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Milton Santos' geographical perspectives in studies of culture and consumption: A study in a rural community

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Abstract

This work is the result of empirical research that demonstrated in the field the potential of the work of the renowned geographer Milton Santos to the culture and consumption studies. First, we conducted a process of conceptualization using the geographer categories of verticality and horizontality, which are different configurations of space partitions. While the former is normally linked to relations of imposition involving dense centers of techniques in the Global North, the latter is formed by local and organic relations in general. The next step was to identify the different types of consumption, according to their respective directionality of space. In doing so, we identified patterns of solidary, foreign, and anthropophagic consumption. Our qualitative research, examined a rural community in the Brazilian city of Divinópolis, where we found out that adoption of new technologies by residents was made by means of adaptive strategies motivated by the search for a new local temporality, improving the individuals' quality of life. Finally, we believe in the potential of this conceptualization in order to problematize global relations between two kinds of places: the rulers and the executors.

Keywords: Consumption. Space. Milton Santos.

A geografia de Milton Santos em estudos de cultura e consumo: um estudo em uma comunidade rural

Resumo

Este trabalho é resultado de uma pesquisa empírica que buscou demonstrar em campo o potencial da obra do renomado geógrafo brasileiro Milton Santos para os estudos de cultura e consumo. Em primeiro lugar, foi realizado um esforço de conceitualização a partir das categorias do geógrafo de verticalidade e horizontalidade, que são configurações distintas de partições do espaço. No primeiro caso, o espaço está normalmente atrelado a relações de imposição com centros de densidade técnica de países do Norte Global e, no segundo, a relações locais e orgânicas. O passo seguinte foi o de identificar padrões distintos de consumo, conforme a respectiva direcionalidade do espaço. Com isso, identificamos padrões de consumo solidários, estrangeiros e antropofágicos. Nossa pesquisa, de caráter qualitativo, foi realizada em uma comunidade rural da cidade de Divinópolis, Minas Gerais, onde identificamos que a adoção de novas técnicas pelos residentes foi realizada por meio de estratégias adaptativas e motivada pela busca de uma nova temporalidade local, melhorando a qualidade de vida dos indivíduos. Por fim, acreditamos no potencial dessa conceitualização para problematizar relações globais entre dois tipos distintos de lugares: aqueles que mandam e aqueles que fazem.

Palavras-chave: Consumo. Espaço. Milton Santos.

La geografía de Milton Santos en los estudios de cultura y consumo: Un estudio en una comunidad rural

Resumen

Este trabajo es el resultado de una investigación empírica que buscó demostrar en campo el potencial de la obra del reconocido geógrafo brasileño, Milton Santos, para los estudios sobre cultura y consumo. En primer lugar, se intentó conceptualizar las categorías de verticalidad y horizontalidad del geógrafo, que son configuraciones diferentes de las particiones del espacio. En el primer caso, el espacio suele vincularse a relaciones de imposición con centros de densidad técnica en países del norte global, y en el segundo, a relaciones locales y orgánicas. El siguiente paso fue identificar diferentes patrones de consumo, según la respectiva direccionalidad del espacio. Con ello, identificamos patrones de consumo solidarios, foráneos y antropofágicos. Nuestra investigación cualitativa se llevó a cabo en una comunidad rural de la ciudad de Divinópolis, Minas Gerais, donde identificamos que la adopción de nuevas técnicas por parte de los residentes se realizaba a través de estrategias adaptativas y motivadas por la búsqueda de una nueva temporalidad local, mejorando la calidad de vida de los individuos. Por último, creemos en el potencial de esta conceptualización para problematizar las relaciones globales entre dos tipos distintos de lugares: los que mandan y los que hacen.

Palabras clave: Consumo. Espacio. Milton Santos.

Article submitted on September 19, 2024 and accepted for publication on March 06, 2025.
[Original version]

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1590/1679-395120240150x

INTRODUCTION

Due to the eclectic nature of consumer culture theory (CCT) (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, 2007; Thompson et al., 2013), the researchers have become interested in a variety of subjects, including the study of space. Numerous of these works focused on consumption in and of space (e.g., Castilhos, 2019; Castilhos & Dolbec, 2018; Moor, 2003; Visconti et al., 2010; Warnaby & Medway, 2013). Consequently, the non-Cartesian bias that initially influenced the field has encouraged a broader examination of places, regions, and territories beyond their mere geographic materiality. In this realm of research, space is viewed as lived, complex, and dependent on individuals' actions to create meaning. For instance, Castilhos et al. (2017) have explored this by categorizing various types of places as manifestations of space phenomenon.

In order to contribute to the field, our landmark is the work of the acclaimed Brazilian geographer Milton Santos. Beyond a mere set of concepts or a theory, Milton Santos established a formidable school of thought (Melgaço, 2017). This article will demonstrate that incorporating Santos' work into studies of consumption and space sheds light on vital issues for researchers in underdeveloped countries. Santos was very concerned with the dynamics of globalization and the roles that developed and undeveloped countries play on the global stage. In his works, it is very common to see discussions about *places that rule* and *places that do* (Santos, 2013). These impositions are made by the former, exporting techniques and technical objects to the latter. Parte superior do formulário

What we argue herein is that we can categorize consumption according to its relations with the partitions of space, which is formed by a system of objects and a system of actions. These partitions have directionalities, being vertical or horizontal, by means of which techniques circulate. Vertical configurations address the international dynamics of production and consumption, and horizontal configurations address closer—and in most cases, traditional—production-consumption relations. Consequently, normally the Global North and the multinational companies 'export' and impose techniques on the Global South. The 'importation' of techniques by the undeveloped countries creates in their places configurations somewhat foreign and 'unnatural'. Finally, we advocate that the consumption patterns linked to each directionality have different functions inside the respective space partition. As researchers from the Global South, we think we are responsible for developing conceptualizations that allow us to explore a long-overlooked phenomenon of impositions and its associated consumption patterns. As citizens of the South, are we just importing techniques from the North and replicating them? Are we importing techniques critically? Are we importing techniques to improve our lives? To provide the Anglo-Saxon reader with an overview of the geographer's work in English, see the book *Toward an Other Globalization: From the Single Thought to Universal Conscience* (Santos, 2017b) and (Santos, 1974, 1977a, 1977b, 1977c, 1979, 1980).

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the strength of the latter paragraph argument, better explained in the conceptualization section. Fortunately, we achieved this by means of field research in a small rural community named Quilombo (despite the name, it is not a quilombola[1] community), where the internet connection was just plenty accessible in 2018. As we relate herein, when the internet infrastructure arrived at the community, the contrast between verticalities and horizontalities emerged. The research method we chose to grasp this phenomenon was qualitative, with field observations and interviews analyzed by discourse analysis.

Furthermore, we want to state that knowing how consumption occurs inside systems of objects and actions in any partition of space is valuable to us as researchers and citizens from the Global South. Examples of research that approaches critically the phenomenon of space in undeveloped countries are cited herein. One of them is the Castilhos' (2019) study, which explored how (vertical) market practices of private urban development excluded vulnerable groups from low-income neighborhoods. Similarly, our research seeks to contribute to the field of research with a new set of theoretical tools for further investigations.

1 Quilombola refers to the descendants of African slaves in colonial Brazil who established communities known as 'quilombos'.

SPACE AND ITS 'NATURE' ACCORDING TO MILTON SANTOS

In the view of Milton Santos, the study of space requires consideration of its two fundamental elements: the system of objects and the system of actions (Santos, 1997). The system of objects constitutes the material aspect of his ontology, as everything tends to assume the status of an object when humans employ any material thing as their landmarks. Conversely, the system of actions shapes space as a vibrant and dynamic entity. Together, these two elements comprise the essence of space. Ontologically, the space construct consists of two correlated and interdependent categories: objects and actions. That approach to the phenomenon of space, in addition to being non-Cartesian (Costa, 2024), is also very similar to Giddens' (2013) structuration theory, which sets actors' actions building structures (rules and resources) in their daily lives' performances, while these same structures constrain or enable individuals' actions. What is similar between these two ontological perspectives is that the world (and space) is not an entity external to individuals but rather constructed and composed by them. It is a non-Cartesian perspective.

After that ontological approach to the space phenomenon, in the next layer of this scientific work, we can be more specific and identify other elements to support our decisions. Additionally, what also sets Milton Santos' work apart and renders it relevant to our field of study is the emphasis he places on techniques and technical objects within a global context. According to the author, technical objects are akin to Trojan horses (Santos, 1977d) as they infiltrate countries, carrying their technical programming with them.

At this point, it is crucial to establish a clear distinction between *space* and *place*, as we are going to see here the use of these two constructs. Space should be regarded more as an analytical category and should not be conflated with cities, states, regions, or countries, even though cities, states, regions, and countries can also be viewed as spaces as well. On the other hand, when we refer to the category of place, we are addressing the lived experiences of individuals in their most tangible form. Places are where life unfolds, and individuals live.

Milton Santos asserts that technique is of paramount importance in global geography (Santos, 1997). This importance is underscored by the global dynamics wherein highly industrialized centers in the Northern Hemisphere, abundant in techniques, export these techniques to less technologically advanced places in the Southern Hemisphere. In this process, the intentions, embedded within technical objects—since every technique is a program for action (Santos, 2013)—along with the techniques themselves, prompt actions in underdeveloped countries. Consequently, these nations find themselves importing techniques and actions that are foreign, as these were not created and developed within their own territories. In spaces characterized as hybrids enriched with various techniques, particularly in Southern countries, there is a tendency to favor the techniques of the 'reason'—predominantly produced in the North—over the techniques of 'emotion' that are organic to the South (Santos, 1997). The 'backward' techniques that persist in these places are referred to as 'roughnesses' by Santos.

Santos is sometimes vague in the definition of technique. However, it is possible to highlight in his writings that technique has material and immaterial dimensions. In its material dimensions, techniques are associated with objects as form-content, or technical objects. 'It's not possible to see the form devoid of its power to create or determine relationships.' (Santos, 1997d, p. 33, our translation). On the other hand, in its immaterial dimensions, techniques can also be seen as programs for action, as previously mentioned. This later view of techniques is very close to that of Latour (1994, p. 61), for whom '[t]echniques, we learn from archaeologists, are articulated subprograms for actions that subsist (in time) and extend (in space)'. Even if we return to classical antiquity, it is possible to see the idea of the *techne* as an immaterial entity, as a category of knowledge.

As we briefly mentioned above, according to Milton Santos, techniques act as Trojan Horses in a global dynamic. In this context, there are two other constructs that, associated with techniques, are very useful to our theorization: verticality and horizontality. Let us explore Milton Santos' perspective on these.

> The segmentations and partitions present in the space suggest, at least, that it is admitted two frames. On the one hand, there are extensions formed by points that assemble without discontinuity, as the traditional definition of region. They are horizontalities. On the other hand, there are points in the space that, separated from each other, sustain the overall functioning of society and economy. They are verticalities. The space is formed by the ones and others of these frames, inseparably. It is from these new subdivisions that we must think of new categories of analysis. (Santos, 1997, p. 225, our translation).

Hence, when we approach the analysis of a phenomenon from the perspective of these directionalities, we aim to discern the place of origin of the techniques involved. For instance, the cosmopolitan taste cultivated in underdeveloped countries can be seen predominantly as a consequence of verticalities. This is exemplified by communities of Harley Davidson riders in Brazil or the sharing of videos featuring 'dances' performed by residents of rural communities on social networks. Conversely, practices like community health initiatives found in certain Brazilian cities and small communities, as we've found in our study, can be predominantly characterized as a result of a horizontal partition of space because such practices might prove impractical in places marked by high technical density and systematized reason, as big cities are.

These two constructs are, in Santos' theory, the final achievement in his attempt to grasp the phenomenon of the systems that drive space configuration in undeveloped countries. In an article discussing urban economy, Santos (1977/2017a) named these two sub-systems as superior and inferior. As the author said, previously he named these constructs, respectively, as modern and traditional. Even though Santos has abandoned these terms in his most recent works, we think they can help us to understand some nuances we are discussing when we frame verticality or horizontality in space.

In other words, the dynamics present in vertical partitions of space in any place in the Globe reflect most of the Global North, which is technically denser than places in the Global South. Consequently, North and South have different temporalities and 'reasons' (Santos, 1997, 1977/2017a). While North is faster and 'rational', South is slower and 'emotional'.

Thus, as we show in the next section, the theory of the geographer can help us to find out some impositions or resistances of techniques in the dynamics of consumption. This is only possible because the author's ontology presupposes a complex way of approaching the formation of space. Prior works, such as those by Chatzidakis et al. (2018) and Giovanardi & Lucarelli (2018), have already demonstrated the intricate nature of space along with its subjectivities. Even within the field of geography, there's an approach that treats markets as far more than a mere space for the exchange of commodities (Cohen, 2018).

A CONCEPTUALIZATION

After the brief explanation about its 'nature' and based on the works of Milton Santos, we argue that distinctive consumption patterns emerge based on the presence of directionalities within space. Each partition of space has a unique mix of its constitutive elements: objects, individuals, and their actions. These 'slices', due to their inherent heterogeneity, are never completely vertical or horizontal.

We argue that because consumption is inherently associated with space and its directionalities, each type of consumption reflects its associated directionality. Therefore, when analyzing a consumption pattern linked to a predominantly horizontal partition of space, we categorize it as solidary. This construct addresses the idea that, within a horizontal partition of space, there exists a form of solidarity (understood as connections in a Miltonian sense) that is associated with 'irrational', 'inferior', or non-modern individual actions. This organic form of connection resembles the common-sense notion of 'solidarity', a 'backward' form of connection. Otherwise, the 'modern' urban solidarity is typically mediated by rationalities, usually originating from the Global North.

Conversely, when examining a consumption pattern associated with a predominantly vertical partition of space, we classify it as foreign, since the practice itself originates from distant places. The connections emerging from this type of partition are considered 'rational', 'superior', or modern. In this context, individual actions are largely influenced by centers of technical expertise, such as multinational corporations. As a result, certain individual actions or relationships may appear somewhat unfamiliar, unnatural, or foreign.

However, when observing a consumption pattern in which the associated partition of space does not align neatly into these two categories cited above, we can refer to it as anthropophagic. This latter construct is inspired by the *Manifesto Antropófago* by Oswald de Andrade, who, in 1928 as part of the Brazilian modernist movement, encouraged artists to absorb foreign culture, 'digest' it, and transform it into a vital part of a predominantly Brazilian artistic creation. We address these categories again in the discussion section. Table 1 illustrates our conceptualization.

Table 1
Conceptualization: The directionality in space and consumption patterns

	Horizontal partitions of space	Partitions of space with undifferentiated directionality	Vertical partitions of space
Description	Objects and actions largely created in their own place of performance	In these practices, neither horizontalities nor verticalities are predominant	Objects and actions largely external to their place of performance
Consumption pattern	Solidary consumption	Anthropophagic consumption	Foreign consumption

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

It now remains to confirm the utility of these constructs in an empirical setting. Our approach aligns with McInnis (2011), who emphasizes that "articles that contribute to identification make us aware of what we have been missing" (p. 143). As individuals in the Global South, are we missing the fact that we consume impositions? Are we consuming techniques that do not align with our reality? Would replacing foreign consumption patterns with solidary ones improve our relationships with others and with space?

METHOD

To illustrate our conceptualization, we selected the Quilombo Community, situated in the rural area of Divinópolis, Minas Gerais, Brazil. It's worth noting that, despite the name, it is not a quilombola community. According to oral accounts, the community was named after the existence of an old quilombo in the area. We chose this place due to the recent introduction of broadband internet in 2018, which brought about significant changes in the set of consumption patterns of the community. In that year, a radio internet transmission tower was installed, relaying the signal from a provider in a neighboring city. This specific innovation was an effort made entirely by the community association and private companies. It is not a part of a major project managed by the government, for instance. Prior to the introduction of this technical infrastructure, residents already had smartphones, but their connectivity was rudimentary, often requiring them to venture into open fields to get a signal.

Drawing from the onto-epistemological framework that underpins our research in this field, we employed ethnographic-inspired methods for data collection (Belk & Casotti, 2014), which included participant observation and the maintenance of a field diary. Additionally, we conducted twelve in-depth interviews, employing both semi-structured and unstructured approaches. Our selection of interviewees was guided by theoretical sampling (Flick, 2004). The interviewees' profiles exhibit heterogeneity in terms of age and their relationship with the community.

The research *corpus* primarily consists of twelve recorded interviews, totaling 8 hours of recordings. Once transcribed, these interviews span 81 pages and encompass over 53,000 words. In addition to this primary dataset, we have 18 archived conversations from the WhatsApp application, including images, audio messages, and texts exchanged with selected informants. Furthermore, seven field visits were conducted between September 13, 2021, and December 21, 2022, with impressions recorded in a field diary within a Microsoft Word file spanning 10 pages and 4,224 words. Additionally, we have collected screenshots from social networks such as Facebook and Instagram, which include conversations, videos, images, and texts created by community residents and visitors. Lastly, we have archived the webpage of the Diocese of Divinópolis, which contains a brief history of the formation of the Quilombo Community as a rural community.

To explore the data, we employed French discourse analysis (Orlandi, 2005). The discourse is presented to us in its materiality (texts, notes, etc.), but it is not the materiality itself. Discourse is where the statements relate with each other, giving to reality its meanings (Orlandi, 2005; Foucault, 2008). By exploring the materiality of discourses, we can achieve the reality and the meanings in the individuals' lives, shedding light on how they are constructed. We argue that this methodological choice shows us the layer of meanings behind the surface of speech and approaches the texts as socially constructed. This view is very aligned to our non-Cartesian onto-epistemological perspective.

To ensure the quality and rigor of the analysis, we first did four questions: (a) how previously to approach the *corpus*?; (b) how to select categories of analysis?; (c) what are the quotes that have to be analyzed?; (d) how to transcend data analysis to an ontological level?

The solution to reach this quality was: (1) to start from the materiality of discourse (audios and transcriptions); (2) to find out similar elements in the interviews in order to form the categories of analysis; (3) to find out other elements that are not similar but relevant to our research; (4) in each category of analysis, to highlight partitions of objects and actions that illustrate our framework; (5) to select the most illustrative quotes according to our theoretics; (6) to triangulate discourse analysis with other materials (field notes, photos, archived chats, etc.).

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

While exploring the research *corpus*, three analytical categories emerged, each of which illustrates our conceptualization. The first category is termed *space permeability*, the second focuses on *adaptability*, and finally, we introduce the category known as *a new temporality*.

Space permeability

> "These days, if you pause, you get left behind, right? The world keeps moving forward, and if you halt, you might find yourself on the roadside." (Old Cowboy)

What does Old Cowboy mean by *'get left behind'* or *'on the roadside'*? And what about '*the world keeps moving forward*'? This lexical selection can serve as the key to unlocking a broader perspective. Within this perspective lie the elements that will help us to illustrate the concept of space permeability and how points of permeability in space facilitate the flow of techniques.

To remain '*behind*', there must be something moving ahead. But what lies ahead? In the same excerpt, Old Cowboy provides an answer, stating that the '*world keeps moving forward*'. The *'world'* to which Old Cowboy refers appears to be an external entity that continually advances and requires monitoring; otherwise, what's left for him is to remain '*on the roadside'*, on the margins. The excerpt was a response to the question of whether he liked to see the Quilombo Community connected to the internet. After affirming his approval, the informant expressed the feeling of being left on the 'roadside' when unable to fully integrate the entire technical apparatus introduced by an external 'world' into his daily life. In essence, the entire discourse fragment illustrates the relationship between a slower-paced world (where Old Cowboy resides) and a faster-paced world that surpasses it.

In this gap revealed through discourse analysis, we can explore the Miltonian world. The external world that introduces competing techniques, leaving others 'behind,' represents the most cosmopolitan, dense, and fast layer of space. Techniques originating from this layer bring with them certain kinds of actions, which give rise to new configurations within the Quilombo Community. During our observations at Old Cowboy's home, we noted a technological device installed in his living room that enhanced the security of his modest abode. This image contrasted with the surrounding landscape—a category in Miltonian analysis referring to the configuration of objects. Old Cowboy mentioned that the system had been suggested by his electrician grandson. Consequently, the security system has altered the way he receives guests and interacts with delivery personnel and potential suspects. To improve communication with his grandfather, the grandson has created points of permeability in space and effectively introduced new techniques and practices. The first author took notes about that when he visited the field:

> It was a nice house, with a white automated gate. As I approached the gate, some dogs barked to protect the property, and I felt somewhat hesitant. However, the house's gate stood out from the others [of the neighborhood] because it had an intercom with a camera and an electronic motor. When I rang the house, I remember thinking: Is there a monitor inside the house? (field diary notes).

It's common for residents of the Quilombo Community to travel between the surrounding cities and, especially, to visit the urban center of Divinópolis regularly. Children from the community may attend elementary school in rural areas by enrolling in the municipal school in the neighboring community, known as the Choro community. However, if they wish to pursue high school education, they must go to the urban neighborhoods. Whether it's for education, employment, or leisure, people frequently

move between urban and rural areas. Additionally, some individuals in the community are considered weekenders, as they own properties where they spend their leisure weekends with family. This constant movement of people also establishes points of permeability within the community, connecting it with the 'external world' and facilitating the importation of techniques. Consequently, the community's space becomes populated with technical objects and information originating from spaces where time is experienced differently, thus leading to the sensation of being 'behind'.

The introduction of the internet, as we argue, has significantly increased the permeability of the community's space. We received reports of new habits, such as watching series on Netflix, for example. This North American streaming platform offers a diverse range of audiovisual content in its catalog, serving as another means of aesthetic diffusion between spaces with different levels of technical density.

In addition to the internet's arrival, other elements related to technical infrastructure have emerged from field research as catalysts for permeability across different frames of space. Information gathered from residents, corroborated by the website of the Diocese of Divinópolis, indicates that the community was primarily founded by a patriarch, Mr. Antônio Francisco Soares, and his family. Consequently, there is a degree of kinship among many residents, explaining why even among some interviewees shared characteristics such as remarkably light blue eyes are observable. Over time, the once homogeneous community has diversified culturally and anthropologically, with technical infrastructure playing a fundamental role in this process. The newest and the oldest techniques exist side by side.

> "[The local public health center] would not be noted just passing by car [because of its simplicity]. The stone paving ends just before the health center and [the street] continues as a dirt road." (field diary notes).

Regarding the technical evolution of the community, several interviewees mentioned that the paving of the highway, which is just over a kilometer away, brought certain benefits. These included easier access to the urban area, even though it also raised safety concerns. Additionally, the arrival of electricity was highlighted as a significant milestone in the community's history and overall development. The internet represents the most recent addition to a series of technical advancements throughout the history of the Quilombo Community. This collection of techniques, whether imported or not, has played a pivotal role in making the space more permeable to various forms of influence and new residents. For instance, some reports indicate a recent influx of people from the northern region of the state of Minas Gerais.

While the introduction of technical infrastructure such as paved roads, nearby asphalt, electricity, and the internet has undoubtedly increased the permeability of the space, residents commonly refer to the place as the *countryside*. For instance, interviewee Danilo Pedro stated, '*Quilombo is a countryside that can no longer be considered a countryside*'. This sentiment is quite illustrative, as it reflects the feeling among community residents that they don't quite belong to the urban center, despite the presence of numerous technical amenities today. It is as if they enjoy the best of both the 'country' and the 'city'. It is worth noting that a nearby community, the Choro community, has lost the distinctive characteristic that Quilombo maintains. Interviewee Renato even remarked, '*there are now too many neighborhoods and too many houses. It's uncomfortable for us to say, but it feels more like a favela there*'.

The feeling of being distant from the urban center and residing in the countryside is closely linked to the configuration of objects within the space. Therefore, a rural community can enjoy certain technical amenities without losing its countryside essence. Several factors can facilitate this coexistence, such as the spacing between houses, the presence of forests and vegetation, the positioning of sites amidst the houses, and the absence of asphalt in the middle of the community. It is crucial to emphasize here that the meanings attributed to objects are not solely products of the human mind or the objects themselves. This observation shows us also the importance of the discourse analysis method we used.

While there are indeed multiple points of permeability within the Quilombo Community, they have not been sufficient to transform the area into just another urban neighborhood within Divinópolis, as reportedly occurred with the neighboring Choro community. The following excerpt highlights that several impermeable aspects still exist within this space: '*This is the positive aspect of not having services like iFood; we consume healthier options like rice and beans*.' (Lúcia).Parte superior do formulário

Lúcia, who resides in an urban area to facilitate her studies, expressed that one of the things she misses the most when she returns to the community is the iFood app. In her apartment with her college roommate, they have developed a habit of ordering snacks through such apps. So, despite the presence of several points of permeability, the Quilombo Community's space is not highly permeable.

Adaptability and strategies

We begin the section with a very illustrative excerpt.

> "Some points provide a signal, but it is very unstable. For instance, when I stand in the square, near a small tree, the phone gets a 4G signal, understand? However, if I move away from there to make a call, I have to keep the phone on speaker mode to have a normal conversation because if I put it to my ear, the call will drop. So, I have to keep it close like this, and I can't move or shake it. Then I can make and receive calls. I have Wi-Fi in my house. So, when I need to resolve something, I do it at home and then leave. This means that when people send me messages, I only receive them when I have internet access." (Tamara).

This is the adaptability we refer to. In this context, several interviewees reported the difficulties they encountered and described the strategies they employed to circumvent the deficiencies in the technical infrastructure of the Quilombo Community. This discursive fragment, when analyzed as a pathway to understanding the community, reveals its features as hybrid, a place where horizontalities and verticalities stay entangled, and, because of that, individuals need to create adaptative strategies to improve their lives at a crossroad between two different circuits, the vertical and horizontal. The lexical selection '*when I need to resolve something, I do it at home and then leave*' demonstrates a routine that has been structured within the interviewee's specific complex adaptive strategies. Interviewees have developed well-defined strategies to carry out their work, especially when many of the messages sent from their homes have professional objectives. In other words, there is a noticeable disparity between the potential offered by the techniques at disposal and technical objects already possessed by the community's residents and the infrastructure available at the location.

Interviewee Tamara also mentioned that when she goes to a neighboring community for work, she has the Wi-Fi network passwords of the residents saved on her smartphone:

> "I think I have everyone's password there. So, when I arrive there, my phone starts vibrating because it automatically connects to available Wi-Fi networks. I switch from one network to another, and it keeps connecting." (Tamara).

The use of this adaptability exemplifies the naturalization of strategies to overcome the lack of technical infrastructure on the site. For instance, in an urban center, it would not be necessary to have Wi-Fi passwords from several residents of a neighborhood saved on her smartphone. Within the practice of communication via messages in an urban center, such a strategy is unnecessary. However, there is a small shift and adaptation in the practice of messaging when it is carried out in a place like the Quilombo Community.

One of the informants also discussed her strategies for using the Internet in rural areas. However, during the interview that the difference between Quilombo and the urban center of the city of Divinópolis was discussed, she made the following statement:

> "I think that if there wasn't internet here [in the Quilombo Community], I would be living there [in Divinópolis] because of ease. Everything I do today requires the internet." (Andreia).

If the space of the Quilombo Community were impermeable to layers of space with greater technical density, Andrea would be compelled to move to the urban center. In this way, adaptability creates points of permeability in the space and provides residents with strategies to avoid falling 'behind' in time. Interviewee Andrea and other informants highlight the tranquility of the community and say that, for this reason, they prefer it over the urban area of Divinópolis. Adaptability, by creating points of permeability, also helps to keep the Quilombo Community attractive over urban space.

The following discursive fragment complements the previous by demonstrating that the adaptability, which creates permeabilities in the space, helps the community to remain attractive to the residents.

> "Because before, it was truly a countryside. There was no leisure, nothing... Today, you have easier access to those amenities. In the past, it was all farmland. But not today. Today, Quilombo can't be described that way. It's a countryside that's not really a countryside anymore. We have fiber-optic internet. There's a health center providing various services, very good services. There's a butcher's shop, a bar, a snack bar, everything you need. Now, imagine this 25 years ago. These didn't exist. There was a small shop there... It only sold cachaça and beer... Then it progressed, and the community progressed along with the changing world." (Danilo Pedro).

The lexical selection '*the community progressed along with the changing world*' would illustrate the previous section on space permeability perfectly well. The decision to use this discursive fragment here is due to its ability to complement the informant Andreia's excerpt, reinforcing the idea that the technical innovations that have reached the community can make the space more attractive to residents. The 'workaround', a lexical selection used by the informant Lucas, can also be seen as the material result of a series of adaptative strategies. This teleological strategy relates to the desire and effort to keep the community space pleasant and functional at the same time, which maintains the tranquility of the rural environment alongside some elements of the urban environment.

A new temporality

As we said previously, horizontalities and verticalities have each of them different temporalities and rationalities. Consequently, a new technical apparatus of communication in any space changes its dynamics. Another element that emerged in all interviews is the communication dynamics facilitated by the use of the WhatsApp application.

> "[...] today you find out about the gossip instantly. In the past, you had to go to the bar to hear about it." (Lucas).

The arrival of the internet to the community brought about a distinct temporal experience. In the case of the previous discursive fragment, there is a new way of perceiving time concerning communication within the community. For Lucas, the demarcation between 'today' and 'before' is precisely the introduction of the internet in the community. The adverb '*instantly*' holds significance here, underscoring the interviewee's temporal perspective. Its use conveys Lucas's temporal orientation post-internet, as it can only be understood in contrast to the 'before'. It shouldn't be taken entirely literally. After all, does Lucas truly receive gossip instantly? What about the time lag between sending, receiving, and reading a message? In the Quilombo Community's context, the introduction of new technology has given rise to a new temporality.

Readers may question what sets the case of the Quilombo Community apart, as any technological introduction can potentially alter the temporal dynamics of any space. The key distinction lies in the significant gap between technical densities that each of the two sub-systems (vertical and horizontal) addresses. In cosmopolitan areas, technological innovation tends to integrate more seamlessly into the existing technical system and align more obediently with command centers (Santos, 2013). Conversely, in the case of the Quilombo Community, as observed, adapting to the local technical infrastructure requires adaptability, given its lower density of technology. Consequently, the transition from one temporality to another within the community occurs abruptly and is more perceptible.

For this reason, the roughness ('backward' techniques) of space persists, and the WhatsApp group alone cannot eliminate it.

> [...] "there is a surveillance [WhatsApp] group known as the Rural Community Base, affiliated with the Police, that establishes a network of vigilant neighbors. We communicate through it. There is a signal, a sound signal, similar to a horn, with a predetermined number of blasts that signifies we are facing a problem and require assistance. Then, another neighbor contacts the police. For instance, if a robbery is in progress at my home, this sound signal allows the neighbor to alert the police without the intruder being aware [...] and the entire community coordinates via WhatsApp until the police arrive." (Lucas).

Notice that the community has developed a hybrid strategy for self-protection. While they utilize a WhatsApp group to alert neighbors about community safety, they also rely on a 'rudimentary' device—a gas horn—as part of their security system. This serves as a prime example of various techniques coexisting and organizing themselves within the same space. The sounding horn represents a roughness, a form of technical residue within the space. Nevertheless, the protective strategy embraced by the community aims to maximize the number of actions within a shorter time frame, thanks to the internet access.

The proliferation of the internet and smartphones has solidified this new surveillance practice, coexisting with objects from previous practices. This new practice, in the context of temporalities, operates at a faster pace, reducing the response time in the event of a police incident. Each technique, space, and practice have its own temporal dimension, all coexisting within this place.

The new temporality introduced by the flow of information among community residents has made life more convenient. In this context, consider the following discursive fragment:

> "I have a matter to resolve, just like this cachaça I have […]. I have to pick it up in Divinópolis. If I get there and the woman isn't available to sell me the cachaça, I'll have wasted the trip. […] Nowadays, I simply take my smartphone and send her a message [...]. Imagine making a trip by truck or car from here to Divinópolis…" (Renato).

The messages exchanged among community residents help them coordinate their daily activities. In doing so, they experience a new temporality, highlighting how the adjustment of activities is linked to the way individuals perceive time. As evident from the previous discursive fragment, the interviewee has already adapted his routine and the organization of his activities, recognizing that any misalignment among these elements can result in a 'loss', as he states: '*If I get there and the woman isn't available to sell me the cachaça, I'll have wasted the trip*'. Could it be that this concept of 'wasting', as expressed in this context, existed before Renato started using the WhatsApp application?

It's impossible to contemplate a new experience of time without considering the influence of objects, techniques, landscapes, material configurations, and individuals' actions, all of which encompass physical aspects and immaterial mechanisms. Additionally, the concept of time can also be 'accelerated' by the capacity of space to accommodate 'foreign' elements from cosmopolitan layers, which have points of contact with highly technologically dense global areas.

Discussion: endorsing the conceptualization

Now that the discourse analysis has shown the strength of some dynamics we previously discussed in our theoretics, such as the dynamics of techniques in places, its connections with verticalities and horizontalities, and how space—with its objects and actions—responds to that, it is possible to advance in the analysis of consumption, its contexts, and its patterns. The next step is to endorse our conceptualization.

For each previous category of analysis, we have examples of internet consumption. In the first case, we see how internet consumption carved permeable points in space. Second, we discussed the individuals' strategies to consume internet throughout the lack of techniques in the Quilombo Community. Third, we discussed how the consumption of the internet leads the community to a new temporality.

As we argue, consumption is associated with its specific partition of space where it occurs. In order to explore and illustrate consumption and its dynamics inside the context of either vertical or horizontal partitions of space, we chose three practices existing in the Quilombo Community: community health monitoring, community surveillance, and use of social networks for leisure and entertainment (see Table 2).

Table 2
Examples of consumption patterns according to partitions of space

	Horizontal partitions of space	Partitions of space with undifferentiated directionality	Vertical partitions of space
Description	Objects and actions largely created in their own place of performance	In these practices, neither horizontalities nor verticalities are predominant	Objects and actions largely external to their place of performance
Consumption pattern	Solidary consumption	Anthropophagic consumption	Foreign consumption
Examples	Consumption of internet in community health monitoring practice	Consumption of internet in community surveillance practice	Consumption of internet for using social networks for leisure and entertainment in the rural community

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The division lines between vertical and horizontal partitions of space are not completely hard (Santos, 2017a). However, it is necessary to create some parameters to manipulate the constructs separately. We achieved it by means of looking at the origins of the techniques and technical objects present in the frames of analysis. For instance, in the practice of community health monitoring, health agents provide active care when it comes to monitoring patients, scheduling appointments, or, as was the case with the COVID-19 pandemic, organizing the queue for vaccination. This individualized and effectively supportive monitoring would be difficult to install in extremely dense urban areas. This horizontality, therefore, is organic to the place of the Quilombo Community and resists the vertical impositions of the health care management techniques. Thus, in this case, internet consumption is labeled as solidary.

Conversely, the use of social networks for leisure and entertainment is predominantly vertical, and the consumption of internet data, in this case, is foreign. In our archives and observations of social networks, we saw a series of activities with a cosmopolitan taste, such as the publication of short videos with Tik Tok dances. The images we have archived illustrate very well the hybrid characteristic of space, crossed by verticalities and horizontalities, a space full of roughness and advanced techniques. The practice of using social networks for leisure and entertainment is essentially vertical, and when it arrives in space, it "mixes" with some horizontalities. Imagine, dear reader, an Instagram user performing a dance of urban taste with cosmopolitan elements and, in the background, composing the scene, a pasture. Obviously, this kind of use of the internet and social networks was not created in the place.

In the Quilombo Community, community surveillance practice has no predominant directionality because both the sense of countryside community and the feeling of insecurity coming from urban areas were paramount to its conformation in the place. Therefore, internet consumption associated with the surveillance practice can be labeled as 'anthropophagic'. This practice involves various elements, including modern techniques like using the WhatsApp app as well as traditional methods such as alerting the neighborhood using a gas horn. It is a complex practice that utilizes both technical tools and the strong social bonds among residents. By being familiar with the neighborhood's daily routine, residents can easily spot any unusual activities. Unlike previous partitions of space that we categorized as horizontal or vertical, this one is more fluid and varied, making it challenging to label definitively. Therefore, we categorize its directionality as undifferentiated.

When using the term 'solidary' to characterize the type of consumption found in the research, we cannot have in mind what we usually understand by this term and transpose its meaning from one context of use to another. In creating the 'solidary' construct, we refer, within the research context, to a derivation of what circulates in the horizontal circuits of space. It is the same case of the 'foreign' term, which we want to refer to what derives from verticalities. When we chose these lexical terms, we were aware that there was a potential common-sense bias. For instance, it would be a mistake to think that solidarity (as we know in common sense) exists only in horizontal partitions of space.

At the end of this section, we want to summarize what we observed in the Quilombo Community through the lens of Milton Santos' theory. Here we show how the three categories found out in the field (permeability, adaptability, and temporality) contributed to creating the three consumption patterns that we used as examples to illustrate our theoretics. The materiality that arrived at the community in 2018 created the main permeability in the space, opening to the residents the opportunity to have an internet connection. By their adaptability, residents accommodate these techniques in the place. In some cases, they created new practices; in others, they changed older ones. The primordial telos that drove that accommodation was the desire for a new temporality to improve the quality of life.

The community health monitoring and the surveillance practices, in the view of the interviewees, improved a lot with the new technical objects and the use of the internet after 2018, because *'the internet interconnects these people faster'* (Lucas). In the case of consumption of the internet to access social networks and apps for leisure and entertainment, it was just in the context of an adoption of external techniques, showing a partition of space that is a mere verticality and a foreign consumption. So, in our case, when consumption is associated with the desire of individuals to transform traditional techniques to improve their lives, it tends to be either solidary or anthropophagic.

It is worth noting that the residents of the Quilombo Community appreciate internet consumption in general. In our interviews and observations, the complaints about the use of smartphones were just residual and were directed mainly to the foreign consumption, when interviewees related their friends or acquaintances consuming excessive screens and social networks.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Santos' work sheds light on the global dynamics of power between places that rule and places that do. According to his analysis, the Global North and multinational companies impose techniques on places in undeveloped countries. This phenomenon creates in places of Global South vertical partitions linked to command centers in the North. These verticalities exist together with horizontalities, which are partitions of space more contiguous and organic. As researchers of the consumption field, our analysis ends with discovering the role that consumption patterns have inside partitions of space. Solidary, anthropophagic, and foreign consumptions are linked, respectively, to horizontal, undifferentiated, and vertical partitions of space.

What we discovered in our research field is that the accommodation of the imported techniques was driven by the search for a new temporality to improve daily life in the community. This was followed by adaptative strategies accomplished by the residents because there was some gap between the existing techniques of the place and the newly arrived ones. In some cases, this accommodation does not change significantly the directionality of the partition of space, and it remains horizontal. But, in others, the partition of space shifts to hybrid. In the first case, the consumption associated with it is solidary; in the second, anthropophagic. The consumption pattern is foreign when it is associated with a verticality, like the case of the use of social networks for leisure and entertainment.

As researchers from the Global South, we think it would be of major importance to unveil if the consumptions we are investigating are connected to command centers of the North or if the actions of consumers in our research are solidary, conscious or unconscious acts of resistance, or a mere mimicry of a cosmopolitan taste. Look at the health monitoring practices in the Quilombo Community and how the solidary consumption of the internet improved the quality of life of the residents. When we asked our interviewees about the benefits of the internet to the community, they hardly mentioned the use of social networks or some kind of app. The main benefit in the interviewees eyes was the health monitoring and surveillance practices, which improved since 2018 with the incorporation of new techniques.

Furthermore, we think that this discussion can contribute to thinking about business practices more critically. How can we preserve horizontal practices of organizations that resist in certain places by means of a solidary consumption pattern? What strategies can we employ to prevent the impositions of business schools from erasing the authentic relationships practiced by small businesses, resisting the dictates of management schools of thought? Furthermore, how can civil society organizations, as seen in the case investigated by Lacerda (2021) in the Papua *favela* in Rio de Janeiro, withstand the impositions of verticalities and maintain their organic management?

To operationalize this research, we chose to focus on a small rural area, even though we were aware of other similar communities in the city of Divinópolis and others. This decision allowed us to narrow our empirical field to demonstrate our conceptualization. However, we encourage interested researchers to explore other similar fields or even urban spaces for further investigations.

Milton Santos' body of work is extensive, and in this article, we have only utilized a portion of it. We encourage other researchers to explore the rich Miltonian universe, either to build upon our findings or to rectify any potential errors we may have made. As researchers from the Global South, having a landmark that helps us to address our unique challenge is one of the reasons why we emphasize the significance of this work, potentially establishing a prominent research niche.

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DATA AVAILABILITY

The dataset supporting the results of this study is not publicly available.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors acknowledge the financial support of Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES).

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