

4.3. Carioca¹ youth, their cultures and media representations: Searching for roads to a research²

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Abstract

This work intends to present some opened issues about an investigation which has been developed by a group of researchers from Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio), named "JUX — Juventudes cariocas, suas culturas e representações midiáticas" ("Carioca youth, their cultures and media representations"). The purpose of the investigation is to do fieldwork to observe and describe some youth subcultures from Rio de Janeiro presuming that Advertising reinforce a kind of youth representation which only shows rebel (but controlled) traces of what it actually means and that is much more than just this. This is a research in progress and this article points to some possible methodological and theoretical roads to be made.

Keywords: youth subcultures, representation, advertising, skate, carioca.

The aim of this work is to discuss some still opened issues about an investigation which has been developed by a group of researchers from Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio), named "JUX — Juventudes cariocas, suas culturas e representações midiáticas" ("Carioca youth, their cultures and media representations"). So this is a research in progress and we are thankful to KISMIF 2016 for having been a wealthy place to present some possible methodological and theoretical roads to be made.

First, it must be explained how youth cultures studies are linked to our concerns about the process by which social representations of our values, practices and beliefs in the media are constructed, more specifically in advertising. Then there will be presented the Research Group of which the author is the present leading, and the brand-new project with more opened questions to be explored than answers to be given by now.

Let's begin with the main theoretical concepts that this work is based on. As was said, the concerns are addressed to the construction of social representations of the values, practices and beliefs of our society in the media, mainly in advertising. By social representation it is understood, as Serge Moscovici (2011) has once explained, the phenomenon of turning into "familiar" what is "unfamiliar", maintaining the "consensual universe" of society in safe. In other words, the social representations are the ideas, concepts and images given by interaction and by our daily conversations, and also by the media in order to guarantee the necessary social cohesion and harmony. The "work of representation" of Stuart Hall (1997) is also important to understand social representation as a constructionist system, a process that results in "maps of meanings". Nevertheless, it is in Moscivici theory where we take one of the central arguments of this work. We are interested in searching for when and how the social representations come to transform "unfamiliar" into "familiar", specifically in the media, in a prescriptive way. Moreover, it is intended to observe how advertising deals with this process of symbolic construction, since its space is only possible if there is a minimum agreement between people of the same society about what is being

¹ "Carioca" is the word for the people of the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

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said and figured. Advertising is where the “consensual universe” lives at its most expressive way and seems to be the rule for the effectiveness of the significance of the message.

In KISMIF 2015, the author has presented a work entitled “Punk representations in advertising: impurity, stigma and deviance” which was dedicated to observe

what exists on the fringes of social standards, what transgresses, which to a certain extent represents danger to what is normative. By exploring these media representations as a communication phenomenon, more specifically analysing the way in which the construction process of these images, ideas, beliefs, consumption practices thought categories and classification systems occur, I seek to observe what doesn't necessarily fit into what could be considered the norm, conventional or at best agreeable, for an advertising campaign.

How does advertising concur with what is not beautiful or ‘normal’, within the normative and hegemonic patterns present in the media? What are the symbolic limits of a narrative based upon the representations of a ‘perfect world’, of a ‘happy ending’ and of beauty? (Pereira, 2015).

Now we need to extend this approach to some other youth cultures, or subcultures, presuming that the media reinforce a kind of youth representation which only shows rebel (but controlled) traces of what it actually means and that is much more than just this.

On the other hand, we have Advertising as the most important narrative of consumption, according to Everardo Rocha, a Brazilian anthropologist. For Rocha (2000), strongly influenced by Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood's book *World of Goods* (Douglas and Isherwood, 2004) consumption is a system of significance and a system of classification, while Advertising is the place where those significations and classifications are shaped by persuasive and pedagogic images, discourses and ideas. Advertising is the place where the world is perfect, where nobody dies, where everyone is happy and where there is only beauty and all the good things. According to Rocha (2000), Advertising is a game of mirrors where we can find the values that rule our society, which is called by the author a “society of dreams”.

And, finally, we have youth. As we understand, youth is an advertising concept, an idea more than a phase of life. Youngsters are taken as a reference for our culture, they are aspirational to any one of any age and they rule the society of consumption, pointing out to what we have to dress and to listen to, how we can get happiness and work at the same time, where we have to go out to, how we are supposed to have fun. But as well as they are a reference, can also be a threat. Youth subcultures always mean resistance, some of them hardly, some others softly. The subculturalists share particular codes, from the way they wear to the slangs they use to express themselves, that can never make sense to other people. And they are commonly innovative and trendsetters. But all of them, at their very beginning, are in some way “unfamiliar” to the establishment. And there is no possible “unfamiliarity” to the maintenance of harmony and interaction between social actors, according Moscovici. What is unfamiliar has to become familiar, anchoring it in something or some fact already known in the past and objectifying it in a concept, image or idea at now. That is how the media and particularly advertising represent youth subcultures.

By analyzing the advertising that uses youth subcultures as an appeal, we can find paths to reveal a lot about our society, since we live in a culture that idealizes a normative youth lifestyle. And that is what we intend to do in our research.

In January of the current year, we have started up the Research Group mentioned before. The aim of this group is to construct a kind of map of the city of Rio de Janeiro from the point of view of the local youth cultures — or subcultures. We have chosen Rio because it is a very emblematic place in Brazil to think about the relations between the urban space and the social inequality, the uses of the body and youth as a symbolic capital, the occupation of the city by some youth cultures in the recent years, among other reasons. We believe that the representations of carioca youth in the media are more likely to global patterns than to local specificities. Moreover, we believe that very much of the resistance that features the subcultures is simply subsumed when being

represented, considering the perfect world of advertising. The “unfamiliar” becomes “familiar”, neutralizing what could, in a certain way, threaten the necessary “consensual universe” of our daily interactions in society. But in this process of turning the unfamiliar into familiar, there is too much to be ignored. What is silenced by the representation of a young subculture in advertising can only be heard by the fieldwork. In other words, what the media shows by stereotypes is only a shadow of a rich source of alive signs, material cultures, values, codes, practices, norms and ideologies produced and reproduced by the youngsters — or, we may say, the subculturalists. We believe that it is mandatory to observe the culture in action to go further in analyzing its representations in Advertising.

Also we believe that Rio is passing by a visible moment of growing occupation: we see groups of young people gathering around bars, the ones we call “pé sujo” (in bad English, “dirty foot”), downtown streets at night, skate bowls, favelas parties, so on and so forth.

We will do the fieldwork through an ethnographic approach, drawing a symbolic map of Rio de Janeiro and then we will compare our observations with the corresponding advertising representations of the youth subcultures. Moreover, we want to explore the concept of subculture, revising it, and the notions of space and place, as does Ross Haenfler (2014), in “Subcultures: the basics” and other authors before him.

But there are still a lot of questions to be explored: how are subcultures nowadays? Do subcultures exist? How does the inequality of the city of Rio contribute — or not — to the empowerment of some demonstrations of these cultures? Is there resistance to the establishment? How does it happen? What kind of resistance is this? What is to be authentic in a connected and globalized society?

As it was said, this is a work at its beginning. British subcultures are good to think about our questions, in terms of comparison, not only because we have found in Cultural Studies the main concepts of our discussions, even considering the context of them at CCCS, but mainly because their global influence in such scenes, as music, fashion and urban cultures, is still very strong. We have also some Brazilian scholars observing and writing about pop culture, as funk for example, where we can find some of our concerns.

By now, what can be introduced here to the reader are the impressions of the first ethnographic immersion of our group in the field. We have decided to choose five youth subcultures or scenes to be observed. The first one is the skate subculture.

In Rio, we have a space known as Praça XV. It is a historical square in downtown, a set of ancient buildings, some of them are museums or governmental offices. In 1997, a group of young skateboarders occupied the recently modernized Praça XV square which offered excellent conditions for them. But in 1999 the mayor banned the skate practice there. The police acted against them all the time. So they decided to organize a collective named COLETIVO XV (or I LOVE XV — ILXV) and since 2011 the skateboarders are allowed to use the square without repression. If you walk by Praça XV any time, you will see some obstacles that are usually used by the practitioners. They are not fixed in the ground, but remain there. On Wednesdays and Sundays they meet at that spot.

We went to Praça XV on June 26th when they were still celebrating the Skateboarding Day (Figure 1), which has been on the 21st. We arrived by 3pm and observed all the actions that were taking place in I LOVE XV party: street style competitions, a band with a DJ, a small market-place selling T-Shirts and other stuffs made by local producers, a photo exhibition, a skate poems exhibition and a lot of kids, teens and youngsters, and some adults, skating all around.



Figure 1: Skateboarding Day at Praça XV.

Credits: Raphael Medeiros.

There was beer, food, marijuana, music, fashion, bikes in a vivid and friendship interaction between generations, genders, natives and outsiders — more natives than outsiders. From this immersion, we noted that: (1) girls wear like boys to feel included in the group although they are concerned with their beauty (FIGURE 2); (2) politics is an interest of them; (3) there are some visible values reinforced by the presenter in the microphone and by the ethos of the skateboarders like mutual respect, politeness, sustainability, authenticity, DIY, among others; (4) for them, skate is a lifestyle and not a sport; and (5) “skate posers” are not welcome.

These are the first impressions we had. We will soon attend to an I LOVE XV meeting that takes place weekly in a very emblematic cultural circus tent called Circo Voador (Flying Circus in English) which is part of the musical scene of the city since the 80’s. Moreover we will go to three other places in Rio where we can find skateboarders in action: Maracanã, Madureira and Barra da Tijuca. We will interview practitioners, producers and local leaders.

But of course one of the main concerns of our group now is about the analysis of the occupation of the square by the skateboarders. The theoretical approaches of space and place are the core of the discussions we can do about Praça XV: how does a subculture turns a space in a place, considering place as a geographic space where there are conflicts, interaction, social flows, political and cultural demonstrations and so on?

For the comparison between what we have seen till now in fieldwork and what Advertising shows, we can already observe the representations of gender, specifically femininity, where the dominance of masculinity is emphasized not only by the clothes girls wear, but also by gestures and a kind of incompatibility between skate and women’s universe (Figure 3).

Another approach found in the media representations of skate subcultures is from the perspective of lifestyle. Anthony Giddens (2002, p.79) defines lifestyle as “a more or less integrated set of practices that an individual embraces not only because these practices fulfill utilitarian needs, but because they give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity”⁴.

⁴ From the original in Portuguese edition: “um conjunto mais ou menos integrado de práticas que um indivíduo abraça, não só porque essas práticas preenchem necessidades utilitárias, mas porque dão forma material a uma narrativa particular da auto-identidade”.



Figure 2: Skateboarders girls.
Credits: Raphael Medeiros.



Figure 3: Brazilian advertising — Bauducco Cookies and gender representations.
Source: Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mm-LK96GzDw>.

In Advertising, skate lifestyle is objectified by a particular material culture, such as clothes and equipment's. Sometimes it seems that there is an effort to represent this lifestyle in a "clean" way, as Figure 4 demonstrates in the comparison between an ad and a real situation registered during the fieldwork.

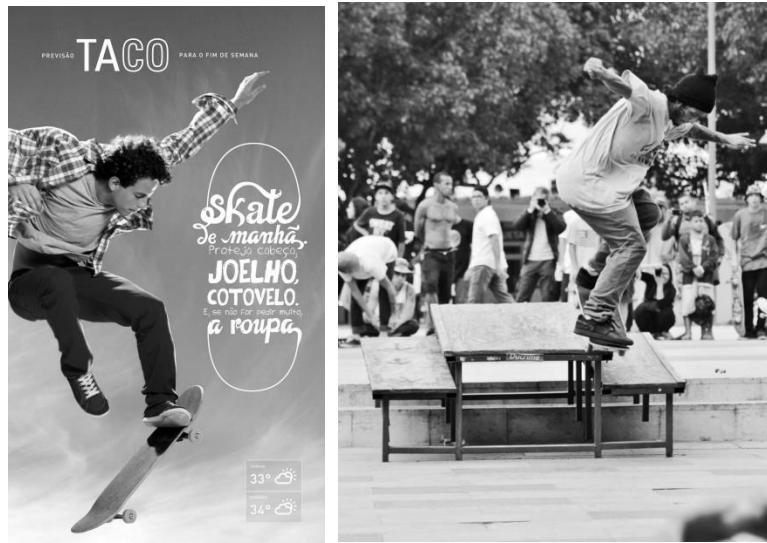


Figure 4: Skate as lifestyle and material culture (Advertising on the left, fieldwork image on the right).

Source: Retrieved from <http://www.script.net.br/Taco-Previsao-do-final-de-semana>. Photo by Raphael Medeiros.

It is possible to find some other common representations of skate subcultural values such as authenticity and even political engagement in Advertising.

And finally we are convinced that the traditional ethnography — with participant observation and fieldnotes — is a better way to understand the carioca youth subcultures than the *flanerie* methodology that has been adopted by some scholars in their researches about musical and cultural scenes.

After skateboarders, we intend to go inside other subcultures and scenes, just like carioca funk, electronic raves, LGBT parties, hipsters and rockers.

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