

## **The mediations of performances: approximation between Adidas and Run DMC from the study of video clips**

### **As mediações das performances: aproximações entre Adidas e Run DMC a partir do estudo de videoclipes**

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**Abstract** *The reputation of the sporting goods brand Adidas allowed for its incorporation into the symbolic universe of various urban subcultures around the world. The hip-hop culture and its adherents also inserted themselves into this context in a very peculiar way, linking Adidas to their repertoire of identity symbols. Thus, the main objective of this paper is to analyze the performances of the American rap group Run DMC and Adidas, as well as their communication strategies in the construction and appropriation of cultural values through the symbolic interpretation of gestures and the outfits of the artists using the brand in their videos. Thus, we intend to discuss the contributions of the group and their music videos in the transformation of the German brand into a symbol of ostentation and consumption for an original culture of African American communities.*

**Key-words:** *Performance; Video clip; Map of mediations*

**Resumo** *A reputação da marca de produtos esportivos Adidas permitiu sua incorporação ao universo simbólico de diversas subculturas urbanas ao redor do mundo. A cultura hip-hop e seus adeptos, também, se inseriram nesse contexto e*

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*vincularam, de forma bastante peculiar, a Adidas ao seu repertório de símbolos identitários. Com isto, o principal objetivo deste artigo é analisar as performances do grupo de rap norte-americano Run DMC e da Adidas, bem como as suas estratégias comunicacionais na construção e apropriação de valores culturais através da interpretação simbólica das gestualidades e figurino dos artistas que utilizam a marca em seus videoclipes. Deste modo, pretende-se discutir as contribuições do grupo e de seus videoclipes na transformação da marca alemã em um dos símbolos de ostentação e consumo de uma cultura originária de comunidades negras americanas.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Performance; Videoclipe; Mapa das mediações*

## Adidas: a hip-hop culture element

The brand of sporting goods Adidas, throughout its history, has built a reputation which allowed its incorporation into the symbolic universe of various urban subcultures around the world. The hip-hop culture and its adherents also inserted themselves into this context in a very peculiar way, linking Adidas to their symbolic repertoire. You can observe this phenomenon in various media channels and spaces for interaction and social practices of young artists, fans or hip-hop militants. In rap concerts, b-boy competitions or even the characters graffitied on the walls of various cities as well as in music videos, movies and advertising campaigns that depict the cultural practices of the hip-hop universe, the three stripes are found as one of the elements establishing the brand identity and recognition of all that is expressed through that culture.

The history and success of the brand among the young audience and more specifically among fans of hip-hop culture, however, was largely the responsibility of the American rap group Run DMC. Rappers Run, DMC and DJ Jam Master Jay, achieved success in 1984 and were responsible for bringing rap to the *mainstream*<sup>3</sup> with the release of the *single Rock Box*. With this song, Run DMC sold over a million copies of their debut album and became the first rap group to have a music video on the programming schedule of MTV (*Music Television*) - which at the time refused to show video clips of black artists, with the exception of Michael Jackson (LEAL, 2007, p.74).

Thus, Run DMC became a symbol of hip-hop culture. Besides being the first rap group to appear on the cover of newspapers and Rolling Stone magazine, they were on the top of the music charts several times and remained on the daily programming of MTV with other video clips, despite the initial resistance of the station. As claimed by Orville Hall and Antonio Allen, in the documentary *Walk this way* (LEAL, 2007), in establishing a unique posture when singing, dressing and gestures,

<sup>3</sup> Mainstream is understood as the dominant cultural circuit in the field of media. A circuit that handles conventions associated with consumption on a large scale, globally, which expands the separation distance between production conditions and recognition of products.

the group also introduced to their rap concerts, a different performance compared to those performed by other rappers until then.

Before Run DMC, the outfits used by rappers in their presentations were extravagant and unusual. However, they translated and gave new meaning to the wishes of the streets when they adopted a new style of behavior that portrayed “a tough guy look” and a peculiar way of crossing their arms as a demonstration of attitude. Through the use of gold chains around their necks, hats and shoes from the Adidas brand, without shoelaces, they contributed to the launch of trends that later became mandatory items in the outfits and the performances of MCs (LEAL, 2007).

It is identified, then, that these rappers led the way in relating to trademarks in a way not yet explored by other genre artists at the time and so significantly introduced it into the hip-hop universe that it became one of the most representative symbols of hip-hop culture (STOUTE, 2011).

This aspect makes us question the relationship between Adidas and Run DMC. How did a brand that initially refused to sponsor the group - claiming it did not want to be linked to what they considered to be a marginal culture - become a symbol of consumption practices of that same group? Despite the idolatry of its members and spontaneous use of the shoe brand, as pointed out by Klein (2002), how did Adidas begin to relate to the rap music genre? We use one of the numerous video clips of the group where the members put Adidas in a prominent position, to analyze their contributions in transforming a German<sup>4</sup> brand into a symbol of ostentation and consumption of the original culture of African American communities.

The challenge of this paper is to analyze the performance of Adidas through the symbolic interpretation of gestures and outfits of the characters in the video clip. Theories argued by the Author when he states, based on scholars of performance studies, that “any human activity can be studied as a performance (...), to the extent that indicates a certain conventionalized action.” The gestures and conducts developed

<sup>4</sup> For clarification, we point out that Adidas, previously registered with the name of Gebrüder Dassler, also supported and actively collaborated with the German National Socialism, in the early 1930s. (SMIT, 2007).

by the rappers Run DMC in the video are understood as “objectivities and rhythmic shapes that lend body shape to a speech” (GEBAUER & WULF, 2004). These gestures materialize the construction of meaning and cultural values that can be highlighted through the voices, gestures, camera positions and frames, the look of artists and characters who participate in music videos (GUTMANN, 2013). The interpretive exercise is used here in the video *My Adidas* (1986), directed by Arthur King.

### **Methodological trails**

As a methodological approach, we use the path traced by Gutmann (2013) to “reflect on the uses of speaking bodies” done by Adidas in the group’s music videos “While builders of senses (or in the words of Martin-Barbero, as technicalities of ritualization of senses and values ...)”. Thus, our goal is to understand the communication strategies of Adidas in the construction and appropriation of cultural values through the gestures expressed in the performances of artists when using the brand.

The video clip of Run DMC with the brand’s presence is seen here as a product that mediates the articulations “between culture, communication and politics that transforms into a logical dialogue of production and consumption, industrial forms and cultural matrices” as per the Map of Mediations proposed by Martin-Barbero (GUTMANN, 2013). Thus, the use of the map contributes to explore the ways in which the production logic of Adidas and industrial formats in the musical field are articulated in the rap genre and are manifested in the performances and gestures of artists in the video clips.

Thinking of the video clip as a media genre from the standpoint of the mediations map allows us to establish some relationships that will contribute to a more objective and useful analysis for the purpose of this work. The video clip cannot be studied as an isolated and independent format because of certain settings imposed by the media, in its relation to culture, the music industry and economic rules (JANOTTI JR, 2003, p. 36 in SOARES, 2005). So, according to Tiago Soares (2005), the music video, as well as the song that originates from it, “is inserted into a

production logic of the record industry and being rooted in this production system, (...) the video is a symptomatic place to identify and discuss the discursive strategies of this product.”

This does not mean that we are unaware of the works that delve deeply into aspects related to the field of audiovisual language for the study of music videos (BARRETO, 2013; MACHADO, 2000) - neither that we disagree with them. The focus of this analytical essay is to understand the construction of values starting from the Adidas brand performance in the Run DMC video clip, therefore the elements of audiovisual language are considered taking this cultural problem as prevalent.

The map of mediations then becomes a possible perspective for investigation of this problem, since Martín-Barbero (2009) argues that there is a strong relationship between consumption, culture and daily lives that are intertwined in communication studies. For him, the relationship between Production Logics, Industrial Formats, Reception Skills and Cultural are provided by the mediations of technicality, rituality, sociality and institutions, respectively. In his famous scheme, we can see the existence of two axes by which these mediations are established. A synchronic axis between the Production Logic and Reception Skills, and another, diachronic, between Cultural Matrices and industrial formats.



Picture 1: Reproduction of the Mediations Map.

Source: MARTÍN-BARBERO, 2009, p.16.

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The video clip is understood here as an industrial format, instituted as a standard from the 1980s and has enjoyed longevity to the present day<sup>5</sup>. A format that articulates the symbolic relations that permeate the collective imagination, and when relating to the competencies of reception of the viewers, it expresses certain consumption rituals. Rituality, therefore, that manifests reception standards through which the subjects will establish the ways they read, view and interact with this television product. Evidently, the music video format is also related to Production Logic, in order to express technicalities - the so called rule book - that puts order to the industrial format of certain content (political, economic etc.)

Therefore, the video is a place of interaction between the spheres of production and reception, and through it the productive logic of the interests and desires of institutional regimes and their communicable strategies are manifested. In the tensioning process, the sociability and constituent rituals of the identification process emerge. According to the author, production logic corresponds to the corporate structure in its economic, ideological, “productive routines” and “*communication skills*” aspects, that concern their “ability to address/build public, audiences, consumers; especially in regard to its *technological competitiveness*: the use of Technicality, which nowadays the ability to innovate in FI is largely dependent on.” (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 2009, p. 18, highlighted by the author).

Thus, the analysis of the dimension of the video clip’s technical nature may be made from the narrative modes with which it sets up its messages. The editing features, short planes and fragmented narratives may indicate that it is seeking to highlight certain aspects of the message at the expense of other visuals and symbols, of lesser importance. Understanding the technicalities imbricated in Run DMC’s video clip is one of the keys to understanding how the mechanisms of perception, recognition and identity of the Adidas brand are engendered by the media

<sup>5</sup> Although narrative patterns in video clips are identified, there is a relative stabilization/destabilization of this format over the explorations within pop culture and expressive vanguards.

text. In this perspective, when dealing with technicality, Ronsini (2010, p 7) says:

Because of its centrality in the social organization, it runs through the entire circuit, modeling rituality, sociality and institutions, that is to say, it models all the relationships because it is defined as the social status of the technique. Therefore, technicality can be understood in a narrow sense, as a textual, narrative or discursive aspect of the media that functions as a perceptive organizer.

Technicality, when establishing the rules of the narrative game in which the configuration of reading ritualizations and media consumption will be possible, highlights forms of social interaction and the constitution of identification. As for rituals, they start to act as a resource that supports and sustains the symbolic connections that mediate the interactions and reception processes of the members of a particular community.

### **The performance of Adidas as a strategy of senses ritualization**

One of the main features of the performance is the “reiterability”. Through it, a certain behavior can be repeated indefinitely without it being made redundant - which authors originally from the linguistic field would indicate as a legacy of the condition of the possibility of performative utterances: repetition. This reiterable dimension of performance was further developed by Schechner (2006) through the restored behavior idea:

Performances are made up of restored behavior portions, but each performance is different from any other. Firstly, certain parts of the behavior can be combined in an endless number of variations. Secondly, no event can exactly copy another event. Not just by the behavior itself - nuances of mood, tone of voice, body language, and so on, but also the specific occasion and context make each event unique.

Erving Goffman (2012) is clearly the inspiration of many of the works on social performances. His proposition has contributed to the



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understanding of performances as an analytical tool of socio-cultural relations, since, for him, the performance is a series of activities in a particular space-time condition facing the continued presence of a number of observers that exercise influence on them. These are the interpretation schemes (key frames, according to Goffman) that individuals use for orientation in social situations.

This definition is essential to approach the concept with the conditions of ritualization that allow the assimilation, the emergence of sensory and cognitive effects - especially in the specific case that we will analyze: the Run DMC video clip and its relationship with Adidas. After all, this is a suitable setting for the staging of certain behaviors that are established between the persona and the musical genre, also between the music genre and branded clothing accessories, and even between the clothing and the persona.

As it is a mediation between the reception skills and industrial formats, rituality implies thinking about the operations through which a certain expression is captured. The communicative condition of a performance implies, therefore, thinking about the corporal existence of a subject to express it and that allows for us to understand how Adidas summons the presence of Run DMC's rappers body and voice. This relationship is not merely established to provoke in the audience aspects related to corporal sensitivity, but also for better enjoyment of the text, its consumption conditions and the reiterability of the spectator's behavior.

Consumption is, in today's society, a central element in the process of construction of identifications and of social performance. In this sense, the position that Adidas now occupies in the symbolic universe of hip-hop is also due to the very performance of Run DMC and therefore it is one of the conditions of existence of the brand's relationship with the members of communities formed by fans, militants and activists in the hip-hop culture. In a parallel to "the theater as a central space of cultural reproduction and exposure of the human body" (Hastrup quoted in Carlson 2011, p. 183), there is an exhibition of bodies and gestures of the Run DMC members alongside Adidas, which favors a particular form of perception and cultural reproduction.

“Identity is a construction that is narrated” says Canclini (2006). With this, the author corroborates the discussion posted in this article, since it explains the media’s influence on the construction of the identification process. For him, media has always played a key role in the construction of identity and sense of citizenship. It summons up feelings of sharing “habits and common tastes, ways of speaking and dressing (...)” that identify and distinguish one group of people from another. Thereby, I think, through the dissemination provided by video clips, Run DMC, with their ways of dressing, singing and performing (LEAL, 2007), establish a new sense of recognition, identity and differentiation among fans from New York ghettos and young people from other social groups, and even those from other cultures and nations.

### **My Adidas: an analytical test**

As we have argued since the beginning of this text, the narrative in the Run DMC video clips constitutes a source of dissemination of cultural codes forming the identities of the fans and the supporters of hip-hop culture - therefore, it is a ritualized narrative. From the moment that Run DMC exhibits and boasts its admiration for Adidas in their music videos, they make a transition from the reality experienced by them (*way of life*) to the reality of the image (*image shape*) and it becomes part of the collective imagination of their fans (BRASIL, 2014). The performance of Run DMC is, therefore, this passage between the fictional world and the real world, and when its members are performing, they are simultaneously performing and recreating their own realities. André Brasil delves deeper into this performative relationship arguing that:

The image forces a coexistence with its representational dimension, a performative dimension: there, *they perform ways of life*. Whether it is in the media, visual arts or cinema, there are more than a few experiments in which images appear not only to represent or symbolize - *not only*, we promptly emphasize - but to invent, produce ways of life, ones that keep a relationship of continuity (in some respects) and discontinuity (in others) with the work. This would allow us to say that the performances that take place there (of authors and characters) are simultaneously in the

real world and in an imaginary world, they are, at the same time, *way of life and image shape*. (BRASIL, 2014, p. 133, highlighted by the author).

In this way, the video *My Adidas* recorded in 1986 by Run DMC through Arista Records, brings a sequence of scenes that constitute a brand performance. Adidas, in an explicit and very expressive way, is linked to the work narrative as a genuine symbolic element of hip-hop culture through direct association with one of the most influential rap groups of its time. You can see in various scenes of the video clip, in the framing, with extreme close-ups and medium shots, Adidas shoes in an attempt to demonstrate the grandeur and importance of the brand in the group's performance.

According to Arlindo Machado (2000, p. 180), through its intense exploration of video graphic effects that make up a language marked and characterized by experimentation, close-up shots, discontinuity, clippings, fragmentation and dispersion, the video establishes the maintenance "(of the recognizability) of at least one image, that of the singer or the band" for the commercial purpose of promoting albums and artists, as well as to "expand their means of expression" (BARRETO, 2005, p. 18). Thus, this "recognizability", presented by Machado, in *My Adidas* is not only for the group, but mainly for the brand.

According to Barbara Smit in her book, the story of this music video begins even before Run DMC was formed. Adidas, in the late 1970's, sent an Italian named Angelo Anastasio to the United States. His role was to promote the brand among American celebrities. In the early 1980s, he came across three African American boys break dancing in the street and they were wearing the brand's shoes and trousers. From there on, the Italian began supplying Adidas products to the young men until they formed the group Run DMC (SMIT, 2007).

However, this narrative is in doubt as the journalist Naomi Klein (2002) states that, initially, Adidas refused to sponsor Run DMC as not to be bound to a marginal African American aesthetic. According to her, the brand executives changed their minds after being convinced by the rappers' producer to watch their show in which thousands of young

people showed their shoes in clamor as a response to the group's performance on stage.

Faced with different versions of the same story, we can conclude that from some point in time, the brand and the group established a relationship of very peculiar symbolic exchanges. On the one hand, Adidas is linked to the symbolic world of hip-hop culture, and on the other, Run DMC acquired a significant symbol of their own identity. The following highlighted scenes show the intensity of this relationship.



Pictures 2 and 3: *My Adidas* video clip scenes.

SOURCE: <<http://goo.gl/GVYO7s>>. Accessed on: 10 Jan 2015.

It is interesting to consider that despite the sequences of images that highlight parts of the lyrics, the video clip's narrative has no direct correspondence with the contents of the musical verbal text. The video evokes aesthetic and narrative features in accordance with the typical genre settings of this industrial format. However, depending on the context of the enjoyment of the video and the degree of knowledge of a particular viewer, if they did not know that it is a music video clip, it can be easily perceived as an advertising film for the brand. The music video *My Adidas*, because of this, is an interesting work for the discussion about the notions of genres that evoke and delimit the horizons of expectations and reception rituals, projecting the technicalities imposed by the productive logic of the music industry.

The first scenes of the video clip, pictures 2 and 3, call attention to the priority that is given to the brand, and thus being detrimental even to the presence of the actual performers. The video starts in the form of a typography animation with the image of an Adidas trainer on top of the title of the video clip. Then, the trainer gains a certain projection and occupies about 80% of the screen. It is only after this that Darryl "DMC" McDaniels appears wearing a jacket, pants and shoes of the brand. The two other members of the group appear in the following sequence as shown in Picture 4. This sequence of images shows how the performance of the brand seems to summon the presence of the bodies of members of Run DMC only as a show of ostentation of their own symbolic representations.

In Picture 5, an illustration of an arm wearing a jacket of the brand and wielding a microphone is displayed. At this time, the voice of one of the rappers says a verse that affirms his command, perhaps on the audience or on his own life. In Picture 6, the voice states that the rapper and Adidas are a good team and that the two always go together and rhyme<sup>6</sup>. These images demonstrate the competence required by the performance of "know how to do it" and "know what to say", to the extent

<sup>6</sup> Original excerpt from the song *My Adidas*: "With mic in hand I cold took command / My Adidas and me both askin P / We make a good team My Adidas and me / We get around together, rhyme forever / And we won't be mad when worn in bad weather".



Picture 4: Darryl “DMC” McDaniels, center, Jason “Jam-Master Jay” Mizell, on the right and Joseph “DJ Run” Simmons, on the left.

Source: <<http://goo.gl/GVYO7s>>. Accessed on: 10 Jan 2015.

that it is more than simply just using Adidas, that there is a kind of link between the shoes and the rapper and vice versa.

Moreover, these actions evoke the performative realization of the “show making” and “explain show making” from the perspective of Schechner (2006). For this author, show making means “perform: point out, over line, and display making (...)” For this concept, Run DMC displays its making and its competence of knowing how to do it, both the act of singing as well as surviving on the streets, using the brand as an amulet that protects and inspires their performances. The performance of Adidas, summoning the bodies and the voices of the Run DMC members, seems to become a kind of inspirational muse that happens to be responsible for its own reason for existing.

Thus, gestures expressed by Run DMC through its own performance in the video, are the materialization of their conduct and, even more interesting, contribute significantly to the performances developed by the Adidas brand in its relationship with the Rap music genre. Gestures, tone of voice and posture evoke a particular form of ritualization among fans and their idols. They indicate the path to follow of how to approach each other and how both can become members of the same community



Pictures 5 and 6: *My Adidas* video clip scenes.

Source: <<http://goo.gl/GVYO7s>>. Accessed on: 10 Jan 2015.

of meanings and values. Thus, Jean Galard helps us to understand how the performance summons values of tastes and senses cultivated by the gestures:

If it is true that every reaction is shaped by society, our gestures, including the most basic ones, are educated, the art that would be dedicated to them would not contradict the “natural”, it would replace a previous art, an implicit aesthetic, barely conscious, which regulates their size and attitude, continence and conveniences that subtends the requirement of contention, if not of restraint (Galard, 2008, p.21).



Pictures 7 and 8: *My Adidas* video clip scenes.

Source: <<http://goo.gl/GVYO7s>>. Accessed on: 10 Jan 2015.

Pictures 7 and 8 clearly show the power of gestures performed by Run DMC in relation to their fans. In them, the audience performs a vibrant action that denotes the passion that they have for the brand and the values it evokes when called upon by rappers to showcase their shoes.

Now, pictures 9 and 10 suggest the configuration of an urban setting as a social space to practice the use of Adidas through a naturalized and daily action that evokes not only the viewer to identify with the social environment in which they are inserted, but also with their own



realization of performance of the social role that is established as an expectation horizon to be followed by the subject through brand consumption. (JEDER JANOTI, 2005 in SOARES, 2012).



Pictures 9 and 10: *My Adidas* video clip scenes.

Source: <<http://goo.gl/GVYO7s>>. Accessed on: 10 Jan 2015.

Thus, when analyzing some of the scenes of the video clip *My Adidas* you can see a strong process of identification as a group is forged by consumption, and with it, the brand is expressively linked to social practices performed by the young hip hop culture fans that Run DMC

represents. The restored performance of its members to use and bear the brand establishes a ritualization of meanings and sharing of tastes which are intensified and enhanced by the video clip's narrative. The brand, thus, seeks to ensure their popularization incorporating itself to the symbolic codes that identify and differentiate the fans and members of reference groups in hip-hop culture. Pictures 11 and 12 contribute to the perception of the influence exerted by Adidas in performing an urban aesthetic that is manifested through the representation of bodies and voices of rappers.

**ADIDAS BACK ON TRACK:**

**382,000 PAIRS OF SUPERSTARS SOLD IN 1986**

"Mostly to keep people from getting stomped," was the reply. Limousine driver Joe Oresco said the group had been in Harper's San Francisco store earlier in the day, "but that was a piece of cake compared to this." Oresco said he had driven other celebrities but

the outside and had no idea what was going on. Livingston whacked the metal gate a couple of times to no avail.

More than a hundred people by now had gathered at the side door. Finally, Airrao retreated to a squad car, called police headquarters and when someone got on the phone

was no way they could bring the group out through the throng in the parking lot.

It was decided to decoy the crowd with the limousines and hustle the members out the back door on 13th Street. By 3:30 p.m. the group was still inside and more than a dozen officers were at

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last 5-inch frame, folded his arms and eyed the crowd warily. The line snaked around the back of the store, about four people wide, and headed along the side of the building toward Macdonald.

Several hundred others were gathered in the parking lot.

"I'm encouraging our personnel to keep a low-key status," LeBlanc said. "Let people know we're here for business. This is not a playground."

At 2:20, 10 minutes ahead of schedule, two limousines pulled into the parking lot and the line



**RUN DMC**  
adidas

Pictures 11 and 12: My Adidas video clip scenes.

Source: <<http://goo.gl/GVYO7s>>. Accessed on: 10 Jan 2015.

The analysis effort performed in this text attempts to demonstrate the ways in which the communicative strategies of Adidas, by summoning the presence of Run DMC boasting the consumption of the brand, have been prepared. The use of the Map of Mediations, despite the need to delve deeper into it in future studies, contributed to the understanding of the imposed relations between technicalities and rituals and how these are manifested by the performance of the brand in its interaction with the group and their fans.

### **Final Considerations**

We realized at the end of the analytical test, that the narrative constructed by the video clip *My Adidas* works in two ways, at least. The first mode is one in which the ongoing actions presented by the artists point to gestures, attitudes and even behavior that rap listeners and fans of Hip-Hop culture develop in their daily lives. In this sense, we can interpret the video clip as a performance of taste, as a kind of exercise of the consumption patterns of a community of meanings, sharing different ways of interpreting the world.

The second way, and the one that interests us specifically in this test, is the way in which the brand itself, Adidas, has a relationship with this musical genre and especially with Run DMC, in order to build a trajectory for the brand itself. We understand, therefore, that the way it is inserted (either reaffirming or projecting) into the dialogue with rap shows a performance of the brand, which allows a discussion on how these communication field agents constantly rebuild their production logics<sup>7</sup>.

The first operating mode is closer to what we call *ways of life* than the second operating mode, *image shapes* (BRAZIL, 2014). In the first mode of operation, the gestures of life are the ones incorporated in the performance of artists, instilling the physical expressions (and why not staged?) of a daily routine there. In the second operating mode, the

<sup>7</sup> The next step of this research is to compare the performances present in the videoclip *My Adidas*, to Adidas' own advertising campaign developed during the time that the music video was released.

seduction mechanisms of the images are teaching the gestures and expressions, aestheticizing the daily life of those groups. This relationship between the operating modes is interchangeable and interdependent.

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