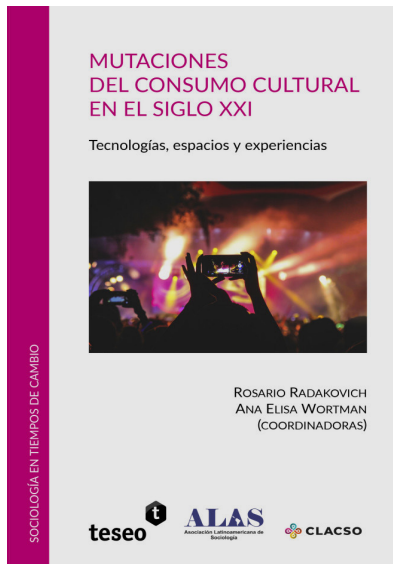


## Mutations in Cultural Consumerism in The XXI Century. Technology, Space and Experience

Rosario Radakovich & Ana Elisa Wortman. (2019). *Mutaciones del consumo cultural en el Siglo XXI. Tecnologías, espacios y experiencias*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Teseo / ALAS / CLACSO. 300 páginas.



In this free, downloadable publication from Teseo, Rosario Radakovich and Ana Wortman present a selection of articles curated on the premise of the XXI Congress for the Latin American Association of Sociology (ALAS), held in Montevideo from the 3rd to the 8th of December 2017. Although the project falls under the purview of a work group with a wide-ranging research program on cultural sociology, the

unifying concept in this compilation of articles centers on cultural consumerism. The decision to focus on the theory is in itself a questioning of the topic not only due to the implied underlying critique of the culturalist perspective – in the way it prioritizes cultural differences over social inequality – but also in the traditional interpretation of sociology of art and intellectuals in the extent that it has stakes in the sparse language of critical theory and Latin American cultural studies.

The observation is evident in the mere allusion to the main title of the book. The biological metaphor in Mutations in cultural consumerism has a certain resonance with Culturas Híbridas (García-Canclini, 2005) on Latin America, but differ in that in this case the blending or merging of social, economic or political processes comes second to the metamorphosis of cultural consumerism in the XXI century. That is why, to talk of “mutation” as a jump in the DNA sequence implies the assumption that there is an inflection point product of the development of new information and communication technology, in the fundamental processes associated with exponential logic derived from the digital revolution.

In this sense one of the guiding principles that structures the compilation of the varying intellectual works is the idea that mutation in cultural consumerism takes place in three different spheres: “the transnational cultural industry (...), the independents (...) and a scenario open to new technologies” (Radakovich & Wortman, 2019). The problem with this particular definition is that it tends to underestimate the contacts, synergies and articulations between all three. Not only because the technological aspect moves freely through

the first two, but also because the dynamic in technological reproducibility in digital merchandise entirely restructures the organizational principles of cultural legitimacy, to the point of permeabilizing borders between high and low culture, the independents, and transnational industrial culture.

In proposing this exercise in cultural dissemination, the organization of the book is defined under post-bourdieusian criteria<sup>4</sup>, in the sense that it presumes the starting point lies in the decline of traditional distinguishing criteria in conjunction with the puffed-up conception of culture. As a result, the appearance of transmedia consumers, digital platforms, binge watching and the saturation/curatorship of content, far from defining a technological scenario separate from autonomous logic, tends more toward merging with real, existing cultural practices and consumerism. This is how and why one of the distinctive hallmark traits of the era is that, the set of typical variations and transitions of the XXI century modify, in the same proportion, both the nature of the cultural artifacts as well as the experience and appropriation of the same.

With the previous, one can find a line of continuity operating throughout the compiled articles, resulting from wide use of the notion of cultural consumerism. This means that in practice, the term operates in extenso and involves a series of heterogeneous activities that despite their heterogeneity, articulate together. Their interaction delimits a particular sphere of analysis comprised of spaces, subjects and articulated objects all possessed of a sense of unity. Not only do they surpass the geographical variety of the experiences analyzed therein, but also the

multiplicity of social forms in which symbolic assets are circulated in the XXI century. Under the modality of participation, intervention and work, or, in mercantile acquisition or free circulation, the book successfully organizes heterogeneous activities into an orbit of belonging to the user/consumer.

Ultimately the previous is what leads to the polysemy affecting the notion of cultural consumerism present throughout the book given that, in some cases it refers to the effective demand of best sellers in Bogota; in others in the tastes and cultural preferences of young French men and women; but also in technological appropriation, from women graduating from the Laboratoria in Mexico City to the use of digital platforms in inland cities of Argentina etc. In fact, despite the diversity of global experiences, there is a strong sense of cohesion when approaching from a perspective that focuses on the location of active audiences and critical reception.

However, this terminological extension, far from deficient, reveals the robustness of the concept. To that end one must distinguish between the initial phases in the consumption process with all the respective rituals of possession, arrangement and emptying (McCracken, 1990), where esthetic questions, effective demand and the breakdown of taste are resolved; the terminal phase of a wasteful cycle relative to usage, the appropriations, domestication and rejection. In this manner, Cicchelli and Octubre's question on how the tastes of the world come down to young men and women demonstrate the importance of exposure to transnational cultural industry, generating different facets of cosmopolitan esthetics (involuntary, sectorial,

main) and new forms of socialization through the circulation of transmedia narratives such as is the case with Pokemon Go, according to the work of Cortex Oviedo. On the contrary lines of research that prioritize later forms of consumerism like, for example, Gonzalo Carballal's thesis on the representations of library use or music that highlight certain trends in cultural practices seen from a stance of individualization and flexibility.

This is all why Mutations in Cultural Consumerism is in essence an invitation to escape dichotomy of thought, avoiding economist reductionism and also cultural relativism, where principal merit consists in putting forward dialectic articulation between producers and consumers. Not in the sense of a deliberate attempt at being acritical of the problematic figure of the prosumer but mostly for highlighting that cultural consumerism always implies a determined work or activity, and that behind these productive operations there are determined consumer models. If Cicchelli and Octubre's article is an example of the first, where emotional and cognitive work is the condition that makes possible the appearance of the cosmopolitan amateur consumer, then in the second case, Quiña and Spinetta describe how the emotional and cognitive labor of the creative producer hinges on the logic of sentiment associated with the consumption of an imaginary entrepreneur. In this manner, with the possibility of conceiving the interaction, we arrive at the maxim articulated by Marx in Grundrisse (2007); of conceiving of an identity falling between production and consumption, both moments forming part of a unit. With the aforementioned opening gesture, the book without doubt represents a promising starting point for future research.

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### Notas

1 The loss in relevance of a theoretical perspective such as the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu is symptomatic, found at best infrequently, cited a total of six times and only marginally worked into three of the thirteen articles in the compilation.

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