



## AGRESSION AND VIOLENCE IN NARRATIVE CINEMA

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*The reflections below are intended to be merely a limited essay/draft. Certain theoretical hypotheses are proposed on the articulation of social actors involved in the construction of audiovisual narrative. For this purpose, I will use restricted – yet very rich – fields of exemplification.*

*I also accept that the discussion on certain issues such as the influence of the audiovisual medium on its audiences, a matter that has been fruitlessly and excessively debated up until now, is over (Jarvie, Sociology of the Cinema<sup>1</sup>).*

### **x FORM THE HYPODERMIC MYTH TO THE INOCUOUS XYRINGE**

Concern about the influence of film or television on their audiences has been an issue for a long time; preceding it are concerns such as the question about the influence of Romantic literature on suicides.

In the 1950s, when the media had almost unlimited power over their audience, more studies were done on the resulting effects. Lazaerfeld's work on the vote and other aspects of social behavior demonstrated that interpersonal influence was more powerful than the media (Lazaerfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, *The People's Choice*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1948).

*While people believed (believe?) that film and television do influence their children, and that if the programming is bad, then their children will be, too. Studies such as those done by Himmelwit (TV and the Child, London, 1958) and Schramm (TV in the Lives of Our Children, Stanford, 1961) reveal that this is untrue. Film may influence us toward good or evil, but if it does, then the way we are is much more complicated than what it seems to be on the surface, and it could even possibly be counterintuitive.<sup>1</sup>*

What is certain is that, behind those who believe in the hypnotic power of the media, there is a mythomaniacal background, a foundation of magical ideas, and a vague messianic paternalism with regards to a citizenry viewed as defenseless. All of this prevents them from incorporating evidence that those who are exposed to the

media, develop resistance techniques and, aside from pathological exceptions, are socialized beings.

In fact, what research has shown is that mass communications do not reach isolated individuals, but rather people who are part of groups and whose actions are carried out through a complex network involving habits, traditions, interests and personal relationships.

More aggressive societies, where day-to-day violence is more damaging, are not necessarily societies that consume more aggressive film and television narratives. We frequently forget that the effectiveness of Nazi propaganda was due less to National Socialist ideology than to the pyramidal organization of the *Wehrmacht* and society as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, it is not very useful to demonstrate, once again, that this belief in media omnipotence is false and irrational. Rather, we should ask ourselves why and how this belief resists the demonstration of its irrationality.

One possible answer to this question could be the fact that, on one hand, what research really proves is that influences, though they exist, cannot be easily separated from the entirety of social facts, while they seem visible and even falsely evident. Moreover, the media and their products have only marginal effects on the proportion of good and evil in a society, but it is difficult to deny that they do contribute to weaving a social imaginary, exercising a certain "sentimental education," postulating fashions or reaffirming styles, positions and concepts.

<sup>1</sup> Jarvie, *Towards a Sociology of the Cinema*, p. 34  
Translator's note: this is not an official translation of the work.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Balle, cited by Durand, Jacques. *Les formes de la communication*. Dunod, Paris, 1981. Durand XII.  
Translator's note: this is not an official translation of the work.

Consequently, it is possible to maintain the hypothesis that audiovisual narrative, especially fiction, is part of the spirit of the times; it expresses and reinforces it, contributing in many different ways to building the notion of reality.

*Communication is established by the mediation of a work that circulates, during more or less long periods of time, in a more or less vast audience. But the work remains strongly marked by the intentions, plans and feelings of its author: it becomes a testimony of a person, addressed to a virtual interlocutor.*<sup>3</sup>

With this power, audiovisual narrative becomes part of reality, at least a small part; thus it is able to favor attitudes and contribute to the symbolic legitimization of social values.

Jacques Durand proposes two examples to illustrate this idea:

*The reality of the battle of Waterloo is not simply the ten hours that it lasted, but rather the time spent by historians and filmmakers in describing it, by readers and spectators in imagining it, etc. In the same way, the most exact representation of the 1920s does not consist, as we tend to see in cinema, of Cocteau, Paul Poiret, jazz, the "Arts décoratifs" style, short haircuts, etc. In reality, those who lived during those years were thinking more of the 1914-18 war than the latest fashions of the moment, and they lived with Luis XV furniture and read Alexandre Dumas.*<sup>4</sup>

Today, however, the narrative reality of the 1920s is that which is shown in films, and not just the "real" reality, because, as stated by Watzlawick: *The most dangerous of all illusions is thinking that there is no more than one reality.*<sup>5</sup>

In any case, the imaginary contributes to creating the real. *The real emerges to reality when it has been woven by the imaginary, which solidifies it, giving it consistency and density.*<sup>6</sup>

A place where society thinks about itself.

From the above, we may also infer that the media and their narratives *constitute one of the privileged*

*spaces where society interrogates itself about its present and its future.*<sup>7</sup> Even the worst film may be capable of proposing or exploring an interesting social, moral or personal problem.

But narrative's contribution to reality is made through rules that are inherent to it: rules of narrative and genre, meaning organized networks of behavior, characters, rhetorical formulae, ways of diving into reality and classifying, discriminating, organizing, rationalizing, excluding...according to norms that are publicly imposed.

*Moreover, these norms and regularities conform to the skeleton of the real.*<sup>8</sup> *Through them, reality is subject to a kind of formalization that is not fundamentally different from recreational formalization; what we see is always transformed into a kind of game, made for our pleasure, even if it is a terrible tragedy.*<sup>9</sup>

First synthesis: Having postulated the low level of media influence on people, it is nevertheless possible to accept that the media do contribute to the construction of reality, calling for their integration into the real world and following rules that are inherent to them.

I will now seek to explore this point.

Narrative as social construct.

From what I have just presented, we may also deduce that narrative, particularly audiovisual narrative, is the result of a dense network of prior knowledge and codes that are common to the authors and consumers. We may cite at least four groups of knowledge:

1. *Codes (vocabulary, syntax, contexts, etc.);*
2. *The general semantic universe (history, culture, politics, science...);*
3. *The particular semantic universe (style and orientation inherent to the narrative in question);*
4. *Information on the immediate past of the particular message.*

However, at the same time, these codes are put into action, in text, by a set of specialists. Roland Barthes calls them "logothetes," a particularly pleasing expression because of its lack of qualifying connotations and, at the same time, its ability to cover a great number of professions, from artists to businesspeople – all are participants in the fabrication of narrative objects.

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<sup>3</sup> Durand, 9.

<sup>4</sup> Durand, 64.

<sup>5</sup> Watzlawick, Paul. *How Real is Real: Communication, Disinformation, Confusion*. Ed. Random House, New York, Toronto, 1976. French translation. Seuil, Paris, 1978. *Translator's note: this is not the official English version of the work.*

<sup>6</sup> Morin. *Le Cinéma et l'homme imaginaire*, XIII. *Translator's note: this is not an official translation of the work.*

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<sup>7</sup> Durand, XI.

<sup>8</sup> Morin [1969], p.36

<sup>9</sup> Burguelin, O. *La Communication de masse*. S.G.P.P., Brussels, 1970. pp. 97-98. *Translator's note: this is not an official translation of the work.*

The joining of these actors – logothetes – with political and social expressions, demands and even pressures, result in the emergence of narratives.

In other words, a narrative is the result of a set of liberties and coercions that may be divided into three major groups:

1. Institutional coercions (political, economic and social);
2. Ideological or moral coercions, resulting from the internalization of social institutions;
3. The coercions inherent to the genre and language of the narrative, especially the coercion of verisimilitude.

I will attempt to explain these points on the basis of a clearly illustrative model: classic Hollywood cinema (from the advent of talking films to the mid-1950s).

Clearly, when we speak of coercion, we are referring to censorship. How were these forms of censorship constructed in the classic Hollywood period? The two first types were the products of a complex system that included producers, pressure groups, responses from the mass audience, and the majority thinking of the logothetes themselves.

The strongest examples were the systems of awarding and legitimizing films, such as the Academy Awards (“Oscars”), and the censorship of the Hays Code.

The office run by Will Hays, a Presbyterian, was created in 1922 by the film producers themselves, in response to the public's growing concern about the contents of films and the scandals that had appeared in Hollywood. In 1927, the first code appeared, titled *Don'ts* and *Be Careful*, made up of recommendations only.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> **Don't Do This**

1. Pointed profanity (this includes the words, God, Lord, Jesus, Christ – unless used reverently – Hell, S.O.B., damn, Gawd), or every other profane or vulgar expression however used, is forbidden.
2. Complete nudity is never permitted. This includes nudity in fact or in silhouette, or any lecherous or licentious notice thereof by other characters in the picture.
3. Illegal drug traffic must never be presented.
4. Sex perversion or any inference to it is forbidden.
5. White slavery shall not be treated.
6. Miscegenation (sex relationships between the white and black races) is forbidden.
7. Sex hygiene and venereal diseases are not subjects for motion pictures.
8. Scenes of actual child birth, in fact or in silhouette, are never to be presented.
9. Children's sex organs are never to be exposed.

The *Be Careful* section recommended restraint in dealing with the national flag, any types of crime, cruelty to children and animals, marriage, surgical operations, and “excessive,” “lustful” kissing.

These precepts, which began as simple recommendations, became a production code in 1934, accepted in full by the industry. The code was then managed by an office that supervised scripts before filming began and examined the films as soon as they were complete.

Any producer who launched a film without the stamp of approval from the office ran the risk of not being able to show it in many theaters throughout the country, since the industry dominated distribution. That producer would also run the risk of being excluded from all relationships with other producers for the exchange of materials or staff. The preamble of the code summarizes its position:

1. No picture shall be produced that will lower the moral standards of those who see it. Hence the sympathy of the audience should never be thrown to the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil or sin.

2. Correct standards of life, subject only to the requirements of drama and entertainment, shall be presented.

3. Law, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed, nor shall sympathy be created for its violation.

After this declaration of principles, the code specified the prohibitions, including a list of the subjects that had caused problems for the industry in the past, up to 1927.<sup>11</sup>

The professional censors in the office were actually the custodians of the values defended by a set of leagues and associations characteristics to the United States: the Legion of Decency, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and even professional organizations that could not tolerate the portrayal of a lawyer as a villain, for example.

All of these groups paid their taxes, they had mobilization capabilities, and they were clients of

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10. Ministers of religion in their character as ministers of religion should not be used as comic characters or as villains.

11. The history, institutions, prominent people and citizenry of other nations shall be represented fairly.

<sup>11</sup> This refers to: Crimes Against the Law; Sex; Vulgarity; Obscenity; Profanity; Costume; Dances; Religion; Locations; National Feelings; Titles; Repellent Subjects. The sections contained the above prohibitions, as well as recommendations such as “The treatment of bedrooms must be governed by good taste and delicacy.”

the films produced by Hollywood. It was important to keep them happy.

How did producers resolve these problems that emerged from the Code and the pressure groups, since villains frequently had professions, and above all because violence and fascination with evil were attractive to the market, then as now? The solution was found in the introduction of what were called compensatory moral values, which made it mandatory to include characters and dialogues to explain the values at stake, and the endings were adjusted so that the system would come to an appropriate conclusion.

The result of this complex system of narrative construction was a cinema that was particularly marked with a puritanical logic, clearly inspired by biblical narrative models. No crime or mistake went unpunished.

### **Treatment of Violence in Classic Hollywood Cinema**

As examples, I will take some genres (and sub-genres and groups of genres as well) that are characteristic of Hollywood cinema and emblematically violent: detective films, especially film noir; the diverse genres of war films and films that involve violence among young people. All of them use narrative models of faraway origins, but with significant continuity and development.

Thus classic Hollywood cinema treats violence in two characteristic ways, the first of which we may call the cinema of faceless enemies. This model includes the major action genres such as the Western, historical films, or war films, where violence is public, anonymous, and frequently recreational. The "bad guys" – be they Indians, Vietnamese, Arab terrorists, or Colombian drug dealers – have no identity, apart from their "leader." The major narrative model of these films may be traced to David, the Goliath and the Philistines.

Historical revisionism or avatars of US foreign policy have brought changes in the identity of the anonymous enemy, but not in the narrative models.

The other major genre of violent cinema is detective film, which ranges from the English model of intrigue, where, according to Raymond Chandler,<sup>12</sup> the crimes are committed to provide the author with a dead body and by means of "hand-chiselled duel pistols, with tropical poisons or curare".

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<sup>12</sup> Raymond Chandler. *The Simple Art of Murder*.

Successive changes in genre, such as gangster films or film noir have not meant great changes in the rules. Not even film noir, whose best examples are *The Maltese Falcon*<sup>13</sup> and *The Big Sleep*.<sup>14</sup> This classic, solid genre takes crime out of its Venetian vase and throws it into the alley...giving it back to those who commit crimes for solid reasons<sup>15</sup> and leaves aside the opposition of the hateful ex gangster and the good, fair police officer, in favor of a new, confusing type of character: the private detective, who is half-good, half-perverse; the greatest incarnation of this character was Humphrey Bogart.

In all cases, however, the fundamental principles were maintained. The final sequence of *Angels with Dirty Faces*<sup>16</sup> proposes the paradigmatic example of compensatory moral values, makes explicit the visionary rupture with the fascination of evil, when the young gangster, unredeemed, played by James Cagney, accepts, on his way to execution, to fake hysterical cowardice, so that his old chums may suffer the disappointment on their failure.

However, these classic narrative models were not only the product of a system of censorship imposed on Hollywood, but they also expressed a certain "doxa," the first source of standards for verisimilitude. According to Aristotle and Plato, the "doxa" corresponds to the relationships of dependence of discourse with a certain body of ideas accepted by the social group in which the discourse takes place. Verisimilitude does not establish, then, a necessary relationship with the real, but rather with what is believed by the majority of the people: The relationship between a particular text and another, general and diffuse, text: Public opinion.<sup>17</sup>

To this system, the laws inherent to each genre are added; these are extremely structured in industrial cinema. The discipline – or the genre – constitute social forms of controlling discourse; limits are set through the play of an identity that takes the form of a permanent updating of the rules.<sup>18</sup> Thus, for example:

*It is known that the Western waited fifty years to say such non-subversive things as fatigue, lack of motivation or aging: for half a century, the young hero, invincible and ready, was the only type of real man in a Western.... he was the only type allowed in the legend of the West, playing the discursive role stated above. In the first sequence*

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<sup>13</sup> John Huston, 1942.

<sup>14</sup> Howard Hawks, 1946.

<sup>15</sup> Raymond Chandler, op. cit.

<sup>16</sup> Michel Curtiz, 1938.

<sup>17</sup> Todorov, op. cit. p.13.

<sup>18</sup> Michel Foucault. *The Order of Discourse*. Gallimard, Paris, 1970.

of John Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, the journalist rips up the pages on which his helper had obtained the true story of the elderly senator, telling him that, in the West, when legend is more beautiful than the truth, then the legend is what gets printed, does he not?<sup>19</sup>

Institutional censorship has never prohibited a character of tired hero or adolescent on the screen.

### From the End of the Hays Code to the Present

The Hays Code and its consequences – classic industrial Hollywood cinema – survived until television began to claim a significant portion of the child and older adult audience. At the same time, in 1949, the US government obligated production companies to sell theaters, thereby breaking the production-exhibition monopoly.

Competition from renewed European cinema after the war also contributed to the crisis of the system.

In 1953, Otto Preminger crossed the Rubicon to produce and direct *The Moon is Blue*, a comedy that includes some jokes about virginity and extramarital sex. Although this film did not obtain the Hays Office stamp of approval, it was shown with enormous success. Preminger went further in 1955 when he made *The Man with the Golden Arm*, whose central character was a drug addict.

At that point, United Artists separated from the MPAA and thus began a process of revision of the Hays Code. In 1956, a new Code, which exalted the artist's creative freedom and declared any form of censorship hateful, was approved, and lasted until 1968.

From this moment on, with the rapid changes occurring in customs, the laws of the market had broken down barriers and inhibitions. But control over "what could be said and what was said" changed too. Today, thanks to the new spirit of the times and the segmentation of the market, logothetes enjoy unprecedented autonomy and freedom. Today, transgression has reached the point where it is "politically correct." At one time, it seemed a great idea, or at least a necessary one. Perhaps now is the time to see if the scale is placed correctly.

Which social actors have the legitimacy to influence the orientation of expressive forms and the contents of audiovisual narratives?

Today it could seem pointless to ask this question: What other social actors – besides the logothetes

themselves – have the legitimacy to influence the orientations of the expressive forms and the contents of audiovisual narratives?

The "politically correct" answer to the above is: none. However, this "politically correct" answer is based on some assumptions that merit discussion:

1. The vague or explicit acceptance according to which the artist – the logothete – is a kind of interlocutor of Providence that must be exempt from the conventional vicissitudes of the mere mortals;

2. All outside intervention in the creative process itself is spurious and liable to corrupt, or at least hamper, the art.

To reflect on these points, please allow me to go back in time and look at the example of the fine arts.

The first statement originated in the Renaissance, when the concept of genius was invented. While, in the Middle Ages, the work of art had value only as an object, the renaissance gave it the value of personality.<sup>20</sup> This notion, whose first great exponent was Michelangelo, paved the way for the idea of the unknown genius and the appeal to posterity against the judgments of contemporaries.<sup>21</sup> The Renaissance did not take this step; the Romantics were the ones to give life to the concept, adding a new character: the doomed artist. The work comes to an end in the Twentieth Century, the century of art for hermeneutics, where the artist would not be accountable to anyone, not even the public, but only through professional or amateur decoders, destined to fill with meaning the works opened, sometimes to nothingness, by the artists!

However, it seems difficult to solidly maintain the idea that society should pay a tithe to fund the work of cultural operators, who are a sort of modern monks, without obtaining counterpart contributions other than those considered appropriate by the cultural operators themselves.

This would mean, among other things, assuming that the work of art has only an "esthetic meaning." On the contrary, as Panofsky states, the majority of objects that require an esthetic perception, meaning works of art, are also vehicles of information and instruments or apparatus.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Hauser, Arnold. *Social History of Literature and Art*. Spanish language edition. Guadarrama, 1979, vol. 1, p. 411.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 412.

<sup>22</sup> Panofsky, Erwin. "Meaning in the Visual Arts." *The Renaissance: Artist, Scientist, Genius*. 1955. Paris, Gallimard, 1969, p.39

<sup>19</sup> Christian Metz, "El decir y lo dicho en el cine: ¿Hacia una decadencia de lo verosímil?" *Communication* 11, p.20.

It is clear that what has been acquired by the practitioners of the major arts – in other words, the arts that are given the most legitimacy – has also been passed on to the most recent ones, and by extension, to all logothetes.

The second statement is a consequence of the first. By crowning the artist as a genius, we infer that all outside interventions -- economic, political and social – are negative.

However, there is abundant proof on the contrary. For example, the evolution of painting in the Netherlands is in great part due to the appearance of a bourgeois clientele that progressively came to replace the Church as the main patrons of painting. These new clients guided the painters in a new direction, toward secular realism. Little by little, those patrons became more important, until they finally became central to Flemish portraiture in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It is reasonable to think that this new market, with its requests and tastes, guided the evolution of painting, and it does not seem reasonable to complain about this, given the results of their influence on the painters.

What is true is that creators have always had systemic conditions and reference frameworks for their production, be they medieval guilds or the possibilities created by the development of business (inks from the Orient, the progress of glassmaking techniques for the development of vitraux, the bourgeois clientele of 17<sup>th</sup> century Holland, or in the cities and the Papacy of Renaissance Italy). And although, on occasion, the impact of the market can be negative, it is no less true that this art/market relationship – which is always present – has not impeded the best creative explosions; it would even be possible to argue the contrary.

Artists have always adapted to social circumstances, while managing to make a profound imprint on the human spirit.

This does not contradict the existence – and even the social necessity – of the rebellious, the dissatisfied, the transgressors.

To paraphrase Edgar Morin,<sup>23</sup> every culture is nourishing, castrating, destructive. It imposes its laws, obedience to its values and norms, and, nevertheless, it would stop existing and developing if there were no creators, audiences, and unsatisfied critics to sustain an opposition, capable of permitting its renewal.

But this has also meant that those who refuse social adaptation must be prepared to run the risks of marginalization and misunderstanding. Moreover, the 20<sup>th</sup> century has accepted that even doomed works may be the object of protection or subsidy. But what is not acceptable is that all “transgressive” or “avant-garde” works be awarded congratulations and subsidies, or that art embrace the flags of doom, because when something becomes institutional, it stops being doomed, and a good part of the work that has become trivial in this century has been precisely “avant-garde” work.

In sum, to accept that all social actors involved in a cultural process have something to say – and that they will do so directly, or “vote with their wallets” by disassociating themselves from it – means to accept the systemic condition of all cultural processes.

It is a fact that all systems both enrich and impoverish the elements within them. According to the characteristics of the system, either the enriching incidents, or the impoverishing coercions, will dominate. We will never be able to fully satisfy those who suffer from coercions while enjoying their benefits. But this is all part of the same phenomenon.

### **What to Do About the Spirit of the Times?**

In postmodern times, little can be done to intervene in the work of the logothete system of narrative. Institutional control is no longer well-received, and is impossible to practice, given the variety and availability of media that reach the spectator directly (cable, the Internet, etc.).

However, I do not think we should renounce the interaction between social actors and institutional legitimacy. Is it not time to go back to the pendulum swinging subtly and rhythmically, seeking to guide logothetes and influence creative dialogue, with contemporary assumptions?

I argue affirmatively, but it does not appear to be an easy thing to achieve. I believe that what is possible for those public and private organizations concerned with promoting moral behavior for the common good, are two principles of action:

1. To seek larger quantities, better quality, and more variety of knowledge about the issues that have barely been outlined here.
2. To operate on the basis that the possibility of impacting against negativity is extremely limited, if not nonexistent. However, it is possible to promote positivity through information, stimulation policies, awards, etc. These guidelines are closely related to the creation and densification of network of

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<sup>23</sup> Cfr. Edgar Morin. *La Méthode*, Paris, Seuil, 1977.

actors to produce creative dialogue. Actors whose strength does not reside in their power to sanction, as in the past, but rather in their wisdom and public legitimacy.

#### **Commentary:**

##### ***Cecilia Zaffaroni (Social Worker)***

The ideas that Luciano has presented seem extremely clear, and he has pointed out the central aspects of the question under analysis in this first part of the Seminar.

First, he reminds us that this is not a new issue; society has had to confront it since the emergence of mass media. What has varied historically, is the type of media that has been predominant, the way in which we have approached the media's possible influence on the formation of attitudes and behaviors, and the responses that have been adapted socially.

Second, he draws our attention to the importance of the scientific and systematic study of this issue. There is a tendency to spontaneously or intuitively attribute the media with a much greater influence on behavior than that found by studies, of which he has mentioned various examples.

However, Luciano does not ignore or underestimate the interrelation between the real and the imaginary, and the importance of the narratives that society creates about itself, in the legitimization of codes and sensibilities.

Harking back to the classic period of Hollywood to show diverse forms of social coercion and the way in which, at that time, it impacted on the treatment of violence, is not only extremely illustrative, but also entertaining and nostalgic – at least for those of us who remember the matinees of our youth, where we cheered on the “little guy” who always triumphed over the villains.

At that time, the predominant values and the joining of interests between producers, pressure groups, public opinion and “logothetes” (to use the term employed by Luciano) led to the need to respect certain principles or use compensatory moral values when necessary.

Today, different values have acquired social legitimization, such as respect for individual freedom, rejection of paternalistic attitudes that aim to “protect” the adult consumer, plurality, tolerance; none of these values is very compatible with mechanisms of institutional censorship.

However, respect for individual freedom must not overshadow social responsibility or excuse citizens

from this. There is no right that does not come with responsibility. This is attributable not only to the State in its position as regulator of community living, but also to the citizenry who form part of the social body.

The various actors involved in the production and consumption of audiovisual media represent different interests, expectations and aspirations with respect to the exercise of what they consider to be their rights the understanding of their responsibilities. Links and negotiations between them and their relative power will ultimately determine their level of influence.

Albert Hirschman, in *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*, analyzes the different mechanisms that citizens may use when they feel unsatisfied with the products being offered to them by a company, or when they are faced with failures of an organization to which they belong.

The first response analyzed by Hirschman is that of the “exit”: the consumer stops buying the unsatisfactory product or leaves the organization. The second response is for the consumer to make use of his or her “voice”: file a complaint, protest, and attempt to change the situation. The first mechanism is related to laws of the market, while the second is within the sphere of politics. According to this author, choosing one mechanism or the other depends on the costs involved for the dissatisfied citizen, his or her perception of the possibility of changing the situation without having to resort to the “exit,” and the level of loyalty he or she feels toward the product or organization.

These choices are not so diverse, according to Hirschman, when we are speaking of public assets or public evils. We understand these to be those that are consumed by all of the members of a community or country, and which have such characteristics that they are not only consumed by all, but also we cannot avoid consuming them unless we leave the community providing them. In these cases, the “exit” is not possible, and all we have is the “voice.”

As Luciano argues, today it seems “politically correct” to respect the freedom and autonomy of the “logothetes,” and not put roadblocks in the way of artistic expression. But how do we simultaneously respect the rights of minors who are not prepared to consume certain products that require discerning maturity? How do we respect the rights of parents who want to prepare their children to handle the bombardment of images and representations by the media?

We do not wish to revert to the censorship mechanisms of the past, but we cannot merely trust the laws of the market, hoping that those who

do not want a product will not consume it, because (as we have seen) the “exit” is not possible in this case.

Thus, the only viable, socially legitimate paths for values that are currently predominant are those of the “voice,” facilitating the expression of the diverse actors involved, so that they may articulate and negotiate the exercise of their rights and respect for their responsibilities. This is not an easy path to take in Uruguay, whose citizenry is accustomed to expecting everything, or almost everything, from the State, and a poorly-articulated civil society.

What proposals or lines of action may be taken from this perspective, in both the public and private sectors?

First, to facilitate the expression of the interests and expectations of the sectors involved and promoting spaces for negotiation and articulation.

To stimulate the social responsibility of “logothetes” and consumers in the production and use of these media, and to sensitize the public about the issue.

To carry out educational campaigns to help parents orient their children in ways of consuming, making the most of the educational potential of the media and lessen their possible negative effects. This is not a matter of not watching, but rather a matter of how to watch.

To encourage educational institutions to contribute to this task. To support programs oriented to these objectives with resources or technical assistance.

To strive to impede the deterioration of social capital and foster its enrichment through media that contribute to strengthening standards of coexistence that are accepted by all. To stimulate the creation of audiovisual products that show positive models of the construction of models for social coexistence and other ways of channeling aggression in a constructive manner. To hold contests, establish awards, and fund their production and distribution, for example.

