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# Aesthetics and commodity-labor: Analysis of the Lukacsian aesthetic properties in business magazines – the Exame magazine

**Dimitri Augusto da Cunha Toledo**

Universidade Federal de Alfenas – Varginha/MG, Brasil

**Oscar Lima**

Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais – Belo Horizonte/MG, Brasil

**Alexandre de Pádua Carrieri**

Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais – Belo Horizonte/MG, Brasil

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## RESUMO

### Estética e mercadoria-trabalho: Uma incursão pela Revista Exame à luz das categorias estéticas de Georg Lukács

No presente artigo são tratadas as propriedades estéticas da mercadoria-trabalho encontradas na Revista Exame. Primeiramente, é feita a distinção entre a mercadoria e a mercadoria-trabalho. Em seguida, são relacionadas as categorias trabalho e cotidiano e as formas reflexo da ciência e reflexo da arte, de acordo com o livro *Estética I*, de Georg Lukács. Ainda de acordo com essa obra, também são trabalhadas as formas abstratas de reflexo estético: ritmo, simetria e proporção, e ornamentação. Logo após, mostra-se como essas formas abstratas de reflexo estético (ou “propriedades estéticas”) são reconvertidas à mercadoria-trabalho para a valorização dela. Termina-se o artigo com a análise das reportagens contidas na Revista Exame para averiguar como essas categorias se fazem presentes.

**Palavras-chave:** trabalho, mercadoria, estética, Lukács, revista de negócios.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to explore the problem of the **aesthetic properties of “commodity-labor”** – that is, labor power as a commercialized commodity in capitalism – from the analysis of business magazines. For this purpose, we have resorted to the aesthetic categories exposed in the chapter named *Abstract forms of the aesthetic reflection of reality*, part of *Aesthetics I*, by Georg Lukács (1966).

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*Dimitri Augusto da Cunha Toledo*, Professor do Instituto de Ciências Sociais Aplicadas da Universidade Federal de Alfenas (CEP 37048-395 – Varginha/MG, Brasil).

E-mail: [dimitritoledo@hotmail.com](mailto:dimitritoledo@hotmail.com)

Address:

Universidade Federal de Alfenas  
Avenida Celina Ottoni, 4.000  
37048-395 – Varginha, MG – Brasil

*Oscar Lima*, Doutorando do Centro de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisas em Administração da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (CEP 31270-901 – Belo Horizonte/MG, Brasil).  
E-mail: [lima.oscar@gmail.com](mailto:lima.oscar@gmail.com)

*Alexandre de Pádua Carrieri*, Professor Associado no Centro de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisas em Administração da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (CEP 31270-901 – Belo Horizonte/MG, Brasil).

E-mail: [alexandre@cepead.face.ufmg.br](mailto:alexandre@cepead.face.ufmg.br)

In that work, while resorting to the ontogenetic method that explains the structure of spiritual activities through its genesis (Tertulian, 2008), the Hungarian Marxist philosopher analyzed the long process of constitution of the properties of rhythm, proportion, symmetry and ornamentation. Such properties originated from human work over nature and became, after many generations, relatively autonomous in their relation to labor to establish their aesthetic sphere (literature, drama, painting, etc.). However, these were later reconverted over labor, mediated by science – which ranges from technological advancements (machinery, tools, chemistry, etc.) to the innovations of social engineering (management theories, scientific management, etc.) – hence becoming a condition for the reproduction of capitalism (Paço-Cunha, 2011). This logic would have existed for a long time in the current mode of production:

“What capital adds is that it increases the surplus labor time of the mass by all the means of art and science, because its wealth consists directly in the appropriation of surplus labor time; since value directly its purpose, not use value” (Marx, [1857-1858] 1987, p. 231).

In spite of the relevance of this discussion, the philosophic works in our language on the problematization by Lukács on labor and aesthetics are rare – in spite of notable exceptions such as the thesis by Patriota (2010) and the paper by Tertulian (2008). Besides, this approach is not present in the debates on aesthetics in the field of Organization Studies (e.g. Davel, Vergara, & Ghadiri, 2007; Flores-Pereira & Cavedon, 2010). In Flores-Pereira and Cavedon (2010), aesthetics is understood as the sensory experience of organization artifacts, having as reference the materiality of such objects. In Davel *et al.* (2007), however, art is understood as a methodological resource in the teaching of Administration, to teach students how to think like an enterprise, in the context of the mere social reproduction and the improvement of management practices. Amending this lack, Paço-Cunha (2011) brought the tradition inaugurated by Marx even closer to the Organization Studies. According to the author, each of the categories present in *Aesthetics I* (Lukács, 1966) has a determined role in organizations, adjusted for capital appreciation. These are the **rhythm**, for the acceleration and increase of labor productivity; the **symmetry** and the **proportion**, for the suitability between the commodity-labor and the production needs; the **ornamentation**, for the vestments, architecture of production, among other elements necessary for the generation of surplus-value (Paço-Cunha, 2011). Based on Paço-Cunha (2011), we discuss again some Lukácsian categories and carry out the visual and discursive analysis of *Exame* magazine from 2008 to 2012.

Having considered our key references, we seek to understand in this paper how the categories above are presented through evidence found in national business magazines. As for

that, the paper’s guiding question is: **is it possible to find in the articles published by such magazines a sort of commodity-labor aesthetics compatible with the current stage of the capitalist mode of production?**

Empirically, this work has sought to analyze *Exame* magazine. For that purpose, a discourse analysis (DA) has been carried out, based on the conjectures of the Bakhtin Circle. We have chosen to resort to DA as our methodological technique. That is because, as Bakhtin ([1963] 2008) himself suggests, it is necessary to resort to Metalinguistics as a discipline, and this would have dialogical relationships as an object, something not taken into consideration by the discipline of Linguistics. Accordingly, we decided to use Bakhtin in the analysis of the magazines, for the Bakhtin Circle distinguishes from Linguistics precisely due to its conjectures and methodological framework. Agreeing with Herrmann (2011, p. 3), we understand Bakhtinian Discourse Analysis as:

the space of the ideological code, of the ideological sign *par excellence*, being impossible to break the unity of the social space and of the immediate social context that constitutes it. (Bakhtin/Voloshinov, [1929] 2006, p.70). Therefore, for this approach, differently from the view of languages as abstract systems of forms, we think of it as being constituted by the social phenomenon of the verbal interaction, carried out through an utterance or utterances (Herrmann, 2011, p. 125).

This paper has six sections, including this introduction. In the next section, we discuss the aesthetic differences between commodity and commodity-labor. In the third section, we discuss how the categories **labor**, **reflection**, and **quotidian** relate in the book *Aesthetics I*, by Georg Lukács (1966). Following, we explain the formation of abstract forms of aesthetic reflection throughout the human history, namely rhythm, symmetry, proportion, and ornamentation. In the fourth section, we see how such abstract forms of aesthetic reflection are reconverted into commodity-labor. In section five, Brazilian business magazine *Exame* is analyzed. Finally, the final thoughts are exposed, aiming at future research on the subject.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. The aesthetic differences between commodity and commodity-labor

Haug (1997) has examined how commodities, that is, non-artistic objects, can provide their owners with aesthetic experiences. Therefore, the “commodity aesthetics” indicates a complex that rises from the appearance of the commodity in question (its form, concreteness, etc.) and the sensory relations

it establishes with its consumer. The notion of “aesthetics” was initially used to denominate the sensitive knowledge that emanates from the duality between subjective sensuality and sensual object. Accordingly, the author resorts to the concept of “commodity aesthetics” to refer to how “beauty” – this sensitive manifestation that is pleasant to the sense – has been developed by capital and aggregated to the commodities to excite the desire for possession and purchase in the observer.

In addition to the production of goods, the conversion of labor into a commodity is a peculiar form of wealth and one of the necessary conditions of capital (Rosdolsky, 2001). Therefore, as a commodity, labor can be not only bought, sold, applied and developed, but also worn out and eliminated (Paço-Cunha, 2010). However, due to its specificities, the commodity-labor distinguishes from the typical commodity aforementioned. Although labor can emerge as a thing, a result of its reification, its aesthetic expression as a commodity will differ from the “standardization of affection” expected from the consumer of typical commodities (Haug, 1997). In other words, the subject holds no desire for possession, but instead an appreciation of the thinking subject as for some key concepts, jargons, technical terminology, etc., all of which are reified:

The technical professional disciplines have grown up with capitalism and share in its biases. The consequence of this intimate relationship between knowledge-making and economic power is felt not only in the form of the professions but also in the content of the knowledge on which they base their claim to authority and the designs of the systems they shape. In some cases, for example, the management science that grew out of Frederic Taylor’s innovations, it is practically impossible to distinguish contents of general validity from those regarding a particular capitalist organization of production (Feenberg, 2011, p. 117).

As for that, the capitalist production has highlighted an aesthetic property over commodity-labor: the **performance**. As a rationalized ordination of labor, it echoes through management literature under the labels of the “proactive”, “encouraging”, “flexible”, “communicative” worker, among others (Leal & Faria, 2007). However, this performance can only be verified by the purchaser at the moment of the “productive consumption”<sup>1</sup> of the commodity-labor, that is, at the moment when it is applied in the production of goods and services. Hence, the **social production relation** is the production of commodity-labor –

<sup>1</sup> According to Marx [1867] (1996), the activity of production refers to the consumption of the means of production, tools and objects needed to create the product. Thus, the “productive consumption” is the consumption which occurs at the same time of the production (such as the consumption of roads, the electrical power required to operate machines, etc.), which is different from the “individual consumption”, that is, the consumption of the living individual means of subsistence, essential to the reproduction of labor power.

after all, before it is purchased, labor is a **potential commodity**, for it has not yet produced anything materially:

At first place, the distinction between *labor* and *labor-power*. Labor is but the use of the labor-power, which content consists of the worker’s physical and intellectual skills. Therefore, the salary does not pay the value of labor, but the price of labor-power, which use in the productive process creates greater value than that contained in the salary. The value of the labor-power use consists precisely of the capacity that is exclusive to it, of creating value that is greater than its own (Gorender, J., *apud* Marx, [1867] 1996, p. 37).

However, are the aesthetic properties of labor limited solely to the moment of the production of the commodity-labor? Would not there be any other properties beyond the performance of such commodity? Haug (1997) have shown how the appearance and behavior of clerks in stores must be aligned to the aesthetic properties of the products they sell. As a consequence, we know that the **appearance of the commodity-labor** is also an aesthetic property, which makes up the “brand” of a store and its salespersons (who incorporate it to sell the goods to consumers and their labor-power to the store owners).

It is implicit in the statement above that, in the current mode of production, the commodity-labor has become a sensitive objective that can be perceived regarding symmetry, cleanliness, agreeableness, modernity, youth, disposition, etc. That is, for the purchaser of the commodity-labor, the appearance comes into play even before its productive consumption. An example of such a peculiar aesthetic experience takes place during job interviews. In these occasions, it is common to perceive the candidates’ efforts to employ the “management of impressions”, this set of social abilities through that individuals seek to control the image they give off to others, to be granted the job opportunity. It is up to candidates to evidence their talents, hide their deficiencies, and show enthusiasm for the position and even treating the interviewer with sympathy (Grisci & Carvalho, 2003). Although these strategies of representing “competitive edges” to the potential employer seem individual, they represent consolidated values in the reified world of management. “The current perspective is that subjects become the managers of their careers, by resorting to strategies to make themselves attractive workers, according to the denomination by a magazine belonging to *Grupo Exame*, published in Brazil: *Você S.A.*” (Grisci & Carvalho, 2003, p. 4).

## 2.2. Labor, reflection, and quotidian in Lukács

In this theoretical section, it is worth to carry on questioning what the relation between labor and aesthetics is, to support, in the empirical section, the understanding of how the

different manifestations of labor aesthetic properties in the business magazine *Exame*. Herein, the work *Aesthetics I* by Georg Lukács (1966) becomes our fundamental reference. This happens primarily because, according to the author, labor is the prototype of other human activities, including spiritual ones such as art and science. Secondly, because the slow **autonomization** of art and science has not become separated from the aesthetic properties and from the scientific investigation of labor and the material world (cf. Lukács, 1966, p. 217).

Despite the fact that all human activity (sorcery, religion, etc.) originates from the problems emerging during the species' constant attempt to find their ways of breaking with natural determinism and submitting it to their intentions, it is in *labor* that the true relation between subject (autonomous) and the object is created. For marxist tradition, human labor is simultaneously *teleologic*, for it manipulates the objective reality according to previously established purposes by the subject and *conrescent to the self-constitution of the subject*, for it takes part in the development of their abilities (Marx, [1867] 1996; Tertulian, 2008).

Furthermore, if the traces of aesthetic activity date back to the beginning of life and everyday thinking, this fact reveals the *labor* activity even further, since it creates the forms of everyday thinking (Tertulian, 2008). However, the objectification of labor could never cross the boundaries that circumscribe subjectivity in everyday life. This has been described by Lukács as it follows: “What is characteristic is that in subjective, everyday life, permanent oscillation occurs between decisions based on reasons of momentary and fleeting nature and those based on rigid grounds, albeit rarely conscious (such as tradition or habit)” (Lukács, 1966, p. 42). For that reason, the Lukácsian philosophy elects, as something crucial for the ontogenesis of the spirit, the moment when these forms of everyday thinking are no longer sufficient against the practical imperatives of the existence. Hence, it becomes necessary to carry out more complex generalizations (that is, products of the spirit) to dominate reality (Tertulian, 2008).

Therefore, in the spiritual production, there are *reflections* of the objectivity in which it is produced. Having said that, it comes in handy pointing out some aspects of Lukács' *reflection theory*. According to Patriota (2010), this theory is founded on two axioms. The first is that reflection theory considers external reality as something material; the metaphysical reality does not exist. Secondly, since intellectual reflection is not mechanic or photographic, it is an elaboration that selects and rearranges the categories of objective reality. Otherwise, human thinking would not have been developed and distinguished into science and art, that is, into two different modalities of reflection (Patriota, 2010). It is in the everyday life that this process shows its rawness; for it is within it that “an intricate path to reflect on labor, on experiments, etc., until you reach science and art” (Lukács, 1966, p. 36) will be opened.

Hence, science would be “disanthropomorphizing” reflex, for it refines the maximum subjective conditioning factors of reality to form, through concepts, a chain of generalizing determinations. Therefore, due to the requirement for objectivity in the results, aimed to reflect the properties and relationships among different phenomena as faithfully as possible, its central arranging category is the *universality*. At the same time, and holding similar importance to science, art would be an anthropomorphizing reflex, for it links objectivity to subjectivity, bringing opposites closer. For instance, a literary narrative originates from the need to conceive certain emotion before the world, conforming reality to human aspiration. Moreover, since it singularizes the universal determinations of the human spirit, its central arranging category is the *particularity* (Patriota, 2010; Tertulian, 2008).

Although art and science are somewhat autonomous from material life, they return to that base, becoming more and more active, enriching both everyday practices and common sense with knowledge, experience, and feelings (Lukács, 1996). That is the importance of the **ontogenetic method** to approach the aesthetic properties. Obeying the principle of correlation between the structure and the function, between the property of spiritual activity and its emergence at a certain historic moment, Lukács shows the course ranging from the “prehistory” of the aesthetic activity emergence to the progressive stratification of its constitutive properties. In that sense, its task is similar to “a true archeology of the aesthetic feeling” (Tertulian, 2008, p. 202).

### 2.3. The properties or abstract forms of aesthetic reflection in *Aesthetics I*

We now turn to how the constitution of these *properties* occurred (or “abstract forms of aesthetic reflex”) in the spiritual activities and their posterior autonomization about labor – the concrete foundation of such constitution – to broaden the understanding of apparently simple phenomena. Such analysis helps us understand how the *Exame* magazine produces and spreads its images to impact readers visually, hence reinforcing a sense of “inevitability” involving events happening in the business world.

#### 2.3.1. Rhythm

Among the three properties/abstract forms of aesthetic reflection approached in this paper, rhythm is the one that descends more directly from the labor process. This observation, already pointed out by Karl Bücher in *Labor and Rhythm*, 1896, is endorsed by Lukács (1966). The starting point is that rhythm exists before and beyond labor. In nature, there is a myriad of rhythmic processes (day and night, seasons, etc.), to which magic tries to assure its occurrence. There is also rhythm in the human body (pulse, breathing, etc.) to the point that any oscillation can acquire a negative connotation (diseases,

disorders, etc.). Nonetheless, it is in labor that humans become aware of rhythm, using it as a facilitator/ordering element of labor activities that demand regularity (Lukács, 1966).

Through the facilitation that movements create in the soul of a laborer, the rhythm, initially as a practical function, is converted into a spiritual acquisition, becoming an autonomous manifestation of certain spiritual provisions. The automatism deriving from them frees subjectivity from the effort of paying constant attention to the movement. Once it is made easier, this labor will cause new perceptive experiences. For instance, the contact between a tool and the material on which it performs produces sounds that proliferate “symphonically” in the group work (Lukács, 1966).

Likewise, the rhythm of labor is different from the rhythm of nature. In nature, the rhythm is spontaneous and instinctive. Since it does not result from a practice, there is not an inventive multiplicity of rhythmic variations in it, as in the rhythm of labor. Since it does not demand consciousness, it does not make humans incorporate its vivacity in them. As for the rhythm of labor, although there is not an aesthetic consciousness at this level of elaboration, there is certainly a process in germination according to “pleasant sensations of relief, of possession oneself and the object” (Lukács, 1966, pp. 272-273).

By facilitating life and labor, the rhythm becomes a source of pleasant emotions. Such emotions promote in individuals inner life and awareness of oneself – understood as having greater confidence in oneself, deriving from the autonomy before the concrete environment and the enlightenment of the reflexive consciousness (Tertulian, 2008). By acting and interacting, individuals realize that besides living in what is immediately natural, they can live in a world that has been created by and made adequate to them. Such consciousness about oneself, unleashed by the application of rhythmic formulas retroacts in the labor process, detaching from it to become universal, taking over more complex and spiritual forms (dances, magic rituals, etc.).

As a mimetic being, humans will reproduce this rhythm in their voice, enriching labor in a subjective manner. Initially, through successive “semi-animal sounds”, they spontaneously manifest their feelings (of pleasure, joy, and self-confidence), all of which are connected to the rhythm (Bücher, 1896, cited by Lukács, 1966, pp. 276-277). It will still take long until such vocalizations become chants. Among them, there will be labor chants, of more complex socialization and nearly associated with lament, anger or fear of having their labor exploited. Essentially, the aesthetic constitution of a rhythm occurs in the simple conversion from a simple datum in labor life to its reflection in the aesthetic expression in general (music, dance, poetry, etc.). After all, as an ordering entity of material elements that grants them unity, clarity and evocation power, the rhythm could only carry out these functions in a marginal and casual manner, limited to the circuit originating from the scope of labor (Lukács, 1966).

### 2.3.2. Symmetry and proportion

The development of symmetry and proportion is less complex than the problem of rhythm, due to the abundance of evidence in the relation between the human experience and its surroundings. Humans have always noticed the space and represented it anthropomorphically (the vertical and horizontal coordinates; the left and right side), hence influencing life and art. As for *symmetry*, in particular, Lukács emphasizes that the most immediate human perception already involves an asymmetric valuation of the parts. In the natural world as well, symmetry does not have an absolute value: if in the inorganic world symmetric forms can emerge (crystals, etc.), this hardly ever happens in the organic world (the human face, for instance, is simultaneously symmetric and asymmetric). Hence, there would be a contradiction between symmetry and asymmetry in reality itself, which the aesthetic refigurations should pay attention to, at risk of undermining the artistic creation. As for the incorporation of the dialectics of symmetry and asymmetry in the art, Lukács (1966, pp. 303-304) comments: “there is an authentic contradiction herein, in the Marxist sense, according to which the contradictions do not suppress themselves, but their coexistence creates the form in which they can move”. This contradiction cannot be noticed only in heraldic art; originated in the late Ancient Times, its main characteristic is the conformity to pure symmetry. Nonetheless, the respect for absolute symmetry has perhaps more to do with “the debilitation of the creative power during the artistic life of that period”, than with a consistent contribution to the Hellenist art (Riegl, [1923] (1992), cited by Lukács, 1966, p. 302).

To move on with our discussion about symmetry, we must first address *proportionality*, which is an aesthetic property tightly related to the first (Lukács, 1966). Proportionality enters human life through intuition; the proportion is the principle of ordering the space with the greatest elasticity and scope – that is, through their regularities and parallels, any object can be ordered. Present in the phenomena immediately around humans, the proportion (as well as the symmetry) emerges from a more natural form than rhythm. However, as much as the human species is surrounded by symmetric and proportional forms in nature, which create certain sensations and perceptions, it is through labor that humans see themselves obliged to capture and control such principles, shifting them to consciousness. The existence of geometric art, for instance, was only possible through the intellectual effort employed in the social and laboring contexts. This was the case of the stone ax, whose maximum utility demanded from the primitive humans the observance of the proportions of length, width, height or thickness (Lukács, 1966).

The attention paid to tools belongs to the practical domain. It is not an intellectual action, for according to Lukács the object is not a starting point for analysis. The meaning of this object is intensely and immediately experienced as a sign

of the humankind's own world (Patriota, 2010). As well as labor, art will also impose the perception and management of the objective connections, adapting them to the purposes previously idealized in the organic world. After a long time in the practical domain (that of trials and errors in the several production branches) and, later, in the artistic, proportion would be a theoretical problem – entailing considerations that would enrich the domain of science, and later, of art (Lukács, 1966).

However, how does proportion, which is exclusive to useful or pleasant activities, become an aesthetic activity? The solution of this problem, significant for the understanding of the genesis of the aesthetic phenomena, can be found in the concept above of *self-consciousness*. As much as we have mentioned rhythm, and similar to symmetry, the pleasant sensation caused by a technically well-done labor activity prepares the process through which a practical category becomes an ordering and *evocative* reflection of reality. There is an enlargement of the spiritual moment contained in pleasantness, for the evocative value is an unprecedented perspective for humans, way beyond the contentment face to the practical triumph of producing well-proportioned objects (Lukács, 1966).

The evocative value emerges when proportion, a product of technical progress, begins to represent, like a materialized view of human power, an expression of *self-consciousness*. Emphasized along with self-consciousness, the evocative dimension would allow the dislocation of the utilitarian perspective, derived from the “visual examination of technical success”, to the aesthetic perspective. This allowed humans to enjoy a new pleasure: the experience of something pleasant to the eyes, as a result of its formal properties (Lukács, 1966).

Nonetheless, in spite of the fact that the aesthetic experience is *a priori* concentrated in a representation that is oblivious to every practical interest, it would only affect the recipient subject when it managed to transmit these *evocative contents* from the object's real presence. For, to take place, the experience of the ‘artistic’ reality has to allude to the ‘real’ reality (Lukács, 1966). The subject of such experience is the “whole man”, experienced and pragmatic. Therefore, the aesthetic experience does not break with life altogether (its experiences, its routine, etc.), but produces itself from it and within its temporal flow (Lukács, 1966).

Still on the issue of proportion, it is appropriate to ask what relation it bears to the anthropomorphic principle of beauty. Lukács addresses the issue from the considerations of Renaissance artist and theorist Albrecht Dürer [1471–1528], for whom beauty did not result from strict proportionality. In this context, the proportion would be a relative principle in the organic world, for there is a vital order in it whose essence is not apprehensible through exclusively physical and mathematical means (Lukács, 1996).

In the artistic universe, therefore, strict proportionality cannot become an absolute category, at the risk of suppressing

another exigency of art: the allusion to the human senses, this anthropomorphizing reference that is contrary to mathematical precision. This is a dilemma in architecture, which is aesthetically and functionally bounded by proportionality. For example, an architectonic project that adheres to the rigidity of proportional and symmetrical forms will surely be in risk of constructing creating without an “inner life”. Therefore, the contradiction between proportion and non-proportion in art must be understood beyond strict mathematics, in the realm of life and its expressions (Patriota, 2010).

### 2.3.3. Ornamentation

As for *ornamentation*, the question is: “why do geometric relations cause aesthetic enjoyment and why do they possess the evocative power of feelings?” (Lukács, 1966, p. 341). Similarly to other aesthetic properties, in its origin, the ornamental art lacked originality and autonomy. The technical evolution, the discovery of geometric activities in primitive work, the autonomization of geometric forms in the human eye, among others, were necessary to achieve the threshold necessary to the establishment of ornamental and decorative art.

However, how did that happen? The greatest aspect of the domain over nature by humans reflect, in their interiority, subjective effects of the abstract forms (rhythm, symmetry, proportion). In the course of time, these forms have been abstracted from the labor activity that originated them and the evocative point of view (through which subjects finds themselves and their world), previously secondary has become the key factor for elaboration. Thus, labor and technical progress give rise to feelings that will take humankind to their first especially aesthetic character formation: the ornamental and decorative art. Lukács (1996, p. 327) defines it as “a formation closed in itself, aesthetic, oriented towards an evocation, and which constructive elements are the abstract forms of reflection, rhythm, symmetry, proportion, etc., accordingly [...]”. Therefore, the ornamentation materializes elements of other aesthetic properties.

The central point for Lukács' (1966) investigation on the development and autonomization of the ornamental art is the difference between humans and animals, that is, humans carry out ornamental activities. In that sense, the development of the ornament does not occur only motivated by the fact that humans belong to the animal kingdom, such as Darwinism believes, but instead, by the fact that it is formed using the productive activity. Since it derives from labor, the ornament is not an instinctive activity for humans, deprived of consciousness. Likewise, nor is the ornament an activity deprived of social context: its development follows the principle of social utility, whether it is real or imaginary, such as the human pleasure of ornamenting, for instance (Tertulian, 2008).

The ornamental art “lacks the world” (Lukács, 1966, p. 327). By ignoring the objects and connections of the real

world, its limits are the pure geometric order of space (i.e., the formality of lines and dots). In the process of transition from utilitarian to aesthetic satisfaction, a revelation emerges: the discovery of a harmonious, transparent and necessary order for the surrounding chaos. The desire for order and the pleasure of stabilizing/taming the awe-inspiring blend of phenomena in nature would animate the game of geometric, decorative forms in the aurora of humankind. The conclusion is that abstract (geometric) relations among phenomena precede the concrete content, this being a later achievement of cognitive activity (Tertulian, 2008).

It has been told already that ornamental art is typical of the beginnings of humankind when the domain of life was precarious and uncertain. This is where its historical importance lies. However, what would be the *raison d'être* of art that “lacks the world”, and is limited to the geometric ordering of space? To answer this question, Lukács (1966) crosses the evolutionary process out of ornamental art. The initial stage is that of the *somatic ornament*, the embellishment linked to the sexual life when the sexual signs contained the values of social conventions. The following stage is that of *ornamentation of the working tools*, where more subtle factors than the first level predominate. The acme of the evolutionary line is the *architectonic ornament*, when the ornamental art becomes autonomous, no longer being a secondary and casual element within a utilitarian logic.

Even so, by rejecting a *teleologic conception of history*, which attributes to the inaugural periods of human activity a determined reach into the future, Lukács goes on to attribute to “randomness” a considerable role in the metamorphosis of the useful product into an aesthetic creation. The osmosis of the various types of activities was rather present in the period of indistinctness between art and science. In fact, it now allows one to conjecture that humans made their first aesthetic accomplishments without knowing, oblivious to any aesthetic experience, while imagining they were doing useful and pleasant things (Lukács, 1966; Tertulian, 2008).

However, due to the degree of merging that it promotes between form and content, the ornamental art is not able to deal with whatever is negative. Situated in the realm of beauty and decorative motives, without flaws or disturbances, it does not deal with the social material or with the pains and conflicts that invade and hamper the human lives (Patriota, 2010). The specific loss of the world of ornamental art would be the manifestation of singular historical conditions present in the dawn of humankind, which a historical development – in the rather complicated social and spiritual conditions of the posterior times – shall never again act upon (Lukács, 1966).

By relating the aesthetic activity of proportion with the historic period of its occurrence, Lukács concluded that the contentment and the joy that affected human sensitivity during the discovery of order in the world, expressed by the imaginative frenzy of primitive ornamentation, perpetuated the

aesthetic pleasure experienced before such order even existed (Tertulian, 2008). Let us now leave aside the questions about aesthetics themselves and look into how the properties we have worked with have been incorporated into the current mode of production to generate wealth.

#### 2.3.4. The reconversion of the aesthetic properties over commodity-labor

We have seen in the introduction that the separation of the abstract forms of aesthetic reflection regarding the production does not lead to the suppression of these labor activities. In fact, similarly to what occurs with science, the autonomization of the aesthetic sphere is a prior conjecture for its reconversion over labor. If it presents abstract forms of aesthetic reflection (rhythm, proportion, symmetry and ornamentation), this is because these were externally imputed by capitalist production (Paço-Cunha, 2010; 2011). As for science, its influence on the productive process was the appropriation of labor and the reduction of the labor time for the production of exchangeable values. By referring to the key historical moments of labor development elaborated by Marx ([1857-1858] (1987); Marx, K. [1867] (1996)), Lukács (1966, p. 40) comments: “the introduction of science applied to labor produced decisive changes. At this stage, the work ceases to be determined primarily by the physical and spiritual forces of workers (the period of machinery, growing determination of labor by science)”.

Essentially, labor does not vary much: it establishes its goals and seeks ways to put them into effect. This does not depend on whether the generalizations inferred from the technical discoveries of labor are false or illusory, such as the case of the “imaginary combinations” of primitive humans after they discovered the utility of flints for the production of fire (Lukács, 1996). On the other hand, science relates with the routine in a rather different way than labor does. The research activity (investigating, testing, reviewing, etc.) is much less exposed to interference and disturbance, allowing a provisional detachment of scientists from their very goals. Since they are subject to the routine variations to a lesser extent, the modifications in science can be grounded more on objective factors than subjective ones, allowing it to operate according to the rules it creates for itself (Lukács, 1966).

Even if Lukács evidences the essential aspects that differentiate labor from art and science, the author calls attention to the transition zones between the two planes, such as, for instance, organizations. He states that “Considering all human activities – all objectification, not only science and art but also the social institutions, understood as depositories of such activities – these transitions are presented categorically” (Lukács, 1966, p. 41). Moreover, Lukács observes in modern history a growing collaboration between labor and science, so that the industry began to incorporate scientific and

technological innovation, strongly conditioned by the expert knowledge, in spite of the initial resistance from industrialists.

The introduction of technique into the scope of production allowed the reconversion of aesthetic elements over labor, mediated by its development and scientific application in production (Paço-Cunha, 2011). Let us take the **rhythm**, for instance: in the transition from 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century, we witnessed the identification of the management technique with a level of labor orchestration, whose rhythm of production followed the capital appreciation. An emblematic example of the promotion of efficient labor by science is the research by F. W. Taylor in the American steel industry in 1880, which sought to increase productivity through three different methods:

(1) by isolating each worker from its workgroup and transferring the control of the work process of each worker of work group to management agents, who would tell the worker exactly what to do and when to produce, in the light of; (2) a systematic division of each process in timed component units (“study of time and movement”); and (3) various salary payment systems, which would encourage workers to produce more (Hobsbawm, 2002, pp. 71-72).

In the 20th century, other aesthetic elements were appropriated by management. We have, for instance, the personnel selection by companies. In that process, the aesthetic properties of *symmetry* and *proportion* are used in the reference of the subjective and objective suitability of the job candidate – for instance, being “competitive”, “proactive”, “resigned”, etc. (Paço-Cunha, 2011). Even the physical proportion of the body (height, body type) or the *ornamentation* (attire and paraphernalia to distinguish oneself at the workplace) can be considered (Haug, 1997). Moreover, if the contradiction between symmetry and asymmetry is almost always present in the organic life, in capitalism it can extrapolate the forms and properties of space towards subjectivity, hence provoking its division. Examples of this are the expectation that the company’s employee shows behavior that is simultaneously cooperative and competitive, passive and active, obedient and proactive, conformed and non-conformed, etc. (Paço-Cunha, 2011).

In the set of aesthetic properties reconverted upon labor through the mediation of science, we also find another aesthetic element: the *harmony* (Paço-Cunha, 2011). It is one of the guiding principles of the “unity of command”, defended by Fayol (1989, p. 62, emphasis added): “The *harmony* and unity of a company’s personnel are a great source of vitality for it. It is necessary, therefore, to carry out efforts to establish them”. As a combination of rhythm, symmetry, proportion and ornamentation, the *harmony* becomes the aesthetic principle of pacification necessary for the perpetuation of capital

production and appreciation – both of which are inherently ambiguous. This was the conception of Taylor (1995), who condemned the absence of common interests between employers and employees, for this hindered the two parties from reaching agreements on cost reduction and pay raise: “Most of these men believe that the fundamental interests of employers and employees are necessarily antagonistic. Instead, the scientific administration is founded on the certainty that the true interests of both parties are only one and the same” (Taylor, 1995, p. 25).

One could argue against this idea by stating that through the advancement of science (including the administrative sciences) over the production, the overall labor conditions were improved, such as the decrease in the number of accidents and the fatigue. Nevertheless, the reconversion of the abstract forms of aesthetic reflection over labor by science has not altered the relation between labor and capital. That is, human beings are still pushed closer and closer to their limits, although we now talk about flexibilization of labor, teams with no bosses, significant bonuses, home office, as well as various other innovations. Along these lines, the reciprocity between the idealistic superstructure and the material life relations, away from a *dialectic determination* in the authentic sense, affirms and perpetrates the relations in material life, at least until they can be transformed by the *praxis* (Paço-Cunha, 2011).

Lastly, to bring the discussion up to date, there are still Marxist studies about the interrelation between aesthetics and the productive structure amid the emergence of flexible, post-Fordist modes of capital accumulation (decentralization of productive units, digital and electronic technology, neoliberalization of state policies, the impermanence of fashion, etc.). According to Harvey (1990), the relationship between commodity and image in the context of flexible production, more volatility of commodities in the market, and shorter cycles of economic growth and recession implies that greater attention is paid to the “construction of a new system of rules and images” (Harvey, 1990, p. 287). In his context, the image has a double role, of satisfying a crescent mass of consumers and create new needs for them. Hence, “the commoditization of images of the most ephemeral sort would seem to be a godsend from the standpoint of capital accumulation” (Harvey, 1990, p. 288). In the cultural logic of late capitalism (Jameson, 1993), the commodity needs the image every time, to reproduce, in increasingly intense rhythm and volume, the entire economic circuit that underlies it. Moreover, in spite of the fact that the structural relationship between the cultural and economic instances acquires new contours, it is still based on old presuppositions, which are now intensified. In the end – as anticipated by Lukács (1966) – science and its abstract forms of aesthetic reflection carry on helping improve the very relations of production that sustain them; hence, both become a production expression of wealth that is constantly alienated from the humankind.

### 3. THE ANALYSIS OF BUSINESS MAGAZINES: READING EXAME

The purpose of this section is to observe how the commodity-labor – from the concept elaborated by Marx [1867] (1996) and Lukács (1966), of labor transformed into a commodity and its representation through aesthetics – is presented to the readers of business magazines, more specifically of *Exame*. According to Wood Jr. and Paula (2002), business magazines are inputs for analyses that may explain a worldview on the discourse on labor and, primarily, on “managerial” labor, which affects what is understood and expected from male and female workers.

In this sense, we highlight that the discourses conveyed by the magazines analyzed herein summon different subjects (men and women), with the purpose of promoting the identification of these with the ideas or ideals conveyed by the journalistic and advertising texts, by articulating various imagery and linguistic resources.

This is the context in which the option of studying business magazines is inserted. We understand that delving into this supposedly “modeled” scenario of business magazines is necessary. Therefore, business magazines are understood here as “spaces” where we can find discussions about “managerial” labor, which decides hierarchically how labor, in the scope of the working class, responds to the aspirations of capital.

On the other hand, the choice for *Exame* magazine is based on the conception that such publications enjoy high credibility among subjects of the business world. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that the specific target audience is the manager for there is evidence of elements present in the analyzed articles that present labor to the “eyes” of “those in charge” – that is, the executives, especially those running large enterprises. These findings provide us with elements to select this particular magazine while seeking to identify the commodity-labor aesthetics, as discussed in this paper’s introduction.

#### 3.1. On *Exame*

*Exame* is a fortnightly magazine published by Editora Abril that has a circulation of 220,300 copies, among which 138,755 are allocated for subscribers (about 78% of total sales). In total, the publisher considers the net circulation to reach 177,208, with 22% of unit sales. According to Editora Abril’s website (2013), 40% of the *Exame* readers are women and 60% are men. 88% of these readers are in Class A or B, and only 13% in Class C. Most of them (65%) are aged 20 to 44 and 29% are older than 45. 62% of the readers are in southeast Brazil and 17% in southern Brazil. Under the definition of “Brand”, the publisher describes *Exame* as:

The Brazilian leader in advertising and circulation among business magazines, EXAME is read by 91%

of the executives of the 500 largest companies in Brazil according to a survey by Ipsos Marplan. For over 40 years, EXAME has brought to its skilled readers quality information and in-depth analyses on the main events of the business world. They are readers who realize the real value of the published information and analyses. With credibility, independence and relevance, the content of EXAME are critical to the daily lives and careers of thousands of executives and investors. For ten consecutive years, EXAME has been considered the most admired magazine in its segment, according to a survey by Troiano Consultoria e Meio & Mensagem” (Editora Abril, 2013).

A typical issue of the magazine has from 130 to 180 pages, 70% of which are dedicated to articles and 30%, to advertising. Among the advertisers, there is not a predominant sector. It calls attention that many of these are institutional and especially commissioned by the government to announce events organized by the magazine itself, such as forums and award ceremonies, as well as other products offered by *Editora Abril*. For example, in the June 2009 issue, seven out of the thirty-three ads in the magazine were institutional. Information Technology and Communication companies are also relevant advertisers, with products ranging from smartphones, notebooks and Internet providers to management software. The few consumer goods are luxury items such as imported autos (from imported brands such as the Japanese Mitsubishi, the German Audi, or the Korean Hyundai), watches (Rolex) and Italian suits (Giorgio Armani, Ermenegildo Zegna). We should also highlight that the luxury items advertised are predominantly targeted at A and B male consumers. Those are not consumer goods for any worker, but to well-paid managers, such as directors and CEOs, that is, individuals with high standards of consumption and income. There are also a significant number of advertisements by banks and by business and language schools – about 3 or 4 per issue.

Aligned with the editorial line, *Exame* appears indeed to be a “business world” magazine – the topics addressed involve matters on economics, management, public administration, investments, and technology and, secondarily, career and labor. The “business world” represented in the magazine is that of large companies, important executives and decisions, and great investments, that is, of the great men.

The articles, including the cover story, bring about themes on investments by large companies, the best companies to invest in, the decisions made by top executives, etc. It is interesting to notice that the interest of such readers, according to data provided by the publisher, begins at age 10 to 14 and extend through the rest of their adult lives. We also analyzed the articles and photos about labor, to identify a magazine profile compatible with the proposed theme. Such theme introduces

us to the relationship between labor and aesthetics, besides problematizing the topic of labor power as a commodity.

To highlight the aesthetic properties, we have favored the magazine articles with photographs. The *Exame* issues analyzed in this research date from three periods, namely: a) the period from January 27 to December 28, 2010, totalizing 18 issues; b) the period from January 28 to December 30, 2009, totalizing 25 issues; c) the period from February 27 to December 31, 2008, totalizing 14 issues.

Among the 18 issues published in 2010, only five of them bring the image of a businessman or entrepreneur as a key figure. In general terms, they are all male adults dressed in suits. Other three covers feature individuals: the first is composed of a mosaic of small faces, the second shows a figure with drawings representing men and women, and the third shows small photographs depicting various people, from children to sugar cane cutters. The ten remaining covers are illustrated with background pictures, but the utterances that accompany them stand out.

We can barely find photos of female workers in the magazines. There are mostly photos of businesswomen. Although the reading audience is made of a significant number of females, the magazine does not contemplate female workers in the same ratio as men. This may distinguish *Exame* as a male magazine.

Aimed at identifying the aesthetic categories present in the news pieces, we began with an article published on April 7, 2010, which spreads through nine pages. Entitled “*A corrida da qualificação*” (“The race for qualification”), it addresses the lack of high-skilled professionals in the labor market. The first picture shows several men and a single woman, dressed in uniform, all white and adult. The uniform consists of a blue shirt, black pants, boots, a hardhat and a name tag. The image characterizes the *rhythm*, giving the impression that they are walking. It shows a real activity, but which is also beyond the scope of labor, as emphasized by Lukács (1966). The idea behind the workers moving is compatible with the information given by the text informing that a group of them had to be sent to Germany to be trained, since Brazil lacks qualified professionals. The same article also states that the market lacks not only the workers in the steel sector. Even at bakeries, such as the one operating in Wal-Mart, bakers for hire cannot be found. Therefore, companies need to train their very workers, such as it is the case of two bakers who are depicted in a photo on the third page of the same piece.

In another issue from October 6, 2010, the first article, a full page long, is about soccer. Entitled “*Santos vai mudar a camisa*” (“Santos to change their jersey”), the piece (part of the section “*Primeiro Lugar*”) is about Brazilian soccer superstar Neymar, the “Santos star”. The player’s photo occupies more than half a page. With a white uniform, Neymar is shown playing on the soccer pitch, which gives the photograph some *rhythm*. Furthermore, the image demonstrates the player is carrying out his regular activity, that is, to play soccer, which

distinguishes *rhythm*. In the background, we see the team’s supporters watching the game. The article is about Santos’ sponsors, that is, the ones the team wishes to break the contract with. The interest in breaking the agreement is justified by the “season’s success” and the possibility of making more money with other sponsors. Overall, the article shows certain haste in carrying out such changes.

A little further, the section named “*Capa/Economia*” (“Cover/Economics”) is three-page long. The first of them consists of a full page photo, depicting a FIAT worker on the assembly line. The worker wears a brown uniform, as well as protection gloves and goggles. There is a *rhythm* in the picture, because the worker is depicted while working on the line, performing his task. He was moving when the photo was taken and there is movement on the line. This example of *rhythm* involves another category: the *ornamentation*. We observed the adornments consisting of uniform, protection gloves and goggles, that is, the *ornamentation* of this particular worker. It is an ideal *ornamentation*, determined by the occupational safety law. This demonstrates, according to what has been previously emphasized, that the *ornamentation* is not an activity deprived of social context, for it follows the principle of social utility.

The article published by *Exame* on April 21, 2010, shows a Parmalat worker in São Paulo. The white male adult is in a shed, dressed (*ornamented*) in white, indicating the need for hygiene at this particular workplace, while he pulls a stack of milk cartons. Apparently, judging from the worker’s physiognomy, he seems to be carrying out great effort (*rhythm*). This physiognomy is compatible with the enunciation of the piece, which is “*A parte difícil só começou*” (“The tough part has just started”). This happens because the company had lost market in the previous years and then started to forge alliances to resume growth. It is important to note that the laborer is not the focus of this piece. Much like in almost all *Exame* interviews we analyzed, the laborer is not even mentioned in the article. However, the articles focused on companies are usually illustrated with pictures of their employees at work, never idle and ever *ornamented* according to the company’s sector. Moreover, most photos depict male workers.

Still in the same issue, there is a piece about the harvest of tea in India. The image shows two female workers picking tea leaves. They wear typical, colorful clothes, and a cloth wrapped around their heads. One of them is an adult and the other appears to be much younger. The two of them have brown skin. The image also agrees with the article title “*Campos de novos negócios*” (“Fields for new businesses”). Both the title and the piece refer to the results of private investment in agriculture. As opposed to what may appear at first glance, the female workers are not the focus of this article either, but instead, it discusses the growth of Indian agriculture. One can observe the *rhythm* of the harvest, associated with the *ornamentation*. The *rhythm* refers to the actual harvesting activity while the *ornamentation* can be understood as an activity in itself. In this

case, the *ornament* serves the characterization and performance of the given task. The *rhythm* is also conveyed by the theme, which is the investment in new business opportunities. The use of female workers calls attention in particular.

The exceptions to the rule that few articles focus on workers are those addressing the decisions made by top executives or the situations deriving from these. An example is a piece from the June 2, 2010 issue, which refers to businessmen who can coexist in family terms in their businesses.

According to this article, “disputes among relatives are the cause of closure of 65% of family businesses” (Exame, June 2010, p. 1). To illustrate the article, the five-page piece reports about the case of the representatives of three different nuclei of a single family, the *Garcias*, who control Algar. Based on the experience of the three nuclei to control the company, the magazine manages to assert and generalize that indeed “there is a formula to put an end to conflicts” in companies which management is based on family relations.

The main pictures in this piece occupy half of a total of two pages, where the representatives of each of the three nuclei of the *Garcia* family are shown: Eleusa, Luiz and Marianna. That is, two women and a man. They are all white adults, dresses in the usual businessperson attire. The man is in the center, showing hierarchy: he is the center of the company, the CEO. The two women are depicted as secondary in the group’s management. The piece also shows some *rhythm*, especially as for the management changes and the *pax* conveyed in it. However, the executives’ photo does not reveal *rhythm*. Even when they are at the office, or at a place where they can work or more around, their placement to take the picture is clear. They are not performing an actual task, which would characterize *rhythm*.

As for the 2009 issues, a little change was made as compared to those published in 2008. Until then, there used to be a section named “Índice de Empresas” (“Index of Companies”). In its place, there was a section called “Agenda do Líder” (“The Leader’s Agenda”). Among the 25 magazines analyzed in this paper, 14 show individuals on the cover. All of them are adult white males, who also happen to be top executives. To give a notion of the businessmen who appear on the covers, they are the CEO of Santander Bank, the owners of Frog and Casas Bahia, the CEO of Natura, former president Lula, Apple’s founder, as well as investors, economists, and consultants.

In the “Capa Gestão” (“Cover/Management”) section from December 2, 2009, the topic addressed is the consultancy provided by *Instituto de Desenvolvimento Gerencial* – INDG. The article discusses the challenges of working as a consultant. To illustrate, there is a photo of Gerdau, one of INDG’s first clients, the medium-sized picture shows the back of an employee who wields a tool. He is in a blue uniform, with a top hat and gloves on, presenting once again the *ornamentation* of the fact that the company abides by the law, following the principle of social utility. The plant is huge, but the scenario only shows the man in question. There is no *rhythm*, only *ornamentation*.

A little further, in “*Brasil Cidades*” (“Brazil / Cities”), there is a two-page article observing that infrastructure must advance along with economic growth. The picture on it shows a supermarket in São Paulo, where an employee, dressed in white and wearing a hat, hands in a certain product to a customer. The *ornamentation* of the employee is characterized therein. He is behind the counter of the “Cold Cuts” section of the supermarket. The man smiles at the customer and gives an impression of movement through the delivery of the product; that is, he shows *rhythm* while performing his typical laboring activity. His smile is a way to attract customers, for according to the magazine “the consumers’ level of demand has increased”. Such demand covers all compliances of a high-quality service, from the salesclerk’s sympathy to the quality of products.

Further, we find an article in the section “*Negócios Globais – África do Sul*” (“Global Business – South Africa”), occupying three pages. The first shows a photo of Patrice Motsepe, “the first black man to get rich after the end of apartheid in South Africa”. Still according to the magazine, “he has stakes in more than 20 mines and does business with Brazilian mining company Vale”. He wears a stamped red shirt and a pair of navy blue pants. He smiles at the camera, and there is no movement, only *ornamentation*. In that sense, it must be emphasized that he escapes the ornamentation of the other businessmen photographed by the magazine. His stamped red shirt escapes the standard attires consisting of light or navy blue colors, usually required for the serious businessmen associated with the magazine. However, for us, Africa is perceived as different, exotic. The third and last page shows three workers at a nickel mine. They all wear blue uniforms, yellow waistcoats, gloves, and hardhats. Two of them are working with a machine while the third one only observes. This is where we observe the *rhythm* of the work carried out at the mines. That is, the work of ornamentally dirty miners in their typical vests, opposite to the businessman in a stamped red shirt.

There is in the same magazine an article in the section “*Estudo Exame – Seguros*” (“Exame Study – Insurance”, which occupies seven pages. Although the focus never shifts to the laborer, there is a photograph of a surgery, between the section’s third and fourth pages. It shows three doctors performing a surgical operation. They are all dressed in blue, with cap, gloves, and masks, once again the *ornamentation* required to perform that task, so that the three physicians are *adorned* for their regular activity. There is movement in the photo, created by the image of a doctor handing an instrument to another one, which conveys *rhythm*. The picture shows at least a man and a woman (the third one is in profile and readers cannot determine the individual’s gender).

A picture of laborers perceived as unconventional was published in the June 3, 2009 issue. The corresponding article occupies four pages and is entitled “*Faltou combinar com os russos*” (“They forgot to arrange it with the Russians”). By simply reading the sentence, one might not realize what the

piece is really about. However, the image shows soccer players in jerseys, playing a match. We later realize that the title refers to the Russian businessman who owns London-based soccer team Chelsea FC. The mention of the arrangement to be made with the Russians refers to the losses in investments made in professional soccer players. According to the magazine, “groups have invested more than 100 million Brazilian Reais in soccer player transfers, an absolute record in the Brazilian history” (Exame, July 2009, p. 2). The problem is that the players’ performances were not compatible with the investments made, which is a category linked to the *rhythm*.

An interesting advertising in the November 18, 2009 issue was paid for by TV-show *Aprendiz Universitário*, produced by Rede Record. The advertisement occupies two pages. One of them depicts the host of the show above and the other one displays text. The host is dressed in a dark suit and is framed from his waist up. The ad resorts to an interesting wordplay: “*O professor é exigente, as aulas são puxadas, mas a nota é alta: um milhão de reais*” (“The teacher is demanding, the classes are arduous, but the final grade is high: one million Reais”). The advertising piece links the fact that the participants in the show are university students and transports the reality depicted in the show to the academic reality. The host is perceived as a demanding instructor since the participants need to achieve certain goals and are assessed on this process. If they do not accomplish the objectives, they fail, that is, they are eliminated from the show. All obstacles in the way of the students are challenging, but they will pay off in the end: the one who resists best wins one million Brazilian Reais.

A rather curious article published on May 6, 2009, works as an ad for *Exame* magazine itself. It has six pages and consists of the following: “EXAME challenged Ricardo Pelegrini, IBM’s CEO, to log the decisions he made during a regular working day and that illustrate this ad. When you are the head of a company that big, reading EXAME is paramount” (Exame, May 2009, p. 72).

The same utterances accompany the three businessmen chosen to illustrate. They are the CEOs for IBM, FIAT, and CLARO. There are two pages for each of them, all with a dark background that contrasts with the white font used in the text layout. On the second page, there is a photo of the CEO in question, holding EXAME and smiling at the camera. They are all white males in dark suits. Next to the text above, the magazine lists how many decisions the CEO made on a single day and adds: “one of them was reading EXAME”. The first page and most of the second one are filled with text. This text describes the schedule that the businessman went through on a regular working day at the company. This advertising piece is odd, for if one pays attention to the pages in question, they will realize they all have dark backgrounds. The only bright part is where *Exame* magazine is, in the hands of each of those executives. It is somehow possible to draw an analogy, for it transmits an idea that the businessmen in charge of large companies live

in the darkness, doubtful or hesitant about what to do next. In contrast, for those who read the magazine such decisions can be “clearer” and, for that reason, “reading EXAME is paramount”.

Among the 2008 issues, we realized they had two sections less than the 2009 ones. This means that from 2009 on, the sections “*Só no Brasil*” (“Only in Brazil”) and “*Grandes Números*” (“Great Figures”) were added to the magazine.

14 covers of 2008 issues were analyzed, and eight of them showed people. Six out of the remaining eight depicted white males in suits: they are businessmen. Another one shows a consumer over a mosaic of goods. Finally, the last one shows an elegant, adult brunette: the global president of PepsiCo. This is the only cover with a woman on the cover, in the issues published in the years of 2008, 2009 and 2010.

The April 23, 2008 issue brings an article about a former kitchen chef. He founded his own restaurant in Denver, Colorado. Differently from what one might expect, the chef is not wearing the usual chef attire, that is, the white uniform with a long white hat (*a toque*). Instead, he smiles at the camera and wears jeans and a black shirt, while preparing a dish. *Ornamented* in a different way, this chef shows innovation by setting up his business, for he joined the fast food segment, but making dishes only after they are ordered. In other words, although the dishes can be prepared fast, the customer needs to wait until they are ready to be served.

The special edition dated June 18, 2008, brings a piece about “the HSBC backpacker”. The article was part of the section “*Gestão e Ideias*” (“Management and Ideas”) and occupies a single page only. The businessman mentioned in the text is a young white male and wears a suit. In the background, in Singapore, the executive is sitting and some people are walking by. There is a certain contrast between the suit used by the “backpacker” and the Asians, who wear Bermuda shorts and flip-flops in the background.

All articles mentioned above show evidence of the use of the categories of rhythm and ornamentation in the news stories published by *Exame*. This implies that the aesthetic of commodity-labor proposed in the current stage of the capitalist mode of production can also be observed in the business magazines, here in particularly in *Exame*.

#### 4. FINAL THOUGHTS

This paper has presented some elements regarding the aesthetics of the commodity-labor. They are: the fact that labor as a commodity is presented as a sensitive object; that the aesthetic properties of the commodity-labor are different from commodities in general; that such properties are connected with the appearance (form) and performance (content); that such properties are manifested beyond general art; that, however, such properties oscillate according with the social moment when the commodity-labor is carried out (such as, for instance, the moment of the job interview). We have also seen in the

works by Lukács (1966) that the abstract forms of aesthetic reflection (rhythm, symmetry, proportion and ornamentation) have their original matrix in the productive activity. Likewise, that the introduction of technique in production implies a more profound action on the part of the superstructure over the productive activities, boosting capital appreciation.

In general terms, we found in the analysis of *Exame* the categories already evidenced. We basically observed the categories of *rhythm* and *ornamentation*. Rhythm always emerges when the pieces show photos of workers on the assembly line or carrying out services are presented. These individuals are dressed up, ornamented, according to the demand of law: the company's overalls, the gloves, the goggles, the earplugs, etc. The photos always show movement. The worker in question is never idle. As for the executives and managers, the way they are presented is distinctive. Many of them are ornamented with black or dark blue suits, characterized as the classic *ornamentation*. Some of them, are dressed in formal shirts in light colors, when not wearing a suit. The *rhythm* is conveyed by the rolled-up sleeves, displaying labor action that is not manual. It refers to mental labor, performed with paper and numbers, in the everyday routine of business management. The photos show they are not idle. Other photos, on the other hand, do not convey any evident *rhythm* among these people. As for *symmetry* and *proportion*, we have observed the lack of symmetry or proportion as for female laborers. The laborer – and consequently the labor depicted by *Exame*, whether it be on the assembly line/services or in the field of management – is almost always a man. Whenever they appear, women are presented as secondary to labor (similar to the article about the Algar group). Regarding age, the executives/managers presented are normally 40 to 60 years-old, which shows symmetry with the magazine's readers and target audience.

Moreover, it shows and makes clear (sometimes implicitly) that there is some experience in the labor performed. They are not young people or too old, retired from work, but instead, people at productive ages and management experience and therefore, holding management positions as CEOs, etc.

After this research, we came to realize that although Lukács does not have mass culture as its central object of study – as it is true for some Marxist scholars of the Frankfurt School – it is reasonable to resort to the understanding of the forms of aesthetic reflex for the critical analysis of business magazines. After all, as the instance that produces meanings, of construction and reconstruction of social representations, such magazines spread a specific image of a worker in the collective imaginary. An image that emphasizes the differences between (ornamented) professionals from others. This is the case, for instance, of the photos taken on the assembly lines, in which the executive is depicted in impeccable attire, tireless before his subordinates, the factory's workers. This image begins to be massively consumed by its readers – executives, investors and also administration students – who wish to enter the glamorous world of business. What is ironic is that the creature turns against the creator: the ornamentation, which was previously a way for the editors to make the magazine's graphic project more plausible for readers, becomes a precondition for its commercialization, once that a different layout could risk losing the same emotional appeal.

Lastly, it is important to note that although the application of the Lukacsian categories to the analysis of business magazines is unprecedented, this paper, since it is of exploratory nature, is not conclusive and the results cannot be generalized due to the sample constraints. In that sense, we suggest that new research is carried out, contemplating a wider scope of magazines, to work the social representation of executives in a broader sense. ♦

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ABSTRACT

**Aesthetics and commodity-labor: Analysis of the Lukacsian aesthetic properties in business magazines – the Exame magazine**

This paper deals with the aesthetic properties of commodity-labor found in *Exame* magazine. At first, we distinguish commodity from commodity-labor. Then, we relate the categories labor, everyday life and the reflection forms of science and art, according to the book *Aesthetics I*, by Georg Lukács. Also according to this book, we work with the abstract forms of aesthetic reflection, namely rhythm, symmetry and proportion, and ornamentation. Soon after, we show how these forms (or “aesthetic properties”) are converted into commodity-labor to increase their value. We conclude the article by analyzing the reports contained in *Exame* magazine to find out how these categories are available.

**Keywords:** labor, commodity, aesthetics, Lukács, business magazine.

RESUMEN

**Estética y trabajo como mercancía: Una incursión por la revista Exame a la luz de las categorías estéticas de Georg Lukács**

En este artículo se analizan las propiedades estéticas del trabajo como mercancía encontradas en artículos de la revista *Exame*. En primer lugar, se hace la distinción entre mercancía y mercancía-trabajo, posteriormente, se relacionan las categorías trabajo, vida cotidiana y las formas reflejo de la ciencia y del arte, de acuerdo con la obra “Estética I”, de Georg Lukács. Además, se trabajan las formas abstractas de reflejo estético: el ritmo, la simetría y proporción, y la ornamentación, que aparecen en la misma obra. Luego, se demuestra cómo esas formas abstractas de reflejo estético (o “propiedades estéticas”) son reconvertidas en la mercancía-trabajo para su valoración. Al final, se analizan los reportajes de la revista *Exame* para averiguar cómo dichas categorías se presentan.

**Palabras clave:** trabajo, mercancía, estética, Lukács, revista de negocios.

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