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TOGETHER, YET APART: WORKING-CLASS YOUTH AND CELL PHONE USES

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Abstract

The uses of cell phone by 'girls' and 'boys' have been observed in order to understand how a subaltern condition is related to pre-reflexive dimensions of sexism and to ways of thinking about class condition itself. Our research methods consist of a combination of a survey, ethnographical observation within the school environment, and interviews in order to observe their interactions on Facebook During the fieldwork, in a public school in Santa Maria, a city in the southernmost state of Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil), we conducted interviews with 12 working-class youth [young men and women] from the ages of 15 to 24. One of the conclusions of our study is that economic status, low cultural capital and lack of participation in collective activities may be related to the individualized use of cell phones, which become a technology for both self-expression as well as for the expression of the restricted peer group. Opinions given in reference to gender issues are revealing of persistent sexist notions regarding women's and men's attributes, associating women to the private sphere while men are associated to the public.

Keywords: Cell phone, class, gender, youth

Resumen

Se observan los usos del teléfono móvil por jóvenes teniendo como objetivo un mejor entendimiento de la condición subalterna que está relacionada a las dimensiones pre-reflexivas del sexismo y a las maneras de pensar la condición de clase. La metodología de esta investigación mezcla la encuesta, la observación etnográfica en escuelas y la entrevista para describir las interacciones en Facebook. Durante la investigación de campo en una escuela secundaria perteneciente a la red pública de educación en Santa Maria, ciudad en el extremo sur de Brasil, se realizaron entrevistas con 12 jóvenes de la clase obrera con edades entre 15 y 24 años. Una de las conclusiones de esta investigación es que la condición económica, el poco capital cultural y la ausencia de participación en actividades colectivas, posiblemente, presentan una relación con el uso individualizado del celular, el cual se convierte en una tecnología expresiva del Yo y del grupo restricto de pares. Las percepciones manifestadas acerca de las cuestiones de género aparentan ser reveladoras de la persistencia de nociones sexistas acerca de atributos considerados típicamente masculinos o femeninos y de la asociación de la mujer a la ámbito privada y de los hombres a la ámbito pública.

Palabras-clave: teléfono móvil, clase, género, juventud

It is increasingly urgent to understand how current mobile technologies condition the experience and consciousness of youth who have been socialized within an audiovisual and multimedia culture (Martín-Barbero 2014; Livingstone 2002). In a country like Brazil, generational differences are felt all the more deeply in virtue of the deficiencies of the public school system and book-based literary culture (Oliveira 2012). This text contributes with reflections on the ways in which youth use cell phones at school as an attempt to define class and gender identities within a culture of convergence (Jenkins 2009; Orozco Gómez, 2014). There were two major reasons for focusing on the school context: the possibility to observe groups of youth in interaction as well as the conflict between school culture and new technologies (Oliveira 2012).

"Class" identity is not a reference to class consciousness but, rather, to feelings that emerge from being or coming together within a peer group inasmuch as the social capital of youth, which expands by means of using cell phones and social networks, does not usher them beyond the boundaries of their own social class. That is why we endorse the idea of isolation – that is, in other words, the idea of the isolation of the group in relation to other groups as well as to what members experience within a certain group itself.

A sense of belonging, as is noted here, is based on subjectivities, which in turn imply sharing individual and emotional aspects of private life and, at least, a vague notion of lifestyle. Isolation within the group, i.e. among peers, can be understood as the absence of social, political, and cultural cooperation which would lead to a more confessional, intimate type of sharing based on daily events, demonstrations of affection, photos, and festivities. Accordingly, one of the main reasons for that is a set of impediments to thinking in class terms.

Just as there are reasons for gay youth to manifest their discomfort with prejudice and girls with sexism, there are reasons for these youth to express resentment toward their subaltern condition. Yet, that does not happen because all their attention is focused on their participation within the sphere of consumption over training for their professional future.

Forms of self-presentation on cell phones and social networks raise the issue of false identities as the way one presents themselves may not reflect who they really are but, instead, may say much about who they would like to be. This research is, therefore, not solely based on what is said via social networks and text messages; it also includes the observation of youth behavior *in loco* and in face-to-face interviews in order for identity construction to be understood by means of answers given to questions regarding such construction, namely: who I am, who I say I am, who I want to be, what self I present to others, etc.

We use the notion of class to designate a subaltern social condition, expressed through economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capitals which come together to determine a way of life that is not limited to an internal logic of its own but depends on class and power relations. In tandem with the Marxist tradition, we argue that popular culture sustains certain autonomy *vis-à-vis* dominant culture and yet bears a relation to it and to its web of social and economic ties. Ways of being manifested in popular culture are thus shaped by living conditions.

One of our hypotheses is that the incessant search for connectivity through social networks and text messages represents an attempt to gain visibility in the face of inexpressive social and political conditions, such as high levels of unemployment, poor schools, lack of cultural policies toward youth, and so forth. The attachment that working class

youth have for their cell phones is thus related to their lack of social recognition for, as Sennett argues, the greater the social resentment that people harbor, the more a consumer object must mitigate such feelings (2012, p. 174).

Those issues are related to the role of the media in the practice-based construction of the social (Couldry 2012, p. 32) and, in this specific case, to representations circulating in popular music and videos as well as in what consumers/users create themselves by the use of technologies. Consumption (García Canclini, 1997) is defined as a process of appropriating goods in the symbolic disputes – through classification, distinction, and communication – around social class and gender in which subjectivity and social identities are defined. Young people's relationships to the media in general and to cell phones in particular are not taken to be exclusively determined by social practices and social structure but also by the specific characteristics of technologies. Communication technologies are seen as molding practices since, as many authors from the field of Communications have pointed out, they extend their reach of uses with the mobility that is characteristic of the digital era (Martín-Barbero 2010; García Canclini 2008; Scolari 2008). Furthermore, it is information technology itself that makes network society possible, which leads to the realization that, rather than asking how these technologies "impact the social", we must conceive of them as constitutive elements of the social fabric (Castells 1999, p. 50).

We examine gender issues as well in an attempt to understand how sexism is reproduced in representations of the use that boys and girls make of cell phones, that is, in a "pre-reflexive and subconscious dimension" (Mattos 2006, p.157) that is not connected to notions of gender equality. Young people (Abramo

2005) may express some consciousness of equal rights, as girls often do with regard to housework, yet, at the same time, consider women as a repository of affective and emotional virtues in contrast to men's rationality. That ends up influencing notions such as the one according to which women or girls are more concerned with the appearance of their cell phones than with their technical features. The young males we spoke to agree that men and women should receive equal pay for equal work, yet many of them go on to reproduce the division between men's monopoly over the public space and women's link to the private.

Our focus on multiple methodologies stems from the socio-cultural character of our research, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter (Denzin and Lincoln 1998, p. 3). In order to understand practices of cell phone use, we bring together Pierre Bourdieu's sociology (1984) and Martín Barbero's theory of mediations (1987) in an attempt to grasp the processes through which this technology is appropriated. Our study of cell phone use focuses on how it is adopted; on the personal, social, and cultural meanings it is assigned; as well as on how it becomes an effective instrument in the composition of a lifestyle. Such an approach does not overlook actors' intentions and conscious choices but recognizes that, given people's adjustment to their *habitus*, much of what is understood as someone's intentions is, in fact, the unconscious result of class conditions (Bourdieu 2009, p. 100).

The first phase of field research, which lasted for six months in the year of 2012, included ethnographic observation at a public school in the city of Santa Maria, in Brazil's southernmost state of Rio Grande Sul, where we worked with around 10 young people during class breaks and scheduled meetings. Later, we interviewed

12 working-class youth between the ages of 15 and 24[1], all of whom were high school students or graduates, in an attempt to explore issues of gender and class in greater depth. Some of the young men were in situations of social vulnerability due, in some cases, to sexual orientation and, in others, to involvement in illicit activities. Three were black, four were white and five were mixed-race. While we are not able to deal with race in all its complexity here, we follow sociologist's Paulo Sérgio Guimarães (2002) debate on race in Brazil so as to highlight that we are not of the view that Brazil is a racial democracy. One of the ways in which racial issues came up was in the admiration that black and mixed-race youth hold for funk music, samba, and for black performers and recording artists such as Beyoncé.

In addition to the aforementioned research strategies, we also applied a survey with 90 informants with the purpose of carrying out a more extensive mapping of cell phone use, meant to reach out to middle and upper-class youth who were not the target of our ethnographic research. That allowed us to draw some initial comparative considerations on social classes in an attempt to grasp the meanings that working-class youth give to their cell phones as well as the ways they use the devices. The following section will dwell on the uses and meanings given to cell phones in daily life, relating these to issues of class and gender. Later, the focus will be on the use of cell phones in the school environment.

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[1] All interviewees gave permission to share their answers. We have given them pseudonyms in order to protect their privacy

On the go while staying put: cell phones and everyday life

The parents of the 12 youth whom we interviewed have the following occupations: construction worker, construction worker's helper, house painter, small-business owner, military police officer, and gas station attendant. They live in poor neighborhoods on the outskirts of town and their major source of entertainment comes from using available media to talk to peers and hang out with friends. Based on how little they read and on their complaints about the poor quality of public schools, we could say that most of their cultural capital comes from mass media.

Of the 12 young people that we interviewed, four have personal computers at home and, for most of them, it is the cell phone that enables their participation in a culture of convergence. They pay R$15 *reais* (Brazilian Reals), the equivalent to some US$4 (US dollars), per month for mobile data, with which they access social networks, watch videos of their favorite bands on YouTube, as well as access Google and Wikipedia for schoolwork purposes. The cell phone thus provides them, quite literally, with freedom, modernity and speed in a way that is quite dramatic. It represents the mobility that they are otherwise denied to enjoy an array of cultural goods.

Among poor youth, we find Winocur's interesting conclusion applicable. The internet and cell phones are platforms that foment symbolic empowerment among youth in the face of a real lack of power within institutional spaces (2009, p. 23). Young people's power refers largely to their control over the only thing they can control: the self. As many Latin American authors have argued (*apud* Winocur 2009, p. 57), everything else is uncertain. Youth study more but there is less employment available; they are more skilled in their use of

technologies but do not have access to decision-making positions; their symbolic consumption is on the rise, unlike their access to material goods and services. Furthermore, the aforementioned expansion of symbolic consumption is very relative. In sole reference to Facebook, whose access statistics show use growing by leaps and bounds, all of the 40 most-shared links in 2011 came from six major media corporations[2].

One of the most fertile routes for the scrutiny of identities is that offered by Bauman when he suggests that, if, for an earlier 'society of producers', it was commodity fetishism that hid the human interaction underlying the movement of commodities within society, in today's society of consumers, it is the fetishism of subjectivity that obscures the commodification of symbols used in identity construction (2008, p. 22-23). We can expand on at least two consequences that this has for issues of class and gender. Regarding the former, consumer culture emphasizes a lifestyle based on what one is able to purchase rather than the position one occupies within a social hierarchy. Regarding the latter, much of what defines what it means to be a man or a woman today is based on the body – corporeality (Costa 2004, p. 203) – and on body standards that are publicized through the media. Although we are unable to develop these arguments at length here, it does become clear, through our discussion of research data, just how much an object of consumption like a cell phone can work as a symbol of status that is disconnected from class and linked to a particular way of

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[2] According to statistics from different sources (Parente 2011; Dias 2012; Veja 2014), Facebook had 800 million users in 2011, one billion in 2012 and 1.35 billion in 2014.

thinking about masculinity and femininity in terms of esthetic characteristics. Nonetheless, the importance of the category of social class as a parameter for understanding how youth use consumer goods to think about the class they belong to or even to compensate subaltern social position remains. As one of our informants said, people "might think I'm from a higher rung" based on the cell phone he possesses (Marcos, age 24).

In these liquid times, a cell phone that saves names and images of what we have seen or experienced is kept close to us as an element with which we build our sense of identity. For the young people who took part in our research, the strong appeal that the cell phone has for communicating with peers and for entertainment – games, videos, music – reveals the precariousness of their access to the goods of "high culture". The technologies that young people cherish the most are the computer, the cell phone, and the television. The prevalence of images and short phrases on Facebook indicates that content production is limited. As Sennett argues, access to social networks "show[s] what friends are up to, send out comments, yet this does not necessarily signify any deep involvement" (2012, p. 176).

Facebook or Orkut profiles reveal preoccupations with personal image and a concern not to expose one's intimacy or one's family. They are meant to exhibit "what people are" rather than "what they are not". Friends are cited as the most important reason for staying connected. Comments as well as shared or "liked" links focus mainly on personal ideas, idols, musicians and bands as well as on chats with friends and acquaintances. Posting photos to their profiles is one of the major activities that our informants engage in.

Our informants' favorite television shows are of different fiction genres, such as *telenovelas* (soap operas), which were

also cited by boys. Most of our respondents do not have access to cable television. When asked to name scenes in *telenovelas* or movies in which a character uses a cell phone, most of them referred to scenes from Brazilian *telenovelas*.

Furthermore, content production does not cover issues of a social or political character. There were two exceptions however. One was a boy who shared a link through Twitter (posted via cell phone); an article written by a journalist who urges parents to accept their gay sons. The other was a girl who posted the phrase "*mulher não é mercadoria*" ("women are not commodities") on Facebook. The interrelatedness of cell phones and other media was made evident through images of movie or TV actors, singers, and even cartoon characters.

The little that we know about the relationship between youth and cell phones suggests the intimate connection between device and body, or the use of the former as an extension of the latter. Technology is *added on* to attire, but, beyond the practical functions inherent to each, the phone maintains a symbolic function of distinction and communication. Keeping the cell phone close to the body may be related to its use as an emotional technology that connects users to feelings and emotions shared with friends and loved ones. The cell phone remains present in all of life's daily activities: sleeping, eating, commuting, going out, studying, showering, etc.

[...] I can't even imagine life without my cell phone! [Laughter] Because I have to talk with friends, send text messages... I have to be available all the time... I sleep with my cell phone under my pillow! [Laughter] I open my eyes in the morning and the first thing I grab is my phone… and I just can´t manage to turn it off! (Tânia, age 17)

I can't live without one. When I had to do without one, I almost went nuts! I couldn't go on Facebook, couldn't call my friends". (Eloá, age 17)

It means everything to me. I take it wherever I go. When I have it on me, life seems to flow normally. (Marcos, age 24)

I wake up and get on Facebook (via cell phone), have breakfast, talk on my phone, post something on Facebook. In the afternoon, I get back on Facebook. (Gustavo, age 16)

I always have it by my side. I can listen to my music. (João, age 15)

According to the majority of those we interviewed, the technological resources, the model and the design of the phone as well as the airtime plan that is chosen are elements of social distinction between rich and poor. A minority of respondents believe that credit availability tends to democratize what is available to different classes. Rich people's cell phones evoke modernity, global connection, and access to other means of communication. Some made negative comments about people whom they see as pretentious, going beyond their means to acquire a phone that doesn't correspond to their purchase power. Thus, they insinuate that people should make choices that are consonant with the reproduction of social hierarchies.

Specific results obtained while working with these youth that speak to issues of class, race, and gender within a culture of convergence indicate that the most frequent uses of the phone include text messages, music, and social networks, not necessarily in this order. Similar results were obtained from the youth who answered our questionnaire. Evidently, the multiple uses of the cell phone also include making calls, using the alarm, the calculator, and so on.

All of our informants express the desire for better handsets, especially models from the latest generation. The influence that advertising has over their choices is somewhat relative since most of them make their decisions based on price while still prioritizing internet access. They are well informed about the latest products, which they hear about from television or social networks. All of them possess basic web-surfing skills with the exception of one who also knows how to use spy programs to delete profiles from social networks or to block Messenger use.

Class and Gender

Young people's definition of who they are is intimately connected to what they consume, which includes their cell phones. They see social relations from the perspective of consumption: when they define who is rich or poor, for example, objects of consumption are what comes to the forefront. Although they mention work, they see earning money as something almost magical, whose immediate result is what people buy. They recognize that not everyone has the same opportunities, but disadvantages are always seen as resulting from unknown sources rather than as the cause behind the life situation of those who are poor – their lack of money, jobs, entertainment, education, and good schools. This negative image is compensated by watching television shows and movies as well as by listening to music since reality is overwhelmingly unwelcoming to be repeated during one's leisure time.

When asked about poverty in Brazil, about the way of life of different social classes and the disadvantages of the poor in relation to the rich, half of the interviewees saw poverty as the result of unwillingness to work and to study, emphasizing different access to consumer goods or to services such as education, trips, clothes, and parties. The other half are more conscious of political problems or to the way in which the poor are incorporated into the mode of production (politicians, infrastructure, and labor).

[...] I don't think that the poor are interested in studying, learning more, knowing more about things, discovering more. They sit around waiting for things to happen. (Ana, age 18)

[...] Some of them try to get work and don't have any luck, they haven't got much education, didn't have a chance to go to school, began working too early. (Ema, age 19)

Politicians waste too much money they could be using for infrastructure, for health, but they use it for buying cars, they spend it, they put it away on the Cayman Islands. (João, age 15)

Brazil has so many poor people because money is not distributed correctly; it's in the hands of few. (Eloá, age 17)

In further analyzing how youth speak of the poor, we note that eight of them signaled what they see as positive aspects of poor people's way of life, such as solidarity, parents' love for their children, devotion to work, moral rectitude, the ability to be happy, and humility – all while still emphasizing their scarce access to material goods. In that sense, class dispositions are reproduced everywhere, with little questioning, in ideas, for example, that poor people are loud when they talk on the phone, they swear a lot and speak where and when they shouldn't, whereas the rich are discrete.

Although we might disagree with the notion of the disciplined use of cell phones in public places, we are interested in discovering if there is any consciousness of the arbitrary character of what is considered appropriate and if dominant class dispositions are always considered correct. Only a minority of the university students who answered our survey questioned the fact that the dominant class is the one that establishes the parameters of what is considered sensible or polite, which is to say that impoliteness may as well occur in both classes.

Our survey revealed three types of responses to questions about the different uses of the cell phone among the rich and the poor: those related to distinction (28%); those related to the democratization of consumption (21%); and those related to the critique of distinction or inequality in the distribution of consumer goods (48%). There was a clear division between those who questioned distinction and inequality and all others. The latter made reference to the differences between the cell phone devices used by rich and poor people in terms of naturalized differences in cultural capital: individual choices, skills in using resources, and interest in information rather than entertainment (or vice versa). Thus, they believe in a democracy that is based on consumption.

Responses from qualitative interviews carried out with working-class youth repeat two of the three patterns that we found among university students: the notion of the democratization of consumer goods through credit and the idea of distinction. Other commentaries, rather than expressing critique, merely point to existing patterns of unequal distribution, singling out those goods that poor people are able or unable to purchase.

There are differences in the way boys and girls value their cell phones. While girls show concern for the current trends and place importance not only on the technological resources a device offers but also on its color, boys place greater emphasis on resources and prefer discrete colors. Girls also adorn their phones with stickers and protective covers and choose their wallpaper with care. Similarly to Dittmar's findings (*apud* Skog 2002, p. 256), our research shows how the cell phone is used to project a favorable self-image, express social status and make one's personal traits more visible.

Gender differences and their relation to the way technologies are used deserve further investigation and require more observation through fieldwork. The differences that we have noted refer to the ways in which boys and girls use their phones. This includes references to those who "talk more" or to esthetic considerations, although, as mentioned before, both boys and girls show interest in "modern", "up-to-date", attractive design. There is, thus, a myriad of repetitive clichés regarding gender: women are more careful with their cell phones, women are able to do several things at once, women are more concerned with appearances, women talk more than men, etc. The problem lies not in whether these ideas are true or false but, rather, in the fact that they reproduce gender differences created by women's subordinate social position, that is, the fact that women are relegated to the

role of one who exists "to be noticed" (Bourdieu 2003, 79), someone destined to look after their family.

> Girls prefer bright colors, like pink. And [their phones] have to attract attention, like with a flower on them or something. For us, any kind of cell phone will do, one that is loud enough for us to listen to music on is good enough. (Fábio, age 15)

> I think girls want a more delicate cell phone. Boys don't care more about the content. Girls do too but they also care about appearance. (Nívea, age 16)

> Boys have backgrounds in the applications menu; girls have all that prissy stuff. A personal touch that is really different. A [female] friend of mine has a bunch of different application patterns. All Betty Boop. (Carlo, age 18)

> Usually, women are more capable than men, in my opinion. Women do all kinds of different things throughout the day… like I said about my mom... Not men though. If a man goes to work, that's all he does, just that one thing. (Ana, age 18)

> [...] I don't think they care about a lot of different things. Women worry about running the household. [...] I think that mothers have more patience and fathers have less patience with their children. (Tânia, age 17)

> Maybe women pay more attention to detail than guys, they are more organized. (João, age 15)

Most of our informants say that their main contacts on Facebook and Orkut are friends, classmates, family members, and acquaintances. Gay youth are those who seem to keep the widest range of people in their network. This may be due to the specificities of their sexual orientation, perhaps more easily expressed online than in face-to-face interaction, especially in a medium-sized city where prejudice is experienced more harshly than in large metropolises.

We have also detected a correlation between gender representation and families: those whose fathers are engaged in family life, caring for children and taking part in housework, do not evoke gender differences because they experience equality within the household. Others either comment on how overburdened women are with the double work shift or merely go on to reproduce unequal family patterns. Although over half of the youth in our study take familial models of masculinity and femininity as their models, following the moral example established by their own parents, the rest claim that their families do not provide examples to be followed.

When we looked into the kinds of role models that people have through the media, the importance of television in shaping class, race, and gender patterns becomes evident. Informants mention talk show hosts who moved up from humble backgrounds, people who show esteem for the poor, white and black *telenovela* actresses, as well as black women who are recording artists. Models of masculinity are heterogeneous but include actors who are recognized for their artistic talent or their race; musicians, for their style; and

even former president Lula, in virtue of his trajectory.

Cell phones at school

Within the tradition of reception studies, texts, interpretations, and contexts are taken as important objects for our understanding of the symbolic meaning of media in everyday life (Livingstone 2008, 53). With regard to cell phone use, we prioritize the comprehension of the symbolic sense of practices themselves, that is, the way in which making calls, sending text messages, posting on social networks, and browsing the web assign meaning to class and gender identities. Working-class youth use their cell phones at school for entertainment, for self-expression on social networks and for schoolwork. The little time they dedicate to their studies, in comparison to the amount of time during which they use their cell phones for other purposes, might be detrimental for the acquisition of school-based cultural capital.

All of our informants report having been reprimanded for using their cell phones for sending text messages, listening to music, accessing social media, taking photos, etc. As schools are not able to keep cell phones out of the classroom, teachers' strategies are limited to asking kids to keep them off during class. Yet, this is very hard to enforce. Ethnographic observation within schools shows that teachers have an extremely hard time imposing any discipline when it comes to using cell phones in the classroom, a situation that is, in no way, limited to the milieu where our own research was carried out.

A minority of those we interviewed appreciate high culture. School is seen as a place to be with friends and teachers, and the legitimacy of books as a source of knowledge is, in itself, insufficient to encourage young people to read. None but one girl said she enjoyed studies and mentioned the school library. Her parents can be placed among those who take an active role in their children's education, whereas the majority of parents do not go beyond verbal acknowledgement of the importance of having an education, taking no concrete stance in this direction. Only three parents help their children with homework, establish study times, or take action when their children's grades plummet. Our informants nurture the dream of professional success but, when confronted with their chances of having a university education, most have doubts as to whether they would actually be able to do so, tending to blame themselves for insufficient devotion to their studies.

Conclusions

We agree with Winocur's (2009, 15)[3] discussion of working-class use of the internet and cell phones in that these technologies represent a symbolic scenario of new forms of "sociability and entertainment, a source of consolation, as well as both a real and illusory space where uncertainty can be controlled – a resource to sustain, maintain closeness and reinvent the presence of others". These findings are now highly consensual among a range of authors and, yet, we need to go beyond them in order to know how these facts are related to class, gender, ethnic, generational identities, and so forth.

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[3] Coming to a similar conclusion regarding intimate diaries on the web, Lemos (2002) believes that blogs represent a form of cohabitation through sharing the banality of daily life, escaping solitude. Oikawa (2012) sees greater versatility in blogs that go beyond the mere function of friendship and sharing the mundane and the everyday, to exercise a more creative and poetic form of writing which may attract a broader audience.

One of the conclusions of this study was that economic conditions, low levels of cultural capital and lack of participation in collective activities bear a correlation to individualized uses of the cell phone, which, in turn, becomes an instrument for self-expression and for establishing relationships within a restricted peer group. Youth lifestyle is based on emotional and personalist experience, thus contributing to a loss of consciousness of the place one occupies within social hierarchies. It is worth adding that consumer culture contributes to the dwindling symbolic importance of class, which, however, does not mean that the latter loses its importance in terms of being a determinant of how people live. For this very reason, consumer culture celebrates well-being, comfort, health, beauty, youth, balance, mobility, speed, freedom, difference, and equality as well as a series of other values that are less linked to struggles over power and distinction than to projects of the self, the constitution of personal, individual, psychological experience (Vicentin 2008, p. 98).

If class was once crucial in politically defining our way of life – and, in objective terms, continues to do so –, it is also true that, today, it has lost some of its symbolic grip. Furthermore, the greater one's involvement with media culture is, the greater the probability that class is neglected or minimized as a determinant of life conditions and the more consumption is likely to be perceived as taking its place instead. That is precisely what is currently going on in Brazil, with the rise of the working classes to a better condition within the realm of consumption being interpreted as a rise *into* the middle class. If, on the one hand, a greater focus on processes of the making of the self is inherent to youth as a stage in the life cycle, it is also a factor enabling them to circumvent their real lack of access to cultural and material goods. On the other hand, however, where economic capital is very low, anger toward what is seen as the difference in the lifestyles of different segments of capitalist society is exacerbated. Yet, when such feelings are coupled with low levels of cultural capital, anger turns into resentment rather than into articulated political action.

Finally, one of the most important aspects of the use of mobile technologies and the internet is, therefore, the production of the self as a sort of "trademark" that circulates through the conveyal of a self-image as an attempt to overcome the material conditions of life that are intrinsic to class and other objective attributes. Nonetheless, the material constraints which are normally experienced offline are not completely obliterated for class capitals still stand out in the use of such technologies.

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