Capturing the gaze in cybernetic capitalism

Captura de la mirada en el capitalismo cibernético

Captura do olhar no capitalismo cibernético

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ABSTRACT

The gaze has become an object of usufruct in the context of a contemporary capitalism with the capacity to convert digital users into producers of content that enriches the large post-media corporations. A kind of scopic surplus value, which today has the potential, through the metaverse, to capture the body. The nodal articulator of this system lies in what I call the *technological structure of negative recursivity of the self-image*, which resides in the use of networks and systems to confront the psychic pain that the networks and systems themselves produce. This negative spiral is the main form of subject capture, potentiated on the horizon of the metaverse as a radical capture of one's own body.

KEYWORDS: *cybernetic capitalism, the capture of the gaze, the technological structure of negative recursivity of the self-image, the scopic surplus value.*

RESUMEN

La mirada se ha convertido en objeto de usufructo en el contexto de un capitalismo contemporáneo con la capacidad de convertir a los usuarios digitales en productores del contenido que enriquece a los grandes corporativos posmediales. Una especie de plusvalía escópica que hoy tiene la potencialidad, con el metaverso, de capturar el cuerpo. El nodo articulador de este sistema se produce en lo que llamo *estructura tecnológica de recursividad negativa de la imagen de sí*, que radica en el uso de las redes y los sistemas para encarar el dolor psíquico que las propias redes y los sistemas producen. Esta espiral negativa es la forma principal de captura del sujeto, potenciada en el horizonte del metaverso como captura radical del cuerpo propio.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *capitalismo cibernético, captura de la mirada, estructura tecnológica de recursividad negativa de la imagen de sí, plusvalía escópica.*

RESUMO

O olhar tornou-se objeto de usufruto no contexto de um capitalismo contemporâneo com a capacidade de transformar os usuários digitais em produtores de conteúdo que enriquecem as grandes corporações pós-midiáticas. Uma espécie de mais-valia escópica, que hoje tem o potencial, com o metaverso, de capturar o corpo. O nó articulador desse sistema ocorre naquilo que chamo de *estrutura tecnológica de recursividade negativa da imagem de si*, que reside no uso das redes e sistemas para enfrentar a dor psíquica que as próprias redes e sistemas produzem. Essa espiral negativa é a forma principal de captura do sujeito, potencializada no horizonte do metaverso como captura radical do próprio corpo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *capitalismo cibernético, captura do olhar, estrutura tecnológica de recursividade negativa da imagem de si, mais-valia escópica.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In this article, I aim to propose a reflective, analytical, and critical perspective on the condition of the gaze within the digital technological horizon shaped by contemporary capitalism. This condition can be characterized as the *capture of the gaze*, which means disposing the ability to see and its possibilities according to the economic and symbolic interests of the corporate forces that dominate our socio-historical horizon, that is, making the gaze a source for extracting surplus value. To account for this requires three analytical approaches, which I will synthetically carry out here: to point out the cybernetic transformation of contemporary capitalism, to explain the fundamental device that such capitalism uses to capture the gaze (capturing the gaze is a form of capturing the subject), which I call the *technological structure of negative recursivity of the image of the self*, and to show that the perspective of establishing the *metavertical world* implied in the cybernetic transformation of capitalism continues as the capture of the body.

To give an account of this analytical sequence requires a broad development that, due to the conditions of limitation imposed by scientific publication models, cannot be given in its entirety. For this reason, the article is developed very concisely, in a tight narrative. Nevertheless, I strive to elaborate the arguments precisely and to root them in various empirical investigations. To this end, it is necessary to include a number of new concepts (some of which I have developed in other publications) that I feel are necessary to understand the implications of what is happening today with the gaze. For the reasons mentioned above, these concepts are also presented in a limited form. In this framework, I present the concept of the *matrix gaze* in order to expose both the processes of establishment of a dominant way of seeing that obtains results of a political order -it points to a symbolic domination of vision- and an economic order -it produces a *scopic surplus value*-. This makes it possible to state that the fundamental action that the big media corporations carry out, as the main forces of the matrix gaze, is to construct the social gaze. But *cybernetic capitalism* does something more than that, and that is, from Boris Groys' (2015) approaches on the design of late modernity as a form turned to the design of itself (with its high aesthetic implication), what I call *ontological expansion* of design: the demand that people carry out processes of redesigning themselves, for which, such capitalism offers and generalizes resources. With this, this cybernetic capitalism achieves, precisely, that the subject offers itself without reticence to be usufructuated. That is to say, the disposition of entire populations producing without resistance the symbolic content that the media systems used to produce. The engine of such productivity is the *technological structure of negative recursivity of the self-image* already mentioned.

2. CYBER CAPITALISM

Contemporary capitalism produces a transfiguration, which I call cybernetic, that can be characterized by four fundamental mutations:

1. Its new expanded condition, consisting in the overflowing of the limits of surplus value generation from the fields of production to the fields of consumption, now implies a kind of surcharged surplus value, consisting in the usufruct of the users of digital systems. The banking systems, for example, in their shift to digitalization, have turned us into their cybernetic employees: the cashiers and operators (who open accounts, handle money, provide financial services, etc.) are now in our charge. To be a customer is also to be a bank worker, but without being paid for it. We produce a surplus value for which we are not paid.
2. Its capacity to displace the ownership of the means of production to the workers and to keep the surplus value they generate. A surprising process that contradicts the classical Marxist doxa which assumes that the ownership of the means of production constitutes the pillar on which exploitation is established. At least we can say that with this mutation, the immediate field of the means of production is owned by the workers, but their ownership does not imply the recovery of the economic surplus produced with them. The surplus passes to whoever possesses and controls a new means: the computer system (or the platform) that intangibly controls the relationship between the product (or service) and its customers. The Uber worker provides the means of production: his car, he takes care of the maintenance and replacement costs, but the surplus value does not stay with him, but with the corporate that owns the computer platform. It is as if this system appropriates, not the means of the workers, but the *capacity* that these means have, in addition to the surplus value that the worker generates with them. Something different does not happen with the Instagram or Facebook user who, as will be seen, produces the content held by these corporations, the smartphone or tablet he uses belongs to him, but his productive capacity of image is at the service of the corporation that captures him.
3. Its capacity to reprogram entities to give themselves as a source of profit. This restructuring has an ontological form: the being surrenders itself to be as the system requires, in such a way as to allow its totally ductile disposition, without friction or resistance . *Re-disposition* that, for the gaze, operates as psychic-symbolic capture. That is, as an adaptation of the gaze to consume and produce what the corporate requires (that which enriches Facebook or Instagram: information, experiences and senses).

4. Its capacity to generate a new layer of reality that allows it to have an open and full field for its creation of wealth, a new world already assembled for its disposal. Today this world is tendentially assembled as various virtual fields which are called metaverses.

As Bolívar Echeverría (2005) points out, in capitalism there is a systemic sequence (a *trend*) "that has gradually changed the main position in the appropriation of rent, taking it from the field of the lords of the earth to the field of the lords of technology" (p. 19), and it is, with technoscience, where capitalism has produced the fundamental devices of the cybernetic transfiguration of which I speak. As far as the psychic usufruct of the subject is concerned, that is to say, the capture of his gaze, the great post-media communication apparatuses are the key devices of its re-disposition and usufruct.

3. THE MATRIX GAZE AND ITS PROFITABILITY

In recent years, a field of interrogations and production of concepts has been developing around the configuration of the gaze, not as a physiological-perceptual structure, but as a social system of framing and generation of seeing. The gaze as a frame of visibility and as a cultural scheme of organization of the visible[1]. Elsewhere I have tried to account for this instance of perception itself and visual intellection as a *matrix gaze*, that is, as an aesthetic-political system of gaze generation that governs the limits of the visible, its meanings and senses (Lizarazo, 2024). In particular, I have looked at the ways in which the socio-political matrices of the gaze establish two key issues: the region of the visible (that which enters into the focus of attention and that which is excluded and eliminated) and the hierarchies granted to beings and entities by this framing structure[2]. The work of Judith Butler (2010), for example, with respect to what she calls *frames of war* shows the differentiation that a given political and civilizational framework makes between valuable beings and despicable series, even to the point of including or excluding those who belong or do not belong to the field of the human. I propose then to give an account of some significant aspects of what I consider to be the way in which,

1 Hans Belting (2012) has shown, in his historical research, some of the dimensions of that cultural gaze that establishes margins of the visible, and, therefore, that also leaves zones of invisibility. In particular in *Florence and Bagdag* he shows the difference between the visual admissibilities of East and West, in the context prior to the production of the Renaissance revolution, which meant the Florentine invention of perspective. The European perspective was only possible because of the Arabic mathematics that gave it its foundation. In one case, the Florentine perspective produced an image of the world as a figurative field; in another case, the Arabian, a perspective that did not account for visual objects, but for light itself. In the first view, a figurative perspective of objects in a visual plane ordered according to the relationship between a point of observation and an imaginary horizon; in the second view, a geometry of pure light that evoked divine thought.

2 The cultural-historical boundaries between the visible and the invisible have been addressed by classical semiotics that shows the relationships between codes of perception and codes of visual representation (Eco, 2011), and the history of artistic perception that shows the variations of visibility in different moments and currents of artistic representation (Gombrich, 2023).

in the contemporary context of capitalist digitalization of social life, a cybernetic gaze is established that lies in making people's gaze a prime source of profitable usufruct and, at the same time, a means for their biopolitical capture.

In contemporary society, the gaze is an object of dispute; it has been so in the media society and it is also so in the field of post-media communications. It is, properly speaking, a matter of capture: trapping people's gaze, conquering or colonizing their ways of seeing in order to obtain a sophisticated surplus value from their scopic needs. This is the basis of the wealth of the communications corporations of our time (Dellato, 2023). Shobhit Seth (2022) points out that the media and communications industries today articulate advertising, television, film, radio, and social networks, so that it is not just about diversifying the business, but about managing most of the fields of people's attention. As Tim Wu (2016a) shows, there is a business scheme based on capturing, maintaining and selling human attention: free entertainment (which in reality is not), which asks its users, in exchange, to attend to information about advertisers and products, to which the attention of these people has been sold. Thus Apple reached, in 2022, a capitalization of 2.74 billion dollars with services such as Apple Music, Apple TV and Apple News. Walt Disney for that same year capitalized close to 238 billion dollars with areas such as media networks, film studio production, radio, television, as well as interactive media and video games; Comcast capitalized a billion dollars with sports, news, film content, television and Internet services; and Netflix, finally, reached 152 billion dollars mainly through membership to its *streaming* content (Seth, 2022).

Contrary to what is usually thought, with the technological development of recent decades, there has been no greater democratization of communications. Since the 1990s, a continuous process of high concentration of global media has been taking shape. According to González Pazos (2019), for *Reporters without Borders* in 1983, 90% of the global communications sector was controlled by 50 companies, while by 2011 only six corporations monopolized about 80% of the entire field of global communications: Time Warner, Disney, NewsCorp, NBC Universal, Viacom and CBS. Approximately 9,000 radio stations, 1,500 television networks, 1,500 newspapers, 1,100 magazines and 2,400 publishers[3] owned by these companies.

There are two common misconceptions about the relationship between the media and society:

A. Assuming that the media are only economic corporations. Understanding them only as companies is a very poor and innocent vision.

3 These corporations are what in economic jargon are called holding companies, i.e., companies of companies. There is a sort of parent company that owns all or a substantial majority of the shares in such a way that it controls the entire group. It is important to keep in mind that these capitalist structures control or seek to control three components: a) content production, b) distribution networks (Internet, cable, etc.); and c) devices (*smarthphones*, tablets, computers) as is the case with Apple.

Their role is far beyond the purely economic field, as Tim Wu (2016b) points out: "In an information industry, the cost of monopoly should not be measured in dollars alone. We must also consider its effect on the economics of ideas and images" (p. 97). But it is necessary to go further. The most relevant power of the communicational corporations lies in their capacity to construct a view and with it a conception of historical phenomena, to convene the capital conversations of the social space; to define the main public agendas, as well as to produce a discourse and an axiology on the way in which collective problems should be approached. In other words, its main power lies in the construction of the matrix gaze.

The dominant communicative structures construct the main narrative of social events, with media actors acting as enunciators in all fields of life: with respect to what is considered relevant, to the economy and its processes, to education, to culture, to psychology. This is why the dominant semantics of our time tends to offer capitalism as the solution to the crucial problems that capitalism has produced. Two examples at hand: the approach to the environmental crisis and the processes of adoption of information technologies as government policy.

In the first case, the media promote the idea that the severe environmental crisis will be solved with new technologies generated and applied in the corporate logic. The need for an energy transition from a global system based on polluting fossil fuels to more sustainable models is narrated in these discourses as the transition to a "green economy". But this economy is not really a solution to the chaos of pollution, hyperconcentration of profits, damage to health, ecological destruction and social depredation; it is rather, as Azamar (2024) puts it, a formula in which "corporate giants have taken the helm and are steering the course of this transition according to parameters that maximize their profits, but are not necessarily aligned with the common good" (p. 17). The shift to lithium-based energy systems, for example, is a false solution as it

> Lithium mining requires large quantities of water, which can cause crises in the regions where it is developed, as well as damage to the environment and people's health. In addition, its intensive production generates carbon dioxide, which contributes to global warming. (Azamar, 2022, p.13)

In the second case, technology corporations and the government of Vicente Fox in Mexico (first decade of the 21st century) proposed that problems such as social marginalization, educational backwardness, inequality, poverty and the lack of health infrastructure would be solved through a large program to provide computers and Internet networks, supplied by private companies, in what was called *e-Mexico*:

> That is why it was explicitly proposed: 'to close not only the digital gap, but also the gap in education, health, access to markets and the existing gap with the government, especially the one that prevails between the federal and local governments'. In other words, *e-Mexico* would make it possible to bridge the historical differences between the poorest and the most benefited in terms of education, health and access to economic opportunities; and, if that were not enough, it would generate bridges of communication between the federal and municipal governments. (Lizarazo, 2010, p. 193)

The result, it is known, was not the closing of any gap, but widespread disappointment: school performance did not improve with the ICT programs, social marginalization did not decrease, and the differences between the rich and the poor grew. The millionaire returns of the corporations contracted for e-Mexico also grew.

It is possible to say, then, that, thoroughly visualized, the media gaze tries to make a permanent ontological diagram of the world: it defines what people and their relationships are, establishes the differences between nature and society, identifies the beings that make up reality and speaks continuously of their relationships and their needs. In all this, especially the media system has a power of representation, interpretation and action on politics and the political[4]. This key place of the media lies in its great capacity to construct a vision of the political and its actors, of what is at stake in the conjunctures and structures of the social. And here, then, is the second common misconception about the media: the assumption that, in a political sense, they only play a role in electoral processes.

B. It is a mistake to think of the role of the media as purely informants of the electoral process or as mere stagehands who set the stage for the presentation and discussion of political actors; and it is also wrong to think that their political role is only limited to electoral periods. Both are wrong. The argument that Judith Butler (2010) developed regarding the role of "embedded journalism" during the Iraq War is a general condition of the dominant media forms in this capitalist modernity: the media *frame* politics. They frame it in terms of their corporate interests and the links between political and economic elites, and in doing so, they behave as political actors. But perhaps the most relevant issue is that the media do not only play a political role in politically labeled scenarios and moments. They do it all the time and on all issues. They trace the daily plot of the political, they give the daily the political plot required by their interests and alliances. The

4 It is in this sense that Castells (2012) identifies the media as the very field of gestation of the political: "The fact that politics is fundamentally developed in the media does not mean that other factors are not important in deciding the outcome of political battles; nor does it mean that the media hold the power. They are not the Fourth Estate. They are much more important: they are the space where power is created" (p. 262).

> political action of the media is not only produced in the conjunctures, but it is fundamentally based on working, second by second, for the establishment and reification of certain political structures of life[5]. Thus, then, the power of the media is to construct the social sense of the conjunctural and the structural.

These two misconceptions (A. to think that the media are only economic corporations and B. to assume that they are only political informants) can be overcome if we understand that the action that the media fundamentally perform on populations is that of constructing their gaze. The media's capacity to produce the social forms of the gaze is its main power and this implies economic returns, as well as political and ideological returns. On the other hand, the gaze they continually institute and regenerate is not of an adjacent or marginal order. Their gaze establishes the main structures of the visible, thus being one of the key forces in the organization and production of the *matrix gaze*. And this matrix gaze is not something abstract: it is corporate and financial positions, it is legislative and electoral visions, it is definitions of technologies in transportation, communications, private medicine, industrial biotechnology, it is positions regarding social movements or migrations. And it turns out that, on all these issues, the different positions held by the hegemonic media and information agencies tend to be highly coincidental (Bagdikian, 2004). In this sense, we are quite close to what the Russian philologist Mikhail Bakhtin (1989) called *monoglossia*, a monoglossic gaze that is established under the ownership of the public apparatus of enunciation (a historical dynamic in which the media have made public enunciation a privilege and a highly profitable business).

Across the board there is a clear inclination of the global media for financial capitalism and for models of deregulation and reduction of the role of the state in the face of the corporate and business world (Herman, 2000). The mainstream media tend to be reticent to progressive processes and overly critical ideas. The fundamental media strategy is the construction of a hegemony of meaning that is tactically linked to the other capital powers of our time: for this they erect actors, produce crises, generate polarizations, illuminate characters and events and erase and leave others in the shadows (Taibbi, 2019). They superimpose issues that benefit them and produce zones of silence on what they need attention to dissipate (McChesney, 2000). They produce narratives about events and social actors, construct public perception and have mastered the construction of collective emotions. Telmex and Televisa promoted and supported (and probably agreed to) the telecommunications reform during

5 There is no apolitical media segment. Even an advertising commercial is also political because it institutes/restitutes a logic, a praxis and an axiology of life that is conducive to its ends. No product can be presented without a world; media discourse always presents, at the same time, the product and its world. It presents and promotes a world of life in which this product or this service is a crucial necessity for life. This lifeworld is, fundamentally, a political form.

the government of Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018) in Mexico, which allowed them to significantly expand their power over the market. It is well known that in the United States the media have contributed to the fact that the social view on the right to bear arms legislatively benefits the arms industry, by focusing attention on an individualistic and warlike conception of security. Similarly, in the United States, for many decades the corporate media have lobbied to influence tobacco control policies (World Health Organization, 2008), while *The Sun*, *Daily Mail*, and *Daily Express* were decisive in the approval of Brexit in England.

The matrix gaze is thus a construction of power and power that constructs the dominant forms of seeing.

4. SELF-DESIGN AND DIGITAL SUBJECTIVITY

Groys (2015) has observed a central characteristic of the role of design in modern society: its call to overcome the traditional distinctions between content and appearance, in such a way that, in the process of its new historical shaping, design is not put as something that overlays the nature of things, but is constituted as the organizing and constructing principle of those things. Both the 20th century avant-gardes and Russian constructionism abandoned the conception of design as an ornamental and exterior practice and moved towards producing design that addressed interior structures. The distinction between design as the elaboration of the appearance of things, and structure as the configuration of those things, no longer made sense. This implied another defining transfiguration: "Modern design has transformed the totality of social space into an exhibition space for an absent divine visitor, in which individuals appear as artists and as self-produced works of art" (Groys, 2015, p. 33).

The design operation does not consist then in making a cover that hides or refines a raw interior structure, which would then be arranged in a more suitable way for the user, as in a machine or a building that keeps its entrails. Being the machinic or architectural structure the very object of design, everything is produced to be exhibited. The distance between the production of the structure and the production for the exhibition is shortened, to the point of practically falling apart. Thus exhibition becomes the fundamental principle of production and the world becomes a totality to be exhibited[6]. From a contemplative position (for example, in the Kantian sense), today's society is nothing more than a game of simulacra (merchandise and spectacles) that only conceal emptiness. For Groys (2015), "this position overlooks the fact that the current design has become total, and therefore no longer admits a contemplative and exterior

6 The main issue at stake in the production of Jobs' devices and software was the relationship with the user, what engineers call "usability": aesthetics, physical and mental ergonomics as a fundamental principle of the design plan for the devices that have defined the most crucial turns in the economy, society and politics: personal computers, smartphones, tablets.

position" (p. 32). It is not then about the opposition between essence and designed appearance; the opposition itself is displaced and disappears because what has become is the extension of design to all instances and slabs of being. This means that we are witnessing *an expanded design*, before which the customary limits of the field lose meaning. Traditionally, design has been restricted to the field of spaces, objects and systems, but here, what we see is a design that *expands ontologically* –this is not a category of Groys (2015)– since it is oriented to the *self*: "Every citizen of the contemporary world has yet to assume an ethical, aesthetic and political responsibility for the design of the self" (p. 32).

It is necessary to point out two issues to account for the kernel implied in Groys' statement: I) if design no longer lies in the production of appearances, but in the production of the structure of being, it has an ontological character; II) expanded design unfolds as a feature of the contemporary world, rooted in the demand for the individual to design himself. Additionally, it is necessary to point out that this condition of design, noticed by Groys in the establishment of the aesthetic structures of the modern world, is only fully realized in the new moment that the cybernetization of capitalism makes possible, in the sense that I have stated in the introduction to this article[7].

The opposition structure/design still prevails in much of 20th century production, and at least in symbolic terms, the conception of the self-design of the self is more or less foreign in medial societies[8]. In them, a broad imaginary of identity originating from telluric, clanic, even sociobiological sources is deployed, so that the narratives of the true self or the true self anticipate the discourses of self-design. But it is in the digital society, of post-medial order, endowed with technological resources and conforming supranational and delocalized forms of communication, that the imprint of self-design reaches its conditions of perpetration. Groys' analysis points to the extension of self-design, but does not account for its intimate connection with the logic of capitalism. Therefore, it is not only necessary to identify that expansive ontological design crystallizes in the horizon of cybernetic society, but also that it is made possible by it. It is necessary to underline this missing sense in Groys' perspective, insofar as it allows us to identify the forces of historical mobilization that crystallize and push this becoming. Thus, one of the crucial features of the cybernetic transfiguration of capitalism lies in capturing the

7 Naturally, we are not dealing with design sequences in which a new model leaves other models behind. Several models coexist at the same time, but it is possible to notice the dominant ones.

8 This does not mean that media and industrial capitalism did not promote the idea of autonomy of the self, so characteristic of modernity, as a marketing strategy and for the constitution of consumer society, but there are three reasons why self-design becomes a crucial device until the cybernetic horizon of late modernity: 1. Only until cybernetic capitalism did we have the tools and technological systems that make self-design so reliably possible as the main structure for defining the subject. 2. In the media and industrial world, the promotion and economic use of the autonomy of the self still deployed a discourse on the "true" self, as if there were a natural essence to be discovered and praised; with cybernetic capitalism there is no hidden truth of the self to be sought, but rather a system of technological resources to produce oneself. 3. In particular, capitalism did not yet have a cybernetic form that would allow the radical usufruct of beings. Today the cybernetic form has self-design as its key device.

self-generation proper to the expanded ontological design, in order to make it the object of obtaining a surplus value that would be given, in itself, as a self-gift of being. The expanded logic of self-design is constituted in the structural form that capitalism requires to enter into a new, exacerbated condition of wealth production. The core of the matter lies in the predisposition of the being to self-design as self-gift. Immediately it must be pointed out that this self-design is framed in the systems of production of the self that capitalism itself provides, in the aesthetic logics of sociality and meaning that it requires for its configuration.

This approach makes it possible then to give meaning and explanation to the fundamental feature of the devices of production of the symbolic in the contemporary world. To identify it, it is necessary to recall that the dominant communicative production of our time, in schematic terms, involves two key regions: on the one hand, the hyper-concentrated structures of generation and usufruct of meaning, produced by a limited number of global corporations, and which I referred to, in some detail, in the second section of this article; and, on the other hand, the communicative production of the social subjects themselves, deployed, mainly, in post-media devices that present themselves as technology and digital media companies, or technology and social networks, or Internet technologies. That is, Meta Platforms Inc. (formerly Facebook), Alphabet Inc., Amazon.com.inc. and Tencent Holdings Limited, among others.

Cybernetic capitalism provokes the displacement from the medial region to the post-medial region, where the networks of production of meaning that emanate from infinite points of generation and are oriented towards infinite points of assimilation, also imply that it is the social subject who produces the symbolic content that, previously, was produced by the medial systems[9]. Such a trajectory is not produced by technical innovation per se, but is the result of the politics and economics that sustain, generate and usufruct such technique. This being so, this transition also implies that it is not so much the communication of information or knowledge that is produced in the post-media and what socially underpins them, but the possibility for people to permanently redesign themselves. With contemporary post-media dominance, the question of networks of meaning is not so much a matter of communicating information, but a structural principle of aesthetic self-design. The *crux* of post-medial communication is, then, the design of the self. Increasingly richer systems of resources for the re-editing of the self, producing a synthetic image fused with a register image that allows both to intervene our morphology and to place us

9 Network marketers and economists call UGC user- or consumer-generated content for products and services, so that people are becoming not only advertising designers for brands, but free promoters of products. In this regard, *Forbes* magazine says: "UGC comes in many forms, including social media updates, reviews, blog posts, videos and podcasts. Customers can also share it through unboxing videos, Q&A forums or photos that boast about their purchases. Brand loyalists are another mature source of UGC, as they are already passionate about a brand and are established advocates within their community" (Duke, 2023).

in enclosures and relationships as diverse as we wish, that allows both to narrate our experiences and to continually re-narrate ourselves. In this, undoubtedly, there is something that does not appear in Groys' previous references: the design of the self does not only respond to a new condition of presentation of the self before the structure of the world configured as a macro-space of exhibitions, in it there is also an energy of compensation (or its promise) for this redesign. The energy gained (or its promise) is appreciation. The gain of appreciation and liking for such a presentation.

5. NARCISSISM, DEPLETED BODY AND FEAR OF EXCLUSION

Post-media devices such as Facebook, TikTok or Instagram consist mainly in providing resources to stimulate the new narcissism. A contemporary techno-aesthetic narcissism celebrated and increasingly demanded by sociality that offers, as its main compensatory energy, social appreciation[10]. In the ancient world, narcissism constituted a moral defect punishable by social dishonor or judgment of banality. Such judgment was possible on an ontology that differentiated the essential from the apparent –in the sense referred to above by Groys–, but in a horizon of self-design in which the difference between the latent and the underlying has been broken, narcissism is not sanctioned, but rewarded. The system requires an intensified narcissism that drives both the action of the individual to design himself aesthetically, and the dynamization of the entire display structure. What this new narcissism punishes is rather the fall into ugliness, unpopularity, decrepitude. This is what must be avoided at all costs, and its elision is what ensures that the generalized aesthetic design apparatus is kept in motion at all times. The system demands that there be continuous renewal; a *selfie* is meager, a constant and proliferating production is required, a daily reiteration of yes, in which there is a clear display of the beauty and popularity we possess. But, paradoxically, this system of reification works on the psychic device of the uncertainty of the self, particularly on the concerns about the acceptance of others. We can say that the device feeds on the impression of body depletion. That is to say, the impression that our body does not measure up to the bodies that prevail both in the advertising discourse and in the comparison of bodies that constitutes a sort of implicit code of the image in the networks.

In 2023, a trial of adolescents from schools in Melbourne, Australia, showed that increased use of social networking sites was associated with high-profile

10 In this analytic there is no kind of moral sanction to narcissism as a reserve of self-appreciation necessary for subjective stability. As well identified by psychological theories and psychoanalysis, a reserve of self-love, self-eroticism and self-appreciation is fundamental to make the subject sustainable (Bernal, 2012). This does not detract, however, from the identification of the structural stimulus to exacerbated narcissism as one of the keys to the profitability of cybernetic capitalism's own image. Such narcissism produces surplus value, on the basis of the capture of the subject by corporate apparatuses. This without entering the field of analysis of narcissistic personalities and their predatory characteristics of otherness, and without exploring the ruinous implications for social sustainability of the process in which contemporary societies are becoming, by the force of perpetration of cybernetic capitalism, literally narcissistic societies.

body image concerns. These were users who were dissatisfied with themselves, had eating disorders and were anxious to find quick ways to build muscle. Their networking activities consequently revolved around self-image and the image of others (Jarman, Fuller et al., 2023).

A study by Vogel et al. (2014) showed, for its part, that intense use of social networks produced poor self-esteem in people, given by exposure to upward social comparisons (networks of people with high activity, with enviable habits and popularity), and tended to generate less negative self-evaluations when the comparison profile was of downward people (less popularity, less activity). Finally, the study by Ethan Kross and his collaborators, published in 2013, points out that Facebook appears to be a resource for satisfying humans' basic need for social connection, but in reality, instead of improving their sense of well-being and inclusion, its use contributes to deteriorating subjective well-being. According to the results, Facebook use generates negative changes in factors that consider the two components of people's well-being: how they feel at any given moment, and satisfaction with respect to their lives. The more they used Facebook at a given moment, the worse they felt afterwards; the more they used Facebook for two weeks, the lower their levels of satisfaction with their lives were (Kross et al., 2013). This highlights what I wish to call the *technological structure of negative recursivity of self-image* that networks generate in people[11]. Post-media systems produce psychic pain that, in turn, causes people to use such systems. The corporate machine generates the experience of body shrinkage which in turn guarantees a permanent return to that machine. The abundant publications of conventionally beautiful people, with turned and muscular bodies, with marked abs and beautiful faces, imbricated with advertisements for clothes, food supplements, diets and gyms, are found in the structural recursion that produces the persistent impression of body depletion that guarantees people's recurrent adherence. The recursivity of the post-media technique has its core where feelings about the body influence the use of networks, and this use influences feelings about the body.

The profiles that are chosen or abandoned, the time spent on a photograph or a video, the decision to comment or not, the type of comment that is made, are all inspired by feelings of body depletion, and all of this is based on the technological structure with which the devices have been designed (i.e. by their system of obtaining performance from people's feelings of misery). The device captures the digital behavior and, thanks to its algorithm, returns a new dose of images and contents that reiterate or intensify the feelings one has of oneself. The device itself offers the resources to try to improve oneself, to make oneself more attractive or attractive, more interesting and closer to the standards

11 This recursion occurs in other ways, for example, a study conducted in Ontario (Canada) showed that Facebook exposes people to ambiguous information about their partners that generates suspicion and jealousy, and this itself causes them to make a new and intensified use of Facebook. Facebook makes them jealous, and jealousy makes them more attached to Facebook (Muise, Christofides & Desmarais, 2009).

exposed therein. The editing of oneself and the investment in the illusion of oneself is one of the fundamental operations of the image in our time.

Meta reports that 600 million people use Facebook or Instagram filters to "improve" themselves[12]. But such enhancement is not entirely happy; the immediate satisfaction it produces also brings feelings of sadness and some heartbreak. The University of London conducted a study in 2021 that showed that 90% of women used filters to enlarge their eyes, whiten their teeth, unify their skin tone, reduce the size of their noses, make their lips fuller, shape their jaw or lose weight (what they call "skinny filters"). But at the same time, 94% reported feeling pressure to look a certain way on social media, 75% said they would "never live up to the images they saw", 60% confessed they felt depressed by such use, and 80% confessed that social media made them feel bad about themselves most of the time. Linked to this, the 2021 US *ParentsTogether* survey revealed that 48% of teens used beauty filters at least once a week, and of those, 61% stated that using them made them feel worse about their physical appearance. Relative body confidence in their *online* life, self-doubt in their *offline* life. One cannot understand image today, without considering that it is, primarily, body image illusion. In a sense we are a society obsessively revolving around our own image.

What is it that makes this contemporary condition of looking and looking again as a principle of existence persist, in a society that produces, daily, 95 million *selfies*? My hypothesis is that the iconic obsession with the self constitutes a new site of surplus value generation, based on the production of scopic anxiety and the experience of body shrinkage. From YouTube to Instagram, a web of visibility apparatuses structures the visual field to generate a profound need to be digitally seen that is projected onto the impression of being lacking or depleted bodies. The supports of this structure are the promise of being liked (the *like*) and the possibility of projecting an illusion of self. Cybernetic capitalism thus has the power to make the image of self one of the nuclei of the human yearning for sociality and appreciation; and to turn it into an immense source of enrichment. That is why post-medial apparatuses are constituted as devices of ductile aesthetic resources for the production of the self-image as a formidable figuration, not only for its beauty, but also for the exhibition of the state of joy. In his "mirror stage" Lacan referred as "jubilant" the capital moment in which the creature sees itself before the mirror and has the impression that the reflection gives an account of itself (in that phase in which it does not yet have access to language): an instant of joy upon discovering itself in that reflective surface (Lacan, 2009).

Corporate devices today offer an electronic surface on which the image can be constructed with a jubilant appearance, although the underlying feeling is one of restlessness and dissatisfaction. An image capable of being put on as a

12 According to TikTok its *Bold Glamour* filter (adds volume to the lips, lines the face, enlarges the eyes, makes up the face) has been used in more than 200 million videos. Instagram offers the "perfect face" that frames its users' facial features into what it considers ideal proportions, in addition to "skinny filters" and "nose job" filters.

crust that covers the lack, the detriment of self and the feeling of not being what is expected[13]. Successful device that operates in a paradox: narcissism of an existential lack. But within an imaginal system that promises a space of illusions (beauty, popularity, amusements) that, in turn, can be artificially produced. This constitutes a second form of the *technological structure of negative recursivity of the self-image*, here in its nihilistic condition: to crave in the other, what the other does not have. I provoke in others a feeling of misery, by the redesign of myself that provokes the feeling of misery.

6. THE METAVERSE BUSINESS

I have called post-media systems *apparatuses of nothingness* given their unique cybernetic characteristic of producing surplus value by producing nothing. None of the great corporations of contemporary communication, Facebook, Google, YouTube, Instagram, or TikTok, produce communicative content. They do not produce visuality, but they are the greatest machines of visuality that the history of capitalism has produced (Angulo, 2023; Forbes Staff, 2023; Ancajima, 2023). The cybernetic principle that makes this possible lies in arranging the techno-social matrices to profit from the eager visual production of their users. Devices out of nowhere that configure a matrix of placement and usufruct of people to produce the content that enriches them. Literally machines for the capture of the gaze and the body, which arrange the gaze as the source of their enrichment. A cybernetic process of contemporary capitalism that makes the need for communication an inscription in the machines of nothingness. Exercising today the right to communicate means becoming unwitting workers of these large corporations (Patnak, 2024; Counts, 2023). If today the possibility to educate, communicate, work, have fun, undertake, demand, due to the techno-digital reconversion implemented and extended in the world, that every person registers and makes use of such devices (Deliotte, 2016; Alter, 2017); this immediately installs workers as corporate workers, without salary and without a work contract. In the face of this, it would be worthwhile to outline the right of people to *offline life*. It makes sense to rethink the political value of a renewed Luddite attitude: the valid resistance to the cybernization of our lives, which is not now the result of an election, but of a violent and general imposition. There is something of fascism in repeated phrases such

13 See, for example, how the use of Snapchat filters creates among young people unrealistic beauty parameters, which is related to the fall of their self-esteem (Maqsood & Sangra, 2021), or the way in which social networks and the culture of beauty exert pressure on women, an epidemic, the author considers, that produces emotional and mental illnesses, as it turns out raised by Engeln (2018) in his book Beauty Sick. But especially, and this is, in my opinion, the key issue of the book: contemporary young women, face a contradiction between rejecting beauty models, but at the same time, doing what is necessary to look like them; they condemn the objectification they suffer in the media, but consume them with intensity; they question conventional ideals of beauty, but use filters to make their body conform to them. This is a variant of what I previously called the technological structure of negative recursivity of the self-image: the awareness of the capture that the system makes of our bodies, but at the same time the impossibility of getting out of it.

as the title of the Deia article: "The future will be digital or it won't be", where sentences such as Luis Bonet's emerge: "the digital transformation affects the whole of society and whoever doesn't do it will be out of the game. Whether it is a person, a company or the country as a whole" (Dirigentes Digital, 2022). This is a hegemonic vision little discussed, appearing both in advertising and political rhetoric, as well as in a variety of theoretical positions on the technological present and future, from that of former FBI and Interpol advisor Marc Goodman (2016), who assumes the inevitability of networked life and assesses the terrorist and criminal risks of Internet development; or David Weinberger (2012), who posits that what he considers the radical transformation of the processes and forms of network knowledge, is an indisputable fact; to that of Ray Kurzweil (2006), who posits things as an inevitable destiny of human fusion with cybernetic machines embedded in the brain. In all of them, there is no doubt that cybernetic life is totalizing and ubiquitous[14].

It was pointed out in this article that the fourth property of cybernetic capitalism consists in its capacity to create a new layer of reality as an open disposition for the production of wealth in the self-donation of beings for its usufruct. That territory emerges today in the form of the metaverse[15]. The machines of nothingness project there a new and recharged phase of their becoming, an intensification of their capacity of capture, perpetrated by the possibilities that this additional layer of reality provides. The metaverse, as we know, is a virtual space constituted as a new territory of experience, offering the realization of purely informational operations in all fields of life, with the capacity to produce consequences both in the virtual world and in the physical-empirical space[16]. Virtual worlds were initially produced to host multi-user games in different locations, and to generate experiences of virtual coexistence such as *Second Life*. Today they are open to a multiplicity of possibilities and tasks: working, living together, education, shopping, communicating, exchanging, socializing.

14 The hegemony of the vision of the techno-digital necessity (in the philosophical sense of the term) of society underlies both the most critical and counter-capitalist perspectives (hackeractivism, for example), as well as the political and market teleology of contemporary capitalism.

15 In *Snow Crash*, writer Neal Stephenson (2000) introduces the term "metaverse". The novel is about a serious error in Apple computers that dissipates information and produces chaos that is visualized on the screen as snowflakes crashing against the glass. Metaverse in the novel is a completely virtual world created with digital technologies where people are presented as avatars interacting with fellow humans and system programs. In Stephenson's novel there is a stratified social structure where people seek to evade the dystopian reality in which they live. In the metaverse there are exclusive environments for those who have privileged positions and have very gifted and sophisticated avatars, as is the case with the Black Sun club. The metaverse can be entered by private means or by public access, but the type of access leaves a mark. The public ones are deficient (or poor) in the definition and possibilities of the avatars, the private ones respond to a range related to the user's technical knowledge and power. The author is currently employed by the virtual reality company *Magic Leap*, after having been a consultant for Jeff Bezos' *Blue Origin* (what an absorption capacity of capitalism).

16 The metaverse is the extended fabric that constitutes an additional layer of reality in which various virtual worlds will be housed or sprout, such as those currently constituted by Decentraland, Minecraft or Roblox (Ciancio, 2022). The prospects propose the capture, by multiple cameras and scanners, of the most diverse physical spaces, to convert them, through their datafication, into virtual worlds, which in turn will be fed by information and internet resources (offered by their users and by the internet of things). The metavertical world envelops the physical-empirical world, merging the two territories at certain points, and copying, with modifications and recreations, the people who inhabit it.

Although some technologists identify the establishment of the metaverse as something incipient and distant (for example, Cathy Hackl, executive director of *Futures Intelligence Group*, who considers that only "There are what I call glimmers of the metaverse"), the reality is that its scaffolding is already being assembled, and as Antonella Ciancio (2022) points out, the more than 20 million daily users in Fortnite, or the 25 million visitors who attended the Travis Scott concert there, evidence a field that with great power is being built. Roblox has 230 million active users (who spend almost 3 hours a day in its world) and nearly 3 billion registered accounts, Fortnite has 150 million users (who spend almost two hours a day in that space), and Minecraft 140 million users with almost 6 hours a day connected in its world. Nikeland (Nike's world) is attended by 2 million visitors per month (Della Vecchia, 2023), and Zwift, a sports company in the metaverse, is valued at $1 billion.

According to the consulting firm Dapp Radar, during 2023, two billion dollars were bought in virtual land offered by companies such as Sandbox and Decentraland, while there are others, smaller in size, but with high profitability, such as Voxels, where properties are sold with the size of a small family house (in proportion to the size of an avatar), or slightly larger, three stories, with a terrace. In contrast, Decentraland sells much larger plots of land, such as the one acquired by Philipp Plein, a British luxury clothing brand, the size of four soccer fields (all in proportion to the regular size of an avatar), where it plans to set up a store and a gallery, in the style of what UPS, Samsung or Sotheby's have done. In Sandbox, meanwhile, Adidas, Atari, Ubisoft, Binance, Warner Music and Gucci have acquired land where they are setting up stores, visitor centers and spaces to promote their services and products. The fashion industry has a prominent business in the metaverse. *Gucci Town* exceeds 36 million visits per year, and *Nikeland* in 11 months has more than 25 million visits. Even with sovereign money (real money) you can buy clothes for avatars in *Gucci Town*. The Fabricant, a virtual world-only fashion company, makes exclusive clothing for avatars. Their clothes are custom-made for users in various virtual worlds. This fashion house recently sold a digital garment for $19,000 (Tidy, 2022).

In this sense, Tom Mitchelhill (2022), refers to a report by JPMorgan Chase -the first bank to set up in the Decentraland metaverse- in which

> details the types of business opportunities that companies can expect to find in the metaverse. The report states, "The metaverse is likely to infiltrate every industry in some form in the next few years, with a market opportunity estimated at more than USD 1 trillion in annual revenue", while noting that USD 54 billion is already spent on virtual goods each year, twice as much as is spent on buying music. The report notes that the average price of virtual land doubled from USD 6,000 to 12,000 between June and December last year, and predicts that in-game ad spending will reach USD 18.4 billion annually by 2027. (Mitchelhill, 2022)

As the consulting firm McKinsey & Company puts it, the metaverse could reach $5 trillion by 2030:

> According to the 'Value Creation in the Metaverse' report, e-commerce will be the main source of revenue in the metaverse, accounting for approximately 50% of the total value by 2030 ($2.6 trillion) ahead of e-learning 270. billion), advertising (206 billion) and gaming (126 billion). (Europapress, 2022)

As business and corporate prospecting executives often say, the business opportunities opening up are, for equity, promising: because it has the potential to substantially boost returns for companies in healthcare, entertainment, digital services, communications, sports, finance. HSBC and JPMorgan Chase have bought significant real estate on *blockchain-based* platforms Decentraland and Sandbox. JPMorgan created in 2020 its Onyx virtual bank (*blockchain* platform for "exchanging digital assets") and produced its JPM Coin for transactions. Onyx's Decentraland branch is located in a virtual district developed by Republic Realm, which emulates the streets of a Tokyo neighborhood. For the bank, the metaverse will be worth close to $1 trillion annually and will "take over" virtually every sector of the economy in the coming years (Blockhain Observatory, 2022). With this perspective, corporations from various industries have been building their spaces in the metaverse for some years now: Warner Music, Samsung, GAP, Nike, Atari, Adidas, Verizon, Walmart, Gucci.

The challenge that the metaverse represents for capitalist corporations lies in the construction of its base system, which faces the challenge of unifying the diverse universes; for this very reason, the business today is fundamentally in the construction of this infrastructure (as happened with the Internet), to make effective the new layer of reality in which cybernetic capitalism will find full conditions. The place of delivery of people for their continuous usufruct.

7. PSYCHIC AND BODILY CAPTURE IN THE CYBERNETIC CAPITALISM OF THE METAVERSE

Matthew Ball (2022) defines the metaverse as

> a massive, interoperable network of real-time rendered 3D virtual worlds that can be experienced synchronously and persistently by an effectively unlimited number of users with a sense of individual presence, and with continuity of data, such as identity, history, rights, objects, communications, and payments. (p. 55)

Four are the main characteristics of its definition: the metaverse implies the interconnection between virtual worlds with a logic of *interoperability and data continuity*, which means that avatars can transit from one territory to the other, that their operations are valid in all worlds, that they can carry the objects acquired, and, especially, that resources and payments can be

transferred; the second issue is the *synchronous experience*, which means that users, through their avatar, have the ability to perform actions with others in real time (play or go shopping, attend concerts, visit tourist areas, have sex, do business, play sports, work); the third issue is *persistence*, i.e., that the elements of the metaverse are permanent, that the designs or changes produced by users last over time, so that the experience has continuity, and disconnection does not imply the disappearance or alteration of the state of things; and the fourth, perhaps the most relevant, called "sense of individual presence", consisting of the high impression of immersion and personal commitment experienced by users, achieved thanks to the contributions of the previous characteristics.

The metaverse is built with the power to generate in users the experience of what philosophers have called *presentification*: the sensation and intellectual assumption of being and being there, even though their interaction is with an interface. The complex technological articulation of the metaverse (high-speed Internet and 5 and 6 G networks, virtual platforms, augmented reality, artificial intelligence (AI), *Blockchain*, NFTs, and virtual reality) makes possible the impression that the self is there, inhabiting and acting in such places (given by high-quality graphics, holographic sounds, synchronous interactions with users, virtual objects and environments, and the possibility for avatars and environments to be customized according to users' desires and resources). One more feature is fundamental in this configuration: the relationship and interaction between the virtual world and the real world. There are two key features in this:

1. The metaverse offers virtual replicas of the spaces of the physical-empirical world (not only offices or houses, but also industries and government offices, and, as projected by tourism companies, cities and public spaces and places of interest), which can be visited, traveled through and interacted with, and in which various types of transactions can be carried out.
2. The metaverse fosters reciprocity between worlds: certain virtual actions will have consequences in the real world (telepresence, teleworking, teleshopping), and certain actions in the physical-empirical world will have consequences in the virtual space (such as the purchase of land, goods and services).

Analytically, this shows that the metavertical system is projected with the capacity to constitute a world consistently articulated around a projection of subjectivity reconfigured according to the possibilities of access, play and resources of individuals. This takes place in a growing process of social adhesion

in which the translation of institutions and public, commercial, communicative and entertainment management will force a massive insertion. Indeed, an additional layer of reality, which, progressively, will become more determinant and defining in the course of socioeconomic, symbolic and political life.

Scopic anxiety is not an element external to the techno-social structure of informational capitalism and it will not be external to the cybernetic capitalism of the metaverse: the massive demand for digital connection has one of its main legs in the promise of relief from people's fears of insignificance and isolation as we have seen. This means that we are at the center of biopolitics. But not a biopolitics defined, as in Foucault or Agamben, around the constitution and preservation of sovereign power. A biopolitics fundamentally configured and reproduced by the economic-corporate powers, interested in producing surplus value and power with the needs of bodies. Desires, drives, fears, need for recognition, illusion of beauty and acceptance, as a source of enrichment. Nor is it a biopolitics (in the sense of Foucault or Agamben) exercised only on the fleshly body, here rather a biopolitics extended also to the virtual body or avatar. The control of the physical body and of the digital body understood, as I have been suggesting here, as a totalizing capture of the subject. It is then a matter of producing anxious and detrimental psychic conditions: the more balanced and serene people are, the less they need the instantaneous approval of the networks, the less they are worth for the system of informational capitalization. The system is looking for people who spend all their vital time in digital time. And that this digital time, the body-flesh time in chiasmus with their body-information, is totally captured by the additional layer of reality that cybernetic capitalism has been able to build.

The fact that a subject needs to be permanently reaffirmed in the expected responses (but never fully), that the digital mesh of the subject's vital-time is increasingly tightened so that there is no instant outside the capture circuit, promises to assemble the whole life of people in a continuous and perpetual *online* experience. Tools and devices are designed to maintain a permanent capture of perception and interest, and for actions to be basically mixed and virtual (SynergyXR.com, n.d.; Gallace, 2022). Ubiquity of the cybernetic system that, just as the gaze of god penetrated all the enclosures and the soul of human beings, with the corporate Internet of things, post-media systems and web 3.0[17], will manage to penetrate the intimate fabric of people[18]. It is not about a system of greater knowledge of people, to help them in their goals and their growth; it is, in fact, about a deeper knowledge of the individual to sell him

17 Whose capital element is the development of an intelligence of learning human inclinations and behaviors, to design customized products that track and take advantage of their inclinations and routines (Joshi, 2023; Uchyigit & Ma, 2008),

18 It is not by chance to establish a relationship between the pretensions of power configuration in cybernetic capitalism and the pretensions of religious power in some of its most victorious periods: as the church pretended to be sovereign of the body and soul of all individuals, cybernetic power also pretends to capture all bodies and the whole psyche of people.

better, to adhere to him and capture him. Google and Facebook redesigned an Internet that did not operate on the principle of scopic and psychological anxiety, but turned it into an economic model based on maintaining attention. Their basis was the analysis of our appetite schemas, our crucial need for social approval, our need for belonging and appreciation. Its redesign was fueled by the knowledge provided by the cognitive and behavioral psychology championed by America's leading research centers. B. J. Foog, director of the *Behavior Design Lab* at Stanford University[19], explicitly states that the purpose of his classes is "to create machines that can change what people think and what they do, and do it automatically". Foog works simultaneously for the university and for Facebook, Google and Amazon. In the late nineties he proposed and developed with his students several interactive applications based on cognitive psychology techniques, to turn them into persuasive technologies. As Peirano (n/d) points out, in the nineties Foog spoke of

> helping people stay in shape, quit smoking, manage their finances well, and study for exams. Two decades later, his methods are world famous for having generated billions of dollars for several dozen companies, but not for having helped anyone quit smoking. (p. 21)

Along with him, other gurus form generations of designers and entrepreneurs of what I call machines out of nothing, systems made to capture consciousness and structure our gaze in alignment with the matrix gaze.

Nir Eyal, who received his master's degree in *Business Administration* from Stanford, was a professor of Product Design at the same university and has specialized in behavioral engineering, an approach that uses insights from the behavioral sciences to enable people to become users and create the consumption habits required by companies. His book - written in collaboration with Ryan Hoover - *Hooked: How to Build Habit-Forming Products* (Eyal & Hoover, 2014) presents a model of triggers or triggers, actions, rewards and feedback loops, which aim to produce permanent habits in users (i.e., produce dependency). Ramsay Brown, on the other hand, with a background in neuroscience and knowledge of brain mapping not only studies the relationship between human behaviors and persuasive technologies, but his company Boundless Mind Technologies (formerly, more explicitly called Dopamine Labs) is oriented to "behavioral design" and the use of persuasive AI for the generation of behaviors and habits in people (i.e., technological addiction).

19 It's not just the 10-minute distance between Stanford University and Silicon Valley that underlies its proximity. Stanford has shaped the technological thinking and approach of some of the companies that today constitute some of the most powerful corporations in the world. It is not strictly speaking the development of knowledge that is the focus of its academic significance, but rather the generation of technologies and projects for the capitalist corporation. Perhaps it is in this university where what Paul Virilio (2003) called *technoscience* is most fully realized: science at the service of technique, technique at the service of factual interests. Stanford has developed several military research projects and the logic of entrepreneurship that produced Google, Yahoo!, Hewlett-Packard, YouTube, Netflix, Instagram, Firefox or WhatsApp (Fernández, 2015).

On knowledge and approaches of this nature, applications were designed so that the Internet could sell better and to produce in people an urge to connect. Technoscience operating for the biopolitical purposes of the machines of nothingness. The proprietary and corporate systems of the metaverse project everything in that direction, with an infinitely greater capacity for absorption. It is nothing else that Nike, Amazon, Sony, Nvidia or Apple expect. But there is one more element, which is part of what I previously called *technological structure of negative recursivity of the self-image*: The metavertical gaze implanted by the devices of nothingness has the capacity to produce not only ways of seeing, but dermal, bodily, proxemic and synesthetic experiences, which then extend the scopic need to corporeal need. The whole body depending on its connection, on its daily dose of artificial dermal and muscular experience. The works of Henry Wallon (1975) and Kaja Silverman (2009) taught that the constitution and persistence of the impression of self do not only come from symbolic affirmation in language and identification in the image. Before the *visual imago*, or the symbolic indexing of a person, there is a *bodily imago* that is given by the dermal and muscular contact with objects, and especially with the body of others, in the touch they make of us, in the touch we make of them.

Tech corporations are funding research to build prosthetics, attachments and even artificial skin to enable users to have immersive sensory and highly immersive experiences. Scientists at Carnegie Mellon University, for example, are developing projects to enable Zuckerberg's metaverse to deliver dermal experiences, in particular they call *ReSkin* a synthetic skin made from a plastic membrane with nano-technical magnetic particles 3 millimeters thick that transmits sensations of touch and pressure. Given technological developments in pixelated vision and holoacoustic sound, the artificial skin is a substantive next step, a maya that can contain and shape the body's experience. Meta scientist Abhinav Gupta says:

> If you think about how humans or babies learn, multimodal data are fundamental to developing an understanding of the world. We are learning from pixels, sound, touch, taste, smell, and so on. But if you look at how Artificial Intelligence has advanced in this last decade, we've made great advances in pixels and we've advanced in sound: audio, voice, etc. However, we are still missing something as critical in this advancement as touch. ReSkin could allow robots to measure pressure forces at approximately 0.1 Newtons on objects less than 1 millimeter wide. This will allow researchers to have a better understanding of the physics behind the object, as they work to build the metaverse. (Gupta in Ledron, 2021, n/p)

It is important then to ask ourselves about the human and social significance of a context capable of offering corporative dermal experiences of objects and spaces, and particularly of rose, contact and virtual interaction with other bodies, in people who need not only the integration and symbolic approval in

social groups, but the somatic contact of the presence and intention towards themselves of other bodies. Will we yield to hegemonic corporations the sense, the form and the experience of the body?

The still schematic and provincial developments of the metaverse that are now visible, i.e. the fragmentary metaverses of video games that have become virtual fields like Fornite, or the virtual territory worlds like Roblox, or the incipient Meta networks, give clear signs of what is being projected. A cyber-capitalist layer of the world. Even if we argue about the possibilities of liberation and unusual corporeal experiences that are projected there, even if we promote the possibilities for education, medicine, the development of science and artistic creation, all of them powers of these technologies, it is innocent to ignore the biopolitical potentialities they offer both to global corporations, as well as to governments and their governments. And these, in fact, are the forces that will produce the continuum of the metaverse, because it is these corporations that have the investment capitals that their assembly requires (dense cloud computing infrastructures, advanced virtual reality and augmented reality technologies, development of very high-speed connectivities, AI design appropriate for personalization and dynamic environments, cryptocurrencies, *blockchain*, technical solutions for interoperability).

The metaverse will allow a transversal deployment of what I have argued here as a technological structure of negative recursivity of the self-image, with it, the capture of the subject reaches its totalization[20]: a kind of cocoon absorbed in a virtual magma that re-disposes it to surrender itself to a system of full and permanent usufruct and capitalization[21]. All this is a question about aesthetics,

20 It is naive to assume that Elon Musk's sole objective with Neuralink is to help people with quadriplegia or spinal cord injuries to provide them with brain-computer connections that will eventually allow them to regain some control of their limbs. Therein lies one of its possibilities, undoubtedly, but the potential for business and mental colonization that a device inserted in the brains of large populations has is not negligible for the capitalist gaze. Several academic researches raise the ethical questions about brain-computer interfaces (BCI), issues such as patient autonomy, protection and security of their encephalic data, fair access to cognitive growth, mental privacy, blurring of the boundaries between humans and computers; even the significance of what we consider a human being (Botes, 2022; Burwell, Sample & Racine, 2017). But these studies are focused, primarily, on the medical issue of using these interfaces to address neural and nervous system diseases. There is, however, a key area, which requires significant studies in this regard because the possibility of recording, interpreting and altering brain activity, undoubtedly opens an ethical-political and biopolitical issue: the possibilities of human control by the ways of direct intervention on brains. Studies in this direction are scarcer. Without addressing the biopolitical question, the research by Margaret Kosal and Joy Putney (2023) poses an analytical framework for predicting the use of neurotechnologies in the commercial and military sectors in the United States and China, while the study by Lesaja and Palmer (2020) raises the question of the implications and risks of the adoption of brain interface technologies in the context of brain data trading or neurocapitalism.

21 This is not the place to develop this approach, but the fundamental property of cybernetic capitalism of redesigning beings to give themselves, without friction, to the system of usufruct, is projected to the entire field of being: parallel to the capacity of invention of a world of virtual experience that has the potential to reproduce the totality of spaces and objects, as well as to invent space-objects that produce an enveloping somatic experience destined to generate unprecedented processes and spaces of capitalization; just as this occurs on that surface of reality, it produces, in another field, what we can call "invented biology": That axis of synthetic biology that operates under the principle of the demiurge. The capacity to generate exnovo a biology that, for the most part, responds to the needs of growth of the accumulation of capital; or to reprogram beings for its usufruct. An industrial biotechnology that thinks of life as a field of resources to invent organisms and organic modifications that produce substantial surplus value (Soetaert & Vandamme, 2010; Stephanopoulos, Aristidou & Nielsen, 1998). Let's say, biological surplus value. The manipulation of the genetic codes of organisms to produce the substances that industries require.

a question of political aesthetics in its most radical form, because what is at stake is the capture of the gaze-in-body as a sensitive experience. Awareness of our time that demands the construction of a counter-look with the strength to question the foundations and purposes of this reconversion of experience and that calls for an attitude of politicization of aesthetics, today already far from Benjamin's demand (Lizarazo, 2013), but in the sense that he put into play when he warned of the aesthetization of politics.

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