

Presentification, bond and delegation in social network sites¹

Presentificação, vínculo e delegação nos sites de redes sociais

Presentificación, vínculo y delegación en los sitios de redes sociales

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Abstract *The paper discusses material aspects of communication on social network platforms and approaches the ways by which actors present themselves in these spaces based on a case study: the choice of characters of the mediatic universe as images for the profiles. Materiality theories and Actor-Network Theory are used to question the bibliography on social networks and analyse the exchange of profile photos for childish characters on the past Children's Day on Facebook, based on the categories of self-reflexivity and expressive coherence.*
Keywords: *Materialities of Communication. Social Networks. Facebook.*

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Resumo *O artigo discute aspectos materiais da comunicação nas plataformas de redes sociais, abordando os modos através dos quais os atores se apresentam nesses espaços a partir de um estudo de caso: a escolha de personagens do universo midiático como imagens dos perfis. As teorias da Materialidade e Teoria Ator-Rede são utilizadas para problematizar a bibliografia sobre redes sociais e analisar a troca de fotos de perfis por personagens infantis no último Dia das Crianças no Facebook, a partir das categorias de autorreflexividade e coerência expressiva.*

Palavras-chave: *Materialidades da comunicação. Redes Sociais. Facebook.*

Resumen *El artículo discute aspectos materiales de la comunicación en las plataformas de redes sociales, abordando los modos por los que los actores se presentan en esos espacios a partir de un estudio de caso: la elección de personajes del universo mediático como imágenes de sus perfiles. Se utilizan las teorías de la Materialidad y la Teoría Actor-Red para problematizar la bibliografía sobre las redes sociales y analizar el cambio de las fotos de los perfiles por las de personajes infantiles durante el último “Día de los Niños” en Facebook, a partir de las categorías de autorreflexividad y coherencia expresiva.*

Palabras-clave: *Materialidades de la comunicación. Redes sociales. Facebook.*

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Introduction

In October 2011, on the occasion of Children's Day, we observed an increasing wave of the exchange of the photographs of our friends' profiles on Facebook – many of them above 40 – for pictures of animated cartoons' characters, children's films and childhood heroes. Far from being eccentricity, the viral movement of picture exchange, on the occasion of date, topic or special motive is quite recurrent on social network sites.

Thus, beyond a mere entertainment, in this event we saw the possibility of discussing communication aspects through the social network platforms which concern the ways through which the actors presentify themselves, connect themselves to others and construct associations on these socio-technical nets and of finding out what is the role of the avatars in this process.

Since the beginning of the 2000s – mainly from 2003 on, when sites such as MySpace, among others, conquered thousands of users – the social network sites have become a central phenomenon of cyberculture, which affected the daily socio-communicative practices on a world scale and attracted the university's attention.

In the communicational environment, we identified two main currents of analysis. The first, which articulates the social dynamics and the subjects' expression on these platforms with a broader phenomenon related to the *regime of visibility and power of contemporary society*, based upon three matrices: a) overexposure of the subject and of private life based upon Guy Debord's (2003) notion of the society of spectacle (LIPOVETSKY, 2005; SENNETT, 1988; SIBILIA, 2008), b) the articulation between vigilance and visibility, based upon Foucault's notion of discipline and Deleuze's notion of control (BRUNO; KANASHIRO; FIRMINO, 2010); or as c) expressions of Virilio's dromocratic society and/or Baudrillard's simulacral logic (TRIVINHO, 2010).

On the other hand, we identified a second current which is interested in the discussion about social networks, identities, interaction and qual-

ity of the bonds established between the inter-agents on the sites (BOYD; ELLISON, 2007; RECUERO, 2009; ZHAO; GRASMUCK; MARTIN, 2008) in a more topical and momentary way.

Although both currents contribute to the understanding of aspects of the phenomenon in question, it seems to us that, concomitantly, they do not respond to a central investigation: that of the understanding of the way in which actually occurs the communicative process between the actors on the social network sites and what is the role of avatars.

Thus our specific objective, in this study, is to discuss how determined actors presentify themselves on Facebook⁴, what is the role of the avatars and how this communicative process occurs with their contact net, basing our discussion upon a case study, which is: the choice of characters coming from the mediatic universe as profile images on commemorative dates, in this case, the past Children's Day.

It is appropriate to say beforehand that by using the notion of *presentification*, we are interested in emphasizing the processing and performing dimension of this process with regard to the central role of the avatars for the identity construction of the actors on the nets. Thus our argument is not that the avatars "represent" or "illustrate" aspects of the actor's previously constructed identity, but that it is the heterogeneous and hybrid net, characterized by human and non-human actors which constructs, all together, in a distributed and relational way the actor's *presentification* on the net – premise which is based upon aspects of the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) proposed by Latour (2005), according to what we will explain further on.

A second element on which we also bet is that in this process, the users opt to render visible and to hide determined contents, in a process obviously marked by self-reflexivity (GIDDENS, 2002), that is to say by the conscious, reflected and intentional choice of the appropriate materials

⁴ Facebook is the site of social networking which is more used nowadays, counting on more than 800 million users in the whole world, according to the statistics of the site: <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>. Access on: January 15th 2012.

and at the same time by the expectation about the other's look, which we will call "expressive coherence"⁵.

Thus part of the communicative process occurs in the game between exposition and invisibility, thus contradicting the argument about the fortuitous, indiscriminate and little reflected exposition of the actors on the nets, present in the premise about "the tyrannies of visibility".

A third bet is that the articulation between aspects of the Materialities and Actor-network theories can become productive tools for this analysis. Quite a complex challenge, since there are still few communication studies which explore these connections in Brazil, thus rendering difficult the interlocution with other studies⁶.

Thus, in an attempt to complexify the discussion, we take as premises the ideas that:

- a) Communication always supposes a data of "materiality" (GUMBRECHT, 1993) and the presentation to the other one, through his discursive and material performance, is fundamental in any communicational and identitary process (GOFFMAN, 2009) – which is not different on the social network sites.
- b) The consumption of cultural goods is an identity producer and on personal pages and social networking sites the users often appropriate these goods, choosing each element to be published "for its semiotic potential", in a conspicuous "self-presentation process" (SCHAU; GILLY, 2003, p. 394);
- c) And that the discussions about identitary constructions – especially on social networking sites – very often ignore this central aspect: that of the understanding about which mediatic materials (photos, videos, songs, etc.) are used by the actors, for which reasons, in which ways and with which frequency.

⁵ Coherence which is always being submitted to tension by the "noises" which permeate any dialogic and communicational relationship.

⁶ For the uses of ANT in the social networking studies, see: Bruno (2012) and Lemos (2012).

At last, it is appropriate to explain that this exploratory study, which counted on the conduction of interviews and the analysis of the pictures of ten profiles defined on the basis of the following elements: 1) minimum time of one year of Facebook use; 2) minimum number of 250 friends on the contact net⁷; 3) the actors' connection, such as teachers or students, to universities of great Brazilian urban centres and 4) actors of both sexes and various ages. The justification for this corpus is that we were interested in approaching this phenomenon far from any association with a juvenile phenomenon (in the sense of the restriction to a certain age group), with a popular phenomenon (in the sense of the relation to a certain class) or conducted by little experienced users and/or eccentric ones in their communicative practices. On the contrary, our argument aims at understanding it as a good short cut to the understanding of a set of strategies which characterize the dominant communication model through the social networking sites.

In order to approach the diverse aspects of the discussion, we divided the article into three parts: in the first, we propose a short review of the bibliography based upon the two currents mentioned above: 1) that which approaches the "excess" of visibility, exposition of the self and vigilance on the social networks and 2) the discussions which have been held about the identity construction and the social bonds on these spaces. In the second section, we will mainly discuss the sociological perspective about consumption cultures, in which the identity processes are intrinsically connected to the consumption of symbolic and material goods; besides a short approach to the notion of materiality and of the ANT. At last, in the third section, we analyse the data we obtained with the case study.

⁷ But the average of time of use and of the number of friends was higher: two and a half years of use and 721 friends respectively.

Short review of the state of the discussion art

Visibility and vigilance on social networking sites

Reflecting on the contemporary mediatic scenario, a current of researchers argues that we are living in a new regime of visibility dictated by the overexposure of private life, which is accompanied by a new power regime marked by distributed vigilance exerted by common individuals inserted into the context of the “cybercultural dromocracy” (TRIVINHO, 2007).

As if it were not enough to be inserted into this regime, exposing our subjectivities “in a shameless way” in all the mass media – from the reality shows to the social networking sites – we would still be doing it *deliberately* for two reasons basically: one is the narcissistic necessity to be in the centre of attentions, in a continuous “show of the self” which has the intimacy and obscenity of daily life as its major spectacles (SIBILIA, 2008), leading very often to the “melancholy of the self” (TRIVINHO, 2010), and the other one is the understanding that vigilance is synonymous of security, leading the subjects to a process of mutual and continuous monitoring which deepens Foucault’s panopticum (BRUNO; KANASHIRO; FIRMINO, 2010).

Following this (these) perspective(s), we see the proliferation of studies, which discuss the question of participative vigilance (ALBRECHT-SLUND, 2008), of oneself’s overexposure” (PEREIRA; BERNAR, 2011) and of the “*apareSer*” [a combination of the Portuguese words “*aparecer*” (to appear) and “*ser*” (to be); something like: “*appearBe*”] (BELLO, 2011), of the security failures, of the users’ excess of trust to exhibit personal information and of the problematic use of these data by companies (JONES; SOLTREN, 2005).

If, on the one hand, these studies bring to the surface central questions of contemporary communication, such as the reconfiguration of the frontiers between the public and the private domains or the right to anonymity and the protection of personal data on the net, they become problematic for our analysis, since they understand the social compo-

nent as a coercive and superior instance, which is achieved and precedes the individuals. Thus this dimension converts itself into the explicative factor of all the other events and not the fact to be explained; it does not allow us to comprehend the ways in which the social configurations are concretized in different ways in the agents' daily practices – multiple and heterogeneous, in different contexts or conditions (CALLON; LAW, 1997; LATOUR, 1991a, 1991b, 2005).

Thus to understand the social networks as *associative processes*, emphasizing their relational and materially heterogeneous dimension, since it is composed of people and things that affect each other mutually, on the basis of the Actor-Network -Theory (LATOUR, 2005), and not as a reflection of the society of the spectacle, the dromocratic and/or control society is a methodological premise which distinguishes our study from the analyses mentioned above.

Identitary dynamics on the networks

Searching this more precise understanding of the identitary dynamics on the social networks, it is appropriate to stress a second current marked by the momentary look we claim here.

According to Baym (2011, p. 17), the social networking sites⁸ are “unique in the combination of multiple means of communication and therefore in the extension and control of social tracks they can provide”. Thus we can emphasize that these sites are related to at least three socio-communicative aspects: 1) the subjects' *directed* visibility online; 2) the articulation of their contact networks (the other subjects with whom they share the connection on a determined system) e 3) the use on a unique space of diverse communication forms (which permit the exchange of textual, imagetic, audiovisual, etc. contents), thus being objects which

⁸ “Services based on the web which allow the individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a restricted system, to articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and to look and cross their connections list and those others make within the system” (BOYD AND ELLISON, 2007, online).

are dear to those who study the aspects of the identity construction, social interaction and communication nowadays.

In this direction, one of the main arguments of this perspective concerns the centrality of the social aspect of these sites, that is the interactions that occur between the inter-agents, in the creation or maintenance of weak or strong social bonds – which can generate behaviours of cooperation or conflict – and which constitute an important role in the ways in which the information are transmitted and replied (RECUERO, 2009), or in the “performance of the friendships” and in the “administration of the impression” (BOYD; ELLISON, 2007) as crucial factors in the creation of determined perceptions the other have of ourselves (WALTHER *et ali*, 2008).

Thus some studies refer to Goffman (2009) in order to think primarily two aspects of the identity constructions on the social networking sites: 1) that of the administration of the impression, that is to say the actors’ search to attempt to control and administrate the impression that the others will have of them (although there can very often be an involuntary rupture in this construction) (BOYD; ELLISON, 2007), an aspect which would be facilitated in the virtual environments, where the physical body is not present and where we can select the contents we want to exhibit (BAYM, 2010), and, mainly on social networking sites such as Facebook, on which a series of tools allows us to choose the groups of people who will have access to determined contents⁹ and 2) of the diverse social roles the individuals play, in this case on the different digital platforms, understanding the actors’ identities as a multiple and flexible construction, related to their interests and objectives in order to presentify themselves in distinct ways (within the same and) on various spaces (ZHAO; GRASMUCK; MARTIN, 2008).

Also corroborating our premise that mediatic materials are often used by the actors in order to presentify themselves on Facebook,

⁹ Nowadays on Facebook we can, for example, by uploading photos on our page, choose which group (s) of friends will have access to those pictures. Thus photos considered improper for determined contacts (such as professional) will not be exhibited to them.

some studies show that “traditional identity markers, such as religion, political ideology, and job” are still “important identity indicators”, but that “the mediatic preferences” are “more often selected than the classical markers” (PEMPEK; YERMOLAYEVA; CALVERT, 2009, p. 233), understanding that “like in the material world, self-presentation online often depends on commercial references” (SCHAU; GILLY, 2003), an aspect we will come back to later, when we are going to discuss consumption as a social process which produces identities.

Although the perspective provides us with interesting aid to think the identity construction on social networking sites, we notice the fact that few of these studies intend to analyse the materiality of these identity constructions, that is to say which photos, videos, texts, links, etc. the users choose to publish (and not to publish) on their pages and for which reasons? What would have motivated our informants to specifically choose determined pictures to represent them on Facebook on the past Children’s Day? Thus in order to be able to carry out our analysis and to try to shed light on these questions, we will now very shortly present our premises about the questions of consumption as identity producer and about the aspects of the materiality and actor-network theories which we are interested in using in our analysis.

Consumption as identity producer and the debate on material culture

According to what we pointed out above, the connection of the cultural and mediatic goods with the identities on social networking sites – some times more “used” than the traditional markers – is very common. This process corroborates the understanding of consumption practices in the present time (not only on these sites, but it is quite evidenced on them) as practices of daily identity (re and de) constructions, which occur materially as well as symbolically.

Today we can speak of a consumption metaphysic (CAMPBELL, 2006), not in the sense that we merely “are what we consume”, but in the sense that, in the present time, it seems to be unquestionable that it is in the consumption sphere, through the question *how* (and also, of course, *what*) one consumes, that we can understand the elaboration and confirmation (or not) of identities.

From this viewpoint, consumption has a symbolic and cultural dimension and therefore a communicative one, since it reveals us how the actors feel, think and organize themselves providing at the same time material for the construction of their own micro-narratives, in a process which is highly reflexive (GIDDENS, 2002) and which necessarily involves the choices that are made.

It is within this perspective that the diverse aspects of the discussion about the role of *material culture* – especially the empirical investigation about the impact of certain objects, pictures, photographs and other materials for the construction of the communicational dimension of the networks – gain importance.

Materiality and Actor- Network- Theory

According to Gumbrecht, materiality concerns “all that participates in the production of meaning, without itself being meaning” (GUMBRECHT, 2010). In this direction, it is appropriate to refer the reader, firstly to the discussion proposed initially by McLuhan and used again by Gumbrecht’s circle that displaces the reflection on the technological mediation of the hermeneutic, political and/or ideological field in favour of the attention to materiality or concreteness of each communication channel. The argument to be emphasized is that every communication act requires a material support which exerts influence on the message and therefore mass media are constitutive elements of the structures, of the articulation and of circulation of meaning, imprinting themselves on the relationships people maintain with their bodies, with their conscience and with their actions.

On the other hand, the notion of material culture also refers to a second current of authors connected to the studies of consumption anthropology, such as Miller (1994) and Mizrahi (2006). Coming from distinct traditions, they also emphasize the importance not only of understanding the symbolic dimension of material goods, but also the *physical nature* of the objects or the relationship “between person and thing”, inducing us to think about the specificity, concreteness or materiality of each technical artefact in its daily uses.

From these combined perspectives, the investigation about the acuity – or “symbolic efficaciousness” – of certain objects to translate certain particularities of the symbolic world, at the same time in which the subtleness of the differentiation processes made possible by certain material artefacts, gains the central stage of our reflection, which does not intend to reintroduce the dichotomy body-mind or matter-symbolism – this time privileging the body and the matter. But it intends to emphasize that the sensory and aesthetic dimension of the objects must be taken into consideration in any communicative process, as well as its symbolic dimension.

In the discussion, it would be appropriate to come back to some premises of the Actor-Network-Theory (LATOUR, 2005). We especially think about Latour’s discussion on delegation (1991b), in which the author suggests a sociology of technology less worried about the distinction of human and non-human actors on the socio-technical networks, recognizing that these are materially heterogeneous networks; and more interested in discussing the distribution or delegation of tasks within the process.

In his perspective, any technical artefact has got anthropomorphic characteristics since it is a delegate who performs activities or tasks designated by human beings. More than that, a technical artefact is first designed by human beings, and in a second moment it substitutes the human beings’ action in order to finally prescribe the human beings’ action in a certain way – emphasizing that the process occurs on two ways since the objects have also agency. The more paradoxical it may seem, it is through the relationship with objects that we become what we are.

This idea of “distributed tasks among humans and non-humans” as well as the whole discussion about delegation seems to be useful because it allows us to go beyond the very common dichotomies in the approach of the relationship between technique and culture or between subjects and objects. According to Latour (1991a): “technology is society made durable”.

It is in this sense that we bet on the notion of *performance of taste*, proposed by Hennion (2002), another author linked to the ANT. For, in this perspective, taste is not a fixed and pre-existent property or quality of a person or of an object, neither a game one plays between pre-existent identities, but a relational and performative gesture between people and things, an always evanescent and instable conquest.

What we call expressive coherence concerns this process and refers to the dimension of continuous adjustment and adequacy of the “materials” and objects which act in the construction of our identities.

In the case in question, the character we choose to identify us on Children’s Day will also be understood in this way: as acquiring anthropomorphic characteristics and receiving the delegation to represent us, on the basis of certain *qualities* which are being established in the *bonds*, that is to say in our relationship with the chosen pictures.

Case analysis

In order to discuss aspects of the questions enunciated above, we chose a specific event: the movement of the exchange of the photos of the profiles on Facebook for pictures of cartoons related to childhood in October 2011, the month in which we celebrate Children’s Day. It is appropriate to explain that the purpose of this movement was to promote, in a ludic way, the users’ awareness of the use of violence against children and their commitment to fight it, but that some of our informants participated in it without knowing this objective.

Since this is an exploratory study, the method we chose is to carry out a primarily qualitative analysis based upon the conduct of interviews or the use of questionnaires given to the ten informants¹⁰, both based upon the same set of questions. Besides this, in order to define who will participate in the study, it was necessary initially to collect some information about the profiles previously selected: number of friends, date on which the person became a member of Facebook and the pictures used in the profile.

After having searched this initial information on our own contact networks¹¹, delimiting who would be our informants, we elaborated the six axes of questions which would guide the interviews which deal with: 1) the motivation to participate in the movement of Children's Day on Facebook; 2) the frequency of participation in such movements on social networking sites and the reasons therefore; 3) the concern about a possible negative perception the others could have of someone who uses a children's cartoon as a profile picture and the articulation with the self offline; 4) the choice of the picture and if (and how) it represents the actor; 5) the pictures the user normally uses in his Facebook profile, its importance, choosing process, frequency of change and control of the function of the tags on the photos posted by friends and 6) the participation in other social networking sites and the photos he/she uses in the profile in these places.

According to the informants' availability we conducted four synchronic written interviews through the chat service of the site, which lasted about one hour on average and we collected the answers of the six other ones by means of a questionnaire we sent them. We will now discuss the results we found, following the six axes of questions we asked.

The first point we tried to find out was the motivation to participate in the movement. Only one of them – and, which is interesting, the youngest – affirmed to have participated in order to contribute to the cause fighting the use of violence against children. Since they were open questions,

¹⁰ Five females and five males.

¹¹ The choice of informants who participate in our networks is justified because it is an exploratory study. But, to avoid the scope of the present discussion, we will not deepen the methodological questions (and the implications of a choice of "familiar" informants) which, like any other option implies gains and losses.

diverse motivations were pointed out, the one they most mentioned – six informants – was to like to participate in movements / jokes in order not to be “left out”, followed (with equally three mention each) by the motivation to think / to show which cartoon would better represent themselves and to like animated cartoons. Related to them other motivations were: “to get closer” to their friends (two mentions), to see / to try to guess the cartoons their friends would use in their profiles (one mention) and to construct a collective children’s memory (one mention, too).

From its functioning logic and from the answers that were given, we argue that this kind of “current” of Children’s Day can be understood as a meme¹², its value being clearly related to the two principal functions which are entwined: sociabilization and identification. The first concerns interaction, that is to say, to take part in the joke is not “to be left out”, it is to interact with the contact network, trying to reinforce social bonds and to increase the relational social capital, at that time in which one searches identification, the sum of “interesting characteristics (and considered positive) of a determined actor, summing features to one’s identity narrative on Facebook” (RECUERO, 2011, online) in quite a self-reflexive way (to think which cartoon would best represent his own self). In this case, we add that these features were sought in specific mediatic cultural goods, animated cartoons, an aspect we are going to discuss later on.

Curiously, half of the informants related that they only remembered having participated in this movement of Children’s Day and in no other one on Facebook. Three others affirmed that they participate in some of them – when they have time, affinity and when they feel like –; one affirmed that he participates only in non-polemical movements (in order to “avoid conflicts”) and another one related that he only participates in the movements which involve avatar exchange, not because of the movement in itself, but in order “to aggregate entertainment to the profile”. Thus we understand that at least with regard to our informants, sociability allied to identity construction

¹² We understand “meme”, in consonance with Recuero, as “a replicator”, which is propagated by the persons by means of imitation” (2007, p. 23).

provided by the Children's Day joke are directly related to entertainment, to ludicity and to the consumption sphere, according to what we discussed above.

To cling in such a visible way to animated cartoons on Facebook – the picture of the profile is that which identifies the users in all their interactions on the site – led us to ask them about the concern about this being disliked by his contact network (it could express a lack of professional earnestness, for example) and about the articulation with the offline self. The great majority of the people we interviewed – eight out of ten – related that they did not care about and do not care about this in any way, for various reasons, such as the fact to have only intimate people on their contact network on the site, people with whom they have personal social bonds, the site being a strictly ludic space, or the fact that many people had adhered to the joke.

Nonetheless, the reason for this carelessness for the most part of them was related to the fact that the joke – and more specifically the animated cartoons – is deeply articulated with their own tastes, their personality features and even with the broader research field, according to their own affirmations. Thus we can understand that it is not the case that these people were not concerned about their reputation by using the picture of a cartoon in their profiles, but about the fact that the cartoons stick to their identities, be it off or online.

By trying to understand the reason for the choice of determined cartoons for the profiles¹³, the association they did between the chosen picture and their identity features, belonging to various orders, such as: personality, tastes, social role, colour of the skin and gender was quite obvious. It is interesting to notice that some declarations emphasized that the choice of the cartoon was associated with “the image” which he believed to be the one the others have of him or with an obviously constructed, rendered performative person, with an identity feature one intends to stress on Facebook, configuring the process of the impression administration (BOYD; ELLISON, 2007) we mentioned above.

¹³ It is appropriate to emphasize that there was no repetition of pictures among our informants and that one of them used more than one picture during the period of the joke. Some of the other pictures they used were: Mickey Mouse, Eric of the cartoon *The Dragon's Cave*, Dotty of the cartoon *Animaniacs*, Dória of *Nemo animation* and Thundersword of *X-Men*.

Let us take four declarations which illustrate the question quite well:

“There’s no way out: I had to think of a cartoon which in some way represents my various identities. This is why I chose a cartoon I like a lot but which is ... which is a bit cool. (laughter). I always say that the identity I reinforce in the social networks is that of a young fashionable cool up-to-date university female-student (...) actually one of the animated cartoons I most like is Bob Esponja [SpongeBob]. (...) Considering that (...) I know that SpongeBob represents (immaturity, nonsense, etc.), I didn’t even think of putting Bob’s picture in my profile =P. that is to say, I thought but I gave it up =P” (H., female professor, PhD student, age 20-30, chose the picture of Pantera Cor-de-Rosa [Pink Panther])

“It is partly a joke because it is an adult animated cartoon, and not a child’s cartoon. And I partly identify myself, because it reflects much of what comes to the mind of an adolescent kid’s father. It is sort of a catharsis, haha”. (W., professor, PhD, father, age 40-50, chose picture of Homer hanging his son Bart Simpson)

“I chose Docinho of the super-powered girls because I think she is a well-humoured example of inconformity, sincerity and gender subversion”. (R., recently graduated, age 20-30)

“I chose this cartoon, because it was one of my favourites when I was a child, because it was one of the first films I saw in the cinema with my father. And because I think that it really represents me, it is a curious female-mouse, detective. I adore detective stories, suspense and such things. To be a researcher is to be a kind of a detective in a certain way. Well, I think it is cute to see mice in the cartoons but in real life I feel panicky. Thus various representation elements made me choose this cartoon”. (D., female professor, PhD, age 30-40, chose the mice Bernardo and Bianca of the homonymous cartoon)

It is obvious that these choices point out symbolic values which the characters evoke and modernize. Nevertheless it is not any of the chosen characters' pictures, but the one which collaborates in order to materialize these characteristics. This becomes obvious in the explanation given above by the adolescent son's father: he does not venerate a "generic" Homer, but the one who hangs his son. H. also emphasizes this, when he comments his choice: "Even her pose I chose has to do with it (...): it is as if the Panther is dancing *Saturday Night Fever*. It has to do with pop culture and music".

We still emphasize that, according to the declarations, the choice of the cartoons was also related to the affective memory, to the effectuation of a homage to a beloved person and to the expectation to generate conversations with the contact networks based upon a posted picture. Thus the questions of identification and sociabilization are involved again. But, in these cases, the picture operates like a short cut, a "magic object", the symbolic efficaciousness of which permits the immediate connection with these sensations.

Going beyond the specific movement of Children's Day, we asked our informants about which pictures they are accustomed to use in their Facebook profiles, which importance they attribute to them, how the choice process works and how often they change them. The most frequent answer (seven mentions) was that the pictures they most use are the photos of the person alone that are aesthetically pleasant, always including the face. The option consisting in showing the face is related to the facility with which the others can rapidly identify the user; and the importance of choosing a photo on which he/she considers himself/herself handsome also reinforces our argument that the materiality of the objects is an important element of the identity construction.

It is not surprising that four informants affirmed that, for their profiles, they often choose pictures of the cultural and mediatic industry, related to songs, films, cartoons, sports personalities among others. According to what we discussed above, we understand that we are inserted into a consumption culture, in which the very act of consuming deter-

mined symbolic and material goods is one of the great identity markers which we use in order to try to define who we are. Thus to use pictures of the cultural and mediatic industry in the Facebook profiles is significant to show to the contact networks aspects related to identity, without being obliged to use verbal and explicit expression, configuring a more implicit identity construction, according to Zhao's, Grasmuck's and Martin's arguments (2008).

It also interesting to observe the modernizing character that sites, such as Facebook (among many others), permit, due for example to the facility to change the profile photo. Three of our informants related that they choose photos which depict their state of mind or feelings of the moment and two of them affirmed that they choose photos which depict recent changes of their physical aspects, such as haircut, beard, etc. They are the ones who change their profile pictures on Facebook more often. The others reported that they do not change them very often and, anyway, they all related that they cannot tell the periodicity of the photo changing very precisely, since they do it, "when they feel like". Four informants said that they consider the profile photo one of the most important elements of Facebook, being considered as an "entrance to the subject's inner self, a "summary" of himself, a "visiting-card", which permits to recognize rapidly who a person is, according to what he/she says.

With regard to the function of the tag, we could perceive that there is generally a concern and control on the part of the informants about the photos on which they are tagged by others; three of them said that they are quite concerned about that (the tags must be pre-approved or they are often removed by the actors) and two of them are moderately concerned, they check the tags that the others do in order not to commit themselves or in order not to exhibit the more intimate moments. This confirms our argument that the actors' performance and exhibition on the social networking sites, according to what we also noticed in the answers to the other questions we did, do not occur in a fortuitous way, being reflexively constructed (and re-constructed, in the search for expressive coherence between the actor and the mediatic materials he appropriates.

At last, with the intention to investigate if there is some specificity in the process of the actors' presentification on Facebook with regard to other social network sites, we asked them if they used others, which they were and the photos they used in the profile on these spaces. Two informants affirmed that they only used Facebook at the moment and all the others also use Twitter¹⁴. Sites such as Orkut, LinkedIn, Tumblr, LastFM, Foursquare, Ning, among others, were also mentioned, but with a much lower use frequency than Facebook and Twitter. Six people informed that they used the same criteria for the choice of the profile photo, thus they often use the same photo on Facebook and Twitter. A woman related that she used different pictures on each social network site, but without knowing the reason for that and another woman reported that she made a distinction between sites which focus more the interaction with people (such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.) and those which focus the published content (such as Tumblr), on those of the first kind she uses more photos of her face in the profile whereas on those of the second kind she uses varied pictures, without an immediate reference to herself, since that would not be relevant on these spaces. Thus we observed that, among the most part of the people we interviewed, Facebook and Twitter occupy very similar spaces with regard to the identity construction, as far as only the pictures used in the profiles are concerned

Conclusions

Based upon an exploratory work, our objective was to understand aspects of the communication on the social network sites and to discuss how determined actors *presentify* themselves on Facebook. Thus our purpose was to demonstrate that: 1) the choice of the cartoons for the joke was a self-reflexive process through which the informants chose

¹⁴ Consideramos o Twitter um site de rede social apropriado, segundo a classificação de Recuero (2009).

to emphasize determined aspects – not always, but for the greater part, considered positive – of their identities (such as “coolness”, investigative mind, negritude, sensitivity to music, irreverence, sincerity, inconformity, among others) in the construction of their life stories on Facebook; 2) this process, as well as all the identity construction processes, is necessarily addressed to the other’s look and requires a negotiation with him/her in order to obtain *expressive coherence* (among the almost infinity of characters that the informants could choose for their profiles all of them chose those who presented qualities which the users would like to connect with their identities) and 3) the subjects *delegated* to the chosen characters the function to presentify them at that moment, according to Latour’s idea of “distributed tasks between humans and non-humans” (1991a). In this sense, the material expressivity of the object combines with its symbolic characteristics in order to achieve the expressive coherence the subject longs for.

Since this is an exploratory work, the main conclusions are rather tracks to be deepened later.

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