

Target and Marketing: Representations About Upper Middle Classes Among Designers and Buyers in the City of Buenos Aires

Bárbara Guerschman
UBA-IDES

The aim of this article is to understand how the construct of social class categories were constituted by a group of designers and clothing-makers from small business enterprises located in certain neighborhoods of the city of Buenos Aires - from the appropriation of the vocabulary of an academic discipline and marketing practice. On the basis of my ethnographic fieldwork, I intend to give an account of the cultural dimensions given to the class on the part of these producers of clothing and other social actors involved in the field of fashion: financial consultants, publicists or journalists of fashion. I will focus particularly on dimensions related to consumption, tastes and styles of life and, from the analysis of such appropriation, I will try to understand which are the criteria and scales of measurement involved in the social stratification, as this issue is considered in the field of marketing.

Keywords: social class, marketing, social stratification, consumption, taste

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of December 2009, I resumed the ethnographic fieldwork that I had suspended in order to write my master's thesis, with the aim of continuing it for my PhD,¹ which is currently in progress. This involved, among several tasks, establishing communication with people who frequented clothing stores belonging to the group of designers for whom I carried out the thesis.

It was at that time that my mother-in-law told a friend of hers that I intended to interview women who belong to a *target group of young people and professionals, who are characterized by a high consumption capacity*. This friend's name was Angeles - whom my mother-in-law included within the indicated *target* - she was in the fifth month of her first pregnancy and worked in the management of a cereal marketing company located in the Puerto Madero area.² Thanks to the enthusiastic presentation of my research, Angeles agreed to meet with me a few days later at a candy store located beside her office. Smiling as we talked in a candy store, in front of the glass building where it was located, she said that she agreed to be interviewed because she considered herself an *irremediable consumer, who buys more clothes than she can wear*.

The target, which was pointed out by my mother-in-law, is an English term that means "target" or "objective" and describes the public to which a company intends to direct a product or service (Roberto Dvoskin, 2004: 43). As described, the term had become part of the language of women living in the city of Buenos Aires who had never planned a survey or engaged in marketing.³ Despite not being professionally linked to the marketing environment, they used a widespread expression within this field.

In addition to the target, there are several categories that journalists use in newspapers and business magazines to describe the work that companies perform when marketing their production: market, positioning⁴ or consumer profile.⁵ Regarding this use, Kalman Applbaum (1998: 324-326) highlights how this vocabulary has been integrated into popular interpretative schemes and wishes⁶. The Marketing influence in today's society also extends to the development of research, focus groups and qualitative and quantitative surveys, by consulting firms, which seek to identify the needs of consumer groups, the way to assign the price to goods along with their production and distribution.

My intention in this article is to give some idea of the dimensions of this influence. Specifically, I try to understand how a group of clothing designers -garments, shoes and jewelry pieces- appropriate the indicated vocabulary when trying to determine the social class to which the individuals who acquire the goods produced by them belong. Regarding the aforementioned vocabulary, I am interested in identifying how marketing constitutes the "upper-middle class" as a form of classification and how the use of such vocabulary influences the way in which designers conceive the differences between and within classes.

The interest of the social sciences in marketing has been materialized in studies aimed at understanding the performative effects of this discipline in the context of the market economy. In his work, Frank Cochoy (1998) - drawing on Michel Callon's (1998) concept of the "calculating agency"⁷ - seeks to understand how marketing specialists themselves have helped to institute this economy. Regarding the purpose of the work, I will focus on studying how professionals in this discipline and their followers perceive social classes in the market context.

I will start this section by introducing the designers I was in contact with during the field work. While some of them formally obtained the degree having graduated from careers offered at private and public universities and institutions, located in the city of Buenos Aires and the metropolitan area,⁸ others came from other disciplines: jewelry, architecture, plastic arts or advertising. As students, several of them worked in the product department of companies dedicated to the clothing production, as assistants to the product manager (the one who leads the section) in the process of making it.

Being fired or having resigned in the early 2000s, several of them started their own brands. To make the clothes under their brands, they used several workshops located in CABA at the same time: workshops for moulding, sewing, samples or shoemakers. Those who did not have their own premises for selling to the public, entrusted the clothing marketing to third party businesses in the form of "consignment."⁹ Others had their own stores located in CABA neighborhoods: Palermo,¹⁰ Recoleta¹¹ and San Telmo.¹²

On several occasions, I visited their shops: large, brightly-lit rooms with no decorations, carefully illuminated with spots, always set to music and flavoured with soft fragrances. From the walls hung metal hangers whose clothes never overlapped with each other. At the center of the shop, there was an area where the clothes that the customers tried on were located. At this point in the purchase, the saleswoman (sometimes customers served by two saleswomen) would intervene to suggest possible combinations of garments or would remain in silence observing the customers' route around the hangers. The intervention also involved recommending different ways to place the clothes on the customers' bodies and suggesting ways to pay for the selected items.

In addition to the opening of the sales space, supporting the brand itself meant participating - occasionally or continuously - in biannual fashion events held at CABA, such as the Buenos Aires Fashion Week (abbreviated *BAF Week*¹³), which consists of a series of fashion shows, corresponding to other events of the same duration, which take place in other cities around the world. In addition to the participation in fashion shows that lasted approximately twenty minutes, the events include exhibition booths in the central hall of the premises that are called *showroom*.

When describing who was buying their clothes, some designers laughed saying that they had never done formal market research to identify a consumer, but that they had done it in a rather intuitive way. Before my insistence, they pointed to an *ABCI* consumer, a social class they characterized as *upper middle class*. According to the NSE corresponding to 2006 (Socio Economic Level¹⁴) prepared by SAIMO (Argentine Society of Marketing and Opinion Researchers), the "AB" sector comprises professionals, owners or managers of medium or large companies. The educational level of these

professionals is equivalent to a full university degree and postgraduate studies. The same educational level is possessed by those professionals in the "C1" sector: managers of "SMEs",¹⁵ partners or owners of small companies. In the following sections I will find out who these customers are and how they differ from other types of buyers.

UPPER MIDDLE CLASSES AND SYMBOLIC LIMITS

How is it possible to determine who belongs to these classes, when they are located in a diffuse space between upper and middle sectors? In relation to this difficulty, Sherry Ortner (2006) describes the "middle class" as a "slippery" category in that it includes both the "lower middle classes" and the "upper classes". For Sergio Visacovsky and Enrique Garguin (2009), the class can be considered as a form of expert categorization established by the researchers, but also as an effective way to which the social actors themselves appeal to recognize themselves in the practices they develop in social life. These identification modes are classification operations that take place in a spatial and temporal context.

In their practices, actors classify while establishing social and symbolic limits that Michele Lamont and Virág Molnár (2002) define as resources to create, keep or alter institutionalized social differences among them. Symbolic limits constitute conceptual distinctions made by actors to classify objects, persons and practices. In her own ethnography, Lamont (1992) proposes to explore the categories from which the members of these classes - professional male graduates, managers and businessmen living in New York and Paris - define cultural values, as they establish distinctions between valuable and invaluable people; that is, between us and others. The author proposes to describe what she calls "upper-middle class culture" based on the analysis of "symbolic limits" which, in turn, implies moral, socio-economic and cultural limits. According to the author, occupation constitutes the central identity dimension of the men with whom she came into contact, which led her to determine occupation as the criterion defining the "upper-middle class" to which they belonged.

In line with the importance given to limits, Carrie Yodanis (2006) proposes to understand how a group of women create the category of "class" from their daily exchanges while talking in a cafeteria located in a rural town in the United States, based on observations made in the cafeteria and open interviews conducted with these women. Categories such as "upper class" or "upper-middle class" are specified by Yodanis based on the respondents' representation of themselves and other women.

In her article included in the compilation by Visacovsky and Garguin, Jon Tevik (2009) proposes to explore the categories used by members of a "professional middle class" in the city of Buenos Aires to define themselves as "professionals". According to the author, these male professionals were accountants, lawyers and engineers who lived in certain neighborhoods of the city considered "prosperous" according to the consumption and lifestyles developed in these places. Interested in the moral judgments involved in the consumption practices of informants, Tevik concentrates on the ethnic categories *-people of color* and *lower class*- related to these practices that involve social imaginaries associated with other social classes, lifestyles and tastes.

One of the main interests of the above-mentioned authors, as far as the upper-middle classes are concerned, was to point out the criteria by which social actors were considered to belong to a certain group, following a certain lifestyle or taste. In their work, the purpose of giving information on the native classifications established by these actors to identify themselves, in relation to others, prevails. The designers and buyers I interviewed established limits between groups of people - and the practices they carried out - but these limits were crossed by the belief that there is an objective market and divisions within it.

DEMAND AND SUPPLY IN MARKETING THEORY

In mid-June 2007, I went to a cafeteria located inside a mall in the Liniers¹⁶ neighborhood to meet Alejandro, who was the product manager of a company that sold women's¹⁷ clothing in the nearby

neighborhood of Mataderos. After a few minutes of the meeting, when asked how they were developing the seasonal collections, he indicated that one of the first instances to do so was positioning:

Alejandro: is what the producer wants people to think about his/her product, the image is what people really get, the positioning is when I am dressing such person with my garment, I take the campaign¹⁸ photo in such a place. Then through advertising and campaigning, I generate that halo around the garment and get certain people to buy the merchandise from me. First I study Marketing in order to know who will be able to buy it and at what price, what type of spinning I will use, with all that a campaign is launched placing my product in a sector, then all that halo is created around the brand and then it is maintained.

Based on what Alejandro and other sources said, I paid more attention when they pointed out marketing terms. According to Gilles Marion (2006), this discipline constitutes a practice as well as an ideology. It includes both actions such as "segmenting the market" or "positioning the product" as beliefs and representations shared by the professionals working in it with regard to the "market" and consumers: the latter choose goods or services in a more or less calculated way in a space where demand for various products occurs. In this context, human needs, which are considered inherently unlimited, and generalized desires, are likely to be satisfied by identifying concrete desires (Applbaum, 2007).

Assuming a correlation between product demand and supply, social classes constitute sectors that are part of markets that are characterized by their changing diversity, according to Marion. From the discipline's perspective, in all societies there are processes of social stratification based on occupation, income level or education (Alonso Rivas and Grande Esteban, 2004).

After talking about the positioning, Alejandro stated the importance of specifying the *spirit of the brand for which*¹⁹ they work, that is, who the user was and his/her age. The clothing design process," he concluded, "requires identifying the ideal target audience, delineating market sectors or niches. The latter were precisely the ones that were intended to be determined in the business rounds organized by "Argentina Exporta", an Argentine institution dependent on the foreign ministry that, in turn, carried out commercial missions in different cities of the world.

Flora worked in that institution organizing the round business meetings between buyers (multi-brand store owners from different cities) and sellers who, in turn, were the same designers who participated in exhibitions: in booths and fashion shows. After contacting her by email in November 2008, we had a meeting in her office located in downtown financial center of Buenos Aires, days after I had participated in a round of the "Puro Diseño" exhibition that takes place in the Palermo exhibition hall. In our conversation, which took place in one of the meeting rooms, I asked her what those niches consisted of:

Flora: the market niche is a very small place that each product occupies, that is, in general, designers aim at a niche because they make a low-scale production. The one that makes leather wallets, well, points to a market niche because they are wallets valued at \$200, they are not for everyone. In this occasion [*she refers to the round in which I participated*] Mary [*a designer's name*] was registered and she has products that are expensive and point to a niche, to an upper middle class or to an upper class directly, to stores where high prices are handled, I call that a niche.

I previously pointed out that marketing was a practice that involved beliefs and representations; it is also characterized by its performative nature, which means that it establishes expert discourses regarding the same phenomenon it seeks to describe (Callon, 1998; Cochoy, 1998; Araujo, 2007). In Callon's terms (2007: 316), performativity involves the impossibility of separating a discourse from reality that is described when the discourse itself contributes to conforming to it. For Marion (2005) Marketing is a knowledge form that conceptualizes, as well as configures the market economy as a scenario.

Regarding the segmenting in niches, the discourse that proposes to identify consumer groups for a leather bag or a dress, accompanied by actions such as the season campaign, institutes such division as an indisputable fact. How is this division established within companies dedicated to the production and marketing of fashionable clothing? In the following section I will describe how the division into classes is conceptualized by the aforementioned designers.

THE TARGET IS A WOMAN WHO...

At the beginning of the fieldwork, starting in 2004, I decided to investigate the characteristics of the consumers who acquired the designers' collections, the social classes in which they considered themselves to be part of. Over the months, I noticed that when I used the term "class", a large number of those interviewed pointed out the *target* of their customers. When I met with a designer called Lisa - in mid 2005, in front of her store²⁰ - I asked her directly to describe it:

Laura: The target, to be understood in terms of age, is women between 30 and 40 years old, that is the strength of my company, and then there is the socioeconomic target which is medium-high. 80% of my customers are professionals and this is important for brand communication.

Bárbara: What do you mean by communication?

Laura: When you work with those customers, you can play with some subtleties that they will see and understand, you don't have to be so literal in your communication. When you work for a high socioeconomic target, if you give them something simple and easy to read, you bore them, so you have to play with another feeling to attract their attention because they don't like anything, it's a very specific target that has a greater power to catch what you want to communicate, it's people that if you work with a visual artist, they are going to know how to value it, they are going to understand it and they are going to like it...".

In relation to the target, designers used to describe it with the statement: *it is a woman who* In this way, Lara - co-founder of the accessories brand "Unicornio"²¹ - referred to the customers who acquired her necklaces and earrings:

Lara: The target is a woman who is between 25 and 60 years old, our product likes women of very different ages, is a woman who has a very particular style, is interested in details, we always say that our accessories complete or highlight a style, whenever you wear an "Unicorn" garment it is noticed, do you understand? in that sense we feel it's exclusive, not all women like to be noted. Not everyone likes to wear necklaces, earrings, wallets or things that make them stand out and our intention is just to highlight every detail of a woman's look and we say it's exclusive because the materials we use are not conventional".

With the statement *-is a woman who-* the newspaper delivered at the door of the "Fashion Buenos Aires" held in the second half of 2004²² included a series of reviews regarding the participating designers stating the address and telephone number of their stores, ages, the fashion shows and prizes won in competitions in CABA and other cities.

Regarding Maria's collections,²³ it was indicated that this designer *made urban and pret-a-porter clothing*²⁴ *aimed at women between 25 and 40 years old, elegant, well-informed and aesthetically sensitive, classic and at the same time transgressive.* On the other hand, Pablo -architect-²⁵ developed three lines of jeans *aimed at modern women, included within a target that starts from the age of 20.* In the

designer Marta's profile,²⁶ it was mentioned the creation of a clothing line aimed *at a female public from 20 to 55 years old, who works and likes well-made clothes*.

At the end of 2009, I went to the store of a designer called Luciana, then located in Almagro's neighborhood²⁷. On that occasion, I did not meet with this visual artist who has been producing clothes since 2001,²⁸ but with her partner Valentina, whose main task - as she herself stated - was to promote the company in fashion events while getting wholesale and retail customers. When asked about the brand's target, the partner explained:

Valentina: "We aim at a consumer of class ABC1 that would correspond to a high purchasing power, A is very high, B is high and C1 is an upper middle class. Class A would be the people with a lot of money and family name, class B women are the women with a lot of money, that is, the "new rich" women and C1 is the upper middle class, ok?"

Upon my request to specify who was part of the *ABC1*, Valeria first referred to the women included in class A: holders of a recognized surname who consumed and appreciated art objects by virtue of a cultural knowledge with which they were supposedly endowed. Class B, on the other hand, comprised women who acquired clothing to imitate famous television stars. These are clients that Valentina characterized as *new rich and of lower class*,²⁹ people interested in *wearing brand name clothes* that could never belong to the class because they lacked the appropriate surname.

Within the capitalist class, the distinction between "old" and "new" money expresses an antagonism between "old aristocrats" and "new businessmen". Val Burris (2000: 364) refers to a hierarchy of entrepreneurs -which was published in the American business magazine *Forbes*- in which the "new rich" were individuals whose parents lacked a substantial fortune having started businesses with a capital of less than one million dollars. The emerging rich, on the other hand, inherited small shops or fortunes greater than a million. In addition to obtaining economic income, the author highlights the demand for honorary status and moral superiority by those who inherited family fortunes. Expressed in other times as blood or titles, this pretension currently involves obtaining a certain education and tastes which the "new rich" pointed out by Valentina lack.

Regarding the classification of fortune, Max Weber (2003 [1948]: 180) differentiated "class" from "status". The first designated a specific causal component in the life probabilities shared by a group of people, guided by the economic interest in the possession of property. The "status" consisted in the social estimation of honor; expressed in a lifestyle shared by those who belong to a social circle. Stratification based on status - which involves distancing oneself from others by looking for exclusivity - corresponds to honorary claims concerning the clothes they wear, the dishes they taste, or the performance of artistic practices. The aspiration to a certain lifestyle involves a voluntary selection of goods.

The food and clothing consumption constitutes one of the several instances where taste is expressed, according to Pierre Bourdieu (1998) for whom the "new rich" have a lifestyle close to that of the popular classes, independently of the economic capital they hold³⁰. The "new rich" - which the author points out as "pretentious" - oppose the former bourgeoisie on the basis of a deficient cultural capital expressed in their ways of eating, dressing and talking. It is a deficit that can be reversed through strategies aimed at concealing their origin as "newcomers" to the countryside (Vazquez García, 2002).

Pedro referred to³¹ the customers of his garments in a meeting at the office, located in the back of his only store. During the meeting, he recalled a customer visiting his store to request a dress for his daughter:

Pedro: the gentleman was an accountant but, in fact later we found out that he was an art collector, interested in design and had the need for his nine-month-old daughter to be baptized in a dress and have it made for me. It touched me to some extent because he wasn't someone, he wasn't a new rich man who needed to snob,³² you know?

According to Pedro, his customers were lawyers or notaries: *professionals with a certain economic and intellectual level and university education, people who studied and traveled*. At the same level referred to by Mariana, a few months after meeting with Pedro. She was a specialized marketing economist who offered financial and commercial advice to designers to develop their brands. The ABC1 - as he said during a conversation in his office located in the Recoleta neighborhood³³ involved a categorization based on income and education level, which included an upper class and an upper-middle class:

Mariana: when you talk about Argentina, there are many who have money to buy from designers, that's the truth, it happens that not all of them have the intellectual level to really know them

Barbara: Who has that level and who doesn't?

Mariana: I'm talking about the people, the Argentine woman who has a *cosmetic surgery* and goes shopping a lot and perhaps has money to buy but doesn't feel like going to the little shop in Palermo, until she finds out, once she finds out she will surely buy there.

According to B. Shamsul (1999: 87), being a "new rich" is a rubric of vague character both in analytical and empirical terms, which cannot be understood as being detached from a context. In relation to Southeast Asia where this author's work is framed, "the new rich" are those who gathered their fortune from the economic and industrial development produced in the region during the last decades. In his work about "new rich" in Russia, after the fall of the Soviet regime; Sergei Oushakine (2000) highlights the supposed illegal origin of the resources on which this group sustained its lifestyle, together with an ideology and aesthetics of excesses expressed in the amount of jewellery showed by men and women.³⁴

The discourses surrounding consumption delimit class fractions around the possession of wealth; some inherit economic capital along with a family title that legitimizes the obtaining of their fortune. While the "new rich" may have acquired a considerable fortune, they lack credentials to prove membership of a group and acquisition of a surname (Bourdieu, 1986).

Beyond economic resources, the classification of social classes according to marketing implies a "cultural capital" expressed in bodily dispositions, educational qualifications and cultural goods obtained in addition to a specific way or knowledge of acquiring them. Being included in the *ABC1* implies owning a title status regarding knowledge about the consumption of goods. It is also based on imitation by those who do not have the aforementioned title. In Georg Simmel's theoretical model (1905), imitation -referred to the integration of the individual in the community- is connected with differentiation. Both trends, from which the author explains how fashion works, are connected with the relationship that classes establish between themselves: the upper layers seek to differentiate themselves from the lower ones insofar as the latter try to appropriate their fashions.

Imitation is one of the principles from which the ABC1 is formed. According to the study carried out by a marketing consultant in 2007 "Mercado Premium en Argentina" about the sector of "higher purchasing power in Argentina",³⁵ luxury is associated with ostentation, excess and bad taste. Consequently, the term needs to be renamed to describe those "goods that are difficult to have, whose consumers possess a certain amount of knowledge when they purchase them." In contrast to the new rich, these consumers are characterized by being knowledgeable, distinguished and exquisite. According to an article published in 2005 in the newspaper "Clarín",³⁶ the AB sector comprises individuals described as "fashion-cool"³⁷ and "aspirational". While the former impose fashion trends, the latter seek prestige by acquiring branded goods.

The aspirational consumer is part of an upper middle class that, having risen socially, seeks prestige by attracting other people's attention to certify that something fits them. Using the example of a jewellery store, the chronicler of the article alludes to the new Russian rich who come in search of "gold skulls or diamond rings for every day of the week". According to a columnist quoted in the same article, luxury

implies "the abundance of things that are not necessary" and, as an expression of such abundance, he mentions an Argentine TV³⁸ diva who bought a leather coat for her dog. The group of rich Argentines includes, according to another article published in the newspaper "La Nación",³⁹ a traditional and a recent upper class. Just as the former includes individuals with recognized surnames who maintain a low profile, the others seek to exhibit the goods obtained by expressing an ostentatious lifestyle.

Marketing is a discipline in which a "social classifying function" works to differentiate individuals endowed with economic capital into different classes based on imitation as the behavior that binds them (Emile Durheim, 1971). Beyond the acquisition of money, the true imitation target is the tastes and styles of others which, according to Simmel, are always alien by virtue of differentiation as a mechanism to re-establish social distances. According to this author, classifications assume that objects or beings are gathered on the basis of a social sensitivity corresponding to moments of collective "effervescence" in which individuals grant things exceptional powers and virtues, attributing them a higher dignity in accordance with a social ideal.

It is important to ask what is the "social sensibility" involved in the description made by the designers concerning the women for whom they are producing. Expressed in another way, what leads designers and other agents involved in fashion to suppose that there are niches to which to direct their collections where these women are located. When interviewed by a journalist from a newspaper in Mendoza, a designer called Marina⁴⁰ describes the author's design - of which she considers herself a part - as a *market, a very small* niche in which garments are produced on a reduced scale and with high material and labor costs.

In order for Marina, Pedro, Lara and other colleagues to assume the correspondence between classes and the division into niches, they must believe in the market as something that exists outside them. In relation to the market, Callon (1998) identifies two dimensions, namely the economic and the social. The first includes disciplines and practices such as accounting and marketing. The second one implies an organization and organization forms that the author associates with the above mentioned calculation agencies. Regarding marketing, the discipline is supported by experts and specialists who contribute to shape the market economy with conceptual frameworks that legitimize the practice. Based on the belief that there are segments that can be identified, the idea of the ABC1 class, the targets or the women identified by the designers, is established. But what about them? how do they identify themselves?

THE PURCHASERS

In the middle of February 2010, I went to Vero's office, a human resources manager in her thirties, who worked in a company located in the downtown district, in front of Nueve de Julio Avenue. Over the course of the interview I asked her what social class she thought she belonged to:

Verónica: Are you talking about the ABC1 sector? [*I clarify that I am addressing any kind of sector*] to a middle, upper-middle class

Barbara: Why do you think you are included in that class?

Veronica: I have a half-economical and marketing-oriented vision of things, right? I include myself more than anything due to my purchasing power, the activities and places where I move around, I don't know, the consumption type, I have access to certain things that maybe other classes don't have, for example, I'm not going to waste time going to Salada⁴¹ or Avellaneda⁴² to buy clothes, I'm not interested in wasting time because I have the purchasing power to run to the mall and buy something at the last minute and give it away, if I were in another income situation or another circumstance, I would have to move around a little more because I wouldn't have enough money for other things

In the years following my meeting with Vero, I interviewed other women in their homes and offices. With one of them, called Giuli (at that time, she was 35 years old), I visited different dressing rooms

located in Santa Fé Avenue. During these visits, she would look at the stained glass windows and, if she liked any of the garments, she would go into the stores, select hangers, try them on and buy some of them by paying by credit card in installments, while discarding the rest. In the course of these tours (similar to those I noticed in my visits to retail stores), Giuli, who also worked as a human resources manager in a company located in Pilar, north of CABA, made comments regarding her tastes, the occasions in which she wore the garments (day and night, formal suits to go to the office or sportswear during the weekends), the relationship between price and quality, the way in which she dresses and the shirts that fitted her.

When these buyers were asked which social class they considered themselves to belong to, they all indicated that they were part of an upper-middle class or ABC1. This belonging is based mainly on their consumption. Paulina, an architect in her fifties, referred to this consumption when we were having lunch at a restaurant near Santa Fe Avenue at the intersection with Callao Avenue. From her perspective, she was part of an upper-middle class. She was not part of an upper class: *we are hard-working professionals who spend our household income, we have no property, neither my family nor my husband's have any money*. Nor was she part of a lower class due to her ability to pay private school costs for her only daughter, to pay for membership in a sports club, to go on vacation, to eat in particular restaurants, to attend plays and movies, and to buy clothes regularly.

For a few years and due to different occupations I interrupted the interviews with buyers that I resumed in 2016 when I went to Marisa's apartment located in Puerto Madero neighborhood. She was the sister of a friend of mine who had been selling real estate in that area of the city for many years. She lived with her children and her husband in an apartment in a modern building with a private security checkpoint where I had to leave my identity card in order to be allowed to enter. Once inside the apartment, the maid offered me a coffee that I drank while talking to her.

At a certain point in the interview, I asked her which class she considered herself to belong to. Marisa looked at me and then she laughed for a few moments and replied: *it is a politically incorrect question you are asking me, you know that, don't you? But I'm going to answer you anyway*. I laughed anyway and replied that it might be an inappropriate question but it was not the first time I had asked someone and received an answer. She added, always smiling, that social class was not a matter of considering oneself to belong or not to some sector but it constituted a sociological reality that transcended what she thought. In her case, she "ranked" in the ABC1⁴³ or upper-middle class because of her income level, her residence in a certain part of the city and the trips she made, at least twice a year outside the country. After the interview, I said goodbye and, with great kindness, she offered me to leave the car in the building's parking lot in case I wanted to interview her again.

To conclude this work, I could say that the approach to the upper-middle classes by designers and buyers necessarily implies a scenario in which these actors are guided by classifications imposed and instituted by a discipline. As Marisa considered it, the ABC1 was not a matter of affiliation but an objective reality from which she understood the division into social classes. Further developments of this work should then begin by describing how experts and gurus influence designers, brands and consumers, how this influence is applied in the development of seasonal collections, in business tours when you are a buyer. What Marisa remarked about is the impossibility of separating oneself from the economic and the economy in order to classify oneself and others.

At the same time, in a later stage of the work I would investigate the following questions: what happens if someone enters or acquires a garment from the designers and is not part of the established target? How would this eventual situation alter the designers' perception of their customers? At the same time, and considering that the buyers are considered part of the aforementioned target, are they necessarily considered part of the upper middle class by other buyers? How do buyers evaluate each other when they visit retail stores?

ENDNOTES

1. The purpose of this project was to understand how the clothing designer, graduated from design careers, is recognized as a clothing producer in the field of fashion in the city of Buenos Aires. In this sense, the

fieldwork included open interviews with designers whose stores are mainly located in the neighborhood of Palermo. Similarly, I interviewed officials from public and private institutions that provide financial assistance to these designers. At the same time, observations were carried out in these locations and public fashion and design events organized annually in the city of Buenos Aires where the latter participate. Finally, the field work involved reading fashion and design papers that included notes and articles referring to these producers. I would like to clarify that, both in my master's thesis and in the articles I have written, I have changed the names of the contributors and the trademarks.

2. Buenos Aires city neighborhood located next to the Rio de la Plata and close to the Microcentro. Created in 1989, the "Puerto Madero" corporation was responsible for developing it, which had fallen into disuse as a port. From this development, there was a commercial and real estate development of the neighborhood that currently includes offices, restaurants, bars and homes.
3. Expression of the Spanish language that refers to the marketing discipline.
4. It is called positioning to the concrete and definitive position that the product or service of a brand occupies in the mind of the persons to whom a certain offer or option is addressed, taking into account what other brands offer (Martín García, 2005).
5. This is the case of an article published in Fortuna magazine -an Argentine publication that deals with economic and business issues- regarding the undertaking of a designer in which it is highlighted that she carried out a "*market research*" aimed at "*positioning her brand*" in the fashion sector.
6. In this sense, the author highlights the action of the so-called "marketers" (in Spanish, *vendedores*) as "spiritual guides", spreaders of "public myths" and agents in the perpetuation of the belief advocated by a needs-oriented individual.
7. With this idea, Michel Callon (1998) refers to a type of knowledge that makes possible modes of action based on configuring the surrounding world as a calculation object based on tools and frameworks. The agents carrying out the calculation, which the author defines as a collective practice, establish a list of goods as well as a range of distribution of these goods.
8. In 1989, the career of Clothing and Textile Design (hereinafter referred to as DIT) was created at the National University of Buenos Aires (UBA). Afterwards, many educational institutions incorporated clothing and / or fashion production training into their curriculum.
9. Consignment" is the transfer of goods from the owner called "consignor" to another person who accepts the status of "consignee" in order that the latter may sell them in his/her name and on his/her behalf, with the former retaining the ownership title of what is sold.
10. Within Palermo, an area informally called "Palermo Viejo" underwent a significant urban transformation in the late 1990s. Previously, it was a residential area where there was a concentration of mechanical workshops, material pens and then architectural and advertising studios, art galleries, advertising, film and television studios. At the same time, commercial premises dedicated to the sale of clothing, decorative objects and furniture were opened along with the opening of restaurants and bars (Carbajal, 2003)
11. Recoleta is a residential neighborhood that owes its name to the convent of the Recoletos Descalzos (Barefoot Recollects), a community of Recollect friars founded in 1716. Located in the north of the city, the neighborhood is characterized by its buildings of historical value. Intensely visited by tourists, its streets are home to branches of luxury fashion houses as well as cafes and restaurants aimed at a public with high purchasing power.
12. Originally called "San Pedro González Telmo", the oldest area of Buenos Aires was initially populated by slaves and port workers. Located just blocks from the government palace, its streets now include colonial houses, old churches and antique shops.
13. Annual fashion event held to coincide with the presentation of the autumn-winter and spring-summer collections. The participants carry out fashion shows, on the venue of the event they set up stands where they exhibit their products. The BAF Week really shapes
14. According to the definition drawn up by the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare of Chile, the "socioeconomic level" is a category that designates a household, shared and extendable to all its members that includes income, education or occupation. In the category of "household", only one person is included, the members of a married couple together with their children or stepchildren.
15. Acronym used for small and medium enterprises, whose occupational and financial limits are set by each country or region.
16. Liniers is the name of a neighborhood located west of the city of Buenos Aires. It was named in honor of the Sarmiento train station. To the south, the neighborhood of Mataderos is located, where an exhibition bearing the same name is held.

17. This is the person in charge - inside a company dedicated to the production and commercialization of clothing - of coordinating instances related to such production: observance of deadlines for the delivery of the garments while directing the task carried out by modelers, cutters or ironers. Several of the designers I talked to worked with this manager before starting their own collections. Apart from working in the company, Alejandro was a teacher in a subject of the DIT career in which I also worked as an assistant.
18. The campaign consists of a photo and video session that takes place in a photographic studio or outdoor location where images of the garments in the seasonal collection displayed by a group of advertising models are taken. The result of this session is materialized in a catalogue called *lookbook* that the brands include in their website, along with the filming of the photo session.
19. The *brand* indicates the company dedicated to the clothing production. It should be clarified that designers consider themselves brands but differentiating themselves from *commercial* or *shopping brands*. This difference was based on the production volumes of models per season, the number of premises on the public road and malls and finally on the adherence to fashion trends expressed in forms of dress, colors and prints. From the designers' perspective, brands literally copy these trends while they adapt them to their style.
20. The store of this designer graduated from DIT and born in 1976 was located in a street next to Armenia Square, inside "Palermo Viejo". Around this square - where a trade fair is held during the weekends - there are restaurants, bars and other shops that sell clothing and decorative items. In 2005, when I met her, Lara owned a store in Palermo and two others located in two malls. She had also participated in BAF Week with fashion shows and showroom.
21. "Unicornio" is the brand of a studio made up of designers from different disciplines - graphic, industrial and clothing design - assigned to its company, whose exhibition space was located in the neighborhood of Nuñez, near the River Plate football stadium. Lacking a retail outlet of their own, other shops were responsible for marketing the products of this group, which had also participated in BAF Week. As a member of the studio, Lara was an apparel designer who graduated from ORT, a third-party institution offering a career in apparel design.
22. La Nación is a politically conservative morning newspaper in Argentina, edited in the Federal Capital, whose initial copy was published in 1870. The "Fashion and Beauty" supplement
23. Graduated from an art school in London, England, this designer founded her company in 2001. Currently, the company has eight stores, one of which is located in the neighborhood of Palermo and the others in malls located in the city of Buenos Aires.
24. French expression meaning "ready to wear" and refers to mass-produced garments based on standardized pattern making.
25. Graduated from the Architecture, Design and Urbanism Faculty (FADU) of the UBA. He has a retail space on Armenia Street, next to Maria C's store.
26. Graduated from graphic design at UBA, Maria studied at the same art school as her colleague, Maria Marta founded her company whose retail space is located on a commercial street in the "Palermo Viejo" area.
27. Almagro is the name of a neighborhood located in the geographical center of the city of Buenos Aires, bordering Palermo. The brand of both partners was called "Secta" and included women's clothing that was characterized by its elastic fabrics and multiple ways of placing it on the body.
28. Set of clothes created by a designer for a particular season of the year: autumn-winter and spring-summer.
29. This expression, whose usual meaning refers to chemical acids, describes people who are characterized by the display of objects considered to be of "bad taste". In his ethnography, Jon Tevik pointed to lower class (along with people of color) as a category used by its natives linked to bad taste and the working classes, regardless of whether they manage to move upwards socially. Even with this promotion, professionals identify them as new rich.
30. In this sense, Bourdieu (1998: 170) defines "lifestyle" as a system of socially qualified signs, a set of distinctive preferences. Taste also implies the propensity and aptitude for the appropriation of a certain type of objects and practices.
31. Graduated from the clothing design career at the UBA, Pedro exclusively manufactures black and white garments.
32. This expression -which was converted into a verb by the designer- comes from the term "snob" referring to people who imitated the manners and opinions of those they considered distinguished or belonging to the upper class.
33. Recoleta is a neighborhood of the city of Buenos Aires located in the north of the city, which stands out for its buildings of historical and architectural value, particularly the Cemetery and the National Museum of

- Fine Arts. Highly frequented by tourists, its streets are home to branches of important and luxurious fashion houses as well as cafes and restaurants aimed at a public with high purchasing power.
34. Regarding this excess, Oushakine takes up Thorstein Veblen's (1967) notion of "conspicuous consumption" for which individuals emulate consumption patterns of groups located at higher stages of the social hierarchy.
 35. S/N: "The new version of the Argentine premium market". Infobrand magazine. Marketing, branding and communication magazine. 22-10-2007.
 36. Heguy, Silvina: "Luxury consumption. How do rich Argentines spend their money". Diario Clarín. Sociedad Section. 26-06-2005. Clarín is a morning newspaper with the largest circulation in Argentina, published in Federal Capital.
 37. The term "fashion" means trendy and "cool" is the person who follows it.
 38. In its original meaning, the "diva" means a well-known opera singer. Later, it was expanded to singers of other musical genres. Nowadays, the term has gained a negative connotation, referring to women who are characterized by an exacerbated self-esteem and consumption as is the case of this figure.
 39. S/N: "The poorest Argentines have \$11 to spend per day". Diario La Nación. Economy Section. 13-10-2007
 40. Marina is a designer born in CABA, graduated from DIT, who started her own brand at the beginning of 2001, together with other designers I interviewed. She participated in several editions of the BAF Week. Currently, she owns a single store located on Gurruchaga Street, in Palermo neighborhood.
 41. Informal name for a fair located in the metropolitan area; in Lomas de Zamora district. It is characterized by the inclusion of booths where clothes and other goods are marketed whose design and logo reflect the goods of recognized brands.
 42. Avenue that crosses the Buenos Aires neighborhoods of Flores and Floresta whose stores sell clothing of all kinds, wholesale.
 43. Social class, according to Phillip Kotler and Gari Armstrong (2008), constitutes a type of social stratification that depends on variables such as the head of household's occupation, income and educational level. In this sense, the segment usually called "ABC1" indicates the upper and upper-middle social classes.

REFERENCES

- Applbaum, K. (1998). The Sweetness of Salvation: Consumer Marketing and the Liberal-Bourgeois Theory of Needs. *Current Anthropology*, 39(3), 323-349.
- Applbaum, K. (2007). Where Demand Meets Supply: Comorbidity and Channel Stabilization in the Creation of a Psychopharmaceutical Blockbuster. *Rethinking Economic Anthropology: A human centred approach*.
- Araujo, L. (2007). Markets, market-making and Marketing. *Marketing Theory*, 7(3), 211-226.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of Capital. *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (pp. 241-258). New York, Greenwood.
- Bourdieu, P. (1998). *La distinción. Criterio y bases sociales del gusto*. Editorial Taurus: Madrid.
- Burris, V. (1986, May). The Discovery of the New Middle Class. *Theory and Society*, 15(3), 317-349.
- Callon, M. (1998). *The Laws of The Market*. Blackwell. Oxford.
- Callon, M. (2007). What Does It Mean to Say That Economics Is Performative? In M. Mackenzie & L. Siu (Eds.), *Do Economists Make Markets?* Princeton University Press.
- Carbajal, R. (2003, November-December). Transformaciones socio económicas y urbanas en Palermo. *Revista Argentina de Sociología*, 1(1).
- Cochoy, F. (1998). Another discipline for the market economy: marketing as a performative knowledge and know-how for capitalism. The Laws of the Market. Blackwell Publishers. *The Sociological Review*.
- Cochoy, F. (2008). Calculation, qualculation, calculation: shopping cart arithmetic, equipped cognition and the clustered consumer. *Marketing Theory*, 8(15).
- Durkheim, E. (1993). *Las formas elementales de la vida religiosa*. Alianza editorial. Madrid.
- Dvoskin, R. (2004). *Fundamentos del Marketing*. Ediciones Granica. Buenos Aires.
- García Sánchez, M. (2008). *Manual de Marketing*. Editorial Esic.
- Lamont, M. (1992). *Money, Morals, and Manners*. University of Chicago Press.

- Lamont, M., & Molnár, V. (2002), The study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28, 167-195.
- Marion, G. (2003). *Marketing Dynamic: New Identities, Co-Optation and Fragmentation*.
- Marion, G. (2005, July 4-6). *Marketing Ideology: legitimacy and Legitimization*. 4th International Critical Management Studies Conference. Critical Marketing Stream. University of Cambridge, U.K.
- Marion, G. (2006). Marketing ideology and criticism: Legitimacy and legitimization. *Marketing Theory*, 6(2), 245-262.
- Martín García, M. (2005). *Arquitectura de marcas*. Editorial Esic.
- Ortner, S. (2006). *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power and the Acting Subject*. Duke University Press.
- Oushakine, S. (2000). The Quantity of Style Imaginary Consumption in the New Russia. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 17(5), 97–120.
- Rivas, A., & Grande Esteban, I. (2004). *Comportamiento del consumidor: decisiones y estrategia de marketing*. ESIC Editorial. Madrid.
- Shamsul, A. (1999). Cultural Construction of New Rich. In M. Pinches (Ed.), *Culture and Privilege in Capitalist Asia*. Routledge.
- Simmel, G. (1999). La moda. En: *Cultura femenina y otros ensayos*. Alba Editorial, Barcelona.
- Tevik, J. (2009). Imaginarios de gusto y moralidad en los fashionscapes porteños. Prácticas y discursos de distinción entre la clase media. In S. Visacovsky & E. Garguin [comps.], *Moralidades, economías e identidades de clase media. Estudios históricos y etnográficos*. Editorial Antropofagia. Buenos Aires.
- Veblen, T. (2008). *Consumo ostentoso*. Editorial Miluno. Buenos Aires.
- Visacovsky, S., & Garguin, E. (2009). Introducción. In S. Visacovsky & E. Garguin [comps.], *Moralidades, economías e identidades de clase media. Estudios históricos y etnográficos*. Editorial Antropofagia. Buenos Aires.
- Weber, M. (2003). Clase, status, Partido. en: *Ensayos de Sociología contemporánea*. Planeta Agostini. Barcelona
- Yodanis, C. (2006). A Place in Town: Doing Class in a Coffee Shop. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35(3).