Far beyond the pixels: consumption and material culture experiences in League of Legends

Muito além dos pixels: experiências de consumo e cultura material em League of Legends

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Abstract: *This article seeks to discuss consumer practices in the digital game League of Legends (LoL), from a study based on the field of communication and material culture. The objective is to understand the relationship between objects and players-subjects-consumers. In order to do so, we seek to analyze the social and cultural trajectory of these commodities in the symbolic experiences in LoL. In this perspective, according to the ethnographic method, reports and observations of the consumption of objects in LoL are presented by players from the cities of Belém (PA), Diadema (SP) and Osasco (SP). The results point to the existence of a complex web of interconnected meanings, responsible for (de)codify the objects and transform aggregations of pixels into experiences of communica-tion, consumption and material culture.*

Keywords: *digital games; consumption; material culture; virtual goods; communication.*

Resumo: *Este artigo procura discutir as práticas de consumo no jogo digital League of Legends (LoL) a partir de um olhar baseado nos estudos do campo da comunicação e da cultura material. O objetivo é compreender a relação entre objetos e jogadores-sujeitos-consumidores. Para tanto, procuramos analisar a tra--jetória social e cultural dessas mercadorias nas experiências simbólicas em LoL. Nessa perspectiva, e fazendo uso de método etnográfico, são apresentados relatos*

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e observações do consumo de objetos em LoL por jogadores das cidades de Belém (PA), Diadema (SP) e Osasco (SP). Os resultados apontam para a existência de uma complexa teia de significados interconectados responsáveis por (de)codificar os objetos e transformar aglomerados de pixels em experiências de comunicação, consumo e cultura material.

Palavras-chave: *jogos digitais; consumo; cultura material; bens virtuais; comunicação.*

Introduction

This research seeks to analyze the consumption of what we call "virtual goods"[3] in the game of digital environment called League of Legends (popularly known as League or LoL). The idea is to understand the ways of consuming digital merchandise, present in this online game, from an approach based in the studies of consumption and based in the categories of symbolic, value dynamics, social relations and the material culture that consumable merchandise in LoL's environment can promote in interaction with subjects. What we intend to do is to capture how these objects[4] in the game are symbolically situated, how they are interpreted and "manipulated" through symbols that evoke and the individual performance they assume in different contexts of League.

We will analyze, thus, how does issues involving values and meanings of use of determined objects are fundamental elements within the consumption developed in the game and how does experiences and values are activated and coincide in consumption dynamics of virtual goods in LoL. It is about understanding the place in the world of objects in League in the relationship amongst players, seeking to understand the social life of these "things".

In this sense, among numberless activities of entertainment and different types of games that were developed throughout the years, digital games are in the vanguard of the so-called industry of entertainment. Among the most diverse types of games in present days, we cast a light on a specific game: League of Legends, a free online game exclusive for computers. The choice of this game was given both by issues that involve Brazil and the Amazonic region in representational forms in LoL (according to MACEDO and AMARAL FILHO, 2015) and by its popularity and national insertion in this environment.

3   According to Jens Frieling (2013) and Jennifer Martin (2008), virtual goods are items that exist exclusively in digital environments but are acquired with real money. We will deepen the meaning of the term later.
4   Object is understood in this study, as Ian Woodward (2007, p. 3) argues, as "material things people find, interact and use".

The game in question was created by the North American development company Riot Games, with headquarters in Los Angeles (USA) and 13 offices scattered around the world, one in the city of São Paulo. According to the company, the global reach of League surpassed the number of 100 million active players monthly in 2016. In that same year, LoL leaded the ranking of most lucrative online games after reaching US$ 1.8 billion, the equivalent to US$ 150 million per month.[5] This amount puts the game in the category as the most profitable game in the world since 2014.

In order to create loyalty amongst the active players in a multiplayer game in the web, we highlight the creation of attractions that keep the experience of playing in constant recreation and motivation. It is necessary, therefore, "items or elements formed by pixels that link capital values[6] for their acquisition" (REBS, 2012, p. 207), i. e., virtual merchandise that incorporate different aesthetic references to attract the consumer-player. It is this relevant factor of LoL that will be the focus of this research and it refers to the consumption of what we name "virtual merchandise": a variety of items, either characters or accessories within the game itself, available for the player through a market system of sales.

In the economy of virtual merchandise, there is a formal commerce in League organized by a system protected by the programming of the game that rules the acquisition and purchase of these items, exclusively processed within the digital environment. We can classify it according to two big categories that vary in specific ways of acquisition: (i) items acquired in-game[7] through playability;[8] (ii) items obtained in the game

5   Available at: https>://goo.gl/JL3Ss3 and https://goo.gl/DDdaG4. Accessed in: Jan. 15th 2017.
6   Even though there is a considerable amount of literature that is dedicated to study the consumption and the material culture using the theory of capitals of authors such as Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putnam, whose contributions are undeniable, it is valuable to highlight that we will walk through a different cultural and symbolic approach (GELL, 1992; MILLER, 2007, 2013; WOODWARD, 2007).
7   Inside the game, therefore, consumable items, accessories to boost character's attributes and improve their performances, etc. all of them acquired through gold conquered as a consequence of the conclusion of certain goals. This coin can be exchanged for items in a specific store within LoL's matches.
8   According to Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (2003), playability is the interaction that occurs between players and rules of a formalized system through the game, therefore, the act of playing.

store through Influence Points (IP),[9] Riot Points (RPs),[10] through gifts or through a system of rewards to players that allows to create paid content for free.

However, this article is concentrated in the second category, both for involving the acquisition of items considered as the main base of profit of the company, detaining bigger attention and divulgation, and for sheltering accessories recognized by every interlocutor of this study as the primary reason for shopping at League: the so-called skins, customized designs with aesthetic transformation of characters within the digital environment of LoL (Images 1 and 2).

Image 1: Screen of information of the character Lux (the skins she has appear on the lower part of the image)[11].
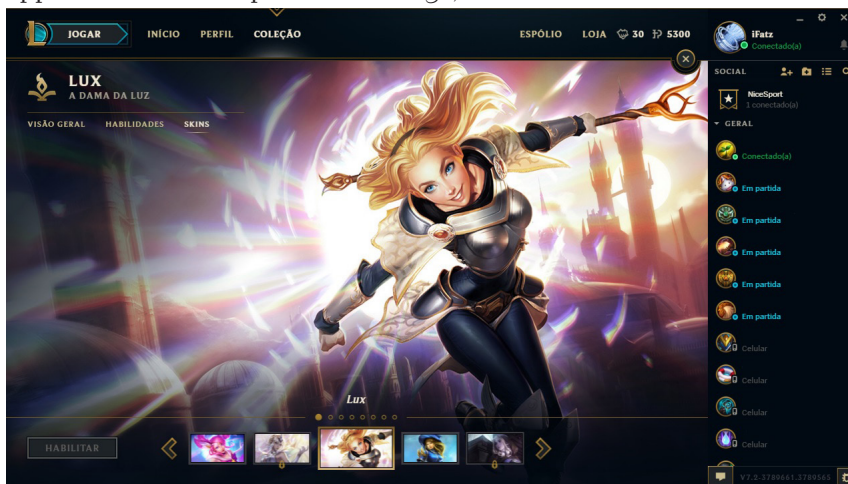
Source: Print screen of the game League of Legends BR.

These particular virtual merchandises are released overall, even though not exclusively, through RPs, a type of "money virtual" that

9   It is virtual coins existing in League, a form of awarding players for the matches played. They are used to perform exchanges, in a game store, for characters, items for mechanics, among others.
10   Virtual coins that need to be acquired for cash.
11   There were interventions in the images inserted in this article, whose objective was to preserve information of subjects that are in the game and in the social media website Facebook.

refers to "[…] The coins circulating in different games that are linked to a symbolic financial value that is enjoyed only in the virtual environment (REBS, 2012, p. 212).

Image 2: Mythical Skin[12] Elementalist Lux.
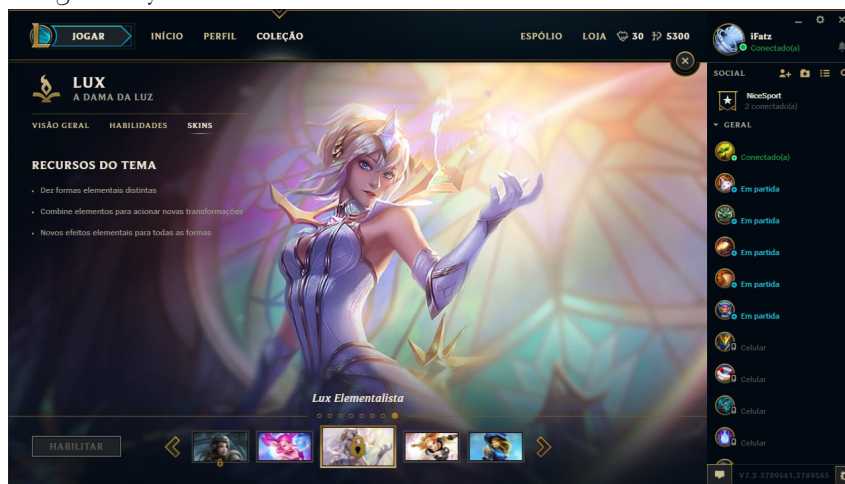
Source: Print screen f the game League of Legends BR.

This text is divided into three sections: In the first we present the methodological matrixes that support this investigation with the goal of elucidating the starting points of this research; in the second section, we raise punctual questions about the publicity strategies for the promotion of skins at LoL; and the third section that comprises, in a more specific way, the analysis we perform of the consumption of virtual merchandise at League through its material culture as main focus of our glance.

Methodologic Procedures

An analysis of consumption of players in a digital game such as LoL entails methodological specificities for the researcher that must adapt to

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12   It is the most expensive skin at LoL and has the highest level of alterations that this kind of item can reach.

the characteristic peculiarities of the study of this medium, being neces-sary to act on it. This is the element that composes the thought of Espen Aarseth (2003) when he reinforces that playing a videogame and, there-fore, consuming it, presupposes a process of learning and an application of a dynamic hermeneutics in which the "go to field" goes through the necessity of a researcher to experiment the game, assuming the posture of a "user-player" – therefore, engaging materially in the experience.

According to this perspective, the fieldwork in this study was devel-oped through an ethnographic research performed with subject-players (or former players) of League of Legends that consume or already con-sumed the different items available in the game through an approach anchored in the material culture. The choice of interlocutors of this research was performed through a long relationship based on trust and assiduity with the interviewed players, with which we shared game ses-sions and learned to explore the universe of LoL. Thus, this participative immersion in the field, during the own experience with existing con-tents in the digital world of League, which awakened the curiosity of understanding the ways in which the subjects consume the items on LoL's environment.

Therefore, four interlocutors that play or played LoL were selected, each one consuming in different ways the items of this environment, three men and one woman (Board 1). All of the participants had knowledge of the goals of the research and the data obtained in the ethnography, inserted here, are built through fictional names, chosen among the names of the characters of the game that each one said to play or like more, in the intention of preserving the subject's identities.[13]

The investigation was guided with support in a semi-structured script thought to better understand the relationship about LoL's dynamic and the processes of immersion of consumption, both based in the axes of this and by imbricated perceptions coming from an ethnographic field research of the symbolic, of value dynamics, of social relationships and

13   Some of our interlocutors indicated concern or already suffered some kind of moral and/or sexual harassment when playing LoL. Moreover, the harassment in this digital game is one of the reasons why one of players decided to stop playing it.

the imaginaries that consumable merchandise in the game carry. However, it is not only about an issue that involve subjects "pondering on what the objects may mean" (WOODWARD, 2007, p. 4), but, overall, players interpreting objects in relation to others and being immersed in the complex intergroup networks modelled by the social role and the space-time contexts.

To think about the phenomenon of consumption, according to what exposes Everardo Rocha (2000), it is necessary to go through the necessary understanding of the intrinsic connection with the culture, which wouldn't be different in an environment of an online game. Therefore, there is the necessity of following the universe of subjects in the medium through the ethnographic praxis and through the direct interaction with the game, which presupposes a passage through the dynamic of playing it (AARSETH, 2003) and perceiving how the cultural codes that give coherence to the practices act. In this sense, the field research was given between June 2016 and January 2017 with players between 18 to 26 years old.

Board 1. Interlocutors of the study.

Player	Age	Time in LoL	City
Lulu	23 yo	Plays for two years.	Belém/PA
Jinx	22 yo	Played for two years, stopped four months ago.	Belém/PA
Talon	26 yo	Plays for three years	Diadema/SP
Draven	18 yo	Plays for three and a half years.	Osasco/SP

Source: The authors

Performed in two steps, the field work happened in the following way: initially, to contact with possible interlocutors, we made use of a profile on LoL and performed researches in groups related to the game in the social media website Facebook. Later, we performed semi-structured interviews between the months of December, 2016 and January, 2017: face to face, with two players in Belém (PA), and through video call on Skype, with the subjects in the cities of Osasco (SP) and Diadema (SP).

So, this research fits the criteria of an on and offline ethnographic approach indicated by Daniel Miller and Don Slater (2004). The field, therefore, has a network dynamic, characteristic of the object of study itself. In the following section, our reflection is focused on briefly talking about the publicity strategies used by the game's company in the promotion of virtual merchandise.

Publicity strategies for the promotion of virtual merchandise on LoL

According to what Everardo Rocha, Carla Barros and Karine Karam (2014) argue, entertainment and consumption are practices related in many levels, even though fun is not always a synonym for consumption. In this perspective, following the thought of authors, both phenomena have a relation of relevant analysis, able to evidence and better understand belongings, tastes on social groups or subjects, styles, beyond sanctioned and socially legitimated distinctions.

In Brazil, according to Newzoo's estimates,[14] the game market will generate an income of US$ 1.3 billion in 2017, given that it maintains as a leader of the sector in South America and the 13th of the world. That includes all types of games, from the most simple, available in browsers and smartphones, to the more complex ones, for consoles and computers. According to the Newzoo's research in 2017, 66.3 million Brazilians play some type of videogame; a report of 2015[15] indicates that 56% of the 33.6 million players spent with some type of game, on average, US$ 45,54 per year, data considered bigger than the average for the region, evaluated in US$ 37. In the national territory, the research Game Brasil 2017,[16] performed by Sioux, Blend New Research and by the Escola Superior de Propaganda e Marketing (ESPM - Superior School of Propaganda and Marketing) with 2,947 interviewed subjects, indicated that 58.7% of these subjects are used to playing some type of

14   Available at: https://goo.gl/UPmPdD. Accessed in: Sep. 24th, 2017.
15   15 Available at: https://goo.gl/uAyy9Z. Accessed in: Jan. 15th 2017.
16   16 Available at: https://goo.gl/rjYo5q. Accessed in: Sep. 24th, 2017.

online game. The second most popular platform is the computer, with 66.4% The majority of the audience of Brazilian players has 25 to 34 years old, comprising 53.6% of the declarants as women and 46.4% as men.

In this scenario, a series of actions performed by the company Riot Games for the creation of virtual merchandise such as skins and champions (characters of the game), include the dissemination of advertisement pieces (filled with content and information) in multiple platforms thanks to the mediatic convergence (MACEDO and AMARAL FILHO, 2015), since the production of promotional videos, comic books, audiobooks, music albums (Image 3), short stories about characters, special events, periodic sales on items, quizzes, apps for smartphones, hiring famous bands for composing songs,[17] etc. Each one of these strategies have an impact in the consumer experience of the player, and, probably, in their choices in the act of buying certain virtual merchandise.

It is, then, through a symbolic system formed by means of communication used by the developer of LoL, in their official website, forums and social media on the internet (Image 4) that a great part of the acts of consumption are stimulated. About the merchandises that are object of this research, different types of skins use different levels of messages; therefore, the bigger value an item has, the bigger amount it will be of advertisement pieces that will help to share it in the narrative environment that the game composes.

Through the insertion of these strategies, Riot Games enables the consumption of virtual merchandise that do not offer any advantage in attributes or bonus in the game, unlike other digital games in which most items available on sale bring improvements to the player. Thus, the company transforms "inert matter in material culture" (ROCHA, 2000, p. 26, highlighted by the author) How some of the steps of this process are effective from the appropriation of players is what we intend to talk about in the next section.

17   The American group Imagine Dragons was hired by Riot Games in 2014 to create the theme song "Warriors" of the World Championship. Available at: https://goo.gl/ SgblY2. Accessed in: Feb. 11th, 2017.

Image 3: Song album Smite and Ignite for the launch of the set of thematic skins Pentakill.

Source: Print screen of the page Penta Kill Music. Available at: https://goo.gl/DlJTzH. Accessed in: Feb. 11th, 2017

Image 4: LoL's Facebook page sharing a piece for the launch of the skin Lux Elementalist.
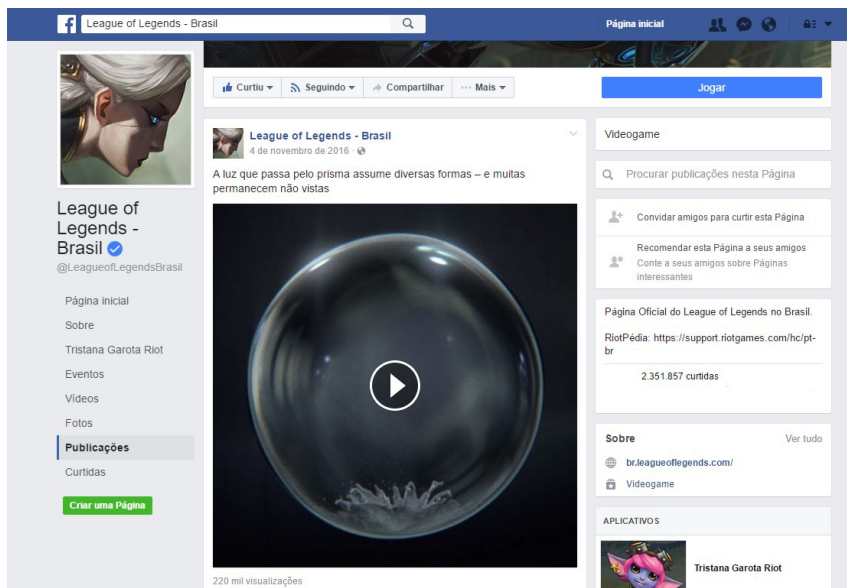
Source: Facebook League of Legends – Brazil.

Objects in the game: material and symbolic culture in consumption practices on League of Legends

Objects are a part of our daily life, and, every day, our daily existence is marked by encounters with these objects. Ian Woodward (2007) emphasizes how objects, apparently inanimate, act upon subjects and are acted by them with the end goal of playing social functions, giving symbolic meanings to human practices, rule social dynamics and carry cultural values. Objects are imbued, thus, with the capacity of meaning and symbolizing stuff or even establishing social meanings in name of people and groups.

In this perspective, each episode of consumption is also an act of simultaneous communication, because the choices of subjects the forms how they organize and give meaning to daily spaces create meanings and promote symbolic circuits that surpass the materiality of consumption, reaching the sphere of ideas and representations, representing a way of living, a lifestyle, surpassing in meaning the material consumption (CASTRO, 2014).

Daniel Miller (2007) argues that the studies of material culture seek an intense comprehension of the inseparable human relation with the materiality that surrounds him, of the preoccupation between the mutual connection between objects and people. From this contribution, we consider goods while objects filled with symbolism that, in interaction, can be capable of promoting expressions and representations, as well as unfolding experiences and meanings. Therefore, they are elements that have value that constitute realities with multiple faces, from their meanings while merchandise (market value) to their importance of meanings (sociocultural value). To Woodward (2007), goods are objects produced in the dominion of specific market relations, in which values are attributed within a system of exchange. Merchandise is considered a technical expression directly associated with the concept of "good", having the same possibility of exchange.

Following this approach, consumption starts to be seen as a process of involvement with the goods (objects in the game, in LoL's case)

which simultaneously focus on the practice and in the construction of meanings, offering shapes, ways of conduct and understandings to be employed in the relationship with objects and subjects. This issue can be perceived in the speech of the player Jinx, one of the interlocutors of this study, that, even without classifying the observation as coming from a material culture between people and objects, highlights brands in this relationship when commenting about the relevance or indifference of having a skin at League:

> I wouldn't say it (skin) is important or indifferent, because it will never be indifferent, I believe it will always have some meaning for the person buying it and a meaning for someone who sees it, who sees that the person has a skin (Jinx, in an interview with the researchers).

What is revealed and evidenced in Jinx's speech is LoL's complexity, how the act of playing implies a dependence of objectives of those who play, of meanings, of observations that are understood, of experiences they intend to achieve and live, of ways of acting towards others.

In the case of games in digital platforms, virtual goods in a very strict sense, are digital objects, coins and other premium contents (paid) that only exist in digital games and in some social media websites (FRIEL-ING, 2013). That way, the appropriations and interactive uses of these products will depend on dynamics of these particular environments and their specific genres, from functional aspects, to decorative and even symbolic. Frieling (2013) says that the increase of the trade of virtual goods widens many research opportunities and raises fundamental questions, how to understand the reasons why the consumers are willing to buy these merchandises. According to Rebeca Rebs (2012), based in Mike Featherstone (1995), the motivations for the consumption of these goods usually indicate purchase necessities typical of material goods, coinciding in purchase practices, possession, sale and exchange of products in a market of entertainment goods formed by pixels that pass through questions of immaterial meanings. We can perceive, in Talon's speech, dynamics that are close to what Rebs' (2012) study shows, as well as the issues raised:

> It is like buying designer's clothing, it is like when you have that thou-
> sand-dollar sneakers, people look at you like: "wow, you have an expensive
> ass Adidas on your feet" […] (Talon, in an interview with the researchers).

Therefore, we notice that just like clothes for Miller (2013), we can think of skins as something that makes the players what they wish to be. It means to consider that they dress the subjects, such as skins makes them who they are, that such objects also act upon the players, In League of Legends, as we've previously said, they do not alter or strengthen attrib-utes and abilities of the characters, that remain the same. Through field research, it was possible to see that a big part of the interlocutors seeks to attain a better experience within the digital environment of the game through the acquisition of online goods (MARTIN, 2008) according to what we've perceived in Draven's speech:

> I buy a lot of skin […], I think I do it because it gives a thrill in the game,
> like, you go into the match and people say: "wow, awesome skin". If some-
> one says that to you it gives a bigger satisfaction, a bigger thrill, you play
> with more desire, you want to honor the skin, honor the champion you
> play with (Draven, in an interview to the researchers).

For Draven, the value of skins obtains meanings from different signi-fiers, among which there is: prestige and recognition from the visibility of these objects with the consequent thrill and satisfaction for its uses, increase in the desire to play, necessity to honor a skin and a character, as well as demonstrating technical expertise - skills and competences – when using them in-game (MACEDO and CORRAL VIEIRA, 2017). At the same time, the affirmation of Draven shows the affirmation of the material culture of what Alfred Gell (1992) called enchantment aes-thetics or a "technology of enchantment", responsible for addressing, in Draven, a will to play with champions that had skins. In a similar way, Jinx, when he expresses what she usually privileges in a virtual good, argued his preference for a type of skin that enables alterations in char-acter's dynamics, because the aesthetic transformations - that these goods enable for champions - were able to change the view she had of them.

> I like skins because they give you a different feeling, for example, there are some skins that only change his clothes [the character] […] I like skins that change your perception inside the game, that doesn't only change your clothes. Because the clothes are only, like, even though they [skins] are cheaper, I don't see much reason for you to have one (Jinx, in an interview with the researchers).

Approximating Gell's (1992) perspective with the studies of consumption from Featherstone (1995, p. 105), it is possible to think of skins as prone to entice a 'instantaneousness', i.e., 'the pleasure of diving into objects of contemplation'. As an effect of this process, there is a tendency for the development of a "uncontrol" of emotions, whose objective is to stimulate the opening for all kinds of sensations available that an object of consumption can evoke, from the joy of immediate and physical pleasures to even sensorial pleasures. Thus, this enchantment is capable of enabling a sensation of fear and trust, according to what Lulu and Draven, respectively, report:

> Because it [the Lux Elementalist skin, Image 2] has a bunch of effects, everyone will look and I think I cause this fear, I may not even know anything about Lux [Image 1], but then I got the skin and the other team will go: "Damn! He paid 40 reais to buy this skin!" So, either he is very rich or he rocks with Lux (Lulu, in an interview with the researchers).

> I think another thing that skins help is that they give you a little bit of confidence […]. You feel exclusive, superior, that gives you extra confidence, sometimes it can help you in the game, you feel more comfortable, play more calmly, think more when you play (Draven, in an interview with the researchers).

Thinking about the perspective of the material culture about this question, we repeatedly fall into a problem of reification, that is, people usually imagine they control the objects, that they exist simply so the individuals are involved or used according to their own terms. However, the approach of the material culture shows us that an object cannot be fully had once it transits and interacts with different subjects and contexts, giving each one of them sui generis forms independent from values

and meanings. Woodward (2007) argues that the objects have a type of power and agency on the individuals – to what Miller (2013) calls "objectification" -, a "capacity somewhat unexpected that the objects have to get out of focus, of bringing peripherals to our vision and still determining our behavior and our identity" (MILLER" 2013, p. 79), in such way they act and instill on the players, giving them meanings and roles in the game, not being passive to their pleasure and "manipulation" by these subjects. We can say, therefore, that the skin also makes the player at League, it dresses him, and makes him what he is in relation to others and with others.

Consequently, the players, when they use objects like the skins, need to understand beyond the uses and practices that motivate their purchases —for example, the aesthetic experience mentioned by most of the interlocutors. It requires the understating, however, that this "parallel life" independent that does not arise ex nihilo but is developed in the creation of skins, so they could navigate widely in the terrain of the game culture. The players participate of the world of the game through this incursion of the universe of collective symbols in LoL's community.

Thinking about the life of objects at League, in particular those which we studied, casts a light on relevant appointments: skins, for example, do not have a specific material form, except through computer codes and pixels. Therefore, we can understand them in two perspectives: (i) while formed by layers of binary codes and techniques, therefore, numbers and elements of programming, (ii) that come to the subject through pixels by the graphic interface of the computer. Codes tend to be less visible for the ordinary player, whereas "the aesthetic is the most visible and perceptible, for representing the interface that is apprehended by our senses" (MACEDO and AMARAL FILHO, 2015, p. 235). Obviously, one does not exist without the other, they complement each other to form a whole that we call skin. Moreover, the performance on LoL, including effects, composition, changes in characters, repairs throughout the years (in textures and pigmentations) corresponds to another phase of life of skins.

Another way, or deviation (WOODWARD, 2007), deals with install-ing, through appropriation and cultural uses that interrupt and modify these initial trajectories of meanings through the production, a biogra-phy of skins that is referred to a social life linked to these consumption objects in the game. That way, the trajectory of the object skin, a phase in the social life it has, is not only associated with its condition as a merchandise, but overall to a complex network of meanings and in-terpretations that are given by players, communities of fans and social groups throughout the existence of each one of these merchandises. When using one of these objects, a network of meanings is directly asso-ciated and also involves charges to the players that carry them.

It is necessary, thus, to consider a series of expectations that belong to the autonomy of these objects in the game (MACEDO and COR-RAL VIEIRA, 2017) and, so, the players perceive they can act on these meanings, re-interpreting the relation. In turn, these meanings bring a perception to the subjects of what the others will expect of them when they have these objects. They "objectify". Thus, the non-compatibility with certain expectations create sanctions that can oppress the subjects as evidenced in Jinx's speech: "when you get in with the skin, people already expect you to play well with that character, because you spent money on him and people think they can control where your money goes". However, we warn that a deeper detail on this issue would not fit inside the scope of the discussion intended for this article.

What is evidenced, at least preliminarily during the early game, is a relation of cultivating reputation, expertise, technical dominion of an object (character), intimately linked and legitimated with the use of skins (cf. MACEDO and CORRAL VIEIRA, 2017). Jinx's speech sig-nals that the "fame" of LoL players, their hierarchies and reputations in matches (overall) in a novice level is intimately related to the objects they use, even though a technical-operational competence and skill is subsistent – necessarily inherent to the status of pro, of expert players, at times professional players (FALCÃO, 2014) – capable of outshine this temporary status brought by skins during other moments of the game

(mid game and late game, for example), in which the technical expertise of each player prevails - in the end, it really is about what matters and defines matches in an agonistic game such as LoL.

However, "people act on (and are represented or symbolized by) things" (MILLER, 2013, p. 104) and by the "auras" they have. Therefore, these objects, as consumption goods invested by a symbolic dimension, mark the frontier between subjects that have or don't have skins, demilit the preliminary positions (in an initial level of the game, and, at least, for beginners) of each one in LoL's environment and reaffirm models of subjectivity (LEAL, FREIRE FILHO and ROCHA, 2016) bringing specific symbolic values to the subjects they have due to the high esteem and meaning attributed by the collective of players.

Furthermore, objects get out and get in the sphere of commodification. That means saying they have "social lives", careers or trajectories that vary according to changes in their meanings for the consumers during a certain amount of time and space (WOODWARD, 2007). Objects, at some point of their "lives", can be defined mainly by their commodity monetary value, which rates them as "merchandise"; some time after an economic transaction, from their incorporations - or subjectivations (MILLER, 2013) - in private rituals, cultures and worlds, according to personal perceptions or relationships, become "de-commoditized", turn out to be "goods" filled with meaning.

The skins can also be reintroduced in the market – when some specific skins are put again on sale by the company or when players sell their accounts in an informal market, considered illegal by the developer. Exposed on the store, either one of the case, they are merchandise, but, when they are acquire, they become "de-commoditized" to give place to the values and subjectivations of each subject. Potentially, skins can be reinserted into the market for re-sale at any moment. "The general point is this: objects are never culturally fixed, but they are always in the process of being and becoming" (WOODWARD, 2007, p. 103). Through these transformations, we create a similar and singular type of biography, in which objects, and not only people, have a social life.

Therefore, coming from Featherstone's (1995) contributions, we can think in a double symbolic aspect of virtual goods in digital games such as LoL: (i) on one hand, there is a symbolic charge present in the design and in the imaginary introduced in the processes of marketing and production of items such as skins; (ii) on the other hand, there is a diversity of symbolic associations used and renegotiated to highlight differences in lifestyle, influencing, even in a very superficial and undefined level, the social relationships in the matches.

Similarly, Rocha, Barros and Karam (2014) argue that the consumption has two dimensions in today's society: on one side, there is the materiality, and on the other, there is meaning. When acquiring a merchandise, authors affirm, their materiality is filled with symbolism, in which every product has a cultural and a public significance supported by mediatic and advertisement narratives. In consumption societies, digital objects are distributed in large scale, found and used by subjects that need to negotiate and establish their own perceptions when they incorporate them into their practices.

Image 5: Official illustration of the character Diana.
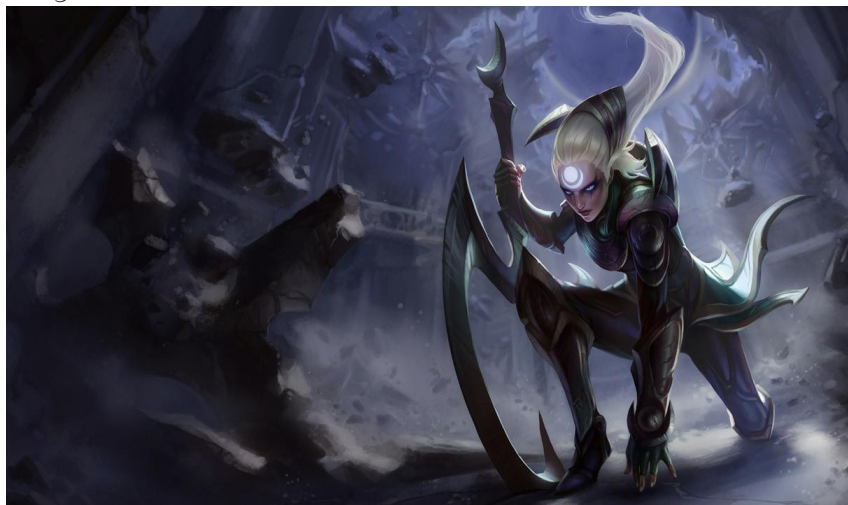
Source: Print screen of Diana's page. Available at: https://goo.gl/HNiRdQ. Accessed in: April 1st, 2017.

In this perspective, we can perceive how virtual goods start to configure a form of acquisition of experiences of entertainment. For Draven, the possession of all the goods related to the character Diana (Image 5) with which he has an intense affectionate relationship, is not enough anymore. So, he invested "a good amount of money", as he told us, to materialize the immaterial through a tattoo – a moon sign engraved in the forehead of the character – kept in secret from his parents.

Draven told us: "About the tattoo I got, I got it right in the middle of my back here […], and I made it because this tattoo has a meaning to me". When we questioned why he had done it and the meaning it had, he told us he liked the name of the character. In a conversation with his mother, he said he would like to have a daughter named Diana, finding out it was also a wish from his parents. He adds: "Her story [Diana's story] […] is different from what her village was, what her home was, then I also, sometimes, feel very different from a lot of people I see around".

The tattoo expresses the immateriality by the materiality: the act of tattooing the character on his back can be understood by the necessity of materializing Draven's wishes, supported by the potential of the tattoo create a legacy of the immateriality of the character and her skins as a material presence in our world through his body. Thus, we recognize the irreducible materiality present in the processes of consumption - "We can't escape that most forms of consumption involve a relation with material things" (WOODWARD, 2007, p. 101). That evidences, therefore, that the search for the material, through experiences enabled by the immaterial, creates even more materialization (MILLER, 2013). The more successful is his affirmation, more Diana and her skins create and add values and meanings for Draven.

The experiences of consumption and material culture of these objects (characters and skins, for example), demonstrate how the relations between them and their subjects become sui generis and contextualized on each experience and emotion and substantiated in the sense of their

experiences, in the importance that the objects may have in their lives and in their perceptions of the world of the players.

Final considerations

The consumption of objects in League of Legends evidences an inter-connected network in a universe of meanings built by players that give another life, "colonize" and are influenced by these objects in so far as both are moved by the social landscape of the game – by this environ-ment they inhabit and incite. Through an ethnographic study, we seek to demonstrate the diverse capabilities that objects of the game, with special attention to the essential role of skins, have to give meaning, build a social and symbolic system.

Therefore, what we can understand is that the nature of consump-tion of objects in League is based, for the players, on their involvement in the transformation of the meaning and nature of these items. It is about a hermeneutic struggle of subjects in denying the exchange value, so they can invest personal meanings to these objects in the game. As consequence, the perceptions are adaptable comprehensions of players, that evidently do not arise ex nihilo, but according to categories as po-sitions/social hierarchies, ages, genders, dominion and expertise (skills and competences) about the technical-operational aspects, etc.

In terms of investments, we can highlight that, when deciding to en-ter LoL, a player ends up, in a more visible level, investing their time, giving attention to the game and converting their experience in the environment for rewards, spoils of war, that are exchanged for the con-sumption of items. Thus, the game economy can also be configured as digital barter. At LoL, everyone is susceptible to consumption in differ-ent levels, either by spending time to achieving conquests and trading for items or by trading money for virtual coins.

But the consumption is sustained, according to Rocha (2000) through cultural codes that give meaning to the process of production from relationships with the material culture and the media. In this sense, consumption is perceived as a social fact that involves a symbolic

dimension, with meanings linked to codes generating categories such as utility, desire or necessity, that do not limit themselves to practical reasoning. Even though there is a scenario with all the essential elements for the market logic, the economic game of production linked by Rocha (2000), the absence of symbolic order (and all their nuance) makes impossible the concrete action of the act of consuming. It seems like there is not a lack, on League, of codes and symbolic systems to complete the objects when they attribute uses and reasons for classifications able to give meanings to merchandise that are turned into goods.

The acts of consumption of subjects in game call attention and communicate choices, modes how they organize and give meaning to their spaces in this ambiance. Thus, thinking about consumption and entertainment denotes how they are passible of mixing, either in the prosaic level of a match in a game such as LoL, or the complex dynamics that constitute collective representations, imaginaries, competitive aspects that are immanent to this context and social relations per se.

Far from exhausting the theme, once we recognize the gaps that are certainly in this article, due to the way we addressed our arguments, understanding this scenario is a challenge to be unveiled in future studies – what is put as work to be done. Investigating how these social relations will keep outlining themselves raises a profound observation around issues about the dynamics and interfaces of entertainment, consumption and digital games, knowing how to recognize the relevance and the place they achieved in our culture, subsisting in them a social framework in which diverse and intense meanings are being woven, capable of activating issues that are so complex as the other evident phenomena in today's culture.

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