has in mind under the concept of image are the fetishistic social relations, founded on the automation of value and extended to the totality of the social use of time, of space, and beyond the wage labour, but essentially following its disciplinary and contemplative logic. The images and representations which, in the spectacle, replace what is directly experienced are, above all, a form of social relationship in which the individuals, who are related, they effectively place themselves as contemplative spectators in and of their own activities and generic relations.

If Debord can conceive the spectacle as constituted in the production, as a mode of production, it is fundamentally because he understands that "with the generalized separation of the worker and his products,

⁸ PERNIOLA. *A estética do século XX*, p. 82.

every unitary view of accomplished activity and all direct personal communication among producers are lost”; consequently, “unity and communication become the exclusive attribute of the system's management.” (*SdS*, § 26). In other words, the concept of the spectacle, not concerning the “mere gazing”, speaks of “which escapes the activity of men, that which escapes reconsideration and correction by their work. It is the opposite of dialogue.” (*SdS* § 18). If one has in mind the two last mentioned passages, one understands that, under the concept of the spectacle, Debord essentially seeks to articulate two fundamental dimensions constitutive of the social appearance, in an occasion in which the commodity-form extends to the whole lived: the expropriation of the autonomous activity, inseparable from the expropriation of the communicative language.⁹

What is mainly central, then, to the concept of the spectacle is that, according to the author, the horizontal extension of the exchange of equivalent brings to the “surface” of the social life (the appearance of the metabolism of the capital, in Marx’s conception) the contemplation that is essential to the wage labour and that, on the whole, it is on the base of this same universalization of the commodity-form of the work products. Taking account of this relation between wage work and the spectacle is important, for it answers the frequent critique that this last category would be limited to the sphere of circulation of commodities and not concerned to the production of the capital.¹⁰ It must be remembered that, for Marx, “it is only from this moment [in which the workforce assumes, for the worker himself, the form of a commodity] that the produce of labour universally becomes a commodity.”¹¹ This universalization is not dissociated from the very thing that characterizes the capitalist production as the production of surplus-value. In his critical conception of the spectacle, Debord takes into consideration that the extension of the mercantile exchanges found a transformation - or, if one wishes, an adjustment – in the social appearance, with the emergence of a totalitarian group of phenomena that produce and require, as in the immediateness of the lived, the contemplative passivity peculiar to the wage labour. His account on the social appearance is not restricted, therefore, to the sphere of exchange of equivalents, but to ponder on individuals’ immediate social experiences in a social historical situation in which the mercantile exchange shows, in the extensive totality of most diverse phenomena, as hierarchical and contemplative as is the mercantile production based on the wage system. The instance of equal exchanges, which simultaneously composes and hides the production of the capital, starts to apparently manifest the contemplation that, in the industrial wage labour, is essential to the production of value.

⁹ In this sense, his reflection on social appearance in the advanced capitalism does not only consider the visibility of the mercantile product, but also its “aesthetics”, its “appearance”. This is just a determination - cf. § 15 of *A sociedade do espetáculo* – of this broader movement of domination of the lived through the fetishistic reification of value. He does not even centrally considerer the tendency – really existent – of the cultural production of late capitalism which concerns products sensorily “visible”, centred on “image” and on “sight”, as it is pointed out, in a sympathetic manner, although unilaterally, by F. Jameson (*A cultura do dinheiro, ensaios sobre a globalização*, especialmente p. 87 *et seq.* e 114 *et seq.*).

¹⁰ As regards this critique, cf., among others: DAUVÉ. *Kritik der Situationistischen Internationale*; BLANC, *L'Internazionale situazionista e il suo tempo*.

¹¹ MARX. *O capital*, p. 141, n. 41.

“Contemplation” – a category that, for L. Feuerbach and the young Marx, is inherent to the speculative inversion subject-predicate – is taken by Debord, and herein following the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness*, as a form of social relationship particular to this extensive moment of mercantile relationship. The spectacle is, thus, a speculative inversion between the sensitive and super-sensitive, which takes a historical concrete form in the field of value over the use-value, a field whose ultimate basis is the inversion between the producer and his product operated by the alienated work. For Debord, the more developed capitalism presents, in a direct manner, that is, phenomenical and apparent, the logic of the super-sensitive abstraction of economic value, imposing an inversion between sensitive and super-sensitive that, ever, had been the immanent fetishism of the commodity form. Therefore, there is not, in this context, a denunciation of the sensitivity on behalf of a true super-sensitive reality, but strictly on the contrary, it is the denunciation of the abstraction dominance of the economic value over the sensitive; it is the critical understanding that, in the conditions of advanced capitalism, the super-sensitive logic of value has become immediate, covered with images, transforming the very sensitive into something similarly abstract (as it occurs in the quantification of time, in the mercantile leisure, in the banalization of the space, in the consumption of goods ...). It is like an image that imposes itself to be seen and to be contemplated that the auto-movement of the capital is constituted in the experience of contemplative passivity in the immediacy of the totality lived.

A second dimension inseparable from the first is that one which is connected with the communicative relationships among individuals. It does not concern, in this case, to separate, and much less to oppose, as does A. Jappe, "the importance attributed [by Debord] to the “communication”, a supposed "great effective novelty of [his] theory [that] results (...) from its reference to the fundamental role of the exchange and the principle of equivalence in the contemporary society ".¹² However, if the alienation of the productive activity is revealed, when mercantile relations become universalized in the totality of experiences and everyday relationships, as essentially the “opposite of dialogue”, it is precisely because, according to Debord, the expropriation of productive activity in capitalism presupposes - and necessarily results in – the loss of direct communication between producers. The expropriation of autonomous activity at work and the expropriation of communicative language are two determinations which reflect themselves reciprocally. G. Agamben highlights this reciprocal determination by considering as essential the critical theory of the spectacle which, in it, “the Marxian analysis is integrated in the sense that capitalism (...) was not directed only to the expropriation of productive activity, but also, and moreover, to the alienation of the language itself, that is, of the very linguistic or communicative nature of man.”¹³ Debord presents, therefore, a theoretical critique of

¹² JAPPE. Guy Debord, p. 189. In *History and Class Consciousness*, work which Jappe relates, with reason, to *The Society of Spectacle*, there exists already this nexus between contemplation and expropriation of the communication, nexus to which, however, Jappe did not attach much importance to in his analysis.

¹³ AGAMBEN. *Violenza e speranza nell'ultimo spettacolo*, p. 14-15. In this same perspective of analysis, O. Virno emphasizes that, under the category of the spectacle, what is at issue is the mode of production, in which “human communication became commodity.” Hence, according to Virno, the interpretation between wage labour and expropriation of human communication expressed, in Debord’s thoughts, the demand that the critique of capitalism must comprehend the critique of the instrumental conception of language, in such a

the advanced capitalism in which the mercantile passivity and the reified instrumentation of language are inseparably articulated. For him, the contemporary capitalism is characterized by essentially the same and unique expropriation of dialogue and autonomous activity, which are condition and necessary consequences of the universalization of social relations directed by the law of value.

Modern Poetry, Labourer Movement and Communism

Comprised of this double validity, the visible and immediate nature of the dominance of the value-form in the contemporary capitalism is a central determination not only related to the concept of the spectacle, but also, for this reason, the prospective affirmation immanent to the critique that Debord elaborates. In a similar way, as psychoanalysis proposes in relation to dreams and to oniric images, the whole issue is to translate into conscious desire, through language and communicative praxis, the possibilities of another life that are hidden/shown in the “images” constituent of the spectacular capitalism. Metaphysically, this essentially communicative position of social criticism seeks refuge in the concept of *common language*.¹⁴ Historically, it is based not only on anti-hierarchical experiences of the labourer movement, notably in Workers’ Councils of the first quarter of the twentieth century, but also in expressive experiences of modern art, which were contemporary of those same revolutionary workers’ experiences. In this context of reflection, Debord thinks the modern artistic development as component of a historical process of dissolution of the “old common language”, a dissolution carried out, first of all, by the development of capitalism itself in its destructive nature of the pre-modern social relations. When thinking this artistic experience as constituent part of the social experience of language, whose destructive element has critically been assumed by writing and by the modern plastic-pictorial figuration, Debord articulates a prospective social sense for the historical experience of modern art, a sense that, for him, it is inseparable from the revolutionary overcoming the present conditions of existence.

In this connection between the historical experience of language and the modern artistic experience, Debord formulates a theory of both the historical constitution and the crisis of autonomous art. In short, he conceives his theory like this: the aesthetic experience that, before, was called “the common language of social inaction”, inseparable from the “religious universe” in pre-modern societies, is constituted, through the dissolution of the former common language, in “independent art in the modern sense”, when “its declaration of independence is the beginning of its end” (*SdS*, § 186). This formulation points to a movement of historical constitution of the modern art statute, as a separated aesthetic experience, but separated from a

manner that “the abolition of the wage labour” is also constituted, essentially, in “freedom of language” (VIRNO. *Cultura e produzione sul palcoscenico*, p. 19-26).

¹⁴ This is not the place to develop this issue, but it may be said, concisely, that the category of common language in Debord assumes to a certain extent a metaphysical feature, in the same sense in which are the *gleiche Sprache*, “equal and common language”, in *The Theory of the Novel* (Lukács), e de *Erfahrung*, “collective and communicable experience”, in *The Narrator* (Benjamin). In all these cases, it is a question of indicating a passage, a transition and a non-fixedness of the present historical experience. This relationship between the categories of common language in Lukács, Benjamin and Debord, I developed it better in *Reification and Language in Guy Debord* (Fortaleza: EdUECE, 2006).

whole social interconnection, in short, as an experience other than that of the former belonging immediate to the aesthetic phenomena of a whole closed community. For him, the independent art historically constitutes its emergence from the old mythical-religious universe, as a way out of a traditional common language; it is precisely this process that, when separating it from the integrated universe of the pre-capitalist community, in which a transmitted sense is retained, constituting it as independent art, dwelling, in this, the beginning of its dissolution as art. What really constitutes it as an autonomous modern art is, therefore, its assumption of the crisis – keeping for itself the place of "self-destruction criticism" – of the experience and the language common to tradition. Liberated for its autonomy, through the destruction of its ancient historical *ethos*, the modern art is constituted as such when it placing for itself an experience in which that destruction is assumed, according to Debord, "critically".

In this way, there would be found, in modern art, a “*critical self-destruction* of the former common language” (the italics are mine). Its entire movement is the one of conscious reflection and experimentation and also significant of this destruction of language, movement by which its very existence is inseparable from this more general historical-social experience. The importance of this process is that, for Debord, “the liberation of everyday life (...) implies the withering away of all the alienated forms of communication.”¹⁵ This withering away was consciously discussed and put into practice by modern art. By understanding it in this historical articulation with its own social language, and having in mind, critically, the anti-communicative nature of the contemporary capitalism, Debord precisely sought to propose a historical prospective sense for this experiment, sense in which the critical feature of the destruction of the former common language in modern art is preserved: “The fact that the language of communication has been lost,” says he, “this is the positive significance of the modern decomposition and destruction of all art. The negative implication of this movement is the fact that a common language must now be found”(SdS, § 187).

According to this understanding, the whole modern art was a consciously positive demonstration of the destruction of the former common language, which it stated and requested in the form of expressive aesthetics. Equally well it has become independent art, leaving the old religious universe, destroying itself critically as belonging to that universe, constituting, in this way, its own formal independence in a inseparable process from the social destruction of the former common language. However, as far as it makes itself the place of a conscious destruction of the traditional language, the modern art inscribes a prospective sense to this way of transforming itself, sense that negatively signals the search for another, non-alienated, “common language”. If the destruction of the former common language is part of the destructive nature of the capitalist society, its assumption by the modern art in an expressive aesthetics is also a critical position considering this form of sociability, characterized by pseudo-communication. However, it is exactly in its critical position in view of the reified daily communication of the capitalist society, inseparable from the communicative perspective in which it is inscribed negatively, that, as stated by Debord, the modern art finds itself historically with the communicative experiences, as counsellors and “assembly men and women” of the revolutionary movement. The development of modern art in their expressive nature, negatively points at the search for the realization of another communicative language which, in their horizontal and anti-hierarchical

¹⁵ DEBORD. *Œuvres cinématographiques complètes* 1952-1978, p. 35.

experiences, the labourer movement positively rehearsed in a practical dialogue of refusing the unilateral language and outside the State.¹⁶

To better determine this communicative perspective that Debord elaborates on his theoretical critique of the more developed capitalism, it is possible to rehearse a distinction between his position and the one formulated by Theodor Adorno. To this author, the ethical-aesthetic opposition between “expression” (*Ausdruck*) and “communication” (*Kommunikation*) has precisely the meaning of a negative position considering the reified “communication” in the market society, from which the expression constitutes a denunciation (essentially a part of socially critical content of the modern art).¹⁷ Adorno structured all his aesthetic perspective - which takes an important place in its social criticism of the late capitalism - the opposition between *Ausdruck* and *Kommunikation*, even in a situation in which he himself acknowledges the crisis of the category of aesthetic expression in the neutralized experiments of the “neo-vanguards”. However, he reiterates it because he remains theoretically committed to the “autonomous form of art”, as it would have been, according to his analysis, experienced by the modern art in between the two World Wars, trying to stress the critical nature of the autonomy of art in view of the dominant heteronomy in the late capitalism. On the contrary, Debord seeks for overcoming this opposition, not choosing, however, the alienated communication from the expression, but conceiving the possibility of a “direct communication”. As conceived by Debord, direct communication is exactly contrary to the sense of *Kommunikation* criticized by Adorno, by he himself and, according to the analyses of both, experienced by the expressive modern art. Nevertheless, Debord intends to go beyond a statement of the expression against the reified communication of current social relationships. Neither disregarding nor circulating, but just taking as a basis the critical sense of that opposition, Debord searches for overcoming it dialectically, with a communicative perspective.

Actually, his communicative conception is diametrically opposed to the criticism that J. Habermas presents in view of Adorno’s expressive perspective. First of all, this does not concern, for Debord, with distinguishing, in a phenomenological mode, world of life and systemic world, as does Habermas in his theory of the communicative acting, but, conversely, it concerns with indicating in a dialectical procedure that a reified logic of the commodity form and the wage labour organizes the entire everyday life. Consequently, the so-called world of life, a category with which Habermas thinks the daily life, is ready determined by the world from the systemic world of fetishistic economical relations. Therefore, it is not a question, for Debord, to take the everyday communication, as it exists in this present alienated society, as a basis of a social communicative perspective, just in the same mode Habermas wants, mode which refers to a

¹⁶ It is in the negative and critical nature of the destruction of language, in and by modern art, as well as in communicative and anti-hierarchical experiences of the working class movement that Debord justifies the historical perspective of the communicative language. This does not concern, therefore, the common language of the pre-capitalist communities, as M. Löwy interprets, for whom in Debord there would be found a “protest against capitalist/industrial civilization in the name of the past values” – *Consumé par le feu* (Le romantisme de Guy Debord), *Lignes*, Paris, Harzan-Lignes, n. 31, 1997, p. 163. Debord does not even start working, in his critique of the reified language, on the positive assumption of a “human essence”, as A. Jappe thinks and for whom the situationist’s position as for the reification “evidently supposes the existence of a “human essence” which may be used as a parameter to determine what is “sound” and what is “alienated” (Guy Debord, p. 51).

¹⁷ ADORNO. *Teoria estética*, especialmente, p. 56; *Ästhetische Theorie*, p. 68.

“rationalization of everyday communication, linked to the inter-subjective structures in the world of life, for which the language is the means genuine and irreplaceable of understanding”¹⁸ For Debord, this present daily communication, in all its levels of “rationalization”, is formed by the autonomous mediation of mercantile relations, hence, it is a “pseudo-communication”. Similar to Adorno’s solitary position, R. Duarte says, precisely against Habermas’ position, that “if anyone of the participants in an activity mediated by language is imbued with this negativity so essential to the philosophy, “communication” between them rarely exceeds the phatic level, in which the ideological instances of the administered world operate”. In that sense, a “communicative action” is really accomplished from the moment when it is able to fully incorporate a radical negativity in respect of the current state of affairs.”¹⁹ It is precisely in satisfying this requirement, by taking it as an assumption, that Debord’s communicative perspective can be understood as a dialectical supersession of the “adornian” position, incorporating it. Rather than deviating from it or abandoning it in favor of an “acritical” communicative perspective, such is the case of Habermas’, Debord incorporates the existing negativity in opposition between the expression and the reified communication, just like this opposition was formed by the modern art and discussed by Adorno.

Thus, as for the essentially anti-communicative nature of contemporary capitalism, in which the aesthetic expression would no longer maintain full negative potentiality that the period in between the two World Wars would have, Debord’s position is for a communicative perspective as a critical stance and as a social project of overcoming the reification. In this regard, there also imposes a radical difference in his conception related to the theory of “communicative acting”, which Habermas would articulate some years later: it does not concern, for Debord, to seek a transcendental foundation for the “communicative praxis”.²⁰ It concerns, therefore, thinking it exclusively based on the negative praxis as regards the unique system of alienations of the market and of the State, negativity that the modern poetic expression, that is, anti-hierarchical, would indicate. It is only while it claims for this negativity, immanent in the modern art experience and typical to the revolutionary tradition of the labourer movement, that, for Debord, the programme of supersession of art, sought by the vanguards of the beginning of the 20th century, means that in the spectacular capitalist conditions the supersession programme of the expressive aesthetics to the social communicative praxis. In this perspective, the proletarian revolution will be heir of the modern art, by positively accomplishing the communicative programme which, in negative, it is immanent, and in contrast, modern art will be achieved,

¹⁸ HABERMAS. *Teoría de la acción comunicativa*, especialmente o tópico IV "De Lukács a Adorno: La racionalización como coisificación", p. 437.

¹⁹ DUARTE. *Expression as foundation*, p. 63.

²⁰ It is even possible to point out a terminological demarcation between the “communicative acting” (*kommunikatives Handeln*), conceived by Habermas, and the communicative praxis, conceived para Debord, a demarcation which precisely translates the conceptual differences above mentioned. Philologically, I want to draw attention to the dialectical-critical filiation of the category of praxis, present in Debord, which is distinct from the more neutral category of acting (*Handeln*), present in Habermas; thereupon, for Habermas’ choice of the German terms *Kommunikation*, *kommunikativ* and their derivatives – objects of criticism in German dialectical tradition, moreover in Adorno – to determine the “acting” which he has in view, quite distinctly from the *Mitteilung*, a nearly metaphysical term which, in this same dialectical-critical tradition, expresses a strong and authentic sense of communication.

by overcoming itself as a separate art, with the transformation of the entire daily life in creative life, non-alienated and historical.

Therefore, as a social critique, this communicative perspective means the affirmation of a strong sense of communication that is not identified, but conversely it opposes, seeking to overcome it, as the social reified experience of the “interchange”, of “communication”. It is this concept - inseparable from the claim, by Debord, of the “insurrectionary tradition” (Benjamin) of modern poetry - that essentially removes the various Marxist trends because, for him, anti-communication, founded as commodity-form, also constitutes the many other forms of social hierarchies, the political representation, the “theories” separated from praxis (ideologies), the conception of the party called “revolutionary”, the trade unions and the State. In short, this is a communicative perspective that carries, with radicality, another sense of communication, which presents once more the Marxian project of a classless society and whose first historical condition is the overrunning of the fetishist dominion of the value. Marx referred himself to communism, in *Capital*, as consisting of “transparent and rational relationships [of men] among themselves and with nature.”²¹ It is this same perspective that reappears to Debord with the formulation of an “immediate transparency of some communication, of the reciprocal recognition, of the agreement.”²² This debordian claim for “transparency” strictly refers to the social possibilities of dialogue and of communication in feasible decisions about men’s common life in a society liberated from the fetishist dominion of value-forms. Without this last liberation, no actual and potent dialogue is possible to the social scale, but also no real overcoming of the autonomous economy is possible without the communicative praxis. It is this connection between communicative praxis and communism – in its turn constituted by the connection between proletarian revolution and modern poetry - which essentially characterizes the social criticism of Debord.’s. For him, it is about opposing the reified society, from the daily social struggles, the search for “a direct communication (...) which can, thus, transform the world according to his wishes.”²³

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²¹ MARX. *O capital*, p. 76.

²² All the King's men, *Internationale Situationniste*, n. 8, jan. 1963, p. 31.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

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