ARTICLES

THE PUBLIC AND THE PRIVATE: TRAITS OF BRAZILIAN CULTURE AMONGST YOUNGSTERS

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses constitutive aspects of the Brazilian culture, particularly the issue of public versus private, based on an analysis of the relationships that youngsters from the popular classes establish with mobile phones. The empirical research, of an ethnographic nature, sought to achieve fine-grained descriptions based on observations carried out in high school classrooms at a state school located in the outskirts of the city of São Paulo. It has been concluded that the use of mobile phones by youngsters denote not only their tastes and lifestyles but also attitudes typical of the Brazilian culture associated to traits of our modernity and to characteristics of contemporary society that manifest themselves as practices of distinguishing individuals and of draining of meaning from public spaces.

CULTURE • CELL PHONES • YOUTH • ETHNOGRAPHY

O PÚBLICO E O PRIVADO: TRAÇOS DA CULTURA BRASILEIRA ENTRE OS JOVENS

RESUMO

O artigo problematiza aspectos constitutivos da cultura brasileira, em particular a questão do público/privado, a partir da análise das relações que os jovens das classes populares estabelecem com os aparelhos celulares. A pesquisa empírica, de natureza etnográfica, buscou realizar uma descrição densa a partir de observações realizadas em salas de aula do ensino médio de uma escola pública da periferia da cidade de São Paulo. Conclui-se que os usos dos celulares pelos jovens denotam não apenas seus gostos e estilos de vida como, também, posturas típicas da cultura brasileira relacionadas a traços de nossa modernidade e às características da sociedade contemporânea que se exteriorizam como práticas de distinção dos indivíduos e de esvaziamento de sentido do espaço público.

CULTURA • TELEFONES CELULARES • JUVENTUDE • ETNOGRAFIA

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SPHÈRE PUBLIQUE ET SPHÈRE PRIVÉE: TRAITS DE LA CULTURE BRÉSILIENNE PARMIS LES JEUNES

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article problématise certains aspects constitutifs de la culture brésilienne, en particulier la question du privé/public, à partir de l'analyse des rapports que les jeunes des classes populaires entretiennent avec les téléphones portables. Il s'agit d'une recherche empirique, de nature ethnographique, qui cherche à décrire cette question de la manière la plus complète possible à partir d'observations réalisées dans des classes d'un lycée public de la banlieue de São Paulo. La conclusion est que l'utilisation des téléphones portables chez les jeunes indique non seulement leurs goûts et styles de vie, mais aussi certaines postures typiques de la culture brésilienne liées à des traits de notre modernité et à des caractéristiques de la société contemporaine. Ces attitudes s'extériorisent comme pratiques de distinction entre individus et vident de sens l'espace public.

CULTURE • TÉLÉPHONES PORTABLES • JEUNESSE • ETHNOGRAPHIE

LO PÚBLICO Y LO PRIVADO: RASGOS DE LA CULTURA BRASILEÑA ENTRE LOS JÓVENES

RESUMEN

El artículo problematiza aspectos constitutivos de la cultura brasileña, en particular la cuestión de lo público / privado, a partir del análisis de las relaciones que los jóvenes de las clases populares establecen con los aparatos celulares. La investigación empírica, de naturaleza etnográfica, buscó realizar una descripción densa a partir de observaciones realizadas en aulas de la educación secundaria de una escuela pública de la periferia de la ciudad de São Paulo. Se concluye que los usos de los celulares por los jóvenes denotan no sólo sus gustos y estilos de vida, sino también posturas típicas de la cultura brasileña relacionadas a rasgos de nuestra modernidad y a las características de la sociedad contemporánea que se exteriorizan como prácticas de distinción de los individuos y de vaciamiento de sentido del espacio público.

CULTURA • TELÉFONO MÓVIL • JUVENTUD • ETNOGRAFIA

N HIS *TECHNIQUES OF THE BODY,* MARCEL MAUSS (1950-2003) SHOWS THAT CERTAIN cultural patterns incorporated by social agents express the particular way in which in each society men learn to make use of their bodies. The English child, whose origin could be suggested by the way she sits and conducts herself at the table, keeping her elbows tightly down and, when not eating, resting her hands on her knees, in contrast to the French child, whose elbows rest fan-like on the table, indicating the hold that traits of a culture keep on their members. Bourdieu and Saint-Martin (1976) speak of bodily *hexis* to refer to this idea, to the strength of culture and of class *habitus* – as cultural influences carved into the details of our gestures, speeches and attitudes, and which are also present in the way we related to objects.

In the present work, we endeavor to interpret certain aspects of Brazilian culture based on the relationships established by youngsters from the popular classes with mobile phones. In order to analyze their practices involving these pieces of technology, we have made use of methodological procedures from ethnography, conducting a fieldwork during the 2013 academic year in different spaces inside a secondary school in the outskirts of the city of São Paulo, here identified simply as School B.

We agree with Geertz (1973) that an ethnographic undertaking is not a mere technical question, such as the mapping of the field or the writing of a diary, but rather an intellectual effort from its practitioners in

search of a thick description. What Geertz (1973) exemplifies in his essay through the several meanings of the wink, contrasting the mechanical act of a nervous tic with that of someone winking at somebody else as a signal in a culture, as a "conspiratorial act" or even the imitation or rehearsal of winks, we can bring into our context and assert that similar attitudes, carried out by youngsters of listening to music in their mobile phones can refer to typical acts within a culture. To understand these actions of youngsters as symbolic actions consists in interpreting them under the clear notion that they are commentaries that go beyond themselves. Because they are not limited to the microculture to which they belong: rather, they have something to say about our own society, about the way we relate to each other and to the technologies.

We, therefore, try to understand the concept of culture in the way Geertz himself proposed, from an essentially semiotic point of view:

> Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. It is explication I am after, construing social expressions on their surface enigmatical. (1973, p. 5)

During the fieldwork we could see that mobile phones, in their materiality, often seem to work as extensions of the students' bodies, being held in a fixed way and following their various body gestures. In this sense, both in terms of their materiality and in terms of the practices associated to them, the use of these devices keeps a strong link with the social and cultural environment of their users, as well as with their consumer practices (SILVA, 2007). It is, therefore, a mobilizing element in the constitution of their ways of being, of living, and in the construction of the individuals' subjectivities. Through appropriation and reappropriation of technological artifacts produced in a globalized way, local cultures produce their own specificities, translated into different patterns of adoption and rules of use for these devices (NICOLACI-DA-COSTA, 2004).

The groundwork for the argument in Silva (2007) consists of the observations made during a study by Lasen (2005) in different European countries. These observations suggest, on the one hand, the existence of common traits regarding the use of mobile phones among the visited countries, which can be extended to the Brazilian reality. The students we followed seemed, in fact, to cling to their mobile phones from the moment they arrive at school to the moment they leave it. Their behavior displays, in this sense, the global mark of the use of these devices,

which consists in the fact that individuals are constantly holding them and displaying them, even when not using them while walking in the streets or in other public spaces such as parks and squares.

On the other hand, there are aspects that differentiate and particularize the form of utilization of these technologies, since local cultures permeate their uses and meanings, resulting in the observation that the traits that seem to characterize a given culture show themselves in the way individuals appropriate the possibilities of use offered by technological devices. For example, the English, as more reserved people, make far larger use of the silent mode in their devices than users in other European countries, such as Spain.

From these observations, we could inquire as to the way in which "Brazilian culture", understood as a symbolic context in which certain practices can be understood and acquire meaning, functions as a mediator in the production of a specific appropriation of mobile phones. What are the forms of use more typical in our cultural context that allow a larger dissemination of certain practices in detriment of others? To work on these traits, we start from an example included in our field observations whose scenario is a close reminder of a typical aspect of our cultural traces.

> *At the beginning of the class, the teacher makes a comment about a student that "seems to be in his own office". The student sits at the back of the classroom with his mobile against his ear talking to somebody. The teacher, starting the class, asks for the student's collaboration. The student answers by waving his hand, telling the teacher to wait.* (RA-11, 12th grade X)

In this excerpt, everything happens as if the teacher, by deciding to start the class at that moment, has chosen to interfere with the student's conversation on his phone. The importance of the student's private affairs seems to trump the collective interest in a space that is public. Not an isolated case, mobile phone calls made inside a secondary education classroom of School B show how these devices tend to reconfigure the limits between the public and private dimensions on a daily basis. Our contemporary experience amidst technological devices shows that the borders between the public and private spheres are more and more blurred, taking on new meanings. We should not, nevertheless, based on this observation alone, adopt as an assumption that the permeability of the public-private border in Brazil is exclusively due to the widespread use of mobile phones. These devices only reveal certain values and practices that became generalized in other spheres of society.

A HISTORICAL-CULTURAL ANALYSIS

To undertake a historical analysis implies, to begin with, avoiding the use of certain categories and divisions that were created to think about other sociocultural contexts, seeking support from authors that deal with what is specific to the Brazilian daily life. In this way, we can better understand the meaning that certain practices (such as talking loudly on the mobile phone or listening to loud music in public) acquire in the web of symbols that shapes our culture. One of the central aspects of this experience lies in the fact that a clear distinction between the public and private spheres, with clear-cut boundaries, was never even constituted in our country. The successive experiences witnessed during the fieldwork denote this undifferentiation, that can be attributed to the incomplete nature of the "Brazilian style" modernity, as noted by José de Souza Martins (2008). In the fieldwork, it was possible to register behaviors that denoted these values, as in the following excerpt.

> *"Lower your voice, R", asks a colleague, and the student promptly answers: "I can talk, it's no one's business". Her colleague replies: "It's like you're talking to the other room!"*
> *The music that R listens to while she practically hollers at her colleague sitting not far from her is not restricted to her earphones. During the minutes in which the classroom is silent, she seems engrossed by the beat that insists to remain audible. At times, she shares the lyrics with the rest of the class.* (RA-15, 10th grade X)

During the process of research, many classes were very noisy. The conversations, even when dealing with private subjects, such as sexual experiences, girlfriends, and boyfriends, were conducted in quite a loud volume. There were several episodes in which boys and girls sitting at opposite corners of the classroom talking to each other.

Tiramonti and Minteguiaga (2010) interpret, in the Argentinian case, the actions of youngsters in public spaces based on the circulation of the groups through different social spaces. While middle-class and high-class people frequent several "institutionalized" spaces, such as clubs, cultural centers, churches and gyms, youngsters from less favored social classes move from the private space of their homes to public spaces such as the borough, the square, the close or the street, so that a good part of their lives takes place in spaces that the authors characterized as "deregulated spaces", where control mechanisms are feeble, since they are less regulated by institutions. Depending on the institutional contexts they experience, youngsters reinvent the school culture in which they are immersed, particularly when empowered by the available technological resources. Nevertheless, the explanation is not restricted to this association because, after all, how can we explain

that youngsters from the middle classes, although reverberating different musical styles, also play very loud music when they drive their cars around the streets or enjoy leisure areas, such as beaches?

The noise or the buzz during classes says nothing about the students' level of learning but certainly denotes that, if family culture transmits certain models of behavior, students reproduce in other contexts the forms of being and acting they learned there. Martins (2008) says that the difference between street and home, as dimensions of the public and the private, is of a very subtle nature in our culture. According to this sociologist, there is "a certain lack of concern with decorum" in this undifferentiation that leads people to behave in public as if they were at home, which "constitutes a strong indication of the precariousness of private life among us" (MARTINS, 2008, p. 87). Such behavior, widely disseminated among youngsters, was also analyzed by Silva (2012, p. 69) in the urban context of Florianópolis.

> The practice of listening to mobile phones without using earphones seems to be gaining strength among Brazilian youngsters [...] there are even disputes among boys and youngsters inside buses and subway cars to see who plays louder. The musical genres most frequently played are, in this order, funk, hip-hop, *pagode*[1], rock, and *sertanejo*[2].

It is therefore important to emphasize that such problems are not restricted to the space of the classroom, but depict aspects of our society as a whole. We can see similar practices taking place in other public spaces, which is demonstrated by the fact that there is an increasing number of places in which certain uses of mobile phones have been forbidden.[3] Embarrassing situations involving the use of sound systems in public transportation are common, and reports appear in the testimonies of one of the students during a focus group conducted for this research.

> *F: What are earphones for? I mean, I once got into a bus and there was a guy there, he was listening to funk. "Don't you have earphones?", "I do, but I left at home". "Not a problem, here's mine, but keep it down, you're bothering everybody in the bus". Then everybody goes "Yeaaah!".*
> *W: Man, like, the bus is already horrible.*
> *F: Yeah, jampacked.*
> *W: Can we at least let people read a bit?* (GF)

1
A popular variety of samba.

2
A Brazilian version of country music.

3
In the city of Campinas, the use of sound systems in city buses has been recently forbidden by a law (mainly due to practices involving mobile phones), which prescribes even the use of "police force" to ensure that it is enforced (MARCHEZI, 2012).

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Public transportation authorities in the city of São Paulo have developed recurring campaigns that aim at alerting users to improper uses of sound devices, as can be seen in the posters reproduced below.

FIGURE 1
SP TRANS CAMPAIGN 2013
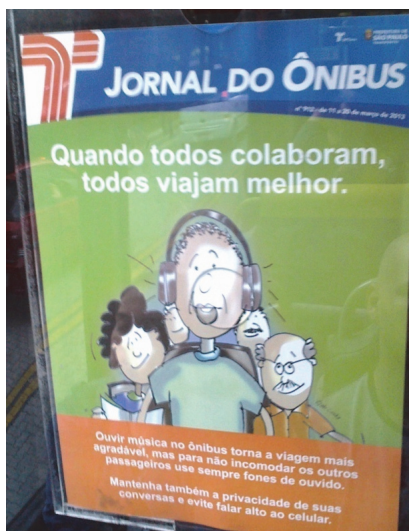
The writing says: "When everybody collaborates, everybody travels better."

FIGURE 2
SP-METRO CAMPAIGN 2013

The writing says: "The best music is the one you choose.
Use earphones and keep the volume down. Spread respect."

The historical analysis of the production of our cultural traits is the fundamental basis for understanding our contemporary attitudes. This need to think Brazilian reality harks back to the Iberian matrix of our colonization, bringing with it the specific trait of personalism. Based on an "adventurous *ethos*" and not on a "work *ethos*", Brazilian

colonization was based on values that emphasized personal relations and the cult of personality, electing the private and not the public as its main arena. From the start given to the initiative of private citizens, colonization had as its hallmark the centrality of personal links, in which the "private" is not constituted by the individual in opposition to the "public", but rather, the limits of these frontiers acquire a much more fluid nature than in countries of the old world (SCHWARCZ, 2008).

Schwarcz (2008) points out that to authors such as Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, the impersonal liberalism was characterized in Brazil just as a "misunderstanding", as a "groundless talk". In a land in which there was a predisposition to rule and little will to obey, there was also, as observed by the author, little regard for social institutions, as well as a "distorted way" to deal with them, which resulted in their fragility and in weak social cohesion. The cultural trait that issued from this historical process is condensed in the idea of the "cordial man" as put by Holanda (1999) in an effort to outline a characteristic trait of the Brazilian population. Cordiality – epitomized in the hospitality and generosity attributed to the Brazilian nature by foreigners – appears as a form contrary to politeness emerged against the ritualism that rules social life. As a form of sociability grounded in the centrality of personal ties, cordiality became a trait that hindered our access to modernity, and whose unfolding is reflected in the character of incompleteness that constitutes us. The idea of the cordial man, opposed to the distance of interpersonal relationships, brought us difficulties to deal with questions of citizenship and also with more general and abstract political issues. Such remnants of the patriarchal milieu – whose mentality is oblivious to the requirements of a society of "free men" and to the equality of rights – are at the basis of the difficulty to understand the distinction between public and private in Brazil.

In fact, a clear distinction between these two spheres of sociability was never established among us. In the specific context of the school, many situations illustrate this undifferentiation, and practices of disturbance become frequent because they are part of a symbolic context in which the demarcation of boundaries has not established itself as mediation in the behavior of people. In terms of sociability in the public spaces at school, the more recurring practices of disturbance are those related to talking on the mobile phone inside the classrooms, and to the use of those devices to play music. The playing of sound through mobile phones, either through earphones or loudspeakers, is also widespread. The analysis of this generalization points to a close relationship with those general traits of Brazilian culture.

The practice mentioned by Silva (2012) regarding the challenges between youngsters in the middle of public transportation in the city of Florianópolis had its correlate in the fieldwork of this research,

particularly during class intervals, where the plurality of sound devices producing music created a context described by one of the teachers as the "war of the mobile phones". However, it is important to emphasize that, despite this trait being general in terms of its permeability, which refers to central aspects of our culture, the various sound-producing practices at school acquire a particular meaning that cannot be dissociated from a symbolic action.

Even if it constitutes a disturbing factor when carried out during classes, the sound-producing use of mobile phones is not always intended by the student as a disruption of the class. Let us take as an example the following situation, felt as embarrassing in a class of the 1st year Y, in which one could hear a song being played – *Vaaaaaai… Vaaaaai*[4]… – in a funk style and shrieking voice. The student using the mobile phone had trouble inserting the earphone jack into the mobile phone, which allowed the sound to be played through the loudspeaker. We also witnessed an attitude of alienation from the students through the use of earphones during sociology classes.

> *The student F, sitting in the back of the classroom, asks in a loud voice: "Teacher, can I keep the earphone inside a classroom?" He replies negatively. "Just asking", said the student. The teacher did not notice that the student was dropping a hint. "He is not even seeing the thing", says a boy in the classroom, reinforcing the criticism.*
>
> *While most students use discrete earphones (earbuds or intra-auricular) in neutral colors and discreetly coming out of their clothing, placed in such a way as to be difficult to visualize, a particular student sitting in front of me, the same one that once said that "he did not care about what other people think", sports a supra-curricular earphone (similar to those used by DJs) in a bright red that stands out from the rest of his clothes. Scolded by the teacher, the student puts the headset away but keeps it on his desk, connected to the mobile phone, which is smaller than the headset itself. "You're not doing the activity?", asks the teacher. The student says that his hand hurts and that his colleague will copy the text for him. The teacher comments that he is a lazybones.* (RA-14, 12th grade Z)

On a different occasion, this time letting the sound flow free, one of the students, also oblivious to the class, now an English class, let some music playing quietly while he checked something in his mobile phone – an attitude similar to those of the students that make use of their phones while leaving them playing music at a higher volume, a common practice that allows others to listen to the music without

4 Meaning "Go! Go!".

their earphones; or, as seen often, as a flouting of the institutional order represented by the teacher and by the school.[5] After a while, he turned it off without any attitude from the teacher. With respect to defiance to order, it is important to note that these practices appear more frequently in the observations conducted in some classrooms and specific disciplines. In the mathematics class of the 3rd year of secondary education, for example, there was an occasion in which one of the most participative students began to sing the lyrics of a rap song along with the music played in his mobile phone, right in front of one of his teachers, while the latter asked him repeatedly to turn it off. The student only interrupted the music when the bell rang, and his colleagues left the classroom for break time. This is a clear example in which the same physical attitude – the reproduction of music through the loudspeakers of the mobile phones – constitutes different actions. The action is not to be reduced to the physical attitude; it adds to the interpretation of the meaning of the agent and of those with whom he interacts (ERICKSON, 1989). Therefore, the playing of loud music by students within the classrooms may have as a function to provoke, to differentiate oneself from the others, or even to escape from those spaces.

In the same way that the existence of laws does not determine the conduct and actions of individuals – something that becomes clear in the case of the law forbidding the use of mobile phones in schools, which failed to eliminate these devices from the school space –, culture should not be conceived as a power to which certain social happenings or individual behaviors could be attributed, but as a context in which social happenings, behaviors, social institutions, and processes can be described in an intelligible manner (GEERTZ, 1973). As a symbolic context, Brazilian culture does not make individuals act in a certain way; it propitiates, in its specificity, to certain forms of interpretation of the meaning by the agents, making certain practices appear more often than others. The flouting of the rules would be more than mere disobedience of external impositions. Individuals are not identically socialized automata that act according to learned routines, but people that act together and find meaning in objects and actions, giving life, in a specific and situated form, to cultural rules or patterns they create through their practices (ERICKSON, 1989). Hence the room for the plurality of meanings produced in our daily actions.

The practices by youngsters described above are not restricted to the local geographic context in which the fieldwork took place. In other schools of the outskirts of São Paulo, Pereira (2010) witnessed similar situations. There are also, as mentioned above, examples of sound-producing uses of mobile phones by Florianópolis youngsters in the ethnographic studies carried out by Silva (2012). In one of her reports, the

5
A fact observed also by Pereira (2010).

author states that one of the teachers even allowed students to listen to their mobile phones inside the classroom, under the condition that they were "light" songs, and not "thugs' music" (SILVA, 2012). On the other hand, despite acquiring particular meanings when brought into the school context, we believe that, in order to interpret this dissemination and generalization of practices based on the public exhibition of music in several areas of the Brazilian territory, it is important to keep in mind the specificity of the Brazilian cultural context, in which the distinction between the public and the private is almost non-existent, as seen above.

Such cultural context is historically marked by its duality, where the demands of impersonality mingle with those of personal treatment. Da Matta (1997) points out that our society displays a basic distinction between individual and person, making correspond to each of these categories a specific way of conceiving the social universe that serves as a guide to our actions. The image of various individuals that together seek to relate to each other through "laws fixed and equal to all" has no place in our society. Under this impersonal vein that constitutes citizenship, the notion of person is responsible for accomplishing several successive cuts into a hierarchical structure, like a mask of relationships superposed on the individuals, thereby transforming them into social beings. This last category consists of an essential mediation through which individual and society relate to each other in Brazil. As Da Matta (1997) observes,

> In the case of general laws and repression, we have always followed the bureaucratic code or the impersonal and universalizing, egalitarian vein of the system. But, in the case of concrete situations, those that "life" presents us with, we always follow the code of relationships and of personal morality, converting the vein of the "*jeitinho*[6]", of "*malandragem*[7]" and of solidarity into our axis of action. In the 1st choice, our unit is the individual; in the second, the person. The person deserves solidarity and a differentiated treatment. The individual, on the contrary, is the subject of the law, the abstract focal point for whom rules and repression were created. (p. 218)

To that anthropologist, several expressions would denote the contempt for the individual in the Brazilian society (DAMATTA, 1997). In this sense, an interesting example brought by him is the police use of the term "individual", which in this context is synonymous with complete anonymity. The system of laws culturally produced in Brazil seems like an imprisonment of the masses who, although following it, know that there are people who, by virtue of their personal relationships, do not "need" to observe general laws. Our distrust of, and distancing from,

[6] A phrase that can be roughly translated as the "Brazilian knack".

[7] A phrase that can be roughly translated as "rascality".

laws also follow from the degree of abstraction with which these laws are constructed, as the author notes: "because we have laws that are in general drastic and impossible to be rigorously followed, we end up not following the law at all" (DAMATTA, 1997, p. 237). The use of the "*jeitinho*" and of the "do you know who you are talking to?" end up engendering the phenomenon of the "total distrust of universalizing rules and decrees" (DAMATTA, 1997, p. 237-238).

Along these lines, let us take the example of an assistant teacher who answers his mobile phone and begins to converse inside the classroom. When a student remarks that the "law (forbidding the use of mobile phones) is for everyone", he responds with a smile. As Barbosa (1992, p. 75) puts it, the "*jeitinho*" is associated simultaneously to our cordial, sympathetic, rascal side, and to our facet as a country that is not serious, that is incompetent and underdeveloped, that prefers talking to fighting, conciliation to dispute". Although the "*jeitinho*" starts from an assumption of equality between peers (since we share in certain national and cultural identity), it has as its result the production of inequality, because its results are "personal", because everything depends on the position in which the agents/subjects find themselves within the interpersonal web of relationships that filter the dynamics of the legal sphere. This makes it clear that, in our daily practices, the distrust and ambiguity that characterize our relationship with the legal sphere are reproduced. It is not surprising that we are incapable of resolving through "legal measures" practical questions such as the use of mobile phones in the classrooms.

A cartoon from the *Turma da Mônica* (Monica's Gang) illustrates well this situation of public sound exhibitions with mobile phones:

FIGURE 3

Source: Sousa (2011, p. 17).

[The writing says: "You should know that my cell phone hasn't got just little games! It also plays music".

"And I will poke you wherever I go!!" I love it!!]

The depiction of a situation like this in the *Turma da Mônica* comic strip shows that such sound-producing practices are disseminated throughout Brazilian society, including children and preadolescents (the target audience of these comics), being part of the symbolic repertoire explored by the cultural production. Thus, the practices we witnessed and recorded in our fieldwork are not restricted to the specific environment of the classrooms and refer us in symbolic terms to other dimensions of our society. Another argument that tends to reinforce such reading through the cultural nature of similar practices that take place both within and without the classroom is the fact that in the survey carried out by Thomas and Bolton (2012), music played in the classroom does not appear among the concerns of North American teachers. Let us take the description of an observation carried out at School B to give us an idea of the amplitude of dissemination of this practice:

> On that day, I changed the place from which I conduct my observations: I set at the first desk on the row against the wall, next to the door – the only access to the classroom. At first, it did not seem as a good place from which to make observations, since the continual movement of students in the corridor outside seemed to distract me from what was occurring inside the classroom. While I write down my notes, some students are circulating along the corridors with their mobile phones play music through their loudspeakers. I can also hear the beat of the funk (although the lyrics of the song are indiscernible) being executed in the school courtyard.
>
> When passing by me, the teacher makes a comment about mobile phones in the courtyard. I say that the noise distracts me. I talk about the experience in the school where I work, in which we have a student radio during break time. She says that they also used to have one at School B, but only during the morning shift. "During the break times in the evening shifts", she says, "you can't even hear them talking; it's a "war of cell phones". The radio could be a way to prevent that", she says. (RA-9, 10th grade Y)

The excerpt above allows us to see how, within the school context observed, such practices are not restricted to the inside of classrooms but are also displayed in other spaces of the school. This sound-producing practice was quite widespread at School B, and disseminated throughout its spaces, from the streets that take students to the school, to sometimes the interior of the classrooms. More frequently, they took place in the school courtyard, a place where a higher dimension of abstraction from personalities occurs because of a higher concentration of people.

To Martins (2008), Brazilian modernity developed incompletely due to the fact that it was restricted and that it was established in the plane of appearances, and not of life and being itself. In this way, there is among us a pressing need for showing off and seem modern, even when social relations still reflect non-modern aspects. We, therefore, carry the remnants of our colonial origin and of the rural and patriarchal society formed here, traits that give us shape and prevent public space, in its various facets, to appear with the impersonality and decorum taken as the forms of hegemonic sociability in the interpretation of social agents.

If historically we produced a "personification of the public space" (SCHWARCZ, 2008), it becomes difficult to respect general and abstract principles as those contained in the laws. This difficulty happens especially because one often deals with inapplicable laws within a practical dimension of daily life. The centrality of the category of person in our cultural context deepens the distrust with respect to the effectiveness of legal determinations since a web of personal relationships works as a mediation in forms of relations that should be oriented by an impersonal treatment. For all these factors, the lack of distinction between the public and private spheres was constituted as an essential trait of our culture and life in society.

MOBILE ETIQUETTES

A cultural context constituted in such way stimulates the dissemination of practices that raise conflicts due to the use of mobile phones in public since the public space is seen by agents as open and suggestive of an infinity of uses that eventually will disturb others. It is in this sense that we must understand the permeability shown by classrooms to practices of disturbance taking place in them.

This aspect of daily life, which denotes a trait of our culture, was also investigated in a 2012 study by Intel, comparing habits of people from several countries regarding the use of mobile phones and the sharing of information. According to this research, 95% of Brazilians declared that they "would like people to show more decorum in the use of their mobile devices in public" (UOL, 2012). In the study, the Brazilians appear as those "who more frequently listen to loud music from cell phones in public" (UOL, 2012). Such practice is considered, generally speaking, as irritating by 62% of the interviewees and, if only adults older than 55 are considered, it bothers 72% of those who answered the questions. Other practices that also displease the interviewees are speaking on the phone very loudly (irritates around 59% of interviewees) and watching inadequate contents (irritates around 49% of interviewees) – practices that refer to the way in which Brazilians use their mobile phones in public.[8]

8
For other statistical data on this theme, see Salatino and Bueno (2015).

The widespread use of mobile phones in several social spaces, where youngsters carry with them the various practices that exist potentially in their technological devices, on the other hand, generates discourses on the part of "experts". Some defend what could be characterized as a "Mobile Etiquette"[9], as described by Anna Post from the Emily Post Institute. Commenting on the Intel research about the habits of consumers of mobile phones, she says that this study indicates that

> [...] the concern from now on will no longer be *whether or not* we share online, but *how* we share. The mobile devices allow us to share information in real-time, and the etiquette helps us to decide how to share and how to be connected in positive ways that improve our relationships. (UOL, 12/09/2012, our emphasis)

These discourses show that, in global terms, contemporary technological practices are taken for granted and seen, for all purposes, as irreversible in each and every context that comprise our daily lives. As to the establishment of an "etiquette" in the use of these devices, there are also practices which, although not constituting a general "mobile etiquette", are being employed by youngsters. Despite the influence of aspects that we characterized as being part of a Brazilian cultural context as a basis for understanding the potential for dissemination reached by certain practices, there are other practices that emerge within our culture, including the school institution, producing forms that are contrary to this general trend, and which are not restricted to teachers and institutional roles. These practices do not conform to the cultural context that relativizes the distinctions between the public and the private and do not deny the sound-producing practices that reverberate within our cultural context. The excerpt below suggests the emergence of an "etiquette" at school, by the initiative of the students of School B, where we conducted the study:

> In the relative silence, we hear a mobile phone ringing. One of the students at the front rows turns back and scolds her colleague: "– Hi! Put it on silent, will you." (RA-10, 1st year X)

Seen as fragments of decorum in a public space in pieces or, in the students' conception, as "good manners" on the part of their colleagues, these practices are revealed in apologies from students

9
According to the author, the Mobile Etiquette consists in behaviors and the ways in which we interact with each other, both in person and virtually. Socially, we no longer concern ourselves with the question of "whether or not" we are going to share a specific content, but rather we concentrate only on "how" we will share it, and this is the issue of the "etiquette" in the use of mobile phones.

whose mobile phones rang during class due to their forgetting to put them into silent mode. Or by students who, when hearing their mobile phones ringing or noticing calls in silent mode, ask the teacher if they can answer the phone, usually slightly embarrassed, as they walk out of the room whispering at their phones.

So, we should not generalize and say that "Brazilian youngsters" are indifferent to the discomfort caused by mobile phones. Such way of defining youngsters should be analyzed and, although there are common traits that seem to be general, we have in complex societies several cultural segments in terms of symbolic universes (such as, for example, *gender*, or juvenile *tribes*, of class ethos, among others), whose diversity becomes evident in the experiences of students, and which are depicted through the representations that part of these students make about those practices, as we can observe in the following passage.

> *Students sitting behind the observer comment, outraged, on a fact they witnessed in the metro. One of them says that she saw girls sitting on the car floor with their cell phones playing funk music. "What a* favelada[10], *eating* Trakinas[11], *listening to funk, other girls came and started singing along". "Look, it's all* favelada", *reinforces her colleague.*
> *While she talked, the student moved the mobile phone, holding it in her left hand, just like the girl sitting next to her moves her phone in her left hand and, next, rests its lightly on her book.* (RA-10, 1st year X)

With their mobile phones in their hands, students are at the same time closer and more distant from the practices of other young people. This allows us to infer that in these youngsters' representations such practices are restricted to certain groups, their value diminished and/or lowered by others; representations similar to what we see in online comments about the news regarding the uses of mobile phones (UOL, 2012b). In the virtual space, there are comments that tend to generalize them as characteristics of Brazilian people. Such as: "Brazilians love noise. They like loud music on their cell phones, in the stereo system, in the car… Such noisy people, argh." We also find other people that tend to circumscribe such practices: "Brazilians, correction, funk-people"; or "99.9% are funk-people"; or still:

> The majority (99.9%) like Funk, but I've heard samba, *forró*[12], *pagode*, rock and gospel music. I think funk and *pagode* are the most irritating, especially when it's just screaming, and nobody understands anything. (UOL, 12/09/2012)

10
Literally, an inhabitant of a *favela*, a shantytown-dweller; figuratively and pejoratively, any poor, and uneducated person.

11
A brand of low-cost biscuits.

12
Regional music originally from north-east Brazil, now popular throughout the country.

To say that there exist general traits of Brazilian culture does not mean that they will be incorporated in the same way by each individual belonging to that culture. We understand culture as a process, in which social agents play an active role, "inventing" themselves from the symbolic material that pre-exists them (WAGNER, 2010). To emphasize the importance of certain traits of Brazilian culture in our analysis is, therefore, a way to outline a context in which individual actions, such as Geertz (1973 puts it, can be understood as symbolic actions, actions that say something about our society. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that, as aspects of an incomplete modernity (MARTINS, 2008), other forms of attitude can coexist with those that reproduce essential traits of our culture.

At any rate, it seems that exhibitionist practices through sound-producing have a strong power of propagation, in so far as they are reinforced by various other practices that find support in the specific logic of this modernity of appearances, which proliferate in the specificities of a "Brazilian culture". An observation made during fieldwork can give support to this interpretation. On a certain occasion, at the end of classes, we observe a group of students entering a car in which the sound system was on and the music was amplified by powerful loudspeakers, attracting the eyes of all those around it who, in their majority, walked towards the bus stop or home. In this way, the triad automobile-mobile phones-loudspeakers seems to develop practices that reinforce each other and serve as a mutual reference, apart from functioning often as symbols that try to represent man's virility, such as pointed out by Pereira (2010) when he speaks about automobiles. This interpretation concurs with that of Silva (2012, p. 80):

> In the case of music listening, especially funk, without the earphones, I believe that the practice of occupying the sound space around oneself, in the public space, supplies a correlate of virile masculinity related to the aesthetically muscular body […]. I also argue that the "subversion practices" afford the young man and the adult a capital of prestige coming from the fact of being able to subvert, although only to a certain extent, institutionalized rules, and of not being just a mere simpleton.

To that author, sound-producing activities are activities that are grounded in the public performance of masculinity (SILVA, 2012). To be sure, part of the social practices witnessed in our fieldwork, such as that of the students coming out of the school with their loudspeakers turned on high, correlate with performances of masculinity. Let us recall the youngsters from various social classes that exhibit the technological signs of potent sound systems installed in their cars. Combined with

other forms of car tuning, such as lights and stickers that singularize their cars, and whose accumulation of technological signs and of power is correlated with their virility, similar to what cocks and their fighting abilities represent to the Balinese (GERTZ, 1973). However, it is important to relativize the use of the "gender[13]" category in this interpretation about the sound-producing use of mobile phones, since the plurality of meanings described above decreases the force of the main argument in Silva (2012). The data gathered in our research through questionnaires showed that among the 43% of youngsters who claimed to make use of the mobile phones loudspeakers to play music, the distribution by sex, although showing differences in the use made of these devices, is also expressive among female youngsters, who claim to make use of mobile phones loudspeakers to play music.

Among youngsters who play music in their cell phones, 42% are female, making use their cell phones loudspeakers to play music. Therefore, we should not overemphasize the gender category and associated mention of performance of masculinity to the use of mobile technologies, as in the case of mobile phones. We must take into account the different contexts in which such performance occurs. Even the practices that, according to Silva (2012), constitute a "capital of masculine prestige" are not restricted to youngsters of the male sex in our study. Some female students, for example, turn on the mobile phone in different situations with the sole purpose of taunting certain teachers. We have also practices that are not read under the sign of "defiance", but rather are sustained through the use of sound and exhibition in devices. They are significantly more frequent than the previous practices, such as the successive cases that occurred during break times, in which circles of friends had their conversations to the tune of funk, by sheer pleasure and enjoyment, with no "subversive" character against institutional order[14].

To understand these sound-producing practices in mobile phones and automobiles, it is important to follow another clue contained in Silva (2012), namely, the sense of urgency felt by youngsters in fulfilling a kind of void. It can be found in the beautiful image created by one of the youngsters interviewed by the author when talking about the meaning of the use of his device: "to occupy where there was nothing". In the words of this youngster: "Like, you go somewhere where there's nothing, you put your music on, even running a kite… anywhere… in the shopping center" (SILVA, 2012, p.70).

How do we understand that the shopping center, one's own house, and particularly the school, are places where "there's nothing"? To answer this question, we must relate the contexts of our daily lives to the fact that the audiovisual environment, either mass media or our personal selection of music, conforms the environment with which we

13
About differentiations in the use having gender as their basis, see Verza and Wagner (2008) who already pointed out several aspects, such as the larger use of games and of "message sending" by boys, whilst the girls use them more to "talk to their friends".

14
We insist that for both girls and boys in the school observed here, the larger part of sound-producing practices was not carried out by youngsters that "socialize against school" (DUBET, 1998), but by those who "socialize in parallel" to it. Thus, such practices did not have a character of defiance, but of *alienation*, and that goes for both sexes.

interact in constant and automatic forms, so that its absence will appear to us as a "void". On this topic, Castells (1999) highlights that devices such as the Walkman, in a certain way precursors of the current MP3 players and iPods (and of certain sound-producing uses of mobile phones), gave birth to a portable audio environment, with which teenagers, through their personal selection of music, built "their sound walls against the external world" (p. 419).

As well observed by Castells (1999), the action of being spectators or audience of media or music is often combined with domestic activities and with all forms of social interaction. Our students testify to that when they perform activities or interact with their colleagues with or despite their headphones. In the classroom, youngsters build with their earphones "a wall" as porous as those of the contemporary institutions, in which we cannot see the difference between the "inside" and the "outside" of which Hardt (2000) speaks. This external logic brought by youngsters to the interior of the school institution seems as a sociocultural logic in which media and music are "the almost constant background presence, the *fabric of our lives*" (CASTELLS, 1999, p. 419, our emphasis).

Unlike "traditional" cultural contexts in which there is a greater symbolic inertia, the culture of the metropolis is relentlessly re-created through a symbolic material that circulates on a global scale. In this context, identity can no longer be understood as something static; rather, contemporary identity would be constructed in the relationship with this huge amount of audiovisual material. Not to be reduced to a "ritualized narrative", identity is an "account we relentlessly rebuild, that the rebuild with the others, identity also becomes a coproduction" (CANCLINI, 2001, p. 173).

The sound-producing practices that take place within classrooms, in the corridors, in the school yard, on the streets and in other public spaces, in an attempt to affirm a precarious and ephemeral identity, can therefore be understood as ways through which we try to collectively narrate our identity in this post-modern context. That is to say, in this post-human context, as it is defined by some authors who, when dealing with contemporary subjectivities, consider not only the relationships between humans, but also between humans and nonhumans, including in this last category both animals and machines, things and technologies (BRAIDOTTI, 2016).

At this point, it can also be useful to recall Simmel (2005), since such actions, collectively performed in our daily struggle against social abstractions, represent our necessity of singularizing and showing ourselves in this context. Therefore, these actions are not to be reduced to *masculine* performances but should be seen as following from the *blasé*

character of urban life in the metropolis, in which society as a whole moves. According to the German sociologist,

> From one angle life is made infinitely more easy in the sense that stimulations, interests, and the taking up of time and attention, present themselves from all sides and carry it in a stream which scarcely requires any individual efforts for its ongoing. But from another angle, life is composed more and more of these impersonal cultural elements and existing goods and values which seek to suppress peculiar personal interests and incomparabilities. As a result, in order that this most personal element be saved, extremities and peculiarities and individualizations must be produced and they must be over-exaggerated merely to be brought into the awareness even of the individual himself. (SIMMEL, 1971, p. 338, *sic*)

A relative silence, as an opposite pole, constitutes itself as a mediatic-sound void experimented as a feeling of absence, like a background contradictory to the immense accumulation of signs, images and information that are incessantly transmitted by countless sources. In this way, we seem to give color to those "greyed out" (by the excess) contents that surround our existence. In the hope of producing new relationships, individuals "overplay" their sound-producing practices in a context already filled to the brim with audiovisual stimuli. In this way, because of the audiovisual hypertrophy of our cultural context, the level of manifestation necessary to achieve the effect of individual differentiation ends up being inevitably disturbing to many people. Here we can take as an example the case, already referred to, of the "war of the cell phones" in School B. The sound-producing practices with mobile phones during break times are recurrent. The scene is of youngsters sitting on the floor of the school yard or along the passages that give access to the teachers' common room. They sit in circles and some groups conduct their conversations to the sound of music propagated by mobile phones loudspeakers. It is not a question of demarcating territories of different styles, since different funk songs compete in this same space. It it is a question of demarcating territories in which webs of sociability work as filters of identity narratives. We are dealing here with practices that reinforce ties of friendship between youngsters, whose singularization strategies oppose these groups to groups of other students, as well as to other individuals that make use of the same strategy of sound-exhibition in the public space.

The comments of a teacher about the "war of the cell phones" as a strategy of differentiation employed by some students in their struggle against the abstractions that govern modern life (SIMMEL, 1971), and her idea of proposing to establish a single radio station for all students,

signals the tendency to mass production and homogenization. In other words, an abstraction characteristic of life in the metropolis and of social institutions.

Despite showing traits that refer to central aspects of the Brazilian cultural context, the practices of youngsters during school break times denote a form that is intermediary between what is specific and historically produced in our culture, and the pressures of globalized contemporary culture. This happens because the practices of youngsters within the school space refer us to a more general character of our relationship with the public space. It is a character no longer restricted to the Brazilian specificity, and if entangled in a context both of a modernity of appearances and of the lack of distinction between the private and the public, complicates and stimulates the use of space as support for practices that aim at the differentiation of individuals. This attitude points toward a contemporary change regarding the meaning of the term *public*, even in capitalism central nations. About this, Bauman (1999, p. 64) says:

> The latter concept used to be reserved for things and events by their nature 'collective', things or events no one could claim to be her or his private affair, let alone an exclusive possession, but in which everyone could demand to have a say on the ground that such things and events affect their private interests and possessions.

In this context, the public appears less and less as a space marked by impersonality, where we could discuss issues about common interests and goods, and more and more as a space in which people feel the need to show to each other who they "really are". The practices of public display of subjects and things without "public" importance follow from this state of affairs, but as a "patchwork of personal aspirations", bringing together private problems and concerns in an effort of singularization, an effort to leave one's mark in a space essentially marked by social abstraction.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

We understand the use of mobile phones by youngsters as symbolic actions, actions that are commentaries about more than themselves. The several uses, in particular the loud reproduction of different styles of music, do not speak only of the youngsters' tastes, about their personalities, because in that music central aspects of our culture and society can be read. They speak to us about a certain form to deal with and face the public space – a historically constituted form that has as its characteristic, in our Brazilian modernity, the lack of distinction between

the public and private spheres. That is the origin of the ambiguity that characterizes our way of dealing with abstract laws, such as that prohibiting the use of mobile phones in public spaces, and the fact that we behave in those spaces as if we were in our own houses. To accomplish a fine-grained description of the relationship youngsters keep with technological devices means to analyze in which way their practices denote a central aspect of Brazilian culture. In our days, this cultural trait finds itself entangled in a global scale of permeability between the spheres of conviviality and sociability, in a process of resignification of the public space that is not exclusive to the Brazilian culture but belongs to post-modernity as a whole. The public exhibition, speaking loudly at the mobile phone, and the strategies of singularization through the sound-producing use of devices are constituted as practices in which agents conduct a reading of the public space not as a common context to be treated with that amount of decorum and ritualism that prevails in social life. These practices, whose meanings reinforce each other, denote a public space that appears to the social agents as conducive of the disturbing uses of sound-producing technologies. On the one hand through the lack of distinction between public and private, but also in view of a public devoid of meaning, understood just as a place in which subjects make public certain aspects and characteristics of their private lives.

The "war of the cell phones", the constant use of the mobile phones' sound-producing potentials by youngsters constitutes an example. The public space serves, then, as support for the narration of an identity in a post-modern symbolic context marked by institutional fragility and symbolic volatility. A context in which agents build and rebuild ephemeral identities, updated daily, that need to be narrated, exhibited and demonstrated, and which indeed are, through the brands, music and mobile phones of youngsters. In a world saturated by audiovisual stimuli, dominated by abstraction and homogenization, certain amount of exaggeration seems to become necessary so that agents achieve the effect of singularizing. The practices that these youngsters establish denote the complexity of actions amidst the symbolic web of our culture. It is in this singularization game that the different spheres that shape this culture intermingle – the class culture, the specifically Brazilian culture, and the capitalist culture. These actions encapsulate traits and leave clues with which essential aspects of the experience of these youngsters at school and in contemporary society can be read, that is to say, of the school culture as it is remade today.

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