

Opacity of the boundaries between real and virtual worlds from the perspective of Facebook users

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Abstract: This article analyzes the relationship between the real and virtual worlds from the perspective of young users of the world's largest social network, Facebook. To achieve the objective, this research involved conducting semi-structured interviews with ten young male and female users of the network who were residing in the Brazilian Federal District. Data were analyzed from an interdisciplinary perspective, particularly supported by interpretive theories derived from Social Psychology and Sociocultural Anthropology. It was evident that participants conceive these two categories as distinct from one another, each with its own peculiarities, but maintaining relationships of similarities and differences. A further observation was that the subjective experiences of the research subjects ended up creating a kind of continuum whose existence is juxtaposed between each of these environments, with the boundaries between them becoming opaque or shifting.

Keywords: Facebook, subjectivity, social, real, virtual networks.

Introduction

The debate regarding the relationship between the real and virtual worlds is older than the internet itself (Lévy, 1996). Bergson (1957), for example, in the field of Philosophy, stressed the coexistence of virtuality and reality in the relationship between past and present, a relationship founded in the direct connection between perception and memory. The concept of virtuality is present in every act in which we perceive something, because we directly refer to our memory, to events, to the feelings and sensations that exist, but these are elusive, immeasurable and coexist within the reality of virtuality, giving meaning to what we perceive.

However, the emergence of the internet and social networks saw large contingents of the world's population beginning to interact with each other in environments traditionally known as "virtual", thereby expanding the debate regarding the relationship between the two categories (Castells, 1996; Nicolaci-da-Costa, 2002, 2003). Thus, the relationship between the real and virtual worlds became a recurring theme in discussions among academics and multitudinous network users, such as those of Facebook. The motivation behind this research is by virtue of the obstacle, within the academic debate, caused by two antagonistic, and at the same time, limiting perspectives: we see this relationship in a dichotomized way and the other that, in search of overcoming this dichotomy, ends up failing to recognize the specificities of each of these two categories and the relationship between them.

Specifically regarding virtual social networks, this issue was reinvigorated and went on to become even more controversial due to the possibility of creating a virtual profile to represent the user in this environment, which can provide interactions with peers, negating the need to have direct personal contact or face-to-face interaction. Thus, the everyday nature of interactions facilitated by information and communication technologies, particularly through social networks, means that millions of people spend a considerable part of their days in environments that are usually referred to as "virtual". The presence of this virtual environment in the daily lives of individuals and the presence of the real environment in the virtual encourages us to ask whether there was ever actually a separation between these two terms — real and virtual — since both are socially constructed categories of thought with comparable features. Or, even better, turning attention towards the object of this article encourages us to ask: how do users of these social networks, especially Facebook, view the relationship between these two categories? In order to answer this question, we will examine both academic literature and statements from Facebook users using semi-structured interviews.

The word "virtual" etymologically stems from Medieval Latin *virtualis*, derived from *virtus*, which is in turn defined as a virtue or as a value or proven force in an action. Lévy (1996) considers it as power, namely that which is associated with the potential, the plausible and the possible. On the internet, the virtual is linked to a communication experience that involves visual, auditory, tactile and sensory aspects. It is a socially constructed environment that is used for technological interaction. On the other

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hand, the word “real” is also from a Medieval Latin term *realis*, which comes from *res* (thing).

The etymological basis of both words demonstrates the difference between the possible or valued and that which is observed or experienced in person. For example, the first covers memory, knowledge and imagination (Serres, 1994). The second supposedly refers to the surrounding reality based on empirical evidence and on habit that engenders the legitimating consensus regarding what is real in people’s everyday lives (Bourdieu, 1977). Despite value, virtue, and things that are not necessarily opposing categories, the real and the virtual end up with dichotomized representations, in terms that are radically different from each other, to the point that one does not think about the similarities between them. According to Lévy (2000), there is a tendency to see the virtual as everything that is unreal, false, deceptive and imaginary. For this author, this point of view corresponds to common sense and tends to be the most used in an everyday sense, which is different to the notion of reality that has a presence and therefore genuinely exists.

When reading Heidegger (1926/2012) on presence for the first time, one might understand the impression that it strengthens this dichotomous view. This author points out that the characteristics of presence are always possible modes of being, but that the character of facticity or factuality, founded in a physical form (*körperlichkeit*), is the primary criterion for relating to the world and to others: “If being-in-the-world is a fundamental constitution of presence in that it moves not only generally, but especially in the daily way, then presence has probably always been ontically experienced” (Heidegger, 1926/2012, p. 106). Based on this concept, there is evidence that reality tends, *ipso facto*, to be designated as being, as that which has a body (*leiblichkeit*) or physical existence. However, Heidegger (1926/2012) also believes it is possible to interpret being itself.

There is a meaning of virtuality that is considered untouchable and non-existent by fact. Based on this perspective, the result of this dichotomy between the real and the virtual is a recreation of the relationship between the objective and the subjective. Faced with the existence of something impalpable, we realize that this supposed dichotomy is therefore subject to the relationship between what is conceived as objective (that which is tangible, evident) and subjective (that which is often associated with the impalpable, immaterial). These definitions emphasize the existence of a supposed outlined border between reality and virtuality, which ends up setting a boundary to the virtual field that is conceived as false, such as the illusory or imaginary. Along these lines, the imaginary was also confused with illusion. Durand (2002) states that “in Western thought there is a constant tradition of ontologically devaluing image and, psychologically, the function of the imagination as a nurturer of errors and falsities” (p. 21).

However, philosophy itself presents us with views that seek to counteract this dichotomy, which provide support for the arguments that we have developed here. Deleuze (1996) makes a contribution to moving the poles of this

dichotomy, and claims that the virtual is not opposite to the real, but the actual is conceived as static and defined: “All the actual surrounds itself with circles of constantly renewed possibilities, each emitting one to the other and all surrounding and reacting to the actual” (p. 49). Deleuze noted that the so-called virtual world permeates what we conceive as real, constituting a condition of possibility to the actual. In this sense, Deleuze (1996), Lévy (1996) and Bergson (1957) use the virtual conception as a power that exists without being present, or rather, that exists without a physical presence. Therefore, it is possible to infer that the real cannot be reduced to what is palpable from a positivist perspective.

Despite the imagistic force that there is in conceiving the virtual as a virtue, as a potential or even as a power that exists without being present, presence remains the distinguishing parameter. However, one can ask: when we interact with people via social networks, are they not present in any way? This different way of being present through image, voice and writing, without the physical question, is in line with the conceptions set out by Deleuze (1996) and Lévy (2000), under which physical attendance is not the only highly reliable criterion to know what is real and what actually exists.

Another route offered by Philosophy that, in reality, makes no sense to the debate regarding the relationship between the real and virtual, is the skeptical perspective from Baudrillard (1991) in relation to what is conceived as virtual. Based on this author’s opinion, both categories are metamorphosed realities, constituting a transfigured reality representation in simulacra. This conception, which has a critical view regarding the virtuality that permeates the so-called real life, is a simulacrum of existence that disfigures the essence of life and human relationships, especially regarding the virtual environment of internet social networks.

Putting the philosophical debate aside and moving towards the empirical research, we decided to ask Facebook users if there was a difference between the real and virtual worlds. The participants’ answers clearly demonstrated that the real and virtual worlds are conceived as two distinct categories, each with their own specificities, whose characteristics (attributes) can be different and similar. The gradation of this difference varies between being completely different, slightly different and even borderline flexible. Depending on the intensity of how they experience interactions while using social networks on the internet, these differences can decrease. We therefore take a few fragments of discourse from participants involved in the research into consideration. All the names mentioned are fictitious.

Method

The objective of this study was to analyze the senses and meanings that young social network users assign to environments conceived as real and virtual, therefore, we selected Facebook because of the familiarity that the researchers have with this site and due to its undeniable global representation. Young participants were chosen as

study subjects because they are currently the demographic that has shown increasing interest in using this means of communication and social interaction.

This research involved the use of a theoretical and technical instrument provided by the qualitative research methodology based on the symbolic interactionist approach. Data collection procedures followed the semi-structured interview prerogative (Groeben, 1990). In order to achieve this, ten interviews were conducted with ten young Facebook users, five of who were female, and five male, all residents of Brasilia and the surroundings areas, Brazil, between 2010 and 2011.

The participants were invited by researchers to participate in the survey on a voluntarily basis. These individuals were selected based on the following criteria: age, gender and place of residence. Thus, the interviewed subjects were young Facebook users aged between 19 and 30 years. The participants' socioeconomic profiles were not considered.

The interviews were held in a restricted environment, with the audio being recorded and subsequently transcribed. The purpose of these interviews was to explore the subject's opinions regarding the relationship between the real and virtual worlds, as well as the subjective meanings and senses (and latent manifested) of the interactions that take place on Facebook. Thus, a script was developed with open and closed questions to guide researchers during the interviews. Subsequently, the similarities and differences in the responses provided were analyzed.

Analyzing the material from the interviews involved interpretative support from contributions by social psychology in dialogue with sociocultural anthropology, which was based on the technical analysis of sense zones (González-Rey, 2011). The main sense zones that emerged during the process of interpreting the reports were as follows: "it is more superficial"; "it feels different"; "real life is within the network"; "emotional involvement and emotion of the texts"; "we are not literally together"; "it is linked with people". The zones were grouped into threads and analyzed based on the similarities of sense and meaning assigned by the interviewees.

The real and the virtual: gradation of the difference and the shifting borders

The main difference regarding the interactions from the real world and the virtual world of Facebook was unanimously viewed as a physical presence, which gives it different aspect than the abstract realm of that network. However, another sense zone that emerged over the course of the interviews was that the actions that occur in the Facebook environment are "more superficial". All the participants involved reported that the interactions mediated by this site lack the so-called eye-to-eye experience, there are no voices to hear, no facial expressions, gestures, reactions to each other's rhythm and, especially, no emotional involvement that supposedly would occur during face-to-face encounters. Therefore, the Facebook users expressed

the view that the interactions on this network tend to be less emotional, more superficial and even less meaningful, as was expressed by Roberto:

A lot of people take the network very seriously, especially those born after the network was created and who are built in the network - outside the actual, sincere, flesh and blood society; the society with a more alive, more intense relationship. Sometimes, life is built ~~not~~ inside Facebook and, based on Facebook, an external life is built, while it should not be this way... Real life is feeling; Facebook is a consequence; Facebook comes from real life, not the other way around.

This respondent's report refers to so-called real life as a life of feeling, of sincerity, of flesh and blood, which, according to him, should give rise to relationships on Facebook, and not the other way around. Most of the participants stated that the superficiality of what occurs on this site is also related to the intention of preserving intimacy and fun-seeking, which are specificities that they attribute to their interactions on Facebook. In Talita's words, the virtual world is completely different from the real one as it is more superficial and does not reflect everyday relationships.

The virtual world is totally different, it is more superficial, right?! I think it is more about posting the things you think about; you come up with an idea and somebody replies. She may even know a lot about how you think, but it is not the everyday world that you coexist in. I do not see that there is an idea of coexisting. And when you post, you put up something that is more "generalized", not being directed towards specific people.

Based on this point of view, real life is daily life and coexisting, unlike the interactions on Facebook, that would be where you publish an idea and a person responds. This report highlights the specificities: the absence of a physical presence and the superficiality of the interactions. Despite having an opinion that differed from the majority of the respondents and claiming that there is a strong reality in the Facebook's virtual environment, Francisco declared that he feels different in both environments:

It is slightly different, but I am beginning to think that it is such a powerful reality that I do not share much anymore; I see less and less of that difference, because today we have the internet on our phones, and to know, for example, if there is a police checkpoint on the street, people communicate it using Twitter. I mean to say that people go through a checkpoint and post this information on the networks. Thus, people walk down the street and consume the internet as they go. Thus, I

think it is increasingly influential in internet cafes. Nevertheless, I do not think anything can replace a meeting and a good old conversation; when we have to solve very large issues that need to be live, other issues must be solved by email. Therefore, I feel differently when I am in one and the other. I can tell you that, yes.

Francisco believes that the supposed boundaries between the real and virtual worlds are becoming increasingly blurred, what draws attention to the interconnectivity between both worlds, in which real events can also be evidenced through the virtual world of the internet. When it comes to feeling, as was mentioned by Francis at the end of his explanation, it is important to note the specificity between what is felt during face-to-face contact, or what involves a physical presence, and what gives us virtual contact, as characterized by the mediation of texts and images on Facebook profiles. Thus, with respect to the “feeling different” sense zone, there was the overlapping of opinions regarding the supposed protection offered by artifacts present in the virtual world, which makes it possible to hide, create and conceal feelings and emotions because of the lack of physical presence.

As Francisco expresses well, these two environments are only slightly different. Francisco uses the term “live” to talk about the interactions in the real or face-to-face environment and “social network” to refer to the virtual environment. He believes that the internet and virtual social networks are such powerful realities that he perceives the difference between these two spaces less and less. At the same time, this respondent does not only demarcate the differences in the modality, as he distributes their activities and preferences between the two environments while affirming that he feels different in both. In a clear allusion to the way in which he experiences these two environments, we infer that there is a distinct effect on the subjectivity of Facebook users.

Francisco’s testimony also teaches us that the degree of differentiation between the two environments can vary according to the intensity with which one lives in one and the other, or both simultaneously. Based on the perspective that he points to, the less frequent users can potentially view the so-called virtual world as more distinctive and remote. For all the modes, the boundaries that separate them are flexible or shifting, as we will see below.

The specificities of each of the environments: “nothing can replace a meeting and a good old conversation”

Most of those interviewed claimed that there is an evident demarcation of borders between the virtual social networks and the so-called real world, as Roberto emphasizes: *“Look, reinforcing what I have already said, the network does not reflect real life, but real life is within the network. I mean that the network is not real life, but*

there is real life inside it”. There is a direct reference in this report to a possible separation between the virtual and real worlds. This view is similar to most of those obtained during this research and, sometimes, was related to the assumption that physical presence is the specificity which is understood as real, as life or as existing, which ratifies the convergence of opinions regarding real life within the network, and not the other way around.

In spite of this peculiarity that was reiterated during the interviews, another comparative aspect which was also highlighted by the participants and which gave rise to the sense “emotional involvement and excitement of texts” was explained by Francisco. For Francisco, there is a difference between both environments regarding the participants’ emotional processing:

When you are in a live conversation, you have to deal with all the emotional involvement that comes up right there and then. In a social network, people write and have to deal with waiting for the reply, this is a good way for you to test the nerves of that person. You can feel this emotion in the writing, because more controlled people write more rational things; grumpier/angrier/short-fused people complain/make angry remarks right there in the text.

The difference of living with emotion in one and the other environment can be seen in the perspective pointed out by Francisco: in the possibility of greater emotional control in social interactions performed using social networks on the internet. During a live conversation, the person has to deal with all the emotional involvement in a way that it is happening at the exact moment of the interaction. Interactions via Facebook therefore arouse other unverified emotions in actual life, as a result of anxiety caused by waiting for a response or a reaction to what you posted. Having no replies to a comment or a delay in responding cause a negative reaction in the perception of several of the other interviewee, which supposedly demonstrates how the other partner felt when faced with an interaction mediated by the Facebook site.

It is the opinion of Francisco that, even taking this search for emotional control into account, the written texts give away how people feel. He states that the reaction largely depends on the person’s temperament. According to him, if the person is more controlled, he/she will write something more rational, and if the person is grumpier/angrier/short-fused, then *he/she will complain/make angry remarks right there in the text*. The text can also act as an emotional thermometer: it is possible to feel the reaction of a person by what they write, by what they choose to express and how they express themselves. This search to control what is written is related with the alterity of individuals participating in the network, especially in terms of the reactions that are face to what is being posted, as Andressa affirms when talking about her fear of inviting envy:

In my case, I am afraid that what I post may cause envy or bring out the “green-eyed monster”. I avoid posting a lot of things so people do not feel this way about me.

By all indications, despite the fear of exposure being widespread, to some measure, among the interviewed users, the limits and the degrees of exposure are extremely varied. In this sense, some of the interviewees claimed that they use Facebook as a sort of diary, in which record a lot of items, including feelings, how they feel on a daily basis, as Carla mentions. However, she says: “*of course I do not publish very intimate details on internet networks*”. Carla expresses these feelings by means of a thought, a song, a literary preference or by way of religious activism. Ana and Carla make the following respective statements:

I like to post how I am feeling on a daily basis. I sometimes post something to let people know how I am. This can be a thought, opinion or even a video or a song that I like.

It often turned into a type of “virtual journal”, but ... of course I do not publish very intimate details, but rather something like this: “may God give me courage and wisdom today...” Which is the type of thing you write in a journal, but also what is involved in a prayer, which does not expose me too much.

Although the interaction via Facebook makes it simple to express feelings, albeit more rational ones, Francisco could be considered to be romantic before being seen as obsessed with virtual relationships. According to Francisco, despite the increasing use of social networking on the internet, “nothing can replace a meeting and a good old conversation”. That feeling regarding Francisco was shared by many other of the research participants.

In addition to the emotional processing, the form of being “present”, it also has its specificities in one and in the other environment. Physical presence was once again one of the main differences in relation to interactions from the real world and the virtual world of Facebook and was unanimously mentioned by the interviewees, which would be a difference between the so-called real world and the abstract realm of social networks on the internet. Ana, one of the individuals involved in this research, expressed the distinct ways of feeling in *praesentiae*:

Yes. The difference is that in the real world you are there with people and, in the virtual world, people are there, and you are too, but we are not literally together. It is as if we are all united without being together, we talk, say things, learn things without necessarily seeing people.

Becoming present and being in the presence of someone implies the construction of borders which are

passed through or overtaken and carries with it a look and expression of the subject, which is expressed and expresses your context and your point of view. On the internet, this point of view becomes a “bridge of view” for the subject and his/her relationships.

According to Maturana (1997), the body is the meeting point between the neurophysiological and experiential-relational dynamics of human beings, which is in constant interaction with the environment. For this author, the body allows you to see the world, to think and feel. Based on this point of view, there is an intersection between experience – the direct relationship of the body with objects, culture, nature and with others – and living, which is expressed through feeling, thought and language. Both are different from one another by the history of interactions from distinct encounters between the body and the environment.

In this sense, this study states that the important point is the feeling that bodily presence or absence can cause on people, since in the real environment there can be a body present without the various forms of expression and action of the person and, in the virtual environment, these expressions and actions can be performed by the subject without physical presence. It is our belief that this is what Ana meant when she reported in her interview that on Facebook we are not literally together. To put it another way, on Facebook, it is as if we are all united, but without being literally together.

We will firstly assess the idea that Ana’s point is in agreement with that postulated by Turkle (2010), captured in the expression “*alone together*”. This quotation refers to a context in which each person, when interacting, is alone in front of their computer, phone or tablet, however, the interacting individuals are connected. In reality, this perspective ends up being another interpretation of the same fact: in the image proposed by Ana, all participants in the network are united without being physically together.

There was also a difference between the interviewees regarding the two environments – the real and virtual – according to the degrees of depth and superficiality of the relationships that are established. As previously mentioned, most participants referred to the superficiality of what occurs on this site, stating that this is also related to the desire to preserve intimacy and to the search for fun, specificities that they attributed to their interactions on Facebook.

The continuum with overlapping realities: “real life is within the network,” “but the network is not life”

This perspective that talks about a very significant distinction between the real and virtual environments was expressed by many interviewees. The interviewees brought up three dimensions regarding the relationship between these two environments: the internality of the network, the externality of the network and the continuum, or overlapping, between these two environments.

In the perspective presented in Roberto's statement, he affirms the existence of internal and external relationships between the real and virtual environments, which he called "the real society" and "the network", respectively. Each of these environments has an internal and external dimension. For Roberto, most of the people who were born after the network's creation, who are built within it, end up shaping their external life (outside of social networks on the internet) based on their experiences on Facebook.

The continuum dimension therefore is derived from expressions such as Monica's, who believes that Facebook (and the internet in general) helps keep people connected with other people. In this sense, Francisco states that people consume internet services and communicate with others while they walk, either through texting and information exchange, or through images. People talk online and then gather to talk, to remonstrate or to work. In this way, more than a separation or a parallelism between the reality of life and the virtuality of Facebook, there is a continuum between the real and virtual, which is referred to as the so-called Moebius Effect by Lévy (1996), which is associated with a transition from the interior to the exterior and vice versa: "This Moebius Effect is accepted in several records: the relationships between the public and the private, the self and the common, the subjective and the objective, the map and the territory and the author and the reader, etc" (p. 24). Therefore, the relationship between reality and virtuality, between interior and exterior and vice versa is manifested in the interactions, virtualizing the real and updating the virtual on Facebook, in a dialectical and continuous movement, whose physical supports are the images that make up the profiles and which provide interactions.

The idea of overlapping is evident, as we have already shown in the statements made by Roberto and Francisco, who, like the others interviewees, said that there is something real in the virtual world of Facebook, even if it is partial or part of one. Francisco stated that the virtual world "is a treasure, it is something in which a good portion of your world is contained that you can go and look at whenever you want. Upon mentioning that a good portion of their world (the real one) is inside the virtual world, Francisco reiterates the territorial definition between inside and outside and demonstrates his understanding that his life, i.e. what he conceives as real is outside, and that only Facebook contains portions of it, therefore, the real.

Both reports add meaning to the "real life is within the network" sense zone. Real life is what the participants associated to contacts, to records (images and texts), to the schedules and services that Facebook contains, through which interaction between users is permitted. The similarity of these senses implies that the real world is conceived as a physical presence, despite the evidence that real life is within the network and that this presence demarcates the supposed boundaries between the real and virtual worlds. As Mônica also mentions: "You can simply leave a message, and even then you are still keeping in touch, regardless of whether he/she [the speaker] is present or not at that

moment". Thus, there is a contact and a place in which this contact can happen, namely Facebook, but there is no presence, which implies that there is this abstract territoriality of Facebook through which feeling emanate based on a conception of real life within the network, but the network is not life, as is claimed but Francisco.

Lévy (1996, p. 24) points out that the deterritorialization movement, which is commonly associated with the virtual environment, is linked to the Moebius Effect, which is actually consistent with the opinion of the users for whom the real is within Facebook and vice versa. However, the research participants did not fully conceive what happened through networks such as Facebook as real, but only as a portion of this reality. It is effectually inferred that the abstract territoriality of Facebook provides interactions that tend to engender life and experiences, regardless of the physical absence of a biological body, as Axt and Schuch (2001) explain in detail:

In the field of the living organism, in which the brain and nervous systems are active and support the kind of body-environment events, all activity and all the meetings belonging to the same class of, events, as Maturana would say, they would be experienced as equivalent – this could include, by chance, the experiences in virtual reality environments, in the form of a certain sentimentality or possibility; because, once satisfied, by sliding to this other reality, with the body-environment conditions of correspondence/structural coupling, the body would fit itself to experience such encounters as similar to those referring to events experienced in the environment regarding the reality understood as objective or concrete. (p. 18, added italics)

The expression of this continuity can be seen Mônica's statements, which points out that social networks allow a person to be connected, which is, according to their respective meanings and senses: to be inserted; participate; communicate; be part of; keep in touch; know what people are doing; not be left out. She understands participation on Facebook or Orkut as a kind of social inclusion:

You can be "linked" with people who are not with you or with people you have not seen for a long time. So, I think it is cool, the fact that you actually become part of a whole that exists and, when you leave, people tell you: "How can I talk to you?" or "I did not tell you because I spoke about this on Orkut or Facebook, and you were not a part of it, this is why you did not hear". So, I think it is really a kind of social inclusion tool. (Mônica)

Carla corroborates Mônica's perspective in her conception of the relationship between virtual and real society in an almost symbiotic way. Carla believes that inclusion in

the virtual society is almost transformed into a condition for inclusion in the real society:

You have to be part of new technologies in order to include yourself in this virtual society as well as in real society itself, because when you sit at a bar or are at a family party, new technology is what people are talking about these days. If you do not know anything about it, it is like I told you: you become a virtual illiterate. (Carla)

Carla's opinion agrees with the fact that both worlds are currently interconnected and mutually in favor of each other regarding the requirements for life in an urban conglomerate society. This interviewee mentioned that new technology is what people are talking about today:

It is the same way as we spoke about before, you are part of the social world when you go out with your college friends to a bar and you have a network of friends, a social network with whom you go out with, if you are part of Facebook, you are involved in a virtual network. If you have no contact with these social networks on the internet, you do not know how to manipulate the internet, you do not know how to look, in any case, you do not need to be in contact with all these social networks, but if you do not have contact with any of them ... what I will say is even uglier, but you are a virtual illiterate. (Carla)

In the two excerpts listed above, Carla uses the expression "virtual illiterate" to refer to the way a person can be classified as being excluded or as excluding themselves in the context of interpersonal virtual relationships as a result of not using sites such as Facebook. This may be a personal choice that may not cause harm to an individual's interpersonal life. However, considering that there is currently a complementarity between the virtual world of the internet and the real world, individuals who choose not to use networks such as Facebook can, in some way, feel excluded from certain groups or even from contemporary society under certain circumstance.

In this context, another equally relevant factor is the marketing coercion that is exercised by means of social networks on the internet. According to Sodr  (2002/2013), the reproduction and diversification of the market and consumption in a world in which globalized capitalism prevails involve significant transformations in the way an individual is present in the contemporary world. Feeling included and participating in the context of social interactions in this perspective implies the necessity to consume objects and services offered by the market, as well as participating in the different activities and environments that are created to perform such activities. Therefore, the option or refusal to use this technology may also be option or refusal politics, a refusal, for example, against the standardization of forms

of sociability which exist within the networks, in this case, Facebook. It is therefore important to stress the existence of options and refusals that are based on forms of struggle and resistance against the registration and naturalization of social, political and economic phenomena imposed by this modality of interaction in the networks.

After also considering this reality, we reiterate that the most pronounced aspect mentioned in the report is the meaning of the "being linked" sense zone, which is in line with the idea of being inserted in society. Participation in virtual social networks effectively produces a real and true sensation of belonging to a group of affinities. While the continuous relationship between these two worlds is clear, the myth of origin is obvious in Roberto's point a view, namely that Facebook comes from real life, not the other way around, or that Facebook is, or should be, a consequence of real life.

The physical presence, bodily visibility, abstract territoriality and forms of being in a sensory environment

The fact that our interviewees see reality as a world of flesh and blood, of feelings, confirms the explanatory force from the paradigm of what is real and virtual, and has colored the debate since the birth of the internet: the physical presence (usually associated with the real) and its absence (commonly related to the virtual plane) are important attributes in order to characterize these two environments.

The fact that the virtual world is seen in an ambivalent manner (although it is somehow integrated to the real life and considering its potential to gather people and socially include them), calls the interviewee's attention: it is also colder and more rationalized, more superficial, and less sincere. As regards the virtual, the real world seems even more reliable and, by all indications, this sentiment is largely based on the materiality of physical presence. This perspective finds correspondence in academic debate, with it being an indicator of its status: the difficulty of distinctly characterizing the two environments and breaking with the paradigm of physical presence in the definition of what is real.

However, while analyzing the statements made by some interviewees in a more dialectic way, regarding the potential of interactions via social networks – being all unified without being literally together –, we find elements to argue in favor of the idea that people are present in distinct ways in both worlds. The possibility a person being able to express him/herself without the presence of a body points to the issue of bodily visibility/invisibility, to the ways of being present without physical materiality. For this reason, we avoid using the absence of physical presence to characterize relationships in social networks facilitated by the internet, because it differs in virtual and concrete environments, it is not the absence itself, but the form of the presence. The bodies of the interlocutors may be invisible, but the people are present in their images and words that make up their profiles.

We believe that the concept of the internet is not a transport to another world, but rather an interactive device or prosthesis, which can help us defend our argument. Most critics believe that the birth of the internet introduced devices that act as interactive prostheses in their own vivacity, which exalt the existing tools and resources in the virtual territory at the expense of the locomotor body as a representable locale of being in the world (Virilio, 1993). Along the same line of reasoning, the ontological conception of life is transfigured into simulacra which are accepted as real and tend to promote the view that life is a simulation, thus squaring it to the true essence that affects all living beings (Baudrillard, 1991).

Based on this perspective, it is worth noting the opinion set out by Wunenburger (2006), which states that the biological body is cheated by the scientific-technological paradigm, which is responsible for promulgating practices that guide the desire of metamorphosis itself, of exhausting the finitude of being and of accessing distinct ontological states. In this way, as is true in the conception from Baudrillard (1991), there is thusly an over-materialization of the body (tattoos, prostheses, doping) and a dematerialization of the same body (glorious body, image and synthesis). Based on this theoretical position, the abstract territory of the virtual environment is a means for people to simulate and create what we might call an imaginary relationship with themselves, a relationship with the body, the surrounding world and with alterity.

Lévy (1996), regarding this process of virtualization, notes that the body leaves itself and takes on new speed, conquers new spaces, while reverting to a biological alterity in concrete subjectivity: "When the body becomes virtual, it multiplies. We create virtual bodies for ourselves that enrich our sensitive universe without imposing the pain on ourselves" (p. 33). According to Lévy (1998), it is during this process of the virtualization that man is asked to pass to the other side of the screen and interact with digital models, at the same time, reality is magnified by electronic devices that become part of everyday life, such as cell phones, cameras and computers, which are interconnected, which communicate with each other and refer us to virtual environments. Therefore, there is a deterritorialization of the physical and geographical locations which brings us to a new territorialization on Facebook, which in turn implies that this connection is supported not only by the artifacts and devices that offer an alleged materiality, but also by the subjectivity that, interconnected on a much broader level, allows experiences, senses and meanings to be shared through narratives and audiovisual resources.

What is happening on the net is real

If the virtual world is not characterized by the absence of presence, but rather by bodily invisibility and the presence of individual personal expression, is it possible to say that what happens on the Facebook does not exist? On the contrary, one can also say that what is happening within

social networks on the internet is a component of real life. As a result of the massive traffic that Facebook receives, which currently has approximately one million users from different parts of the planet Earth, the presumption is that what occurs in this environment will be gradually understood as something that belongs to the so-called real world. Therefore, whatever happens in the virtual world in fact exists. This assertion is not only supported by the alleged materiality that texts and images acquire in the profiles and posts, but also by the subjective universe of people communicating and relating to each other through this site. Thus, if we think that "the subjective universe in which we live, and are immersed in, is as real as the objective world in which we work and act" (Giannetti, 1997, p. 9), it is possible to understand that the facticity of the activities and the things that we conceive as real depend on our perception and our memory in order to be considered real (Bergson, 1957), and furthermore, these are based on the legitimating consensus generated by the *habitus*, by the look of the other and by sharing within the social group (Bourdieu, 1977).

According to the opinion of Facebook users, it is in this environment that there is perception, memory and there is consensus that brings legitimacy so that whatever occurs there is considered real. Therefore, the subjectivity of the users is the bridge or link that binds the virtual to the real and vice-versa, which turns the supposed boundaries between both into shifting borders: despite the specificities and differences between both environments, they tend to be consistent, distort and even merge with each other according to the subjective articulation performed by the interconnected users.

It is worth reiterating that users have experiences expressed through feeling, thought and language during interactions on Facebook; experiences that take place in an analogous way to the experiences in the world known as real. Gonzalez-Rey (2011) states that the subjective system is open, comprehensive and influences the various human experiences, which creates a process that is configured by the multiplicity of productions in a society. Insofar as this type of interaction becomes part of everyday human experience, that has been turned into a social practice or a new *habitus* (Berger & Luckmann, 1985; Bourdieu, 1977), it is also been transformed into a producer of subjectivities.

Final considerations

During the interviews, the highlighted aspect was that the design of the physical body is taken as a reference to identify what one feels when human beings interact with one another. In spite of the respondents' claim that what happens on Facebook is more superficial and an immediate physical presence is more real, they also mentioned that they feel and become excited by what they see and do on the site. This led us to inquire further regarding this way of feeling.

Feeling through texts and images does not differ greatly from us experiencing feelings based on a song or smell, for example, or through a memory or thought. In

this case, the difference is derived from the interaction with the devices and the resources that mediate contact between human beings and life. If this really represents a difference or if it is reflected in the subjective production, then we still need to investigate further. However, we are already in possession of some evidence, such as what the participants highlighted in the investigation that led to this study. In summary, individuals that participate in the

networks that exist within the Facebook site are immersed in this environment of subjective production, which is due to the fact that they interact with others connecting from different locations to express how they feel, think and the things they want. This subjectivity, which is woven as a network, gave rise to what Nicolaci-da-Costa (2005) referred to as a “new psychic configuration”, which we need to understand better.

Opacidade das fronteiras entre real e virtual na perspectiva dos usuários do Facebook

Resumo: Este artigo analisa a relação entre o mundo real e o virtual com base na perspectiva dos jovens usuários da maior rede social do mundo, o Facebook. Para a consecução do objetivo, esta pesquisa ouviu, por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas, dez jovens usuários de ambos os sexos residentes no Distrito Federal. Os dados foram analisados sob a perspectiva interdisciplinar, particularmente respaldada em teorias interpretativas oriundas da psicologia social e da antropologia sociocultural. Evidenciou-se que os participantes concebem essas duas categorias como distintas uma da outra, na medida em que cada uma possui suas especificidades e relações de diferença e de similaridade. Constatou-se ainda que as vivências subjetivas dos sujeitos pesquisados acabam criando uma espécie de continuum cuja existência encontra-se justaposta entre cada um desses ambientes, tornando opacas ou movediças as fronteiras entre ambos.

Palavras-chave: Facebook, subjetividade, redes sociais, real, virtual.

Opacité des frontières entre réel et virtuel dans la perspective des utilisateurs de Facebook

Résumé: Cet article analyse la relation entre le monde réel et le virtuel dans la perspective des jeunes utilisateurs du plus grand réseau social du monde: le Facebook. Pour atteindre cet objectif, cette étude a interrogé, avec d'entretiens semi-structurés, dix jeunes utilisateurs du réseau, des deux sexes, résidants au District Fédéral brésilien. Les données ont été analysées dans une perspective interdisciplinaire, particulièrement soutenue par les théories interprétatives issues de la Psychologie Sociale et de l'Anthropologie Socioculturelle. Il est devenu évident que les participants conçoivent ces deux catégories en tant que distinctes l'une de l'autre, à la mesure où chacune comporte ses propres particularités et ses relations de différence et de similarité. Il a également été constaté que les expériences subjectives des sujets de recherche finissent par créer une sorte de continuum, dont l'existence est juxtaposée entre chacun de ces environnements et deviennent opaque ou déplace des frontières entre eux.

Mots-clés: Facebook, subjectivité, réseaux sociaux, réel, virtuel.

Opacidad de las fronteras entre real y virtual en la perspectiva de los usuarios del Facebook

Resumen: Este artículo analiza la relación entre el mundo real y el virtual desde la perspectiva de los jóvenes usuarios de la mayor red social del mundo, el Facebook. Para lograr el objetivo, se entrevistó, mediante entrevistas semi-estructuradas, diez jóvenes usuarios de la red de ambos los sexos residentes en el Distrito Federal. Los datos fueron analizados desde una perspectiva interdisciplinaria, particularmente apoyada en teorías interpretativas oriundas de la psicología social y antropología sociocultural. Se evidenció que los participantes conciben a estas dos categorías como distintas una de la otra, pero manteniendo relaciones de similitud y diferencia. Se observó, además, que las vivencias subjetivas de los sujetos de la investigación terminan creando una especie de continuum cuya la existencia se encuentra yuxtapuesta entre cada uno de estos ambientes, convirtiendo en opaca o movediza las fronteras entre ellos.

Palabras clave: Facebook, subjetividad, redes sociales, real, virtual.

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