

Juvenile Sociability, Cultural Classifications and ‘Tastes’: A Study on the Universe of Games and Social Networks in Lower Class *LAN Houses*

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Abstract: The objective of this study is to investigate the appropriation of digital technologies in processes of identity elaboration and sociability in a group of poor urban workers living in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The article presents an ethnographic study of LAN houses – the Brazilian cybercafés - focusing on technological uses and their connection with issues such as the role of games as a motor of local sociability and the appropriation of digital technologies as a way of elaborating identities and classifications, through social distinction and cultural tastes. The influence of Internet centers’ attendants was analyzed in connection with the consumption of cultural products such as games and musical styles. The results showed the use of these products in the process of elaboration of local youngsters’ social classifications. The study reveals in what ways game motivation and musical style choices are collectively molded, highlighting the importance of group distinctions and belonging.

Keywords: *youth, games, sociability, social network, distinction, lower classes.*

Introduction

The article aims to investigate the appropriation of digital technologies in the processes of developing sociability identities and experiences among a group of young people coming from the lower classes, starting from an ethnographic fieldwork carried out in *LAN houses* located within

a community in the city of Rio de Janeiro. In the study, we seek to understand how the sociability of the customers of lower class *LAN houses* is built, investigating the consumption of cultural products such as *online games* and the adherence to social networks. The view over the existing ways of interaction in this context may reveal some clues regarding the development of social identities on various levels.

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Adopting the perspective of Miller and Slater (2000), this is not just talking about ‘uses’ and ‘effects’ of the new media, but also investigating how members of a particular culture see themselves in the virtual environment and shape it according to their self image.

The fieldwork was conducted over the years 2009 and 2010 in the favelas (slums)¹ of Rocha², located in São Conrado, south of the city of Rio de Janeiro. The research was conducted through participative observation, in-depth interviews and informal conversations, features of the ethnographic method. In my visits to the community’s *LAN houses*, I would surf the Internet observing the respondents’ interaction with the computers and with each other. At times, I would only observe; other times, I would interact with visitors and attendants through informal conversations or more structured interviews.

Rocha is a small community of about 4,000 residents that was formed over the last seventy years from small homes for employees of an elite club of the neighborhood. There is an intensive flow of foreign tourists, motivated by several factors: the proximity to an important spot of the city for the practice of hang gliding; the work of the *Favela Tour* agency, which promotes sightseeing tours in the community, to get to know the slum ‘inside out’, which includes a visit to local social projects and parades in places like a ‘local bar’; and the *Favela Receptiva* initiative, a tourism program where families in the community offer rooms for lodging, inviting visitors to have a ‘direct contact’ with the day to day life of a ‘charming’ low-income community, as shown on their site³.

Sociability in *LAN houses* in the universe of games

The Rocha community has two *LAN houses* and the preferences of users fall on the social networking site Orkut, the instant messaging service MSN and the universe of games. Boys tend to remain connected for at least an hour, engaging mostly with games and devoting less time to navigate on Orkut and MSN. Girls are on average less time online; often, in less than half an hour of navigation they can feed their social networks. Orkut reigns in the local preference of both genders and various age groups and draws attention for its large degree of diffusion and reputation among the informants. This social network is usually the first contact that the participants have with the virtual world.

The community’s two LAN houses offer different attractions to their audience. The Conecta LAN house is located on the main street of entry to the slum and specializes in video games related to the world of online RPG; there, the ‘craze’ - an expression used by customers and attendants of the LAN house - is the game World of Warcraft, one of the most popular in the world with more than 12 million paying players, according to their manufacturer Blizzard Entertainment⁴. It is a universe of action and adventure, of medieval inspiration; this takes place in the fantasy world of Azeroth, introduced in the first game of the Warcraft series: *Orcs & Humans* in 1994. World of Warcraft or WoW (nickname given by fans of the game and how I am going to refer to it from this point on) is part of a category named MMORPG - Massive

Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game or Multi Massive Online Role-Playing Game - which are online and massively multiplayer games, where characters are created in a virtual world, following the inspiration from the traditional role-playing strategy games. In the Cybergames LAN house, located in the 'center' of the community, the main attractions are the 'violent' Counter-Strike and the car racing game Need for Speed.

The movement of persons at the LAN houses is great throughout the day - some go only to see what is there, who is playing and talk a little, and when it is possible they come back later. One does not necessarily enter the LAN house for Internet access, many just go there to meet the others in a repeated ritual of sociability - among young people, and it is a 'law' to stop by. On the other hand, several regulars have computers at home but prefer to go to the LAN house to make a program in group, that is, for network gaming or even to access Orkut with friends.

The atmosphere in the LAN houses is characterized by a lot of talk and fun, due to the presence of recreational activities in these spaces, such as games and music. In LAN houses such as Conecta, where the presence of online strategy games like *WoW* is prevalent, the space becomes more strongly marked by the masculine juvenile sociability, since girls are less interested in that kind of fun. The visitors experience the atmosphere of the LAN house as a local club (Barros, 2009), where sociability is exercised through shared recreational activities. The average age of the players - boys around the age of eight are starting to become familiar with the game

atmosphere, extending the interest until the age of 25 years or so - is much lower than the world average, which is 28 years, according to *Blizzard*. This is partly due to the fact that *WoW* is a game paid via credit card and in the lower class LAN houses generally, the server is 'pirate', which facilitates the participation of younger people.

In the studied context, we can notice that the game is learnt through a strong share. The use of computers in the LAN houses draws attention to a particular aspect - besides the users being connected and interacting with other online gamers, there is a great interaction with the other people who are present in the physical environment. Young people, whether they are facing the computer or not, communicate intensively exchanging 'tips' about the best strategies and actions to be adopted in battle. The 'teaching' is passed from someone who has more 'expertise' in the game than others, a role that is taken alternatively by multiple players - the attendants of the LAN house and the more experienced players. Sometimes it turns out that navigation is really shared, when someone takes the mouse of those who are in front of the computer and plays for a while or when they request assistance, as observed in a scene: '*Kiko, come here, the powers are not showing up.*' Kiko approaches, grabs the mouse and solves the 'problem' returning the game control to his colleague. Learning revolves around tips about the general logic of *WoW*, its step by step, the best strategies to be adopted, the meaning of English words and even the best way to handle the mouse and keyboard in order to achieve greater agility in the fighting. Thus there can

be two, three or four people around one computer, with one ‘officially’ starring in the adventure, another one with more expertise, taking the *mouse* now and then to advance in stages and a third one making comments about the game or simply ‘kidding’. In a sense, there is a contrast here with the original idea of a *personal computer* - in the environment of the *LAN house* there are ‘collective machines’, operating in a very interactive way, as a ‘shared personal computer’.

Some words that arise in the game are incorporated into the vocabulary, like ‘noob’ (‘beginner’) or ‘quitters’ (abandon, give up the game). In the virtual environment the most experienced players avoid the ‘noobs’ and ‘quitters’ in the days of *WoW*, as one of them says: ‘here we only have ‘pro’ (‘professional’, experienced in the game), no quitters or noobs.’ Both in the sociability environment found in the *LAN house* and in the virtual one, there is a differentiation of status - in the *LAN houses* the most experienced players stand out and have greater prestige, circulating with ease and putting into practice their knowledge in the ‘collective game’ within the virtual space itself where all the *WoW* community interacts with the more experienced gamers distancing themselves from the *quitters* and the *noobs*, forming the ‘select’ group of ‘pro’.

The mediation of the LAN houses’ attendants

The *LAN houses’* attendants are key characters in the public settings for Internet access, mediating contact with

the digital universe for those who do not feel at ease or do not know how to move through this world, besides being characters of key reference for the young regulars of the *LAN houses*, and may play an important role as disseminators of the consumption of cultural products.

The attendant, as a rule, gives the ‘tone’ of the *LAN house*, especially when the dominant public is formed of children and adolescents, always being aware of the behavior of regulars and trying to keep the mood of the environment within the ‘order’. They act as a kind of ‘informal educators’ and may even have a responsibility to ‘take care’ of children and young people who circulate in the place, as occurs in the Conecta LAN. The owners and at the same time, attendants, Francisco (27 years) and Leo (22 years) have great influence on the children and the young people in that space. It was Francisco who determined that the *LAN house* would not have ‘violent’ and controversial games such as Counter-Strike, banned for those under 18 years; and so, the Conecta is characterized by having formed a legion of fans of *WoW*, the game preferred and disseminated by the owners-attendants.

Parents leave their children under the ‘supervision’ and control of the attendants, which may include ‘monitoring’ school performance – those who do not do well in school have their time limited in the *LAN house*. Moreover, Francisco intends to ‘motivate’ the regulars of the *LAN* - he is thinking of offering hours of navigation for those who have high school achievement - showing his concern for the educational

development of the young people present there.

This aspect of care and monitoring of school performance within the *LAN house* is opposed to some extent to other situations where the 'anti-school' feeling is more obvious, as in Pereira's study (2010), the result of an ethnography on the popular *LAN house* in the city of Porto Alegre, south of Brazil. In this study, the author describes the intense involvement of young people with the games and the great lack of motivation in relation to studying which leads to high school dropout. Opposed to this context, there are situations in the community of Rocha in which the concern for formal education is present within the space of the *LAN house* itself, as in the 'partnership' observed between mothers and attendants, in addition to the attendant's very own concern for the young people's school performance.

Going back to the collective experience of the game within the space of the *LAN house*, as *WoW* experts, Francisco and Leo are driven at all times to provide 'tips' of the game to the visitors. They both have certain knowledge of English language helping others understand the game, which is configured in this language. The 'tips' are not passed on only by attendants but also by other regulars who have some expertise in the world of *WoW*, as already noted. Sharing what one knows about the game confers prestige and puts the person in a position of higher status. This condition refers to the scenario found in virtual environments and it perpetrates the logic of sharing information about a specific preferred cultural product such as communities formed from an interest in certain TV

series (Sá, 2002; Gomes, 2007). The principle of giving establishes status hierarchies among the actors, already pointed out by Mauss (1954) in his classic approach on systems of social exchange.

The game *WoW* has a long learning curve, due to its complexity. Hence the importance of collective learning, sharing information, where the attendants take on a role of reference. Johnson (2005) had already called attention to the intricacy of the video games; the online strategy games, especially, require an apprenticeship which does not happen all at once as in the case of chess, where all rules are known beforehand. In the case of MMORPGs, one learns by playing and redefining strategies all the time. Games such as *WoW*, therefore, tend to facilitate the development of longer-lasting ties among the players themselves and between them and the game as well - first of all because *WoW*, in its complexity is suitable for collective learning, sharing 'tips', and finding in the collective space of the *LAN houses* a *locus* of diffusion and secondly because due to the game's features, young people show a high degree of involvement with the characters and pets created by them, forming bonds that will be reinforced over time.

Thus, the choice of playing *WoW* ends up reinforcing a sense of belonging to a group that frequently attends the *Conecta LAN*. One of the attendants said that being present there reinforces the bonds among peers, by sharing the same leisure activity, the *WoW* game, 'This is already a family, there are always the same people, and it is a routine.' The Cybergames LAN does

not offer on its menu online strategy games like *WoW* and, despite charging less for an hour of Internet access it is less frequented than the Conecta LAN. In Cybergames, navigation is more individualized, without much sharing. By contrast, the Conecta has little space for solitary navigation. The experience of playing *WoW*, as said, is characterized by a lot of reciprocity - exchange of information, jokes and collective learning. This *LAN house* even had a 'business expansion' in 2009, with some improvements of the space such as an 'upgrade' of the machines - including better monitors that raise the 'visual attractiveness' of *WoW*, as reported by an attendant - and an increase in the number of computers.

The 'family' of the Conecta LAN reaffirms its bonds in the everyday experience of the game. *WoW* is based on the confrontation between two major factions - the *Horde players* and the *Alliance players*. The players who attend the space often choose the 'Horde', due to the influence of one of the attendants, Leo, on the group. When asked about the reason for the preference for this clan, he replies: 'In the Horde, the characters are uglier ['ugly' here has a positive meaning, as if carrying an aura of rebellion to escape the standards] it has a more tribal culture, a wild one. The Alliance is more civilized, more political. The Alliance is treacherous.'

On another level, related to the construction of subjectivity in the game, it is possible to select options within a wide range of 'races' and 'classes', which makes *WoW* a universe that allows a great diversity, since the player has multiple ways to make his character more unique. While in other

MMORPGs it is common to have three races, in *WoW* there are eight different races, all with well-defined characteristics. The individualizing aspects of the game are also evident in the issue of individual performances - there is a strong sense of collectivity (defending the group) which is linked to moments of high individual performance, as shown by the words of a player: 'It is only me who honors the Horde, everybody else is behind me and I am on the first place.'

Beyond the *World of Warcraft*

The game expands beyond the field of play entering the area of the site YouTube, where the gamers usually watch clips with direct references to the game *WoW*. One of these clips, which is very successful on the site, is 'Eopitame put the shield on me'⁵, made for players of Dota, a variation of *Warcraft*, this is a parody of the song *Blame it on me*, with lyrics adapted to the universe of *WoW*. Those who go to Conecta enthusiastically listen to the clip, while playing, identifying themselves with the lyrics' references to the game.

Thus, the influences of the attendants stretch to other fields, such as the consumption of music - they play in the *LAN* the music of indie rock bands (alternative rock bands) such as *Pearl Jam*, *Alice in Chains* and *Bush*. Francisco does not hide his pride when talking: 'They like Pearl Jam, some no longer like funk.' A regular, in turn, reveals his process of distinction from other young people from the local by his preference for the

musical style present in the Conecta: 'I do not like funk, they play funk in the LAN down there (Cybergames LAN).' Along with indie and metal rock bands, one can also hear in that space some other 'alternative' tunes admired by those in charge with the *LAN house*, such as the *High and Mighty Color*, a band that is part of the soundtracks of Japanese cartoons. It is common for young people to ask the attendants to copy the repertoire they play on their MP3 players - a service for which they charge \$ 0.15 per track - which makes the attendants important disseminators of this musical style. Meanwhile, in the Cybergames LAN, the most required musical genres to be copied are funk and 'pagode', a kind of popular samba.

One can say that the attendants of the LAN Conecta play the role of cultural mediators (Velho and Kuschnir, 2001):

The social life exists only through differences. It is them that, from the interaction as a universal process, produce and enable exchanges, communication and sharing. The study of mediation and, specifically, mediators allows us to observe how the interactions between social groups and different cultural levels take place. [...] In a continuous process of negotiating reality, choices are made, having as reference symbolic systems, beliefs and values around material interests and material goals of all sorts. Mediation is an ongoing social action, not always obvious, which is present on the most diverse levels and interactive processes. (Velho and Kuschnir, 2001: 9-10)

In contemporary society, the issue of mediation is of great relevance in enabling the transit and contact between

different universes, in a scenario of socio-cultural heterogeneity and diversification of social roles. Individuals immersed in the urban environment, in particular, are potentially exposed to a wide variety of experiences, due to movement through universes where different and sometimes conflicting values and world views are being updated. Some individuals, in addition to transiting through different social dimensions, become mediators between lifestyles and various social experiences.

Analyzing the context studied, it is possible to perceive differences between the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) of the owners-attendants and that of the customers. They are not residents of the community and have a cultural capital strongly related to the 'pop universe' - admiration for games such as *WoW*, comics, *Star Wars* saga, Japanese cartoons and *indie-rock* bands - extending their influence beyond the 'musical taste'. They deny the funk, rhythm commonly associated with the popular cultural 'vulgar' universe as demonstrated by the words of Francisco: 'My son [unborn] may be queer; sex is in each one's head, whatever, anything but a funk fan. I am already making a musical selection for him to listen to, from the 50s, starting with Elvis'. It is commonly widespread the perception of Rio de Janeiro funk as a kind of periphery music marked by 'bad taste', which would be expressed, especially by the lyrics considered 'rude' and 'vulgar' (Vianna, 1988).

'Cultural tastes' can be forwarded to lifestyle and social distinctions. Bourdieu (1984) analyzed the social development of taste, arguing that the choices of objects of consumption

reflect a kind of symbolic hierarchy determined and maintained by the economically superior classes to strengthen their distinctiveness - expressed through a sense of superiority - compared to other classes. Taste, then, would be an element that defines and separates the upper class of the working classes, expressing itself in the choices of food, beverage, cosmetics, music, literature, etc. Showing up in the social life in a natural way it becomes a legitimate criterion of distinction for excellence, covering all aspects of human life that include choice and thus forming social groups.

While Bourdieu ponders on the issue of the distinction between social classes, it is worth here to shift the issue of social production of taste to the interior of the same group, which in some contexts can share the same identity - such as, 'the young people from the low-income community' as opposed to 'young people from the upper-class' - but in others, they distinguish themselves starting from various qualifying criteria. Within the context of the study, there are distinctions being created between the 'alternative' taste of the Conecta LAN group and the 'popular' taste associated with rhythms such as funk, by the inhabitants of the slum, as is the case of the Cybergames LAN's customers. One can notice here a sense of higher status among young people in the first LAN in relation to the other one, which would be expressed in choices on how to play the 'best game' - as in the idea phrased by one of the attendants, who mocked the game Tibia, quite popular in other LANs, describing it as 'lame' compared to *WoW* - or listening to a more 'independent' music genre.

Joining Orkut

The 'digital literacy' among the masses in Brazil has been done largely through adherence to Orkut (Spence, 2007). It is through this social network that most Brazilians, especially in the world of lower class groups, have their first contact with the Internet⁶. For these social groups, being in Orkut is a way of being in the world. When I first arrived in Rocha, a boy of 5 years, son of the man who took me to meet the community, asked his father: '*Does she have Orkut?*' This same boy, still illiterate, knew how to enter the social network and was helped by others in the local LAN house, when he wanted to include some new stuff on his page. His father says: 'He cannot read, but he knows how to enter Orkut. Girls [older friends] upload his photos for him'.

The 'initiation' in the Orkut universe is made, preferably in two ways - with the help of a younger friend or relative, or, with the help of attendants of LAN houses. Its 'friendly' interface compared to other networks, also contributes to the massive adherence. Many NGOs and programs of 'digital inclusion' of the government have policies restricting access to Orkut - and to games - in their spaces, which leads to a significant lack of interest of local people in attending places with free Internet access available in their neighborhoods, while LAN houses maintain their constant movement.

Posting on Orkut mostly implies comments and photos of events taken with friends from school or from the neighborhood, with people you just saw or talked to using other means of communication, strengthening the already existing bonds, as it appears

from the informants' discourse. In some cases, one comes to distrust the possible emergence of a 'true friendship' in the virtual world:

No, I do not like it [to meet new people through the Internet]. I don't need it, I already know so many people so why would do through the trouble of trying to meet others? You don't truly get to know people. You, therefore, believe half of what people are saying, but you do not know what the truth is. So I do not go to chat rooms, I do not like it. (Luiza, 19 years)

My friend is with me all the time, he knows what I do and what I do not do, he knows what I like or do not like. Now a friend on the Internet has no idea what I like or dislike. (Jorge, 18 years)

The idea of the Internet as a place of disguise can be threatening to the establishment of trustful relationships and this perception also arises in the words of Francisco, attendant at the Conecta LAN:

I do not add anyone on MSN if I do not know them personally, I do not like that. Firstly because on the Internet everyone is happy, right? So there's a lot of hypocrisy. My mother? She said she was a beautiful brunette and I don't mean to say that she is ugly, but on the Internet... You have to see the picture she uses on Orkut, it's somebody else and I do not know who she is. My mother has already upset about four guys over there; she broke around four hearts...

Orkut is used in various situations in order to share with others, that is, for example, the case of the favorite music video of a 14 year old girl, who

is signed in on her mother's Orkut account, or the case of a soccer team from the Association, whose president, 47, states: 'It's the boys that mess with my Orkut account, they do everything, they notify about soccer matches, everything, I don't even know how to use it.'

Coexistence in the games also nourishes sociability in other virtual spaces, as in the case of Lucio, 18, who loves to play Dota - a variation of the original *Warcraft* game - and created a page on Orkut for fans like him. He does not like the idea of an environment 'without control', where people that he only knows superficially could enter: 'I did it to close the circle, to bring friends together, they have to be people I've seen at least once.' This exemplar case shows the primacy of sociability that combines familiarity and common interests, such as the case of the 'real' friends on Orkut, whose borders are controlled.

This scenario of sociability leads to a perspective that goes in favour of Miller and Slater's formulations (2000) about the inadequacy of making an *a priori* distinction between online and offline life, which is common in research about the Internet. The authors, who studied the relationships experienced in *LAN houses* of Trinidad, believe that this distinction should not be established as a methodological and analytical starting point for research; but rather the distinction is quite contingent, since in some contexts people set in their lives clear outlines for each of these spheres, while for others the distinction is not relevant or does not even end up being established. In the environment studied in the community of Rocha,

online relationships are fundamentally an extension of offline life, emerging as an opportunity to deepen existing bonds with peers. Thus, the Internet appears as a way of strengthening bonds with the group of friends who make up the network of coexistence the most familiar and present in the everyday life of the person.

Sharing the same computer, observed in the *WoW* game experience, also occurs when several people in the *LAN* sit around another one that takes the lead of the navigation on Orkut. In this case, those observing express their opinions on what pages to visit, what to post and 'delete', for example. In one of these typical scenes, a teenage girl was surfing next to a child and an older woman. The latter was making requests all the time - like 'hmm, take that out, delete, delete.' (asking to remove the message posted by a boy). At one point the child sat on the lap of the student and put the headphones to his ear. Then the elder took the headphones for herself and she began singing loudly the song of a Youtube clip, while the student stood in front of the computer running the shared navigation. Finally, the student begins reading out loud a love poem posted by a boy and the reading was made jointly, with her older companion. At another moment of observation, a group of teenage girls entered on Orkut, trying to update their pages and accessing those of friends to see the news. Interaction is a constant during navigation - while one is at the computer, the focus eventually shifts to see what friends are doing. In this collective experience, directions for navigation are being suggested ('let's go on my cousin's Orkut now') as well as actions to check out relationships

('I'll visit his Orkut account to see if he's dating').

Conclusions

The article attempted to understand some ways of surfing the Internet starting from a glimpse over interactions found within the *LAN* space and the cultural context of the social actors investigated. The practices related to digital media reveal different aspects of the social universe of the juvenile group studied, such as the appropriation of the spaces of *LAN houses* as a 'local club' and the practices of shared navigation. The relativization of the 'individual' mode of consumption is needed for understanding the collective uses observed in the experiences with games and social networks in *LAN houses*, where it is possible to think of the idea of 'personal shared PCs'.

An important part of the analysis was to see how the collective navigation in gaming and on the social network Orkut reinforce family and day-to-day social bonds, without noticing here any kind of emptying of the of 'real life' relationships. This does not necessarily express an aversion to new contacts on the Internet, but a clear emphasis on strengthening and nourishing the sociability network already established, which leads to a questioning of a priori oppositions between the 'virtual' and the 'real' relationships (Miller and Slater, 2000). What we observed, in fact, was a reinforcement of social bonds in virtual networking, with a strong call for location. Talking to those 'who you know', with whom 'you meet every

day', with whom 'you just met or talked to' seem to be the major motivations of the sociability established between the informants, which therefore has the mark of familiarity. In their speech, they show a certain perception of the Internet as an ambiguous space, potentially deceptive when it involves contacts that start out as anonymous and where establishing 'true' relationships would be unlikely; this means that the Internet is perceived as a privileged place for disguise and deception. Various anthropological studies (particularly Duarte, 1986; Sarti, 1996; Fonseca, 2004), on the universe of the lower classes, highlight three points of reference in their view of the world: family, job and location. In a sense, the ethnographic data here presented reflects the values typically found in these cultural contexts - an emphasis on the relationships established under the mark of familiarity and location and a certain suspicion towards relationships initiated outside this circle, without human mediation or face to face contact, as is the case of the virtual universe.

With specific regard to the experience with the game *World of Warcraft*, we see the 'classifying vocation' of the cultural product in question which, curiously, makes use of a language of affiliations and clans (*Horde* and *Alliance*), inspired by totems. Young people see themselves belonging to different groups through the game experience - being part of the group in the Conecta LAN and of the Horde clan in *WoW*, liking the *indie* band Pearl Jam and the soundtrack of Japanese cartoons, among other cultural tastes, create a sense of sharing within a specific group of young people

in the community, who distinguish themselves from others who attend the 'inside lan', the Cybergames, where the preference for 'violent games' and musical rhythms socially stigmatized, such as 'funk carioca' - funk from Rio de Janeiro - are verified.

Thus, the development of identities through digital technologies moves in the context of local subjects, where it is highlighted the role of the LAN attendant as 'cultural mediator' who influences 'tastes'. With great influence on the constant group of the LAN house - thanks to their expertise and great involvement with the game world - the attendants end up influencing not only in the adoption of *WoW* as the game preferred by customers, but also in the dissemination of certain musical genres and other cultural products consumed in that space.

The collective experience of the game allows strengthening ties of distinction and belonging to a group of young people who frequent the Conecta LAN, who design their identities starting from a field of classifications that is established on several levels: 'outside LAN' (the young people from Conecta) X 'the inside LAN' (young people from Cybergames) *WoW* players (young people from Conecta) X Tibia players (young people from other LANs); those who love *indie* rock (young people from Conecta) X funk fans (young people from Cybergames); the *Horde* (young people from Conecta) X the *Alliance* (other *WoW* players). The process of differentiation involves at the same time, membership of a group and developing subjectivity, by establishing a sense of 'taste' that goes from the choice of playing *WoW* to adhesion to other cultural products

such as certain musical styles.

It is, therefore revealed, how the motivations for the game - and on a larger plan, the consumption of products and adherence to cultural 'tastes' - are shaped on the collective level, indicating the importance of sociability, of sharing and of the sense of belonging to a particular group against others. The consumption of cultural products thus serves to create 'bridges and barriers' (Douglas and Isherwood, 1979) within the community by shaping the identities of juvenile groups within a particular classification system. It is an arena where actually, a logic that prioritizes products and identities, things and people, differences and similarities in contemporary social life is expressed (Sahlins, 1976).

Notes

¹ The term 'favela' was not used by the residents in their first contacts with the group they referred to the location as a 'community'. In subsequent contacts, the term 'favelinha' came up to name the location. Remember, the term 'favela' usually has a very negative connotation, when associated with ideas of 'chaos', 'dirt', 'disorder', 'poverty' and 'violence'. For a broader discussion on the social representations related to 'favela' and 'community', see Valladares, L. *The invention of the favela: the myth of origin favela.com*. Rio de Janeiro: FGV, 2005, and Birman, P. 'Is the Favela a Community?' In: Silva, Luiz Antonio M. (ed.) *Life under siege: Violence and routine in the favelas*

of Rio de Janeiro. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 2008.

² The names of the location, of the LAN houses and respondents are fictional, as a means of preserving anonymity.

³ Cf *Favela tour* available at www.favelatour.com.br, last accessed on August 3, 2010, *Favela receptiva* available at www.favelareceptiva.com, last accessed on September 10, 2010.

⁴ Source: www.blizzard.com, last accessed on October 5, 2010.

⁵ Excerpt from the lyrics that appear in the subtitled music video: 'But there must be some problem because this guy is not a noob / he is level 37 / he has gold and a clan and everything / I have already used my arcane ring / he even has mana / but he does not put his shield on me / I'm pissed that he does not put the shield on me / look where you walk / do not forget that you have a lot of techies / if you have a lot of bombs you're dead / I left him and went soloing mid / moving around with no life you will die.' Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZvDT69spcO4>, last accessed on March 10, 2010.

⁶ Brazil is one of the countries with the highest adoption rate of social networks around the world, topping the list of countries with more users who visit social networks, in proportion to the total number of Internet users. Orkut was one of the sites that helped the social networks in Brazil become popular. Google launched the Brazilian version of the site in 2004 and in September 2005, half of the Brazilian active on the Internet had already connected to Orkut. In 2010, it remains the most popular social network in the country - in July, about 87% of the internet users used Orkut in Brazil (Source: Nielsen Ibope online – www.ibope.com.br).

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