

Spectacle of the Difference

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Abstract

Starting at Philip Kotler's diagrams of the marketing value chain process, the article proposes to discuss the contemporary production strategies through Peirce's synechism, since the continuity movement from thought to matter is easily observed at the relation ideas - producer - products - ideas (images) - consumer created at the modern times. Moreover, as the commercial value chain gained complexity with contemporary ways of relations, it is possible to expand Peirce's synechism as a base to discuss concepts and ideas of others great scholars related to the theme. The digital interface, the CRM (Consumer Relation Management) and other secondary elements of this new commercial system established two way roads, from stimulation to reaction, where thought, habits and matter are putted so close together that the continuity timeframe is contracted in an exponential form. So, by the observation of this everyday life phenomenon raises three interesting questions. The first one, mainly based on Peirce's synechism and Deleuze reading of Bergson's idea of concept, is it possible to suggest an actualization of the relation between matter and concept? The second, calling up McLuhan and Umberto Eco to the discussion, is it possible that the medium is not the message, but the message movement? And finally, considering Marx value theory, is it possible to say that information is the contemporary base of surplus value?

The title Spectacle of the difference purposely refers to Guy Debord's work, the Society of the Spectacle. However, our goal doesn't aim to Debord's discussion of a kind of society; instead our goal will be to analyze, from a semiotic perspective, a kind of spectacle that presents itself over the relation between production process, informational process, economic system and society.

From a critic-common sense perspective and using pragmatism as method to attain clearness of thought, our goal will be to reach the meaning of the Spectacle of the difference. A meaning that does not limit man to his actions, as William James would agree, but a meaning that tends to a general idea forced from the experiences' regularity. Regarding all endless philosophical disputes, where the meaning was taken for granted, Peirce said:

What is wanted, therefore, is a method for ascertaining the real meaning of any concept, doctrine, proposition, word, or other sign. The object of a sign is one thing; its meaning is another. Its object is the thing or occasion, however indefinite, to which it is to be applied. Its meaning is the idea which it attaches to that object, whether by way of mere supposition, or as a command, or as an assertion. (CP. 5.6)

Moreover he says.

Endeavoring, as a man of that type naturally would, to formulate what he so approved, he framed the theory that a conception, that is, the rational purport of a word or other expression, lies exclusively in its conceivable bearing upon the conduct of life; so that, since obviously nothing that might not result from experiment can have any direct bearing upon conduct, if one can define accurately all the conceivable experimental phenomena which the affirmation or denial of a concept could imply, one will have therein a complete definition of the concept, and there is absolutely nothing more in it. (CP. 5.412)

So, in care of our object of study, the Spectacle of the difference, let's swim at the river of pragmatism just saying that we are considering only the peircean waters, where pragmatism *is a maxim of logic instead of a sublime principle of speculative philosophy* (CP. 1.18). And to not be speculative let's grab our concept from the experience. What is a spectacle? The word comes from the Latin *spectaculum*, which is a derivative form of the verb *spectare*: to look at, to watch. Moreover, contextualizing the action of looking in Debord's approach, it is possible to retrieve a very important element: looking as wondering, as being amazed, or the capacity thereto, as the spectacle of the stars, as nature's spectacle, as a soccer spectacle, as the spectacle of the entertainment industry and many others.

By now, it's quite evident that spectacle is related to an event that presents itself to us demanding a high intensity of attention. Nevertheless, what calls for our attention, in the spectacle sense, is not the desire of understanding, which might it come later; neither the fact itself, as something that persist over our beliefs. What calls our attention in a spectacular event is more about what we feel than anything else. My North American friends say that football is a spectacular sport by itself, however nobody saw, at least in a 10 years window, a such spectacular game like last year Super Bowl finals between the New England and the New York

Giants. So, how can we find a spectacular game different from any other? Simply by its qualities and by the degree of our feelings. It is a subject and a social *constructo* based on amount of feeling that connects us to the event.

And what is this difference that can be spectacular? As paradoxical as it seems, the difference that we are going to talk about is not a difference in its practical consequences, but in its spectacular relation with the observer. WHY? HOW? That is our massive work over this paper and as the discussion goes on, it will be clear that the question HOW relates to habit as the WHY relates to belief.

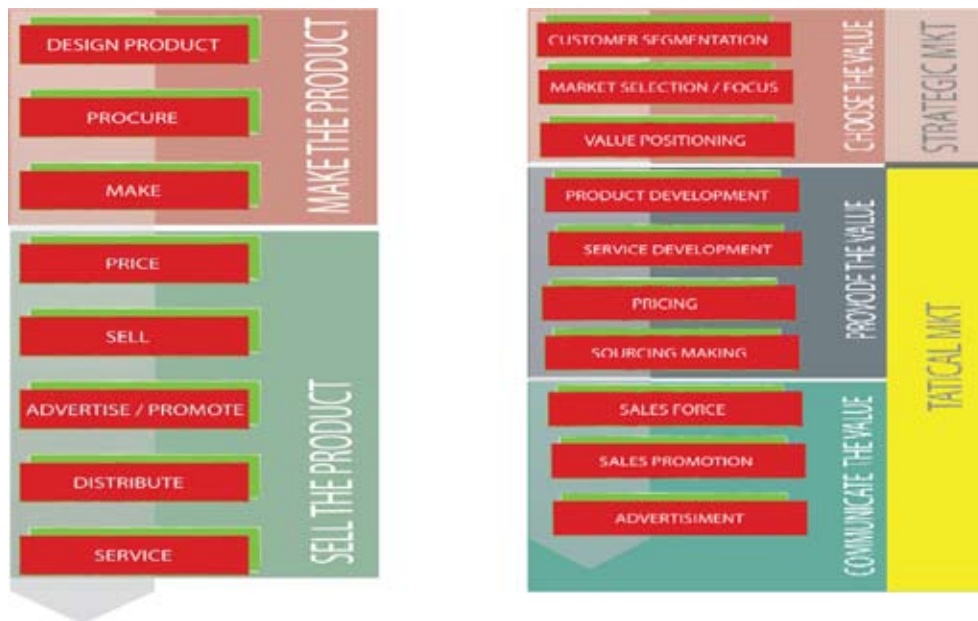
The difference we are going to talk about is the difference that we buy in everyday life, the difference that the capitalist system is using after the mass concept lost its power in communication. Today, we don't see pin-up girls or cowboy's adds saying do or buy this product like everybody else, but we see different kinds of people saying do or buy this product to be yourself. As Slavoj Zizek (2009) pointed out, today the proletariat, the mass, is a kind of zombie, someone dead that walks over the earth empty of life, empty and urging for individualization. So, we come to the core of our discussion, at the contemporary territory where individualization is glued on existence, where an individual does not exist without difference. In the same interview Zizek also raised a very interesting perspective of this emptiness, that according to him is a consequence of the particular taking over the individual common grounds and what I prefer to say is the institutionalization of the human power of production (habit), material and intellectual. This emptiness is a very long and complex concept and for the sake of our objective let's stop here for now.

Then, how does the occidental capitalism system fulfill our need of being different, being a unique part? It created the Spectacle of the difference. And please attend to the fact that I am talking about a systemic genesis.

Just do It (Nike),
Like.no.other (Sony),
Think (IBM),
Think different (Apple),
I am what I am (Reebok),
Because you are worth it (L'Oreal),
Impossible is nothing (Adidas).

By some contemporary institutional slogan, that reflects a company spirit, it's clear the attempt to sell something more than a product, it's clear the selling of an attitude, of habit, a mode of existence, a way of production. Please, as an evolutionist I don't believe, and I am not saying that the spectacle of difference come to be as a opposition to mass society culture. The society of the spectacle and the mass culture still live; but, now, together with a new kind of spectacle that feeds the capitalism system with the energy that it was lacking.

But how this kind of spectacle come to be? To understand how, we begin with two of Kotler's diagrams. For the ones that are not familiar with him: in 2008, Philip Kotler was listed as the 6th most influential person on business thinking by the Wall Street Journal and, today, we can say he is a top expert on marketing strategies.



In Kotler's word.

The task of any business is to deliver value to the market at a profit. There are at least two views of the value-delivery process. The traditional view (the left diagram) is that the firm makes something and then sells it. In this view, marketing takes place in the second half of the value-delivery process. The traditional view assumes that the company knows what to make and that the market will buy enough units to produce profits for the company.

[...]

... the new view of business processes, which places marketing at the beginning of the planning process. Instead of emphasizing making and selling, companies see themselves involved in a three-phase value creation and delivery sequence (as in the right diagram). (Kotler, 2000, p.49-50. Our bold indication.)

The great present Kotler gave us, is the idea that today some companies are not interested in selling a product, but selling a value. So, in this contemporary model of production we make a product, as we once made from a piece of rock a knife, but we sell the idea that a knife can add value to someone's life — we will go further on this later. But, maybe what happened is that companies perceived that a value is timeless and a product isn't. And as we go along it becomes more clear how explicit synechism is the relations we are looking to.

From chance to self-control habits, or even from inherit habits to self-control habits, we can create things that today we call products. From a piece of rock to a knife, from uranium to plutonium 39, synechism come as a third in the relation of tychism with pragmatism; the continuum of thought and matter made possible by the mind tendency to generalize, to acquire habits.

I believe the law of habit to be purely psychical. But then I suppose matter is merely mind deadened by the development of habit. (CP. 2.318)

So, going back to our economics, let's focus on the habit of production, the same habit that according to Marx on the Capital, was taken from the proletariat; where we have a power of production that doesn't belong anymore to the subject that produces. Once we don't have enough space for the whole historical analyze, we begin with a huge revolution in the capitalism system, the Industrial Revolution. Why is it call a revolution? Maybe, because mankind's habit of production was amplified to a scale never seen before that time. Our habit of the making a coat from fur gained exponential magnitude when we learned how to build and use machines to automate the process, or else, when our habit became a machine that could produce much more coats in a shorter period of time than a single worker. And the worker wasn't making a product anymore, it was only a part of the line of production, it was a machine in flesh and blood as Charles Chaplin showed in his film Modern Times.

The manual labor product didn't stand a chance against the machine products for one main reason, the production scale were cheaper. With less cost, especially in human labor, it was possible to produce more at the same time while worker's individual labor value didn't have a direct perception cost in one product price. A machine's production chance (tychism) of acting differently over the same circumstances is reduced in large quantity compare to human's labor. Machines only obey, they don't mediate.

Habits prolonged on mechanical machines made possible to people acquire products that they need at a lower cost. So, the price of the product was enough to render profit to the producer and to be more affordable to society. The general formula of efficiency to a machine is based on the relation between work and energy spent, what looks to be a consequence of the relation habit, benefit and purpose in an evolutionary stream. The producer purpose is to make profit, so the cheaper (with profit) the product, more people can buy what they need, as clothes. At this moment, the producer makes profit in direct relation with the product and the production technology; a matter of scale.

From the Industrial Revolution to the mass society we can see the improvement of the production's technology. Henry Ford putted America on Wheels always looking over a production line; the customer could have a car in any color he wanted, as long it would be black. That's mass production and once the economics system enables itself only to produce a large quantity of the same product it has to state to society that having that product is important to be part of. Part of what? Edgar Allan Poe answered with his Man of the Crowd. Nevertheless, technology of mass production became commodity and suddenly we had a lot of companies producing the same product. The system could not go on like this, once society that was educated of buying the cheaper suddenly was demanding a price that didn't generate profit because of the choice, the habit of production wasn't feeding the system anymore. Since we had two companies to choose from or the system would come with a new habit or the system would suffer a meltdown. Please attend to the elements, purpose, habit, experience in the hall of evolution.

That is a task for a whole era to work out. I have begun by showing that tychism must give birth to an evolutionary cosmology, in which all the regularities of nature and of mind are regarded as products of growth, and to a Schelling-fashioned idealism which holds matter to be mere specialized and partially deadened mind. (CP. 5.102)

Synechism, from mind to matter and from matter to mind, a continuum that supports life through regularity, through habits that grows by an evolutionary movement. It becomes clear that capitalism had grown stronger as an economic system because, far from the communism utopia, it was open to experience. If only Lenin had a chat with Peirce would know that idealism has a different substance than reality.

So, we are close to the 80's and meet with a second revolution, the Informational Revolution. From there to now, it's the Informational Revolution we are living. When I started to work, I had to learn DOS language, today my younger brother doesn't know what that is. But, that isn't our focus, the Informational Revolution is interested in this discussion because two aspects: it amplified the power of abstraction and it made possible a world connection, it amplified communication of thoughts, a semiosis enzyme.

Going back to Kotler's diagrams, from making the product and selling the product, we reached to choose the value, provide the value and communicate the value. How? And here we finish how the Spectacle of difference came to be. Informational technology created more flexible machines and also made possible the cells of production instead the line of production. Today, cells of production and machines with more than one habit made possible to produce different versions of the same product in mass scale, what was beautifully described by Joseph Pine Junior II as mass-segmentation production. Boeing builds its 757 model from cells of production around the world. One of Toyota's factory in the US can produce three different car models in one day. Using the possibility of amplified abstraction we can test and manipulate ideas before they are materialized by habit, what means that we can cut mechanical process of the production process and became more flexible in the doing of the thing. An example is the graphic industry, today we don't talk about plates or physical bases before the information goes to the paper, today, it comes out of the computer and goes directly to final mechanical process of printing. Once the production is more flexible, it is easier and cheaper to produce versions of the same product.

Therefore, over the relation with society, at the same time the system entices you to be yourself, it states you can be a better version of yourself by buying these or those segmented products — parts of the-self that you want to be. Here we go back to Žižek's approach of the zombies. In a semiotic perspective, what is this zombie phenomenon? In a few worlds, the system institutionalizes an individual sign production and it charges money for the signs that individual would like to produce — this resembles what was called the new world order, where the sub-developed countries would sell raw material without any gain to developed countries and buy manufactory product at abusive prices. Here the system answered to the stressed mass society: if to be equal is not valuable anymore, let's charge for the difference. And remember that we are talking about the system of the capital, an intelligent system where the difference will only exist with the mass culture — that is a consequence of capitalism's capacity of acquiring new habits under the same purpose.

No wonder, another marketing specialist, named Michael Porter came with the need of positioning strategy at the same time Mr. Pine was talking about mass-segmentation. And, to a company develop a positioning strategy means to choose a certain product value to a certain kind of consumer. It is a market differentiation, as Apple and IBM. Now, the mass could choose from different products under the same function. The more unique and exclusive, the more profit a company could make with a product.

Grounding the differentiation it was and it is the communication amplification. And I don't think I have to stress this topic that is so casual in our everyday life and, please, just remember that cover of Times's Magazine (2006) where the person of the year was us, meant us the internet user. Today the producer learns more and more of the consumer, today we don't only have list of generic types anymore, today it's possible to build diagram over the consumer habits and turn that information in value, that's a evolution of Kotler's second diagram, where the relation with the consumer is a base of value and it's the final element that makes the Spectacle of the Difference possible.

The clients relationship programs are not booming for nothing. Terms like brand experience, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and brand senses did not come out of the blue. When I said that the companies don't act over a generic customer information as in the past, I meant that the consumer information are not only about sex, age, income, social class and others terms of the subject, but also about habits, today informational technology made possible to know how the customer interacts with the product and with the ambient.

Once I participated in a case where a technical editorial company was digitalizing it content. First because the process would gain speed, second because the client could have its relation with the information amplified and third it was a cheaper production to the company. However, a cluster of clients was a very conservative group and the digital didn't have any appeal. After studying that customer and his (her) product interaction, an important information emerged. The majority of them were afraid of loosing time in their production process by having to learn to use the new tool and, at the end, in the material (books) interaction they didn't have to open a browser and put their login and password. As a result the company is developing a desktop application that shows the customer the information he wants actively by preformatted patterns — now the customer will not have to open a browser.

The communication explosion by the Informational Revolution brings up a new perspective of Marshal McLuhan signature: the medium is the message. Over an article in the New York Times (2009), Umberto Eco brought up an interesting discussion by exposing how the medium is becoming more and more fragile. Well, the message looks to be potential whether the medium allows its movement or not, all the costumer habits information were there before it were collect throw technology and this means that the message is not the medium, but the medium is a base for the message movement, in an peircean view, a base for acquiring the form of the object throw the sign.

From delivering the product, we went to delivering a value over a market differentiation and, finally, came to delivering a value over the consumer uniqueness. And this uniqueness is present by the Spectacle of the difference created after a diagrammatic habit study of the costumer.

This new kind of customer information, it is what I call a surplus information, the relational information that the system collects over the relation with the consumer and, like the market calls, adds value to the product by features, services, relational programs that also feeds this adding value.

In a car industry case by crossing the personal data of the owner, with the kind of use he did of the vehicle (collect in the official mechanic store), it was possible to point out how to personalize and mainly how to communicate a car to became more interesting to a customer

segment. It is always nice to listen what we want to hear. Why people need a 4 wheel traction SUV in the city? It is more a question of using the representation of the car than its functions. We buy a world of representation and not a product. A symbol that is missing in our symbolic embodied self.

Once I went to a bar to watch a soccer game. It was a special day, since my dear team was at the top of the state championship and our main rival was supposed to fall to a secondary division. So, the scene was as follows. Imagine a big bar in L format. One TV at the extreme right of the L base and the second was at the L top. As expected, one TV for each game. When the game of my team was 30 minutes to the end, the other game finished and both TVs started to show my team's game. After a few minutes in this situation and by the other team's fans reaction, it was possible to perceive that they were watching the game with a few seconds in advance. So, my team is dancing in the field and conquers the opposite side of the field, our attack gets near the goal and the possibility of scoring is clear, I heard the other people screaming the F world and as an immediate reaction to the whole scenario, I screamed goal before it happen in mine TV. Everything happened in seconds.

So, let's just say that the possible goal, that real possibility, is the spectacle of the difference a company uses to sell its product and that diagrammatic view of the play is the surplus information. This real possibility, this capacity of human mind that speculates *in futuro*, has an iconic relation with what is presented by the event, and a symbolic one with the *in future action*. So, what we called above, surplus information, is that circumstantial sign (or set of signs) that stimulates the real possibility, in the case of the spectacle of the difference, my wanted self. Let's see what Peirce says about the real possibility when examine his graphs theory.

For although I have always recognized that a possibility may be real, that it is sheer insanity to deny the reality of the possibility of my raising my arm, even if, when the time comes, I do not raise it; (CP. 2.579).

A real possibility doesn't belong to reality and it is real, it is a future action that is possible to be solely because of human mind inferential capacity. The closer to the habits of the observer the stronger is the possibility in that human mind, as a degree of existence. Peirce said:

There is no difficulty in conceiving existence as a matter of degree. The reality of things consists in their persistent forcing themselves upon our recognition. If a thing has no such persistence, it is a mere dream. Reality, then, is persistence, is regularity. In the original chaos, where there was no regularity, there was no existence. It was all a confused dream. This we may suppose was in the infinitely distant past. But as things are getting more regular, more persistent, they are getting less dreamy and more real. (CP. 1.175)

And that is mainly because matter is deadened mind, a mind that developed an intense degree of habits. Nevertheless, as being two different kinds of mind, the laws of matter are not the same that the laws of mind. The reaction to the habit, in human mind abstraction flows over time (the ultimate abstraction law) without the persistence of the space, while in reality space resists as real.

When Deleuze was reading Bergson in his work *Les études bergsoniennes* (1956), he point out to the idea of the space being a repetition and the time a duration. Moreover, in his later other work, *Difference and Repetition* (2006), Deleuze stated that the more in the past, the more is repeated. From a Peircean point of view, time as duration doesn't provoke nothing, it is only (re)comforting, but comfort it is not what we are looking for. If space is repetition and the more in the past, the more is repeated, it could only happens on reality, on nature's law of matter that resist to us. And resist because it is deadened mind with a high intensity of habits. Peirce himself said that the inanimate things don't comity mistakes once there are almost pure habit, pure repetition; from being to substance.

Zeno's brought the question to day light when exposed the story of Aquile's and the Turtle. By the law of mind it is a real possibility that Aquiles will never reach the turtle, once each whole piece of distance can be divided in half ad infinitum by our abstraction. Nevertheless, in the law of nature that is impossible because, in physics, we have the mechanic's law of conservative energy and acceleration as a consequence. Acceleration: the relation between distance, time and velocity. In Nature, space is alter, time is a constant (as in the law of mind), but acceleration and velocity points out, in a logic operation, where the two body will meet in time and space. By the mind laws, acceleration and velocity doesn't mean that the bodies will meet because space is not alter, it can be manipulated in infinitum halves.

A real possibility, as a hypothesis raises from a diagrammatic icon, presents itself to the system as technology can capture the interaction points of someone's life. A diagram of someone's interaction with the environment is a base to create a possible reality to that same one. The spectacle of the difference is a spectacle because is the real possibility that we want to be, it is Narciso's reflection. The surplus information derivates of Carl Marx theory because as proletarian was alienated from the value of his work, the spectacle of the difference is a phenomena only possible by the individual alienation of him(her)self, the zombie kind.

We know that production in full diversity still impossible. Nevertheless, the more exclusive the more valuable; so, what better way to sell a spectacular difference than Charlie ways? Charlie is the main character of the T.V. show *Two and a Half Man*. In one chapter a beautiful woman (re)encounters him after, of course, his disappearance. And she says something like that: Charlie, you never answered my calls, I thought you said I was unique. Charlie replies: You are unique, but not exclusive.

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