

## On Emotion and Memories: the Consumption of Mobile Phones as ‘Affective Technology’

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**Abstract:** In this article, which is theoretically affiliated to studies of consumption as material culture as developed especially by Miller (1987; 2010), the goal is to analyze the consumption of mobile phones in its interaction with social dynamics related to gender and generation categories. How do the consumption practices related to mobile phones influence the emotions experienced in the relationships between parents and children and between men and women? Drawing from an ethnographic approach, I am investigating which emotional investments the social agents express through the consumption of mobile phones, and I am also considering how emotions change when mediated by the consumption of this mobile technology. Through the analysis, I expect both to highlight the richness and complexity of the material and symbolic dimensions involved in the daily processes of consumption, as well as enlighten the study of consumption practices from a segment that is still poorly studied: the popular groups.

**Keywords:** *consumption, mobile phones, emotions, affective technologies, gender, parent-child relationships.*

### Introduction: emotions mediated by the consumption of mobile phones

In January 2012, according to the International Telecommunications Union, the number of phones in worldwide use reached the number of six billion, which makes them the fastest-spreading technology in human

history (Teleco, 2012). However, the issue of mobile phone consumption and its consequences on social relations is a matter of recent study. Especially in the Anglo-Saxon academic world, the intersections of this mobile technology with the social world starting from a sociological, anthropological or even philosophical perspective have

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been consolidated as fruitful object of research, as shown by the books by Manuel Castells et al. (2007), among others, a comparative study on the socio-cultural and economic impacts of the mobile phone in developed and developing countries, the collection of Ito, Okabe and Matsuda (2005) on the Japanese techno culture, or the ethnography of Horst and Miller (2006) on the consumption practices of mobile phones between popular groups in Jamaica. In Brazil, in early 2012 the country surpassed the mark of 240 million mobile phone subscriptions, of which more than 80% use the prepaid system. This data points to the rapid spread of mobile technology among the lower classes.<sup>1</sup>

If the studies regarding mobile phones are new, even more so are the attempts of analysis around the role of use of mobile phones in mediating emotions among social agents. In this sense, Lasen (2004) launches a proposition, quite useful, in my view, in considering the person-object relations in the field of communication and information technologies. To Lasen, it is cost effective, analytically, to think of the mobile phone as an 'affective technology' - in which the social agents tend to keep an emotional relationship with their cell phones and even more, with the content stored on them. This emotional relationship occurs not only because mobile phones are technological objects that are most of the time close to the human body, becoming an extension of it, but also because the content stored or passing through the mobile phones - messages, photos, videos, and even the content of telephone conversations - in most cases holds a high emotional

charge. Therefore, mobile phones become '[...] objects which mediate the expression, display, experience and communication of feelings and emotions. Users enjoy an affective relationship with their phones and feel attached to them (Lasen, 2004: 1)<sup>2</sup>.

Seeking to advance the discussion on the mediation of emotions through communication and information technologies I seek, in this article - through ethnographic case studies regarding the consumption of mobile phones in a low-income neighborhood - to map instances of the social dynamics, especially in terms of gender and generation in which such mediations are present. In this respect I believe that the notion of 'electronic emotions', proposed by Fortunati and Vincent (2009), represents a first effort, although important to explore a field that, for now, is in its initial stage - namely, the study of the role of technology in mediating emotions. For the authors, the 'electronic emotions' category refers to emotions that are experienced, re-lived, told, felt, shown or that are discovered through machines, through information and communication technologies; emotions that are on one hand, magnified, molded, stereotyped, re-invented (Fortunati and Vincent, 2009). Thus, some of the issues to consider are: how do emotions change when mediated by communication and information technologies? How do people experience such emotions? What is the emotional investment that people express through information and communication technologies?

My proposition here is to articulate, through my ethnographic data, the categories of 'affective technologies'

and ‘electronic emotions’ with the anthropological theory of consumption. The argument is that viewing the use as a cultural practice in which people and objects form one another (Miller, 1987, 2010), makes it possible to think that the mediation of emotions through technology occurs in the widely adopted consumption practices - not only through the connection of social agents with the mobile phones or the content stored on them, but also in the way such content affects social dynamics. Thus, I think how the emotions engendered by the use of the mobile phones circulate in social networks and affect their members, providing stories about technology consumption in Morro São Jorge, a low-income neighbourhood of about 4,000 dwellers in the city of Florianópolis, in Southern Brazil.

### **The mobile phone mediation in gender relations**

In my ethnography in Morro São Jorge, Elisa, a forty-three year old housekeeper, became one of my main interlocutors. Elsewhere (Silva, 2008) I wrote that the mere fact of having obtained a used mobile phone, from one of her female employers, has succeeded in making Elisa feel part of the connected logic that characterizes the high modernity. Not only that - the ownership of a mobile phone, even though she did not afford to supply her prepaid mobile phone with airtime every month, resulted in Elisa feeling great happiness, making her feel socially included or in her words, ‘a refined person’.<sup>3</sup> I met Elisa several times in São Jorge, since that first interview in January 2007. Many

things changed in the meantime: Elisa became a widow, lost thirty pounds, left the house where she had worked for years. Now she had another partner and she relocated to his house, but remained in São Jorge. In two years life had changed, and the mobile phones as well. Shortly after they began living together, Romero, the new partner, wanted to give Elisa a present; like many other husbands and wives in São Jorge, he chose the mobile phone as the perfect gift to mark this moment of union. However, Elisa felt satisfied with the former one - or did not want to bother her companion, ‘I told him, ‘Don’t, love, there’s no need for it, I do not want a mobile phone no.’ Well, he insisted, ‘I’ll buy a new phone for you.’” Several days later, Elisa had a surprise:

He came and said he had bought a gift for me. I still scolded, ‘You spend too much money!’ He said, ‘I bought a four-burner cooker [‘very nice’, says Elisa, ‘it’s the one over there’] and I bought a present for you, it’s a surprise’. I said, ‘Oh love, you have a surprise for me?’ When he showed up with this phone, I almost cried because ... But I was so happy, so happy. [...] It has headphones, it has everything! Oh, wherever I go now it’s just with the headphones in my ears. [Sandra: And you also download music?] I do, I learned right away. Music, photos, everything.

Now Elisa won’t let go of her mobile phone, bought brand new in the store in ten installments of 59 reais: a purple Sony Ericsson W380, with a ‘flip’.<sup>4</sup> Her eldest daughter is the one who, when visiting, transfers music files via Bluetooth (‘she passes it to my phone,

she just leans one phone on the back of the other and it's done') but it is Elisa herself who, as she proudly told me, 'plays the music' (meaning 'pressing the buttons to play music', playing the audio file). Elisa has a special fondness for romantic songs of the '70s and '80s ('I love slow music'). She attends the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God three times a week and while going to and returning from the church, 'I'm always listening to gospel radio on the phone. I think it is Sara Nossa Terra.'

I believe that with this gift, Romero wanted to symbolically mark the beginning of a new life as a couple denying Elisa's former mobile phone that she had been given by her first husband (then, the first mobile phone, the one from her female employer, no longer worked):

He went there and took the box,  
'Oh, I bought it for you, for you to  
stop using that old mobile phone'.  
And I said, 'Oh love my phone is  
not old'. 'Give this one to whoever  
you want, give it to your son.'

However, even more relevant for our discussion about mobile phones in gender relations is what follows in Elisa's testimony. Regarding the new phone, she makes a startling statement: she accepted the phone - which she loved - but not the fact that she received it as a gift. Let us recall Mauss (1954) in formulating the theory of the gift - this necessarily involves giving, but also receiving and reciprocating. What Elisa did was to take charge of paying the installments of the phone. This, understandably, left Romero pretty upset; the couple fights from time to time because of that, but Elisa herself is firm in her decision. Her explanation

is crystal clear: 'If we ever separate, I want to return everything he gave me - clothes, shoes, household items, since he has already given me quite a lot - but I do not want to return the phone, no!'

Another important point to be considered in terms of emotions that are mediated through the use of mobile phones is the fear of gossip. So, I could notice in Morro São Jorge a concern in knowing to whom the telephone number is being given. Women are especially concerned about privacy and protection of the family. It is also possible to associate the practice of protecting the phone number to illicit activities. Afonso, for instance, says that 'there are many people who are afraid to give their number, but I have nothing to hide.' In the case of elderly ladies like Mrs. Cema, a respected community leader and mother-of-saint in Morro São Jorge, however, the concern is of another nature - not only with hoaxes, which are constant, but also with potential gossip and calumny. When I ask Mrs. Cema if she receives many calls on the mobile phone, I get the following response:

Honestly speaking there are very few people who have my number, I don't give it away to everyone. Usually I only give the number - once or twice - my mobile phone number in trade, when I make a purchase, if they ask me the number. But otherwise I don't. It's very rare. I don't give my number to just about anyone.

With so much care, Mrs. Cema never got a prank by phone. Therefore, I realize that in Morro São Jorge giving the telephone number means establishing a relationship of trust and

friendship. For instance, in order to explain that she is very friendly with a Catholic priest, sympathetic to the African-Brazilian religious practices, Mrs. Cema states: 'I am very close to him; I have his phone number and everything.' To these ladies, giving one's number means 'I trust and like you.' Only months after ending the fieldwork I fully understood the conversation I had in parting with Mrs. Aurenice, one of the nice little ladies with whom I had spent months in the group for adult literacy. After giving me as a gift a small statue of Our Lady of Aparecida (Brazil's patron saint) she told me in a tone that struck me at the time, which I now interpret as a sense of satisfaction from being able to trust me fearlessly: 'I'll give you my phone [number] eh!'

It is precisely in pranks that lay a threat to the good relationship of the couples. Janaina, for example, who at the age of twenty-nine is at the second marriage and has four children between one and fifteen years old, says she already 'went through a lot of trouble' because of the phone. She already changed the phone's SIM card - which in Brazil is equivalent to changing the number - three times due to the prank calls received. When I interviewed her, her current SIM card was four months old. Although Janaina does not know how they learn her number, she does not believe that is 'someone I know who wants to talk dirty. It is on purpose. Because it could be calling by mistake, it happens, but getting the number correctly, calling the person by the name, knowing where he or she works ...' The current number of the SIM card was revealed to very few people, only those of trust. Cautious, she says

she learned her lesson: 'You have to know who you give your number to, because sometimes it turns into a pretty annoying prank.' As previously stated, pranks, as well as gossip and calumny are the main reason for women to be careful in disclosing their phone numbers. Janaina hopes not to be bothered anymore, because if 'I ever have to change it again, I won't. I'd rather take a hammer and break the phone itself.' For months, Janaina herself had been receiving prank text messages from the same person - a woman - who insisted that her husband was cheating on her. She felt like a person whose privacy has been invaded, since she considers the phone a subject of personal and intimate use. And the target is Janaina herself, since her husband never got prank calls from people plotting about her.

It's usually me the one who they harass. It has always been me. If I still had the other number, for sure they would be harassing me, perhaps to the point of making me and my husband separate.

In some cases, it turns out that it is a friend or an acquaintance who inadvertently ends up giving the phone number to a rival. That was the case of Emilia, a young wife and mother of twenty years of age. One of the neighbors, very good friend of hers, had her phone's agenda searched, without knowing, by a friend who did not like Emilia. This woman started calling Emilia daily, insulting her. Emilia had no way of knowing who she was, since the number calling appeared as 'private' on the caller ID. One day, the woman forgot to put the phone on private mode.

So I called that person and I talked a lot to her and she then said oh, sorry, I didn't know that was you. She was calling me almost every day. The private number was wrong, but then she stopped calling.

However, Emilia explains unidentified calls can sometimes be a blessing rather than a problem. For the residents of Morro São Jorge, job offers can come by phone, and some employers use the private mode when they call to fill a job post:

I sometimes answer when it's private' and it is a prank, but sometimes it can be a job just like the other day, when they called from Back [company of outsourcing services of cleaning and surveillance] and it was private. But then I ask first the person to identify herself. I do not say who I am. I say my name only after they do that.

Calls to wrong numbers can also cause confusion when it comes to jealous husbands. Maria, Emilia's mother, received three phone calls late at night by mistake, followed by a young man who insisted that Maria's number was his brother's. The second time, Maria's husband answered the phone: 'Damn, this guy already called twice!' It was a problem convincing her husband it was just a mistake, that she did not know the man.

So, like Janaina and many other women in São Jorge, Emilia and Maria are very cautious when it comes to giving out their phone numbers. I think that an explanation for this practice is given by Fonseca (2000), who emphasizes the fear of gossip and calumny among low-income groups. Maria says:

The phone is good on one hand but on the other hand it is dangerous. I'm afraid even to call people from outside; I'd rather not even call at all. When it comes to those who are not part of the family, I'm afraid to call, sometimes. It can lead to trouble. I find it hard to make phone calls.

Her daughter Emilia agrees:

The mobile phone is good, but it is also where you catch things that are meant to be secret...

She adds that one must be very careful when lending the phone for others to use, even to friends. When Emilia insisted that a close friend of hers used her own phone to call someone this friend would tell her not to worry, that she would not use her credit and that she would hang up before anyone answered. Emilia, however, was suspicious:

Why don't you want your number to be displayed? Why do you want my number to be displayed, not yours? That is going to lead to trouble. So in the end I lent the phone and I am responsible for sorting the whole thing out and explaining it wasn't actually me that made the call.

In the case of adolescents, especially boys, having more than one mobile phone is a strategy for dealing with multiple girlfriends. This is the case of Caio, who at nineteen is already engaged. When I ask if the device that is on the table is his cell phone, I am told it is 'one of them.' It may be that for many having more than one mobile phone can be symbol of status; however, Caio affirms that his is a different case. In early adolescence, he says he was 'a womanizer, I always had more than

one girl. In those days mobile phones were of great importance because, you know, teenage boys are keen on meeting various girls in various places.' He says that he lost his virginity at an early age, to a cousin, but kept the girlfriend he already had, and soon after got a few more girls with whom he 'shagged'. Caio came to have three phones at the same time to 'manage' - as he described - his multiple love affairs. As already noticed by Horst and Miller (2006) during their fieldwork in Jamaica, another strategy employed in Morro São Jorge is to register in the phonebook the name of a girl using a male name:

There were several numbers ... I would dial the name of a football friend, for example. If any 'other girl' were rummaging through my phone, she would not know who that was. I would just say: this is someone I play football with, excuse me...

The third mobile phone, used to communicate with another girlfriend, became 'vacant' when the relationship ended so Caio's sister received it as a gift. For his two steady girlfriends, Caio reserved two exclusive mobile numbers in two different devices:

It can't be the same mobile phone. If one of them calls me and I'm with the other one ... that would complicate things. I mean during an hour I would turn off one of my phones and leave the other one on when I went some place.

Therefore, according to Caio, he had to have more than one mobile phone, since he had a steady girlfriend on the other side of Morro São Jorge, but shortly after he began dating the girl with whom he ended up getting

engaged, 'But when I got engaged the other one did not like it, she rebelled.' As he always carried with him both mobile phones, Caio sometimes forgot the 'secret device' turned on, and so his fiancée discovered his ruse. At that time, according to Caio, the phone he had assigned for this girlfriend was old and therefore not suitable for SIM card use. Therefore, there was no way to change the number of the device, thus making his life difficult with his fiancée since the abandoned girlfriend constantly kept calling and harassing Caio. Once, when Caio forgot the phone at his home, the fiancée realized that his ex-girlfriend was calling and spoke with her pretending to be Caio's sister. During the course of one such calls, the fiancée, girlfriend at that time, in a fit of rage, threw Caio's phone against a wall. 'It couldn't be fixed; I had to throw away the phone that I used with her.' Besides that, the phone that Caio had been using with his fiancée since the beginning of their relationship 'was also one that the girls from Morro dialed, so that one was also thrown against the wall several times. But that was a die-hard kind of phone, it didn't break so easily.' Caio reveals other types of conflicts like the one when one of his crushes discovered his other mobile number and called him while he was still with one of his steady girlfriends. Very often, when his attempts to pretend he was talking with one of his sisters were going wrong, the fight was sure to start. The engagement, however, marked a break in Caio's life, who now declares himself as 'an honest guy, I no longer receive such calls.' As a sign of loyalty and commitment, he gave the phone that was left to his fiancée, and bought

another one for him, this time with a SIM card. Caio's case exemplifies a shift to another stage of experiencing manhood, when young people make a more serious emotional commitment and are heading to marriage and children; they go from 'hanging out' to 'responsibility' (Arlha, 1998).

### **Mobile phones as affective technology in the relations between parents and children**

In this section I would like to highlight the tensions between generations caused by the mobile phone. I begin by analyzing the case of Lila, a thirty-five year old cleaner, who is in her third marriage. The focus is on her children's attempts to use mobile phones.

Carol, Lila's seventeen year old daughter, is considered a beauty queen by her family. Very beautiful, she participates in fashion shows, and according to her mother, 'is very concerned about her looks and loves to use those high-heeled sandals, nice clothes, makeup. My daughter is a doll, she sometimes works as a model, and she once won a beauty contest'. During my period in the field, Carol appeared in the newspapers for having won one of several contests that take place during Carnival. According to her mother and grandfather, she is not only beautiful but also very intelligent: 'My husband, her stepfather, wanted to give her a computer because she is very intelligent, she knows everything'. However, even being so popular, beautiful and outgoing, Carol does not have a central object in contemporary teenager techno culture: a mobile phone. While acknowledging

that sometimes her daughter may feel excluded because 'all her girl friends have one', Lila is firm in her opinion: to her, cell phones should be banned for those aged less than eighteen. She even considers absurd that children of six or seven are being allowed to use the device freely. In this decision she is supported by her father, Roberto Carlos:

The phone is very useful, but in the hands of children it can encourage plenty of wrongdoing. This is a dangerous path through which some criminal mind may call them and say he is their father. Because the phone is a bit like a computer, like in that soap opera where the little boy stood all day long in front of the computer and then one of those child abusers came along... The mobile phone can be like that too. A scoundrel, a vagabond can grab a pretty girl like that. He manages to get her number and has her waiting in front of the school, after classes, saying he is the father or an uncle.

My field data, however, suggest that the moral discourse of panic, adopted by Roberto Carlos and Lila is a minority among the parents of Morro Sao Jorge, especially when it comes to a young woman's use of mobile phones, like Carol. Most people do not consider troublesome the children's mobile phone use, provided that there is some degree of supervision and guidance. Ciro, a seventy-year old grandfather, with adolescent grandchildren, recognizes that the phone appeals to all age groups:

Nowadays I think it's everyone's taste. A little girl this small just goes like that with a mobile in her hand. Young, old, there is no age

for it. I believe that age does not matter when it comes to having an object... something you like.

Roberto Carlos himself, quoted above, has a ten year old son (actually, as Lila reveals, it is his grandson which he has been raising since the age of two months). The child uses the phone, but with strict recommendations of the grandfather, who constantly warns his grandson not to call anyone apart from family members. Confident of its strategy to protect the grandson from urban violence, and especially from child molesters, Roberto Carlos decided to prove it to his wife, who went with him to pick up the child from school:

One these days I bet with my wife - do you want to see how obedient he is? Well basically I was late half and hour to pick him up. Want to see how he is there at his spot? He was right there. The city is getting more and more violent.

However, the story of Edina shows that many times danger can be closer to family than expected. Although only thirty years old, Edina is the proud mother of three teenagers. Her youngest daughter, now fourteen, underwent harassment from a married man who sent her text messages on the phone. Edina recalls that this happened when Cinara was only twelve. The mother managed to discover the author of the harassment only because she had a very well organized phonebook on her mobile. She noticed that her daughter was frightened when receiving messages and by talking to her Edina discovered what was going on. Digging through her own phonebook, she discovered that the number belonged to an acquaintance

and decided to confront him:

Then I thought: I know this number. Then I went to scan my other phone. I knew the person! I called him and could notice his embarrassment. But I pretended not to know anything. I said: 'Darling, your number's here in my daughter's mobile phone. I do not know if you wanted to send a message to your wife ... You ended up sending it to my daughter. So you'll excuse me if I 'm calling you, but I just wanted to make you pay more attention to what you do.' Then he said: 'Forgive me, excuse me, the message was actually for my wife.' And I replied: 'Because you would not be crazy to be sending these messages to a child. Forgive me for my honesty, but for me only a person of very low scruples sends erotic messages to a twelve year old girl. Imagine if instead of calling you I called your wife, I have her number.' Then he got scared. In a couple of weeks he changed his mobile number and also his wife's.

In São Jorge, my observations indicated that children's phone use during the first years of school life is less common than in adolescents, but it exists. In the school where the majority of the community's children study, a seven-year-old girl told me that two of her classmates have a mobile phone. I talked to one of them who told me how she had got the phone - now quite old - from an uncle who had already been using it for a long time. The girl's mother, owner of a shop in Morro, told me the same thing as Roberto Carlos: The girl should use it only in case of emergency, to call home. Speaking of a broader perspective, since one of

his grandsons attends a State school located in downtown Florianópolis, Roberto Carlos says: 'I look after my grandson, every day I take him to and from school. Nowadays most children have a mobile phone. I see them on the street calling their parents to come get them'.

I argue here that when we leave the age group of grandparents responsible for children and teenagers and we face the age group of fathers and mothers, the perception of risk related to mobile phone use tends to decrease. Another woman, mother to five children - four teenagers and a baby - says she does not care that her children have mobile phones; according to her, dialogue and guidance are the best strategy: 'I do not care [that the children use mobile phones]! I have an opinion. You sit, you talk, if they do not want to follow your advice, we still talk but if they go in the wrong direction ...'

In the case of children, the perception of parents is that the mobile phone is an ally that provides security and better communication between them and their children. In this sense, the concerns in São Jorge echo the discourse of the middle classes in relation to urban violence, as well as the role of mobile phones, here thought of as an 'electronic collar' in relieving the parents' anxiety when they are away from their children, as shown by studies conducted by Nicolaci-da-Costa (2006), in the Brazilian cultural context and studies by Ling (2004) in relation to the middle classes of the so-called First World countries. I also noticed that in Morro São Jorge, the mobile phone can become an ally of mothers working outside the home in their task of looking after their children. Edina's

report, which we presented a few paragraphs above, stresses the feeling of guilt that often affects these mothers as well as the role of the mobile phone in mediating emotions between parents and children:

I had to give Caio [her eldest son] a mobile phone because I worked a lot. He was only seven or eight. That was ten years ago. It was my way of knowing if he was okay. I would call him every hour or two. I had to work in order to provide everything for them but I realized that nothing replaces affection. I basically did not see them awake. I left for work at four in the morning and I would arrive after ten at night. When he turned eleven, Caio told me he didn't want new clothes or nice shoes anymore. He said: 'I want my mother'. Once he sent me a message in the phone asking me how much I was earning per hour. At that time I would make about 35 reals a day, so I would earn about three, four reals an hour. So he managed to get a real from various relatives and handed the money to me: 'I'm paying an hour for you to be alone with me'; He sent a message because I had no time to stop and talk to him! I thought I just had to give material goods to them, and with that I realized that only the material side is not enough. And the phone was in the middle of all this. Even today, very often Caio doesn't speak to me personally. Even now when he wants to apologize he calls me or sends me a message.

In contrast with the examples above there's Carol, the seventeen year old girl whose mother would not let her own a mobile phone. Lila has been separated from the father of her daughter for

fifteen years and according to her, her first husband never helped her at all: 'I went to live with my father who raised her for me'. Even without the financial support, father and daughter kept in touch and Lila apparently had a friendly relationship with her former husband. Carol's fifteenth birthday, awaited with anticipation by the girl, was the occasion when she won a gift from his father for the first time. But the present requested by the daughter did not please the mother: 'The first thing the father of my daughter gave her in his life to her was a mobile phone, one thing that I never wanted my daughter to have.' Roberto Carlos scolded Lila and asked why his granddaughter was using a mobile phone. Lila ended up fighting with the girl's father: 'If you want to give her a present, give her clothes, whatever you want, makeup, but not a mobile phone. If she were allowed to have a mobile phone I would have given one to her already.' However, since it was already done, Lila decided to give in seeing the joy of her daughter: 'it was her dream to have a mobile phone. The thing she mostly asked for was a phone. Mom, father said he would give me a phone when I turn fifteen, will he?' On her birthday, she did not receive a single phone call from her father the whole day. The gift arrived only at six o'clock. Lila recalled the excitement of her daughter: 'My God, this girl was so excited. She immediately took a picture of herself, put it on her phone, she started reading the manual, everything. He already had bought the phone on her name, from the beginning.'

With her mother's permission, Carol took the phone to school. But peace lasted only three days, after which Lila

noticed that her daughter always went to the room whenever she received calls. Even considering that 'we are mother and daughter and I have to trust my daughter', Lila suspected of her daughter's claims that they were only girl friends from school: 'Why not talk to them near me? So the teenagers, these young girls are talking a lot of things over the phone, things which a mother cannot learn.' When the daughter left to go to her grandfather's house without taking the device, Lila took one of the calls - it was a boy - and started talking as if she were her daughter, discovering that Carol was dating and older schoolmate. It was even worse discovering that the boy was encouraging her daughter to lie to her mother about the actual school timetable: 'He was saying oh, you're not going there, I sent you word to meet me in front of the Institute [State Institute of Education, traditional public school in Florianopolis], because whatever.' Three days after getting her much dreamed of present, Lila decided to prohibit the mobile phone again, but in a quite dramatic way:

It didn't take you more than three days, literally speaking... she did not start dating and getting a boyfriend in three days, she certainly was doing that already and I only discovered that because of the mobile phone. She got the phone on day four, on her fifteenth birthday; I remember it like it was today. And I broke the phone on the seventh day of the month. She cried! I only have the box today. [and there was no discussion. Did you try to discuss it?] There was nothing to discuss about. 'But Mom, I didn't do anything wrong,

he's the one who called me...' And I said: 'He called you because you gave him your number; you were already seeing this boy!' 'No, I swear, I have nothing to do with him, he's just a colleague!' But I said: 'Colleague to talk on the phone or...' Then one day he sent a message, the greater anger was from the message, the phone rang and I answered because I don't have any secrets with my daughter! Then I saw the message that went like this: 'This is Miguel. Tell your mother that today you finish classes later.' Ah!!! I waited for her and I waited for her to open her mouth, to make her swallow that phone. She arrived. I said: 'Come here. Do you want the phone? Come here to see what I'm going to do with it.' I put the phone there in the street and broke it; she was watching me as I was smacking it with a hammer, bang bang bang. I gave three blows to the mobile phone. And she was crying because her dream was to have a mobile phone. She is now seventeen and I still didn't give her a mobile phone. It is her dream, she tells me, Mom, all my friends have. I say no, you will not have a mobile phone. Of course, nowadays it's easier; we have a better financial condition to give a mobile phone to a child. But I am afraid.

After this event, and despite the fact she was an excellent student and a great daughter, Carol only had permission to take the a mobile phone to school (her mother's phone) once. That was when her class had won a contest which mobilized all the school and the prize consisted of a samba show that happened at the same school. Lila allowed Carol to take her new phone but

with specific instructions to use it only as a camera. Once she arrived home, the phone was inspected. Carol complains ('it doesn't even seem like my mother is in her late thirties, it seems like she's already seventy, she doubts everything I say...') but accepts the process. Lila kept in her house the 'hammered' phone and sometimes, while recalling the episode, she feels guilty: 'she is seventeen and all her friends have a phone and she hasn't... she tells her friends when they ask her why: my mother smashed my mobile phone. She doesn't keep that a secret.' Even so, Lila keeps her rigid phone discipline. If Carol's friends need to call, they must dial her mother's number. And even so, Lila tells her daughter to put the phone on loudspeaker so she can hear the conversation. I did not find another mother who would do such a strong opposition to the teenagers' use of mobile phones and she herself admitted that she did not know another mother like her. But she admits: 'To this day remains the comment that she is seeing that same boy. Even my mother says, when they truly want it, a phone is not enough to stop them.'

Some months later, I met Lila once again. I asked if Carol could now use a mobile phone. Lila told me that the prohibition continued, and her opinion had not changed. She did not count, however, with the solidarity of Carol's cousins, brother and friends. 'But to no avail because her cousins' phones ring and they come to bring them to her. Cell phones are always in my life, there seems to be no way out of it'. Lila managed to discover her daughter's somewhat creative strategy to communicate with her boyfriend despite the constant surveillance she

exercises over her children:

My girl is like this: my nephews come here to call her with their phones in their hand. When I ask them what it was, they say it was Katia, that girl or somebody else who wanted to talk to my daughter. So I say: then give me the phone because I want to see if that's Katia. So I pick up the phone and they remain quiet, girl! I say: talk, stupid! I know it's you! After a while he says... hi... I noticed that it doesn't matter that I do that anyway. A phone won't stay in their way to communicate. Even my mother thinks I should give her a mobile phone, but I'm afraid. She doesn't even answer my phone because she knows I don't like it. She just plays with it: she puts music on it, or plays games.

It is also interesting to note that Lila does not make any gender distinction: banning the mobile phone usage also goes for her son Marlon, fourteen years old. However, extreme cases such as Lila's may also involve gender biases, like the one I was told about by a high school student, sixteen years old. According to her, her father allowed her brother to have a mobile phone long before her, who had to wait for two years. This same young lady, according to one of her teachers, has her life controlled by her boyfriend through constant text messages. Alane, the seventeen year old daughter of Gonçalves, another one of my interlocutors said that when she asked to have a mobile phone, at the age of thirteen, her father's first reaction was that of distrust: 'What is it that you want it for?' Janaina, who only has boys, thinks she would go through a lot

'more trouble' if she had daughters to use a mobile phone. Parental concern regards early pregnancy, a fact quite common in the community of Morro Sao Jorge. Janaina says that she doesn't control much her boys, even though they talk, she asks where they were and what they did. But with girls, she said it is 'far more difficult':

My oldest son is fourteen. If he were to get someone pregnant, it is not my daughter. It is true that he will have to take the responsibility for it. But if I were to have a fourteen year old daughter who got pregnant, I would get much more stressed than my son coming out and saying he will be a father.

Such a formulation coming from Janaina might explain the conduct of another mother, about whom I heard her two sisters talk about. She controls the life of her sons as much as Lila, but she however, did not object to her sixteen year old daughter to have a mobile phone. The perception about the device, in this case was different: Lauanne's mother saw the mobile phone as the ideal instrument to control and monitor her daughter's life. Nena, one of the sisters, comments: 'She calls her girl 24 hours a day! It's sad. Look, the poor girl, sometimes does not even answer the phone. This is where my sister gets mad because she calls all all all the time.' Titta, the other sister, recognizes that her niece 'is very popular', thus throwing hints that the mother's concern may be justified, though exaggerated.

In Lila's case, it was through the mobile phone that the first girlfriends of his son were discovered. One day, Lila found it strange when her son left the room with a phone in hand.

The boy hid the phone, unaware that his mother had seen his maneuver. In addition, Marlon went to his room several times and Lila could hear the ringing of the phone, even at low volume. His mother demanded who owned the mobile phone, to which Marlon replied that it belonged to 'some girl'. Lila did not prohibit her children to have colleagues, but she was always very cautious about dating. Carol and Marlon's friends already knew Lila's reputation, as well as her interdiction to her children's phone usage. She had no doubt: when Marlon entered the bathroom, she grabbed the phone to inspect it and found pictures of him with a girl. Soon after, she answered the phone: 'The phone rang and I discovered that it was a date of his; not only that, but he was already going to her house. Her mother knew everything and I was the last to know.' A while later, the thirteen year old girlfriend, appeared at the door to look for her cell phone. Lila was told that there was a girl who wanted to meet her. Asked if the girl 'was dating' her son, she was told that they were 'together', which left Lila irritated: 'Not together or dating or any of that sort; Marlon is only fourteen. Is that why you left your phone with him?' She ended up discovering that the girl had a landline at home, and had lent her mobile so that Marlon could take her calls. Lila eventually had to surrender, though under protests, to the inescapable fact of her son's awakening interest in the opposite sex: 'There's no way out of it, I've already tried everything. I took him out and left him on vacation for two weeks in Agronomica [middle-class neighborhood of Florianópolis] in my uncle's house, he returned and

his girlfriend comes here from time to time.' At this particular instant, Marlon himself appears and Lila, amused, asks him if he would like a mobile phone. Visibly upset, the boy replies: 'Of course, Mom!'.

## Conclusion

Throughout this article, I tried to bring about ethnographic cases that would demonstrate the possibility of a link between the anthropological view of consumption as a cultural practice (Miller, 1987, 2010) and the categories proposed by viewing the mobile phone as an 'affective technology' (Lasen, 2004) and its role as a mediator of emotions in social dynamics, which through it, can become 'electronic emotions' (Fortunati and Vincent, 2009). Thus, such perspective around the consumption of information and communication technologies becomes profitable, analytically, to the extent that it consolidates the premise - the driving force for studies emerging in the social sciences concerning the mobile phones - that its interest lies beyond a mere device for making and receiving calls.

Though studies that aim to articulate the reflection on communication and information technologies with the emotions' exercise are still in very preliminary state, I believe the stories of emotions experienced by men and women, fathers and sons of Morro São Jorge, with and through use of mobile phones demonstrate the role of the device in mediating emotions in the social networks of the community studied. In this registry, I hope the ideas here presented, the fruit of

my ethnographic research in Morro São Jorge, can serve a subsidy for an argument that begins to take form: the role of technology in the exercise of emotions.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Although a relatively recent phenomenon, the use of mobile phones strongly influences their social life as I could see over twelve months of fieldwork in a neighborhood of lower classes in Florianópolis - SC, that resulted in the thesis 'Being in time, being in the world: the social life of mobile phones in a popular group', put forward in April 2010 in the Postgraduate Program in Social Anthropology, at the Federal University of Santa Catarina.

<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere (Silva, 2011) I explored in greater detail the emotional bond of the social agents with their mobile phones: the dedication, towards the device, of human feelings like love, anger, shame and jealousy. This emotional bond was thus highlighted in the discourse of the interlocutors, for example, by assigning terms of kinship or friendship to the device. Thus, the mobile phone becomes a partner, child, friend, or even a 'comrade'.

<sup>3</sup> In order to place the reader in the emotion experienced by Vânia when receiving her first phone, I will transcribe her speech from the first interview with me

in January 2007: <<I never had a mobile phone, never ever, and I desperately wanted one, because everyone had it, then why couldn't I have one as well? Why can't I have one? But God in his goodness and his righteousness, I worked there in a house. I worked in a house, doing the cleaning, the lady adored me because after all... But you know she had many mobile phones, very many, that she would throw away. But she always had a new one, the children had, and there I was always like, oh my God, will I ever have a mobile phone? Who knows, for God nothing is impossible. I stayed; I worked with her for a month. Then one day she said 'Mrs. Vânia, I am leaving, I'm off to Bahia', I was cleaning her house three times a week at that time. Then I went there on Tuesday, to work and she said 'Mrs. Vânia, I got a present for you', I said 'A present? What are you going to give me?' 'I have a mobile phone to give to you, do you want it?' Then I said 'Oh, my God, how wonderful ... Now I'm a refined person! My God' and I was all silly, so silly with the mobile phone. Then she gave it to me, with the charger and everything, but look, it served me enough. It's just that I, oh, I do not know how to use the phone. The only thing I know is to open it or press here and there.>> (Silva, 2008: 317).

<sup>4</sup> In native terminology, a 'flip' mobile phone refers to devices with equipped with a plastic tab that protects the keypad, which opens when a call is answered.

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