Representations of Poverty and Digital Inclusion: Clashes over alterity in the field of technology and the virtual universe

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Abstract

This article investigates representations concerning access by members of the lower classes to the technological world and the universe of the Internet. The study observes the crossing of communicational processes of these lower classes with middle and upper class actors, with the issue of co-existence and cultural difference taken as a background. Through observational research in the virtual environment, we conducted a survey of manifestations found on sites, forums and blogs where issues such as consumption of products, services and social networks by people at the base of the pyramid and the question of digital inclusion were in some way related. The research results point to a reaffirmation of the logic of "each one in his place", which winds up questioning the imaginary of the Internet as a democratic space par excellence.

1. Introduction

The issue of digital inclusion of lower classes is currently very prominent. During both terms of President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, the government undertook various efforts in this direction, with initiatives such as "Computers for everyone", "Computer in the Classroom", creation of community tele-centers and the "National Program of Popular Broadband". In the global realm, there have also been discussions in various forums and spaces about how digital inclusion is taking place among the population found at the base of the pyramid. Many initiatives taken by the governments, private companies and non-governmental organizations have been steering the debate toward opportunities for inclusion through certain technological objects such as computers and cell phones, with special attention given to the way in which the lower classes appropriate and consume these technologies.

Nevertheless, there are still few academic studies that present discussions in greater context about the issue. It seems important to introduce to the discussion about the consumption of new technologies and digital inclusion by the lower classes factors related to the existing representations among certain social actors about this consumption. This article[44] proposes to investigate certain representations related to the access by members of the lower classes to the technological world and the Internet universe.

 The search for understanding of specific cultural contexts was well expressed by Garcia Canclini (2007) who referred to the new configurations of the digital universe, which synthesize some of the challenges of studies that explore this field of knowledge.

> "(...) what are the consequences of the fact of accepting cultural diversity as a necessary ingredient for enriching the society of knowledge? We can respond in a simple manner: to conceive of society in a multifocal manner and with relative

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decentralization. This general affirmation acquires distinct meanings in the sciences and in systems of socio-cultural representation. In relation to the universality of knowledge, it implies seeking compatibility between scientific knowledge and that which corresponds to other orders of symbolic experiences and cognitive models. (...) Diversity thus reappears, at the core of the project of the society of knowledge. It is the component that distinguishes the society of information and the point in which it articulates the problematic of difference and the problematic of connection. We can connect with others solely by obtaining *information*, as we do with a machine that provides data. *To know* the other, however, is to deal with their difference." (García, 2007, p. 241)

Some authors criticize, properly so, technical and determinist approaches that point to "necessary" routes in the direction of which identities and sociabilities have been shaped since the advent of the Internet and digital life. Among these critics, Miller and Slater (2004) call attention to the fact that the distinction between "life on-line" and "life off-line" should not be established as a methodological and analytical starting point for the studies, which inspires the realization of empiric studies that show the possible configurations created by actors in specific social contexts. Wolton (2003), takes a similar position by criticizing perspectives that treat technological innovations as motors of socio-cultural change, based on large technical and determinist schemes.

One question deserves to be raised that concerns the disputes for representation among different social groups in the universe of the new information and communication technologies (NICTs). In a country with a strong hierarchic structure such as Brazil, where social differences tend to be naturalized (Damatta, 2000), it is worth reflecting on the coexistence of diversity in communication processes mediated by new technologies. From this point of view, one can approach the relations between different groups and processes of construction and negotiation of differences in the virtual world. From the perspective of the lower classes, there is a sense of exclusion, of "invisibility" and of social disqualification – which does not involve an a priori attribution made by a researcher, but of the way by which these groups perceive themselves in relation to broader society (Vaitsman, 1997). If "consuming" is important to "be part of" and

attenuate the sense of social segregation (Barros, 2007), "consuming technology" would have a strong appeal in the popular context because of the fact that technology is seen as a synonym of modernity, or that is, of the evidence of a new era in relation to which one cannot "remain on the outside."

Neither consume technology nor have a cell phone or computer means for the subjects to be distant from a social dynamic considered basic (from the actor´s point of view) in contemporary life, which is communication mediated by technological devices. Within this situation it seems important to introduce to the discussion about the consumption of new technologies and digital inclusion in the lower classes, factors related to representations existing between certain social actors about this consumption. This article thus proposes to investigate certain representations about access by members of the lower classes to the technological world and the universe of the Internet.

To conduct the study, observational research (Flick, 2004) conducted in the virtual environment mapped various manifestations collected on sites, forums and blogs in which themes related to consumption of groups belonging to the lower classes (products, services and social networks) and the issue of digital inclusion were in some way related. In the case of the "favelization of Orkut", the observation was conducted in 2009 on sites and blogs that appeared after entering the expression in search engines such as Google. The analysis of poverty and technology presented in section 3 is the result of observational research conducted in 2010, also based on search engine sites and accompanying various situations in which the two terms appear related (like the release of a telephone service aimed at the lower class).

This study adopts the notion of representation as presented by Chartier (1990,1997). Inspired by the work of Marin (1993), which was dedicated to the analysis of representations of power, Chartier refers to three levels of reality, that is: a level of "collective representation", which incorporates, in individuals, the divisions of the social world and organizes the schemes of perception by which these individuals classify, judge and act; a second level, that of the forms of expression and style of identity that individuals or groups hope are recognized, and on a final level, that of the

delegation of representatives – unique individuals, institutions or abstract instances – of "coherence and of stability" of the identities affirmed (Chartier, 1997).

This paper concentrates on the first level proposed by Chartier, the "collective representations", seeking to analyze if in the virtual world there are classifications existing on the "real" plane. It thus investigates the "look of the other", or that is, in what way the access of the lower classes to new technologies and the virtual environment has been perceived by other social groups.

2. Poverty and its relational character

From classical works like that of Evans-Pritchard (1978) about the *Nuer*, first published in 1940, passing through authors like Bourdieu (1989), who spoke of the importance of thinking relationally – which means escaping from analyses that are based on pre-established categories such as "immigrants" or "youth" – anthropological thinking sought to emphasize the idea that identity is not something fixed, but situational. In this perspective, the construction of identity is established through the perspective of the social actors, which shows that this is a dynamic and not essentialist concept, with poverty thus being a relative category. Lower class social segments can re-define their identity according to the context in which they are inserted, based on a logic that makes sense in terms of their world view, and not on "objective" criteria defined a priori, "from outside" their cultural reality.

Duarte (1986) recalls that the lower income population have been called the "masses", the "poor", the "people", "uncultured classes", "proletariat", "the inferior classes", "popular" and "workers", whether to contain, raise or overcome them (1986, p.119). The author warns that both common sense as well as the academic world treat the social classes as if this concept had an objectivity independent from specific social contexts.

Since the classification of "poverty" itself tends to be negative, it is necessary to complement the identity with a component that reverts the situation and gives positive value to the equation, like work (Duarte, 1986; Sarti, 1996; Zaluar, 2002), consumption

(Barros, 2007), or another system of social or moral classification (BARBOSA, 2004). Thus, depending on the situation, the classification, now positive, could vary between: poor, *but* worker; poor *but* consumer; poor *but* connected or poor *but* honest. The sense of belonging to broader society, of "being included" would be, in fact, highly relevant in the referred to social universe.

Because of the relational nature of the concept, it is important to indicate in what way the lower classes are constituted within the analysis. In a comparative perspective, while in the middle layers there is a greater emphasis on the notion of the individual (Velho, 1981; Duarte, 1986), which, in terms of consumption, leads to a tremendous search for differentiation and signs of singularity. In the segment studied here there is a strong search to interact "equal for equal", to know the rules, to dominate the game, to participate. On the other hand we sould mention that in the lower classes there are no movements of differentiation, whether internal or in relation to other social groups. We are always speaking in relational identities, which are reconfigured according to the context. The comparison that leads to the contrast between "looking for distinction" (among the middle classes) X "looking for belonging" (among the lower classes) appears in a broader plane, which also has nuances to be recognized.

The approach adopted here, therefore, is a contrast to that of the "culture of poverty" proposed by Lewis (1975), which is seen as something essential and nearly immutable. It is correct to say that the classification of "the lower class" is a construction produced by researchers in their studies – as has been emphasized by Sarti (1996) and Barbosa (2004) in relation to the issue of poverty. This is a relative category that cannot be reduced to a single axis of classification such as that of "material need", for example. In reality, what is important is to indicate in what way this classification arose; in this case Dumont's (1972) relational perspective is adopted, which works with contrasting "individualism" and "hierarchy" to deal with different cultural contexts.

In the studies of the working classes in Brazil, Duarte (1986) is the author who has most systematically developed Dumont´s perspective, which was also adopted in this article. Groups from the lower classes are not autonomous universes or isolated tribes that construct their world vision intact, under the aegis of the hierarchy. On the other hand,

authors with great experience working in the field with these groups, such as Duarte (1986) and Sarti (1996), have been concerned with revealing the singularity of their cultural experience – such as the preeminence of a hierarchical view and of the value of the family as the center of its morality.

3. Poverty and the consumption of technology

After presenting this initial clarification about the relational and socially constructed character of the classification of "poor", we move to the analysis of some representations in the field of the NICTs in relation to the issue of poverty. The access and consumption of the low income classes to technology products such as cell phones can be analyzed through some representations that are "marked" and categorized as being "poor".

The payment system for using cell phones most widely used by the lower classes in Brazil is called "pre-paid", which, as the name indicates, is paid before its use, and therefore has no monthly bill. The widespread adhesion of the low income population to this method leads to the immediate association of the use of the pre-paid system with a less privileged economic situation. This is revealed in the rise of one of the most popular ringtones available on the Internet – which is called "*Um pobre ligando pra mim,*"[A poor person calling me] in which this phrase is repeated melodically twice by a female voice, which then says in a formal tone: "*Chamada a cobrar*, *para aceitá-la, continue na linha após a identificação*" [Collect call, to accept it, stay on the line after identification]. This ringtone is triggered when the person receives a collect call and its wide use reveals, in an ironic way, one of the ways that society relates individuals, social locations and forms of use of objects and services.

A quite common practice among "pre-paid" users is when a person with little credit calls another person to warn them that he wants to be contacted and then awaits their

call, given that even without credit the cell phone in the pre-paid system continues to receive calls. Similar strategies take place in other low income contexts, as indicated by a study by anthropologists Miller and Horst (2006). In Jamaica, these authors found that the company that sells cell phones realized this type of behavior and, to take advantage of the local form of communication, released the "call me" system so that users who did not have credit could call up to 30 people for free to ask them to return the call. Some Jamaicans depend on money that they receive from other people; the circulation of money is the result of the relationships with other people and the cell phone enters this context as something essential for this dynamic to take place, functioning on different levels, especially in the family. People see the phone as an important part of their network and must be certain that their network is functioning with the maximum number of people possible, which makes the calls very fast.

Returning to the Brazilian context, the popular practice of   "a collect-call ring" mentioned here, which lasts only long enough for the number making the call to appear on the screen of the person who has a post-paid system or a pre-paid with credit, has an "official" counterpart. In March 2009, the operator Vivo released the service *Vivo Me liga* [Call – Me] which, as its name suggests, serves to substitute the popular calling method mentioned. It should be noted that this call service by the company was a success, and reached one million daily uses within three months of its creation.

The release of *Vivo Me liga* triggered manifestations on blogs and Internet forums that sought to reveal the suitability of the service for its public, whether through the denomination that made direct allusion to the "poor" condition – as in the online post *"Celular Vivo. SMS free of charge. Do you know the Call the poor [service]?"* – or to the "celular de pobre" [poor person's cell phone] popularly known as the "pai-de-santo" [a medium in the candomblé religion], because it "only receives" calls as indicated in the online post *"Vivo´s Service for pai-de-santo cell phones shows that a Brazilian has a cell phone, not money."*

In a search conducted on Google with the terms "pesquisa celular pobre" [search poor person's cell phone], the link   appeared http://comprar.ai/onde-comprar/motorola-w175-pobre-porem-limpinho/, at which appears a *"listagem de onde comprar motorola w175*

pobre porem limpinho online em loja virtual" [list of where to buy a Motorola w175 poor but clean online in a virtual store]. At this list are found offers for the Motorola W175 model cell phone and its battery. On the "Tecnoblog fórum", a blog dedicated to commenting on "technological experience", there is a post entitled "Motorola W175: pobre, porém limpinho" [poor but clean] (http://tecnoblog.net/forum/topic/motorola-w175-pobre-porem-limpinho), with the sub-title *"Quer um celular feio, porém muito barato? Então você está a procura do Motorola W175.",* [Do you want a poor but cheap cell phone? Then you're looking for a Motorola W175.] which reveals the association between "poor" and a consumer object classified as "ugly".

One factor that draws attention in these cases is the use of humor speaking of the condition of poverty and consumption related to it in more or less virtual environments both on a site of virtual sales and blogs aimed at people interested in technology. Through the use of irony, an association arises between product/social condition /aesthetic (like an "ugly cell phone") in which the demarcation of poverty is explicitly raised – a system is thus established that classifies goods and identities, things and people, differences and similarities. To acquire certain products implies having a certain "personality" and "lifestyle" which distinguishes a certain group from others that form modern society. As Rocha affirms "...we consume to be part of certain groups and in the same gesture, to distinguish ourselves from other groups, in a complementary and distinctive logic that is very close to totemic classifications." (Rocha, 1985, p. 172).

The association of poor and poverty to products and services in the technological universe reinstates the hierarchy found in "real" life by socially locating people through consumption. In a society like Brazil's, formed from a strong hierarchical bias (Damatta, 1981), the clear identification of a social condition by the consumption of certain goods and services appears as a "need" for social localization in a domain that promotes access and a sense of belonging, as is the case of technological objects in the universe of lower class groups (Silva, 2007).

4. The virtual "wall" and distinction on the Internet

In the space of coexistence of the Internet environment, certain representations can be identified as related to the coexistence with alterity – which is understood as the possibility to recognize the "other" as different from "me" (Rocha, 1984). To do so, the analysis focuses on manifestations related to the growing access by members of the base of the pyramid to the virtual universe through social networks such as Orkut and their consequent digital inclusion.

Pierre Lévy (1996, 2000) has emphasized the "democratic" aspect of the Internet, as if cyber space, because of its intrinsic characteristics, favors sharing and egalitarianism, by provoking drastic changes in the ways of thinking, creating relationships and meanings in the world. The network arises in this imaginary as a utopic space where one can have access to all types of information and where the means of production of knowledge and expression of a wide variety of styles are accessible to any person, regardless of their social status and condition. In digital life the "sovereign" and "disciplinary" power lose space to a diffuse type of power, due to the enormous fragmentation provided by the experience in the network environment, where a single element potentially has the ability to influence and reconfigure the whole. This collective intelligence, which reigns in the "democratic" space that is the Internet, does not involve only a cognitive concept, but something much broader, which involves the renovation of social ties (Lévy, 2000). In the revolution provoked by the Internet, social ties are constructed upon a respect for the diversity of human qualities. In one of his works (Lévy, 2000), the philosopher makes a reference to the biblical episode of Sodom and Gomorra, highlighting that Gomorra's crime was to refuse hospitality, which is a distinguishing element of the virtual relationship – recognizing and taking in the other:

> "Hospitality eminently represents the sustentation of the social tie, conceived according to the form of reciprocity: the host is both that who receives as well as that who is received. And each of them can become a stranger (...) Hospitality consists in linking the individual to a collective. It is completely contrasted to the act of exclusion. Justice includes, "inserting", reconstituting the social fabric. In a just society, and

> according to the form of reciprocity, each one works to include the others. [In the contemporary world], where everything takes place, where all are led to change, hospitality, the moral of nomads and migrants, becomes the moral par excellence." (Lévy, 2000, p.36-37)

It is important to question here the a priori definition of a "new world" of meanings that would be formed from the advent of digital technologies, given that no technology is established in a cultural vacuum. There is no"technological reason that carries in itself a meaning separate from concrete experiences. On this basis, one can investigate in what way modes of distinction arise in the virtual space that reaffirm social differences that are present in the "real world", which would contrast to the idea of a space of peaceful coexistence with diversity.

The "favelization of Orkut" appears as a point to be explored, by raising the question of digital inclusion and of coexistence with difference. In some blogs, lists and forums, Internet users, who are supposed to be members of the middle and upper layers, begin to express themselves – often quite explicitly and critically – against the effects of the growing access by the lower classes to the digital world. An observation of the social origin of people analyzed is fitting here. It is known that in the virtual environment there is considerable space for disguise and simulation, with countless situations in which the identity performed is very distant from the daily profile of the agents. But in the case of this study, those who complain about the "favelization of Orkut" place themselves in an hierarchically superior position in relation to the "poor" which leads us to suppose that they are – or at least perceive themselves to have –a relation of social distance from the lower classes.

It is in this context that the expression arose, "favelization of Orkut," which suggests an association between "favela", "poverty" and "poor taste"; the "invasion" of the Brazilian poor on the Internet, which is especially visible on social networks such as Orkut, would bring with it a wake of "tacky" taste that is expressed in photos posted and in the precarious use of the Portuguese language, as appears in some of these declarations;

"Why? Because any little weed who buys a computer in the Casa & Vídeo [brazilian retailer], in 317 installments, wants to get on the Internet and have a profile on Orkut?

Orkut was useful. Today it is infested with illiterate people. Everyone wants to be sensual. Everyone wants to be famous. What's worse is they all procreate...

But there is a way out! There is light at the end of the tunnel.

Bagulho Digital [Digital Stuff] launches the campaign SAY NO TO ELECTRONIC FAVELIZATION."

(http://bagulhodigital.blogspot.com/2007/09/favela-eletrnica.html)

"You know, Brazilians are still new to this Internet thing, and unfortunately transfer the mediocrity of life to the Orkut. That is, Brazilians turned the Orkut into a favela, really "favelized" it, that is the term. And not just Orkut... Fotolog.net WAS the best online photo system. Was! Until it was discovered by Brazilians."

(http://www.morroida.com.br/2006/08/28/sobre-o-orkut)

"A large part of the discharacterization of Orkut, is due to the much discussed digital inclusion. Thanks to Casas Bahias [brazilian retailer] and common insinuators, we can buy PC's for R$ 700,00. In needy communities, Lan Houses pop up that charge from R$1- R$2 an hour. So, those with no education are no longer without technology. Therefore, we have the newest socio-political-economic problem: **The FAVELIZATION OF ORKUT!"** (http://metabolismobasal.blogspot.com/2007/12/lembra-do-longnquo-ano-de-2004-lembra.html)

"If this has taken place with Orkut and Fotolog, just let the favelada [slum dwellers] discover YouTube… if they haven't already ...without wanting to be separatist, but already being so, it stinks having to coexist with certain sub-

cultures who have been sprouting up on the Brazilian Internet…" (http://www.morroida.com.br/2006/08/28/sobre-o-orkut/)

Along with these manifestations, the "anti-digital inclusion" Internet users place together with their comments photos considered "crude", found on Orkut and fotologs of low income people, to illustrate their indignation. What draws our attention here is the reinforcement of negative representations associated to "favelas" among the members of the middle and upper classes. As a location commonly associated to extreme poverty, filth, chaos and social disorder (Valladares, 2005), the idea of "favelization" on the net is a revised version of old perceptions. In one of the statements (the second) the country appears as a large favela; this involves a concept that Brazilians "contaminate" the environments – real or virtual – where they pass, as "unqualified" people in relation to other nationalities.

The undesired digital inclusion causes certain more favored economic groups to reject Orkut, alleging that it is impossible to coexist in the same virtual space with the manifestations of a "lack of taste" and formal education coming from the "periphery". The need thus arises for distinction that leads to a migration to more elite social networks such as Facebook.

How can we think of the question of distinction on the network in the context being studied? Pierre Bourdieu made an important contribution to the analysis of the relation between consumption and social classes in his classic study *Distinction* (1979), in which he analyzes how the social elaboration of taste is established, arguing that choices for consumption objects reflect a type of symbolic hierarchy that is determined and maintained by economically superior classes to reinforce their distinction from other social classes. Thus taste is an element that defines and separates the upper class from the working classes, expressing itself in choice of food, drink, cosmetics, music, literature, etc. Appearing in social life in a naturalized way, it becomes the criteria par excellence of distinction legitimation , encompassing all the dimensions of human life that include choice and, in this way, constituting social groups.

For Bourdieu (*ibid*), the social classes have distinct consumption models that are continuously reproduced from generation to generation. The processes of education and socialization contribute to the insertion of individuals in a certain class, producing specific tastes and consumption practices. Upon internalizing their class position, it would be difficult or undesirable to imitate the life style of other classes. Bourdieu introduces the concept of "cultural capital", which includes cultural knowledge, abilities, experiences, linguistic competence, ways of speaking, vocabulary, models of thinking and world views that are acquired unconsciously by individuals through the socialization processes in family, school, church, neighborhood and subculture to which they belong. Each individual would thus assimilate the cultural capital of the social environment in which he or she was born.

In his analysis, Bourdieu (*ibid)* suggests that the middle class seeks to convert cultural capital into economic capital (which comes to be the economic resources of each individual), while the working class is resigned to restricted consumption choices, accepting the world of limited horizons as a form of class loyalty and because low cost tastes protect against economic uncertainty.

This perspective obviously rejects the idea that taste would be the result of innate and individual choices of the human intellect. To the contrary, it shows the social production of taste, which, as a true "social weapon", reinforces the distinction between social segments.

Together with the social analysis of taste, Bourdieu works with another important concept in relation to his concerns about the cultural differences that oppose social groups: the notion of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1983), which characterizes a social group in relation to another that does not share the same social conditions. By occupying different positions in the social hierarchy, the classes adapt certain lifestyles that would be symbolic expressions of the diversity of living conditions. *Habitus* is thus the "materialization of collective memory that reproduces for successors the acquisitions of the precursors" (Bourdieu, 1983, note 4, p. 91); at the same time in which it is deeply interiorized, it can be renovated over time, inventing new means of performing old functions that guarantee that members of the same class act in a similar manner. Its

strength of modeling a way of life of individuals comes from the fact that it is based on unconscious schemes that result from the work of the education and socialization to which individuals are submitted since their early childhood. This materialization of collective memory also takes place through "corporal dispositions"; each social group forms a relationship with the body that is its particular style, functioning as an "incorporated moral". A person belonging to a certain group shares gestures and postures that reveal their *habitus*. In this point Bourdieu calls attention to the process of "naturalization of the social", because individuals face these different corporal modes as something   "natural", without perceiving that *habitus* is acting in a deep and unconscious manner, guaranteeing the permanence of social differences. The formative presence of *habitus* guarantees the homogenization of tastes within a group or social class, explaining the preferences and social practices within a certain context.

The manifestations against digital inclusion collected in the study show the need certain individuals from middle and upper layers have for distinction when facing the approximation and occupation of lower class groups in territories that had once been nearly exclusive. As seen, according to Bourdieu (1979), accusations about the (poor) taste of low income people are like a social "weapon" that distinguishes groups based on a process of social disqualification that appears to be extremely natural. The online material referring to the "favelization of Orkut" shows photos that denounce an aesthetic perceived as "wrong", where individuals who are "uncouth" or "tacky" exhibit the "poor taste" of class both in clothes and accessories, while also in their bodies that are considered inadequate (next to photos were placed criticisms common to corporal factors such as "excessive" weight and the hair styles of the low income youth). The lower classes should thus remain in restricted spaces – and Orkut would be one of these locations of confinement – creating the need, on the part of the discontents with the virtual proximity, of a shift to other social networks.

Thus, the "democratic potential" of the Internet is experienced, in this context, as a threat to certain groups belonging to the middle and upper classes. Remembering once again Douglas and Isherwood (1979), if consumption serves as a "bridge or barrier", a digital "wall" is raised based on a growing participation of lower income groups in

social networks such as Orkut. Boyd (2008) had previously analyzed in what way the options taken by U.S. Internet users for social networks - MySpace, which was more popular, or Facebook, seen as "aristocratic" – could reveal choices of class seeking distinction. In the Brazilian context, we find clear signs of distinction and expression of power revealed in the question of the "favelization of Orkut". Since 2010, there was a strong migration from Orkut to Facebook by some of the members of the higher socio-economic classes[45], in search of a distinct virtual space that was not "contaminated" by the presence of the lower classes. This involves a movement, subtle at times, where an "obligation" to abandon Orkut appears.

The fear of the potential "pollution" caused by virtual contact with the lower classes can be considered in the light of Douglas' (1976) idea about "purity and danger". Douglas discusses the concepts of "purity" and "impurity" as found in the Jewish and Christian religions by showing how the behavior of cleansing is related to a positive force of organizing, classifying and hierarchizing the environment, or that is, creating order. Passing to an interpretation of the coexistance difficulty in the virtual space analyzed here, using this logic one can think of a similarity, given that the order is also achieved by means of difference demarcation.

It is interesting to consider DaMatta's (2000) analysis about modes of segregation in Brazil and the United States. Upon speaking of the racial question, DaMatta proposes that the model adopted in the United States is that of "equal, but different", because it involves a society based on egalitarian principles and which, for this reason, wound up creating modes of segregation that are quite explicit and exclusionary; the Brazilian case, in turn, can be translated by the idea of "different but equal", given that the

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[45]   See: "Orkut x Facebook: Divisão de classe no Brazil?", by Raquel Recuero. Available at:
http://www.pontomidia.com.br/raquel/arquivos/orkut_x_facebook_divisao_de_classe_no_Brazil.html, last accessed on Nov. 23, 2010; "Orkut X Facebook no Brazil", available at: http://blogdolabjor.wordpress.com/2010/11/08/orkut-x-facebook-no-Brazil/, last accessed on Feb. 2, 2011.

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society is perceived as originally hierarchical, which would allow approximation of the parts as long as each one does not forget their distinct origin:

> "A system that is in fact profoundly anti-egalitarian, based on the logic of ´a place for each one, each one in its place´, which is part of our Portuguese inheritance, but which was never really shaken by the social transformations. In fact, a system that is so internalized, that among us, it goes unnoticed." (Damatta, 2000, p. 83)

Thus Brazilian society likes to see itself as an inclusionary nation, in which differences coexist harmonically, as in the myth of the triangle of the 3 races (Damatta, 2000). Nevertheless, in various moments, ruptures arise in this scheme, giving space to the appearance of authoritarian rites such as "Do you know with whom you are speaking?" (Damatta, 1981) which re-establishes an hierarchy among individuals, or as in the case of the data raised by the study, in which spaces, life styles and tastes are marked in a quite explicit manner. The "danger" of the virtual world is precisely that it offers the possibility for an extreme approximation of social differences. The arguments raised in the idea of the "favelization of the Orkut" appeal to the naturalized hierarchical principles that are deeply enrooted in Brazilian society, requesting that the lower class groups remain in their restricted spaces, within the logic of "each one in his place".

5. Final Considerations

The article sought to analyze representations of certain social segments that are more economically favored about the inclusion of low income groups in the new communication environments. The study initially looked at the way in which the consumption of technological products such as cell phones by segments of the lower classes can be analyzed through some representations that initially indicate a classification of products and services that are categorized as "poor".

The demarcation of products and services with the classification "for the poor" relate to Bourdieu's perspective (1979), which emphasizes that efforts to establish "distinction" are a key aspect of consumption of different social classes, and his strong concern for showing this phenomenon as a mode of reproduction of social mechanisms for the

maintenance of hierarchies among classes. In this case, the representations found related to this consumption serve for the creation of "bridges and barriers" (Douglas et al, 1979), modeling profiles of products and people within a certain classificatory system.

Considering the perspective of segments of the lower classes in relation to the appropriation of new communication technologies, we have a framework (Barros, 2009a; Silva, 2010) that points to the use of cell phones within a logic of belonging, or that is, of escaping the social invisibility to which they were relegated to become simply "poor". "To be a consumer" – and in this context, to be a consumer of a certain cell phone – signifies overcoming the condition of poverty. The dimension of consumption rose in this context as if it had the ability to offer belonging and inclusion in the broader society of consumption, defining the subjects as poor and consumers. While in other social groups in the middle and upper classes what calls attention is the construction of identities and emotional ties that reinforce the singularity of individuals (Silva, 2007). In the lower class context, this other dimension is revealed – that of being "accredited" to participate in the society of consumption, knowing the rules and acting as social actors who through consumption have the power to attenuate the enormous social differences in the Brazilian social universe.

Continuing in this internal perspective of social actors, the use of the NICTs by lower class groups can be understood as a privileged means of seeking more egalitarian relations with the other within the broader society. In this case, it is within a more egalitarian sense (being equal to everyone) than one of affirmation of idiosyncrasies (having a singularity that can be expressed in the processes of objectification through a cell phone). Based on inspirations from the works of Dumont (1972) and Simmel (1971), we can think of a passage from an hierarchical situation (being "poor" as hierarchically inferior to "being rich") to an egalitarian relationship (being "equal to each other" in the sense of the quantitative individualism postulated by Simmel, where all are on the same plane of existence). For Simmel (1971), quantitative individualism would be found in the universalist and enlightenment ideals that affirm the liberty, equality and autonomy of the social subjects – the "citizens" – of modern democracies. Qualitative individualism, meanwhile, would be sustained in the attributes of

singularity, interiority, authenticity and creativity of the subjects. In contrast to the quantitative individualism in the lower class context studied (having a cell phone to be an "equal"), we find processes of objectification based more on qualitative individualism in the universe of the urban middle class, where the consumption of cell phones tends to reinforce the singularity of the individual before peers.

We thus have a contrast that can be established. On one hand, the representations of social groups in relation to the use of technology by lower class segments lead to classifications that insist on the attribution of an "essence" to the condition of poverty, which is formed by a negative symbolism that would socially disqualify and seek a virtual distancing from those classes. This involves the perpetuation of hierarchical relations (Dumont, 1972) where the rich and the poor maintain their inequality and complementarity, within the logic of "each one in his place" (Damatta, 1981). On the other hand, the appropriations of the lower class segments in the field of new technologies seek, to a large degree, the dissolution of hierarchical schemes through the establishment of more egalitarian relations with the other, which are based on the idea of "having access" to the "new world" of contemporary connections.

Based on what was seen in the article, a great difficulty can be perceived by the part of certain social groups in elaborating alterity in the virtual environment. Alterity is understood here as the recognition and knowledge of a plural humanity based on a radical "decentering" in which all the cultures are relativized (Rocha, 1984; Laplantine, 1996). The recognition of alterity presupposes a qualification of the other as "different from me". The theme of the "favelization of Orkut" serves as a discussion of how the construction of alterity can be problematic in the virtual universe, reproducing consolidated modes of segregation and disqualification aimed at low income groups, which questions the imaginary of the Internet as a "democratic" social space par excellence.

Finally, to deepen the discussion, it would be important to make a greater effort to understand the NICTS, based on the cultural reality in which individuals are inserted, investigating their appropriations in relation to technology and the virtual world in future studies based on empiric and contextualized research. The Internet embodied the

utopia of the "electronic democracy," especially for authors such as Castells (1999) and Lévy (1996; 2000). Castells (1999) envisioned a "new society", which would have as one of its central components a "multimedia culture" without stratification, where individuals in egalitarian conditions would be found immersed in virtual networks.

As Maigret (2010) and Wolton (2003) have already identified, it is necessary to escape from the technological determinism that surrounds a significant portion of the literature about the Internet, as mentioned above. Greater attention must be paid to the cultural practices that precede the use of this technology and which create particular configurations. As Maigret summed up well: "Given that it does not present anything coherently, and responds, much more, to contradictory social demands, the Internet develops in superimposed layers that are increasingly numerous, of frequently different logics." (Maigret, 2010, p. 409). As Sahlins (1979) presented in an important work, the particular characteristic of human life in society is the symbolism inscribed in all social acts. For this reason, the meanings of human life are collectively constructed. There is no objective reality – in this case a technological one – which is separate or autonomous from the social subjects. The new information and communication technologies are inserted in the context of already constituted human and social relations and do not promote on their own a universe of pluralist coexistence. The visions about the social differences lived in the off-line world can perpetuate in the on-line realm, as seen. It is thus necessary to analyze the "superimposed layers" mentioned by Maigret, revealing the fields of negotiation and dispute for representation among different social groups.

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