

Circulation: from multiple perspectives of value to the appreciation of the visible

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Abstract

This article is based on the observation of the amplified role attributed to images in a mediatization scenario. These texts, put into circulation, gain strength when they negotiate the flow of the meaning production, that is, the photographs and videos are no longer registers but they become effectively the events to which they refer. Thus, the starting point is the idea that circulation is a space of value attribution (ROSA, 2016a) where the regulation of the visible is given tentatively between the spheres at play. The focus of this text is to discuss the concept of value from multiple perspectives such as exchange value, narrative value, symbolic value and non-value. For this, two movements will be carried out: theoretical reflection and empirical analysis. As theoretical contributions we call upon Eliséo Verón, Carl Schmitt, Pierre Bourdieu and Giorgio Agamben. The empirical analysis focuses on the case of the photograph of a young Muslim woman, a journalistic record of the Westminster terrorist attack in London.

Keywords: Mediatization. Circulation. Value. Image. Photojournalism.

Introduction

Thinking about communication today may be an impossible task if circulation is not considered central and probably a starting and finishing point for understanding the social phenomena that unfold before our very eyes. In saying that it is the starting and finishing point, it is not about staying in the same place, but it implies following the flows, their beginnings, their turning points and, consequently, the changes by which the production of meaning passes through. If, on the one hand, we perceive profound changes in the conditions of circulation of social discourses from the access made possible by the web, on the other one, we have complexations of the communication process itself, since the social actors ascend to the media, also interfering in their logic. Regarding the images, specifically, we see a growing production, whether it is of photographs, videos or collages. Such production not only is visible but it is already thought for mediatization and ends up presenting strategies of fixation. These relate to operations of value that prolong the circulation of determined images.

The hypothesis of circulation as a space of value was proposed by Rosa (2016a), but, as it was embryonic, it considered circulation as a kind of space, a locus. With the advancement of empirical research, which will be brought further on, this perspective was revised. We understand that circulation is not a place since there are no forms of retention, nor a physical or closed space to circulate objects. Circulation consists precisely in the dispute, in the struggle for the production of meaning that is produced in the scope of the media *dispositifs*. However, this clash, more and more, involves contacts, fusions that make opaque the contours between the grammars of production and reception (VERÓN, 2004). This does not mean the end of the gaps but, on the contrary, its potentialization, when both media institutions and social actors have effective conditions to promote circulation. Thus, our attempt here is to avoid incurring in what Braga (2012) alerts

we stress that strictly speaking, it is not the ‘product’ that circulates - but it finds a system of circulation in which it is feasible and which it feeds. The product, however, is a particularly auspicious moment of circulation - precisely because, consolidated in its continuing form (and multiplying in society in mediatization), it can continue to circulate and reverberate in other spaces. Due to its permanence and also because it gets composed while it attempts to form the environments in which it circulates, the product becomes a special object of observation for inferences about the more general processes in which it gets enrolled (BRAGA, 2012, p. 41 – Our translation).

In this way, what interests us in this article, in particular, is precisely the permanence of images as products of and for circulation and, at the same time, as drivers of flows, that expand and exasperate in proportions often unthought. To comprehend the transformation of society and the movements of circulation, both by actors and journalistic media institutions, we return to consider: 1) circulation as a relation of value attribution; 2) this relation when applied to the images is linked to the capacity of proliferation and permanence of determined photographs and videos, and 3) what implies multiple consumptions or phagias. To take these aspects into account, we will verify different perspectives of value and, therefore, of exclusion. To this end, we mobilize an empirical object related to the terrorist attack of Westminster in 2017, which we call here as the case of the “insensitive Muslim” (PRASS; ROSA, 2017).

Multiple Value Perspectives

From the understanding that circulation implies a relation of value, we propose to discuss, here, some of the multiple perspectives of this concept. Our view turns to the idea of value as an exchange, the value of narrative, symbolic value, and non-value. At first sight, an approximation of these concepts seems very difficult, but it is not a question

of thinking them where they are situated, but of making a move to bring them closer, to think about the communicational and the circulation of the images. For this, we propose ourselves to the tension of authors like Eliséo Verón, Carl Schmitt, Pierre Bourdieu, and Giorgio Agamben, since in each of these authors we locate the notion of value with a specific approach.

Turning to Verón (2013), although the author does not focus on the value, we consider that it is important to think about the issue of access in order to place the value in the theoretical textures of circulation. For Verón (2013), there is a growing production of discourses that, while new, are also derivatives and file triggers. For the author, what the Internet does, mainly with its global aspect, is to broaden the field of application. Verón (2013, p. 281 – Our translation) emphasizes that the transformation is of the order of the relation of the individual social actors with the media phenomena. “The WWW involves a mutation in the conditions of access of individual actors to media discursiveness, producing unprecedented transformations in the conditions of circulation¹”.

Thus, when we think of changes in the conditions of circulation, we also think about the social and collective values that we put on the scene. The author himself referred to the mechanism of value creation, especially in the media market. That is, the mutations provoked by the web also imply transformations within the media institutions that need to review their practices, since the circulation sharpens the lags of meaning. Nevertheless, the entry of social actors into production, although with its technological and appropriation² differences, means that forms of value creation by broadcasting or canonical media are no longer enough for other values that begin to emerge and confront those produced by traditional media instances. That is, circulation, enhanced by access to media devices, involves value relations that are, according to Rosa (2016a), hybridized. The media is no longer enough, alone, to define what must be seen and transformed into agenda and schedule, the social actors also share this activity.

The contents of knowledge are no longer an element of the supply rigorously dosed by media institutions, but a dimension of the demand for search operations of “consumers”, in their internet browsing trajectories (VERÓN, 2013, p 285 – Our translation)³.

1 In the original: “La WWW comporta una mutacion en las condiciones de acceso de los actores individuales a discursividad mediática, produciendo transformaciones inéditas en las condiciones de circulación”.

2 We understand appropriation, hither, from Rosa’s perspective (2016b) concerning an inventive action, a subversion of technology beyond its simple use. Appropriation involves the creative act.

3 In the original: “Los contenidos de conocimiento ya no son um elemento más de la oferta rigurosamente dosificada por las instituciones mediáticas, sino una dimensión de la demanda de las operaciones de búsqueda de los “consumidores”, em sus trayectorias de navegacion por internet”.

This implies that actors co-determinate values since they are not only in the condition of receptacles but of those who promote demands and make effective use of technical dispositifs, acquiring a sort of freedom or concession to elect their own values or reiterate the present ones. In this sense, Gorz (2005, p. 9 – Our translation) also turns to the discussion of computerization or digitization. For him, there is a process of revaluation of knowledge, among which is the experience, the capacity for self-organization, and, not least, that one of communication. “The factors that determine value creation are the behavioral component and the motivation”. Thus, we adopt the idea that the images that circulate and, therefore, receive social value are those in which there are a behavioral component and a motivation to carry out the flows. What kind of motivation can we identify in a meme about the political situation in Brazil? Now, we do not spend time, work of intellectual creation to do something that is not, minimally, significant. A joking meme is certainly more valued than a photo-record image because the motivation is on the meaning, not on the technique.

Schmitt (2009), on the other hand, argues that the expression “value” is now very often evoked, whether by journalism or the political field. Thus, in his view, there is a banalization of the term since there are differences in translation and interpretation. At the same time, the term “value” implies social issues and virtue, as well as the economic aspect. Schmitt is concerned with the first aspect, the philosophy of values. Precisely, in our view, it is the social aspect, the idea of esteem that is attributed to determined images in the circulation, which is central. The author (2009, p. 4 – Our translation) questions: “The values are not, but are worth. What is its validity based on? It can be based exclusively on papers, and we have to ask: Who is the one that establishes the values?⁴” These seem to be current questions in the mediatization scenario. Who holds the power to attribute the value?

Schmitt (2009) himself appeals to Max Weber, for whom it is the individual who establishes the values, having, for this purpose, the freedom for subjective decision. Now, if the decision is subjective, there is always a conflict established, because, if something has value, something will necessarily be excluded. After all, they “value for something or for someone⁵” and more, the value only exists as an update. Transposing to our discussion of images, the only one that remains circulating is the one that is valued repeatedly, in several instances, both in production and in recognition. Otherwise, these photos and videos disappear, even if they are still available files. The empirical case that we will present in the corpus of this article shows, exactly, that the image of an attack, the photo-recording of a wounded person on the floor, may gain more space and visibility if the updating of the meaning allows the autonomization of the image, that is, its detachment from the fact to take the shape of the fact itself. It is also important to highlight Schmitt’s warning (2009, p. 10 –

4 In the original: “Los valores no son, sino valen. ¿En qué se basa su validez? Se puede basar exclusivamente en ponencias, y tenemos que preguntar: ¿Quién es el que establece los valores?”.

5 In the original: “valen para algo o para alguien”.

Our translation) “the logic of value, [...] is always, at the same time, a logic of the valueless⁶”. What are we leaving valueless?

In this same perspective, Agamben (2010) refers to the issue of value in “Homo Sacer”. From the experience of Hitler and life unworthy of being lived, the author links the value to the existence of a non-value or devalue. Somehow, denying a value “annihilates it”, eliminating its possibility of permanence and existence. We may take the images of the “insensitive Muslim” who, in the lack of her will, annihilated the value of the lost lives, of the attack itself, when her image acquired ethnic-religious connotations in the appropriations of the social actors via Twitter. Obviously, Agamben’s (2010) discussion is not linked to mediatization but to biopower. We take the liberty to make these approximations, since we consider that the notion of a “sacred life” that can be eliminated also fits the idea of images that can be eliminated, obscured, turned opaque in the sake of others that seem to have more power. However, this power is granted by subjects who choose them to put and keep in circulation.

This power is nothing more than the symbolic power, which Bourdieu (2011, p. 8 – Our translation) describes as an invisible power that can only be exercised “with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they exercise it”. That is, the power provided to subjects to attribute value is an invisible power, but it implies action, both of those who exercise power, and of those who are subject to it. What action can we think of here? It is the action of observing, producing, subverting, taking forward, excluding other images, in short, the very act of value, either by maintaining the original meaning of an image or transforming it into another. Bourdieu (2011, p. 14 – Our translation) points out that symbolic power is constituted by utterances, by the way of making people see and then believe in a specific aspect. Such a power “can be exercised only if it is recognized, that is, misrecognized as arbitrary. This means that symbolic power does not reside in ‘symbolic systems’,” but rather in the relationship between those who exercise power. If we think of the photographs and videos of the attacks, recognition is central, either to take an image forward or to erase it. Both operations involve power, choices, and, consequently, the production of a belief. If we keep it in circulation, we attach value to a determined image; thus, it establishes itself as belief, as what is there to be reiterated, blocking opposing images from gaining the same visibility. The notion of symbolic value seems relevant to us here. Bourdieu (ORTIZ, 1983), speaking of symbolic exchanges, advocates that the discourse is a symbolic product and can receive very different values, depending on where and how it appears.

In this respect, the image, as a symbolic discourse, is also naturally affected by the “market” in which it is inserted. It may be the market of journalism, with its rules and codes, or the market of social actors which make their rules when already in the circulation process, therefore, in the interactions in multiple *dispositifs*. Bourdieu (ORTIZ, 1983) goes on to point

⁶ In the original: “La logica del valor, que siempre es, al mismo tiempo, una logica del sinvalor”.

out that the social value of products necessarily derives from their relationship with the market. This relationship is anchored in the idea of competition and confrontation with other products. It is from this confrontation that the distinctive value emerges; therefore, what is considered as having social value. Thus, what allows an image of an attack to gain multiple circulation possibilities is not only the technological access, but, specifically, the ability to distinguish from others and, therefore, be significant socially, beyond the geographical or religious boundaries. Then, we defend here that the value of use, that is, how much a specific image is used, replicated, reproduced, inserted in circulation, operating other and new circuits, does not only depend on the use, but on the distinctive value that it assumes socially. This value is manifested in the operations of utterance, satire, the re-signification of the image, and its consumption.

In another perspective, Nogueira and Medeiros (1999) bring, from John Krutilla, the idea of the value of existence and how much this value is tensioned by consumption. That is, if the image is not consumed; therefore, its value of existence is lost. The question is how to estimate the value of existence. The value of use, by the economy, involves the effective or potential use of a product. The value of existence, yet, is intrinsic and independent of use. We must consider that the use brings up other values as the value-option. An image, when appropriated, generates interactions, has its value of use activated, but at the same time, it puts in check the value of the existence of other images on the same fact/event. In doing so, we can infer from Nogueira and Medeiros (1999) that existence *per se* is not enough as a value. We return, then, to the market and conflict relation pointed out by Bourdieu (ORTIZ, 1983). It is not enough that the product exists, it is necessary that the circulation is configured as a relation of value, in which only what is recognized, and therefore ratified, begins to dismember itself in new flows.

For example, through semiotics, it is possible to consider that the value is not in the object, but in the sense that is dimensioned from the construction of the value. It is in this respect that we reinforce our hypothesis of circulation as a value because we understand that the senses at play are mobilized in value relations. From this perspective, Garcia (2003, p. 69 – Our translation) argues that “it is at the level of narrative that value takes the form of a semiotic concept since significations are constituted from relations”. For Greimas (1983 apud GARCIA, 2003), for example, it is through the utterance that the object and subject junction takes place, and thus, an investment of value. So here we are interested in these multiple perspectives of the concept of value to take them as the basis for thinking circulation as a relation of value.

In this sense, we can think of this relationship as a clash of meaning production that implies: a) identifying something worthy and, necessarily, pointing out a devaluation; b) understanding that any product inserted in circulation ends up in a market; nevertheless, the social value of this product/sense only emerges of its capacity of distinction; c) the value of use does not determine the value of the image or its permanence in circulation, but it awakens to the necessity of consumption; d) the consumption established as habitus

and social practice has repercussions on the value of existence, since existing (whether as a person or as a significant materiality) is no longer enough. Finally, e) the value does not hide in the object that circulates, as Braga (2012) already emphasizes, but in a sense constructed through narratives, utterances, and operations. Transposing to our empirical reality it is a matter of thinking that the image of the Muslim woman that ascends to the media *dispositifs* of social actors and journalistic media institutions is the fruit of a relation of value attribution in circulation since other innumerable images of the Westminster bombing (including very similar ones) were made available and put into circulation, but their condition of existence does not always become a condition of permanence.

Valorization of the visible: The case of the Westminster Muslim

Our case of research is linked to the bombing attack in London on March 22nd, 2017, at 2:40 pm. That, which could have been an ordinary day, was marked by a terrorist act which became known as the Westminster Attack⁷. Six people were killed⁸ - including Khalid Masood, the author of the attack - and 50 were injured⁹ after a Hyundai Tucson ran over pedestrians and police officers on Westminster Bridge, a tourist spot in the British capital near Parliament. Authorities spoke about the fact, and several images of the event were published in the press. However, a photograph stands out from the others, not because of its tragic potential, but because of the symbolic discussions unleashed from its inscription in the circulation, causing its meaning to operate flows that extend beyond the attack *per se*.

In the record made by the freelance photographer Jaime Lorriman, a woman wearing a *hijab*, the Islamic veil, talks on her cell phone. She walks alongside a group of people trying to rescue one of the victims of the attack. The photo sparked Islamophobic arguments after Texas Lone Star (@SouthLoneStar), a Twitter user, shared it with the following statement: “Muslim woman does not care about the terrorist attack, casually walking and checking her phone around a man who is dying.” The publication was accompanied by the #PrayForLondon, #Westminster, and #BanIslam hashtags and received thousands of retweets and likes.

7 This case was composed from work articulated with Marco Prass, journalism student at Unisinos, who developed his TCC under the theme of circulation of images and held a fellowship of Scientific Initiation under the supervision of Prof. Antônio Fausto Neto.

8 ROMANIAN tourist hurt in London attack has died. **The New York Times**, London, April 7th, 2017. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2017/04/07/world/europe/ap-eu-britain-attack.html?_r=0. Accessed on: 13 apr. 2017.

9 SUMMERS, H.; MACASKILL, E.; DODD, V. WESTMINSTER attack: Khalid Masood identified as potential extremist in 2010. **The Guardian**, London, March 26th, 2017. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/mar/26/westminster-attack-khalid-masood-identified-as-potential-extremist-in-2010>. Accessed on: 13 apr. 2017.

Figure 1 - Photo-record that became photo-flagrant



Source: Jamie Lorriman (O GLOBO, 2017).

The discussion has been replicated by several international digital influencers and notable journalists. Thus, a cycle was established: Texas post on Twitter, derived from a news report, turned into thousands of comments, discussions on xenophobia, arduous defenses of the demise of Muslims in support of Donald Trump's policies on social networks; and, obviously, the reproduction of the photograph on numerous media devices, coming to a point in which the photographed herself had to explain, in public, her victim status. In theoretical terms, we turn to Rosa (2015) when referring to the need for producing images.

Even with the understanding that the image is the result of interactions at different levels, we observe that the mirroring of exogenous images is becoming more frequent, both in the production of photographs and in the recreation of images based on others. In other words, the images, especially photographic ones, adhere to the media facts, merging with them, and it is necessary to produce more images (ROSA, 2015, p. 138 – Our translation).

It is natural, therefore, that the images produced in this event circulate so powerfully and presenting a fertile ground for the adoption of various senses.

The idea of circulation puts in tension the roles of production and recognition, basic elements to consider the communicational process, increasing the complexity of the relations. (...) Catapulted to the space of circulation, the images are elaborated, reworked, replicated, added with new meanings. This reveals an intense work performed by language, by dispositifs, but especially by the valorization between production and recognition that hybridize themselves (ROSA, 2016b, p.5 – Our translation).

In the case of this article, this hybridization is explicit: we have the sense of “fact registration” carried out by the journalist, and, later, social actors develop intense interactional processes on image interpretation. Apparently, layers of meaning, non-present in the first presentation of the image, are added when “memes” or Twitter posts question the posture and behavior of the portrayed woman. They even shift the first sense, the attack in London, to other autonomized social facts such as the case of 9/11 and conflicts with immigrants. The narrative of the behavior of the Muslim woman summons an earlier memory, and, consequently, all the symbolic and meaningful charge that the term attack carries. Thus, when it becomes elaborated, re-elaborated, and valued in circulation, the image ceases to be the record, no longer innocent, and becomes autonomous, and, therefore, implies exclusions, non-values, because other images, other angles of the issue are simply invisible. The image below shows a situation very similar to that of the young Muslim, but the man, although the post tries to highlight that it is the “same thing,” is not valued in the circulation, because what is at stake is not the photograph itself, but the meaning that comes from it.

Figure 2 – Photo montage that exhibits other similar situations, but that did not gain media space



Source: Twitter (2017).

Thus, we consider that circulation is precisely the accentuation of a relation of value attribution, in which polarity operations do not imply the end of circulation, but its amplification. Disagreement is an elaboration of meaning that leads to the image ahead; that is, social actors and institutions share information management. When replicated and reconfigured, the image is no longer the photograph of the Westminster bombing, but an image-synthesis, an autonomous image that can be used for the purpose of awareness-raising and discrimination, as long as there is prior attribution of value. In attributing value, therefore, we enter the sphere of the devaluation, which is necessarily an operation performed by subjects that can be both social actors and journalistic institutions. It is also necessary to consider the question of the market, since the image of the Muslim labeled as insensitive “dominates” the discursive market, appears on the newspaper, migrates to the cover, becomes a report with the character, invades the social networks and Facebook timelines to such an extent that its broad offer could suggest a drop-in demand. However, unlike the economic tension between supply and demand, in the case of the photograph of the attack, the distinctive value is not plastical (quality or image strength), but the detail of the hijab that allows an addition of a layer of meaning.

When we think of the market of meanings, still struggling against the harshness of the word market, we face consumption, that is, the phagia movement of circulation attributed by Rosa (2016b). When the author refers to the social phagia, she mentions the act of deglutition of the social actors who consume the available images to expel them in the circulation in the form of more (or the same) images. In a complementary sense, the media phagia is established when journalistic institutions take up the image expelled by the social actors and cover it with new meanings, now those framed in the rules of journalism. In short, one phagia leads to another, a consumption derives from other consumptions, and in unending – and mainly unpredictable – flows because its control extrapolates the grammar of production, becoming dependent on the grammar of recognition manifested in the interactions.

Considerations between values, exclusions, and replications

Given the above, an increasing role attributed to images in our society is evident. This mediatized society, that has its logic crossed by the practice of the media, but which elaborates its own interactions, dissociating itself from the notion of media-centrism so present in the studies in the 1990s. In the context of mediatization, in which being in the world is no longer conceivable without being mediatized, the images as texts and discourses put into circulation acquire strength when they promote the production of meaning. That is, the central feature of the image as a record is gradually lost so that it takes on the condition of the event itself. In the case of Westminster, we are no longer talking about the attack. It becomes only the background of a broader and more intense discussion of the issues of Islamophobia, judgment to the other, potentiated by the space of networks that, in the name of access, assume they are the amplification of voices.

Rather than amplify, what is perceived in the case in question, is that the value attributed to the image of the Muslim woman, now with the nickname of insensitive, puts both the portrayed and the photograph itself in new conditions of movement. The image itself gains conditions of permanence, self-referentiality, erasing the very event to which it is linked. Assuredly, there is a relevant operation of the dispute of meaning carried out between social actors and media institutions within the scope of devices to attribute value. The photograph, that was first published in journalism, gains strength on Twitter, obtains space on Facebook, and returns to journalism, now no longer to refer to the attack but to the other senses that it has obtained in the relationship of the value of use and consumption.

At no point did we say that the relationship of value attribution is smooth from contacts or confrontations. Circulation is precisely this clash, since there is no flow, unfolding of what, apparently, has only the value of existence. If only existing is not enough in our mediatized scenario, since it is necessary to be visible in the circulation, we realize that the role of recognition is fundamental. Perhaps, because it is within the scope of recognition that the dichotomy value and non-value (or depreciation) is consolidated. It is no longer a matter of only valuing, therefore, of taking forward, but of choosing what will not be carried forward, and, thus, runs the risk of being doomed to oblivion. The question that remains is: what other image re-significances are to come? And what values, within the philosophy of values, are being put into circulation? We are faced with the logic of valuing the visible which, to a certain extent, means that subjects and collectivities determine what is to be seen. What is devalued is annihilated by phagia and conformed to the condition of file, since repetition is a power in circulation as a space for the mobilization of interactions.

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