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NEOLIBERAL DESIGN UNVEILED: A LACANIAN AND ŽIŽEKIAN EXPLORATION OF POSSESSION FANTASIES

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Abstract. In the current stage of neoliberal capitalism, a mutually beneficial relationship exists between the user and the design within the societal image universe. This has created issues for users, such as perpetuating the tension between desire and satisfaction, leading to an insatiable desire and sustained engagement with the product. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, desire is an essential aspect of human existence linked to lack. In contemporary society, the design focuses on constructing the subject's desire for things, often through cultural content, to evaluate their needs and desires and how they can achieve them outside the framework of Lacanian psychoanalysis. However, shaping a product based on the desire of the Other and presenting it as the user's own contradicts the design's stated goal of prioritizing the user. This raises concerns about the user's role in the design process and how designers can accurately understand and meet their desires and needs. This research investigates the user's role in the design process, the time designers can understand and fulfill their needs and desires, and the applicability of critical concepts in Žižekian terminology to critique design products.

1. Introduction

As evening settled in, I caught sight of a new phone ad on T.V. It boasted a host of accomplished individuals who had achieved their dreams with the aid of the latest phone technology. This spectacle shattered my peace, causing me to scrutinize my phone with a sense of alienation and judgment despite purchasing it for the promises of a New Me. The gap between the promised future and my current reality only deepened, and envy of a lot that had yet to arrive set in. I realized that a new purchase would only offer a temporary substitute for satisfaction, a painful pleasure, a jouissance. As a designer, I felt a sense of shame for contributing to the feelings of inadequacy that individuals experience. Are we not, as designers, promising them a horizon of pleasure with seductive new desires? Are we not offering a better life by fostering the intuition that their sense of lack can be overcome through our designs? Do we not create new life and substitute satisfaction by belittling the deficiencies of existing products? The bitter taste of coffee lingered as I pondered the weight of my actions. Design is the art of constructing one's new perception in the eyes of others by disparaging one's own and others' designs. When design falls into the wrong hands, it becomes a sinister and malevolent act rife with a fiction of deficiency and vilification in its language.

In reality, the design strives to be well-intentioned, even demonstrating an honorable defiance towards the prevailing order. It endeavors to exhibit compassion towards its projected user, considering value and utility. The design aims to identify and rectify the perceived deficiencies in its user, thereby reminding them of their potential through its products. By interacting with these objects, the user can self-discovery, foster a relationship with them, and develop individual projects for the future within the confines of possibility. Despite the best intentions, every design project begins with a search for something the user needs help with. For instance, the empathy phase in popular design thinking, which involves identifying what the user feels, thinks, says, and does, stems from this quest for discovery. The subsequent stages of the design process, such as prioritization models, user research, and prototyping, revolve around determining whether the initial deficiency identified is indeed a deficiency. However, a paradox emerges here. Since the product that addresses the deficit falls short of the ideal, creating a substitute satisfaction instead needs to be revised. This renders design a sustainable process, with each incomplete design as a starting point for the next. It is worth bearing in mind that the designer is, in effect, their own worst critic. The designer is the designer's *lupus est*.

Since insatiable desires often characterize human nature, incompleteness is undeniable, like the story of *homo esperans* (Fromm, 1968), who hoped and strived for but never achieved full humanity. In Lacanian theory, desire is a fundamental feature of human existence, linked to a symbolic absence in both the subject and the Other (Lacan, 1991). Consequently, the subject's desire is always incomplete, perpetual, and reliant on the Other. The absence of something becomes the object of desire, and what is withheld from the individual is even more desirable. Žižek states that Lacan's concept of desire is a potent force that compels us to endlessly move from one signifier to another, searching for the ultimate signifier that can restore the meaning of the chain of signifiers before us (1997). This force is driven by the unnamable object a, which represents desire as a lack in the symbolic order, and the feeling of something missing or absent from our lives is persistent (Homer, 2005). The Lacanian theory highlights the significant similarities between the construction of the subject and the construction of the other with the concept of persona in design, particularly in the context of lack and desire. According to Lacan's ontology, the subject represents a structure that follows the self and is characterized by an inherent deficiency or difference fundamental to its existence. Nowadays, the subject's desire for things, which serves as the focus of the design, is often constructed with cultural content, making it possible to evaluate the persona's needs and desires and how they can achieve them outside the framework of Lacanian psychoanalysis. This article outlines the psychoanalytic subject and its similarities to the divided individual within the neoliberal system in contact with the designed products of the system. The structure of this subject will be explored in detail as the main topics in an attempt to understand the theoretical and methodological perspectives of the act of design, demonstrating its adaptability to product criticism.

2. Lacanian Subject and The Design

Lacan's subject theory regarding design conceptions may appear unusual at first. However, Psychoanalytic Theory seeks to explain human behavior and, in doing so, broadens its approach to include unconscious processes. The theory's central premise that people are motivated by unseen components controlled by the rational mind and

consciousness has led to its widespread application in deciphering and understanding, for example, consumer behavior and motivation. In particular, Freudian psychoanalytic theory, with its assertion that unconscious desires and motivations are the drivers of behavior, became one of the behavioral models, each revealing only a portion of the human psyche to understand buyers in order to reveal the mechanism behind the "black box" of the human psyche (Kotler, 1965).

For an extended period, design has seemingly struggled to maintain its noble objectives amidst the relentless pressure of the prevailing economic structure. Design processes persist as imitation, representation, or presentation of reality, offering a semblance of truth. In this quest for truth, design endeavors to elucidate and advocate the rationale behind a product's existence by constructing a Lacanian-style fictional reality replete with its distinctive language (Güneş, 2023). Consequently, crafting a compelling and multifaceted narrative behind a design becomes as crucial as it is to conceive the design itself (Liao, 2016).

In Lacan's revised Saussurean-based model, the signifier, representing the physical product, resides within the realm of objective and shared reality. The meaningful component, however, encompasses the object's essence, embodying the thoughts, emotions, and experiences elicited when interacting with the artifact (Hjelm, 2002). Therefore, design's responsibility extends beyond merely presenting the physical object; it involves transforming and presenting the harsh facets of reality, both in terms of form and content. It is imperative to reconfigure and render reality in a more palatable form to establish a harmonious relationship with reality. The iterative reproduction of the object successfully conveys the challenging aspects of an otherwise unpalatable reality, softened through the lens of industrial rationality and disseminated as a utilitarian commodity (La Rocca & Scarpitti, 2017). Individuals routinely execute this transformation through their interpretation of reality through experiences, intuitions, designs, and impressions. One of design's roles is to effect this transformation for individuals, particularly under the pressures of neoliberalism.

Contemporary design's foremost task appears to be the design of the individual who serves as its interlocutor. When we consider the ability to generate significant ideas that culminate in a desirable product (Goodwin, 2009), the initial step is the design of desire. Subsequently, design shapes the predisposed individual who will harbor this desire and presents this individual to eager participants who will experience it. The contentious aspect arises from the fact that this desire pertains to the desire of the Other. When individuals perceive the desire of the Other directed towards them, they commence desiring. The dominant system must first desire the subject as the Other, serving as the instigator. To this end, the system designs the desired individual as the Other, then showcases this archetype to others and demands that they conform to the desired individual's mold, often through the medium of products. The primary crisis and division inherent in today's consumerism emanate from this dynamic. It becomes crucial for individuals to occupy a place in the interiority of the Other (brand loyalty), fulfill its demands (market share), and become the object of its desire (customer and user). Curiously, consumers position themselves as a result of being acknowledged by the Other, while the Other, acknowledged by the consumer, undergoes a similar process. In this symbiotic relationship, desire must be unveiled as truth, a task shouldered by the Other—capital—which is more organized and assertive within supply-based markets. The subject must recognize its desire, constituting the overarching goal of the entire consumption system. The pivotal point here is not the mere act of recognition but rather

the subject's creation of a novel existence through the expression of desire. Within this creative process, a disconnect emerges, given the incongruity between the analyst's desire and their words, as the full extent of the desire's truth eludes expression.

If, according to Lacan's theory, desire is fundamentally the desire to become what someone else desires and to gain recognition from that Other, then desiring to become the object of the Other's desire holds profound implications within the neoliberal system. Through its economic and political mechanisms, neoliberalism contends that it rewards economic actors with the potential for self-actualization, fostering greater freedom and opportunities. Subsequently, the system designs individuals by its desires, and these individuals, by aligning with the system's design, learn what to desire, thus becoming the object of desire themselves. In this context, desire no longer revolves around private lives but assumes a dialectical connection perpetually attributed to subjects and formed through their desires.

Today, within the framework of the neoliberal system and its instrumental apparatus, individuals are strategically positioned as the embodiment of the system's desires, encouraging others to identify with this idealized archetype. This phenomenon underscores the interplay between desiring the system's desires and the pursuit of recognition. Consequently, desire is redirected towards unattainable ideal designs, prompting incomplete individuals to seek self-realization through the offerings of the neoliberal system.

The system's expression of its desires is notably exemplified in the discourse of persona within the design field. A persona represents an imaginary user or consumer defined by the shared characteristics of the target audience (Pruitt & Adlin, 2006). A persona conveys the values, attitudes, and character when associated with a brand. Furthermore, personas serve to foster empathy and identity, aiding in the understanding of users and the development of tailored solutions for their needs. These personas are typically constructed based on needs, goals, behaviors, attitudes, frustrations, and personal characteristics, targeting specific users or consumers and effectively communicating the company's intended messages (Mulder & Yaar, 2006). Personas are fictitious yet detailed, concrete representations of target users created through meticulous data analysis. They embody realistic archetypes representing target audience segments, summarizing insights gleaned from user research and facilitating informed decision-making in the design process.

These personas are meticulously defined, incorporating various attributes such as names, ages, familial backgrounds, friendships, occupations, genders, education levels, ethnicities, social statuses, life stories, goals, and tasks (Grudin & Pruitt, 2002). In addition to user personas, marketing personas, and brand personas can also be developed (Pruitt & Adlin, 2006). Marketing personas are tailored to represent distinct market segments, lending a human face to these segments and enabling the alignment of marketing communications with their unique characteristics (Cooper & Reimann, 2003). These personas provide a concise summary of information that informs the positioning and definition of marketing strategies. They play a critical role within organizations, offering motivation for purchase decisions, enabling a focus on buyer preferences and attitudes, and providing contextual cues for targeted marketing communication efforts (Tomlin, 2018). On the other hand, a brand persona represents a cultural stereotype of a brand's personality and psychographics established through concerted marketing communication endeavors (Stern, 1994). These commercial personas fulfill three primary functions: they act as embodiments or proxies of firms, shape people's expectations

concerning their interactions with firms, and cultivate customer loyalty to the firm (Stern, 1988).

Each constructed design persona embodies an idealized individual that the system desires, proposes, and ultimately imposes, mirroring the expectations placed on individuals, akin to the standards imposed on students within state education systems. These definitions are readily accessible to individuals, as they are presented as truths within the neoliberal system. In the discourse of neoliberalism, there is a conspicuous absence of acknowledgment regarding inadequacy or impossibility; instead, it purports that there is no deficiency, asserting that object a, the ultimate desire, is attainable. Neoliberalism fiction perpetuates an interconnected cycle of desires, driven by the denial of loss and incompleteness through the pursuit of object a. This discourse presents the object of desire as, for example, "an individual in their thirties, residing in urban settings, possessing higher education, pursuing a respectable career, living independently, prioritizing self-care, actively participating in social life, and deriving enjoyment from life." Individuals strive to align themselves with this prescribed identity, aspiring to become the object of the system's desire. Their motivation is grounded in a desire to avoid being left behind and to mitigate feelings of guilt associated with non-conformity. One alignment method involves consumption patterns, where individuals pursue a lifestyle that mirrors this idea. For instance, an individual aspiring to this archetype may choose to study architecture for prospects, relocate to a metropolitan area to pursue career goals, acquire an automobile to explore the city and embrace personal freedom, engage in activities like yoga and pilates to prioritize well-being, eagerly await the arrival of weekends, adopt organic and diet-conscious eating habits, actively participate in social and cultural activities, and share their experiences on social media platforms.

The mechanisms through which neoliberalism manipulates subjects into perpetual pleasure-seeking are discernible. The subject is incentivized to pursue their desires by perpetually experiencing dissatisfaction, a vital element of this paradigm. The system manipulates individuals' desires to encourage relentless consumption and employs new ideas, technologies, and discourses. Despite well-intentioned ideals, empathy, participatory design practices, and commons and shared values (Karadima, 2022), determining individual characteristics and shared values can sometimes be co-opted by the system to influence individuals, legitimizing and persuading them subtly. Every product is marketed with the premise that "there is nothing better." The neoliberal subject eagerly chases new products, expecting unparalleled satisfaction. However, contentment remains elusive once the desired item is obtained, and the search for the next object of desire ensues. Consequently, the system consciously nurtures a perpetual desire and subsequent disappointment within the subject. The system requires subjects who have become detached from their desires and believe they can fulfill them. In essence, subjects seeking to thrive within the system must refrain from critiquing it.

According to Freud and Lacan's psychoanalytic beliefs, the unconscious plays a critical role in human behavior. While Freudian psychoanalytic theory holds that the unconscious primarily comprises suppressed drives and instincts, Lacanian psychoanalytic theory holds that language and society shape and limit the unconscious, thereby limiting the psyche's desires and identities. The symbolic order, the sphere of language and culture, is thought to have a decisive influence on subjectivity. Both theories agree that unconscious processes shape the subject but disagree on the psyche's organization. According to Freud's theory, the subject is primarily driven by unconscious desires and instincts that are repressed and controlled by the conscious mind. In contrast,

Lacanian theory holds that language and the symbolic order shape subjectivity through cultural and social norms. The Lacanian subject is divided between the conscious ego and the unconscious "Other," which refers to the field of language and culture that structures subjectivity. The subject is not self-contained but is always related to the Other. In Lacanian theory, the subject's position within the language and culture and how language shapes their desires and identities becomes the primary focus of analysis.

The Mirror Stage, which is a constant point of reference throughout Lacan's work, i.e., the individual's identification with an image other than himself through the awareness he gains through the mirror (the transformation that occurs in the subject when he adopts an image) constitutes the starting point of his experience with actual reality (his own body, the people and things around him) (Lacan, 2001). From the moment the human being enters into a special relationship with its image, a relation of incompleteness, a relation of alienating tension emerges (Lacan, 1991). Moreover, the mirror stage also contains a symbolic dimension. Even before birth, the subject is already included in a symbolic network constructed through language by his parents and family.

The emergence of the Lacanian subject is intricately linked to the verbal discourse surrounding it and its unspoken implications. The subject is the byproduct of external linguistic influence, forming within the confines of Others' mental universes. It emerges due to language's molding impact, an entity characterized by a lack of self-mastery. Language is not a terminus but rather an innate aspect of being, an existence into which one is born. The subject's formation through language prior to its very existence is akin to the process of subjectification in design. This is because subjectification is the process by which a subject is constructed, and the user serves as the subject's manifestation regarding its potential for being and behavior, in short, its complete objectification. Therefore, at the initial phases of design, the form of being or behavior becomes the focal point of contemplation, with concepts and techniques directed towards generating a form of subjectivity.

At this juncture, the first consideration is this: the design subject exists within the designer's mind before it has even materialized, and the designer articulates and objectifies it. Thus, the question arises about how the subject of design emerges from nothingness. The critical idea required for such a being to exist and for the designer to legitimize its presence must be improved. Every design subject is grounded in the concept of incompleteness and a trace of disappointment. Paradoxically, incompleteness dominates the possibility of the subject and sets the framework of possibility. The subject's incomplete existence, then, acts as a summons to the designer to sketch the outline of potential and satisfy this incompleteness.

The second observation is this: the designer does not produce a lack within the hypothetical subject's fictive construct but instead discerns an existing shortfall. According to Fink, the lack is a reminder that something else has been misplaced, possibly yet to be discovered (1997). Identifying a design's potential may occur when the designer assumes the end user's perspective. This involves the designer adopting a hypothetical subject's viewpoint and examining the design through their eyes. By doing so, the designer can detect any lack in the design and subsequently communicate these findings to the user through discourse. As a result of this discourse, the user may become aware of lacks that they were previously unaware of. In short, it is not the subject who looks in the mirror during the design process but the designer who looks in its place and under its disguise.

In the face of the object, the subject of the design becomes aware of itself as both subject and object. For Lacan, discovering the person's dual nature is the key to this complex inter-relational interaction and experience between the self and the external world. This design object functions as a mirror, reflecting the subject's self-image. When designers analyze the subject in terms of the design process, they create a user persona based on qualitative and quantitative data. However, this persona is inherently flawed and lacking, which disrupts its unity and creates the possibility of desire. This lack is the *l'object petit a*, an infinite desire that can never be satisfied. The lack of the user persona only partially represents the desire that can never be filled. Beneath the user's needs, deeper desires express their desire to live a good life. According to Lacan, the object of desire is absent, indeterminate, and imaginary. Thus, it cannot be named yet can never be satisfied. Desire arises from a need but cannot be reduced to a mere demand. The object that causes want and the object that will satisfy it are the same, yet they are always different. This difference can only provide a substitute satisfaction. In the design context, all products exist in an unbridgeable gap between want and desire. Thus, the role of design is to identify needs, reveal the object of desire, and approach latent desires to some extent. Design should aim to create not the object of want but the fantasy object of desire, *l'objet petit a*. This requires identifying needs and understanding the unbridgeable gap between want and desire.

Let us use the design process for a product, specifically an air fryer, to create an object that possesses use value and serves as an object of desire. The designed product is intended to function as an intermediary between the subject and their desires, thereby becoming the object around which desire is centered - what Lacan refers to as *object petit a*. It is important to note that the product itself is not the object of desire but instead serves as the aspect of an object that attracts the subject and initiates desire. As such, the product contains the function of a particular object as a missing object in the impulse circuit, serving as a hidden agalma within the physical product and the designerly discourse that will trigger desire.

The designer's initial actions involve conducting two deficiency determinations. The first deficiency determination is done by analyzing precedent products, recognizing that existing products create substitute satisfaction. The designer will inevitably attempt to fulfill the satisfaction these products cannot provide through their incomplete product. However, the designer's product will also not be able to escape the fate of substitute satisfaction. The second deficiency determination involves analyzing the subject's expressed needs, noted as deficiencies, and recorded as data. The design subject's needs must be satisfied and complete, existing between what is and what they want to be. The designer considers the potential user in detail within the data, objectifying them, giving them a body, and, in the last stage, taking on their identity. In this state, the designer reaches empathy and assumes the persona's image in the mirror, taking it upon themselves and absorbing it.

This unity between the designer and the persona is the harbinger of new conflicts and problems, as it confronts the difference between the persona as it is and as it is intended to be. The designer's thoughts and feelings about how the Other sees the persona are crucial, as the persona's desire is essentially the desire of the Other. As Fink (1995) suggests, the designer's persona will learn to desire as an Other, as if it were someone else. From the persona's point of view, the designer attempts to define how the desire of the Other is manifested. This is where fantasy, which Lacan sees as an economic system of the psyche, comes into play. Desire finds its reference and foundation in fantasy, which

is both the final stage of desire and, when considered in terms of its manifestations, actually takes place at the level of consciousness. It is only when fantasy passes into the content of the message at the level of consciousness that the persona finds itself in an extraordinary situation. During communication, something contained in the imaginary structure of fantasy merges with something else (the product itself and its discourse) that usually reaches the level of the message. Consequently, the product becomes one of the things the persona is deprived of, the phallus.

On a simple plane, such as an air fryer, the transformation of an object from a utilitarian item to an object of desire necessitates the satisfaction of the Other's desires to some extent. The Other, representative of a higher level of meaning, such as culture, society, or groups, compels our hypothetical persona to adopt its desires as their own to be recognized and to perceive themselves from the perspective of others, thereby creating a false self. The persona's needs become demands only through the intervention of the Other. The boundary between needs and wants is where desire takes shape (Lacan, 2001). The construction of fantasy is central to desire. The desire of the Other constructs fantasy. The son's desire to eat the cake is shaped by his mother's desire, making him the object of maternal desire; the cake serves as a vehicle for exchanging desires (Žižek, 1997).

The subjective response of individuals to the desires of the Other is exemplified by the fantasy of buying and owning an air fryer. Designers can learn valuable lessons from this phenomenon, particularly in concretizing the persona's response to the desire of the Other through the product. As the symbolic value of objects increases in today's world, where the functional value of products is decreasing, individuals are increasingly driven by the pursuit of status. Designers must identify the desire of the Other and the persona's deficiencies in the mirror phase to create a product that meets their subjective needs. However, because the product will always be incomplete, the fantasy of owning it is temporary. Constantly updated products, such as phones, contribute to an endless cycle of consumption that prevents individuals from grasping the object petit a, the source of desire. The capitalist system employs two primary strategies to keep desire alive. The first is mass production, which keeps the object petit at a certain distance from the subject.

In contrast, the second involves advertising that creates a sense of deficiency in individuals and offers solutions to their perceived inadequacies. The incessant release of updated products, as exemplified by the iPhone, creates a pathological cycle of consumption in which the individual is subject to unending and insatiable demands imposed by external forces. The individual who upgrades from an iPhone 13 to 14 is aware that the release of the iPhone 15 is forthcoming. This leads to temporary satisfaction from the upgraded device until the next version is released; at this point, the individual realizes their continued lack and becomes uncertain or indecisive. These forces, referred to here as the Other, present a symbolic representation of desire that compels the persona to consume to fulfill their perceived deficiency. However, these fantasies prevent the persona from genuinely grasping the object petit a, which represents the source of their desire. If the persona were to attain the object petit a, their desire would dissipate and become aimless. In order to keep desire alive and functioning as the engine of the capitalist system, the object petit a must be kept at a distance and presented as an unattainable goal, like a rainbow. Advertisements remind the subject of their lack and instill anxiety, as in the case of a supplement advertisement suggesting that a mother's breast milk may be insufficient even though it is the most suitable food for her baby. The desire of the Big Other in this context is for the mother to be a peaceful caregiver who feeds her child adequately. This transformation can only be achieved by consuming

supplements provided by the system. Ultimately, the advertising produced by the system is concerned with what individuals lack, how they should be, and how they can fulfill their fantasies.

3. Evaluating Žižek's Concepts in Terms of Design Field

Žižek uniquely adapted Lacanian psychoanalytic methods to popular culture, arguing that the globalizing and transforming world is shaped by symbolism that manipulates the individuals involved in the cultural order and prevents them from accessing the truth. Žižek argues that *anamorphosis* gives a distorted and blurred image by activating desires and anxieties (1992). This allows for recognizing the inconspicuous aspects of the staging of reality and the underlying ideology at the symbolic level. Žižek emphasizes that the object petit a, the object-cause of desire, is only perceived by a look "distorted" by desire and does not exist for an "objective" look. This means that the object petit a is "objectively" nothing, but from a particular perspective, it takes the form of "something."

In contemporary consumer culture, the construction of reality and ideology in products such as cinema narrates how to achieve fictionalized desires and create an illusion inherent in reality that constructs it. Lacan's theory posits desire as the unbridgeable gap between need and its expression in demand. The product's need cannot be expressed in symbols, while demand is necessarily symbolic. The object that causes desire and the object that satisfies it are always different, and genuine desire can never be satisfied. This non-overlap between the cause of desire and its object produces uncertainty, wherein the subject knows their desire but cannot be sure. Design settles into this uncertainty created by non-overlapping between cause and object of desire and tells the subject how to desire by always keeping desire at a distance.

In practical terms, a designed object can fulfill a need by being competent, such as an automobile's ability to transport an individual from one place to another. Postmodern consumerism desires not the "real" object but substitutes for desires (Bocock, 1993). Each object can be considered materially, mechanically, economically, socially, and semantically (Eco, 1976). For automobiles, the last two aspects are produced as symbols of modernity, technology, and progress, reflecting the social positions of their owners (Wernick, 1991). The automobile occupies a unique position as a design object, existing at the intersection of both need and desire. However, it can never be fully positioned solely as an object of desire; instead, it can only temporarily create an illusion of desire in the subject by suggesting that it can bridge an unbridgeable gap or by presenting itself as possessing mystical excesses (Žižek, 1989). To become a desiring subject, the consumer must be knotted to the design discourse and identify with it, specifically at the point de caption, which is the point at which the subject is anchored to the signifier. The signifier unifies a given field and establishes its identity, enabling the subject to become a desiring one. Suppose the other defines the subject's position as a respected, conspicuous, or envied member of society through car ownership. In that case, the car presented is not shown simply as a car but rather as an object of fantasy that can be possessed. In reality, the desire is not satisfied, and the role of the fantasy of ownership is to produce the illusion that a satisfying object of desire exists somewhere. Therefore, the discourse produced by the design should cultivate the fantasy of possessing the object through the object itself, producing an illusion of the subject and describing its position in the future. Žižek's work demonstrates that consumer products are more than mere

objects of need; they are symbols of social status and cultural units evaluated by others, producing desire through fantasy and keeping it at a distance.

The relationship between desire and illusion is a critical aspect of identification. Žižek has categorized identification into two distinct types: imaginary and symbolic. According to Žižek, these two forms of identification are closely associated with desire and illusion. Imaginary identification, as described by Williamson (1978), involves identifying with an idealized image of oneself that represents one's desired self-image. In contrast, symbolic identification involves identifying with the position from which one is observed in a way that enhances one's likability and appeal to others. Žižek argues that symbolic identification dominates the imaginary form of identification, making it more significant (1989).

According to Lacan's mirror phase, an individual's perception of their own identity as a unified whole is only possible through identification with an external image. This perspective highlights how persona-based design discourses, which suggest that individuals can attain their idealized selves by possessing a product, can be seen as concrete examples of ideology, as they function as mirrors for individuals to reach their ego ideals. For instance, when consumers encounter an idealized representation of an individual associated with a product through an advertisement, they initially recognize the difference between themselves and the representation through imaginative identification. This recognition may lead to a sense of inadequacy or lack. However, through symbolic identification, the consumers may integrate themselves with the product and assume the representation position, observing themselves through the eyes of others. The product can function as a mirror even without a specific representation. For example, when a consumer encounters an air fryer, they may access the idealized design of the subject embedded in the product, waiting to be discovered, and imagine whether they can occupy the position of the representation themselves. Additionally, if a well-known brand is associated with the product, the brand experience reinforces the mirror effect of the product.

4.   Points to Consider in Design on the Path of Lacan and Žižek

Lacan and Žižek's discourses offer practical insights into the field of design, but these can only be utilized if one avoids the pitfall of manipulation. The subject's vulnerability as an interlocutor facing the desires of the Other exposes them to manipulation and enables the design to confront and communicate with its own "dark side." Here, the "dark side" refers to designers' conscious and insidious strategies and decisions to constantly engage users with their frustrations and shortcomings and manipulate them. As Monteiro argues, designing without fully understanding the consequences of one's actions can be as unethical as knowingly designing something harmful (2019).

In the realm of design, the user and their needs occupy opposing ends of a spectrum, with design serving as the intermediary. A user's needs represent a deficiency they experience, which, if addressed, can help their ability to perform tasks effectively. Designers reveal these deficiencies in various ways, such as by soliciting feedback from real users through qualitative or quantitative data, envisioning hypothetical personas to represent users' unspoken needs, or analyzing the shortcomings of existing products that satisfy similar demands. Regardless of whether it is artificial or natural, a need is justified by a deficiency in a user. In this way, for the designer, the user is, in principle, fragmented,

incomplete, but always inspiring, alongside the truth. The user's inspirational quality for the designer stems from the fact that they constantly feel incomplete and uncomfortable. Furthermore, a successful product is capable of triggering these feelings. A deficiency that is not felt does not create demand for that design product and removes the justification for the act of design.

Design, in this regard, encompasses two fundamental strategies. Firstly, it focuses on desire rather than need to give itself continuity. Design is also a promise of pleasure, containing the idea of attainability of desire but ultimately never fulfilling that promise. It simply evolves into a void that only multiplies consumption. Therefore, it is beyond a physical product that it targets and embodies the "object petit a." Hence, an air fryer that promises delicious chicken legs in a short time not only meets the need for chicken legs but also announces the free time that the subject can allocate to themselves in the kitchen as object petit a, and the ability to acquire professional cooking skills. In the neo-liberal economic stage that capitalism has reached today, there is a symbiotic relationship between the user and the design within the society's image universe. In this relationship, which generally aims to obtain mutual benefit, the user and the design exhibit mutualism within a mutually beneficial relationship as symbionts. The design feeds on users' deficiencies and anxieties, deriving its life force from them. The user, in turn, feeds on the attainability promise of the design's desire. While the cycle of deficiency and anxiety feeds the promise of desire, the inability of the promise to be fulfilled through substitute satisfaction is the source of deficiency and anxiety. When it comes to the topic of anxiety, the second design strategy comes into play.

The relationship between lack and anxiety is intriguing. Firstly, desire emerges as a consequence of a relationship with lack rather than the object itself. Anxiety, in turn, arises with the disappearance of desire. What triggers anxiety is not the absence of the object but rather the proximity to it, which leads to the loss of lack itself (Žižek, 1992). In the example given by Žižek through the story "The Dark House," the gaze of the men in the bar transcends the traditional point of view that perceives an ordinary everyday object and instead recognizes the fascinating contours of the object of desire, thus making possible a gaze that grasps nothingness, a gaze that grasps an object "out of nothing" (1992) The story ends with the despair of the men who are deprived of a fantasy space to project their desires.

From a design standpoint, the initial decline in substitute satisfaction occurs as products, initially conceived as fantasy objects within the mind, become ordinary upon accessibility or approachability. This elicits a sense of disappointment initially yet simultaneously rekindles the experience of lack. To describe the user's interaction with the product, the process entails the emergence of deficiency when facing the product, leading to symbolic identification through the product and fostering a fantasy of possessing the product within the subject. The pleasurable fantasy of possession originates from the possibility of an impossible relationship between the object 'a and the object that constitutes the subject's desire. Similar to the excitement generated by the potential of winning a jackpot until the final moments of purchasing a lottery ticket, the fantasy of possession dissipates upon acquiring the product. The discovery process involves an awareness of lack, which diminishes the product to an ordinary reality.

Consequently, tension arises between the product (the real) and the space it occupies (the symbolic plane). Although the product initially embodies the idea of desire attainability through fantasy, it ultimately fails to fulfill this promise due to its inherent

incompleteness, an integral component of its reality. Consequently, as the initial lack remains unsatisfied, desire persists, and anxiety dissipates.

Accepting the product's imperfections makes it commonplace, creating the alluring promise of the next opportunity, giving birth to a new object of desire. This rebirth represents a space in which the user must pay the price to redeem his or her desire (Lacan, 2001), and the user realizes himself or herself as a subject by determining his or her position within the object 'a relation (Blanco, 2018). Just as a birthday child eagerly opens each mysterious gift only to find that he or she has not achieved the ideal present, design products trapped in a cycle of substitute satisfaction lack the power to eliminate the sense of lack. Ironically, the second design strategy stems from the product's inherent imperfection. Every product remains incomplete as a representation, paving the way for subsequent design justifications. While users feel pleasure when they obtain the object of their desire, there is always an underlying sense of disappointment because the resulting product fails to meet their expectations. This results in a limited and painful pleasure derived from the assumption of finding the thing sought while searching for the desired object through the lens of desire, known as *jouissance* (Lacan, 2001).

Whether we acknowledge it or not, as designers, our goal within the capitalist system is to create desired objects for consumers, allowing them to dream of and strive for unattainable perfection while overlooking the flaws of actual objects. People push themselves to their limits to pursue this goal, constantly striving to achieve the ideal or "perfect" object. This journey contains pain and pleasure; the more pain the user feels, the closer they feel to their desired object. Surprisingly, as designers, we are aware that these unattainable desired objects do not exist and that we are the ones who create the game. Based on the saying, "*Revolution is like Saturn; it devours its children*" (Bücher, 2011), we sacrifice our previous "perfect" designs and present our new designs as a revolution, saying, "We are aware of our previous shortcomings and offer you a new one." Two points are particularly troubling here. The first is the constant promotion of perfection and uniqueness, which are presented with the knowledge that they are temporary. The second is the desire to climb to the top by building a new "perfect" ideal on the shortcomings of previous "so-called perfect" designs. Can there be anything more satisfying to a designer than identifying a flaw in a colleague's design and using it to justify their product? Many discourses, such as disruptive innovation and competitive superiority, are fed by these pleasures of designers. Seeing flaws as a mirror and treating the art of perfecting them as a design strategy is possible if the aim is to move forward with a critical perspective. Therefore, accepting the existence of subjective flaws or problems in the designs produced for them and treating them as potential rather than a liability defines a positive attitude towards progress and allows for a wide range of possibilities for advancement.

The complex desire-based relationship between a product and a human elevates design to a position where it generates a particular illusion between people and their desires beyond satisfying ordinary needs. In today's world, where users send messages about themselves, their identities, and social statuses through products and brands, a design action focusing solely on functional needs and requirements remains innocent and insufficient. Considering the subjectivity of language and symbols in shaping this relationship, design can create products that meet functional needs and carry specific meanings and values for users by using this insight, thereby creating controversial new subject positions and affecting how users see themselves and their place in the world. The role of gaze in shaping subjectivity and the paradoxical nature of desire focused on an

unattainable object leads design to set the ideological goal of designing products that are always somewhat unattainable and create a desire for users to interact with the product. The role of ideology in shaping desire is increasingly pushing design preferences toward being influenced by broader cultural and social ideologies. Design, essentially an art of problem-solving, is becoming an area that produces problems for users, namely, feeding the tension between desire and satisfaction, creating a never-fully satisfied desire, and keeping users constantly engaged with the product. The complex interaction between desire, ideology, and design, which is constructed against users' interests, accelerates the transformation of products from their pure forms into fetishized objects of desire, as evidenced by the new mobile phone advertisements that disrupt the tranquility of the evening. Suppose the satisfaction of user needs and desires is increasingly mentioned as a goal in current design definitions. When it comes to desire, designers' responsibilities and ethical framework must be reconsidered in the face of this exciting but dangerous goal.

Beyond its practical function, an air fryer can claim to provide users with the capacity to achieve values that bring pleasure by generating leisure time through saving time, liberating them from obligations and constraints for themselves and others, and allowing them to engage in an activity of their choosing based on personal preference. This claim to provide freedom and capacity for enjoyment places a significant burden and responsibility on this modest product and the designer who imagines both the user and the product in their mind.

The underlying desire that permeates a product often stems from the desire for the Other or the Other. This desire is strongly yearned for and necessary, yet remains unfulfilled by the mere presence of the product. The thing that is so desired, so needed, and so far from satisfying with its presence... It is what the subject is deprived of, but unlike what is expressed in design definitions (users' desire), it never belongs to the user, and the user does not truly own it. In shaping a product based on the desire of the Other and presenting its instrumentality and desire as the user's own, the act of design contradicts its purported goal of placing the user at the forefront. The issue at hand raises necessary inquiries regarding the active involvement of users in the design process and the extent to which designers can accurately apprehend and address their desires and needs.

Within the industrial design literature, user-centered design emerges as a prominent framework, seeking to prioritize the user's needs and desires throughout the design process. Nevertheless, the efficacy of this approach is accompanied by ethical concerns encompassing the product design process, marketing strategies, and the level of users' awareness concerning the underlying desires that mold the design and functionality of a product, mainly when these desires are rooted in the desire of the Other. These ethical concerns demand a critical appraisal of the design process and the implementation of measures to ensure that the users' needs and desires are genuinely prioritized while avoiding any potential for manipulation or exploitation.

5.   A Fiction

Within their psychoanalytic theories, both Lacan and Žižek, drawing on the insights of Hegel, Marx, and Freud, share a common emphasis on the unconscious and the significance of language in shaping subjective experience. Using a structural model of the psyche, Lacan emphasizes the unconscious's profound influence in shaping desires,

identity, and behavior. Conversely, Žižek underscores the role of the symbolic order and the unconscious in shaping our understanding of reality and subsequent actions. While Lacan views ideology and the unconscious as means to unveil desires and impulses, Žižek regards ideology as an indispensable aspect of social reality, shaping our comprehension of the world and our actions.

In a fictionalized scenario where Hegel, Marx, Freud, Lacan, and Žižek engage in a conversation while observing an iPhone 14 commercial on television, each would likely offer an array of critiques and perspectives. As the most senior participant, Hegel would likely be concerned with how the phone reflects broader cultural and historical developments, including the growing significance of digital technology in contemporary life and its impact on social and economic relations. Marx, in contrast, would vehemently oppose the marketing of the telephone as a luxury product, arguing that it epitomizes the contradictions and inequalities of capitalist society, citing exploitative labor practices as evidence. Freud would contend that advertising manipulates and exploits our unconscious desires to create demand for the product, asserting that this phone addresses our sense of identity and self-worth by establishing cultural norms and values underlying our identities.

Assuming the floor, Lacan would argue that the advertised phone is positioned as an object of desire, elucidating how desire is constructed through language and imagery in the advertisement. He would assert that the advertisement strategically taps into the viewers' unconscious desires and anxieties, reinforcing existing power structures and societal hierarchies. On the other hand, Žižek, through an ideological lens, would criticize the marketing of the iPhone 14 as a luxury product, highlighting the perpetuation of consumerism and materialism. He would scrutinize the advertising industry for promoting consumer culture, manipulating viewers' desires and emotions to facilitate product sales. Žižek would express skepticism towards how advertising sustains existing social and economic inequalities, effectively maintaining the status quo.

Furthermore, in their intensified conversation, Lacan would delve into the notions of the imaginary and the symbolic, analyzing how the observed advertisement played with individuals' desires and fantasies to create an idealized image of the product and the lifestyle it represents. He would argue that this idealized image is a product of the imagination, which pertains to images and perceptions that shape one's sense of self and relationship with the world. Lacan would further assert that language is employed to establish a symbolic order. In his view, the "Real" aspect of the iPhone 14 would encompass its physical characteristics, such as size, weight, and battery life. In contrast, the "Symbolic" aspect would involve Apple's brand identity, such as its association with innovation and luxury. The "Imaginary" aspect would encompass the emotional effects of using the phone to connect with others, providing pleasure and satisfaction.

Žižek, on the other hand, might contend that the newly introduced phone offers a superficial satisfaction without any genuine novelty or meaningful change despite being presented as a novel. He would argue that advertising exploits our unconscious desires and fantasies, transforming them into a means of profit for the company. Žižek would assert that advertising engages in ideological manipulation through stimulating lifestyle imagery, distracting society from more pressing social and political issues.

In summary, these six perspectives collectively adopt a critical approach to examining the operation of power, ideology, and culture in society through the lens of a phone advertisement. While Lacan and Freud primarily focus on the fundamental psychological dynamics underlying product marketing, Žižek and Marx extend their

analysis to encompass broader social and economic ramifications of consumerism and materialism. Hegel provides a comprehensive framework, concentrating on cultural and historical trends.

Let us further explore our fictional scenario by assuming the involvement of Lacan and Žižek, two sextet members, in the design of an air fryer. Lacan's approach to designing an air fryer would likely be influenced by his theories concerning the interplay between desire, ego, and self. Depending on his perspective, Lacan would emphasize the symbolic and imaginary aspects of the air fryer, considering how it can fulfill consumers' desires and reflect specific images or personalities. Regarding the concept of the Real, which represents the raw and unmediated experience of the world beyond language and representation, the Real in the context of an air fryer would pertain to its physical and material attributes that exist independently of human interpretation or meaning. This would entail considering factors such as weight, shape, and texture during the design process to ensure safety, comfort, and usability. The symbolic aspect, encompassing language, culture, and meaning, would also be significant in evaluating the air fryer, considering its cultural and social connotations, such as status or identity.

Furthermore, according to Lacan, the Imaginary refers to the realm of subjective experience, fantasy, and desire, highlighting emotional and psychological elements such as the pleasure or desire that the product would evoke in its users. Thus, the value of an air fryer could extend beyond its physical or symbolic attributes and encompass its capacity to facilitate connectedness and social approval. In essence, the design of an air fryer could enhance users' sense of self and reinforce their desires, or it could challenge their assumptions and disrupt their expectations, prompting deeper reflection and self-examination. Given Lacanian theory's emphasis on the role of the unconscious in shaping desires and subjective experiences, his approach to design would revolve around creating products that tap into users' unconscious desires and establish a profound resonance. Consequently, it is necessary to design an air fryer that prioritizes clear and effective communication, employing symbols and language in creative ways to generate new meanings and associations.

Žižek would likely be influenced by his critique of consumer capitalism and advocacy for radical social change. His approach to designing the new air fryer would critically examine the contradictions and tensions inherent in the more extensive capitalist system responsible for its production. It would involve scrutinizing the dominant ideology of consumption and striving to subvert and challenge the norms associated with capitalist production and consumption. The design should prioritize collective well-being over individual profit, challenging the dominant logic governing capitalist production and consumption. Additionally, the air fryer should cater to the needs of marginalized communities and promote sustainability and environmental justice. Žižek's design approach could be provocative, deliberately challenging conventional aesthetics and functionality, compelling consumers to confront their assumptions and preconceptions. In this way, the design of the air fryer could become a potent tool for political activism, directly challenging political regimes and structures or mobilizing consumers to address pressing issues such as climate change or social justice. His proposed design criteria could include environmentally friendly materials, low energy consumption, sustainability, accessibility, public interest, healthy eating, challenging the dominant narrative of fast-food culture, and creating a design that subverts traditional aesthetics and questions prevailing consumerist norms.

Marx would align himself with Žižek's perspective, demanding that the air fryer be produced and distributed in an egalitarian and fair manner, ensuring equitable treatment for all workers involved in its production. On the other hand, Freud would argue that the emphasis should be on a product that stimulates and satisfies the user's primitive desires and senses related to food and pleasure. Hegel would advocate instilling a particular spirit or ethos that reflects the cultural values of its users, creating a fryer that fosters a sense of community and collective identity rather than reinforcing individualism and competition.

Lacan's theories on desire hold significant relevance in industrial design for ethical considerations within the field. The centrality of desire in human experience underscores its critical role in both the design and consumption of products. However, designers have the potential to exploit desire in unethical ways, mainly through emotional manipulation aimed at instilling a sense of longing, privilege, or social validation. This manipulation occurs as products are intentionally crafted to elicit and shape desire.

Moreover, when design manipulation aligns with the cultural norms and values associated with products, there is a risk of reinforcing stereotypes and perpetuating harmful social norms, such as social inequalities. This occurs as a gap is created between those who can afford and participate in the desired lifestyle promoted by the product and those who cannot. Design rooted in desire-based manipulation can reshape or reinforce cultural norms and values, thereby influencing the formation of one's personality through product consumption. When design is solely driven by desire and focuses on products that tantalize and provoke desire, it can result in an endless consumption cycle and a culture of materialism. This cycle emerges from the frustration and dissatisfaction experienced in the long run, leading to negative consequences for individuals and their surrounding environment. While generating desire can be a powerful tool for driving consumption and market demand, if not thoughtfully considered, it can lead to cyclical dissatisfaction, a potentially illusory sense of happiness and fulfillment rooted solely in material possessions, impulsive and unnecessary purchases, and the exploitation of vulnerabilities. Design that fixates on superficial qualities such as appearance, status, and fashionability risks fostering a shallow sense of self-worth.

As design justifies itself based on imperfections, it becomes crucial for consumers, as framed by Lacan and Žižek, to be aware of these inherent flaws and to strive for more sustainable, ethical, and inclusive approaches to design and consumption. Prioritizing long-term value should be at the forefront of such endeavors.

6.   Position of Design in Neoliberalism and Conclusion

In his seventeenth seminar, Lacan introduced the concept of the four discourses, namely the Master, University, Hysteric, and Analyst discourses, which he perceived as frameworks for structuring the social bond (Lacan, 1991b). The inherent historical dimension within these discourses necessitated the subsequent introduction of a fifth discourse, the capitalist discourse, which Lacan highlighted as markedly distinct from the original four. In this context, Lacan pointed out how industrial objects inundated society, often as "pseudo, pleasure-enhanced mass commodities" (Lacan, 1991b, pp. 92-93).

Central to Lacan's critique of capitalism was the perception that the capitalist discourse was founded upon the signifying petit a object of commercial consumption, presented as essential for the subject. In this configuration, capitalism assumed the role of the new Master, wherein consumer society invested in commercial objects with the promise of surplus pleasure. This construction hinged on the concept of surplus

jouissance, wherein the capitalist discourse, like the other discourses, intertwined discourse with the experience of jouissance—where pleasure gives way to discontent—to fulfill obligatory directives for pleasure.

Nonetheless, the capitalist discourse was fundamentally an offshoot of the Master discourse, albeit with critical distinctions. In the Master discourse, the agent (S1) communicates (→) with the Other (S2), yielding a product (a) as a result. The agent's motivation in addressing the Other is driven by a concealed and repressed truth ($), which, regardless of intentions, remains elusive, and the true impetus behind the discourse lies in this repressed truth. In this discourse, the Other lacks access to the motivating truth, and no direct (//) connection exists between the visible product and the truth. For instance, when a mother (S1) instructs her child (S2) to study, she may consciously assert that she seeks her child's success (a) with no ulterior motive. However, hidden beneath this intention, there may be a desire for success ($) to outshine other parents, to vindicate a repressed thought, or to prove oneself to one's parents.

Conversely, in the capitalist discourse, truth becomes readily accessible, eliminating the need for an arrow at the upper edge to facilitate the agent-other relationship. Within this framework, the subject assumes the agent's role, endowed with the capacity for self-direction. The subject can confront the truth directly and possesses unmediated access to the petit a object. In cases where the petit a object exists, there is jouissance and surplus jouissance. Unlike the other four discourses, where the object of desire remains unattainable, the capitalist discourse presents itself as a system promising completeness, devoid of incompleteness. By rendering truth visible, this characteristic of the capitalist discourse encourages the consumption of commercial objects, conceived to satiate desires and the subject's indulgence in the cultural norms of consumer society, anchored in the illusion of abundance.

Another noteworthy aspect of this discourse is that deviant actions outside established patterns bear the risk of poverty and suffering. Capitalism offers swift solutions to discontented, suffering, restless, and fragmented subjects through tangible brands: "Buy this and alleviate your woes!" Consequently, subjects are presented with mother/master signifiers to identify with, and the resolution of the subject's fragmentation is attempted by asserting that desires are attainable. However, the promised miraculous product remains elusive and unattainable, leading to guilt when expectations go unmet.

The neoliberal revolution, initially shaped by intellectuals like British economist Friedrich Hayek and American economist Milton Friedman, gained institutionalization in the latter half of the 20th century, notably during the tenures of Reagan and Thatcher. This phenomenon transcends mere economic doctrine, encompassing micro-level elements such as individualism and private property and macro-level dimensions like globalization, extending beyond the confines of capitalism and enabling its expansion. Despite the exploitation and manipulation of desire inherent to neoliberalism, its resilience lies in its capacity to construct a fantasy narrative, positioning the free market as the coveted object of desire. This narrative imparts purpose to the subject by presenting an aspirational object of desire while explaining its temporary unattainability and outlining the steps required for eventual fulfillment (Maher, 2023).

Neoliberalism also standardizes and economizes the fantasy narrative. Globalization leads to uniformity in individuals, tastes, and ideals, allowing the same narrative to transcend national boundaries, independent of societies. Consequently, the truth-promoting advertisements of global corporations can be broadcast worldwide, triggering identical desires, sometimes without translation. This explains why a Mercedes

is desired similarly in Argentina and China and why an individual from Turkey can engage with "How I Met Your Mother" cast at MacLaren's Pub, thousands of kilometers away, sharing laughter at the same jokes.

Design emerges as a critical tool in neoliberalism's construction of the fantasy narrative. Stern and Siegelbaum (2019) assert that design is not merely a response to neoliberalism but a pivotal factor in its formulation and execution. They argue that the prevalence of neoliberal practices in professional design and the goals of neo-liberalization are intertwined with design. New design methodologies, such as Design Thinking and User Experience (UX) design, represent the cutting edge of neoliberalism. Julier (2013) contends that design closely correlates with the social, economic, and political structures it operates within, with design culture evolving consciously within these conditions. For him, the ascendancy of design is a byproduct of neoliberalism, elucidating neoliberal social and economic processes. Thus, as long as neoliberalism persists, design will continue to serve its objectives and mediate its evolution to sustain its existence.

Neoliberalism's reliance on multifaceted and variable factors complicates precise predictions about its future. This ambiguity makes it challenging to ascertain the design trajectory within the neoliberal paradigm. However, one undeniable aspect is that as long as desire persists and the system repeatedly generates it, neoliberalism exploits and manipulates desire. The free market and increased competition ensure that desire remains alive and is presented as truth to ostensibly free-choosing subjects through natural, automatic, and self-generating actions, including economic unit activities aimed at asserting themselves under the guise of customer orientation, differentiation, and completeness.

Concerning the claim of customer orientation, differentiation, and completeness, it becomes evident that design has been endeavoring to align with this neoliberal template for a considerable duration. A complex relationship exists between neoliberalism and customer orientation predicated on individual freedom and initiative. Understanding and fulfilling the needs and demands of customers are regarded as pivotal for success in the competitive landscape. Many design practices, such as User-Centered Design, Design Thinking, and UX, enhance customer loyalty, expand market share, and secure long-term success. These methodologies place the customer/user at the center, emphasizing their needs and feedback. The crucial factor here is the authenticity of these needs. Suppose needs are manufactured independently of customers, and mass-produced products continue to be presented as necessities for the subject. In that case, design practices risk devolving into tools for superficial stylization aimed solely at increasing output and sales.

Moreover, changes in the roles attributed to designers are discernible. Designer roles increasingly evolve into connective roles, mediating between genuine user needs and those determined by capital, establishing a design network that links and balances the exchange of ideas and actors, including users, involved in the product development process (Güneş, 2021). As an advocate of a free-market economy, neoliberalism encourages individuals and businesses to compete and innovate, promising temporary rents secured through intellectual and industrial property rights as rewards for innovation. However, the disruptive nature of innovation penalizes those who lag, leading businesses to institutionalize innovation paradoxically. The innovation process poses challenges for businesses, designers, and users regarding production and monitoring.

Innovation, while promising completeness, devalues existing products and instills guilt in those who fail to keep pace with the new. The neoliberal system attempts to satisfy

the desire for completeness through images. Objects that the subject does not genuinely require are produced due to the subject's sense of lack. New objects manipulate and exploit this desire, offering transient fulfillment before being replaced by other objects. This approach, presented through objects of desire that provide the illusion of completeness but fail to satisfy upon acquisition, encompasses a meticulously designed communication language, texts, and subliminal messages.

Within this framework, which prioritizes the individual and disregards society, employing society only as a tool to manipulate the individual, and which leaves the future subject to market whims while pursuing unbridled economic growth, the activism efforts of design practices, both individual and societal, are open to scrutiny. This scrutiny arises due to the close association of design with elite structures and its integration into the system to create value. Notably, the system's faith in free markets does not grant designers the anticipated freedom in their actions and subject to their preferences.

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