

# Applications of the Lacanian theory of discourses in the field of Communication\*

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## Abstract

This article discusses the application of Lacan's discourse theory in the field of Communication. Based on bibliographical research, which includes texts of the author illustrating the proposed application, its purpose is to examine modes of use of this tool and the recourse to it as an instrument of interdisciplinary articulation. It is shown that the discourse theory serves as factor of rapprochement and differentiation, pivot for abductive reasoning, framework for historical evolution, criterion for systematization and underlying method, and that the interface between Communication and Psychoanalysis brought about by the application of this theory involves the notion of Psychoanalysis in extension and operations of conceptual import, export and contextualization. It follows that this application is useful for research not only in Communication but even in Psychoanalysis, in addition to contributing to the understanding of the broader social context.

**Keywords:** Discourses. Lacan. Communication. Media. Epistemology.

## Introduction

The starting point of this article is an epistemological problem, the possibility of applying Jacques Lacan's discourse theory to the research in Communication. Its goal is to discuss the application modes of this theory, illustrated with examples, and the types of interface this application allows to establish between Communication and Psychoanalysis. The methodology used is bibliographical research, congregating my own works as illustrations, Lacan's texts that address the discourse theory and some other sources that contribute to elucidate the epistemological questions posed.

For years I have been using the Lacanian discourse theory in various applications in the field of Communication and eventually in other areas. This has enabled me to obtain an empirical experience of the possibilities and advantages of using this theoretical tool.

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However, as these works are usually hybrid, located in the interface between Psychoanalysis and Communication or some other discipline, it is not always possible to clarify the meaning and scope of such applications to the target audience (which usually belongs to just one of these areas). It was because I felt the need to justify more systematically the uses of the discourse theory in Communication and the advantages derived from this that I matured the idea to write this text.

This discussion covers issues of more general epistemological interest for Communication, in that they have parallels with issues brought by theoretical loans to the field of Communication from other areas, calling into question the porous borders of this field, its way of handling interfaces with other disciplines etc. Furthermore, in a more specific approach, it is part of a tradition of interdisciplinary dialogue between Communication and Psychoanalysis.

The article begins by broaching some basic elements of the Lacanian discourse theory. It then provides examples of readings of media phenomena based on a specific discourse or matrix of discourses. From there, the uses of this tool are examined, as factor of rapprochement and differentiation, pivot for abductive reasoning, framework for historical evolution, criterion for systematization and underlying method. Finally, the recourse to the discourse theory is taken as an instrument of interdisciplinary articulation, which covers the notion of Psychoanalysis in extension and operations of conceptual import, export and contextualization.

## **Elements of the Lacanian discourse theory**

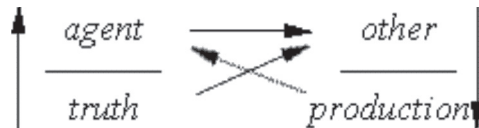
It would not be appropriate to discuss the use of the Lacanian discourse theory in the media field without providing a preliminary indication of what it addresses to those who are not familiar with this theory. Nor would it be the case to linger on this matter longer than necessary. Therefore, the following is a brief presentation of the scheme of discourses, considering that the understanding of each discourse should benefit, later, from the description of some examples regarding its application.

The way Lacan uses the word “discourse” is unconventional. As he states in the *Seminary XVII*, in 1969-70, discourse is not necessarily related to text, but it is a structure that “may well subsist without words” (LACAN, 1991, p.11 – Our translation). More precisely, “this notion of discourse should be taken as a social link, founded on language” (LACAN, 1975, p.21 – Our translation). Thus, the discourse theory, proposed in the wake of the May 1968 movement, corresponds to his most serious attempt to reflect on social issues. At this time, Foucault makes a conference in the French Society of Philosophy addressing precisely (by another route) the issue of discourse, and Lacan (2006, p.188 –

Our translation) states that “I considered myself to have been summoned” to participate in it, because of the announcement by the philosopher which suggested that he would allude to the “return to Freud” promoted by the psychoanalyst. During the ensuing debate (see FOUCAULT, 2001, p.848), Lacan refutes the student slogan “structures do not walk on the streets” (disseminated via graffiti on the walls of Paris), which Lucien Goldmann draws against the lecturer, arguing that the structures do walk on the streets.

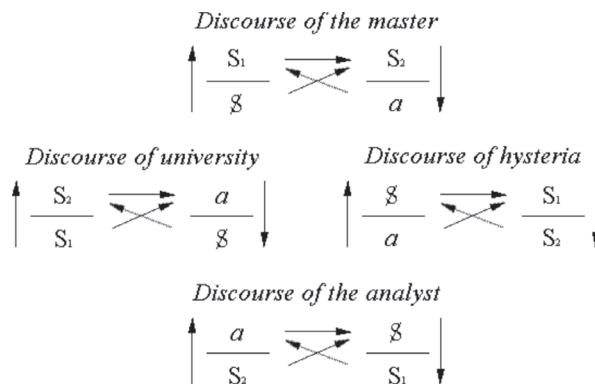
Each discourse is represented by an algorithm, or *matheme* – neologism coined by Lacan in reference to Levi-Strauss’ *mythemes* (1958, p.233) –, containing four elements distributed in four places. These elements are the master signifier ( $S_1$ ), the battery of signifiers or knowledge ( $S_2$ ), the barred or divided subject ( $\$$ ), and the object  $a$ , the object cause of desire or surplus-enjoyment ( $a$ ). The places, in turn, include the agent, the other, the production and the truth (FIG. 1).

Figure 1 – Places of discourse



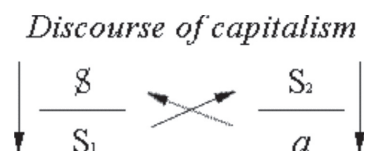
As the order of the elements is in principle defined as invariable, it results from this arrangement four possible combinations: the discourse of the master, the discourse of university, the discourse of hysteria and the discourse of the analyst (FIG. 2).

Figure 2 – Matrix of discourses



Later, in a speech in Milan, Lacan (1978) adds a fifth discourse to this matrix, called discourse of capitalism and obtained from the discourse of the master through a reversal of places between the elements on the left side of the algorithm, complemented by a reorientation of the arrows (FIG. 3).

Figure 3 – Discourse of capitalism



In all discourses, with the exception of the latter, there is a disjunction of impotence on the bottom line: “The structure of every discourse necessitates an impotence, defined by the barrier of enjoyment, to be differentiated as a disjunction, always the same, from its production to its truth” (LACAN, 2001, p.445 – Our translation). Similarly, between the positions of agent and other there is another disjunction, of impossibility: “The first line contains a relation which is indicated here by an arrow, and which is always defined as impossible” (LACAN, 1991, p.202 – Our translation).

It is from the discourse of the master that the others are derived. In this discourse, the top line shows how the symbolic order is articulated:  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  represent the most basic structure of language (the initial terms of a chain) and law (the relationship between master and slave, which refers to the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave). This is an explicit relationship of power. There also appears the tendency to totalization: when the master signifier intervenes in the knowledge ( $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$ ), it projects on it an aspiration to unity. In the bottom row we see the subject ( $\$$ ), who is constituted on the basis of his subjection to the symbolic order, and the remainder of this operation, the surplus-enjoyment ( $a$ ), which is what escapes the symbolic.

In the discourse of university, the agent is not  $S_1$ , for example a figure of authority, but  $S_2$ , knowledge, something more abstract. The name itself of this discourse stresses the importance of knowledge, and gives a clue about what kind of knowledge it deals with – systematized, classified, cataloged. It is not a neutral rationality though: occupying a dominant position, it is a conventional knowledge. Nor is there a transparency: in the position of truth,  $S_1$  represents the disguised power. On the right side we have the other reduced to a mere inform object, a remainder of real ( $a$ ), someone inarticulate to be educated, socialized, disciplined – in short, transformed into a subject ( $\$$ ) in the service of a particular social order.

In the discourse of hysteria, the dominant position is occupied by the hysterical subject ( $\$$ ), which is the exemplary divided subject, wrapped in doubt and questioning. The cause of hysterical desire ( $a$ ) occupies the position of truth inaccessible to the subject. It is manifested in the form of a demand addressed to someone, about this truth which the hysteric does not have access to: who am I? what do I want? The other of the discourse corresponds to the master who is questioned ( $S_1$ ). With his questioning, the hysteric urges the master to produce knowledge ( $S_2$ ). This knowledge tries to account for the cause of hysterical desire, the object  $a$ . The most obvious example is the psychoanalytic knowledge, generated in the course of the treatment of hysteria by Freud.

In the discourse of the analyst, the analyst is in the position of agent, being represented by the object  $a$  – he is the cause of the desire of the analysand to know the meaning of his own symptoms. The posture of the analyst favors the emergence of the analysand in the position of other as \$, a hystericized subject that has barred access to his symptoms, but has the ability to direct his questions and complaints to the analyst. In the position of production,  $S_1$  represents the repressed master signifier that is revealed in the analysis: the manifest content, encrypted, of the free associations, and the interpretation they receive. In the position of truth is  $S_2$ , the knowledge never fully told, which the analysand presumes in the analyst.

Unlike the others, the discourse of capitalism is generated by a twist of the discourse of the master, with the terms in the positions of agent and truth changing places. It is the only discourse in which the order agreed between the terms is subverted. Also, the flow indicated by the arrows is modified, making the movement between locations to be continuous. The subject (\$) in the position of agent apparently assumes the leading role, as if he commanded the master signifier ( $S_1$ ) in the position of truth. There is no longer the disjunction of impossibility between agent and other (in theory all is possible) and the disjunction of impotence between production and truth (the limits to enjoyment disappear).

Considering the formalization presented above, the mechanism of the discourses is very abstract and may be used in a wide range of situations. This brings to mind the observation made by Weber (1922, p.124), when he discusses the types of domination, that “none of these three ideal types [...] usually appears in a really ‘pure’ historical form.” Lacanian discourses – in which, to a certain extent, we could see a parallel with the Weberian concepts (the discourse of the master corresponds to the traditional type of domination, the discourse of university to the bureaucratic, the discourse of hysteria to the charismatic) – are not present either in any context in a pure form; in practice, they are always combined and they can all be involved in a given situation. In a context such as the academic one, we not only find the discourse of university, as expected, but all the others. In addition, the scope of each discourse is broader than its name suggests. One can take the case of the discourse of hysteria: it is not restricted to hysterical subjects, but includes social processes – concerning all kinds of people – which have a homology with the clinical structure of hysteria. And all this holds for the reading of media processes anchored in the discourses.

## Examples of application in Communication

If discourses, as defined by Lacan, are social links, it is not hard to see their connection with Communication, which is of course inseparable from social links. Thus, the examples proposed here allow to study Communication as a social bond from various angles.

Direct uses of the discourse theory in Communication include, among others, the distribution of the dynamics of the media process within the matheme of a discourse or the classification of functions and rhetorical strategies of media within a matrix of various discourses.

It is possible to draw a parallel between the terms of the discourse (master signifier, battery of signifiers, divided subject and object  $a$ ) and the components of the communication process (sender, message/code/channel, receiver, and motivation/noise, respectively). From this point on, the dynamics of a given discourse – that is, the internal relations between elements arranged in different places – can serve to characterize the dynamics of a given media process. Here's an example, regarding the dynamics of advertising on mass consumption, as captured by the discourse of hysteria (CASTRO, 2009). In the discursive framework the consumer, as a divided subject, is lodged in the position of agent and motivated by the lack in the position of truth. By questioning the advertising person about his desire, the consumer enthrones him as master signifier in the position of other. A similar role is played by models used to entice the consumer and the targets whom the consumer, in turn, is encouraged to seduce. Knowledge is generated in the operation, by way of fantasy, which tries to deal with consumer desire and which, as battery of signifiers, recovers the universe of goods. The disjunction of impotence, on the bottom line, shows that in this process there is partial enjoyment and dissatisfaction, so that it repeats itself indefinitely.

It is possible to relate the different types of discourse with the most important functions performed by media communication since the beginning of modernity: the discourse of the university refers to discipline, the discourse of hysteria to seduction, the discourse of the master to ideology and the discourse of the analyst to transformation (CASTRO, 2010b). In the discourse of university, we encounter a disciplinary logic similar to the apparatuses of domination. The proliferation of signifiers (which does not necessarily presuppose diversity) generated by the media indicates the value of the message ( $S_2$ ) at the expense of the sender ( $S_1$ ). And when it comes to dominance of the message, it is important to consider, paying attention to the lesson of McLuhan (1994, p.7), that “the medium is the message” and that the technical devices also have a role. Who controls the media in general does not express himself directly through it, and who expresses himself often does not do that in his personal capacity; technical mediation can also cause detachment. Regarding the relationship between the left side and the right side of the algorithm, it should be noted that the typical structure of the discourse of university relies on collecting and processing data, extracting knowledge from or about their targets, taken as objects ( $a$  in the position of other). Aside from the disciplinary aspect, Communication has another primary function, the seduction, which is seized by the discourse of hysteria. In this discourse, the divided subject (\$) sets himself in the position of agent, driven by lack ( $a$ ) in the position of truth.

Turning to media in order to realize his desire, the subject puts it, as master signifier ( $S_1$ ), in the position of other. The result from this is knowledge ( $S_2$ ) trying to respond to the subject. If in the discourse of the university the Other is on the left side of the algorithm ( $S_2/S_1$ ), in the discourse of hysteria the Other is on the right ( $S_1/S_2$ ). In the first, standing on the side of agent, the Other interpellates; in the second, standing on the side of the other, the Other is questioned. In one case ( $S_2$  on the top level), impersonality and objectivity are valued in the place of the Other; in the other case ( $S_1$  above), singularity is valued. We go from the panopticon to the synoptic: “The tables have been reversed, and it is now the many who watch the few” (BAUMAN, 2000, p.85-86 – Our translation). Under the prism of the discourse of the master, the media can work unequivocally as an ideological apparatus, promoting the belief in absolute values, directly endorsing current beliefs in the society in which it operates, or may behave ideologically in an implicit way. Ideology is linked to the fiction of a perfect message, full of crystallized sense – when it plugs  $S_2$ ,  $S_1$  stops the sliding of meaning in the chain. An attempt is made to convey the idea that sender ( $S_1$ ) and receiver (\$) are on the same side, and to simultaneously challenge the lack of coincidence between them, to hide the difference designated by the limitation of the subject. In the framework of the discourse of the analyst, message and sender lose space to remainder and receiver – it’s almost as if the Communication was upside down. And indeed, revolutionary implications at times accompany technical innovations that are relevant to Communication. To these discourses is added the discourse of capitalism, contemporary variant of the discourse of the master. In this discourse, it is not only suggested that receiver (\$) and sender ( $S_1$ ) are on the same side, but that the first commands the second – it is the illusion of interactivity. Illusion because, although apparently in control, the subject is reified, is subjected to the logic of the object, which ultimately determines him ( $a \rightarrow \$$  in the diagonal line). We have therefore the function of complicity, which makes this discourse a more refined mechanism of control than the discourse of the master, or even the discourse of university. And, if the types of discourses are ideal, not appearing in reality in a pure form, but always combined, this is also true for the media functions.

In the same vein, the more general rhetorical strategies of Communication can be connected to the various discourses defined by Lacan (obviously without the specificity of figures of speech in the traditional sense). Let’s see how this operates in terms of advertising (CASTRO, 2012a). Advertising from the point of view of the discourse of the master corresponds to a prescriptive approach, and usually exposes someone formulating a mandatory sentence based on a clear position of authority. The message is direct, like “Buy it!” And, to stress it, the ad may use capital letters, exclamation marks, emphatic tone, repetitions, etc. This style was more common in the past, despite its long tradition in political propaganda. It is what one sees in American recruitment posters depicting Uncle

Sam, in a pose of authority, directly pointing to the viewer, with the caption “I want YOU for U.S. Army.” The type of ad modeled on the discourse of university is a deliberate call to reason, trying to persuade consumers with the help of sensible arguments, detailed data and specialized jargon, despite the aura of mystification around all this, as examined by Barthes (1957) in *Mythologies*. Like the previous model, one can use a figure of authority, with the difference that in this case the authority comes from the knowledge it is assumed this figure has. The typical protagonist is a professional who has some relation to the advertised product, about which he can presumably articulate a well-founded point of view, such as a dentist in white uniform praising the virtues of a toothpaste brand. As for the discourse of hysteria, its strategy is entirely based on seduction. In the context of advertising, the idea is to build a fantasy around the merchandise that is able to capture the subject’s desire. Imagination is released, so that a wide range of situations involving glamour, romance, adventure, exoticism, transgression and the like adheres to the products. This procedure is common, and probably the most representative of the general spirit of advertising: we can think of the Marlboro Man riding against the skyline. However, precisely because it is so often used, it can easily spill over into clichés and become less effective. Finally, the discourse of capitalism provides the most current advertising strategy, which puts the consumer in evidence and forges a complicity with him, by treating him as someone smart, who is in control and who knows what he wants. The DDB campaigns for the Volkswagen Beetle, which revolutionized advertising from the late 1950s onward, are paradigmatic in this regard. The message is subtle, and the product and even the brand can appear in a relatively inconspicuous manner, inviting the customer to fill the gaps. In these parallels it was not taken into account the discourse of the analyst, since it would be difficult to link it to the intents of advertising. It should also be noted, of course, that these various strategies can be combined in various ways. And it may be convenient to distinguish between elocution positions within a media process, more defined (such as the one that associates advertising in the mass consumption to the discourse of hysteria), and rhetorical strategies, more flexible (one of them linking advertising to the discourse of hysteria): in theory, the positions in the first case (the advertising in the place of other, challenged by the subject in the place of agent) could be related to different rhetorical strategies in the second case (insofar as the advertising could vary its responses to the interpellation addressed to it).

An example illustrates how a single media phenomenon can be seen from various angles according to the discourse theory:

When Google scans the Internet collecting information from each site, we are in the discourse of university. When it meets our demand providing results, we are in the discourse of hysteria. When we deify it, we are in the discourse of



the master. When it computes our data and customizes the results it offers us, as if it knew us, knew our preferences and anticipate what we want, we are in the discourse of capitalism (CASTRO, 2013 - Our translation).

## Application modes

From the above examples of application of the scheme of discourses to Communication, we now have the initial elements to investigate the meanings and characteristics that such application can take on.

To throw light on the similarity between two media phenomena, they can be characterized by using a single discourse. Conversely, to show the difference between two media phenomena, one can characterize them by using different discourses. That is, both phenomena are translated into a common code, the protocol of discourses, in order to be compared. This can be particularly useful when affinity or contrast is not clear or cannot be clearly stated at first, their comparison, through the intercession of the discourses, serving to emphasize this.

To fit a particular phenomenon in the operation of a particular discourse or the general matrix of discourses requires some resourcefulness. And even if the application relates to already known facts and relationships, this opens the possibility of a new relationship between them. In addition, the continuous exercise of comparisons using the diagram of discourses may result in unexpected consequences. When we decide to explain a phenomenon in light of the scheme of discourses, we may sometimes know in advance that there will be something corresponding to a discourse or to a discourse position before knowing what this will be. This may be related to the kind of reasoning that Peirce (1988, p.227) calls abductive and differs from both deductive and inductive: “It is the idea of putting together what we had never before dreamed of putting together which flashes the new suggestion before our contemplation”. This is analogous to what happened in the construction of the periodic table by Mendeleev, who reserved spaces to chemical elements that were not yet discovered. The difference here is that what one wants to find out is basically a relationship. For example, when we think of Communication from the point of view of the discourse of hysteria, the responsibility for the demand lies with the audience, pressured by its lack, and this goes against a widespread notion where the audience is in a passive position and the initiative lies with the media. And in the specific case of advertising, when we allocate fantasy and commodities as  $S_2$ , the position of production of this discourse, this will naturally leads us to think of fetishism (CASTRO, 2012c, 2014) – it is a relationship that is imposed by the structure.

While it is a synchronic, not diachronic, articulation, the matrix proposed by Lacan groups discourses with different historical geneses and which gain prominence at different

times. Currently, when the discourse of capitalism tends to be dominant, it is not hard to find new ways to apply it. When we think of consumption and advertising, it can be considered that while the postwar characterization of each term/position is predominantly based on the molds of the discourse of hysteria, today it tends to be better represented by the discourse of capitalism (CASTRO, 2012b). The prevalent rhetorical advertising strategies follow more or less the sequence: discourse of the master-discourse of university-discourse of hysteria-discourse of capitalism. And the configurations of the public as mass (in broadcasting) and as modular cluster (in cyberculture) are represented, respectively, by the discourse of university and the discourse of capitalism.

The most simple and obvious way to make use of the discourses is for the purpose of classifying and presenting ideas. The goal of disserting on a subject in a clear and didactic style benefits from the internal organization of work, the division into parts, the classification. The highly abstract and flexible arrangement of discourses provides a model of systematization; when its application is feasible, this model imposes itself naturally. If a work explains a determined media process through the algorithm of a discourse (such as the dynamics of advertising via the discourse of hysteria), it can be divided according to the parts of the algorithm and the components of the process that occupy these places. And in a work which describes the classification of a process (such as media functions or rhetorical strategies of advertising) according to the matrix of discourses, one can define its parts according to the various discourses and the corresponding modulations of the phenomenon.

In some cases the discourse theory can function as a “vanishing mediator” or “vanishing term,” to refer to the expressions, respectively, of Jameson (2008) and Badiou (2009). That is, it would be useful to unveil a series of relationships through Psychoanalysis, but when these relations were unveiled, they could be expressed through another formulation. Despite having played a decisive heuristic role, the discourse theory, after providing an outcome, falls into the background, as a scaffold that is removed after completing a construction, or the stones in the soup in the picaresque tale featuring the character Peter Malasartes. It is what I do in a text (CASTRO, 2010a) that shows the operation of mass consumption according to the logic of the discourse of hysteria, but contains no direct reference to this concept. The most consistent argument to conceal the display of the discourse theory, as the method which allowed to achieve given results but which became dispensable, is the fact that this is a specialized theory, therefore potentially strange and intimidating to people from other areas, what is aggravated by the notorious aura of hermeticism around Lacan and the arcane aspect of the algebraic formulations representing this theory. It may be objected, on the other hand, that to not dispense with the display of the scaffold has its advantages. One is to enable the reader to have access, to some degree, to the making off of the work, in order to verify the use of instruments and perhaps to use them to reach

his own conclusions. Moreover, this could strengthen the Communication interface with Psychoanalysis and possibly with other areas to which this instrument could be extended.

## **Interfaces with Communication**

Resorting to the Lacanian discourse theory to analyze a media phenomenon has an impact on Psychoanalysis itself, like a boomerang effect. At the same time, it puts emphasis on the interdisciplinary aspect of Communication. This articulation addresses directly the interface between Communication and Psychoanalysis, as well as, indirectly, the interface between Communication and other disciplines, in that applications of the discourse theory in Communication and in other areas end up having points of contact with each other. Furthermore, the media phenomena tend to carry with them a certain gravitational field, often appearing as glued to theoretical approaches, within and outside the field of Communication, which help to locate them and to understand them; when these approaches also engage the Lacanian construction, the theoretical intersections are multiplied.

The use of the device of discourses makes Communication a type of probing ground of Psychoanalysis in extension. This can be interpreted as an advance in knowledge – but, in principle, more specifically in the field of Psychoanalysis than in the field of Communication. This progress consists of, first of all, demonstrating in practice the scope of the discourse theory. Furthermore, a theory is transformed when it “travels” (SAID, 1983), that is, when it is applied in contexts different from the original. In the case of the discourse theory, formulated by Lacan in a relatively generic tone, its trips tend to bring more precision to it. Each use of the theory helps to understand it better; the understanding of a discourse develops from its application. To the extent that an element, a place or a relationship of a discourse is illustrated by a specific case, it gets a special characterization, incorporates something to its sphere of use, and this affects the way that this ingredient of the discursive configuration is perceived and can eventually be used in other cases. Thus, linking the rhetoric of contemporary advertising to the discourse of capitalism shows that the illusion of being in control is a cardinal feature of this discourse. It should be noted, however, that, despite the fact that we are considering the return of an application of Psychoanalysis to Psychoanalysis itself, things are not necessarily exhausted at this point, for it may be possible to distinguish in the discourse theory, in other words, within a psychoanalytical construction, elements of communicational nature.

One can take as a starting point an application of discourses outside the area of Communication and draw inspiration from it to bring this approach to the area. If it is true that until now the use of the discourse theory is uncommon in Communication, insofar we consider all other areas the universe of examples – and possible inspirations – is expanded.

Lacan exemplified (albeit briefly) the action of discourses in areas such as science or politics when he proposed them. It is not uncommon, here and there, that Lacanian psychoanalysts venture into social analyses taking advantage of this tool. And the dissemination of Lacan's influence in various sectors of academia results in unusual approaches. The time factor is an important reference: because of the predominance of a discourse in an era, it provides a theoretical framework for understanding this era.

Who makes use of the application of the model of discourses in Communication may be interested in exporting it, either because the target area has an affinity with the subject studied (say, science to those who study cyberculture), in order to get a feedback in terms of parallels among these applications, or for contextualization purposes.

With the import and export movements in the applications of the discourse theory, whether starting from a media phenomenon to achieve a more general context, or vice versa, it is important to emphasize the compatibility between these two levels, insofar as both share the dominant social bond. In other words, the discourse theory allows expressing the contextualization of the particular within the general. Thus, the discourse of university, which serves to characterize printing press at the beginning of modernity, also illustrates what took place at that time in economics, politics, science, religion, politics and family – the virtualization of authority and the rise of knowledge in the form of proliferation of signifiers. Similarly, the discourse of capitalism, which applies to today's advertising, can be used to illustrate many other facets of contemporaneity, which have in common the apparent leading role and (self)-reification of the subject. The discourse of university can be associated with Foucault's disciplinary society (1993), the discourse of capitalism with Deleuze's society of control (2003). Therefore, despite not explicitly proposing that, the Lacanian discourse theory ends up providing social diagrams that are characteristic of an era. The comment made by Jameson (2002, p.214) concerning his use of the concept of reification is on point:

Being able to use the same language about each of these objects or quite distinct object levels, we can restore, at least methodologically, the lost unity of social life, and demonstrate that far distant elements of the social totality are ultimately part of the same global historical process.

Due to its degree of abstraction, Lacan's discourse theory is uniquely tailored to establish such relations. Hence, this is probably the most important justification for its use.

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