Social Networks Scopophilic dimension - social belonging through spectatorship

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*"The economy of **visible** is a politic choice, that of a **common place**"*
Marie-José Mondzain, (2003: 9)

Abstract

As images become more and more omnipresent our relation to them assumes new contours. Contemporary social networks place a singular emphasis in the optic apparatus challenging traditional networked media studies to take into account new objects and social processes.

This paper aims to bring contributions from visual culture studies into the research about social networks audiences and the relations they establish with the medium and with its users. It will argue that scopophilia may be a dear concept to evaluate how people socially interact in social networks. This scopophilic dimension transforms users into spectators. Spectatorship would be, then, a fundamental notion, not only to understand the social role of pictures and videos on social networks as also to understand how social networks contribute to the promotion of social organization and cohesion.

The paper will discuss how scopophilia and spectatorship lead to the formation of communities of vision and the redefinition of intimacy in contemporary societies.

Keywords: Scopophilia, Spectatorship, Intimacy; Publicness; Networked Media Studies; Visual Culture Studies

Introduction

The optic regime is, since the Greeks, a central aspect of western cultures. Aristotle (2002: 1) says in Book I of *Metaphysics* that sight is the most trustful of the senses. A quick glance at language shows the omnipresence of visual metaphors. For example, there is the expressions *take a look* meaning deal with some subject or issue, and *to peek in the books* meaning a short revision of bibliography. Or even the English verb *to demonstrate* (from the Latin *monstrare* meaning *to show*) illustrates the little distance between language and optics. The word *theater* shares the same root as the word *theory (greek theoria* meaning contemplation, speculation, a looking at*)*. And much of our vocabulary is influenced by sight: to enlighten, an observation, a perspective, an overview (Jonas, 1982).

In recent years, the establishment of a field of study named Visual Culture encompassing cultural studies and fields like photography and film criticism, television studies, computer - mediated interaction, comics and videogames, confirms the preeminence of image (still or in movement) and the hegemony of vision in

contemporary societies. Some authors, like Ong, (1982) argue western cultures are characterized by a deep ocularcentrism claiming we tend to use more our eyes than other senses. Therefore, language is apprehended as vision: the visual sense is favored to the touch, smell or hearing senses.

This vision-dominated culture has evolved, along the centuries, to a pleasure in watching images. It is undeniable that the act of look, stare or watch involves a special delight in contemporary visual culture societies. Not only technological developments emphasize the vision (such as the telescope, microscope, photography and television) as also cultural habits have become increasingly visible. Everything is supposed to be seen, even personal aspects once closed in privacy. In videoclips, we see women in underwear; in some television shows such as *Dr. Phil* the audience testifies intimate confessions; in theaters the backstage is open to visits; in movies there are regularly small films documenting the movie's production and details until then unseen by the general public; in some restaurants the kitchen is perfectly observable from the client's table. It seems there is a generalized tendency towards transparency and visibility. This pleasure one retires from watching, this expansion of the gaze or *scopophilia* (from the Greek love to look) was first popularized in the 20th century by psychoanalysis when Freud, in his sexual theory, refers the *Schalust* (curiosity). It was later developed by the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan (the mirror stage) and Fenichel. But what is interesting to mention in scopophilia is the importance given to appearance seen as an object of the gaze. This stress the desire individuals have to display themselves and to see others, as if seeing was not just an act of perception but also some form of publicity and social recognition.

One of the strongest attributes, even if it is not always an object of concern, of mediated networks raised with Internet, especially social networks, is precisely its insistence on the scopophilia of self-presentation. We define social networks as media-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public and visible profile, (2) create a list of other users with whom they share a social relation, and (3) share, view and traverse their connections's inputs such as images, videos or messages (cf. Boyd and Ellison, 2007). The nature and nomenclature of these connections, as also the different possibilities given to its users vary from site to site. But the centrality of images, the pleasure to watch and the scopophilical behavior, they all characterize social networks. *Facebook, Orkut, Tribe, Hi5, Bebo, Cloob, Faceparty, Friendster, Hyves, Tweeter, Google Plus, MySpace* or *Linkedin*, they all base its attractiveness in the possibility of the anonymous individual access the public realm and show itself to the world, be it using words in chats and feeds, be it (more often) in a more iconic language sharing videos and pictures. There one can freely stage his self-display, preparing a public appearance to its own abilities (there are a long number of singers whose auditions to success were made through videos posted in Internet, first in social networks like *Facebook*, then posted in video-sharing websites like *You Tube*). Networked media such as Internet but

also some mobile phone, tablets and smartphones applications are used according to the idea of social networks in which carefully produced self – images constitute the way promoting virtual (and real) relations. This is possible because contemporary western societies encourage scopophilia. Repeating Aristotle (2002: 1), they believe vision is the main entrance to truth.

As pictures seem to reveal everything, they put individuals as spectators. As a spectator of one another we seem to witness individual authenticity. In social networks we easy find all the attitudes present in mundane life: people play, joke, seduce, share opinions and comments. Relations evolve from these small traces. Through those pictures, through vision people collects all the traits that will permit to establish some sort of personality. Watching the other, looking to its self-appearance, the digital user of these media networks can understand at least how he should perceive them (starting with nicknames and avatars). So, a person who desires to be (literally) seen as radical will sure post an amount of pictures pointing to that aspect of his personality: some photo taken with the parachute just after a 3000 meters jump, some picture of the individual with friends having for background some far mountains with ice peaks, or even some video reporting the wet-wedding in the bedrock of a distant sea having for guests an half-dozen people outfitted with scuba-diving equipment. These examples are not so unsual.

Thus, we are saying one fundamental way of making relations (and make them persist along the years) has to do with scopophilia and the incommensurable gratification people experience displaying his personality and life events in videos and photos, as also seeing other people's iconographic self-representation. However, even if social networks attract millions of people to this scopophilic regime, they cannot be confused with reality-shows since these television programs ground its pleasure in viewing in a synoptic (from the Geek *syn* meaning together and   *opsis* meaning view) model, that is, only a few are seen by millions of individuals. By its turn, social networks do not base their scopophilic dimension in a synoptic model, not even a panoptic (from the Greek *pan* meaning all and *opsis* meaning vision) one: in networked media, social networks are not apprehended neither by a majority viewed by a few, nor a few viewed by a majority of people. Since its nature is a grid of relations, social networks' scopophilia do not fit squarely in the synoptic or in the panoptic. They imply a in-between model, one that deals, at the same time, with an individual being seen by many and many being seen by a few. Thus, we propose to name this mixed model of the synoptic and panoptic an *amphyoptic model* (from the Greek *amphy* meaning *both* plus the Greek *opsis* meaning vision). *The amphyoptic scopophilia of social networks* refers to the infinite crossing between modes of individuals watching one another simultaneously. Thus, in social networks individuals can be seen, at the same time, either by many, either by just a few. Their publicness and social relationships are articulated between these two modes.

The networked media studies, hence, face two challenges: first, to ponder the central role given to gaze in social networks. Second, to consider the consequences of the amphyoptic model of social networks scopophilia. What do we find if we treat social networks from its iconic premise? What means this condition of being seen by a few and by the many?

In this paper, we will seek to answer these two questions having in mind the consequences of thinking in digital media social networks from an amphyoptical scopophilical perspective. We will argue that social networks like Facebook or Google Plus promote a new form of social cohesion, one that have its main asset in the reconnaissance that visibility and vision play a major role in social organization. More important, thinking about networked media from the scopophilical standpoint may enable us to mark out the singular forms social belonging may assume today. We will meditate on the possibility of the primacy of image[1] in social networks to produce a new form of community, one mainly based on the social power of vision provoking original modes of participation and engagement for audiences. We claim that spectatorship may be, not only the missing link to understand those scopophilical forms of social engagement, as also it may present us with the opportunity to outline the transformations on individual identity and on the public-private dichotomy.

Putting the concept of *spectator* on the networked media studies may be audacious but it will not seem so if we give it all the importance it deserves. Because what is on stake here, it not a negative conception of spectator seen as a passive and easy-manipulated audience. We do not repeat Plato's opinion about images. Spectatorship is not about a simulacrum or being confronted with alienation. The detractors of spectatorship usually blame the spectator for two main reasons: one, to look is not to know since the spectator faces an image and an appearance of reality, ignoring its process of production. Two, to look is not to act. The spectator rests still in its place, inactive and submissive (Rancière, 2008: 8). This criticism first appeared in 1758 *Letter to D'Alembert on the Theatre* written by Rousseau (1968). Representation was considered a decadent activity since acting was seen as a form of deception, a seductive and manipulative way of addressing individuals[2]. It weakened morals as audiences were merely amused. Individuals were considered mere passive and a-critical spectators. This perspective was present on Horkheimer and Adorno's critical theory (1969) dealing with the standardization of culture (and vision). The cultural industry spectator was described as one without gaze's creative energy, just a visual consumer.

Contrasting with these premises, spectatorship will, in this paper, be understood like a form of subjectification through images and vision (cf. Mondzain, 2007: 117). The image is not necessarily something regressive; instead it involves a power of making visible individual symbolic frameworks. Images

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[1] We rely on Mondzain's (2007: 13) understanding of image: image is all that makes a subject capable of engaging with the visible from a spectatorship standpoint.

[2] This is very different from the modern understanding of theater. For Artaud or Brecht, for example, the theatrical representation allows the individuals to gain conscience of their social situation functioning as a collective form of putting together social energies.

contain the ability to make knowable and to make actable. To stare is also a social action transforming and distributing. Like discourse and talking, to look and to be a spectator is also an act of interpretation and judgment. The spectator is an acting subject. The images he sees are a dynamic mode of people making contact with society and initiating several modalities of connection with his (or her) own subjectivity and with the other. The spectator is a subject of the human world and is characterized by a scopophilical relation to society. These assumptions lead us to a path capable of providing decisive clues about how social networks are today used and experienced by individuals, and how they apply them to their own demands.

In order to approach the social networks from the scopophilia angle, we shall focus on the concept of spectator and what it may mean in networked media. Then, we will sketch the possibility of a community of vision. At last, we consider its consequences on the individual and on the redefinition of privacy.

Spectatorship

As long as social networks work in the amphyoptical scopophilical regime, they form a community of spectators dealing with appearances. Everything given existence is destined to be perceived by someone. What socially exists, including social relations maintained through social networks, depends on appearances, on an exterior manifestation, an outward show of something. That's why we need to relocate the spectator (as the person who watch) in networked media studies.

Let's bring the phenomenological teachings of Hannah Arendt to discussion and establish a relation between spectator and appearance. She says, for example, that men and animals are themselves beings of appearance predestined to being able to see and be seen, to hear and be heard, to touch and be touched (Arendt, 1999: 30). This means there is no subject without the possibility of being an object to someone. That's why, according to Arendt, living beings are not just in the world, they are of the world since they are simultaneously subjects and objects, they can watch and be watched. Being alive denotes an impulse of self-display corresponding to apparent dimension. Living things appear like actors in a stage (Arendt, 1999: 31). Appearances are, hence, the mode the social world appears, is perceived and recognized. Networked media have only developed this tendency already present in mundane social intercourse. Social networks like Bebo or Faceparty intensify the spectatorship experience underscoring the facets of appearance through a visual representation of its user's personality. Bebo, for example, exhorts them: "*Share the Real You*". This display in attained in a pictorial way and corroborating what Arendt noted: the apparent always denotes an appearance to others. Social networks provide, thus, the virtual stage where individuals, like actors, can appear, perform, display themselves and place a public behavior. They carry out the

simultaneously transformation of users into actors and users into spectators. Given this perspective, the success they currently have among internets and mobile phone users has to do with the opportunity they provide to the confirmation and acknowledgment of individual existence.

According to Arendt (1999: 29), appearances always claim spectators. Because it is not enough to appear to ourselves; in order to confirm our existence we need to become apparent to others and receive their acceptance. So, spectatorship is not just a media condition. It is a mundane and human condition (Mondzain, 2007: 213) that social networks, we believe, have expanded. One motive for its popularity lies on the warrant they offer to a social need: the need individuals feel to being socially recognized - even if based in appearances and images. This recognition is above all a recognition of self-display, but since to appear is to exist (Arendt, 1999: 32), the recognition social networks perform is a recognition of the individual. Surely, this kind recognition is far away from, for example, Axel Honneth or Nancy Fraser's moral and political recognition (Fraser and Honneth, 2003). But, nonetheless, is a form of recognition. But of what kind? Through spectatorship, individuals can be recognized as member of small communities and expect to take part (even superficially) in the horizon of meaning of those mainly aesthetic communities (cf. Maffesoli, 2000: 34).The apparent bridges individual and society[3] promoting the encountering of the social network users with a visual community.

Social networks seem to relocate individuals in communities running as a form of literal *tele-vision* (cf. Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 273), distant looks united in a coherent vision functioning as the visual and apparent substratum of a sense of belonging to a community. Social networks convene a *tele-vision* because they work visually the formations of emotions (cf. Jay, 1993: 312). It is this collective emotion formed by each individual gaze that inserts social networks users on a peculiar form of community. The need to self-display in the majority of social networks must not be mistaken with a generalized narcissist attitude: more than impose its own idiosyncrasy, social networks users carry an act of revelation, making visible to a community of spectators their particular features. If it is in the common world that people gather and recognize themselves as part of a society, social networks assume the task of supplying a complementary opening for people reveal make apparent themselves and, hence, form a *community of vision.*

We must accept that in the need for recognition we are dealing with a new form of intersubjectivity: one grounded in the power of disclosure, of exposure, on the will to self-display and at the same time watch the self-display of others. It is the possibility of self-display in the scopophilical dimension of social networks that gives an opportunity to a community, to the share of a common world where individuals take part looking and be looked. People are recognized, and social networks users are inserted in a community of vision because they become visible, apparent, available for amphyoptics. These communities become a

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[3] Consider, for example, Cloob's slogan: "*Iranian Virtual Society*".

community because they are also an object of an optical scrutiny. To appear implies the plurality, says Arendt (1999: 21), a diversity of point of views about what appears to the community. It requests others' adhesion, it gathers other's gaze. That's why, for Sartre (1953: 525) being seen by the other is the condition to see the other. Spectatorship involves an intersubjectivity of the gaze, a meeting of looks initiating a meeting of subjectivities. In social networks appearances turn men to spectators and, as spectators of a community of vision, they enter on a process of recognition. Scopophilia is the path to a sense of belonging and ulterior acceptance of individual's idiosyncrasy.

To summarize, in this paper we are suggesting that image's centrality in social networks recommend us to envisage individuals as spectators, this is, as creators of a public space of visual representation that is offered to the other's gaze and that grounds a sense of belonging attainable through a very special community- as we will see. Scopophilia in social networks like Friendster denotes the movement of the spectator setting in action a communicative flow of subjectivities that constantly demand the formation of communities of meaning. It is evident that the grid of pictures and videos that distinguishes social networks bring forth a fundamental category, that of spectatorship. Social networks users, because they take part on an aesthetic process, they are also spectators. As so, while watching and linking images, they are never alone. Scopophilia bring them together. In their structure, social networks point to the fact that the condition of spectator comes, not simply from a relation to an object, but above all from a relation that is established between individuals through images. They link together using vision. We see that process happening in social networks where users become spectators that involve collectively with each other struggling publicly for a respectable spot on the public world. Social networks are just another form of people interact, develop their subjectivity and submit them to other's approval. Not the main form, not the only form, but a form among others to achieve a way of social recognition.

Community of Vision

Today we perceive the supremacy of image on networked media interactions. These mediated exchanges are not totally iconic or optical. Of course, social networks like Facebook for example, are not all about pictures, avatars, videos or" likes". There is space for small comments, fragmentary opinions or spontaneous written remarks. Many television programs and brands use it to establish a more effective closeness to their audiences or consumers. As they send their messages, they also receive reviews and appraisals from their followers.

Nonetheless, the image has in there an avoidable role: the presentation page is flooded with pictures and Facebook users recognize themselves from one main picture that represent them in the social network. The

way Facebook connects people is a very optical one: each user feel his relations to other users through the pictures and videos he can see from his Facebook "friend". Each one of us can peek in the life of our "friends", see if they are fattier or thinner or if they are aging. Most of what happens in life is posted in social networks not without the proper staging: there it is, for example, a couple posing to the camera in their wonderful trip to Alps, or there it is, the brand new car someone has just bought, or there is even a photo taken during the graduation ceremony. Social networks are, thus, an iconic form of registering all the moments in life, a new and meditated way of tracing and recalling by optical means the landmarks achieved by individuals. This means a different form of people become public. Publicness is in networked media more immediate, more mundane, more user-friendly: anyone and by any motive can post and make public a fragment or the whole of his life (cf. Thompson, 1995: 125). Through pictures social networks users feel they can reach easier their friends, family or colleagues. And the main form of communicating one's life is making it visible. What could be more direct and transparent than the pictures of my life posted and accessible to my web of social contacts? How could I better inform what I have been doing (in work and in leisure) unless I make available, 24h per day, 7 days a week, 12 months a year, all the experiences I have been living? Social networks are, hence, social shortcuts, small trails leading directly to the individual and making its privacy easier to be communicated and acquainted. They represent an universal means of public expression (Coyle and Vaughn, 2008).

The importance of the amphyoptical scopophilical dimension of social networks is the possibility they entail about fostering a collective and shared point-of view. In other words, one of the more surprising features of Orkut or Hi5 is the capability to transform a set of individual virtual representations on a community. And they attain it through vision: social networks constitute small media communities of vision. Their users become instantly spectators. As they rely on the image, social networks appreciate their users, not as a simple audience (like television or radio audiences), but a community of spectators, each and single one gazing, accessing and evaluating the life of its media circles of contact or grid of "friends". Social networks seem to us communitarian (mediatized) spaces having in vision the vector of the community sense. The projected images of the self, those theatrical staging of one's own life, add to the flesh of the face-to-face interaction the momentum of the conscience of a multiplicity of individuals sharing its life's incidents. What could better produce community than the various visualizations network users have among them? Facebook's slogan is illustrative: "*Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life*". Or Orkut's slogan: "*Equal to real life*".

The essence of social networks seems to be founded in the collective idea of community and community is mostly accomplished by the scopophilical attachments connecting through vision every single individual. So, individuals are not simply an audience: as a community of vision, as spectators, they do not suppose a

passive condition. Being spectator is at the very core of social networks. It's user's standard situation. They inform, they discover, they comment, they maintain social relationships, but do all these things seeing, looking, gazing protractedly. Here being a spectator is not a subjection to the flow of phantom images[4]; it is an emancipation meaning the garble of those who see and those who are seen, those who participate commenting and those who are the object of participation. Social networks entail a reconfiguration of time and space compressing social intercourse in networked media: there each individual have the power to visually connect to an immensity of persons (Wellman, 1999).

Of course, images escort humanity since its beginning. But the inflation of images with the invention of optical technologies have shifted its relation with individuals. Networked media, like Internet or mobile phones, have sharpened this ancestral link between man and images. Now, scattered among the polymorphism of the visible and in the diversity of subjective experiences, image is constituted in the construction of a "common vision" (Mondzain, 2003: 18), of a community of gazes, sharing the looks and mixing intimacies in social networks. These scopophilical networks show how society live in the share of the visible, in the share of a common world based (also) in images. Today social networks emphasize how communities can be established through the visible and the invisible, and through the management of looks in the great architecture of the amphyoptical scopophilical regime. However, the community of vision we find in, for example, Internet's social networks do not point to a common look. Although, there is a common vision, there is not the same and exact look spreading in millions of individuals. We never see the same others see. But we can have a similar vision, a conference of gazes, the meeting of a community of vision. What is at stake in sharing is not just the visible, is also those things images can just point to. Seeing together, to form a community of vision is also sharing the invisibility of meaning (Mondzain, 2003: 140), something that needs to be fashioned *in continuum*. And that community meaning rests, for example, in the images we choose to see together, those optical representations social networks users decide to make accessible to the common gaze. "To decide what one sees, what one likes to look and what does not like to look, to decide what one gives to the gaze, is a matter of a shared word on the common space of a sense to build" (Mondzain, 2003: 153).

Communities of vision are built on a set of iconocities that grant the possibility to communicate meaning. Images are not self-evident, they need to be accepted, discussed, and interpreted. The importance of the image in these communities of vision lies in the fact that without them there is not much space to consider the other. The sharing of vision has to do with the exchange of gazes that enables sense to arise. When the visible in made a common vision, then, the debate begins concerning a community of vision. Whenever the visible is produced like an enigma, all we can do is to rely on the construction of gaze between a

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[4] We are far away from the simulacral image of Baudrillard (1994).

community sharing a vision. So, the question is "*What do images show*?" but above all: "*What do we see*?". What gives sense to images is the movement of questioning, is the acceptance that the transparence of the visible in made by a community of vision settling its meaning. Images are not substantial; they demand a community to provide them the answer to its mystery. To see is not a natural function: it is mainly a construction we all participate whenever we shape the visible.

The visible stresses and demands sociability, and a community of vision follows after the scopophilical dimension of social networks.

Going Intimate in Public

Social networks are special objects of networked media studies for many motives. We had some of them highlighted namely the amphyoptical scopophilical dimension, the conversion of users into spectators and the formation of a community of vision. We cannot conclude this paper without commenting the corollaries of those features: the remaking of intimacy. If users are spectators, thus the intimate and psychological life are also subjected to an exhibition.

While dealing with a scopophilical process and with spectators, social networks are redefining the traditional frontiers between what is private and what is public. Self-display can, in some cases, unveil the inner aspects of individual's personality. Private aspects of life like the birth of a child, minor personal accidents or marital life are easily published in social networks user's profile and profusely documented with pictures and videos. Private life turns more and more a public affair, open to potentially millions of people (Boyd, 2008: 131). In other hand, many intimate social relations, like love ones, happen today in the public eye of social networks. Flirting is not only visible in the body language of some pictures or some comments[5]; it is also advanced often as the one of the main interests in social networks, mostly among its teenager users.

Social networks are, thus, major processes contributing to an exposure of intimacy that Tisseron, for example, calls "*extimacy*" (Tisseron, 2005: 47). Extimacy is the movement towards exteriority, towards the public gaze, towards the look of others. Unlike intimacy, extimacy is characterized by the exposure of individual's inner, most subjective core and is sustained by the desire one feels to communicate his interior and psychological side. It "consists in the wish to communicate an interior world" (Tisseron, 2005: 52). Extimacy is just another aspect of scopophilia that we can note in reality-television programs or in newspapers and life magazines. But extimacy happens, at the same time, in social networks's amphyoptics scopophilia. Extimacy searches for an enrichment of individual subjectivity through disclosure. Self's outward movement, the exteriorization of those things that are felt in the direction of other individuals

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[5] The majority of social networks even include in their profiles the information about user's marital status. Some of them, if the user is not married, give two options: *available* or *not-available* to romance.

grant social networks users   the prospect of a socially controlled re-adjustment and interiorization made possible through other's reactions (many times, the web of contacts of social networks are composed by members of user's belonging group) . The right to show whatever one wants means the will today's social networks users (particularly younger generations) have to take control of their own lives. And take control of its lives on the social networks domain means to trust subjectivity to a self-display, that is, a rewriting of intimacy in order to take into account society's gaze.

Social networks extimacy does not imply a deletion of intimacy but a redefinition of what may be public and private. In social networks intimacy cannot be conceived without a public exposure, without individuals give themselves to a collective gaze. This means that social networks reshape, not only intimacy but also personal identity. Because, with this extimacy movement, intimacy is but one aspect of subjectivity, a dimension among others in personality (cf. Mehl, 1996: 164). Intimacy is a moving terrain. Individuals manipulate it exposing some things but concealing others. Not all is showed in social networks. Extimacy is a free reformulation of individual's private aspects in order to receive a social recognition that allows to improve their own subjectivity. Intimacy is something that exists when and where individuals want (Tisseron, 2005: 76). Social networks seem to echo this assumption: they display visual (and discursive) representations of individuals but these do not sum up the entire subject. Extimacy is a means to an end and a primordial consequence of the scopophilical dimension of social networks. The changes blurring the public and the private should be considered as part of the communities of vision and thinking in social networks users as spectators. We assist to a radical search: one that deals, not with a deep identity, but with a development with multiple and heterogeneous aspects of a composed identity. She is understood as a dynamic process that uses social networks scopophilia as a collective form of exploitation of its potentialities. And self-representation has become, because of social networks, unconstrained. Images liberate the imprisonment of the appearance and let free multiple possibilities for identity[6].

Identity is, more than ever, attached to the apparent realm and the optic regime (Tisseron, 2005: 95). Networked media function as social liaisons individuals use to stay connected to each other and enrich their subjectivity through the gaze of others. In the particular case of social networks, they proceed to the management of idiosyncrasies, for one hand, and the management of a sense of community, in other hand. Individuals have the right to claim a social visibility of their subjectivity and at the same time - redefining its own intimacy and identity - take a step further towards collective recognition.

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[6] The importance given to social network's profiles as an index of one's own identity is confirmed by the legal consequences framing the usurpation of profiles. *Facebook jacking* designates a new form of cyber-crime and is compared with real abduction of identity. It consists in the stealing of a social networks' user profile assuming the control of its public life posting untrue comments or pictures thumbnails. It is seen as way of taking a false identity and can leave serious damages to individuals self-esteem. *Facebook jacking* can happen if users are using a public connection and forget to sign out their accounts. A Portuguese newspaper accounts two cases (one in Portugal and one in United States of America) in the article that can be read in http://www.publico.pt/Tecnologia/facebook-jacking-perder-o-controlo-na-rede_1508541 (available on July 2012).

Conclusion

Until now, the power of images has been neglected in what social network's studies concerns. This paper tries to bring visual culture studies to networked media research, particularly digital media audiences. It suggests that a new understanding of the role of social networks in sense of belonging and on personal identity can be attained if we think in its users as spectators. First - answering to the first initial question we brought - spectatorship is a human and social condition that social networks have only enhanced. Second- and answering the following question - spectators in social networks, it is argued, can form a community of vision based in its amphyoptical scopophilical dimension. Third, while there is a pleasure in watching images is central on social networks a movement of extimacy putting intimacy on the public realm occurs. Extimacy is not a sterile self-display but a mode of compose individuals personality through the public exposure to other's gaze. This may mean personal and social identities are in constant motion, that they are dynamic processes in which social networks take a big part (Zhao *et alli*, 2008). We tried to highlight some signs about digital media's positive role in the development of social relations. Even if it is not the only method, the scopophilic movement of social networks can function as visual bridges between individuals and society, and optic mechanisms of social recognition. In fact, we attempted to investigate how social belonging and community cohesion can arise from images' *pathos*, the emotion that unites a community of vision.

Schopenhauer once wrote: "or else when we are occupied with some purely intellectual interest – when in reality *we have stepped forth from life to look upon it from the outside, much after the manner of spectators in a play*"(Schopenhauer, 2006: 47). This paper views spectators through a different, less negative lens. Social networks users are not spectators that watch quietly the world passing by in front of their eyes. They are spectators in the sense they act when they see, judging, evaluating, commenting, recognizing. They are actors in the play of life understood as *theatrum mundi*. Spectatorship is a social condition of being in the world, of being visible and making ourselves public and available to others.

Social networks insistence on the optical regime takes this step further, promoting new configurations to community integration and social belonging.

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