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Only for You!

Brazilians and the Telenovela Flow

By Thaís Machado Borges

Doctoral dissertation. By due permission of the Faculty of the Social Sciences, Stockholm University. To be publicly defended on Friday, 06 June 2003, at 10.00 a.m. Nordenskiöldsalen, Geovetenskapens hus, Frescati, Stockholm University.

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Abstract

Only For You! Brazilians and the Telenovela Flow is an anthropological study of the reception of a popular and commercial mass-media product – Brazilian "soap-operas," or *telenovelas*. Telenovelas are broadcast throughout Brazil six days a week, at prime-time. They attract an audience of more than forty million viewers, every day.

Initially, this study began with a simple question: how do viewers engage with telenovelas' representations of the Brazilian society? Ethnographic fieldwork (conducted during several periods between 1995 and 2000, in the state of Minas Gerais, southeastern Brazil) amended and complicated this question. It became clear that in everyday life, outside of the context of immediate telenovela reception, people not only talked about the contents and characters of these programs; they also talked extensively about subjects and products that derived from or somehow entangled with the telenovela plot. The term *telenovela flow* is used in this study in order to describe and visualize this crucial part of informants' receptive experience.

The research presented in this study explores the contents of the telenovela flow, tracing and identifying some of its articulations and interspersions, and relating them to contemporary Brazilian society. It also examines the way the telenovela flow hails and interpellates *You*, the viewer, to interact with it.

It is argued that the telenovela flow presents hierarchies of gender, sexuality, race and class as embodied and naturalized, at the same time that it presents tangible and immediate ways to transcend or at least circumvent those very hierarchies. Viewers, in their engagement with the telenovela flow, evaluate, scrutinize, and search for ways to reinforce or transform their positions as subjects within Brazilian society.

Only For You!

Brazilians and Telenovela Flow

Only For *You!*
Brazilians and Telenovela Flow

Thaïs Machado-Borges

Stockholm Studies in Social Anthropology

2003

Only for You!

Brazilians and the Telenovela Flow

Doctoral Dissertation

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Com lembranças gostosas de
minha avó querida, Ida Spini
Machado, com quem me
diverti tanto durante a minha
infância e adolescência,
assistindo e comentando as
intrigas, as modas e o *glamour*
de várias novelas.

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Acknowledgements

"If you were going to write a telenovela, what would it be about?" This is a question I asked my informants and a question I tried to answer several times.

Could the many phases of this project become the stuff of a popular telenovela? Seen retrospectively, I can clearly identify moments of suspense, humor, thriller, desperation and happiness. I would have to add some extra touches of glamour to the plot and cut all the very long scenes when some of its characters sit in front of their computers, staring at their screens hoping to be blessed by divine inspiration. "A Different Kind of Doctor" (provisory title) could be a somewhat successful telenovela addressed to a restricted and well-delimited group of viewers.

I want to take the opportunity to thank several of the people who would certainly become main characters in my imaginary telenovela. Without their very real and concrete help this study would not have come true. Like in a Brazilian telenovela, these people belong to different, sometimes interspersing groups.

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Introduction

Altair, a sixty-year old man whom I had known from the time I was a teenager in Brazil, was keen to help me with my research on Brazilian telenovelas. "It will be interesting for you to look at the seven o'clock *telenovela*, *Thaïs*," he told me. "There is a rich woman there, who wanted to be artificially inseminated. She wanted a blond baby, with blue eyes. She goes to Canada – or was it the United States – to have this insemination done. And then she gives birth to a couple of black babies. It's interesting to see what people will say about it. You see, many people say that there isn't racism in Brazil, but in fact..."

In the waiting room of a private hospital:

Barbara [A middle-aged, white, upper-class woman]: I'm worried. It's been several hours since the doctor said we would be able to see the babies, and so far nothing has happened!

Eugênio [A white millionaire in his early thirties. Barbara's adopted son and the ex-husband of Teodora, the mother of the babies]: Calm down,

The weekly magazine

Contigo! (22

April 97) has the following headlines and

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mother! I've understood that the babies are well. It was a complicated birth.

Caio [A white young publisher. Eugênio's best friend and Teodora's admirer]: I'm so nervous that it's almost as if I was the father of those children! I'm dying to see their little faces.

[...]

The doctor comes in.

Eugênio: Doctor!

Barbara: Is there any kind of problem, doctor?

Doctor: No, the babies are fine, thank God. But I want to talk to Teodora, because I want to know if there was any change in her request at the sperm bank. Do you know anything about it?

Eugênio: No, Doctor. What is this all about?

Caio: My God, these things never work!

Doctor: Would you follow me to the nursery?

The doctor points to two black babies.

Barbara: I can't believe it!

Eugênio: How?

Caio: What now?

Clarice [A white university teacher. Barbara's adopted daughter and Caio's girlfriend]: Does she know about it?

Inside Teodora's room, at the hospital. Teodora's maid, a working-class white woman named Sexta-Feira [whose name means "Friday"] is also there:

Caio: She is waking up.

Teodora [An upper-class, white woman in her

story:

Salsa e

Merengue's last episode:

Eugênio goes back to

Teodora;

Valentim and

Madalena get

married; Vasco

conquers

Adriana;

Heitor is

murdered by

Lídia; Kelly

Bolla and

Antonio

united by their

baby; Anabel

decides to stay

with Rodolfo;

Jacynta

marries and

becomes a

countess.

Moda Moldes

No.150, 1997.

Debora Bloch

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early thirties]: Where are my children? Barbara, are they beautiful?

Barbara: They are beautiful! Caio, Eugênio, would you please say something?

Caio: Eugênio knows how to say these things better than I do.

Eugênio: Teodora, the babies are healthy and they are wonderful. But there is a small detail...

Teodora: What detail? Tell me Eugênio! What happened to my children? Have they got all ten fingers? Did anyone count their fingers?

Caio: Yes, Teodora. Stay calm.

Teodora: But why are you looking at me like that? What are you hiding from me?

Clarice: I'll be waiting outside.

Teodora: Caio, please tell me, or I'll go and find it out myself!

Eugênio: Teodora, when you were inseminated, did you choose the donor?

Teodora: Yes, I did. I wanted certain physical traits. I wanted the donor to be a Canadian. I've always liked Canada. What happened, Eugênio? Why all this mystery?

Barbara: There is no mystery. The donor might well be Canadian, but his physical traits are not.

Teodora: What do you mean?

Sexta-Feira: Let me explain: *Dona* Teodora, there might have been a mistake when they sent you "those things." I think they might have mixed the labels.

Caio [to Sexta-Feira]: Stop it!

Teodora: What are you saying Sexta-Feira? I don't understand!

Sexta-Feira: What I'm saying *Dona* Teodora, is that the things that they've sent to you might be Canadian, but the donor was a black man (*um*

is the cover of this issue, and she is wearing the clothes that her character Teodora wears in the telenovela. The headlines are: "Imitate the *novela* – 35 hot outfits from the telenovela *Salsa e Merengue* – for all ages!" *Mulher de Hoje* No. 206, 1997. "Marcello Antony [the actor who plays Eugênio] – portrait of a talented

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negão). You've given birth to two wonderful mulattos, *Dona Teodora*.

Teodora: Mulattos? What do you mean?

Eugênio: Teodora, the babies are not as you are thinking. They are different.

Teodora: But how? Do they have wings? Do they fly? Is that it?

Sexta-Feira: Calm down, *Dona Teodora*. The nurse is bringing the babies for you. They are so beautiful! [...]

In the hospital room. Teodora is carrying both babies in her arms.

Teodora: Oh, they are so beautiful! Look at their hands, Clarice. So wonderful!

Sexta-Feira: There was just this tiny problem, wasn't it, *Dona Teodora*? The babies came with the wrong color.

Teodora: Sexta, don't talk like this about my children!

Caio: I wanted to say that they look like someone, but I really can't.

Teodora: But they look like me! They are just like me. They have my traits: big mouth, vivid eyes...

Caio: Imagine if you hadn't told the truth to Eugênio. He would immediately find out that the babies were not his.

Teodora: But they're almost his. They have his blood. If it wasn't for Eugênio's blood transfusion, the babies wouldn't have survived. [...] [Looking at the babies]: At least, my darlings, you won't have problems with freckles!

Teodora's home, later. She is sitting in the living room and talking to Caio:

leading star:

From the moment his face appeared on television he conquered, in record time, the attention of fans and the recognition of the critique.

Now, he wants to succeed in theater and film."

Debóra Bloch advertises for a hair dye product in *Caras*, a variety magazine –

"How to get to Hollywood in twenty minutes."

Debora Bloch does a

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Teodora: Caio, I need to ask you a favor. I want you to buy me some books. I want to read Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and Nelson Mandela. I want the best of black literature!

Caio: But why Teodora?

Teodora: Because I need to prepare myself to raise these children! They will never be chic if they live in a world full of prejudices. I don't want my children to be afraid. I admit, I wasn't prepared for this caprice of the destiny. But, if God wanted it that way, it's because He is telling me something. By the way, I want also a copy of the Afonso Arinos¹ law.

Caio: Come on! Are you crazy?

Teodora: No Caio, I know the jungle we live in. My children will not pay for that. All my money will at least serve a good cause. Caio, I will sue anyone who makes a joke, or even insinuates anything. [...] I'm afraid, Caio. I think I'd better send my children to Europe, to Switzerland. I'm afraid of raising these children here in Brazil.

Caio: Your children won't be happier living in a boarding school in Switzerland.

Teodora: Really? I have my doubts... [...]

Teodora is in the living-room, talking to Lidia.

Teodora: My insemination didn't turn out the way I expected.

Lidia [An upper-middle class, white business woman]: What happened? Any problem with the babies?

Teodora. No, they are fine. The problem is the world out there. You see, the donor, the Canadian that I requested for the insemination...it turned out that he is black.

television
commercial for
a project by
the Ministry of
Education.

Debora Bloch
does a
television
commercial for
a hair dye
product.

Debora Bloch
does a
television
commercial for
a brand of
bread.

Debora Bloch
does a
television
commercial for
a brand of
sanitary-
napkins.

TV Folha 10
November 96:
"Debora Bloch

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Lidia: Black? But you asked for a blond type, with blue eyes and physical traits that would remind those of Eugênio's! I remember that.

Teodora: Yes, I did. But there was a mistake, an exchange, I really don't know. A caprice of destiny. My children are mulattos. And according to Sexta-Feira, who is showing herself to be an expert on the subject, they will get darker.

Lidia: Oh, really?

Teodora: Wait a minute! You don't have to look sorry! They are simply wonderful, my dear! Beautiful! I'll tell you something, Lidia. I've found out that I was a warrior without a cause. I fought against windmills. Now, my darling, with my children, I'll have a good cause to fight for!

(Extracts from dialogues in *Salsa e Merengue*, 1997, *Globo*)²

lends her
humor to
Teodora in
*Salsa e
Merengue*."
TV Folha, 10
November 96:
"This is
Teodora"

A Passion for Telenovelas

Brazil is a country with one of the largest television audiences in the world. 87 percent of the households in the country have at least one television – in sheer numbers, this means 39 million TV households. Even outside the household, televisions are everywhere – in cities it is impossible to pass a street without seeing a shop, a bar, a restaurant or an office with a television. Through communication satellites, reception dishes and retransmitting ground stations, television reaches people even in the most remote villages in the country. What is broadcast on all these television sets? Soccer, of course, is shown more or less continually. News and entertainment programs also make up an important share of television's programming. But one of the most broadcast – and most watched – types of programs is the subject of this book – the television *novelas* (which I, in accordance with academic writing on this topic, will often refer to with the word *telenovelas*³).

Telenovelas are broadcast throughout Brazil six days a week, in the afternoon and during prime-time. They attract a daily audience of

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more than forty million viewers. Individual telenovelas are able to catch and maintain the attention of a faithful audience during their duration of six to eight months. Unlike U.S. or British soap-operas that may last for many years, a Brazilian telenovela ends after one-hundred and fifty to two-hundred episodes, and is immediately substituted by a new one. Their plots can conform to real life seasons and holidays, and often, they introduce fashions and products, approach polemical subjects and comment upon (in a realistic or parodic way) contemporary social issues.

Telenovelas are a common point of reference among Brazilians: *Roque Santeiro* ("Roque, the Saint-maker," 1985-6, *Globo*) was seen daily by over seventy million people. The characters of Porcina and Sinhozinho Malta became points of popular reference. Especially Porcina, an exuberant and vulgar widow, the fiancée of Sinhozinho Malta, fired the public imagination: pink ribbons, plastic necklaces, scarlet lipsticks, all of which were considered by specialized fashion magazines as bad taste accessories, came to be in vogue – "the Porcina style." A few days after the inauguration of this telenovela, an outbreak of a cold virus was named after Porcina – "one that takes everybody to bed" (Herold 1988).

Popular telenovelas can temporarily stop the country. In 1990, Rio's carnival parade was delayed by almost one hour because the last episodes of the telenovela *Tieta* ("Tieta," 1989-90, *Globo*) were broadcast at the same time as the parade was supposed to start. In another case, newspapers and television programs devoted numerous articles and features describing how people were captivated by the final episodes of *A Próxima Vítima* ("The Next Victim") a prime-time telenovela broadcast in 1995 by the *Globo* network. This telenovela had become a hot conversational topic, discussed not only within the intimacy of the family but also in workplaces, schools, universities, bars and restaurants. The identity of the murderer in this telenovela, only revealed in the very last episode, became the motive for many bets among an excited audience. *Globo's* prime-time news broadcast, the *Jornal Nacional*, interviewed the author of the telenovela, who explained that many possible endings were filmed and nobody but he knew who the murderer would be. Suspense was nationwide.

Telenovelas also play an indisputable role in the distribution and consumption of fashions and goods. In 1992, one could watch a

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character of *Globo's* telenovela *Pedra sobre Pedra* ("Stonewall," 1992, *Globo*) using a cellular telephone, even before this telephonic system was inaugurated in southeastern Brazil, the most industrialized and developed region of the country. In 1995, *Explode Coração* ("Bursting Heart"), also broadcast by *Globo*, introduced personal computers and the Internet to television audiences.

Telenovelas popularize different regions of Brazil, making some of them into tourist attractions. Such was the case for example, of *Pantanal* ("Pantanal," 1990, *Manchete*), which brought to the screen the western part of the country. Northeastern Brazil became popular because of telenovelas such as *Tieta* and *Renascer* ("To Be Born Again," 1993, *Globo*) whose plots took place there.

There are also striking examples of the interplay between telenovelas and Brazilian politics: in 1989, the telenovela *O Salvador da Pátria* ("The Savior of the Nation," 1989, *Globo*), featured as one of the main characters a charismatic, uneducated rural worker, who became involved in national politics. There was a striking likeness between this character and Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, (the first viable left-wing presidential candidate who came from a modest background and who, in the 2002 elections, became Brazil's president). Since democratic presidential elections were going to take place at that same year as *O Salvador da Pátria* was broadcast (i.e. 1989), Lauro César Muniz, the author of this telenovela, was pressured by politicians and network producers to change the plot and the character, in order not to influence the real presidential elections (*Veja*, 12 February 97). There are other examples of the relationship between telenovelas and the Brazilian state. The telenovela *Explode Coração* ("Bursting Heart," 1995, *Globo*) launched a campaign to help parents find their missing children. Real mothers were given roles in the plot to ask characters/viewers for help in their searching. And indeed, many children were found (*Veja*, 29 January 97). In 1996, two senators of the Brazilian Congress, Mr. Eduardo Suplicy and Mrs. Benedita da Silva made a special guest appearance in the telenovela *O Rei do Gado* ("The King of Cattle," 1996 -7, *Globo*). Playing themselves, they attended the wake of the fictive senator Caxias and praised his political agenda, even as they offered their condolences to the senator's widow. In 2000-1, the telenovela *Laços de Família* ("Family Links," 2000-1, *Globo*) approached the theme of medical transplants and launched a

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national campaign to promote and encourage the donation of organs (*Veja* 10 January 01). This same telenovela discussed also the stigmas of prostitution and sexual impotency. Questions related to gender, sexuality, race and class are an omnipresent feature of Brazilian telenovelas and a continual theme for academic and popular debates.

Central Questions

I began my research in Brazil with a simple question: how do viewers engage with telenovelas' representations of the Brazilian society? During the course of my fieldwork, this question was both amended and complicated as I realized that when viewers/informants mentioned *novelas* in their everyday errands and conversations, they were not only referring to the plots of these programs, but also to images, advertisements, magazines and diverse commodities that interspersed with the plots of telenovelas. In this study, I use the term *telenovela flow* in order to more accurately describe what people were actually receiving and commenting upon.

This book, then is about people's reception of the telenovela flow. I investigate how the telenovela flow interpellates viewers – how it calls them, addresses them – and how viewers, in their turn, answer or do not answer to these callings. Through an analysis of my ethnographic material, I investigate the place of the telenovela flow in the making of gendered, sexualized, raced and classed Brazilian subjects. Such an investigation contributes to contemporary debates all over the world on the relationship and impact of media upon people.

The ethnographic material presented here is heavily gendered. As anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod (1999:94) suggests, melodrama-inspired television serials such as soap-operas and telenovelas, because of their "focus on the emotionally laden interpersonal domestic world," have been associated to a women's world. Indeed, as we shall see, Brazilian telenovelas do place great emphasis on interpersonal relationships and emotions, and they focus heavily on strong female characters. In this sense, they are a "woman's genre," and, as Hamburger (1999) has documented, they are produced with a female target audience in mind.

Researchers have pointed out (Fadul 1993; Hamburger 1999; Vink 1988) that Brazilian telenovelas reach whole families, including men.

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Be that as it may, during the course of my fieldwork, I noticed that men were much more reticent in openly talking about telenovelas than women were (this issue will be discussed below in my section on methods). Therefore, the research presented in this study privileges a focus on women – the way they circulate and are represented in the telenovela flow, and the way they engage, as viewers, with the messages coming from this flow. This does not mean that men are completely absent from this study. But when male informants expressed their opinion about telenovelas and acknowledged a certain engagement with the telenovela flow, they often referred to and focused on the women that circulated in the telenovela flow (their bodies, their beauty, their ways of behaving).

As far as race, class, and sexuality are concerned, I want to make it clear that throughout this study "race" is understood broadly to mean a social construction that refers to ostensibly shared physical traits that are, in turn, hierarchically differentiated and arranged along social, economic and cultural vectors of inequality and power (cf. Harrison 2002). When I use terms such as "middle-class," "upper-class," and "lower-class" in this study (in Brazilian Portuguese: *classe média*, *classe alta* and *classe baixa*), I adopt a native perspective. Class, according to local criteria, is usually understood and measured in terms of profession, education, income, consumption habits, and possession of goods.⁴ "Sexuality" here, following Foucault, is approached as socioculturally located discourses that bring together bodies, pleasures, desires, and power in particular constellations and social formations (Foucault 1976, Rubin, 1984, Stanton 1992).

The research presented in this book emerges from and contributes to three main bodies of literature: media studies' debates on the relationship between viewers/readers and popular culture, studies on contemporary aspects of the Brazilian society, and anthropological approaches to media.

(1) The work of cinema studies scholar Robert Stam (1989) and Cultural Studies scholar Valerie Walkerdine (1997) regarding people's reception of popular culture has influenced my own understanding of the reception of the telenovela flow. These two authors argue from different perspectives (Walkerdine has examined the role of popular culture in the making of feminine subjectivity among young, working class girls in England, and Stam has explored Brazilian films) that there

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has been a polarization in the debate regarding the relationship between readers/viewers and popular culture: people are either described as (a) revolutionary and resistant in their readings of popular culture, or (b) as duped, unable or unwilling to make critical readings and concrete demands on the real world. In my own fieldwork in the Brazilian city of Belo Horizonte, I came to share those scholars' dissatisfaction with these polarities. The people who became my informants, and their ways of relating to the telenovela flow, cannot easily be characterized as resistant; but neither are they duped or uncritical. In this book, I argue that my informants' engagement with the telenovela flow is part of everyday practices that, together with a range of other activities, come to shape and constitute their positions as subjects within Brazilian society.

(2) The second body of literature within which this study is situated foregrounds the connection between popular culture and socio-cultural issues played out in contemporary Brazil. Is the telenovela flow a mass- and commercial product that commodifies Brazilianness by emphasizing certain kinds of symbols and social interactions and ignoring other, less commercial features? Or is it, like Geertz (1973) once suggested for Balinese cockfights, part of a popular tradition that should be approached as meta-social commentaries of real life?

Throughout this book I examine these positions and show points where they conflate: the telenovela flow might be approached as meta-commentary, as instances when contemporary Brazilian society "thinks out loud about itself" (Mukerji and Schudson 1991:23). Questions related to gender, sexuality, race and class, as well as explicit social and political commentaries on contemporary Brazilian life are an omnipresent feature of Brazilian telenovelas. An analysis of the telenovela flow and the ways it is received by diversified audiences throws light on contemporary and relevant social issues that are played out in Brazil. My goal here is to catch and foreground the interplay between the ways social hierarchies⁵ are represented in popular culture and the ways they are thought of and played out in everyday life. Or, as film and media studies scholar Charlotte Brunsdon (1995:59) puts it, if "the personal is the political," then "the media construction and representation of personal life becomes fascinating and an urgent object of study."

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Approaching the telenovela flow as a popular mass product also enables us to investigate the issue of consumerism – the ways telenovelas incorporate commodities into their plots, the ways these commodities are connected to Brazilian life-styles and the ways people relate and "incorporate elements of the sponsored imagery into their everyday interpersonal relations" (Lull 1986:607). Does consumption of telenovelas and of the commodities introduced by them play a role in the shaping and understanding of one's social positioning as a subject in Brazilian society?

(3) The third body of literature within which this study is situated consists of theoretical tools that allow me to analyze the interplay between people and imag(in)ed ways of being a Brazilian subject, as presented through the telenovela flow. I adopt a cross-disciplinary theoretical framework that combines literary theories of communication (Bakhtin 1970, 1981, 1986; Stam 1989) and social theories of subject formation (Althusser 1971; Butler 1997). In addition, my approach to the reception of the telenovela flow is grounded in contemporary anthropological understandings that situate popular culture within a socio-cultural context. As mentioned above, messages and images found in the telenovela flow could, on the one hand, be approached as meta-commentaries about the Brazilian society. On the other hand, the telenovela flow could be approached in terms of mass produced representations, objectifications and commodifications of Brazilian culture (Herzfeld 2001; Landay 1999) that help viewers in the construction of their own representations of reality (Dickey 1993, quoted in Herzfeld 2001), by showing them "rich, ever-changing possible lives" (Appadurai 1991:197). Following Herzfeld (2001: 305), I will be arguing that media "creates both the awareness of actual and potential differences, and the 'stuff' with which to imagine those differences."

Through ethnographic fieldwork, anthropology discloses how lived local experiences are interlinked with national and transnational images, tendencies and ideas – the commodification and production of bodies, the emphasis on beauty, malleability, use of artifices and seduction – all of which abound in the telenovela flow and can be considered as part of transnational tendencies. Ethnography allows me to illustrate how such themes are related to a national, Brazilian context and made body through individual agency. Ethnographic fieldwork

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also allows me to understand that reception of media products is a dialogic process of repetition, circulation, appropriation and reiteration; one that is anchored and framed by socio-cultural contexts and subjective backgrounds.

Throughout this study, I blend theoretical discussions with actual case material gathered during longer and shorter periods of fieldwork, conducted between 1995 and 2000, in the state of Minas Gerais, southeastern Brazil. In 1995, I spent three months in the city of Ouro Preto doing preliminary fieldwork. In 1997, together with my husband and daughter, I spent six months in the city of Belo Horizonte. After this period of fieldwork, I have returned to Belo Horizonte for shorter periods (generally a month), once a year. All in all, this means I have spent ten months (in addition to my entire childhood and adolescence) in Belo Horizonte.

Fieldwork / Homework

Born and raised in Belo Horizonte, I came to Europe as a student at the age of nineteen. The years passed, I got married and made a home in Stockholm, Sweden. As a Ph.D. student, I finally decided, after much consideration, to return to Belo Horizonte and make it the setting for my research. By choosing to conduct fieldwork at home, I was aware that I would have to deal with previous, biased, subjective knowledge from the field I was about to investigate. How should I handle this question? Das (1995:40) touches upon the problem I was experiencing:

Do they [native social anthropologists] earn membership of the anthropological community on condition that they renounce (not simply transcend) all forms of knowledge acquired through membership of the society of which they now write?

Das (1995:40) answers this question by referring to the "Otherness that resides within each of us": even "native" anthropologists are not always insiders within their own communities – class, education, and gender are also important aspects in the definition of what it is to be an observer from within or from the outside. I came to position myself as both an insider and an outsider in relation to my field. How could I ever pretend that I did not know anything about telenovelas? How

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could I ignore the fact that during my childhood and adolescence I laughed, worried and gossiped about these programs, their actors and characters? I decided to take advantage of my previous knowledge about telenovelas. My point of departure had to be that of an insider. Another concrete manifestation of the way I turned my previous, "native" knowledge to my advantage was that I started asking my old friends and acquaintances whether they knew anybody I could interview (this technique is called "snow-ball sampling"). I thus used their networks of acquaintances and relatives as informants. I rented an apartment in a central, middle-class, residential district and started finding ways to participate in the daily life of people living in this neighborhood.

Like Brasília, Brazil's capital, Belo Horizonte was planned and built to become the capital of the state of Minas Gerais. The city was inaugurated in December 1897. It has today a population of approximately three million people. The neighborhood where I rented an apartment in 1997, during my most extensive period of fieldwork, will be referred to as Issavas.⁶ This neighborhood is constituted by residential buildings and commercial establishments (boutiques, shopping malls, bars and restaurants).

During my walks up and down the neighborhood, I saw television sets almost everywhere: post-offices and banks had television sets installed in a corner of the wall so people standing in line could see (but often not hear) a telenovela re-run, commercials, a film or a talk show. It was very common to see television sets in bars and restaurants. Some of them were placed in a discrete corner, sometimes behind the counter (in this case they were for the staff, rather than the customers). In other cases, huge television sets could be strategically placed facing the bar's tables. Some bars had a "sport profile" and their television sets were only tuned in to sport channels. Others, generally "family" restaurants, such as pizzerias, were tuned to *Globo's* channel (the largest TV network in Brazil, and the fourth largest in the world). Sometimes, while running errands, I could follow, walking from block to block, the results of a soccer game or the dramatic quarrels of a telenovela couple. I just had to turn my head towards the places where people were sitting (or were supposed to sit) and there was a great probability that I would find a television set. It is important to keep in mind that television sets were not only domestic commodities exclusively found

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inside households – television sets were, through commercial establishments, disseminated throughout urban spaces, throwing their sounds and images towards pedestrians.

Rua Nabuco,⁷ the street where my husband, daughter and I lived in 1997 crosses almost the whole Issavas neighborhood and links it with the center of the city. There were many buildings under construction in that part of *rua* Nabuco where we were living. The few houses that still existed in that part of town (most people agree that it is no longer safe to live in houses) were being demolished giving way to residential buildings, protected by gates, alarms and security guards. The constant noise of hammers, tractors and pneumatic drills was in the background during our whole stay.

This street was the arena for innumerable social contacts. Shops or *boutiques* of the area had often foreign names, such as *Lumière*, *Ghost Teen* (a shop that sold clothes for young people), *Cellular Point*, *Tool Box*, *Bambino*, and *Café Croissant*. These boutiques, through their names and, very often, through the products they sold, offered passersby a flair of exoticism: many of these establishments proudly announced that they only sold "imported products." No matter if these products came from China, Paraguay or Miami, they played on an anxiety commonly expressed among middle- and upper-middle class Brazilians, about their identities as people coming from a "third world," and their desires for a "first world" life style.⁸ Well-dressed people purchased the most varied goods, and strolled on the sidewalks, window-shopping. Less fortunate people, who earned their living by working as maids, babysitters, cleaners, street cleaners, car washers or car watchers (people who watch over cars parked on the street so that they won't be broken into), or even destitute people who sat on sidewalks and begged for money or food, also circulated in this same landscape. The Issavas neighborhood is quite a wealthy part of the city, but its social composition is far from being homogeneous. This is one reason why I found it appropriate to make the neighborhood the basis for my fieldwork. As will be discussed in the chapters that follow, I noticed that previous studies on the reception of telenovelas focused on the way poorer women with lower levels of education related to these programs. I was curious to investigate how wealthier viewers – viewers who actually had more economic possibilities – related to and engaged with the telenovela flow. My intention was to investigate how people

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from different social backgrounds (who nevertheless shared a common geographical space) responded to the calls of the telenovela flow.

The building in *rua* Nabuco where I rented an apartment had twenty-one floors with four exactly identical apartments on each floor. This building was not different from the other buildings in the neighborhood when it came to security measures: in addition to the gates that marked the limits between the public street and the private home, the entrance of the building was controlled by a doorman (who, by the way, had a tiny, black and white TV set on the top of his desk). Visitors had first to press a button to get the main door opened. Then, they had to present themselves, explain their errands and name the apartment they were going to visit. The doorman would then call someone in this apartment to check if he could send the visitor up. Once inside the building, the visitor would have to choose an elevator – should she/he take the *elevador social* or the *elevador de serviço* (literally and respectively, the social and the service elevators)? Apartments were inhabited either by couples and their small, adolescent or sometimes grown up children or by young men and women who studied or worked in Belo Horizonte and whose parents lived in smaller towns. With very few exceptions, almost all the households in this building, employed some kind of servant – either a cleaner who would come once, twice or three times a week, or a maid (*empregada*) who would either work as a "live in" employee or come and go from work everyday, or a "live in" babysitter (*babá*), or a washer (*lavadeira/passadeira*).⁹

Once inside an apartment, one could notice that the duality social/service or, as Brazilian social anthropologist Roberto DaMatta (1978) would put it, home/street, organized the internal spatial division. There were two entrance doors – one led directly into the living-room (*a entrada social*/ social entrance) and the other led directly to the kitchen and *área de serviço* (a room with tiles on the floor and walls, usually where the laundry is done and where cleaning products and brooms are kept). Quite close to this area there was a tiny bathroom and a bedroom built to be the "maid's room" (*quarto de empregada*). As Brazilian social researcher Suely Kofes (1993) explains, domestic employees such as maids are a part of the everyday life of Brazilian middle- and upper-class families. People who work as maids are generally lower-class, often non-white women. Their presence in

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the everyday life of these families (they are the ones who clean, cook, wash, and sometimes take care of the children) creates affective bounds between themselves and their employers. As Kofes suggests, many families say that their maids are "almost" family members. Complete membership in the family is, however, not allowed. It is not unusual for maids to be denied the rights to receive guests, throw parties or participate as guests in important social occasions. Maids and employees share a common but segregated arena.

In my own building, the segregated space of the apartment building provided me with an opportunity to recruit my first sample of informants: I noticed there were some women, who went to the building's playground every morning, from around 8:00 to 10:00 a.m. with children about the same age as my daughter. I acquired a daily routine and started to frequent the playground between these hours. This way, I established contact with seven women, six of whom worked as live-in babysitters and were aged between fifteen and thirty. The seventh woman was a thirty-year-old, part-time university teacher, mother of two children.

I also decided to become a member in one of two private sport clubs that existed in the Issavas neighborhood.¹⁰ The club in which I became a temporary member had approximately 1600-2000 members. With the exception of the athletes, who sometimes lived in distant points of the city, people who frequented this club lived in the immediate neighborhood. Those practicing a sport were there during the week. Others, either families with small children or men and women of all ages, frequented the club on weekends, to play, swim, socialize, drink beer and play cards. Besides the official club members, there were many people who went to the club to work: coaches, cleaners, doormen, bartenders. I decided to become a club member because the sports club presented a possibility for socialization and contact with possible informants. At the club, I established contact with seven more women – three adolescents (aged between fourteen and sixteen) and four adults (aged between twenty-five and forty). I did not formally interview any of these women, since I was mostly interested in observing if (and how) telenovelas were mentioned or connected to the physical exercises we did together: was there an implicit or explicit idea on how an ideal body would look like? I carefully listened to the most varied chit-chat,

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and wrote down everything I thought could have some relevance for my research.

Finally, the third and most diversified sample of informants was the one created, as I have already mentioned, with the help of my acquaintances' personal networks. The thirty-one persons included in this group have varying ages (from fourteen to eighty), are both men and women (even though women were more numerous – twenty-four women and seven men), with different occupations. While I met some of these people on a more sporadic basis, sometimes just for an interview or a conversation about telenovelas; I saw others in this group on a more regular basis. These informants could closely follow (some of them with a certain amusement and/or amazement about my research interests) my steps during fieldwork, and I could also closely follow them. Some of them kindly told me about articles or interviews they had read on newspapers or seen in television about a subject they thought could interest me. Others were more concerned about when I was really going to interview them and what kind of questions I would ask.

During this period of fieldwork I gathered a total sample consisting of forty-five people –thirty-eight women and seven men. The age of the informants spanned between fourteen and eighty-years (the majority of them, i.e., thirty-two persons, were aged between fourteen and forty-five). Informants occupied different social and economic positions: thirteen of them had truly low incomes (about 100 reais a month, which corresponded to 100 US dollars), three of them had originally low incomes but had ascended socially and economically, and the rest of them, i.e., twenty-nine had higher educational levels and higher incomes (see appendix 1 for an index of informants).

There are several reasons why there are many more women than men in my sample of informants. First, as I have already mentioned, the men I approached were reticent to acknowledge any kind of interest in telenovelas. They were "not interested," "didn't have time to watch them," "didn't have an opinion about them," even though many of them seemed to be aware of the general intrigues of present and past telenovela plots. Telenovelas were assumed to be "women's business," at least in the context of formal interviewing.

A second explanation as to why my sample of informants has more women than men lies in the nature of fieldwork itself. A great part of

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my fieldwork was conducted in domestic spheres – the playground, the club, shops and boutiques. These were, during daytime, places where women and children from different social backgrounds predominated. My "snow-ball" sampling led me to be introduced to some potential (often not so willing) male informants, but the majority of people I got to know through old acquaintances' networks were women.

Finally, in 2001, I tried to compensate the predominance of female informants by asking a teacher at a private university in Belo Horizonte to have her undergraduate students in Communication to write an essay about telenovelas. I suggested three themes from which they could choose: "Telenovelas: education, alienation or plain entertainment?" (*Novelas: educação, alienação ou só diversão?*); "Telenovelas: Brazil on the TV-screen?" (*Novelas: Um Brasil na TV?*); "Is Beauty for Show? Bodies and Eroticism in Telenovelas" (*O que é bonito é para se mostrar? Corpo e erotismo nas novelas*). I also asked them to write down their age and their parents' occupation. The order in which I presented these themes here indicates the students' preferences in picking a theme for their essays. I obtained a total of one-hundred-eighty-three essays written by one-hundred-seven women and seventy-six men, aged between seventeen and forty years (with a majority aged between eighteen and twenty-two), coming from different social-economic backgrounds (see appendix 1). Besides bringing to the fore the opinion of men, these essays helped me to test whether the analysis of my qualitative material could be extrapolated to include a larger group of people.

Methods of Research

Throughout fieldwork I combined two major techniques to collect data: interviews (semi-structured and informal) and participant observation. Participant observation was a way to obtain access to the moments when the telenovela flow spontaneously intercepted with viewers' everyday lives. It was also a way to get access to tacit, "obvious," and unspoken meanings which did not emerge from interview situations. I could take advantage of my position as an insider and an outsider in relation to the field: because of my Brazilian background and because of the naturalness with which I spoke

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Portuguese, sometimes my informants forgot that I was not a full-time resident in Brazil. So people would talk to me about a special event or a *novela* – punctuating the obviousness of this event with expressions such as "you know" –, taking for granted that I knew what they were talking about. My ignorance of certain things an insider should know, and the way these things were presented to me as being so obvious,¹¹ made explicit what normally would go without saying.

After having spent some weeks in the field, I had the impression – to my dismay, it must be admitted – that people did not talk much about telenovelas in their everyday lives, nor did they seem to have the same burning interest for this subject as I did. I started to question my research plans: did telenovelas really occupy such an important place in Brazilian society as I had assumed they did? How could I go on asking people about telenovelas, gender, race and class if they never really talked about such issues? I could, to a certain extent, coerce people into talking about what I previously had decided would be interesting, but would that be a faithful description of reality? Having all these questions in mind, I decided to observe, during the first months in the field, how telenovelas were spontaneously mentioned in people's everyday interactions and conversations. By taking such a standpoint I moved my focus away from the moment of broadcast (or from the places where immediate reception might take place) to streets, parties, and everyday conversations and interactions. One of the main problems I had to confront as a consequence of my approach was the often implicit character of the correlation between people's everyday lives and the telenovela flow. In the analysis of the case-studies I will present here, I interpret certain events in the lives of my informants by juxtaposing them to a detailed description about the way these informants related to the telenovela flow (their explicit statements about their watching practices, and observed behavior about moments when the informants drew explicit connections between their actions and the telenovela flow). Ethnographic fieldwork enabled me to situate particular events within broader and more complex contexts, and thus bring implicit relationships and associations to the fore. The major contribution of this perspective lies exactly in the examination of these spontaneous, often implicit, tacit or ignored intersections between everyday life events and the telenovela flow.

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The focus on the non-immediate reception of the telenovela flow made me realize that for the most part, informants' commentaries and references to telenovelas were fragmented and mixed with other topics and thought associations – an event taking place in a telenovela could trigger a discussion about an everyday, "real life" subject. This expression "real life," in Portuguese, *vida real*, is frequently used in everyday talk about telenovelas. People make a distinction between telenovelas and real life. For instance, one could say: "In real life, the actor Tony Ramos is married." The expression "real life" is used to emphasize a contrast between everyday life and the fictive world of telenovelas. It is also used to refer to viewers' own experiences and is synonymous with "everyday life."¹² So, telenovelas' landscapes, characters, names and persons could be used to comment upon real events, places and persons. And the other way around, everyday events could also lead to associations about fictional characters and situations. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, this change of focus made me realize that viewers did not only talk about telenovela plots, their contents and characters, they also talked extensively about subjects and products that derived from or somehow intercepted with the telenovela plot. They talked about the *telenovela flow*.

While participant observation gave me access to spontaneous commentaries about the reception of the telenovela flow and about its intersection with everyday life, I found that interviewing, on the other hand, allowed me to obtain more specific data about these same subjects.

I conducted, twenty semi-structured interviews, most of them (seventeen) with women, aged from fifteen to forty-five. I booked a time and a place and arrived with my tape-recorder and with a list of questions that I intended to ask. This questionnaire was open to modifications and extensions, depending on the answers I got from my informants. The questions I asked were structured around three main topics:

- 1) Practices of watching and familiarity with the genre – the aim here was to situate telenovela watching within the context of everyday life: what are the informants' favorite telenovelas; how many telenovelas a day do they watch; what leisure occupations do they have; do they discuss the telenovela with others; what is a good telenovela in their opinion; do they think that telenovelas are all the same or very

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different; can they recognize a kind of character that appears in most telenovelas; etc.

2) The relationship between fiction and reality, and the reception of the telenovelas' messages: do characters in a telenovela resemble people that the informants know; do the events portrayed in a telenovela resemble events of the everyday life; would they like to be characters in a telenovela; etc.

3) Reflections and representations on gender, sexuality, race and class – the aim here was to investigate how social hierarchies of gender, sexuality, race and class are experienced by the informants in their daily lives and how they are portrayed in the telenovelas: what is the sex, age, marital status and occupation of the interviewees; how do they discuss ethical and aesthetic values – what is beautiful and what is not; what is good or bad taste; what are their fears and aspirations – notions about "good" and "bad," "right" or "wrong," "happiness," etc. (See appendix 2 for interview questionnaires).

All these interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. Even if these interviews were important for my material, since they made people talk almost exclusively about subjects of my own choice, I felt that my informants often gave "official" answers to my questions, as if there was a correct or even a politically correct way to respond. Many times, what people told me when the tape-recorder was on totally contradicted things they had previously said, in a more informal situation. So, in the last months of fieldwork, I decided to change my approach. I started inserting the interview questions I had formulated into informal situations and conversations: for instance, if someone mentioned anything about the outfit of a telenovela character, I took the opportunity to ask this person's opinion about the impact of telenovelas: "How do you like this fashion?" "Are television and telenovelas a good fashion guide?" My idea was that people would thus talk in a more spontaneous and informal way about subjects that were directly related to my research interests. Using this technique, I came to gather many "structured conversations" on the most varied subjects. I also applied this method with some of the persons I had interviewed previously, since I interacted with them frequently in the course of my daily routine. These structured conversations (most of them were written down later, not tape-recorded), combined with participant observation, contain much of my best information.

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In 1997, during the six months period I spent in Belo Horizonte, eleven telenovelas were broadcast (ten of them at prime time, i.e., between seven and nine o'clock in the evening) from Monday to Saturday, on four commercial channels. Of these eleven telenovelas, two were imported from Mexico, and the rest were produced in Brazil. TV *Globo*, the major producer and exporter of the genre, broadcast five telenovelas daily. I videotaped several episodes from different telenovelas, several television programs, and gathered newspapers, magazines and articles about telenovelas. Most of the ethnographic material I gathered during this period contains references to four particular telenovelas:

- *Maria do Bairro*, a Mexican telenovela that tells the adventures and misadventures of Maria, a poor woman who marries a rich man. It was broadcast by *SBT* at 7:30 p.m.

- *Xica da Silva* ("Xica, the Slave Who Gives Orders"), a Brazilian telenovela about Xica (pronounced 'Sheeka'), a female slave in Minas Gerais who became one of the most powerful women during colonial times. It was broadcast by *Manchete*, at 9:00 p.m.

- *Salsa e Merengue*, an urban, Brazilian telenovela that focused on varied kinds of interactions between people coming from different socio-economic backgrounds in Rio. It was broadcast by *Globo* at 7:00 p.m.

- *A Indomada* ("The Untamed Woman"), a telenovela with touches of magical realism about people living in a little town in northeastern Brazil. It was broadcast by *Globo*, at 8:30 p.m. (see appendix 3 for a brief description of all telenovelas mentioned in this book).

Outline of the Chapters

In the following chapter, Chapter 2, I trace the history of Brazilian television, discuss television's role within Brazilian society and look at the place of telenovelas within Brazilian television.

Chapter 3 frames the theoretical arenas within which this study is situated. It summarizes previous research on media and focuses particularly on anthropological research about Brazilian telenovelas. After this summary, chapter 3 discusses the possibility of moving beyond not only the analysis of moments of immediate television

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reception, but also the idea of delimited and circumscribed television programs. Here I present and discuss the idea of a *telenovela flow* as a concrete way to broaden the perspective of reception studies. This chapter approaches the relationship between culture and subjects, as it poses the question: what impact do particular representations (such as telenovelas) exert upon people? In addition, this chapter introduces two key concepts – *dialogism* and *interpellation* – that will be used throughout this book as tools for analyzing the ethnographic material on reception.

Chapters 4 through 7 lay out the central thesis of the book. I argue that informants, in their engagement with the telenovela flow evaluate, scrutinize and search for ways to reinforce or transform their positions as subjects within Brazilian society.

Chapter 4 analyzes the telenovela flow. It traces the articulations and interspersions between telenovelas, other television programs, other media and the most diversified commodities. Furthermore, it explores the contents of the telenovela flow in terms of interpellations – calls that are addressed to *You*, the viewer.

Chapters 4 and 5 are linked by a short Intermezzo which bridges the telenovela flow and people situated on the other side of the television screen. This Intermezzo is an introduction to the analysis of my informants' reception of the telenovela flow. It asks the question: do viewers turn around and answer to the calls coming from the telenovela flow?

Chapter 5 explores the various ways my informants related to the interpellations coming from the flow. Departing from interviews and case material, this chapter looks at the interplay of social hierarchies, the telenovela flow, physical appearance and consumption focused on the body. A central question discussed here is the place of the telenovela flow in the production of national, female subjects.

Chapter 6 continues to explore the ways informants engage with the telenovela flow. It connects the idea of production of national, female subjects with love and social hierarchies. This chapter has three main objectives: first, it approaches the way the telenovela flow depicts love, seduction, and feminine strategies as possibilities of transcending – or at least circumventing – hierarchies of gender, sexuality, race, and class. Secondly, the chapter investigates the interplay between desirability and social hierarchies as they are played out in the telenovela flow and

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discussed by my informants in everyday-life situations. Finally, the chapter demonstrates that informants appropriate, circulate and reiterate the telenovela flow's fantasies of love, seduction and feminine strategies, as a way to negotiate the gap between imagined and possible lives.

The conclusion (Chapter 7), pieces together the themes that keep reemerging throughout this study: it examines once more the intricate relationship between the telenovela flow and Brazilian society, and the main aspects that informants focused on in their reception of the telenovela flow. This last chapter argues that informants' engagement with the telenovela flow reflects a will to be recognized as a subject within the Brazilian society.

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¹ The Afonso Arinos' law dates from 1951 and prohibits discrimination because of color, race, sex or marital status of a person.

² All translations in this book are mine, unless otherwise noted.

³ *Novelas* is the word that Brazilians use to refer to these programs.

⁴ According to the Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistics (IBOPE), in 1997, upper- and upper-middle classes were estimated to have a monthly income varying between R\$5,894 and R\$1,614 (this corresponded, at the time, to the same amount in American dollars). Middle-class was estimated to have a monthly income of approximately R\$844, and lower-middle and lower-classes' monthly income varied between R\$435 and R\$229. In 2000, the IBOPE presented on their Internet homepage the main criteria used to classify Brazilians according to their socioeconomic background. Internet users could answer to an on-line questionnaire prepared by the IBOPE and find out about the class to which they belonged. A list with ten items – color TV, radio, bathroom, car, vacuum-cleaner, washing-machine, VCR, refrigerator, freezer, and even maid – was presented. The questionnaire respondent was given a certain number of credits (from zero to five) for the quantity of items she or he possessed. The educational level of the respondent was also evaluated: five credits for those who had a university degree, three credits for those who had an incomplete university degree (and so on), until one came to zero credits for illiterate people. The possession of more than four color TVs corresponded, in terms of credits, to a university degree. 29-34 credits indicate that the respondent belongs to the upper-class; 20-24 credits indicate that the respondent belongs to the upper-middle class; 11-16 credits indicate that the respondent belongs to the middle-class; 6-10 credits indicate that the respondent belongs to the lower-middle class; and 0-5 credits indicate that the respondent belongs to the lower class.

⁵ Following Hess and DaMatta's (1995) readings of Dumont (1970), throughout this study I use the word hierarchy to designate:

[T]he result of built-in prejudices that do not allow some people to attain some positions in society by virtue of their 'blood,' skin color, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or some other way of distinguishing people that has nothing to do with ability. (Hess and DaMatta, 1995:6).

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"Hierarchy," according to this definition, and still following Hess and DaMatta (1995), refers more to an *ascribed* rather than to an *achieved* form.

⁶ I use a pseudonym here in order to protect the identities of my informants.

⁷ Also a pseudonym.

⁸ "Third World" ("*terceiro mundo*") and "First World" ("*primeiro mundo*") are expressions, which I noticed were very used among the persons I met within this neighborhood. They were used antagonistically, "third world" being very pejorative and meaning backwards, uncivilized, dirty and messy, and first world meaning often chic, rich and luxurious. I have two examples from my field to illustrate that.

One day, crossing a very trafficked street, I was very surprised by a car driver who did not stop at the red light. Another passerby commented the driver's behavior: "Isn't it typical third-world?" (In Portuguese: *Ê, terceiro mundo!*)

I was talking to a middle-aged man about the "Diamond Mall" – a fashionable and luxurious shopping mall that had recently been inaugurated. He told me half jokingly that he really liked this mall because when inside of it he could "scent the flair of the first world."

⁹ A cleaner would usually charge R\$25 to R\$30 *reais* for a day's work (one real corresponded, in 1997 to approximately one American dollar). The salary of live in servants (such as *babás* and *empregadas*) varied largely, from the minimum pay established by the government (at the time of the field it corresponded to R\$110 reais/a month) to its double or, in more unusual cases, its triple. In other words, one was usually better paid if one worked by the day rather than as a "live in." On the other hand, most of the households wanted their employees to work full time and receive a salary at the end of the month.

¹⁰ To become member in a club, one has either to buy a share (that might cost from one thousand to four thousand American dollars) or thereafter pay a fee of fifty to two-hundred dollars/month. Or, with the help of an acquaintance who is a member of the club, one can loan a share – and then pay a monthly fee (this was my case). There are other kinds of memberships that allow access to the club for youths who practice a sport. The fee in this case is lower and individual and access to the club is limited to weekdays. Otherwise, the prices mentioned above included membership of a whole family.

¹¹ Examples: When I asked a woman what her dog's name was, she answered me: "Linda Inês, *you know*, from 'Pedra sobre Pedra'." Or: "She is, *like this, you know*, a real *perua* [i.e., a turkey, *perua* is a slang to indicate a woman with bad taste]." In Portuguese: "Ela é assim, *sabe*, uma *perua* de verdade!" For one who was not acquainted with the slang "*perua*" it was hard to know what the woman in question *really* was like.

¹² Mitchell's (1999: xiii) definition of representation as a set of images, meanings and social practices that promote a distinctive apprehension of the really real, has several parallels with the way my informants distinguished between telenovelas and "real life." A commentary made by one of my informants illustrates that: "We watch this program and we laugh so much: oh, those people are crazy! Then, we suddenly realize that real life is exactly the same thing. Then we don't laugh as much, anymore."

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I Have to Watch!

Brazilian Television and Telenovelas

Joana: They showed it on TV. The scene of a man being lynched. He was a burglar. He entered the house...took a hostage...it was the house of some rich people. In the south... Do you remember Paulo? I couldn't sleep for days! They lynched the man. He was on the way to the police station...I can't understand human beings! Later, when the man was not even moving anymore, they threw gasoline over his body and set fire to him! And the man burned and moved like a worm...They showed it on television! I was feeling bad for more than one month.

Paulo: I told you not to watch!

Joana: But I have to watch! I have to watch to understand how people are. There's no use avoiding it...These kinds of things might even happen to me! And to think that there are people who don't feel anything: "That's how it goes!" they say.

(Extract from a tape-recorded conversation with Joana, 28, housewife, and her husband Paulo, 27, language teacher.)

Everyday violence, glamour, information, entertainment, anguish. Television seems to be everywhere, approach all possible subjects and reach everybody. In this chapter, I describe the widespread impact of television in Brazil and the central place of telenovelas in Brazilian television. My discussion is based on information obtained from several

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academic studies about Brazilian television (Kehl 1986; Mattelart and Mattelart 1990; Mattos 1990; Silva 1997; Sodré 1977), its programming politics, its audience (Fadul 1993; Fachel-Leal and Oliven 1987; Girardello 1998; Micelli 1972) and its relation with the state (Kehl 1979; Santos Jr. 1996). This initial description serves a second objective, namely to start delineating the relationship between telenovelas and Brazilian society. This relationship is a crucial one that needs to be made explicit in order to understand why people like Joana and Paulo simply "have to watch."

Television in Brazil

The initiative to introduce television technology to Brazil was taken in 1950 by the head of a chain of newspapers and radio stations, Assis Chateaubriand.¹ *TV Difusora* (in São Paulo), *TV Tupi* (Rio de Janeiro), *TV Paulista* (São Paulo) and *TV Record* (Rio de Janeiro) were the first regional television stations in the country. At that time, television was a medium available only to the few that formed society's elite. Television sets were expensive commodities that had to be imported from other countries. Mattos (1990) notes that a television set cost only little less than a new car. In other words, it was an expensive investment. Television's programming, though quite influenced by the radio (in both content and form), was nevertheless oriented to respond to the demands of the elite that owned television sets. Hence, the main programs were televised theatre, music and imported films with subtitles (i.e., restricted to the literate).

In the late 1950s, television sets became economically accessible to more people, since they were now being produced in Brazil. According to statistics presented by Mattos (1990: 10), in 1950 there were 200 television sets in the whole country. In 1958 this number had increased to 344,000. In 2000 the estimated number of television households in Brazil was 39,000,000.²

To understand the development of television in Brazil, one has to look at the political context of the period. Television was introduced to the country when industrialization, modernization and regional development were the keywords of the Kubitschek government (1955-1961). Brasília, the current capital city of Brazil, was under construction (1957-1961) with an eye towards propelling the country

forward towards modernity. The idea behind the construction of the new capital was that the whole country would then "catch up with the innovations of Brasília" (Holston 1989:18). Introduced in the country during this march towards development, television, with its innovating technology, became itself a sign of modernity.

From its infancy, television was seen as a way to mediate oral and visual information to all possible kinds of viewers, including among them a considerable number of illiterate persons. Its spread throughout the country was seen as an issue of governmental importance. In 1962, the first Brazilian telecommunication code was promulgated. It entrusted to the state "the responsibility of installing and operating the telecommunication networks" and it confirmed "the private status of radio and television broadcasting" (Mattelart and Mattelart 1990:20).

As television became more accessible to the population, programming was rethought and adapted to reach a broader audience. By the early 1960s, television programming consisted of Brazilian telenovelas, dubbed films, Brazilian adaptations of North-American entertainment programs and variety shows (*programas de auditório*). Variety shows combine games, documentaries, talk shows, different kinds of contests and many other features requiring the active participation of the studio audience, who is also invited to sing, act, perform tricks and participate in contests and debates (Lopez 1995).

The military coup, which overthrew President João Goulart on March 31, 1964, resulted in increased state intervention in the implantation and programming of television. As Mattos (1990) reports, the right to concede or refuse the permission to start a television network came to rest exclusively in the hands of the country's president. Political preferences inevitably played an important role in the concession of television rights.³ In 1965, the network *Globo* was founded with the financial and technological support of the US *Time-Life* organization. By 1967, however, measures were taken to hinder foreign participation in Brazilian communication. *Globo's* partnership with the Time-Life group was seen by the Brazilian government as going against national interests: communication was a national matter and should not receive the interference of foreign groups. So, in 1969, the *Globo* network was nationalized (see Ribeiro and Botelho 1979).

Television was also seen by the military government (as it was by the Kubitschek government) as a way to create a national identity, and as a

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way to link the remote regions near Brazil's borders to the rest of the country (Straubhaar 1982, 1984; Tufte 1993). In 1965, the Brazilian national communication company, *Embratel*, was created. Its motto was: "Communication is integration" (Mattelart and Mattelart 1990:20).

A Commercial Enterprise

The military government encouraged the expansion of private, commercial television networks, and favored those networks whose programming would help in the preservation (and construction) of a national memory (Kehl 1979). A regime of strong state interference was combined with economic liberalism. Mattelart and Mattelart (1990) summarize this contradictory situation:

[In order] to assure a minimum of consensus for a political project that was forced to resort to coercion and police control, state power had to call in the commercial machinery of mass culture, the product of a society in which opinion is a recognized actor in the public sphere, a mass culture linked to the idea of representative democracy and free access to the market economy of information, culture and entertainment. (Mattelart and Mattelart 1990:31)

The military government also supported the private, commercial development of television because it helped in creating a consumer economy. Television was a perfect medium to create a domestic consumer market and to attract local and foreign capital: able to reach the whole nation, television was a way to address Brazilians as potential consumers (Lopez 1995).

In its beginnings, television programs were sponsored by a single (generally a multi-national) company. This sponsorship was announced at the beginning and sometimes at the end of the program. Since the 1960s, as television gained popularity, programs were structured so that they could incorporate commercial breaks. During these breaks different products were advertised. This way, instead of obtaining sponsorship from a single company for each program, television networks started to sell time for advertisements. Unlike countries like U.S.A. or Sweden, where television programs were (and are) for the most part produced by independent producers and then broadcast by

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television networks, from their very beginning, Brazilian television networks combined the production and distribution of programs, thus forming their programs in order to allow product placement and the insertion of commercial breaks.⁴ The development of Brazilian television programming is therefore interwoven with the development of television advertisements (Mattelart and Mattelart 1990:25; Ortiz et al. 1991:134; Vink 1988:37). The intersection between telenovelas and advertisements will be analyzed in more detail in a coming section in this chapter, and in Chapter 4.

Profiling itself as a faithful ally of the state, *Globo* explicitly adopted the task of showing "Brazil" on television. In 1969, *Globo's* National News Report (the *Jornal Nacional*) was broadcast for the first time simultaneously throughout the entire country. In 1970, the whole nation could watch Brazil win the Soccer World Cup. National broadcasting opened the door for the broadcasting of a series of programs about Brazil – *Amaral Neto, o Repórter* ("Amaral Neto – Reporter") for instance, was a program where the rightwing reporter Amaral Neto showed the country's varied landscapes and presented them as Brazilian natural wonders and unexplored resources. *Fantástico: O Show da Vida* ("Fantastic: the Show of Life") first broadcast in 1974 (and still going strong), is a mish-mash of sensational news and reports about extraordinary crimes, Brazilian everyday violence, paranormal phenomena and medical discoveries (Brazilian or international). A second and later step towards the cultural integration of the country through television was the creation of programs that brought the periphery of the country to its center. *Carga Pesada* ("Heavy Load," broadcast by *Globo*, in 1979) was a fictive serial about two truck drivers and their adventures throughout Brazil. *Globo Rural*, first broadcast at the end of the 1970s was a program about life in the countryside that approached everything from agricultural innovations to rural customs and music.

Television was given an agglutinating function: first it integrated the nation culturally by spreading understandings of southeastern, middle-, and upper-class standards of life (such as eating habits, leisure activities, dressing and decorating styles) to the rest of the country. The southeastern region (i.e., the economic center of the country) formed by the states of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo, became a positive model of progress, development and

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urbanization.⁵ Television contributed not only in spreading middle- and upper-class values from the center to the periphery of Brazil, but its positive portrayal of the southeastern region and its cities might also have contributed to an increased rural migration and other demographic changes (Faria and Potter 1990). Pace's (1993) report on the effects of the introduction of television (and telenovelas) in the remote Amazonian town of Gurupá, in 1982, illustrates this:

The program content of [tele] novelas does more than simply provide topics for hours of discussion, it also gives people from Gurupá a first-time glimpse of middle- and upper-class life styles in Brazil, particularly of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo where most novelas are filmed. [T]he community of Gurupá is overwhelmingly lower-class. On a national scale, over ninety-five percent of the community ranks as poor, with only five percent ranking as lower middle-class. Information on middle- and upper-class lifestyles and affluence is very limited. Even when people from Gurupá travel to urban centers such as Belém, there usually is little contact with people of higher socioeconomic status. Therefore the images of the middle- and upper-classes that are presented on the nightly novela are new information. (1993:199)

Television spreads representations of life styles, consumption practices, consumer goods (and of the people who consume these goods) throughout the country.⁶

As Brazilian television flourished, the Brazilian film industry gradually became more and more precarious. Rejecting the market and consumerism, Brazilian cinema was poorly subsidized by the government through the *Embrafilme* (*Empresa Brasileira de Filmes*). This state owned institution was supported by leftist intellectuals (who saw in it the opportunity to develop the film industry) and by the military government who, in a nationalist spirit, saw the production of Brazilian cinema as a way to confront foreign domination (see Johnson and Stam 1995 for a throughout analysis of Brazilian cinema productions). Talented actors, actresses and writers who, in most countries, would go to the film industry, went instead to television and especially to telenovelas and televised Brazilian serials. In 1990, then-president Fernando Collor abolished the *Embrafilme* and cut the subsidies for all kinds of cultural products that were not adapted to the market. The consequences of this decision, and the context within which it was

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taken (inflation, the shrinking internal film market, and the impoverishment of the lower-middle class audiences) were devastating for cinema production, which collapsed. In 1993, in an effort to promote the resurgence of national cinema, the Brazilian government proposed the "audiovisual law" (*a lei audiovisual*), which promulgated tax reductions to enterprises that would invest in the production of Brazilian films. This measure, combined with an artistic collaboration with television actors and actresses has been very successful in resuscitating the production of Brazilian films.

Television Networks

In 1997, during my most extensive period of fieldwork, the Brazilian television industry consisted of five main independent commercial networks – *Rede Globo*; *SBT* (*Sistema Brasileiro de Televisão*); *Manchete* (bankrupted in 1998); *Bandeirantes*, and *TV Record*; and one non-commercial (and non-governmental) television network – *TV Cultura*. There are, nowadays, other commercial channels (*MTV*, *Canal 21*, *CNT*, *Gazeta*, *Rede Brasil*, *Rede Mulher*, *Rede TVI*, *Rede Vida*, *TV Senado*) whose broadcasting is connected to certain parts of the country. The public image of the major TV networks is not that of anonymous and faceless enterprises. On the contrary, each of these networks is related to a specific person or family.⁷ *Globo* is owned by Roberto Marinho's family. Roberto Marinho started as a journalist and is now one of Brazil's most influential businessmen. Throughout the years, the *Globo* empire has come to include, among other things, a daily national newspaper; a radio system with several radio stations; a publishing house which in 1988⁸ controlled twelve percent of the magazine and book market in Brazil; a record company, a video company, several cable stations and a cultural foundation. *SBT* is owned by Sílvio Santos who started his media career as the host of a variety show and gradually built a considerable conglomerate of varied enterprises. *Manchete* was owned by the Bloch family; its founder was also a journalist with a similar background as Marinho. *Bandeirantes* is owned by the Saad family, and *Record* is owned by Edir Macedo group (the leader of an evangelical church, the Universal Church of God's Kingdom).

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Each of these networks also came to develop its own profile. *Globo*, the world's fourth largest television corporation, portrays itself as a network that cares for the quality (moral and aesthetic) of its programs.⁹ "The *Globo* quality pattern" (*o padrão de qualidade Globo*), a slogan spread by *Globo* itself, is manifested on a visual level by a certain sumptuousness in the scenery and costumes of actors, the professionalism of program hosts and news anchors, and by the use of innovative technology (Vink 1988:44). Textually, *Globo*'s "quality pattern" is manifested by a concern with the use (in program promotions, variety-, and news broadcasting programs) of correct grammar, avoidance of slang, and a predominantly southeastern accent, either from the states of Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo. Its innovative technology (*Veja*, 28 February 96; Vink 1988) combined with continuous marketing and audience researches have contributed to its leading position among other television networks. *Globo* produces more than sixty percent of the programs it broadcasts.

The programming of networks such as the *SBT* and *Record* consist basically of entertainment programs, imported films and serials, and Mexican or Venezuelan telenovelas (*Veja*, 05 June 96).¹⁰ *Bandeirantes* has lately come to profile itself as a network mostly focused on sports, and *Manchete*, when it was broadcasting, emphasized journalism, documentary programs and telenovelas.

Introduced in the country in the early 1990s, cable television and its approximately seventy channels are a new option for upper- and middle-class viewers. Recent statistics from IBOPE – Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistics (2001) estimate that only thirteen percent of the households with television sets in Brazil have access to cable TV. Significantly, IBOPE also reports that viewers who have access to cable TV spend more time watching Brazilian non-cable channels than they do watching the cable channels.

TV Programming

Competition among commercial networks to obtain large shares of the television audience has not led to diversity in programming. The combination of telenovelas, news, imported films dubbed into Portuguese, variety shows (*programas de auditório*) and, more recently, programs about everyday violence, is common to all networks. Most

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networks also organize their programming according to a very similar time schedule: variety shows and talk shows, for example, are broadcast on weekends and weekday afternoons. News reports are broadcast at lunchtime and around eight o'clock in the evening and are generally followed by telenovelas. Later in the evening there are documentaries, serials or imported films.

Media scholar Michael Schudson (1989:168) makes a general argument that the content of programs in many countries aims to be relevant and resonant with the life of the audience. By this he means that one can only successfully impose something on people if the symbolism of the object/idea in question relates to underlying native traditions. Brazilian network programming is no exception to Schudson's generalization. It incorporates contemporary, day-to-day preoccupations that color the life of millions of Brazilians (Hamburger 1998; Sodré 1997; Straubhaar 1984) and presents them in the form of a glamorous, euphoric spectacle. Simpson (1993:49) suggests the term "programmed euphoria" to describe one popular television show broadcast by *Globo*: *O Show da Xuxa* ("Xuxa's [shoosha] Show"). But in my opinion, Simpson's term can be applied to describe the atmosphere of Brazilian television generally. In order to illustrate this argument, I recall here a particular feature of television broadcasting: a feature called "Life of an Artist" (*Vida de Artista*) broadcast in 1997, on *Domingão do Faustão* ("Big Fausto's Great Sunday"), one of *Globo*'s variety shows. The major theme in this feature is the transformation of an unknown person, usually from a modest or poor background, into a national and wealthy celebrity. This transformation is portrayed in emotional terms, and emphasis is given to the hardships suffered by the celebrity throughout his/her path toward fame – a theme that clearly relates to contemporary preoccupations involving class mobility, family life, emotional life, and the search for happiness (there is an explicitly foregrounded equation between fame and happiness in this and similar features).

On a typical occasion, a pop-singer whose life and career were being narrated became very moved and started sobbing uncontrollably. The program host, Big Fausto, turned to the audience and commanded them in an intimate tone: "Let's respect this moment of emotion!" At the same time that Faustão uttered these words, a camera treated the viewing audience to an extreme close-up of the sobbing singer. Faustão

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continued: "Let's respect this moment of emotion! It's not easy when one's father dies young, in an accident, and one is left alone in the world." The camera cut back to a new close-up of the singer, who was now crying even more uncontrollably. When the feature was over, the singer sang, still with tears in his eyes, his latest hit – a happy, light dance tune.

Brazilian media scholar Muniz Sodré (1977) has compared the narrative style and repertoire of Brazilian television to popular entertainment traditions, such as the little circuses that tour the interior of the country – the magician who saws a woman in half, the boy who repeats words backwards, the woman who can communicate with spirits, the girl who knows everything about some famous person in history – disparate subjects that are euphorically presented as part of a glamorous spectacle. Another moment of television broadcasting comes to my mind as an illustration to Sodré's remarks: after reporting on an unsuccessful and violent rebellion in an over-crowded Brazilian prison, the anchor of an afternoon news program smiled at the camera and announced: "Coming right after the commercial break: hundreds of people die in a flood in Bangladesh. And: a delicious pastry recipe!"

Life tragedies, successful career paths, prison rebellions and pastry recipes – anything can be packaged under the form of a euphoric, sensuous, visual, and ephemeral spectacle to be consumed.¹¹ The name of *Globo's* prime-time Sunday variety show (already mentioned on p.31) crystallizes the interspersing of television programs and spectacle: *Fantástico: o Show da Vida* ("Fantastic: the Show of Life"). In other words, life, when it is televised becomes a fantastic show, a popular spectacle. Brazilian television transforms anything it broadcasts into a spectacle. Another of Simpson's (1993:70) remarks can be applied to describe the euphoric and almost carnivalesque atmosphere of Brazilian television programming: there are no moments of silence on Brazilian television – when no one is speaking, there is music; there are lights, sounds and constant motion (and emotion) on the television screen.¹² Variety shows such as *Planeta Xuxa*, *Programa Livre*, *Programa do Gugu*, *Silvio Santos*, as well as talk-shows such as *Hebe Camargo*, *Silvia Popovic*, televised soccer matches and children's programs all conform to Brazilian television programming's euphoric and festive atmosphere.

Through direct addresses to the "*público lá em casa*" ("the public at home" – this is how many hosts address their audiences) and through

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non-verbal addresses such as looking at and gesturing straight into the camera, television personalities speak to the public in ways that invite an impression of intimacy (see also Fiske 1987:53 for more general comments on this phenomenon). And *Globo* explicitly attempts to create a personal relationship with its viewers. Commercial breaks and programs are framed by slogans such as: "*Globo e você, tudo a ver!*" ("*Globo* has everything to do with you!"), or "*Quem tem Globo tem tudo!*" ("If you have *Globo*, you have everything!"), or even "*Rede Globo: um caso de amor com o Brasil!*" ("*Globo* Network [has] a love affair with Brazil!"). It is within this atmosphere of complicity and intimacy that ordinary and extraordinary facts and persons taken from the everyday life are packaged under the form of a euphoric spectacle and presented to the audience.¹³

And now... Telenovelas!

For Barbara, nothing is more important than to celebrate her 35th wedding anniversary together with her husband, Guilherme. The celebration is being organized at their mansion, which is located in a very fashionable Rio neighborhood.

Anabel Muñoz is another woman who loves parties. She earns her living organizing parties and celebrations. She is organizing the fifteenth birthday party of Kelly Bolla, daughter of the owner of a local supermarket, situated in a middle-class neighborhood in the suburbs of Rio.

The destinies of these two women, who apparently have nothing in common, will cross when Barbara finds she is not really the mother of her only son, Eugênio, and that Eugênio's real mother has to be found quickly to save Eugênio's life. Almost thirty years earlier, Barbara gave birth to a stillborn but she was anesthetized and didn't know this. Her husband, Guilherme, substituted the stillborn baby for another one, given up by a mother who could not raise her child. Eugênio, now a fully-grown adult, gets contaminated with quicksilver in one of his father's mines and needs to get a bone marrow transplant. Only next of kin are compatible givers. So Guilherme has to tell the whole truth

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to his wife and son. After a shock, the couple decides to search for Eugênio's biological mother, who turns out to be Anabel, the party organizer.

Anabel's past is also crowded with untold stories – when very young, she became pregnant after a short and blind passion with Urbano. She gave birth to a son whom she immediately gave up for adoption. She kept this secret for years. Later, she got married to a Cuban, Félix Muñoz, and had two boys and three daughters.

Now Anabel will have to reveal all her secrets – the whole truth about her first son, and her affair with Urbano, who, to everybody's surprise, was also the father of Valentim, Anabel's second son. It was only when Urbano abandoned her for a second time that she decided to marry the Cuban Félix, who decided to raise Valentim as his own son.

Valentim and Eugênio's lives are turned upside-down: Valentim, who was very proud of his Cuban roots, has to rethink his identity. Eugênio, who thought he was the only inheritor of his parents' fortune, has to face the idea of having another mother and brother.

Besides all the already existing complications, Eugênio and Valentim fall in love with the same woman...

(*Salsa e Merengue* was written by Miguel Fallabela and Maria Carmen Barbosa, broadcast at seven o'clock by *Globo*, in 1997. This summary was found in *Globo's* web site, www.globo.com.br. The present version is an adapted translation of the original text.)

This short summary of *Salsa e Merengue* is a typical example of the intrigues that make up a telenovela. Telenovelas have a serial form, consisting of daily episodes, each of which has four or five segments divided by commercial intervals. Each segment ends with a "cliff-hanger" – an expectation that reaches its climax, and the problem is solved in the next segment or in the next episodes. As I have already noted in chapter 1, unlike many American or British soap operas, which can continue for years or even decades, Brazilian telenovelas all end after six to eight months. *Globo* is the main producer of

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telenovelas, broadcasting five a day. Telenovelas are generally broadcast at around six-, seven-, and eight o'clock in the evening, and people refer to them as the "six-," "seven-," and "eight o' clock *novelas*." The six o'clock telenovela is generally romantic and lighthearted. Its plots often center on past periods in Brazil's history, such as life at the end of the nineteenth century or at the beginning of the twentieth century. The seven- and eight o' clock telenovelas deal with a larger variety of subjects. They can either be humorous, or they can deal with controversial subjects.¹⁴ The eight o'clock telenovelas are the most popular ones and they can have daily audiences of fifty million viewers. They are broadcast after the National News report, and they attract a heterogeneous audience.

In terms of specific content, telenovelas deal with a great variety of subjects. They address issues of social positioning and power, social ascension, gender relationships, love and sexuality. The first telenovelas were broadcast in 1951, twice a week. They were adaptations of melodramas and radionovelas to television. From 1954, most telenovelas were adaptations of non-Brazilian novels. Authors such as Jules Verne, Alexandre Dumas, and Victor Hugo had some of their works adapted to telenovela plots: TV Tupi broadcast "*Miguel Strogof*" (Verne) in 1954, "*Conde de Monte Cristo*" (Dumas) in 1956, and "*Corcunda de Notre Dame*" (Hugo) in 1957.

In 1963, starting a new trend in Brazilian television, the network Excelsior aired the first *daily* telenovela "2-5499 – *Ocupado*" ("2-5499 – The Line is Busy"). Written by the Argentinean Alberto Migré and adapted for Brazilian television by Dulce Santucci, it was the story of a female prisoner who worked as the prison's telephone operator. By accident, she comes to talk to a man who falls in love with her, without knowing that she is a prisoner.

The Brazilianization of Telenovelas

The content of most of these first daily telenovelas was however often still based on non-Brazilian, non-contemporary, exotic themes and melodramatic stories.

By 1968, the network *Tupi* broadcast the first telenovela based on Brazilian contemporary reality. It was the story of *Beto Rockfeller*, a Brazilian *malandro* (scoundrel), and anti-hero. Beto was a shoe

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salesman who managed to pass as a millionaire and started dating a rich socialite. The telenovela portrayed how Beto oscillated between his two lives – as a humble shoe salesman and as a prestigious (fake) millionaire. Besides its innovation in theme (the sympathetic anti-hero), this telenovela introduced colloquial language and slang to the television screen. It attained great popularity. Soon, other television networks developed their own styles of making telenovelas and started exploiting themes picked up from the contemporary social scene (such as class conflicts, inflation, middle-class life style, politics) as basic and recurring elements in the plots.

Since the end of 1960s, it is not unusual to see telenovelas conforming to real-life seasons and holidays and referring to contemporary social issues like corruption, AIDS, undesired pregnancies, homosexuality and racism. Telenovelas will sometimes even adapt recent news stories: in December 1992, for example, Brazil's then-president, Fernando Collor, was impeached by Congress for corruption. In 1993, the telenovela *Fera Ferida* ("Wounded Beast," by Aguinaldo Silva, broadcast by *Globo*) portrayed the impeachment of the fictive mayor of the city of *Asa Branca* ("White Wings" – a clear allusion to the government and the capital city of Brasília, whose original master plan was the shape of an airplane). In 2001-2, the telenovela *O Clone* ("The Clone," broadcast by *Globo*) interspersed the subject of genetic engineering among complicated love intrigues. Connecting fiction and reality, many telenovelas follow the real calendar: telenovela characters celebrate Carnival, Christmas and New Year on the same days as their audience. Telenovela characters wear the same fashion that can be seen in shops and magazines and they speak about problems that are lived by the audience. Telenovelas' "nowness" (and the ephemerality it evokes) becomes an important part of the televised spectacle as it foregrounds parallels between fiction and reality.¹⁵ By establishing a parallel temporality, telenovelas' nowness incorporates, to a certain extent, a part of viewers' experiences into fiction, at the same time that it allows viewers to incorporate telenovela themes into their lives. A dialogue between fiction and reality, viewers and telenovelas, is generated.

Telenovelas as a Genre

Brazilian media scholar Martha Klagsbrunn's (1993:17-8) observation about the plots of Brazilian telenovelas is incisive:

The tale of a man and a woman who fall in love with each other; but before they get together, they must overcome many obstacles. The main characters usually have different social and economic backgrounds: one is rich, the other poor. Families are the core of their respective circles, surrounded by their relations, friends, neighbors, staff, etc. One of the main characters struggle to unveil the mystery that is part of the plot and in most cases involves his/her parents, or tries to discover who stood behind the family's ruin. ...Everything happens in a tangle of misunderstandings, surprise events and intrigues.

Telenovela plots do follow precisely this kind of pattern. However, they also incorporate new elements (either new ideological positions or contemporary debates) to this old formula, thus combining repetition and innovation (Eco 1985, Klagsbrunn 1993).

Researchers on Latin American telenovelas seem to agree that the genre that initially structured telenovela's narratives was the melodrama (Borelli 1997, Mazziotti 1993, Steimberg 1997, Trinta 1997). Characteristic features of melodrama are sentimentality, extravagant incidents, sensational appeals to emotions and a happy (or morally assuring) conclusion (Ang 1985:61, Thornburn 1976:78). These authors argue that in spite of the development of telenovela as a genre in its own, some characteristics of the melodrama can still be found in most telenovela plots: startling situations, crude sentimentality and a happy ending where the evil is punished and the good is rewarded. But without abandoning the melodramatic tradition, telenovelas also incorporate other kinds of genres to their narratives.¹⁶

Telenovela's plots are also inspired by other kinds of media, such as films (Westerns, thrillers, and comedies), documentaries, and advertisements. Media and social studies scholar Sílvia H.S.Borelli (1997:169-177) presents a typology for the different kinds of telenovelas. She classifies them into five categories:

1. *Humoristic* – light comedies, political satires;¹⁷
2. *Western* – telenovelas that take place in rural milieus;¹⁸

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3. *Thrillers* – telenovelas that evolve around a mystery or an unsolved murder;¹⁹

4. *Documentaries* – telenovelas that emphasize realistic descriptions of everyday life, especially everyday violence;²⁰

5. *Romantic adventures* – telenovelas with explicit Manichaean themes, played by heroes and villains.²¹

To these classifications I would also add the *urban* telenovela, which deals with varied issues concerning peoples' lives in a big city, the *historic* telenovela, which portrays the life style of a certain epoch and the *fantastic* telenovela, which adds supernatural, paranormal or magical elements to the plot.²²

Form: Telenovelas as a Spectacle for the Senses

Much like other programs broadcast in Brazilian television, telenovelas are packaged in the form of a sensuous, visual and ephemeral spectacle. It is a spectacle that, in order to represent in a simplified way an otherwise subtle and complicated reality, exaggerates and emphasizes contrasts and contemporary contradictions.

In an interview to the weekly news magazine *Veja* (12 February 97), the Institute for the Study of Telenovelas (*Núcleo de Pesquisa de Telenovelas* – *NPTN* – the very existence of which, in itself, indicates the importance of telenovelas in Brazil) reported the results of an investigation they conducted on the content of the twenty-seven "eight o'clock telenovelas" broadcast by *Globo* since 1980. Comparing "real Brazil" and "Brazil in the telenovela," researchers came to the conclusion that by and large, Brazilian telenovelas portray the lifestyle of middle and upper-middle classes of urban, southeastern Brazil; a type of lifestyle which differs radically from those of the majority of telenovela viewers. This same article presented some statistics comparing "real Brazil" with the "represented Brazil." Telenovelas under-represent the number of households with a traditional husband and wife structure – whereas seventy-three percent of the households in Brazil have this structure, in telenovelas, the figure is forty-eight percent. An opposing trend exists when it comes to the statistics concerning the number of separated parents, or persons living alone or living in other kinds of household arrangements. In all three of these cases, telenovelas seem to over-represent the categories.²³ Furthermore,

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sixty-two percent of the women in telenovelas work, as opposed to the fifty-two percent in Brazilian reality. Another difference in representation is the size of the families – whereas according to national statistics, Brazilian women have, 2.3 children, women in telenovelas have 0.88 children.

Telenovelas, as the reports from *NPTN* indicate, exaggerate certain aspects of the Brazilian reality, and they under-represent certain groups (like elderly people, children, and extremely poor people), thus giving a simplified picture of the Brazilian reality. Further analysis of the form of telenovelas confirms this exaggerated and clear-cut picture: telenovela plots are played out in sharply delimited spheres – urban vs. rural, center vs. periphery. Urban telenovelas, whose plot take place in the city of Rio, generally portray a sharp opposition between northern and southern parts of the city (*Pecado Capital*, 1976, 2000, *Globo*; *Água Viva*, 1980, *Globo*; *Baila Comigo*, 1981, *Globo*; *Barriga de Aluguel*, 1990-1, *Globo*; *A Próxima Vítima*, 1995, *Globo*; *O Dono do Mundo*, 1992, *Globo*; *Salsa e Merengue*, 1997, *Globo*; *Laços de Família*, 2001, *Globo*). In the southern parts of Rio (telenovela version), there are the most fashionable neighborhoods, with huge mansions, apartments, beautiful beaches, powerful and prestigious persons. At the other end of the spectrum, is the lower-class suburbia of northern Rio. These kinds of differences do exist in real life, but are not as polarized as telenovelas presents them.

Telenovelas' representations of class differences²⁴ tend to be *visual* rather than verbal (Vink 1988). Geographic positioning (fancy neighborhoods vs. distant but charming and warm-hearted suburbia) and consumption practices (decoration of homes, dressing styles, taste) are used to denote social class in telenovelas. Rich characters live in mansions or penthouses with swimming pools, they travel abroad, eat at fancy restaurants, drive around in imported cars, practice elitist sports such as tennis and windsurfing, and have servants who clean, cook and wash. Rich men are powerful, generally the owners of industries (*Pecado Capital*, 1976, *Globo*; *Salsa e Merengue*, 1997, *Globo*; *Explode Coração*, 1995, *Globo*; *Suave Veneno*, 1999, *Globo*), doctors (*O Dono do Mundo*, 1992, *Globo*; *História de Amor*, 1995, *Globo*; *O Clone*, 2001, *Globo*) or, in rural telenovelas, large and influential landowners (*Pantanal*, 1990, *Manchete*; *O Rei do Gado*, 1996, *Globo*). Rich women are either married to rich men (*Suave Veneno*, 1999, *Globo*), descended

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from rich families (*Salsa e Merengue*, 1997, *Globo*) or are the heads of powerful industries (*A Próxima Vítima*, 1995, *Globo*; *A Rainha da Sucata*, 1990, *Globo*).

Upper-class telenovela characters are generally white and dress in clothes with discrete colors and patterns. They avoid excesses – too strong make-up, too much jewelry, too loud colors, too many accessories. Characters' hair (both male and female) is generally straight and well coiffed.

Middle-class characters are close to the elite in their consumption practices. They frequent the same places and go to the same parties as the members of high society. Both men and women work, generally as teachers, architects, art-dealers, advertisers, public workers or journalists. For instance, middle-class characters in *Salsa e Merengue* (1997, *Globo*) had the following occupations: journalist, owner of a supermarket, artist, and instructor at a driving-school, employee of a big company. Middle-class characters are also mostly white (one of the few exceptions to this was *A Próxima Vítima*, broadcast in 1995. It featured a black middle-class family and was widely publicized as the first telenovela to ever do so). The dress style of middle-class characters is slightly more casual than that of the upper-classes. The newly rich are portrayed as having tacky clothes and a taste for exaggeration.

Working- or lower-class characters live in small houses in suburbia. Space is scarce in these houses and its division is not so specialized. For instance, the living-room of lower-class houses is the place where the family eats, watches television, and receives its guests. The interior of these houses is decorated in an exaggerated way – too much furniture, too many patterns, too many inexpensive decorative objects (such as plates or porcelain penguins) that connote bad taste. Another recurring indicator of poverty in telenovelas is the lack of servants and maids. Lower-class characters have also other kinds of leisure activities than middle- and upper-classes: they are portrayed watching TV, drinking beer at home or in local bars (not in restaurants), and practicing popular sports (such as soccer). Until 1995, it was almost only among lower-class characters that one could find black actors. This situation is gradually improving. Black actors are nowadays given not only more important roles in the plots of telenovelas (like in *Xica da Silva* 1997, broadcast by *Manchete*, which is the story of a black female slave who becomes the most powerful woman in the state of Minas Gerais) but

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are also being gradually disconnected from the lower-classes (as in *Salsa e Merengue*, 1997, *Globo*, where two black children are born to a white and wealthy mother; or in *A Indomada*, 1997, *Globo*, where a black actress played the role of a teacher married to a white man coming from a traditional and conservative family). When it comes to lower-class characters it is harder to describe a typical style or way of dressing. Depending on the importance of their role in the telenovela, lower-class characters can either wear jeans and T-shirts, uniforms (if they work as maids), or sometimes have a tacky or outré clothing style. Vink (1988) suggests that social difference in telenovelas is expressed by different kinds of consumption rather than different kinds of jobs. An example of this is *O Dono do Mundo* ("King of the World," 1992, *Globo*). In this telenovela, the plastic surgeon Felipe bets his friend an expansive bottle of champagne that he will manage to seduce Márcia, a lower-middle class kindergarten teacher. When Márcia, several episodes later, swears to a friend that she will take revenge on Felipe, she bets a crate of beer. Champagne and beer – the two bets are not particularly subtle ways to represent class positioning.

In addition to telenovelas' form – its exaggerations and simplifications, and its use of visual indicators to mark social differences – another important aspect that should be noted when analyzing the form of telenovelas is their editing. The visual rhythm of telenovelas is adapted to their plots. Urban telenovelas have generally a quicker rhythm, with shorter scenes and dialogues sequences intercalated along one episode. Rural telenovelas, on the other hand, have a slower rhythm, longer scenes and an emphasis on nature and ecology. Through visual techniques, telenovelas' editing convey the atmosphere of urban chaos or rural idylls. They convey sensuous experiences to be comfortably consumed at home.

Music is yet another indispensable part of telenovelas' sensuous spectacle. From the first episodes, each character or romantic couple in a telenovela is connected to a special song – every time they appear on the screen their music starts to play. In telenovelas, music expresses states of mind – happiness, sadness, tension, and romance. Background noises such as thundering, rattling or whistling can be also used to foreground a dramatic, humorous, or ridiculous character and/or situation.

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Finally, bodies and nudity have gradually become an indispensable part of the telenovela spectacle. Telenovela producers seem to draw a connection between nakedness and an increase in audience numbers. For instance, in 1997, there was an enormous polemic in the Brazilian press around the telenovela *Xica da Silva* ("Xica, the Slave Who Gives Orders," 1997, *Manchete*). This telenovela played heavily on eroticism and naked scenes. Its main actress, Taís Araújo, who played the role of Xica da Silva, was only seventeen when the telenovela was inaugurated. *Manchete* was planning to broadcast, the same day the actress turned eighteen, a scene where Xica bathed naked in a waterfall. The debate centered on the question of nakedness and the legality of showing a minor naked. Even if the scenes were only to be aired the day the actress reached her legal age of consent, they were evidently filmed when she still was seventeen. Should this be allowed? As it turned out, when the scene was broadcast, the debate centered on it fired the curiosity of many people who then started to watch the telenovela, and no legal sanctions were ever brought against *Manchete*.²⁵

Bodies and nudity are also a strong presence in telenovelas' opening sequences. The first telenovela to use naked bodies in its opening sequence was *Corpo a Corpo* ("Body to Body," 1985, *Globo*). The opening sequence of this telenovela showed the naked silhouette of a man and a woman kissing. This trend was then followed by many other telenovelas. The opening sequence in *Tieta* ("Tieta," 1989, *Globo*) – a telenovela whose plot takes place in northeastern Brazil, showed the transformation of a northeastern mountain landscape into the shape of a (naked) woman's body. *Pantanal's* opening sequence portrayed the transformation of a jaguar into a naked/wild woman. *O Dono do Mundo* ("King of the World," 1992, *Globo*) adapted a famous film scene from Charles Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*: in the adaptation, Charles Chaplin plays with a terrestrial globe covered with images of half naked women. *Barriga de Aluguel* ("A Belly for Rent," 1990-1, *Globo*) showed the silhouette of a naked, pregnant woman. *Mulheres de Areia* ("Women of Sand," 1993, *Globo*) interspersed images of a naked woman with running sand, giving the impression that the woman bathes in sand and/or is made of sand. *A Indomada* ("The Untamed Woman," 1997, *Globo*) showed a barefoot woman wearing a short, tight red dress who transforms herself into stones, water, and fire in order to trespass several obstacles placed in her path.

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These sequences illustrate not only the important role occupied by (female) bodies in telenovelas. They also foreground the plasticity and malleability of these female bodies.

Since the end of the 1980s and during the 1990s, it is not only female bodies that get attention and exposure in telenovelas. Male bodies as erotic objects have also emerged as objects of attention. So these days, virile male characters are also filmed half-naked, showering, bathing, and resting undressed in bed. There is, however, an interesting difference: male bodies are almost never represented as being as malleable, plastic and changeable. Male bodies remain intact and whole – they don't metamorphose into water, sand or fire as do the bodies of female characters.²⁶ I will return to possible reasons for this difference later.

Content: Euphoric Articulations

In the previous section, I discussed the form of telenovelas and compared it to a sensuous spectacle. I argued that telenovelas used images, music, bodies, exaggeration and clear-cut boundaries in order to represent reality – good and evil, rich and poor, urban and rural, tradition and modernity are brought together throughout the plot of telenovelas. In this section, I want to suggest that the content of telenovelas could be described as a sequence of euphoric articulations – unexpected, improbable, implausible interrelations that make characters go through personal transformations that often result in some kind of social mobility.²⁷

For example, Joventino, the youngest son of a rich cattle farmer, and the main character in *Pantanal* (1990, *Manchete*) was brought up in the city of São Paulo. His life takes an unexpected turn when he falls in love with Juma, a modest, brave and independent young woman who lives all by herself in the wilderness of western Brazil. Dara is an urban, middle-class Gypsy and one of the main characters in *Explode Coração* ("Bursting Heart," 1995, *Globo*). She challenges the traditions of her people when she refuses to marry a Gypsy man and opts instead for the love of a stranger she met through the Internet. In *O Rei do Gado* ("The King of Cattle," 1996, *Globo*) Luana, an active member of the MST (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra*), an organization that struggles for agricultural reform, falls in love with Bruno, powerful

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landowner and "the king of cattle." In *Salsa e Merengue* (1997, *Globo*), Jacinta, a black, working-class, live-in female servant, gets married to a blond German count.

As one can see from the examples above, seduction and love are often the driving force behind transformations and social mobility. Different spheres of activity are brought together by telenovela characters who seduce and love one another. Heterosexual love, but also love between family members, friends, and, more recently, between persons of the same sex is, as Vink (1988:182) suggests, presented as something that brings happiness and gives meaning to characters' lives. In *Dancin' Days* (1978, *Globo*) the character Júlia Matos, who had spent several years in prison for a crime she did not commit, is determined to move upwards socially and become a member of Rio's high society, because of love: she wants to conquer the heart of her daughter, raised by Júlia's wealthy sister. In *Barriga de Aluguel* ("A Belly for Rent," 1990-1, *Globo*) two women, a biological/wealthy mother and a surrogate/poor mother, fight desperately for the same baby. Because they both love the baby, they decide at the end of the telenovela that he would have both women as his mothers. In *Por Amor* ("Because of Love," 1998, *Globo*), a woman becomes pregnant and decides to give away her child to her own daughter – a woman who cannot become pregnant; in *A Indomada* ("The Untamed Woman," 1997, *Globo*), Lúcia Helena consents to an arranged marriage (to a man with whom she eventually falls in love) out of love to her deceased parents and because she wanted to make their dream come true. Desperately trying to conquer the man she loves, Teodora, a main character in *Salsa e Merengue* (1997, *Globo*) has herself artificially inseminated in order to fool her ex-husband back into a relationship, by arguing that she conceived with him before their marriage broke down. Teodora's plan is unsuccessful since, as we saw in the introductory chapter, the twins she later gives birth to turn out to be black. In *Laços de Família* ("Family Links," 2001, *Globo*), the female character Capitu works as a call-girl in order to support her son whom she loves. It is also out of the love for a man that she decides to leave prostitution.

A message that seems to run through all telenovela plots is that seduction and love slip through the social hierarchies of class, age, race and sexuality. Poor and rich persons are attracted to, and fall in love

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with each other (*Pantanal*, 1990, *Manchete*; *O Dono do Mundo*, 1992, *Globo*; *Salsa e Merengue*, 1996-7, *Globo*; *Xica da Silva*, 1997, *Manchete*; *A Indomada*, 1997, *Globo*); white men are attracted to/seduced by/ fall in love with black women (*Corpo a Corpo*, 1985, *Globo*; *Xica da Silva*, 1997, *Manchete*; *A Indomada*, 1997, *Globo*; *Por Amor*, 1998, *Globo*); white women have relationships with black men (*Baila Comigo*, 1981, *Globo*; *A Próxima Vítima*, 1995, *Globo*); middle-aged women and young men are attracted to each other and eventually fall in love (*A Próxima Vítima*, 1995, *Globo*; *Explode Coração*, 1995-6, *Globo*; *O Amor Está no Ar*, 1997, *Globo*; *A Indomada*, 1997, *Globo*; *Laços de Família*, 2001, *Globo*); men are attracted to/ fall in love with each other (*A Próxima Vítima*, 1995, *Globo*; *Xica da Silva*, 1997, *Manchete*; *Roda Viva*, 2001, *Record*); women are attracted to/fall in love with each other (*Vale Tudo*, 1988-9, *Globo*; *Torre de Babel*, 1995, *Globo*; *Salsa e Merengue*, 1997, *Globo*).

Sexual desire, seduction, and love are intrinsic to plots of telenovelas. They work as a means to put together and articulate separate universes, promote transformations and social mobility.

Telenovela Writers

Telenovela writers are famous. They are often better known than Brazilian authors who write fiction (Lopez 1995:261). Until the beginnings of the 1980s, a single writer was the only person responsible for the development of a telenovela plot. Nowadays, it is common to divide authorship into a series of separated tasks. So a telenovela has a main writer who sketches the initial plot, and sometimes helps to cast some of the main characters. This writer is assisted by researchers who report on particular professions, situations or historical times that are going to be portrayed in the telenovela. The main writer will also be helped by one or two co-writers, who are either responsible for writing dialogues, or for writing certain sequences of the telenovela (Ortiz 1991; *Veja*, 28 February 96). However, even through the division of tasks within the telenovela industry has become quite elaborate, it is still the main writer who has the responsibility for the success or failure of a telenovela.

Telenovela plots are written with approximately one month of anticipation (fifteen to twenty episodes) from the episode that is being

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broadcast, which is a way for the writer to cope with unexpected events, like the pregnancy of an actress, or the illness or death of a leading actor. Writers modify the plot depending on the feedback he or she receives from the audience. When writing the telenovela *O Dono do Mundo* ("King of the World," 1991-2, *Globo*), the writer Gilberto Braga wished to portray class differences in a realistic way: poor people only got poorer and the rich, richer. Braga wanted the telenovela to have no hero. The main character, Felipe Barreto, was a mean, successful and rich character. The two leading female characters were portrayed as passive and superficial. The audience reacted against these ideas and the telenovela had disastrous ratings. In an interview to "*TV Programa*" (14 July 91), Braga explains some of the measures he took in order to get better scores of audience:

I had to change the personality of some characters such as Vicente [a disillusioned old man who worked as a taxi driver]. His character was too sad for the telenovela. A new character was introduced, a good and idealistic young doctor. Felipe Barreto, the evil character, had to pay for his sins and lose all his money. I had to give more strength to the middle-class characters in the plot, in order to please the middle-class audience.

There is an intrinsic relationship between the telenovela writer and the audience. Some writers might change the plot to please the audience, others might give a leading role to a secondary character because of the public's reaction. Manoel Carlos, who also wrote *Baila Comigo* ("Dance with Me," 1981, *Globo*) explained in an interview the modifications he was obliged to make in the plot of that telenovela because of the unexpected popularity of a secondary character:

Plínio was only a secondary type, destined to die in episode 58. But when the telenovela started to be broadcast, everything changed. People started to talk about Plínio as a member of the family and so they saved his life. Many people wrote me letters saying they felt like Plínio's children and I did not want to assume the responsibility for a mass of orphans. (Quoted in Vink 1988:144)

This flirting with the audience has its limits too. Dias Gomes, another telenovela writer, wrote two endings for *Roque Santeiro* ("Roque, the Saint-Maker," 1985-6, *Globo*): in one ending, Porcina, the main leading female character, left the powerful and evil

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Sinhozinho Malta, thus choosing the love of Roque, the charming hero. In this version, Malta was punished for all the crimes he had committed during the course of the telenovela. In the other ending, Porcina prefers money and power instead of love, and she stays with Sinhozinho Malta. *Roque Santeiro* left the audience in suspense until the last episode. Both endings were taped but nobody knew which one would be broadcast. Finally, the second ending, when Porcina hesitates but decides to stay with an unpunished Sinhozinho Malta was broadcast. The writer justified his choice by pointing out that the romantic ending, even if it would have pleased many of the telenovela's viewers, would not have been a faithful reflection of what really goes on in Brazilian society, where rich people take impunity for granted.

Gilberto Braga, the writer of *O Dono do Mundo* ("King of the World," 1992, *Globo*) used his position as a writer to create a compromise between the audience's and his own will: after modifying the plot of the telenovela to get more popularity among the audience, the writer reversed the situation in the final episodes of the telenovela. Felipe Barreto, the evil character who had lost all his money and properties and who had become a humble person, recovers his wealth and becomes, once again, evil and corrupted, just like he was at the beginning of the telenovela.

Nowadays, each television network struggles to have a permanent group of telenovela writers. In spite of the expansive character of the telenovela industry, there is still a very limited number of top ranked writers. Competition among different television networks has inflated salaries and increased the prestige of the profession.

An article in *Veja* (16 July 97) reveals that the salary of a top ranked telenovela writer such as Benedito Ruy Barbosa can reach up to US\$100,000 a month. Top ranked writers are contracted by a television network for a couple of years. During this time, they receive a fixed salary even when they are not writing a telenovela. Their salaries are raised during the time the telenovela is aired, since they are paid for product placement along with the story's plot (I will discuss this below). *Veja* also reports that telenovelas' main writers receive five percent of the value of each advertisement insertion, thereby sometimes doubling their monthly income.

Telenovela writers have different backgrounds and styles. While some of them were involved with theater and journalism before they

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moved into telenovela writing (during military dictatorship many playwrights and intellectuals found in telenovelas a medium to reach the masses and comment, metaphorically, about the country's situation), others started as telenovela writers and then eventually moved towards other domains of dramatic expression. Top ranked writers have managed to create a personal telenovela style, and to specialize themselves within a certain genre – urban, regional, romantic, political, humorous, fantastic or historical telenovelas.

Most of the writers have also publicly expressed an opinion about their profession. Some argue that telenovelas have a cathartic force and that they can be used as a means to inform people (Sílvia de Abreu and Gloria Perez have said such things). Others emphasize the entertaining, light-hearted or romantic character of telenovelas (Aguinaldo Silva and the deceased Janete Clair.)²⁸ Still others see telenovelas as political instruments, a way to comment upon Brazilian society (for instance the telenovelas by Benedito Ruy Barbosa and the deceased Dias Gomes).

Telenovelas' Stars

Telenovela actors and actresses play an important role in the media world and in Brazilian society. Lopez (1995:258) suggests that for actors and actresses to "work in a telenovela today is often to have reached the apex of one's professional career." I would add that to work in a telenovela is also a way for an actor or actress to gain visibility in various media circuits. Telenovela actors and actresses have the strong support of various media, and they participate in publicity campaigns, promotions, interviews, advertisements, etc. Actresses are often invited to be the cover of beauty and fashion magazines, and to reveal their beauty secrets, diets and gymnastic programs.

An extra income source for many young actors is to be the emcees of teenage birthday parties. An article in *Veja* (24 July 96) reveals yet another source of income for young telenovela actors: to be the special guests of organized trips to Disney World. Their role is to accompany groups of up to 300 teenagers (most of them female), during a seven to fourteen day trip. This kind of arrangement has become a popular way for middle- and upper-class girls to celebrate their birthdays. During these trips, the actors are supposed to chat with as many girls as possible, take pictures with them, give autographs and sometimes even

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dance with the girls. For this work they receive almost R\$2,000 a day, which at the time the *Veja* article appeared, corresponded approximately to the same amount in US dollars.²⁹

Other parallel income sources for actors/actresses are appearances in advertisements. Vink (1988:156) illustrates this with an amusing anecdote, told by actor Raul Cortez:

When I was making a commercial in Porto Alegre, people from the agency asked me which other character would develop more in the *novela*. They wanted more actors working for them. I mentioned one particular actress who was to have an important role. Two months later, the agency people were disappointed because this character had attempted suicide and thus could not sell any product at all.

This anecdote highlights the fact that advertising agencies tend to contact only those actors who are playing popular characters. Actors who play villains or suicidal characters are thus more limited in their ability to milk the advertising market.

Through their visibility in different kinds of popular contexts and media, telenovela actors and actresses become familiar faces to the audience. Audiences know them not only as telenovela characters but also as public persons, with certain opinions about social and political issues: telenovela actors and actresses are often invited to participate in political campaigns showing their support for a certain candidate or a certain political party. They also participate in televised Carnival parades, wearing the colors and dancing to the particular rhythms of Samba Schools. The presence of telenovela stars in these kinds of events gives a touch of glamour to the occasion and attracts the attention of more people. At the same time, participation in public events functions as self-promotion, contributing to increase the visibility of these actors and actresses.³⁰

Telenovelas' Audiences

In order to sketch a picture of telenovela watching, I rely on the statistical data presented by scholars who have researched on telenovelas. Brazilian anthropologist Esther Hamburger wrote a Ph.D. dissertation on the production of *Globo's* telenovelas (Hamburger 1999). She argues that statistically, the number of telenovela viewers

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decreased during the 1990s, due to the introduction of cable TV and to the greater availability of VCRs. According to the statistical data presented by Hamburger (based mostly on the works of Aidar 1996, and Potter et al. 1998), the number of television and telenovela viewers had consistently been rising since 1960, and during the 1980s, the telenovela audience reached its peak. For instance, telenovelas such as *Roque Santeiro* ("Roque, the Saint-maker," 1985-6, *Globo*) reached between sixty to seventy percent of the households with a television set. In the 1990s, by contrast, it is estimated (according to audience surveys made by *Globo* and IBOPE) that a telenovela considered to be a success reaches no more than fifty percent of the households with television. In absolute numbers, however, this still represents about seventy million viewers.

Statistics presented by the IBOPE show that telenovelas reach a wide range of viewers, which IBOPE classifies by age (14-25; 26-39; above 40), geographical position (urban or rural), gender, and socioeconomic class (AB – upper- and upper-middle-class; C – middle-class; DE – lower-middle class and lower-class).

Briefly, the tendency shown by these statistics is that telenovelas are watched mostly by people belonging to age group one (aged between 14-25) or group three (more than 40). Telenovelas are watched by women and men: according to Aidar (1996),³¹ within a four year period (1990-1994), 27.2 percent of Brazilian men watched *Globo's* eight o'clock telenovelas compared to 37.2 percent of Brazilian women.³² As to the relationship between telenovela viewers and class, still according to Aidar (1996), during a four year period (1990-1994), the majority of the audience belonged to class DE (lower-middle and lower class approximately 35.3 percent), followed by class C (middle-class approximately 33.8 percent), and class AB (upper-middle and upper class approximately 27.5 percent).

Watching Practices

Telenovelas frequently use repetitions and flashbacks in their narratives. This, added to the way the narrative is built in daily episodes, gives viewers the possibility of following them with different degrees of assiduity and attention. While some people sit in front of the television screen and pay attention to the plot, others combine their

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watching with the most varied activities such as eating dinner, washing dishes, talking, reading a newspaper, driving a cab, or guarding the entrances of apartment buildings. That television watching in general and telenovela watching in particular can be combined with diverse activities has also been observed by other researchers in media such as Hartley (1992: 210-1), Grossberg (1987:34), Vink (1988), and Tufte (1993: 89).

Beltrão (1993), Tufte (1993), and Vink (1988), all of whom have conducted research on the reception of telenovelas in relatively poor neighborhoods in northeastern, southern and southeastern Brazil, report that in lower-class households, the living room is where collective, non-private activities take place. It is the place where guests are received, where the family has its meals, where the children do their homework and where people watch television. It is meant to be the most representative room of the house, a room that is turned towards the outside world.

For wealthier middle- and upper middle-class households, the living-room is generally the space that is most protected from the household mess, it is where guests are received and where social entertainment takes place. It is therefore, not usually combined with the parallel activities that take place around television watching (such as eating, drinking, playing, etc.). In these households, television sets are placed in more private surroundings, where family activities take place. In my fieldwork, I noticed that such households either had a television set in the same room where they ate their meals, or in their bedrooms, or else they had a television in a special room – the *quarto de televisão* (television-room).

People who had a television room explained to me that they did not want television to intrude in their lives. That explained why the television set was placed in a special room. These kinds of explanations were often contradicted by the fact that the television set was turned on even when no one was sitting in the television room. Voices and sounds coming from the television freely mixed with other household noises.

In many cases, television works as a kind of "household clock" – its recurring and regular attractions, such as the six-, seven- and eight o'clock telenovelas, the one o'clock afternoon news and the eight o'clock news broadcasting served often as markers of time, regulating

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or coinciding with other household activities. Thus, it was not unusual to hear people saying that their children came home from school when *Malhação* (a teenage soap-opera) was starting, or that they ate dinner just before the National News, or that they went back to work (from the lunch break) when the afternoon news was about to finish.

Moreover, it is not unusual to have television and telenovelas as producers of background noise, a kind of electronic interlocutor. Writing about Venezuelan's regime of watching television, Barrios (1988) gives an example of use of television as a background noise that is similar to behaviors I have observed during my own fieldwork:

A teenager turned on every television set that crossed his path on his way to his room (three in total) after returning home, then he set down to talk with his father in another room. (Barrios 1988:72)

There are different modes of attention and different ways of using television and telenovelas. As television watching became a more taken for granted practice within everyday life, people started combining it with other activities. As the examples above have shown, these different contexts in which television and telenovelas are watched, have brought, in their turn, new meanings to the medium itself (television as a status symbol, as a household clock, as company, etc.).³³

Telenovela\$

Many television networks have now organized telenovela industries so carefully that as soon as a telenovela is over – this generally happens on a Friday, with a repeat of the last episode on Saturday – there will be a new one to substitute it, starting on the following Monday. So, even if different telenovelas come and go, the certainty that one telenovela will be followed by another, and the viewers' expectation of seeing very well-known actor's faces reincarnated in new fictional characters, make this apparently fragmented rhythm of telenovelas into a cyclical one – a telenovela continuum.

In 1985, the average cost of an hour long *Globo* telenovela episode was US\$20,000 – 30, 000. In 1992, however, *Globo* executives announced that an 'ambitious' novela could cost as much as US\$120,000 per episode (Lopez 1995:259). These costs are, as Lopez observes, easily covered by domestic advertising revenues.

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Advertisements are either placed during the intervals of a telenovela or within a telenovela plot. An article in *Folha de São Paulo* (TV *Folha*, 3 December 95) approached the subject of product placement in telenovela plots. According to this article, there are many ways to promote a product within a telenovela. A more discrete alternative is to show a character holding or buying a certain product, filmed in close-up so that the product's brand name can be seen. Another alternative is to insert the product in a dialogue taking place between characters. Here follows an illustration of this. It is a scene from an episode of the telenovela *História de Amor* ("Love Story"), broadcast in November 15, 1995, at six o'clock, by *Globo*. Three female characters, Nazaré (the house's maid), Kátia and Bianca, are talking.

Bianca: I'm so hungry!

Nazaré: It's ready to serve now. [As she takes a plate from the oven, the oven's brand name is shown in close-up].

Bianca: Poor you who will have to clean this oven afterwards!

Nazaré: No problem! This oven is really not a problem, Bianca.

Kátia: It has an auto-cleaning device. I even said to Nazaré that since things are so easy nowadays, I might even consider to start cooking.

Nazaré: This oven cleans by itself, but it doesn't teach you how to cook!

According to the *TVFolha* article, companies that invest in product placement seem to find this kind of investment worthwhile, because it reaches viewers when they are paying attention to the telenovela, and it complicates the distinction between reality and fiction, encouraging people to acquire things that are shown within a fictive frame.

Ortiz et al. (1991:114) show that in 1988, *Globo's* prices for a thirty-second advertisement were US\$8,900 during the intervals of the six o'clock telenovela, US\$16,000 for the seven o'clock telenovela, and US\$19,800 for the eight o'clock telenovela. The prices for product placement were twenty to thirty percent more expensive than a sixty-second advertisement. The 1995 article in the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* about product placement in telenovelas estimated that a thirty-second advertisement aired during the intervals of an eight o'clock telenovela by *Globo* cost approximately US\$65,000. The price for a product insertion in the plot was of approximately US\$90,000 per

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insertion. In other words, product placement in telenovelas costs much more than advertising for products during commercial intervals. The number of insertions varies, depending on the popularity of the telenovela. For instance, in the telenovela *A Indomada* ("The Untamed Woman," broadcast by *Globo*, at eight o' clock, in 1997), I detected at least five insertions spread throughout the plot: an instant coffee brand, a mini-bus, a bank, a milk brand, and an English course were incorporated into the plot.

Mattelart and Mattelart (1990) suggest that the development of television and of a national telenovela industry go hand in hand with the development of an urban consumer society. In fact, it is interesting to note that the increased appearance of black telenovela actors and actresses since the mid-1990s coincides with the Brazilian government's new liberal policy regarding the import of foreign goods and the consequent import of ethnic products (such as beauty products for black women, which previously had not been available in Brazil). It is tempting to see a correlation between these factors.

Besides advertising revenues, Brazilian telenovelas have been exported to more than one hundred countries (Allen 1995:13; Mazziotti 1993:25). From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, *Globo's* annual profits on telenovelas sales had risen to US\$20,000,000 (Allen 1995:13).³⁴

Telenovelas have also generated a variety of spin-off products: there are television and radio shows about telenovelas and their stars, there are gossip magazines (such as *Amiga*, *AnaMaria*, *Caras*, *Contigo!* and *Tititi*),³⁵ there are fashion magazines reporting the latest telenovela fashions (such as *Moda Moldes* and *Manequim*) and, last but not least, there are the cassettes and CDs with national and international tunes that are played during a telenovela. Since 1971, the *Globo* network has been selling records with the same songs that were played during a telenovela. Due to the success of sales, the network expanded telenovela music to always consist of two CDs – one with national and the other with international tunes (Ortiz et al.1991). Other networks have followed this idea and are now producing their own telenovela CDs.

Throughout this chapter, I have discussed Brazilian telenovelas in terms of their history, commercial aspects, production, form and content. I compared the form of telenovelas to that of a sensuous spectacle: events from Brazilian everyday life are exaggerated,

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visualized, performed in beautiful landscapes by good-looking actors and actresses, with a soundtrack of Brazilian and international tunes and a guaranteed happy ending. The content of telenovelas was described as a sequence of euphoric articulations – relationships that connect (often through seduction and love) different and clear-cut universes, thus promoting individual transformation and social mobility. In the next chapter, I present some theoretical tools, which will enable me to analyze the way telenovelas resonate within the lives of the people who watch them.

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¹ In England, the BBC already started broadcasting television programs on a regular basis in 1936. However, the spread of television technology around the world was intensified only several years after the end of World War II. In Sweden, for instance, the first official television broadcast happened in 1956.

² According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE).

³ This was only modified in 1988, when the concession of television networks became a decision to be taken not only by the president but also by the Brazilian Congress.

⁴ Mattelart and Mattelart (1990:25):

In the United States, it is only very recently – since deregulation – that the rigorous separation between broadcasters and producers has begun to become blurred, enabling the constitution of powerful integrated groups. While the three networks produced no more than three and a half hours a week and stations produced less than ten percent of their programs, in 1986, the shaking up of the entire structure of the audiovisual industries of the United States brought about closer relations between production and broadcasting.

⁵ According to Mattelart and Mattelart (1990:19), in 1970, seventy-three percent of the country's industries were situated in the southeastern region.

⁶ Landay (1999:27) makes a similar observation concerning the relationship between North-American television and consumerism.

⁷ Sodré, 1977 makes a similar observation.

⁸ According to Vink, 1988: 30-31.

⁹ According to Allen (1995). Simpson (1993:63), affirms that "of every ten television sets turned on [in Brazil], an average of six are tuned to *Globo*. The network's power in the Brazilian entertainment world has been compared to Metro-Goldwin-Mayer's influence in the movie-making industry of the 1930s and 1940s." According to recent statistics, found in *Globo's* web site (www.globo.com.br), the network presents itself as reaching now 99.52 percent of the Brazilian territory, which corresponds to 37,743,062 households with television, or 161,080,257 inhabitants.

¹⁰ The *SBT* is now producing own telenovelas as well.

¹¹ Flora Sussekund (1985:13-4) in Mattelart and Mattelart (1990:33) suggests the term "spectacle" and "aesthetics of spectacle" to describe the content of Brazilian mass culture as it bloomed during military dictatorship.

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¹² This programmed euphoria that characterizes Brazilian television could explain the reasons why so many people use television as background noise.

¹³ I am aware that my presentation of Brazilian television programming as a euphoric spectacle brings associations to the Bakhtinian concept of "carnavalesque" (Bakhtin 1984[1965]). This concept, as Stam (1989:98) points out, is used as a device to analyze cultural productions (such as literature and film) as echoing the social practice of carnival. Very briefly, carnivalesque practices imply the valorization of the life force, orgiastic sacrifice, celebration of the grotesque, foregrounding of social inversion, presentation of change as a source for popular hope, emphasis on ambivalence and ambiguity, feelings of union with the community, and an emphasis on a participatory spectacle (Stam 1989:93-4). According to Bakhtin (1984), within carnival, all hierarchical distinctions, all norms and prohibitions, are temporarily suspended. Carnival generates a cosmic gaiety, a parodic laughter that mocks social hierarchies.

Can the same be said about television programs? Stam presents the term "ersatz carnival" (1989: 224), a simulacrum of carnival style festivity, a projected fulfillment of what is desired (for instance: social inversion, change, popular hope, feelings of union and participation within the community) and absent within everyday life. Are television spectacles "the product of the oppositional culture of the oppressed" (Stam, 1989:224)? Or are they "a bread-and-circuses-show, managed from above for purposes of profit" (Stam, *ibid.*)? I have avoided classifying Brazilian television programming as either echoing the practices of carnival or as simulating them. In the next chapter, I will propose some theoretical concepts that move beyond an either-or dichotomy.

¹⁴ A sample of telenovelas and their themes is presented in appendix 3.

¹⁵ Much like Brazilian telenovelas, Egyptian television serials (according to Abu-Lughod 1995:196) provide explicit social and political commentaries on contemporary Egyptian life. Something that, still according to Abu-Lughod, American soap-operas never do.

¹⁶ Geraghty (1991) makes a similar analysis of British and American soap-operas. According to her, soap-operas seem to combine three distinctive genres – melodrama, realism and light entertainment.

¹⁷ *A Guerra dos Sexos* (written by Sílvia de Abreu, broadcast in 1983-4, by *Globo*) and *Roque Santeiro* (written by Dias Gomes and broadcast in 1985-6 by *Globo*) are two good examples. See appendix 3 for a short plot summary of some telenovelas.

¹⁸ *Pantanal* (written by Benedito Ruy Barbosa, broadcast in 1990 by *Manchete*) and *O Rei do Gado* (also written by Benedito Ruy Barbosa and broadcast in 1996-7, by *Globo*) are examples of rural telenovelas.

¹⁹ *Vale Tudo* (written by Gilberto Braga and broadcast in 1988 by *Globo*) and *A Próxima Vítima* (Aguinaldo Silva, 1997, *Globo*).

²⁰ *Corpo Santo* (by José Loureiro, broadcast in 1988 by *Globo*).

²¹ *Que Rei Sou Eu?* (by Cassiano Gabus Mendes, broadcast in 1989, by *Globo*).

²² Urban: *O Dono do Mundo* (by Gilberto Braga, broadcast in 1992 by *Globo*). Historical: *Xica da Silva* (written by Adamo Angel, broadcast in 1997 by *Manchete*). Fantastic: *A Indomada* (by Aguinaldo Silva and Ricardo Linhares, broadcast in 1997, by *Globo*).

²³ Separated parents – in Brazil: 16 percent; in telenovelas: 19 percent

Persons living alone – in Brazil: 7 percent; in telenovelas: 15 percent.

Other household arrangements – in Brazil: 4 percent; in telenovelas: 18 percent.

²⁴ A striking parallel appears between the Brazilian Institute for Research on Statistics and Public Opinion's criteria for determining class (discussed in Chapter 1) and telenovelas visual

representation of class differences. Both the IBOPE and telenovelas put an emphasis on consumption of certain specific goods as being an indicator of class.

²⁵ A federal law (8069/90) regulates and prohibits the depiction of certain situations involving children and adolescents younger than 18 years. In the end, *Manchete* was not prosecuted in the case of Xica da Silva/Tais Araújo because the network waited until the actress's 18th birthday to show the scenes of her bathing naked in the waterfall. As an 18-year-old person the actress could give her consent to broadcast the scene. It is significant that in the nude bathing scene, which lasted over two minutes, according to *Veja* 4 December 1996, the actress was filmed bathing by herself. Her nude body in the waterfall was observed by the character who later became her lover and protector, but nothing of an explicit sexual nature was depicted. Had there been more explicit allusions to sex in the scene, the network would have been immediately prosecuted by the *Ministério Público* (Ministry of Public Affairs), which is in charge of the regulations concerning persons under legal age.

In Brazil, there is a federal authority that classifies the content of films and television programs and recommends appropriate hours for broadcasting to the networks. These recommendations are not directives. However, if the content of a telenovela should come to be considered as inappropriate (with for instance too many naked scenes or too many allusions to sex) for the time when it is broadcast, then the Ministry of Public Affairs would have the authority to bring legal sanctions against the broadcasting network.

²⁶ The examples I recall of male characters that underwent bodily transformations are all from telenovelas that dealt with supernatural or magical themes.

²⁷ Introducing the work of Lévi-Strauss (1995[1978]), Wendy Doniger (1995: x) writes that "he [Lévi-Strauss] is the one who taught us that every myth is driven by the obsessive need to solve a paradox *that cannot be solved*." Myths, according to Lévi-Strauss transform binary oppositions into concrete representations. In order to bridge the strong contradictions it portrays, a myth often depicts a hero/heroine as having characteristics from both of the opposed sides.

²⁸ Extracts of interviews found in Ortiz et al. (1991), illustrate this better:

Lauro César Muniz: "As a novela writer, I try to give as much information as possible to the spectator, since this is a country of people that don't read. So, I try through my novelas, even if sometimes I have to sacrifice their aesthetic quality, to inform the masses" (1991:162). [My translation]

Dias Gomes: "We were making anti-bourgeois theatre and had a bourgeois audience. What I do on television, according to the statistics, is seen even by bandits. This is what I call a popular audience" (1991:163). [My translation]

Aguinaldo Silva: "I was irritated with that story of protest-novelas. I wanted to make a big joke, a *novelão* with all the obvious clichés from classic *feuilleton*" (1991:166). [My translation]

Finally, Benedito Ruy Barbosa, in an interview to *Veja*, 06 November 96, affirms that his telenovelas are based on real persons and events.

²⁹ According to the same article, actors' salaries vary from R\$2,000 up to R\$20,000 a month.

³⁰ Just like for telenovela writers, Brazilian actors and actresses are assumed to be progressive, politically engaged, and generally (not always) left wing sympathizers.

³¹ Cited by Hamburger, 1999:282.

³² Aida's (1996) material is the analysis of quantitative data gathered by the IBOPE (Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistics) on the number of telenovela viewers between August 1990 and January 1994.

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³³ Lull's (1986:601) findings on the uses of television undertaken by audience members in family settings in the U.S.A. have several intersections with the practices around telenovela watching in family settings in Brazil:

Television was found to be used as a background noise, companionship, entertainment, punctuation of time and activity, regulation of talk patterns, experience illustration, establishing common ground, entering conversations, reducing anxiety, clarifying values, providing an agenda for talk, creating patterns of physical and verbal contact and neglect, family solidarity, family relaxant, reduction of conflict, maintenance of relationships, decision making, behavior modeling, solving problems, transmitting values across generations, legitimizing opinion, disseminating information, substitute schooling, role enactment, role reinforcement, substitute role portrayal, intellectual validation, exercise of authority, gate keeping, and for the facilitation of arguments.

³⁴ I focus here on the case of *Globo*, since this network obtains the majority of advertising revenues in the country. (Mattelart and Mattelart 1990:40)

³⁵ These magazines are published weekly or biweekly and are sold by subscription, in supermarket checkout racks, and at newsstands. *Contigo!* for instance, has a circulation of almost 250,000 biweekly issues, and it cost R\$3.90 in 1997.

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Broadening the Perspective: Key Concepts for Analysis

Alexia, a thirty-one-year-old executive secretary, with an university degree in communication, commented on the outfit she was wearing at her sister's wedding ceremony by referring to the main character in a Mexican telenovela: "Today, I'm dressed as *Maria do Bairro*: from top to toe. I am *Maria do Bairro*!" she exclaimed to me. Alexia's explanation touches on a much discussed theme within both media studies and anthropology about the impact that particular representations (telenovelas, *rites de passage*, films, public celebrations, advertisements) might have on people: do they shape what people think and how they act? And if so, what determines their power? Why are some representations more powerful than others? Are telenovelas like Balinese cockfights, in Geertz's (1973) rendering? That is, do they teach their viewers something about their society? And do telenovelas' representations of gender, sexuality, race and class work as guidelines for, or enablers of, particular kinds of subject formation?

Having spent the last two chapters contextualizing this study in terms of the material I will be analyzing, I now want to turn to theoretical concepts that will allow me to investigate what brings Alexia (and other people with whom I spoke) to compare herself with a telenovela character, or with a fictive situation. Do messages coming from the telenovela flow work as guidelines for positioning people in society?

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Here, I will begin by sketching the development of media studies, focusing particularly on the question of the reception of media messages. I will highlight the intersections between media studies and anthropology in order to locate the research in this study within the theoretical framework of an anthropology of media. I then move on to a discussion about the telenovela flow as an attempt to broaden the perspective of reception studies. Finally, without losing sight of the anthropological approach to media, I take an interdisciplinary standpoint and engage with the concepts of *dialogism* (Bakhtin 1970; 1973; 1986) and *interpellation* (Althusser 1971; Butler 1997). I will show how these concepts might work as theoretical tools in the analysis of my empirical material.

Previous Research

The study of media has been approached from within different disciplines and with the help of different theories. Common to many of these approaches is the concern to investigate whether or not media exercises a powerful and persuasive influence upon people (Gurevitch et al. 1982). A question that almost obligatorily follows this first one, and which has also been at the core of the study of media, relates to the status of the people who receive media messages – do people *passively* receive media messages, or should they be seen as *active agents* who work to decode and interpret?

With a point of departure in Marxism, members of the Frankfurt School (Adorno 1974; Horkheimer and Adorno 1972; Marcuse 1968) highlighted alienation, homogenization and socio-cultural erosion as the result of commercial mass media. The standpoint of these scholars was that media had a power to impose its repressive messages directly upon unprepared *spectators*. This kind of reasoning became known as the "top-down" or "hypodermic" model, since, as Hirsch (1998) has summarized, it attributed to media the power to "'inject' its repressive message almost directly" (1988:213) into people who were exposed to it. From this point of view, Alexia, who declares herself to be *Maria do Bairro*, could be seen as a prototype of the unprepared and alienated spectator – one who is unable to discern between fiction and reality, and who blindly accepts and incorporates broadcast messages. A problem with this perspective is that its focus lays exclusively on media

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messages. No other factors, such as an analysis of the viewers' own interpretations of the messages received, were included in the research. An analysis of media messages was considered enough to understand their effects and foresee their consequences.

Revising and refining this Marxist legacy (Hall 1980 [1973]; Williams 1977),¹ and inspired by linguistic understandings of how messages are transmitted and how meaning is created through communication (Morley 1981; Hall 1982), British Cultural Studies started approaching people as active subjects in the process of interpretation of different media. This shift in perspective was marked, for instance, by a change in terminology from "spectators" to "viewers." A "viewer" as Fiske (1987:17) puts it, is "someone watching television, making meaning and pleasures from it, in a social situation [...] A viewer is engaged with the screen more variously, actively, and selectively than is a spectator." The receiver/viewer is seen as an agent in the process of text/message decoding.

The result of this re-orientation was a change in focus, clearly noticeable during the 1980s, from the text/message, to the interpretive practices of media audiences. Diversity in audiences was examined, as was the way in which various audiences engaged with and used different media (Lull 1986).² The plurality of meanings that could be created from a media text/message was also highlighted. Moreover, as Spitulnik (1993:296) has pointed out, these new tendencies marked a change in focus on media research – there was a move away from the idea of texts as a closed, privileged site of meaning, to an idea of texts as "dynamic sites of struggle over representation, and complex spaces in which subjectivities are constructed and identities are contested."

In the 1980s, media researchers increasingly turned towards anthropology and anthropological methods to better situate their research within complex social contexts. Until then, much of the research on audience activity was conducted in isolation, often through the application of formal questionnaires, as if the viewers' reception was independent of any social context. Ethnography (often understood simply as a research method to obtain qualitative material) became a keyword among media researchers (Ang 1985; Morley 1980; Radway 1988). The introduction of ethnography was basically a new way for these researchers to obtain more qualitative material that could situate

viewers' reception within a socio-cultural context (Hodge and Tripp 1986; Mattelart 1990).

Spitulnik (1993:298) argues that one problem with this approach is that "ethnography" worked in many cases only as a label – detailed participant-observation was often minimal and actual immersion in the daily practices and social worlds of the people studied was almost non-existent. Ironically, at the same time that ethnography and anthropological methods for data collection were being praised and adopted by media researchers, they were being roundly criticized and questioned within anthropology (e.g., by Marcus and Fischer 1986; Clifford and Marcus 1986). The ethnographic turn within media studies lacked the reflexivity that works like that by Clifford and Marcus had introduced into anthropological practice: people's self-reports were quite often taken at face value, and the role of the ethnographer in the process of investigation was not examined.

Anthropologists, meanwhile, had approached the study of media in several ways – "as institutions, as workplaces, as communicative practices, as cultural products, as social activities, as aesthetic forms, and as historical developments" (Spitulnik 1993:293).

The first anthropological works on media appeared during the period around World War II when Benedict (1946) and Mead and Metraux (1953)³ analyzed films, novels and other media as ethnographic material in order to understand the national culture of adversaries like Japan.

The Post-War period in anthropological studies of media was characterized by a focus on the impact of media in modern communities (Warner and Henry 1948), on the relationship between media and social change (Honigman 1953), and on the production of media (Powdermaker 1950). Between 1970 and 1980, anthropologists analyzed mass media in terms of symbolic constructions and rituals (Bharati 1977; Claus 1982 [1976]; Das 1973; Karp 1981). Influenced by debates revising the anthropological practice, the 1980s and 1990s mark a move towards a deeper contextualization of both viewer and media within the social and cultural arenas where reception took place (Abu-Lughod 1989; Das 1995; Hirsch and Silverstone 1992, 1998; Kulick and Willson 1994). A variety of studies focused on ethnographies of media (Caughey 1986; Hannerz 1990; Kottak 1990), the cultural construction of news (Beeman 1983), the study of media

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production (Dornfeld 1998; Graffman 2002; Pedelty 1995), and media consumption and reception (Abu-Lughod 1993, 1995; Dickey 1993; Lutz and Collins 1993; Fuglesang 1994).

Studies on the reception of television programs started investigating the context within which reception took place. Researchers looked at the varying modes of watching television and to the place television occupied (both physically and culturally) in people's lives (Barrios 1988; Lull 1988). There was an effort not only to understand people's interactions with the content of media messages, but also to situate these practices within local constraints and experiences. This effort is mirrored by research that investigates viewers' watching practices (the way people actually watch programs, who chooses what to watch, and the preparations around watching) and the place television sets occupy in the household (Dahlgren 1990; Morley 1986; Tufte 1993).

It is in this attempt to broaden the perspective of reception studies that I situate the present research. Most research on the reception of Brazilian telenovelas (Beltrão 1993; Hamburger 1999; Tufte 1993; Vink 1988) has taken into account viewers' reactions to and interpretations of the *plots* of telenovelas. One has a well-delineated program and a well-delineated research context, namely, the *immediate* reception (read interpretation) of telenovelas' plots.⁴

Fachel-Leal and Oliven (1987), Beltrão (1993), Tufte (1993) and Vink (1988) are just a few examples of works in this area. These authors start from the idea (with which I agree) that telenovelas' plots use a great deal of repetition in their narrative structure: important events and problems are repeated and re-cited from episode to episode, in order to keep viewers in touch with the intrigues, but also to allow new viewers to quickly get a picture of the whole story. In addition, in the effort to engage as many viewers as possible, the themes developed depict a variety of positions and allow for many different interpretations.

Most of the studies on the reception of telenovelas focus on women's (often from lower-classes) reactions to and interpretations of telenovelas. Gender, class, and to a certain extent, age, are issues at the core of reception studies on telenovelas. The subject of telenovelas and race has, with a few exceptions (DaSilva 1999)⁵, seldom been addressed. In spite of the differences concerning themes for investigation and methods of research, studies on the reception of

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telenovelas seem to point in similar directions when it comes to the relationship between telenovela viewing⁶, age and class.

There seems to be a relationship between age and the way people report about their viewing practices. The younger the viewer, the easiest it is for her/him to admit her/his likes and dislikes about a certain character or event in a telenovela. But as they reach adulthood, the connection that viewers make between personal feelings and feelings depicted by telenovela characters become less overtly articulated. The trend shifts again when it comes to older people whose opinions about telenovelas are expressed more overtly.

The relationship between class and telenovela viewing has also been thoroughly studied. Fachel-Leal and Oliven (1987) compare how women belonging to different social classes (upper-middle class and lower-class in Porto Alegre, a city in southern Brazil) retell the events of the same telenovela (*Sol de Verão*, 1983, *Globo*). She concludes that these two groups have very different modes of interpreting the same plot: they had different opinions about what the main subject of the telenovela was, they could disregard the prominence of certain discussions (lower-class women never mentioned that the telenovela touched upon the subjects of women's sexual or professional dissatisfaction, while the upper-middle class group emphasized this very aspect in its discussions), they had different expectations regarding the way the telenovela should end (lower-class women were more engaged with the destinies of the telenovela's characters and wished for a happy ending, whereas upper-middle-class women had a more distanced relationship to the individual destinies of the telenovela's characters). In a nutshell, Fachel-Leal and Oliven come to the conclusion that class does play a role in the process of reception of telenovelas. More recent research on the same topic (Lopes 2000) has come to similar conclusions.

Vink (1988:219, 232) analyses how working-class women living in a neighborhood in Porto Alegre interpret telenovelas' messages in accordance with their social background. Vink argues that these viewers use their "cultural resources," their experiences being working-class *and* women in order to produce meanings from the telenovela text. Following Fachel's findings, he points out that there is a difference between working-class and middle-class women when it comes to the way they relate to telenovelas. While the latter have a more aesthetic

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involvement with the telenovela – taking a distanced position in relation to the plot, considering the performances of individual characters/actors, and evaluating the development of the plot, working-class women watch telenovelas "with their hearts" (1988:232). They have an emotional involvement with the plot.

Vink (1988:220) asserts that "emotional involvement is not an obstacle to insight or awareness" – identification with a fictive character might help the viewer to situate herself socially. He also points out that identification is not synonymous with imitative behavior, and concludes that:

Working-class women [who] become conscious of their situation would like it to be different but, at the same time, they know that male and /or class domination is a reality they have to live with. Novelas show them that life can be different but not for them, not here and now. Change, in the sense of struggle by the oppressed against domination, will not be caused by television. But the telenovela message can help working-class women and men to become conscious that life can be different and, as such, means a first step towards a process of social change. (Vink 1988:240)

Beltrão (1993) examines the process of identification that takes place between viewers and the characters of the telenovela *Que Rei sou Eu?* ("What Kind of King Am I?" 1989, *Globo*). She interviews both men and women belonging to different social classes, all of them living in a semi-urban community in northeastern Brazil.

Beltrão argues that for the viewers she studied, identification occurred at two levels – an individual and a social level. On the one hand, viewers could relate to the plot as citizens, as members of the same community. They thus situated themselves as a collective within a Brazilian context and drew parallels between community life and the everyday life depicted by the telenovela. Individual identification was, on the other hand, characterized by the transcendence of categories of gender, race, class and age: "I found women identifying with male characters, and poor with high [i.e. upper] class characters" (1993:68). Moreover, Beltrão also points that a single viewer could identify with different aspects of several characters.

According to Beltrão, identification happened when viewers found similarities between themselves and telenovela characters (their appearance, behavior, and problems), or when viewers wished to be like

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the characters in telenovelas (this would explain why identification sometimes transcended social categories of differentiation). But what happened after identification? Did identification with fictive characters contribute somehow to change the way viewers' reflected upon and acted in their everyday lives? Beltrão leaves aside these kinds of question.

Telenovelas and Everyday Life: Key Concepts for Analysis

1. Telenovela Flow

Ethnographic fieldwork made me realize that outside of the context of immediate telenovela reception, people not only talked about the plots of these programs, their contents and characters; they also talked extensively about subjects and products that derived from or were somehow entangled with the telenovela plot.

Anyone who has watched more than fifteen minutes of a Brazilian telenovela will notice that the stories depicted in an episode are often interrupted by commercial breaks. As I pointed out in Chapter two, a typical telenovela is approximately forty-five minutes long, divided by four commercial breaks, each of which lasts about five minutes. Each of these breaks is introduced and concluded by an audio-visual signal – a shortened version of the theme song and opening images that present the telenovela. Commercials and trailers of other coming attractions are shown in between these signals. Moreover, images and sounds of telenovelas are disseminated throughout social space by the presence of television sets in public areas, by written commentaries in the Brazilian press, by the participation of telenovela actors in the most diverse public arenas.

A complete analysis of viewers' reception of Brazilian telenovelas should take into account the way telenovelas are integrated and implicated within other media and within events of daily life. It should approach telenovelas not as uninterrupted and delimited stories about the life destinies of a collection of characters, but rather as dynamic cultural products whose "retrievability" goes far beyond the medium of television. The word "retrievability" is used by media researcher Michael Schudson (1989:160-1) to indicate the force of cultural

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objects (advertisements, for instance) to reach people, to make themselves available to people.

Literary scholar and media critic Raymond Williams (1974:90,96) observed that what is conventionally known as television programming, or listing, is in fact more than a succession of differentiated items or programs. Williams also noted that what is shown on television is a flow of diverse and loosely connected programs, constantly intercepted and interwoven with each other. He suggested that instead of analyzing how distinctive units or programs are watched by a certain number of persons, it would be interesting to approach the "characteristic experience of the flow sequence itself" (1974:95), where images and emotions are offered to viewers as a boundless and total experience:

A crime in San Francisco (the subject of the original film) began to operate in an extraordinary counterpoint not only with the deodorant and cereal commercials but with a romance in Paris and the eruption of a prehistoric monster who laid waste New York. (Williams 1974:91-92)

Williams used the metaphor of flow to describe an immediate perception of television watching. Williams' flow sequence has been a source of inspiration for other media researchers. Budd et al. (1985), for instance, did a content analysis of what they called a "television flow" – an episode of an American serial and of the advertisements shown within the commercial breaks. They found a structural coherence between the fictive narratives and the advertisement that immediately followed them. For instance, if there were children in the fictive narrative, there would be an advertisement with children during the commercial break. They concluded that advertisements profited on fictive narratives in order to promote their products. Altman (1986) focused on the commercial aspect of the television flow. Flow was seen as a way to keep viewers "plugged-in" to the television. Allen (1985) saw the narrative of soap operas as an example of a flow of sequences (sudden changes from one plotline to the other). Jensen et al. (1994) used Williams' concept of flow to create different categories (super-flow, channel flow, audience flow) in an attempt to understand the practices of television watching.

Because it works as an unfolding metaphor that can be used to describe processes of juxtaposition, transposition of meaning and interconnections, flow has also been a key word in anthropology and

other social sciences (Castells 1989; Czikszentmihayi 1990; Hannerz 1992, 1997; Howell 1995; Kroeber 1952; Lash and Urry 1994).

Inspired by this metaphor, I found it accurate to propose a new delimitation of *what* was being received by my informants, and I call this the *telenovela flow*. In this study, telenovela flow stands for all the mass media commentaries (television programs, advertisements, newspaper articles) and spin-off products that intersect with the plot, characters and actors of telenovelas. The term telenovela flow is a way to describe and visualize a crucial part of my informants' receptive experience.

2. Dialogism and Heteroglossia

Like other theorists interested in the study of media (Fiske 1987; Newcomb 1984; Spitulnik 1996; Stam 1989, Stam et al.1995), I have found an inspirational source in the intricate and comprehensive work of Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin.⁷ Bakhtin became known outside Russia and Eastern Europe in the 1970s, when some of his works were translated into French and appeared under the name of *La Poétique de Dostoïevski* (1970 [1929]). Among other issues, Bakhtin touches upon questions regarding content analysis (*La Poétique de Dostoïevski*, 1929), authorship (*The Dialogical Imagination*, 1981; *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 1999 [1986]) communication and understanding (*Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, 1973 [1930]), parody and carnivalization (*Rabelais and his World*, 1984 [1965]). Underlying all his works is a focus on the praxis of language and communication.

The reason why Bakhtin's work is applicable to the study of media is partially explained by the subjects he approached (content analysis, authorship, and mechanisms of communication). Bakhtin provides an elaborate framework for what later would come to be called a reception study. He argued that mechanisms of communication take place not only between a speaker and an addressee, but also between subjects *and* utterances/ texts / novels. As we will see, his theories have suggestive similarities with actual debates within the social sciences.⁸ Holquist (1986:xx) has argued that Bakhtin's legacy is a catalogue of questions and intuitions open for further exploration. I propose here to follow and explore two of his main concepts – *dialogism* and *heteroglossia*.

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Bakhtin's position on language and meaning was in many ways a response to Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de Linguistique Générale* (Saussure 1960[1916]). Saussure suggested that *langage* is constituted by *langue* (language/grammar) and *parole* (utterance/speech). *Langue* denotes the relatively stable system of communicative signs shared by the members of a society that exists independently of particular speakers or hearers. *Parole* is the creative, individual manifestation of the *langue*. While for Saussure the specific object of linguistics should be the *langue*, "the norm for all manifestations of speech" (1916:24)⁹, Bakhtin argued for the importance of a study of the language-speech totality. That is, he stressed the need for an investigation of how language is practiced. In response to Saussure's calls for a "semiotics," a science of signs, Bakhtin proposed what he called a "metalinguistics" or "translinguistics" (Bakhtin 1970:13).

Translinguistics is concerned with understanding the praxis of communication and especially the praxis of *dialogue* – verbal/semiotic interchange that takes place between subjects and/or between a subject and his/her own words (Bakhtin 1970:240). According to Bakhtin, a dialogue combines and is constituted by *voices*, *utterances* (or discourses/words)¹⁰ and *social contexts*. While *voice* represents a "distinct socioideological positioning," or a point of view on the world (as Stam 1989:37,50 puts it), *utterance/discourse/word* is a discursive unit, a context-bound manifestation of the voice. A single utterance can evoke a variety of completing or conflicting voices. To this combination and/or confrontation of voices within an utterance, Bakhtin gave the name of *polyphony* and/or *heteroglossia*.

An example from Hill (1993) will help me illustrate some of these terms. Hill analyzes the use of Spanish words by southwestern U.S. English speakers. In popular culture, and more specifically in the film "*Terminator 2*" she finds examples of this usage. A recurring utterance in that film – "*Hasta la vista, baby*" – is a key example in her analysis. While she is more concerned with parody and irony (which were also studied by Bakhtin), I use this phrase here to illustrate some of the concepts I have introduced so far.

A significant occurrence of the phrase " *Hasta la vista , baby*" takes place near the end of "*Terminator 2*." It is uttered by a good cyborg, called a terminator (played by the actor Arnold Schwarzenegger) at the moment he thinks he is killing his nemesis, a bad cyborg – the evil

terminator. As Hill points out, the good terminator had learnt the phrase "*Hasta la vista, baby*" from the film's hero, a tough, white, LA street kid; one who, the film explains, is destined in the future to save humanity from destruction at the hands of armies of evil terminators. In Bakhtinian terms, when the terminator utters "*Hasta la vista, baby*," one can first hear the *voice* of a child, who taught it to the cyborg in an effort to get him to be more humanlike. But there is more to it. The child hero was a monolingual English speaker. The phrase he taught to the terminator illustrates the linguistic manifestation of daily contacts between English and Spanish speakers – there is the *voice* of Spanish speakers – "*hasta la vista*" (in English, "until we meet again") combined with the *voice* of English speakers – "baby" – an English word that, in itself, contains a plurality of *voices*. "*Hasta la vista, baby*" thus evokes a certain socio-cultural context of multi-lingualism and multi-ethnicity. In this sense, it carries a particular *social accent* (Bakhtin 1986)¹¹ or an *intonation* (Volosinov 1973).

This *heteroglotic* phrase, originally spoken by a child, is then quoted and transposed into a different context – the moment when the good terminator is about to annihilate the bad terminator. When "*Hasta la vista, baby*" is uttered in this new context it receives an ironic twist, since the good terminator neither wants to see the other terminator again, nor does he consider the evil terminator to be his "baby." This shift of context exemplifies how the meaning of an utterance can be refracted or modified depending on the context in which the utterance is made.

A further example of the implications of context shifting is evident in the fact, again discussed by Hill, that in 1992, the actor Arnold Schwarzenegger, who was accompanying then-President Bush on his campaign in New Hampshire, growled "*Hasta la vista, baby*" at Bush's opponents. By re-citing the *voice* of the terminator and transposing it to this context of actual confrontation, the actor Schwarzenegger was also evoking some of the Manichaean themes at play in "Terminator 2," thus paralleling the film with reality.

"*Hasta la vista, baby*" illustrates the context-bound, shifting, intertextual and interactive process of communication and production of meaning, to which Bakhtin gives the name of *dialogism*. With this concept, we are brought back to the core of the translinguistic enterprise and its interest in dialogue, heteroglossia and context.

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Dialogism derives from the word dialogue and it aims at describing the mechanisms of interaction taking place between and betwixt voices, utterances/discourses/words, persons and contexts.

From a media studies' point of view, dialogism offers a counter-response to those researchers who described the process of reception of a medium as one-sided and – as Bakhtin would say – monologic,¹² where media messages were said to exert a direct influence upon its receivers, thus imposing their supposedly homogeneous (and homogenizing) messages upon a passive mass. Seeing the process of reception as *dialogic* means that we can analyze how viewers socially position themselves and how they actively negotiate between messages which are themselves embedded with socio-cultural meaning, or as Bakhtin would put it, messages that carry intonations or social accents.

It follows that the content of a media message can be seen in terms of conflicting or complementing *voices* – for example, the voice and political/ moral profile of the broadcasting network, the voice of the socially positioned author who writes the text, and the voices of the characters within the text. Acknowledging such a complexity already at a textual level is a step towards questioning the idea that the messages of a certain media program are the same everywhere and for everybody. At the same time, by describing the processes of communication as context-bound (utterances are enunciated and received from particular social positions and laminated with socio-cultural meanings), dialogism allows researchers to emphasize the necessity of studying media as interwoven with other social practices. In other words, the concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia can be used by media researchers as a way to recognize the active role played by the viewer/receiver in the process of interpretation and use, at the same time that it recognizes that these interpretations and uses are generated within particular socio-cultural contexts. As I have shown earlier, this is a position that is adhered to by most of the contemporary media researchers. So what, besides the terminology, does a Bakhtinian approach add to research on media?

The concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia offer an important contribution to the study of the reception of media messages since they point at processes of *circulation*, *repetition*, *appropriation* and *re-iteration* of meaning that take place in human communication (conversations, dialogues, novels, texts, etc). Bakhtin's theories about communication and the process of understanding are saturated with

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concepts such as re-accentuation (1986:87), intonation, (1973:103), multi-accentuality (1973:23), and circulation (1986:162).¹³ These concepts focus on the points of contact between voices, utterances, persons and contexts. They highlight how utterances can be (and are) transposed from one context to another, in a dynamic commingling, in which the involved parties constantly change:

[T]he unique speech experience of each individual is shaped and developed in continuous and constant interaction with others' individual utterances. This experience can be characterized to some degree as the process of *assimilation* – more or less creative – of others' words.[...] Our speech, that is, all our utterances (including creative works), is filled with others' words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of "our-ownness," varying degrees of awareness and detachment. These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate. (Bakhtin 1986:89)

The ideas of circulation and re-accentuation that are implied by the concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia can be used, at a micro level, to understand the mechanisms at play in the telenovela flow and in viewers' reception of this flow: how and what messages are appropriated, circulated and reiterated by viewers?

These questions, in their turn, intersect with major issues within social and human sciences regarding the relationship between structure and agency, conditioning and creativity, individual and society: how are social practices and representations generated and how are they reproduced, circulated and/or modified? Are cultural products (such as telenovelas) issued from powerful social groups and are they capable of shaping human action? Or is culture (of which telenovelas are a part) a "tool-kit" (Ortner 1984) a set of pliable ideas and symbols, which can be selected and used by individuals, according to their purposes?

Micro and macro levels of analysis are articulated when we start asking questions like: what voices is Alexia articulating when she appropriates, circulates and reiterates *Maria do Bairro*? What makes her want to circulate messages from the telenovela flow? In what ways does *Maria do Bairro* guide Alexia's conduct?

While I have argued that Bakhtin's concepts can be applied to describe the *mechanisms* of circulation that take place in communication (Alexia's references to *Maria do Bairro* could thus be

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described in terms of appropriation, circulation and reiteration), I recognize that they do not address the question of the *impact* a text or a representation might have on the people that circulate them. Bakhtin does suggest the idea of a heteroglotic subject – a subject formed by a plurality of voices and social accents (Bakhtin 1970:13, 254; Volosinov 1973:41)¹⁴, which could be seen as a way to approach the question of impact of representations upon people. But this idea remains at an abstract level and is not developed thoroughly. Ideas similar to Bakhtin's heteroglotic subject have nevertheless been developed in other disciplines. Psychoanalysis, for example, is premised on the idea of a divided subject and of the self as being an array of signifiers (Lacan 1977).¹⁵ Social scientist Donna Haraway expresses something similar in her contention that a subject is "partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another" (Haraway 1991:193). The idea of a heteroglotic subject, a subject that "is always constructed and stitched" is essential in my own reasoning since, when I propose to investigate the relationship between telenovelas and people, I start from the idea that there are numerous *voices* or *social accents* that impact on subject formation. Media (and in this special case, the telenovela flow) is, or might be, some of these voices.

3. Interpellation

Questions regarding the impact of cultural products among people have been approached and discussed from different points of view. For instance, Schudson (1989) attempted to investigate the impact of mass media products upon people, by asking the question "How does culture work?" His answer was that culture (and its products, such as mass media) works as a reminder of things people already know.¹⁶ Mass media products would, according to this perspective, confirm and reinforce certain representations and stereotypes assumed to be "natural" by Brazilian viewers. This is indeed an interesting perspective, but it is partial – what happens after the moment when viewers are reminded of things they are assumed to know? Do they just go on repeating these things, which they already knew?

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While Schudson's (1989) inquiries about the impact of cultural products upon people are important, I see the concept of *interpellation* (introduced by Althusser 1971 and revised by Butler 1993, 1997) as a way not only to further develop the questions discussed above but also as a precise instrument that allows me to approach and analyze the specific case of the reception of the telenovela flow.

In "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," Althusser (1971) introduced the concept of *interpellation* to designate the moment when a voice from the outside addresses an individual, who, by turning around, becomes a subject (in the double sense of being both an agent and a subjected being).¹⁷ The address from another animates the subject into being. One of the examples Althusser gives to illustrate interpellation at work is the policeman who hails "Hey, you there!" to call the attention of a passerby. Althusser argues that it is the call of the policeman and the fact that the passerby recognizes him/herself as being the addressee that brings the passerby into existence as a subject. Why? "Because he [the passerby] has recognized that the hail was 'really' addressed to him, and that 'it was *really him* who was hailed' (and not someone else)" (1971:174).¹⁸

The concept of interpellation is a helpful way to articulate calls and messages issued by the telenovela flow with viewers (who might turn around, as it were, to respond to those calls), at the same time that it suggests that their turning around brings them into existence as certain kinds of subjects. Let us first take a further look at this concept.

Althusser's interpellation is a top-down description of how subjects come into being: the voice of the policeman is an allegory for the voice of a dominant, naturalized ideology in society. The passerby who turns around when hailed by the policeman indicates that he or she is already subordinated to that voice, he or she recognizes and responds to it – in other words, ideologies are naturalized, invisible, taken for granted by the persons who live in any particular society. Religious systems, educational systems, the family, legal systems, political systems, trade systems, the media, literature, arts and sports are all ideological state apparatuses – distinct and specialized institutions that make up people's lives, and that call them into being as particular kinds of subjects:

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Thus ideology hails or interpellates individuals as subjects. As ideology is eternal¹⁹, I must now suppress the temporal form in which I have presented the functioning of ideology, and say: ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects, which amounts to making it clear that individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects, which necessarily leads us to one last proposition: *individuals are always-already subjects*. (1971:175-6)

Althusser points out that the policeman hailing a passerby is just a possible illustration of interpellation, which in fact happens all the time: individuals/subjects are immersed in ideology, they recognize its calls, regard these calls as natural and obvious, and tend to reproduce them as being obvious²⁰:

I only wish to point out that you and I are *always already* subjects, and as such constantly practice the rituals of ideological recognition, which guarantee for us that we are indeed concrete, individual, distinguishable and (naturally) irreplaceable subjects. (1971:172)

In her book *Excitable Speech* (1997) the US philosopher Judith Butler addresses the question of subject formation through language. Returning to interpellation, Butler examines and revises this concept as she explores a question Althusser mentions only *en passant*²¹: do individuals always turn around when interpellated? Butler dwells on Althusser's realization that interpellation does not always work, and suggests that some people might not recognize themselves as the addressees of an interpellation. They might simply not turn around, or they might turn around and deny that interpellation, as in the interchange: "Hey, you there!"/ "That is not me, you must be mistaken!" By further exploring the idea that an interpellation might not always result in recognition from the part of the addressee, Butler comes to suggest that "interpellation is an address that regularly misses its mark" (1997:33).²² For instance, let us suppose that a person is called by an offensive name. Her refusal to recognize herself as being the addressee of the call might be her way of making herself recognizable as another kind of subject than the one the interpellation attempted to call into being.

Revised in this way, the concept of interpellation becomes less deterministic than it was in Althusser's original formulation. Furthermore, it can be understood as a complement to Bakhtin's

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dialogism and heteroglossia, since it aims at explaining and developing the relationship between voice and subject formation (a question that, as I have pointed out above, Bakhtin only touches upon): utterances/words are heteroglotic, i.e., they carry within themselves a variety of *voices* and *social accents*. These utterances/words are appropriated by and/or imposed upon individuals by means of diverse interpellations (issued in everyday interactions through conversations, bureaucratic forms, television programs, or what have you). If the individuals addressed by these interpellations "turn around" (and some won't – there are those who will not recognize themselves as being the addressees) they might then either assimilate these utterances/words, or they might re-accentuate them, thereby opening up possibilities for novelty, change, resistance or subversion.

Butler suggests that "one 'exists' not only by virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense, by being *recognizable*" (1997:5). With this kind of formulation, I see Butler as foregrounding agency and dialogue in interpellation. While being *recognized* implies that one is constituted as a subject by calls from the outside (and in this sense, subordinated through and within an ideology), being *recognizable*, as I read Butler, implies a certain individual agency, a willful attempt to slip past or demand entry into a circuit of recognition. By becoming *recognizable*, one exerts influence on the kind of address one can receive. With the help of this distinction, I could interpret Alexia's exclamation "Today, I'm dressed as *Maria do Bairro*: from top to toe. I am *Maria do Bairro*!" as indicating a desire to be *recognizable* either as an elegant and/or rich and/or sensual woman; or as an ironic, humorous person who plays with the idea that *Maria do Bairro* is not what a rich and sensual woman would be (or would like to be) called.

This chapter's main objective was to present and discuss the major concepts that will work as tools for the analysis of my ethnographic material. It was based on the material I gathered doing fieldwork that I came to argue that viewers/informants, in moments outside of immediate reception, were not only relating to a delimited and well-circumscribed program but to a series of entanglements and intersections that telenovelas have with other media and other domains of society. The term telenovela flow is the result of this attempt to broaden the perspective of reception studies.

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Bakhtin's concepts of "dialogism," "heteroglossia," and "voice" are useful theoretical tools to explain this broadened perspective on reception, and to examine and systematize the mechanisms of circulation and reiteration at play in the telenovela flow and in my informants' reception of this flow.

Finally, the concept of "interpellation" allows me to investigate the impact of the telenovela flow upon people. Do viewers turn around answering and reiterating the messages and calls coming from the telenovela flow? What effects do their answering might have? Can these messages and calls (be used to) bring into being viewers/addressees as certain kinds of subjects?

In order to start answering to these questions, let us now take a closer look at the telenovela flow.

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¹ See also Lave et al. 1992.

² The relationship between media and its audiences/consumers has also been investigated in terms of uses and effects. For instance, Eysenbeck and Nias 1996 [1978] 'studied the relationship between media exposure and the effects this exposure might have on people's sexual or violent behavior. Other researchers (Berelson 1949; Herzog 1940; Lazarfeld 1940; McQuail et al. 1972) were less concerned in investigating what media did to people and more concerned in trying to understand what people did with media. This approach was referred to as the "use and gratification model" because it aimed at describing audience activity "as attempts on the part of humans to *gratify particular needs*" (Lull 1986:600). These researchers investigated for example, people's motives in reading a particular newspaper or watching a particular television program. Use and gratification research has been criticized (Elliot 1996[1974]; Ang 1989) for being part of a functionalist tradition – its point of departure is the premise that media *gratifies* particular needs. But what are these needs? How are they defined and are they observable at all?

³ Mark Allen Peterson mapped out the development of anthropological studies of media in a talk at the Summer School for Media and Anthropology, in Hamburg, 1999 (forthcoming).

⁴ Radway (1988:363) criticizes the fact that many media researchers still initiate their "inquiry by beginning with texts already categorized as objects of a particular sort. Audiences, then, are set in relation to a single set of isolated texts, which qualify already as categorically distinct objects. [...] Such studies perpetuate, then, the notion of a circuit neatly bounded and therefore identifiable, locatable, and open to observation. Users are cordoned off for study and therefore defined as particular kinds of subjects by virtue of their use not only of a single medium but of a single genre as well."

⁵ DaSilva (1999) writes about race and symbolic exclusion in telenovelas. However, her focus lies on the content, not the reception of these programs.

⁶ When it comes to the relationship between age and telenovela viewing, my material seems to confirm the findings of previous research (see also Hamburger, 1998, 1999)

⁷ Most scholars (Holquist 1986; Peytard 1995; Stam 1992) agree that Bakhtin wrote some of his works under several pseudonyms. Volosinov – *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1973) was one of them.

⁸ Bakhtin's theories could be compared to contemporary "interactionist" approaches (Fay 1996: 233).

⁹ According to Saussure (1916: 25), *langage* (language-speech) "is manifold and anomalous. Astride several domains at once – the physical, the physiological, the psychological, it pertains, also, both to the domain of the individual and to the domain of society. It resists classification under any of the categories of human facts because there is no knowing how to elicit its unity. Language, on the contrary, is a self-contained whole and a principle of classification."

¹⁰ *Slovo*, the Russian term for "word" is used by the Bakhtin School to designate not only a linguistic unit (like the words in a dictionary), but rather a communicative unit with a social character, which makes it closer to "utterance" or "discourse." (Peytard 1995)

¹¹ "The Problem of Speech Genres," in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*.

¹² This term is used by Bakhtin (1970) in contraposition to the term dialogic.

¹³ Bakhtin does not use the word "circulation" but he implies it as in the sentence: "The text lives only by coming into contact with another text (with context)" (1986:162).

¹⁴ Bakhtin (1970: 254):

Les mots d'autrui, introduits dans notre discours, s'accompagnent immanquablement de notre attitude propre et de notre jugement de valeur, autrement dit deviennent bivoques. Seules les relations entre ces deux voix peuvent varier. Le simple fait de reproduire l'affirmation d'autrui sous forme de question, amène l'affrontement entre deux interprétations du même mot: nous ne nous contentons pas d'interroger, nous problématisons l'affirmation d'autrui. *Notre langage quotidienne est pleine de mots d'autrui; avec certains notre voix se fond totalement, oubliant leur appartenance première; par d'autres, que nous considérons comme bien fondés, nous reforçons nos propres mots; dans d'autres encore, nous introduisons nos orientations personnelles, différentes ou hostiles.* (My emphasis)

Volosinov (1973:41):

Each word, as we know, is a little arena for the clash and crisscrossing of differently oriented social accents. A word in the mouth of a particular individual person is a product of the living interaction of social forces.

¹⁵ Bracher (1993) explains Lacan's divided subject:

At the very moment that we come into being as a subject by virtue of identifying with a signifier, we are solidified, petrified, by the signifier, reduced in a way to being nothing more than the signifier that represents us (VI 76, XI 199,207). Thus Lacan says, 'through this relation to the signifier, the subject is deprived of something, of himself, of his very life ("Hamlet" 28).' The lost part of life – the part that disappears behind the signifier – is the object *a*. This situation produces the divided subject \$, whose division is the effect of the master signifier and which master signifier has the function of covering over. [...] The 'I' that I think about never coincides completely with the 'I' that does the thinking; the urges and characteristics that I take to be mine never exhaust or even adequately represent the forces that constitute my being and drive my thought and action – forces, moreover, that are themselves conflictual and self-contradictory. (Bracher, 1993:41)

¹⁶ Schudson (1989:174):

Generally, culture works as a reminder, a sign that makes us mindful – and mindful more of some things than of others. The extreme case is the all but contentless cultural object that I have used for illustration earlier, the string a person ties around her finger to remind her to water the plants when she gets home tonight. The string does not provide new information at all: she was already aware that the plants should be watered. The string makes this information more available to her and so helps make the knowledge she already had more actionable. The string may be more effective if it is brightly colored or if it is on her right hand (if she is right handed) or if she ties it tightly enough so that it hurts or if she has frequently resorted to this device in the past. Then the string becomes not only within reach but rhetorically effective.

¹⁷ Althusser (1971:182):

In the ordinary use of the term, subject in fact means: (1) a free subjectivity, a centre of initiatives, author of and responsible for its actions; (2) a subjected being, who submits to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission.

¹⁸ Here is the quote in its entirety:

I shall then suggest that ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!' Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn round. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was 'really' addressed to him, and that 'it was *really him* who was hailed (and not someone else). (Althusser, 1971:174)

¹⁹ There are two points here that should be elucidated: Althusser makes a distinction between ideology in general (which he means is eternal) and ideologies (in the plural). The latter are said to succeed one another and to have histories of their own. When Althusser uses ideology in the singular he is talking about a general phenomenon that, in everyday life, might take multiple shapes and have distinct histories. Althusser (1971:161) explains that ideology (in the singular) is eternal, in the sense that it is not transcendent to all (temporal) history. It is omnipresent and trans-historical.

²⁰ Althusser (1971:174):

But in reality these things happen without any succession. The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing.

²¹ Althusser (1971:174-5):

One individual (nine times out of ten it is the right one) turns round, believing/suspecting/knowing that it is for him, i.e. recognizing that 'it really is he' who is meant by the hailing.

²² Here follows the continuation of that quote:

[i]t requires the recognition of an authority at the same time that it confers identity through successfully compelling that recognition. Identity is a function of that circuit, but does not preexist it. (Butler, 1997:33)

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The Telenovela Flow: On Connections, Entanglements and Interspersions

The analysis I present in this chapter has two major aims. The first one is to describe the dialogic character of the telenovela flow, by exploring the entanglements and interspersions of telenovelas with other television programs, advertisements, other media and the most varied commodities. I will demonstrate how voices coming from telenovela plots are transposed into other domains of society. And vice-versa: voices coming from everyday life are transposed into telenovela plots. I will illustrate how voices, in their process of circulation within the telenovela flow, accumulate multiple layers of signification.

My second aim is to demonstrate that some of the voices circulating within the telenovela flow interpellate viewers, inviting them to interact with the flow. And here I plan to identify some of these interpellations.

The method I use in my analysis of the telenovela flow, is similar to a snapshot: I take one specific telenovela plot (*A Indomada*, broadcast in 1997, during my most extensive period of fieldwork) and then examine how voices from this telenovela circulate and articulate with other television programs, advertisements, other media and everyday situations. Meanwhile, I analyze these circulating voices in order to grasp their contents.

Heteroglossia in A Indomada

A Indomada ("The Untamed Woman"), was written by Aguinaldo Silva and Ricardo Linhares, and broadcast by *Globo* in 1997, after the eight o'clock National News Report. Instead of retelling the entire plot of *A Indomada* as a narrative, I will identify some of the characters who voiced the major themes of the plot, regarding matters of gender, sexuality, race and class.

The telenovela takes place in Greenville, a fictional little city with wonderful beaches and sugar cane plantations, situated somewhere along the Brazilian northeastern coast. A century ago, the city hosted a large population of Englishmen, who were there to build a railway. Since then, Greenville has kept its British traditions alive. It is the location of the encounters and confrontations of the following characters:

Helena: a strong, honest and courageous woman in her late twenties. Helena is the fruit of a forbidden relationship between an upper-class woman (a member of a very powerful family in Greenville), and a rural worker. Helena's parents died a tragic death. Her foster parents (an uncle, Pedro Afonso, and his wife, Altiva) were on the edge of bankruptcy. When Helena was still a child, they made a deal with a newly arrived stranger in Greenville, Teobaldo. The deal was that Helena would marry Teobaldo as soon as she became an adult. Meanwhile, the stranger would support her and her foster parents. The child Helena was sent to live in England, and when she returns, many years later, she is determined to respect the deal made by her foster parents and to accomplish what her parents had dreamt of – to buy and re-open the sugar factory that once belonged to her family. Although she originally does not love the stranger she is obliged to marry, by the end of the telenovela she is truly in love with Teobaldo and expects his child. She manages, through her own effort, to reopen the sugar factory, thus making her parents' dreams come true.

Pedro Afonso: a good-hearted man with a weak character. He is Helena's uncle, married to Altiva. Pedro Afonso's gambling problems brought the family into bankruptcy. He is a frequent customer of the city's brothel and eventually falls in love with Zenilda, the brothel's owner.

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Altiva: conservative, greedy and mean, she married Pedro Afonso to ascend socially. After the bankruptcy she does everything she can to keep up appearances. She has two sons, one (**Hercules**) together with Pedro Afonso and another one, **Artêmio** (who knows nothing about his mother until about 3/4 of the way through the telenovela). Artêmio's father was Altiva's sister's fiancé, **Richard** (who knows nothing about Artêmio until about 3/4 of the way through the plot). Altiva gave Artêmio away right after birth.

Altiva exerts enormous influence over Greenville's women since she acts as a moral crusader and leads the fight to close down Greenville's brothel. She tries to crush anybody who threatens her power. When the truth about her past is revealed, and she loses the role of moral crusader, she eventually goes insane. In an attempt to kill Helena she gets killed and, at the end of the telenovela her image appears hovering above Greenville like an evil cloud, threatening to come back for revenge.

Hercules: Altiva's and Pedro Afonso's son, he has inherited his father's gambling problems. He surprises his parents when he reveals a well-kept secret – he is married to a black woman, **Inês**, played by actress Isabel Fillardis (who was on the cover of a *Playboy Magazine* in 1996), and has two children from that marriage.

Santa: Altiva's younger sister, she has lived under Altiva's oppression, which has driven her to become an alcoholic. Only she and the maid **Florência** know Altiva's hidden past.

Florência: an old black woman who has worked during several decades as a live-in maid in Pedro Afonso's family and knows the family's secrets and problems. She treats **Helena** and **Artêmio** as her own children and helps them in their struggle to reopen the sugar factory.

Teobaldo: the stranger who arrived to Greenville. He is a successful businessman of Egyptian origin with a mysterious past. He has an autistic son (**Emanoel**) from a previous marriage. Throughout the telenovela Teobaldo tries to possess Helena, first by using his physical force, then by using his economic power and social position. He finally manages to conquer her heart by truly falling in love with her.

Emanoel: Teobaldo's son. He has nervous attacks and can sometimes see the future in visions. Emanoel falls in love with a poor young virgin who was supposed to start working as a prostitute at

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Greenville's brothel, but who decides to run away in the last minute. Emanuel turns into an angel at the end of the telenovela and literally flies away to the skies.

Scarlet: daughter of Greenville's former, corrupt mayor, she is married to **Ypiranga**, Greenville's current mayor. Scarlet is a woman in her early thirties, with a strong self-esteem and a huge appetite for sex and fashion. She becomes crazy with desire when there is a full moon and chases her husband for erotic encounters. Scarlet has a daughter (**Caroline**) who is in love with the son of her father's worst enemy, the judge **Mirandinha**. Scarlet exerts control over her husband through seduction or by threatening to go on sex strikes.

Ypiranga: Scarlet's husband and mayor of Greenville, he has a weak personality and is obsessed with the power that his political position gives him. Ypiranga wants to bring modernity to the city through a series of huge, expensive and useless projects such as changing Brazilian (right hand) traffic rules to British (left hand) ones.

Cleonice: Scarlet's mother, married to the oppressive husband and corrupt local deputy **Pitágoras**. She is insulted and denigrated by him throughout the telenovela, until its end, when she decides to change her life and starts confronting her husband, who is finally sent to jail. At the end of the telenovela she is democratically elected to be the new mayor of the city.

Zenilda: owner of the local brothel. She is a woman in her late forties, who lives together with the brothel's prostitutes, treating them with affection and discipline. The prostitutes work at night and make embroideries during daytime while they dream about romantic love and marriage. Throughout the telenovela, Zenilda affirms that she never forces anyone into prostitution, and that those women who work in the brothel do so because prostitution is their calling. Zenilda has a close (love? friendship?) relationship to **Vieira**, a tough, masculine woman in her forties, who works as a manager in **Teobaldo's** supermarket and who sells the prostitutes' embroideries (as Indigenous art) to Altiva's moral crusaders. Zenilda falls in love with Pedro Afonso (Altiva's husband, Helena's uncle), a fact that momentarily provokes the rupture of her relationship with Vieira. At the end of the plot Zenilda and Pedro Afonso get married. She regains Vieira's friendship and passes her the business (the brothel) on to her.

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Mirandinha: a widow in her late forties, she is Greenville's incorruptible judge, who fights against the mayor Ypiranga and his father-in-law, Pitágoras, throughout the telenovela. Mirandinha has an adult son, **Felipe**, who is madly in love with Ypiranga's daughter, **Carolaine**. Mirandinha falls in love with, and marries, her assistant **Egídio**, a young and shy man in his mid-twenties.

The intersections and confrontations between the voices of different characters in *A Indomada* reveal conflicting views regarding issues of gender, sexuality, race and class. I will examine how the female characters in this telenovela enact some of these contradictions. The reason why I chose to look at the female characters is that they enact contradictions in a more explicit way than the male characters, which is, in its turn, a significant dimension of the representation of male and female characters in this telenovela – the women in the plot are consistently more complex than men.

Helena, for instance, embodies contradictory views on womanhood: having spent several years abroad, she is a modern, business minded, ambitious woman who nevertheless accepts an arranged marriage contracted by her foster parents. Altiva embodies several contradictions – she fights as a moral crusader but is unscrupulous and has a dubious past. She is bankrupt but very proud of her family name and does everything to keep up appearances. A racist, she finds herself the grandmother of two black children. Florência is a poor, black live-in maid who exerts power upon Altiva since she knows some of her well-kept secrets. Scarlet is a woman with an aggressive, seductive sexuality who is happily married and lives in compliant domesticity. Cleonice is the oppressed and powerless wife who becomes a powerful mayor. Zenilda enacts the dualism between prostitute and mother/saint. She runs her brothel as a protective mother and her sweet and naïve prostitutes dream day and night about finding the perfect man. And, at the end of the telenovela, Zenilda marries one of the most influential men in the city (Pedro Afonso, Altiva's former husband). Mirandinha enacts moral and sexual contradictions – incorruptible and correct, she falls in love with a subordinate employee. A widow and mother of a grown-up son, her future husband is almost the same age as her own child.

Going with the Flow: the Arrival of Murilo Pontes

During an episode of *A Indomada*, several of the characters commented upon the arrival of a mysterious person to Greenville, the fictive English colonial city where the telenovela took place. Murilo Pontes, as I came to know by watching "Video Show" – a television program about television programs (broadcast by *Globo* from Monday to Saturday, at two p.m.) – was the name of a main character of another telenovela (*Pedra sobre Pedra* – "Stone Wall," 1992, *Globo*) also written by Aguinaldo Silva, one of the authors of *A Indomada*. As the *Video Show* explained, the city in which the Murilo Pontes character lived, Resplendor, was geographically close to Greenville, according to the author's fictive map. In *A Indomada*, Murilo was visiting Greenville in order to bet and play cards at Greenville's "British Club."

The *Video Show* broadcast a scene that was yet to come in that evening's episode of *A Indomada*, in which Murilo Pontes, played by the actor Lima Duarte, would meet Zenilda, owner of the local brothel in Greenville, played by the actress Renata Sorrah, who had also played the part of Murilo's object of love and hate in *Stone Wall* (*Pedra sobre Pedra*).

In the scene, Murilo recognizes Zenilda (or Pilar Batista – the character in *Stone Wall*) and asks her if they had not met before, in a clear nod to *Stone Wall*. As if this was not enough to make explicit the connections that were being drawn between these two telenovelas, the background music accompanying Murilo and Zenilda's meeting was the same song played whenever Murilo Pontes appeared in *Stone Wall*. To Murilo's question, Zenilda enigmatically answered that maybe they had met before, "in another life."

The interaction between fictive worlds creates an odd sense of realness – this episode illustrates how fiction starts growing parallel to and independent of the real world, creating its own map within (real) Brazil, and allowing some of its characters to stroll from one telenovela to the other in order to bet and play cards. But this realness is broken by the actress Renata Sorrah, who was playing the role of Zenilda in *A Indomada* and who had played the role of Pilar Batista in *Stone Wall*. While Murilo Pontes remains the same character in both telenovelas, the characters 'Zenilda' and 'Pilar Batista' are two different women.

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This highlights to the viewer that Renata Sorrah is an actress and that she acted together with Lima Duarte (Murilo Pontes) in another telenovela. Realness is also ruptured by the fact that all these events were carefully revealed, explained and commented to the viewer through the program *Video Show*.

Murilo Pontes' arrival at Greenville illustrates the dialogic circulation of voices taking place within fiction – the character Murilo Pontes travels in fictive space from Resplendor to Greenville. He seems to recognize Zenilda/Pilar Batista. Past and present voices (*Stone Wall*, broadcast in 1992 and *A Indomada*, broadcast in 1997) laminate the same scene for a few seconds.

At another level, the *Video Show*'s pedagogical explanations about Murilo Pontes' arrival in Greenville can be seen as an illustration of the circulation of voices from the telenovela plot to other television programs. This circulation gives viewers extra information about how to understand and interpret the events in the telenovela, at the same time that it increases the retrievability of *A Indomada*, making parts of its plot available to day-time viewers.

Going with the Flow: Advertisements and Telenovelas

A striking feature of the telenovela flow is the circulation of actors/actresses and characters from the telenovela plot to various kinds of advertisements. For instance, throughout the eight months that the telenovela *A Indomada* was broadcast, many of its characters and actors/actresses participated in commercial campaigns for the most varied commodities. Eva Wilma, the actress who played Altiva, appeared in commercials for headache pills. Paulo Betti, the actor who played Ypiranga, did commercials for a brand of washing machines. The actor José Mayer, in the frame of his fictive character Teobaldo, talked about the advantages of buying a certain car as well as the reasons why one should trust a certain bank for its special services. An instant coffee brand, a milk brand, and a course in English were some of the many products placed within this telenovela's plot. Let us look more closely at this dimension of the telenovela flow through a detailed analysis of two advertisements.

Scarlett Shoes – Making Paths and Bridges to Reach You!

The actress Luíza Tomé or the character Scarlet (spelled with one "t") enters a bedroom carrying three Scarlett-cases (a brand name spelled with two "t"-s) which she casually throws on a bed. Besides the bed, this room is also furnished with two armchairs covered with a zebra patterned cloth.

The actress/character then opens a wardrobe and happily sees a collection of shoes laid out on a shelf. At the same time, one can hear the actress/character's voice: "Scarlet[t] – accompanies me on all occasions, *always* making me fashionable!"¹ She chooses a pair of boots among these shoes and puts them on with a smile.

Next scene: Scarlet/ Luíza Tomé is on a catwalk, presenting the winter collection of shoes. Male voice-over: "On the catwalk: 1997's winter collection! You only pay sixty days after your purchase. No deposit, no interest payments." At the same time, one sees flashes of Scarlet/Luíza Tomé walking on the catwalk. In these sequences she wears three different outfits. Five different pairs of shoes are quickly shown.

Still on the catwalk, Scarlet/Luíza Tomé makes a half-turn and faces the camera. As she turns, her hair falls down languidly over one of her shoulders. She says: "Provoke *deesiíres!* You too should use the new collection from *Scaaarlett !*" ("*Provoque de-se-jos! Use você também a coleção Scar-lett!* ") as she winks and smiles at the camera. The words "desire" and "Scarlett" are articulated, with each syllable extended and their vowels pronounced over extra beats: [de: zee : jus] , [iskaaah: letji]. They are clearly the focal points of the sentence. Luíza Tomé/Scarlet looks meaningfully into the camera while she says "Provoke *deesiíres!*" She raises her eyebrows as she says "You too" and moves slightly closer to the camera. Finally, as she ends her sentence, she winks and smiles. Her mouth is kept open in a smile until the advertisement is over.

This advertisement lasts no more than twenty-five seconds. It profits on the telenovela's plot and characters in order to say much more than a few seconds of broadcasting usually allow.

The Scarlett shoes advertisement blurs the limits between fiction and reality. It is never explicit whether the protagonist speaks as the

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character Scarlet from *A Indomada* or whether she speaks as the actress Luíza Tomé. The clothes and outfits worn by the protagonist in the advertisement are very similar to the ones Scarlet, the character, wears in the telenovela. In addition, the way the bedroom in the advertisement is furnished – a bed, and some armchairs covered with a zebra patterned cloth – evokes associations to Scarlet's own, fictive bedroom – the scenery for her erotic rendezvous with her husband.

The advertisement foregrounds a duality between fiction and reality by exploiting the homophony between the name of the character, Scarlet, and the name of the shoe brand, Scarlett.

The blurring between fiction and reality continues when one considers what the protagonist in the advertisement says. The first utterance "Scarlet(t) – accompanies me on all occasions, always making me fashionable!" could be interpreted as a statement: Scarlet (the character) accompanies Luíza Tomé (the actress), on all occasions. This utterance, moreover, brings associations to some of the hallmarks of the character Scarlet.

An extract from a dialogue in *A Indomada*, between Scarlet (Luíza Tomé) and Teobaldo (José Mayer) illustrates this. This dialogue takes place at a party to celebrate the engagement of Scarlet's sister. Wearing a long velvet dress, Scarlet enters the living-room where the party is taking place, and everybody's attention is drawn towards her. She then starts greeting the guests and talks to Teobaldo:

Teobaldo: "Madam, you really deserve the title of the most elegant woman in Greenville."

Scarlet: "Well, thank you! You see, Mr. Teobaldo, that is the way I am: I either like to be very well dressed or completely undressed. I am not worried about the in-betweens..."²

The second utterance in the advertisement, the one said on the catwalk – "Provoke *deesiire*s! You too should wear the new collection from *Scaaarlett*!" is also a direct reference to other traits that characterize the character Scarlet and that are repeated over and over again in the plot of the telenovela. Just a few examples to illustrate that – throughout the plot, Scarlet advises other women in the art of seduction, she prepares aphrodisiac potions in her dreams, she threatens her husband with sex strikes, she invents a special verb – *nhanhar* – to meaning, "to make love," and she becomes completely crazy with desire when the moon is

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full or, rather, double (*lua dupla-cheia* – a double full moon is a mysterious natural phenomenon that only happens in Greenville).

The amalgamation here between Scarlet (a fictive character) and Luíza Tomé (a real life actress) does particular work: it enmeshes viewers. Notice once more the way the sentence "Provoke *deesiies*! You too should wear the new collection from *Scaaarlett*!" is uttered: not only does the protagonist speak in the imperative form, when she utters the words "You too," she raises her eyebrows and moves slightly closer to the camera, starts smiling at a fixed point (at *You*) and finally ends her sentence by smiling and winking.

Here we have a sequence of calls or interpellations that connect the protagonist (who is either the character Scarlet or the actress Luíza Tomé) to a very real *You*, on the other side of the television screen. The blurring between fiction and reality is, in this sense, manifested by the fact that a character or an actress is actually evoking *You* through her utterances, but also through body language (the eyebrows, the step towards the camera, the smile and the wink) that emphasizes the power of that evocation. Facial expressions such as a smile or raising one's eyebrows evoke the physical presence of someone else. The protagonist is interacting with and reacting to the one she is looking at. Since she is looking directly into the camera, it gives viewers, on the other side of the screen, the impression that she is actually looking at him/ her/ them. Her wink³ works as a kind of a diacritic, one that grabs the viewers' attention and marks a very specific word: the name of the shoe store – Scarlett.

Winks are also a way of sharing something with another person. Winks can be either used as a coy mode of flirtation, or they can be used as a sign of secretive complicity between the one who winks and the one who sees the wink. Winks can also be a way to call into question the veracity of what has been previously said. Scarlet/Luíza Tomé's wink is particularly interesting because it evokes, simultaneously, all these possibilities. She could either be flirting with the viewer or she could be relating to *You* as a friend sharing a (fashion/seduction) secret or making a deal. Another possible interpretation is that she could also be commenting on her own performance, as if she was saying "I know that you know that I am an actress making a commercial" or "I know you know that I am playing a

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fictional character." In all these cases *You* is evoked, hailed and invited to step into the telenovela flow.

Having examined the transposition of voices between fiction and reality, and having pointed at the interpellative character of the advertisements, let us proceed now to analyze this advertisement and some of its utterances in terms of associative chains of signification – how certain words, expressions and gestures are impregnated with voices and how these, in their turn, can be linked and associated with other voices thus making paths and bridges of signification that ultimately might manage to catch *Your* attention and say something to *You*.

"Provoke *deesiires!* You too should wear the new collection from *Scaaarlett!*" A first association promoted by these utterances is that they are displaying a set of objects that can indeed provoke desire – the winter collection of Scarlett shoes, the actress Luíza Tomé, the character Scarlet, the fashionable clothes.

These utterances can also be connected to the idea that one can provoke desires by being fashionable – an association that brings notions of class, gender, sexuality, modernity and race to the fore: *You* have to have the money to afford buying things that make *You* look fashionable. And/or looking fashionable might indicate that *You* belong to a certain class. Being fashionable can also be associated with the idea that *You* are able to keep in touch with the changes brought by a modern world. The wish to provoke desires by becoming fashionable, furthermore, can be related to a certain image of womanhood and femininity, in which women are described as fashion addicts, or in which femininity is encapsulated in a metonym; a commodity (the pair of shoes) that can be purchased.

The image of Scarlet/Luíza Tomé walking on the catwalk can be associated with the idea of being a professional, a successful career woman, who is stylish and confident enough to enjoy being on public display. Her smiles and wink can be linked the to idea of friendship and closeness, and/or to the idea of sexual invitation and seduction as a power game. Is Scarlet/Luíza Tomé an "untamed woman," a woman with an aggressive sexuality? Or is she a woman whose aggressive sexuality is domesticated within the limits of heterosexual marriage? Are Scarlett shoes a way to make of one's body the means to achieve a certain kind of power, a certain position within social hierarchies?

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By linking fashion to the capacity of provoking desires, the advertisement erases race as a visible issue for discussion. The fact that Scarlet/Luiza Tomé is a white woman who is talking about how to provoke desires is neutralized by what she suggests: it is a commodity, and not a skin color that will help *You* to provoke desires. However, *You* here can be seen as linked to whiteness. The brand and character name Scarlett (with one or two "t"-s), a name that to Brazilian ears sounds English or American, is also linked to a classic film character/star, Scarlett O' Hara/Vivian Leigh (in "Gone with the Wind"), who embodies whiteness (situated as she is, against the background of blackness and civil war). The very foreignness of the name Scarlet(t) also raises associations with things coming from outside Brazil, things coming from the predominantly white "first world."

During the 1980s and 1990s, a large number of Brazilians emigrated to other countries, in search for better social opportunities. The United States topped the list of the most popular first world countries where Brazilians could try to make a good living (Margolis, 1993). Scarlet, the character, and the city where she lived, Greenville, evoke associations to a Brazil in which things anglophone signal development and wealth. Scarlett, the shoes, and even Scarlet, the character, also raise associations to transnational flows of goods and people who, in turn, can be connected to the issue of class, since not everybody has the money to travel abroad or even to buy imported products⁴ (whose prices, until the mid-1990s, were exorbitant).

In other words, what at first seems to be a simple advertisement for shoes, is in fact saturated with voices that say things about gender (notions of femininity, of womanhood), sexuality (seduction as a strategy to obtain power, aggressive sexuality, domesticated sexuality), class (the call to buy, to become fashionable), transnational flows (references to an English-speaking world, the "first world," global fashion) and race (the voice emerges from a white woman who evokes another, famous white woman). This heteroglossia – that connects seduction, desire, womanhood, femininity, goods that can be used as a means to act socially – interpellates *You*, in the real world.

And then, either *You* buy the product because *You* desire to become Scarlet/Luiza Tomé, the woman who "provoke desires" and is "always fashionable;" or *You* buy the shoes because *You* want to provoke desires and the shoes are a means to become desirable; or *You* buy the shoes

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because *You* desire to possess Scarlett; or *You* don't buy the shoes at all because *You* didn't identify any of these interpellations as being addressed to *You*; or because *You* can't afford them.

One more remark before we move to the analysis of the next case study. The shoe store Scarlett was not a product of the telenovela *A Indomada*. It already existed and still exists independently of the fact that the telenovela is now over. Since then, other television celebrities have been invited to be the stars of Scarlett advertisements. In 1999, for instance, the connections between the shoes and the fictive Scarlet were superceded, and it was Adriana Galisteu's turn to be under the spotlight (Galisteu is a media starlet who became famous because she was a girlfriend of the deceased Formula 1 driver, Ayrton Senna). It is interesting to notice the speed and ephemerality of the goods, persons, and messages that circulate in the telenovela flow.⁵ To show Scarlett's advertisement with Scarlet or Luíza Tomé as a protagonist in 1999, less than two years after the conclusion of *A Indomada*, would clash with the feeling of actuality, of now-ness that advertisements nourish on, and would be a sign of outmoded-ness.

The Diet Product: Wealthy and Famous People are Talking to You!

The next example further illustrates the dialogical circulation of meanings and voices within the telenovela flow, and between the telenovela flow and everyday life. In my analysis of the following commercial, I will give special focus to the representations of the body, its physical appearances, its consumption practices as markers of social positioning.

Two actresses and one actor appear in this commercial. The actresses are Carolina Ferraz and Silvia Pfeiffer. Both had recently (1996 and 1997) played important roles in different telenovelas. These two actresses, both of whom are white and approximately thirty-years-old, generally play the roles of sophisticated, well-to-do women. The actor is José Mayer, a white man in his late forties or early fifties, who played the mysterious stranger Teobaldo in *A Indomada*. In 1995-6, Mayer had also played the role of a doctor, married to the rich and spoiled Paula, played by Carolina Ferraz (i.e., one of the actresses in this diet product commercial) in *Historia de Amor* ("Love Story," 1995-6,

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Globo). In both telenovelas, José Mayer played the roles of distinguished, wealthy men. In the diet product advertisement, these three people present reasons to buy a diet product – *Zero-Cal*, a sugar substitute. Here follows a description of the advertisement in its entirety:

Shot 1 – Mid-shot of Carolina Ferraz. She is sitting leisurely in a dining chair, in front of a table covered with white cloth. The whole setting is very white and bright. Behind her, one sees a huge window and a green, unfocused background. This could be a restaurant, a spa or even Carolina Ferraz' private home. She is wearing a white cardigan, her hair is tied in a pony-tail and one can see that she is wearing a pair of discreet, small earrings. She is holding a cup of ice-cream in one hand and a spoon in the other. She looks at the camera and says:

"You (*slightly pointing the spoon towards the camera*) are probably wondering: how come Carolina is so *thiín*, when she eats this much?"

Shot 2 – The actress Silvia Pfeiffer, also sitting in a chair, in front of a white table. The background is also unfocused, very light and bright and it suggests the atmosphere of a restaurant. Silvia Pfeiffer has short hair, pearl earrings and a white dress or top, leaving her shoulders visible. She is filmed in a mid-shot, from the waist up. Looking placidly at the camera, she answers Carolina's question: "She uses *Zero-cal*!"

Shot 3 – We are back to Carolina Ferraz and the same setting as in the first shot. Here too she is filmed from the waist up and she completes Silvia's explanation with a gentle smile. She speaks slowly but determinedly, pausing at the things she is enumerating: "With *Zero-cal* I take away the calories of my jui-ce, of my coff-ee, of my dessert."

Shot 4 – A mid-shot of José Mayer. He is standing, wearing a white T-shirt and an open white shirt. The background is also unfocused but predominantly white and bright as in the other sequences. José Mayer faces the camera and says: "Isn't it *nice* (*raises his eyebrows*) to cut calories but still eat *tasty* food?" He is almost whispering when he says these last two words and he raises his eyebrows once again. As he finishes this phrase he raises a little cup of coffee (also white) as if toasting with the camera, takes a sip and winks back at the camera.

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Shot 5 – Silvia Pfeiffer, in close-up: "Do you (*points with her hands towards the camera*) want *advice*? *Zero-cal* has almost zero calories (*shows the product*)."

Shot 6 – José Mayer, in extreme close-up: "You (*winks at the camera*) don't need to get rid of *taste* (*raises his eyebrows*) in order to get rid of calories."

Shot 7 – Silvia Pfeiffer, in extreme close-up: "And besides that: with *Zero-cal* your coffee tastes *much* (*winks at the camera and smiles*) better."

Last shot – Carolina Ferraz, in close-up: "*Everything* gets tastier with *Zero-cal* (*smiles at the camera*)."⁶

The whole advertisement lasts for forty seconds.

Examining a series of "Brazilian dilemmas," DaMatta (1978) suggests that through its constitution, Brazil claims to be a modern, democratic country, where all citizens should be treated equally. But, at the same time, the traditional and hierarchical heritage of rural Brazil, described and romanticized by Freyre (1995[1933]), still persists. So, according to DaMatta, it will be in private, personal relationships – that is, in spheres that are not reached by the law – that social differentiation is going to be manifested. The body and the home (and their appearances) are, as DaMatta once suggested (1978:155), the utmost arenas for the establishing of social hierarchies – beauty, cleanliness and other easily naturalized aspects, such as tastes, preferences and feelings, work as markers to differentiate what the law declares to be equal (i.e. Brazilian citizens).

In the *Zero-cal* advertisement, the creation of a sophisticated atmosphere is partially achieved by featuring two actresses and one actor, all of whom had recently played roles of wealthy, sophisticated persons in telenovelas. Whereas in Scarlett shoes' case we had a complete blurring between the actress and her character, in this advertisement it is clear that the protagonists are actors and not fictive characters. Carolina Ferraz refers to herself as "Carolina," her real-life name. However, there is still a blurring between fiction and reality in the sense that traits of fictive characters (wealth, sophistication, good taste) are transposed and presented as being personal traits of the actor and actresses in question. Their physical appearances and the setting, combined with the roles these actors have previously played, key viewers that what is being portrayed here are men and women with money. The women wear discreet make-up, their straight hair is

immaculately coiffed and they are slim. They only wear discreet jewelry and their clothes (in both cases, white) are also very tasteful, with no excesses. The same goes for the male protagonist, José Mayer. His black hair is also impeccably combed, his clothes are white and discreet and he is, as one can see from the shot of his torso, a trim and fit person. All three have a pale, white complexion, and dark, straight hair.

There are a series of points of intersection between the advertisement and telenovelas' way of portraying contemporary, urban, upper middle-classes and upper classes. In fiction, sophisticated, wealthy people are generally white and wear clothes with discreet colors and patterns. They are careful to avoid excesses – too much or too strong make up, too much jewelry, too many accessories. When it comes to sophisticated female characters, it is almost a rule that their hair is either straight and/or short (cut above the shoulder). Straightened hair on people known to have curly hair is a sign of being well-off, of having the money to go to a professional hairdresser. Short hair styles are also often used by actresses who play the roles of upper class, modern, business-minded women. The majority of female news anchors also wear short hairstyles. Wealthy men are also represented as being discreetly elegant, in their way of dressing and behaving. Teobaldo, the character played by José Mayer in *A Indomada*, often wore linen suits, trousers and shirts in matching nuances of beige, and leather belt with shoes in the same color. His tone of voice was often calm and he did not gesticulate when talking.

White and light colors are used both in clothing and in furnishing to represent the atmosphere of wealth. In telenovelas, it is very common to see living-rooms of the upper- and upper middle-classes furnished with predominantly white, somewhat futuristic furniture that gives the room a light and bright atmosphere. Rooms are also sparsely furnished.

What is the relationship between whiteness and the upper class? Historically, since the inauguration of the republican regime in 1889 (one year after the abolition of slavery), discrimination on the basis of race or color is illegal in Brazil. The period in-between the World Wars was characterized in Brazil by, on the one hand, a project of whitening Brazilians through miscegenation: by promoting the emigration of white Europeans into the country, it was hoped that the population of the country would gradually whiten (Skidmore 1993, Fry, 2000). On the other hand, this period was also marked by the development of a

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theory of cultural syncretism. Brazilian anthropologist Gilberto Freyre, was one of the main representatives of this theory. Freyre (1933) argued that all Brazilians, regardless of genealogical affiliations, were culturally African, Amerindian and European. As Fry (2000:90) discusses in his reading of Freyre's sociology, "the three 'races' were *imagined* as cultural clusters that in combination allowed for the imagination of a racially and culturally hybrid Brazil."

Since Freyre, then, the debate over racial issues in Brazil has oscillated between contradictions. There are no polarized races, but rather a complex taxonomy that classifies people according to their appearances rather than their genealogies (Nogueira 1985). And the myth of racial democracy is still alive and works "either as a charter for social action or as an ordered system of social thought that enshrines and expresses fundamental understandings about society" (Fry 2000:97). At the same time, recent statistics point out that white Brazilians are still far more educated and earn much more than the nonwhite population. According to Fry (2000:92), in 1990, 11.8 percent of whites had completed twelve years of education as against 2.9 percent of nonwhites. The average income of non-whites was a little less than a half that of the whites. So, in spite of a strong belief in the myth of racial democracy, nonwhites remain poorer and less socially mobile than whites, which partially explains the connections between whiteness and the upper-class in this advertisement.

There is also an economic-aesthetic dimension to the use of whiteness in the representation of sophisticated milieus. White furniture, clothes and settings require more work to be kept clean. Having a white living-room implies that one also has the money to afford people (usually non-white maids, washers, cleaners) to keep the white white. Another connection between whiteness, wealth and the diet product is the association one might make between whiteness and hospital, clinics, and doctors. The Zero-cal product sold in this white ambiance accrues some of these medical, scientific qualities that are associated with the setting.

Finally, wealth in telenovelas is conveyed linguistically through a pointedly articulate, calm and sometimes even distanced or chilly way of talking. Carolina Ferraz illustrates this manner of speaking when she pauses as she enumerates what she likes to consume: "...my jui-ce... my coff-ee... my dess-ert..." The use of the possessive pronoun "my"

also foregrounds the fact that she can afford to purchase all these things habitually.

My point is that the advertisement for this diet product not only uses protagonists taken from telenovelas who have played the role of wealthy people; they also use the same techniques of representation of wealth and good taste as the ones used by telenovelas: whiteness, discreet clothes and accessories, straight hair, bright settings (that could be spas, restaurants or wealthy private homes), confident, articulate and slow talking people, with economical gestures and fit bodies.

Diet products and the idea of going on a diet, are of course in themselves associated with class and well being. A substitute-sugar product such as the one in this advertisement, costs much more than sugar. This advertisement is structured around the idea that *You*, provided that *You* have the money, will be able to eat *your* dessert, sip *your* coffee, and drink *your* juice without getting fat. In a country such as Brazil, where millions of people daily struggle to eat in order to survive, the preoccupation to *avoid* calories is definitely class specific.

Besides promising miraculous effects ("With *Zero-cal* I take away the calories of my jui-ce, of my coff-ee, of my dess-ert..."), this product offers consumers a sensual experience: "*Everything* gets tastier with *Zero-cal*." This product is implicitly offering *You* a chance to follow the advice of well-off, sophisticated people (both fictional and real), thus inviting *You* to experience, through *Zero-cal*, the taste of the white upper-class.

Finally, this advertisement highlights gender. Vanity, and the preoccupation with physical appearance, are not presented here as only being a female concern (as most often happens in commercials, telenovelas and other programs). Instead, here, even men are explicitly interpellated through the actor José Mayer. But the interpellation has a specific valency: by winking, raising eyebrows and almost whispering how nice it can be to "cut calories but still eat *tasty* food" ("*Não é bom poder cortar calorias com coisas gostosas?*"), Mayer balances his concern with physical appearance by uttering his lines in the voice of a masculine seducer. In telenovelas, José Mayer regularly plays such characters. In addition, in Brazilian Portuguese adjectives and verbs generally used in connection to food consumption – such as *gostoso/a* (tasty), *saboroso/a* (with flavor), *deliciosa* (delicious) and *comer* (to eat) – can also be related to sexual and sensual experiences: one can "eat," i.e.,

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have sexual intercourse with a person, and the person one eats or wants to eat can be described as "tasty" and "delicious." Thus, José Mayer's concerns with watching his weight contain the subtext of a sensual invitation: "Isn't it *nice* to cut calories but still eat *tasty* food?"

As I have pointed out before, the three actors in the Zero-cal commercial were either participating in telenovelas that were broadcast at the time (as in the case of José Mayer in *A Indomada*) or they had just played important roles in telenovelas that had only recently finished (as in the case of Silvia Pfeiffer and Carolina Ferraz). Nowness is an important aspect in this advertisement.

Nowness is also present in the blurring between fiction and reality. The fictive traits of current telenovela characters are transposed to the actors that portray them (and here we have another dialogic relationship between the voices of fictive characters and their actors). Time-bounded representations of good taste, sophistication and well-being from telenovelas are re-iterated in the advertisement in order to create an atmosphere of sophistication (and here we have the appropriation and repetition of voices that describe wealth and sophistication in the telenovelas). Fiction, reality and now-ness are connected once more, when actors and actresses start interpellating *You* – looking at *You*, calling *You*, giving *You* advice, pointing at *You*, smiling and winking at *You* (and here we have the voices of fiction breaking through the television screen, to reach *You*) – your choice is presented as a real possibility.

To summarize, the case of the diet product gives us another example of what it is that flows in the telenovela flow – people and products (the actresses, actor and the product), linguistic expressions (representations of upper-class modes of speaking) and values related to gender (representations of male and female beauty and bodily appearances), sexuality (the protagonists sensuously inviting *You* to eat tasty food and its implicit sexual undertone), race (again – representations of beauty and bodily appearances) and class (upper-class milieus and ways of life).

Only for You...

Like the two examples I have analyzed in some detail illustrated, many television advertisements have as their main protagonists

telenovela actors and actresses who at the time the advertisement is broadcast are often playing important roles in a telenovela. The way these actors perform during the advertisements raises associations to the traits of the actor's or actress's telenovela character. At the same time, the advertisements also imply that these same traits are also personal, private qualities of the actor or actress.

Notice that in the advertisements I have discussed there are references to sensuality, emotions or sensations. They both finish, like so many other advertisements, either with a wink or a smile at the camera. They invite *You* to experience certain feelings by buying the right products.

The parts that these actors/characters play in the advertisements tell us something about their characters in the telenovela: through the commercials, viewers get a hint that Scarlet/Luiza Tomé is a very sensual woman and a fashion addict; that José Mayer is an attractive man who plays attractive characters; and that Carolina Ferraz and Silvia Pfeiffer are sophisticated women who play sophisticated characters. The retrievability of telenovela plots is increased by the circulation of its actors/characters. On the other hand, the products for sale are associated to hierarchies of gender, sexuality, race and class that get articulated by these characters/protagonists in the telenovela.

Telenovela stars, characters, goods, modes of speaking, bodily appearances, representations of beauty and of modes of living are tightly pressed into a heteroglotic packet that is addressed to *You*. The network *Globo* makes this idea explicit. Its commercial breaks are always bracketed by slogans such as "*Globo* has everything to do with *You*!" (*Globo e você, tudo a ver!*) or "If *You*'ve got *Globo* *You*'ve got everything!" (*Quem tem Globo tem tudo!*) If *Globo* really has everything to do with *You*, it immediately follows that what is going to be shown in the intervals is also of relevance for *You*, the viewer. These slogans work in at least two ways. On the one hand, their objective is to keep the viewer "plugged-in" with the promise that if *You* stay watching, attractions designed for *You* are on their way.

On the other hand, these slogans can be interpreted as articulators between the world of the telenovela and the real world of purchasable goods. The slogans and the advertisements might appear to resolve some of the contradictions of Brazilian society: during the commercial breaks Scarlet/Luiza Tomé reveals how to play out *Your* femininity and

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"provoke *deesiies!*" and Silvia Pfeiffer, Carolina Ferraz and José Mayer invite *You* to share their class experiences – by taking away the calories of *Your* jui-ce, *Your* coff-ee, *Your* dess-ert. "If *You've* got *Globo*, *You've* got everything," at least in an imaginary way. The telenovela flow interpellates *You*, hailing *You* to become a particular kind of subject.

As I have already mentioned several times, this hailing, uttered in encouraging voices, is frequently framed as a kind of inviting secret. The promise of shared secrets is an important part of the telenovela flow. Fan magazines, for instance, provide weekly reports on the private lives of telenovela actors and actresses; they comment on current events of a telenovela plot and, most importantly, they summarize what is going to happen in the coming episodes of all telenovelas aired on Brazilian television.⁷

The sensational headlines of fan magazines, very often taped to the walls of newsstands, let passersby in on secrets about the upcoming telenovela events – who will die/marry/betray/fall in love with whom. Hence in March 1997, the headlines of *Contigo* magazine cried: "Helena betrays Teobaldo [characters in *A Indomada*] during their honeymoon!" In April 1997, the same magazine had the following headlines: "*A Indomada*: Felipe and Carolaine are free to love each other," "Fire destroys Helena's plans" and "*Salsa e Merengue* [another telenovela] – The final episode!: Valentim and Madalena get married."

Coming events, confrontations and reconciliation in telenovela plots are revealed in advance in ways designed to attract the curiosity of viewers and passersby. In a sense, these magazines and their headlines confirm what was once suggested by media researcher Geraghty (1991) in her study of American and British prime-time soap-operas: people might know what will happen in the soap opera plot, but the thrill of watching these programs is to find out *how* things really happen.

Media and communication studies' scholar Lucrécia Escudero's (1997) analysis of the role of secrecy in Argentine telenovelas brings some further nuances to the matter of revelation of plots by fan magazines. She argues that secrecy and the revelation of secrets is one of the major motors in the narrative of Argentine telenovelas. Escudero's analysis can also be applied to the Brazilian case. Her major point is that secrets and their eventual revelation allow viewers to interact with the telenovela plot. Secrecy engages viewers in a cognitive process of analysis of characters and events. Viewers are, throughout

the plot, motivated by the possibility of understanding and revealing the characters' intimate secrets.

Following Escudero's reasoning, one can see fan magazines and their summaries of forthcoming events as a way for the reader/viewer to become an accomplice of the author, which is, I would add, a position that implies a certain power – only the author and the reader/viewer know what will happen to the characters in the plot. Watching the telenovela becomes, then, a way to see how the characters themselves will find out about the secret that the author/viewer already knows. In watching, viewers can collect clues and perceive subtle revelations that will eventually lead the characters themselves to find out what viewers already know.

Besides being a means to link viewers, telenovela plots and telenovela writers, fan magazines such as *Amiga* ("Girlfriend"), *Contigo!* ("With You!"), *Tititi* ("Gossip"), *AnaMaria* ("Ana Maria") through their titles, also constantly interpellate viewers/readers as accomplices and intimate partners: they are either "With You!", or they are your "Girlfriend," whose name is "Ana Maria," or they are fresh "Gossip" delivered to you.

In all these cases, one can see an effort to personalize the magazine, to make it human-like, something readers can relate to as a friend or a confidant (if not a real friend, than at least as a source of material for conversations with your real life friends). These magazines nurture the commodification of gossip about the private lives and destinies of telenovela characters and actors.⁸ Their circulation occurs at a national level and contributes to reinforcing the shared knowledge among Brazilians that telenovelas are a common cultural good.

Secrets vary and cost differently depending on the audience to which they are revealed. Fashion magazines targeted at middle- and upper-class women reveal the trends of telenovelas, showing "dresses and styles from *Salsa e Merengue*" (*Manequim*, January 1997) and inviting the reader to "copy from the telenovela: thirty-five outfits from *Salsa e Merengue*, for all ages" (*Moda Moldes*, n. 560, 1997). Magazines such as *Cláudia*, *Desfile*, *Elle*, *Marie Claire* and *Nova* have revealing interviews with actresses and actors presenting them as ordinary (upper-class) persons, with ordinary (upper-class) tastes. The actors and actresses divulge their general opinions about society and politics and emphasize their own contribution to improving the present situation of the

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country. In these interviews, actors/actresses talk as professionals and not as the incarnations of such and such characters from a certain telenovela. This genre of interviews emphasizes the boundaries between fiction and reality. Their stress lies not in fiction *per se*, but in the *performance* of fiction by these persons. So whereas fan magazines blur the line between fiction and reality, fashion magazines reinforce it, at least to a certain extent. The beginning of an interview with the actor José Wilker (who played a character in *Salsa & Merengue*) illustrates this:

An elusive tiger: for a long time, José Wilker thought he was a bluff. Today, twenty films and fifteen telenovelas later – and various written, enacted and directed theater plays – he admits he has "a certain talent." Married and father of two adolescent girls, Wilker approaches his fifties with lots of charm, sagacity and irony. Here he talks about his experiences with drugs, his communist militancy during youth, criticizes the Brazilian film industry, discusses fidelity and confesses that he is a seducer – but a fake one: "Do you want to get disappointed? Then you should get involved with me." Take a number and guarantee your place in the queue [for those who would like to get involved with him]. (In *Marie Claire*, April 1997)⁹

Note that even while this interview foregrounds the gap between fiction and reality – it is clearly about the actor José Wilker and not about the characters he has played – it also urges readers to "take a number and guarantee your place" among those who would like to get involved with the actor. The remote possibility of intimacy works here as an invitation to interact with a star from the telenovela flow.

Other magazines focus on (female) bodies, unveiling other kinds of intimate secrets. Male bodies and bodily parts (torsos, arms, shoulders and legs) are gradually gaining more space in the telenovela flow. However, female bodies are still predominant.

Magazines such as *Boa Forma*, *Caras*, *Corpo a Corpo* and *Mulher de Hoje* and *Raça*¹⁰ promise to show (and effectively construct) "Patrícia França's [an actress, who played a role in *Salsa e Merengue*] Brazilian beauty" (in *Boa Forma*, 10 December 96). They reveal "the sensuality of Cláudia Raia [another actress] at eight months of pregnancy" (in *Caras*, 21 March 97). They interview Paulo Pires, "the twenty-nine-year-old, 1.86 m, blue-eyed Portuguese actor playing a character in *Salsa e Merengue*" (*Mulher de Hoje*, nr.206, 1997). And they describe

"what Luana Piovani [an actress] does to have such a wonderful body." Through these interviews and articles *You* are given the opportunity to get acquainted with actors and actresses and to share their diet programs and to discover their beauty secrets.

Beauty secrets introduce purchasable goods, suggest that a beautiful body is something obtainable, and unveil associations between bodies and social hierarchies. For instance, Isabel Fillardis (a black actress who played a character in *A Indomada*) reveals her "beauty secrets" to *Mulher de Hoje* ("Today's Woman"). She is pictured against a black background, sitting on a chair, with her hands resting on her legs. She wears a transparent lilac blouse that reveals her breasts, a scarf in the same fabric (that is gently blown by a wind), a thick and long golden chain, and a pair of small earrings. Her hair is tied in a bun. She looks slightly downwards towards the camera, and her mouth is closed in a smile. And the text reads:

The model and actress Isabel Fillardis, 1.72m and 52 kg, follows a balanced diet: 'My food has a minimal quantity of fat and salt. I avoid eating rice and I usually eat salads, beans, vegetables and white meat. I eat pasta only every now and then. I don't drink beer or soft drinks. Sweets, chocolates and cigarettes are completely forbidden.' Isabel takes one hour of exercise on her stationary bicycle whenever she has the time. She stretches before and after her training session. Her dry skin is moisturized after each shower. When it comes to her hair, it is massaged twice a month by the hands of the hairdresser Ana Monteiro. (In *Mulher de Hoje*, March 1997) ¹¹

The "beauty secrets" revealed by Isabel Fillardis, bring associations with class and wealth – one has to have the money to pay someone to prescribe a diet or a gymnastic program specially for *You*, just as one has to be able to afford paying for moisturizing body lotions and hair massages. However, at the same time that these secrets are made available to a broader audience, they are revealed in a quite general manner (with the exception for the hairdresser, no products were mentioned). This gives *You* a chance to profit from the celebrity's advice, without necessarily having to buy expensive products or consult expensive doctors (even if all these are implied).

Moreover, Isabel Fillardis' "beauty secrets" apparently erase the connection between race and class – even black women can be wealthy, famous actresses. The secrets also suggest an association between race

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and aggressive sexuality, through the daring and sultry picture that illustrates the text.

An interview with Carolina Ferraz (one of the protagonists for the Zero-cal diet product) in *Corpo a Corpo* (1998) reinforces my argument here that the revelation of beauty secrets introduces products (and/or consumption habits) that might help *You* to obtain a body that evokes certain kinds of social hierarchies and challenge others:

Classic, elegant, sensual – she is so beautiful! The beautiful Carolina Ferraz is on vacation. She has been working out and is a little leaner. Her face expresses tranquility, she is happy with her life. Here she tells everything she does to have such wonderful skin and a well trained body.

"Classic, elegant, sensual – she is so beautiful!" Beauty here is not only described in terms of class and sensuality. It is also naturalized: the actress makes no effort to become as beautiful as she is – "her face expresses tranquility." However, her artifices – "everything she does" – are going to be revealed for *You*.

The connections between revelations, femininity, bodies and telenovelas reach their apogee in the Brazilian edition of *Playboy*.¹² *Playboy* often has telenovela actresses on its cover, sometimes directly linking the actress to the character she plays in a telenovela. Hence, one could read in some of the *Playboy* issues of 1997: "Gabriela Alves, *Salsa e Merengue*'s sweet bride naked in Venice," or "Leila Lopez – Suzane from *O Rei do Gado*, nude."

Each monthly issue of the Brazilian edition of the *Playboy* magazine is very well promoted both in the written press as well as in television. Soon, through hard promotion campaigns one gets to know (even if one happens not to be a faithful reader of the magazine) who will be the cover of the coming issue of *Playboy*, or who has accepted *Playboy*'s invitation to pose nude and how much she will be paid. The more famous the star, the stronger the advertising campaign. Moreover, there is often a *post factum* analysis of the impact of certain issues of *Playboy* in the mainstream media – who sold more copies? Was it Roberta Close (a transsexual who once was widely considered to be the most attractive woman in Brazil)? Or was it Vera Fischer (a blond telenovela star in her early fifties, also considered by many as one of the most attractive Brazilian women)?

The various kinds of revelations offered to *You* by the telenovela flow confirm, just like the advertisements for shoes and diet product, that bodies are a crucial arena for the manifestation of social differences. Furthermore, these revelations suggest not only that beautiful bodies can be strategic means to obtain celebrity and money; they also suggest that beautiful bodies are malleable. The connections linking bodies to telenovelas, appearance, social differentiation and the promise that beauty is obtainable (through the acquisition of certain services and products) are summarized by three headlines from one of Brazil's most widely read weekly news magazine, *Veja*: "When success makes miracles – how fame, money and a scalpel accomplish metamorphoses" (17 February 99), "Generation 98 – who are these new faces in the telenovelas and how did they get a place in the sun?" (19 August 98), "Sculpted bodies – why do well trimmed male models reign in advertisements, on the catwalks and in television programs?" (10 July 96). The first article attempts to explain how fame and money are dialectically connected with physical beauty: talent and physical appearance might lead people towards fame, at the same time that once famous, people attempt to improve their physical appearance through aesthetic interventions. The second and third articles discuss why and how talent and/or good looks might help people to step into the telenovela flow. Besides making explicit some of the articulations contained in the telenovela flow, these articles from the mainstream press comment upon the flow, turning parts of it into matters for public debates. And here, *You* are given the opportunity either to understand, for instance, "how fame, money and a scalpel accomplish metamorphoses," or to comment about these themes as recurring and serious issues in Brazilian society today.

Hey, You There!

So far, I have discussed several aspects of the telenovela flow. Approaching it in terms of dialogical circulation, I have identified how views on gender, sexuality, race and class are voiced by characters and transposed to persons, products, and linguistic expressions. I have also illustrated how the telenovela flow is characterized by a movement in space – how elements from telenovelas are transposed to

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advertisements, to other media, to products one can buy and advice one can follow.

Intermingled with the dialogic aspect of the flow is its interpellative side. As I have shown, the telenovela flow is constantly hailing and inviting *You* to enter into dialogue with it and thus position *yourself* socially. At the same time that the flow presents social differences as embodied, made body and naturalized (the advertisements, the beauty advice, and the revelation of secrets all pointed in this direction), it also presents consumption centered around the body (taste, clothes, accessories, food, diet programs, gymnastics, aesthetic interventions) as tangible and immediate ways by which *You* might gain access to a predominantly white, rich and beautiful world. The body and the products it consumes are presented as a possibility to circumvent naturalized differences and renegotiate social positions. With the right shoes or diet product, *You* might manage to slip beyond social hierarchies of gender, sexuality, race, and class.

Your body and the products it needs or desires (because they carry voices about gender, sexuality, class and race) are presented as a key to gain access and entrance to a circuit of recognition: by choosing to turn around and answer to the interpellations of the telenovela flow, *You* can choose to become recognizable. And by choosing to become recognizable – "Here I am!" – *You* will be choosing to become a positioned Brazilian subject.

Having discussed the telenovela flow in terms of dialogical circulation and in terms of interpellation, I now want to present two television programs, also part of the telenovela flow, that through their content, crystallize the themes I have been discussing so far.

You Decide! (Você Decide!)

"*You Decide!*" is a weekly program broadcast since the beginning of the 1990s that consists of single episodes in which a particular moral issue is discussed. Three possible solutions to the problem being discussed are offered and viewers are invited to dial a toll-free telephone number and vote for the ending that they prefer. The ending that gets the majority of votes is then broadcast. *You Decide!* was the first Brazilian entertainment program (and one of the first in the world) based on immediate interaction with viewers.

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The program is divided into several sequences interrupted by commercial breaks. Each sequence of the program is introduced by a telenovela actor. In the case I will discuss, Tony Ramos (who had recently played a main role in *Anjo de Mim*, 1996-7, *Globo*) describes the public's reactions and the way the story is developing as the votes are updated.

Simultaneously as it is seen on television, the program is also broadcast on a big screen in a public square somewhere in Brazil and members of that audience (watching live) are interviewed and asked about their opinions on the topic that is dramatized during the episode.

An advertisement promoting the night's coming episode of *You Decide!* (broadcast during a commercial break of one episode of *A Indomada*) mixes voice-over explanations and short sequences taken from the program:

Shot 1 – male voice-over and flashes of scenes from the coming episode: "*She finds out that her son is in love with a young [male] foreigner.*"

Shot 2 – scene from the episode.

Mother (*to son*): "You two are very close, aren't you?"

Son (*to mother*): "We are in love!"

Shot 3 – male voice-over and flashes of a scene (*a passport is shown in close-up*): "But as a tourist, the young man is not allowed to remain in the country."

Shot 4 – scene from the episode:

Son (*to mother*): "He will have to leave the country!"

Shot 5 – male voice-over: "What will happen now? What shall they do?"

Shot 6 – scene from the episode:

Son (*to mother*): "You could marry him!"

Boyfriend (*to mother*): "I can return to Spain alone. Or you can marry me and I [will therefore get legal status and be able to] stay in Brazil with Pedro. Or Pedro can return to Spain with me and put an end to this agony!"

Shot 7 – flashes from one scene where the two young men are running on the beach and male voice-over: "*You choose the ending! Today! You Decide!*"¹³

In the second advertisement for *You Decide!* (also shown during another break of the same hour of telenovela), Tony Ramos presents the

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plot of the episode. The actor is wearing a light brown suit and he talks in a moderate, calm tone. He is sitting in a television studio, with three big screens on his right side. Under each screen there is an electronic board to count the viewers' votes.

The camera moves from wide-shot to mid-shot and finishes with a close-up of the actor Tony Ramos, who says:

If it is not easy to live a love affair under normal circumstances, imagine how hard it is to live a romance that deviates from the established norms. Modern society is described as liberal and open to any kind of love. But those who have unconventional relationships know that in practice there is another truth. Would you confront any obstacle to stay by the side of the love of your life? Is it always good to hope for the best? Or wouldn't it be wiser to give up everything? Soon, *You Decide!*

In the previous cases I have discussed, I suggested a possible convergence between the voices of a fictive character and the voices of the actor/actress. This convergence, encourages a transfer of traits from characters to actors/actresses (as in the case of the advertisements) and eventually to the product being sold. In the case of Tony Ramos and *You Decide!* there is a similar phenomenon of convergence between the voices of the extremely popular actor Tony Ramos and the character he has played in telenovelas. With one or two exceptions throughout his entire career as a telenovela actor, Ramos has played the role of the "good guy" in telenovelas. His public image as a private person is colored by the characters he has played throughout his career. When he introduces the night's episode he has a calm and moderate tone of voice, the same voice that he uses for the characters he usually plays.

Through Tony Ramos' performance, in both the commercial advertising the show, and in the show itself, the world of telenovelas is articulated with reality. Not only is there a blurring between actor and character here, since Tony Ramos' public image is in resonance with the roles he plays, but there is also the articulation between fiction and reality by the fact that the actor is actually directing himself to a "*You,*" who might actually decide to dial a certain toll-free telephone number and vote for your favorite ending, thereby directly influencing what is shown on your television.

Moreover, the content of *You Decide!* stories are often based on true stories (like the one presented here, which was inspired by a case that

mobilized the Brazilian press and politicians).¹⁴ In this sense, *You Decide!* is a concrete case of meshing between reality and fiction – aspects of Brazilian reality end up into fictional programs, and viewers are given the possibility to pick their favorite solution.

There are several interpellations in these two commercials advertising *You Decide!* Starting from the explicitness of the title, *You* are invoked time after time to participate in the plot and take an active role in deciding the solution of the night's episode. *You* are given the opportunity to answer to the program's calls and decide whether a mother should marry her son's boyfriend, thus allowing him to obtain a residence permit in Brazil; whether a young Brazilian man should leave Brazil together with his boyfriend; or whether two young lovers should give up on their relationship.

All these possible endings are presented in ways that allow approximations between the characters' fictive life stories and real situations: "Would *You* confront any obstacle to stay by the side of the love of *your* life?", Tony Ramos asks the viewers in his introduction of the night's episode. And it is made clear, throughout these calls, that the destinies of these fictive persons depend on *You*, because "Today, *You Decide!*" – *You* are given the power to decide upon real-life dilemmas.

That night, *You* decided that the two young lovers should abandon their relationship.

Do You Want to Be Tchan's Brunette?

While "*You Decide*" crystallizes the interpellative call of the telenovela flow, the next case to be discussed foregrounds the kind of interpellation that is being addressed to *You*.

As I briefly described in Chapter 2, *Programas de Auditório* (variety shows) are a popular and recurring weekend attraction, both on *Globo* and other television channels. Here I will concentrate on one of the most popular Sunday variety shows, *Domingão do Fausto* ("Big Fausto's Great Sunday," broadcast by *Globo*).

Basically, this afternoon program is divided into several sections – games, competitions, funny home videos, music, interviews, and tear-wrenching accounts about someone famous, generally a singer or an actor. The program lasts between three to five hours, depending on the

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other coming attractions to be broadcast during the rest of the day (like soccer matches). Big Fausto hosts all these events. Big Fausto is a large white man, with short black hair, probably in his mid-forties. His dress style is casual and proper. He usually wears a shirt carefully tucked into quite tight, very high waisted pants which divide his protuberant stomach in two. He has a playful and vaguely patronizing style of relating to the members of the audience, and an intimate, yet polite way of relating to the guest artists that appear on the show.

Big Fausto's Great Sunday is filmed in front of a very active audience. Everyone in the audience is encouraged to participate in competitions, sing together with the guest artists, dance to the background music that is played throughout the show, and scream with excitement by the sight of favorite telenovela actors and actresses. Behind Big Fausto, in the background, there is a group of approximately fifty young women dressed in aerobic outfits. This group of women provide a continually moving background. In a carefully choreographed kind of aerobic/dancing they move in unison throughout the entire duration of the program.

Many of the songs performed in *Domingão do Faustão* are part of the sound track of telenovelas. As I mentioned on Chapter 2, telenovelas have a national and an international repertoire of music, available for the public to buy on CDs or tapes. Each major character or couple in a telenovela has a particular theme song that comes to function as a musical description of the character's state of mind at various moments of the plot. Sometimes certain events or landscapes become also associated with a certain song. The presence of singers and musicians in this variety show, performing songs that are played in a telenovela, is yet another example of the dialogic aspect of the telenovela flow.

Variety shows such as *Big Fausto's Great Sunday* are based on the presence and participation of people involved with telenovelas. Interviews with actors and actresses have basically two parts – conversations about the character that person is actually playing in a telenovela, and questions about the actor's/actress's personal life, and his/her career plans. Sometimes, the interviewee will take the chance to plug a theater play or other event in which s/he is participating, or s/he will reveal a telephone number that people can call to engage her/him in advertisements – as the emcees for private, exclusive parties, or as participants in other events, such as Carnival, political campaigns, etc.

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At other times, actors and actresses are invited to be part of the jury of different contests that are played out on the show.

Big Fausto's Great Sunday is yet another example of the dialogic character of the telenovela flow – people and trends circulate here as commodified goods. Famous people appear on the program to promote themselves, to advertise their work and to be able to keep themselves rolling on the wheel of fame. As I have mentioned earlier, while discussing an advertisement with Scarlet/Luiza Tomé as the protagonist, the circulation of people, goods and trends in the telenovela flow is extremely fast and fame is ephemeral. People who made the headlines in 1997 might today be completely forgotten if they have not managed to recycle and update their fame factor.¹⁵

In 1997, *Big Fausto's Great Sunday* held a contest to elect a female dancer to an extremely popular band, called *É o Tchan!*. This band already had a blonde dancer and they were now looking for a "brunette" (*morena*), to make a pair. Thousands of young women, all of whom felt interpellated by the almost rainbow-like category of "brunette," responded to the contest's call.

A jury of six persons, all of them acting as authorized experts of beauty and performance, had the task of choosing two semi-finalists among ten women (the finalist was chosen one week afterwards through telephone voting by the "audience at home" – yet another example of a *You Decide!*-kind-of-program).

Four of the six celebrities invited to participate as members of the jury were actors and actresses from telenovelas: a young male actor who was going to play one of the main characters in an up-coming six o'clock telenovela, an actor and an actress who both played roles in *A Indomada*, and an older actress, who played a part in a telenovela that was being reprised in the afternoons. The two other members of the jury were a famous model (Luíza Brunet) who had recently tried (but failed) to start a career as a telenovela actress and an older, well known transvestite (Rogéria) who often made guest appearances in telenovelas and other television programs.

Before the contest started, Big Fausto asked each of the members of the jury what they thought were the necessary qualities that a dancer of the band *É o Tchan!* should have. Was talent, charm, big buttocks or the ability to move one's hips the most important quality? Carla Perez, the main dancer of the *É o Tchan!* (and the one who was going to get a

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dance partner through the contest) became known for the size of her buttocks and the daring way that her dancing illustrated the sexual allusions made in the band's song texts. The members of the jury agreed that what was needed was a combination of all those qualities.

Faustão's contest can be seen as an interpellative call – who wants to be *Tchan's* brunette? – that managed to attract the attention of thousands of candidates from all parts of Brazil. Everybody who could fit herself into the category "brunette" or who felt she had talent, charm, big buttocks, or an arresting way of shaking her hips, could be a potential winner. This contest concretely presented yet another version of the same interpellation that I have been examining – the body can be a tangible way to circumvent hierarchies of gender, race, and class: *your* brown/sun-tanned, talented, big buttocked, dancing body can propel *You* to be a winner, to become a celebrity. By choosing to turn around and compete to become *Tchan's* brunette, *You* are choosing to become recognizable. The contest presented a possibility that *Your* body could be an immediate way to make your wishes for glamorous upward mobility come true.

The members of the jury – four telenovela stars, one model and a famous transvestite – constitute a tableau vivant of this interpellation. They incorporate and perform the idea that the Brazilian body is both beautiful and obtainable (Rogéria the transvestite is the best evidence for that) *and* connected to telenovelas.

The Telenovela Flow and Brazilian Society

In this chapter, I used the term *telenovela flow* to describe how telenovelas as a genre are entangled and interspersed with other television programs, advertisements, other media and everyday matters. I analyzed a snapshot of the telenovela flow and presented it as a process, a chain of references and cross-references in constant and indefinite expansion. One of my objectives has been to demonstrate the mechanisms of circulation and transposition at work in the telenovela flow: how voices coming from telenovela plots are transposed into other domains of society, and the other way round – how events, people and products from everyday life are transposed to diverse media and to telenovelas. In the process of transposition and context change

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these voices accumulate multiple layers of signification. This, I argued, was the dialogic character of the telenovela flow.

Had I decided to focus exclusively on the reception of telenovela plots, the picture I would have drawn here would certainly be quite different. For instance, social communication scholar Marcio Schiavo (1998) studies how telenovela plots contribute towards social development through "social merchandising" – a term used to designate the discussion of polemical issues in entertainment programs. Schiavo analyzes the plot of the telenovela *A Indomada* (1997, *Globo*) and identifies in it the following instances of social merchandising: the telenovela condemned prejudice against poor people, prejudice against sex workers, prejudice against black people. It discussed the corruption of politicians, sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, safe sex, people with mental disabilities, alcoholism, marriage between older women and younger men, donation of organs, and child labor.

Schiavo's analysis of *A Indomada* is a good close reading of the telenovela plot. However, while there are dimensions of this plot that might be considered as progressive and even subversive because they discuss important, polemical issues in the Brazilian society, my analysis of the telenovela flow captures and emphasizes other aspects than those that appear exclusively in the plots of telenovelas. Consumption and commodities occupy a more heavily foregrounded role in the telenovela flow, and, as we will see, in viewers' non-immediate reception.

While studying the telenovela flow, I tried to include and analyze as many segments, entanglements and intersections as possible, in order to give a picture of the extent of the phenomenon I was looking at. I came to the conclusion that the telenovela flow courses through several domains of the Brazilian society – from a pair of shoes to the celebration of carnival, from gossip magazines to national politics. Connections, entanglements and chains of reference lead to further connections, intersections and associations: television sets are commodities that can be found not only in homes but also in public spaces; headlines and photos of the latest and hottest telenovela events, characters and actors are spread all over town through newsstands and billboards; fashion and gossip magazines circulate among friends, employers and employees with amazing rapidity. The degree of retrievability of the telenovela flow is high and it contributes to its spread throughout various social arenas.¹⁶

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Besides circulating nation-wide, the telenovela flow is related to the Brazilian society in other ways. First of all, with very few exceptions, it recycles only Brazilian actors – there were two Portuguese actors in *Salsa e Merengue* (1997, *Globo*) and the Italian pornographic actress/politician Cicciolina had a non-speaking part in some episodes of *Xica da Silva* (1997, *Manchete*). Otherwise, the actors and actresses circulating in the telenovela flow speak Portuguese and are *Brazilian*. The telenovela flow offers access to and displays *Brazilian* bodies, *Brazilian* life-styles and it is centered around things that take place in real or fictive *Brazilian* landscapes. These are places that viewers, at least in theory, can visit (the northeast, the southeast, colonial cities, Pantanal). Moreover, the telenovela flow materializes Brazilianness through patterns of consumption, by circulating commodities that can be found (and bought) in the Brazilian market. These commodities and their consumption are, as anthropologist Robert J. Foster (1999:270) suggests, powerful vehicles to materialize nationality since their collective consumption might diffuse a feeling of shared affinity. Brazilianness is visualized and made into bodies and practices through the telenovela flow.

The telenovela flow creates and reproduces collective senses of identity that intersect with other, recurrent representations of Brazilianness. Several researchers on Brazil (Barbosa 1992; DaMatta 1978, 1995; Velho and Alvito 1996; Vianna 1995) have pointed to the interplay between hierarchy and equality as well as holism and individualism, as central sources of tension and contradiction, that lie at the root of the Brazilian society. According to these authors, the interplay of these dualities guides Brazilians' interpretations of their everyday life experiences, and are central to the construction of a sense of national identity, Brazilianness (*brasildade*). On the one hand, the hierarchical heritage of colonial Brazil is said to persist up to the present day in social relationships that promote dependency and patronage (something hardly surprising in a country where the disparity between the rich and the poor is among the greatest in the world, with the richest 10 percent of the population earning nearly 50 percent of the country's income, and the poorest 10 percent earning less than 1 percent.)¹⁷ On the other hand, however, the Brazilian constitution declares that all citizens are equal and there are numerous

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laws that declare that everyone has the same rights, regardless of their social status (Fry, 2000:103).

So what characterizes Brazilian society, according to many who have attempted to portray it, is the co-existence of and continual tension between fundamentally opposing principles and practices: hierarchy and egalitarianism, social solidarity and anti-social individualism. Brazilian politics (Reis 2000; Velho and Kuschner, 1996), gender and race relations (Burdick 1998; Fry 2000; Nogueira 1985), arts (Sant'anna 2001), social rituals (Barbosa 1992) and sexual practices (Parker 1991) have been interpreted with the help of perspectives that emphasize ambiguity and the maintenance, at the same time or alternatively, of two or more incompatible beliefs or attitudes.

The same emphasis on seemingly opposing beliefs and practices is played out in the interpellations coming from the telenovela flow: social differences are presented as embodied, made body and naturalized (the commercials, the beauty advice, and the revelation of secrets all pointed in this direction). Provided that viewers turn around and answer the calls of the telenovela flow, consumption around the body (taste, clothes, accessories, food, diet programs, gymnastics, aesthetic interventions) is presented as a tangible and immediate way for viewers to position themselves in society among hierarchies of gender, sexuality, race and class.

This kind of tension is what animates the telenovela flow. In that flow, social differences exist. Furthermore, those differences are portrayed as being embodied and, therefore, in an important sense, natural. That the overwhelming majority of actors and actresses playing middle- and upper-class characters are white, for example, is unremarkable (so much so that when a telenovela did finally depict a middle-class black family in 1995, this created a sensation). However, at the same time that the telenovela flow presents the bodies it materializes as naturally tied to particular raced, classed, and gendered positions, it also depicts different kinds of bodies and practices as accessible – if *You* only buy the right products. If *You* respond to the calls to buy Scarlett shoes, put *Zero-cal* into your coffee, or have your hair massaged twice a month by a hairdresser, then *You* are consolidating – or you may be on your way to changing – your place in the hierarchies of race, gender, and class.

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So the telenovela flow relates to Brazilian society in three senses: it encourages national identity by circulating images of Brazilian actors, actresses, products and landscapes; it reinforces social hierarchies by presenting them as unremarkable; and it presents viewers with different ways of embodying their own positionality in those hierarchies.

Let us turn now to some of the ways in which individuals actually go with this flow.

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1 In Portuguese: "Scarlett – acompanha todos os meus momentos, me deixando sempre na moda!"

2 In Portuguese:

Teobaldo: "A senhora realmente merece o título de a mais bem vestida de Greenville."

Scarlet: "Muito agradecida. Eu sou assim mesmo Senhor Teobaldo: eu gosto de estar muito bem vestida ou completamente despida. Eu não me preocupo com meio termos..."

3 See Geertz for a discussion on thin and thick descriptions of winks (1973:6-7).

4 According to Elisa P. Reis (2000:18), in 1997, of the fifty-four million Brazilians who were poor, twenty-four million lived under miserable conditions. The top 10 percent of the population, roughly sixteen million people constituted the country's upper strata and in-between these extremes remains a large group that encompasses very disparate social categories.

⁵ Appadurai (1998[1996]:83) writes about the relationship between consumption practices and ephemerality. His analysis takes a different direction than mine. He argues that the pleasure of ephemerality has been inculcated into the subjects who act as modern consumers. This is a pleasure found in the "tension between nostalgia and fantasy, where the present is represented as if it were already past." In the case of the telenovela flow I do not see the connection between ephemerality, nostalgia and fantasy. In my opinion, ephemerality, in the telenovela flow is connected with now-ness with a will to keep up with the constant changes that make up the present.

6 In Portuguese:

"Você deve estar pensando: a Carolina é tão ma-grii-nha, como é que ela come tudo isso?"

"Tomando Zero-cal!"

"Com Zero-cal eu corto as calorias do meu su-co, do meu cafe-zinho, da minha sobre-mesa..."

"Não é bom poder cortar calorias com coisas gostosas?"

"Você quer uma dica? Zero-cal tem quase zero calorias."

"Ninguém precisa cortar o sa-bor para cortar calorias."

"E tem outra coisa: com 0-cal, o cafezinho fica muito mais gostoso."

"Tudo fica mais gostoso com 0-cal."

7 These secrets cost: *Caras* is published on a monthly basis and cost R\$4.50. An issue of *Amiga* (weekly) cost R\$3.50; *Contigo!* (weekly) cost R\$3.90; *Tititi* (weekly) cost R\$2.40; *AnaMaria* (weekly) cost R\$1.50. An issue of *Cláudia* (monthly) cost R\$5.20. An issue of *Elle* (monthly) cost R\$ 5.90. *Manequim* and *Moda Moldes* are distributed monthly and cost R\$4.90. All these prices are from 1997. The minimum salary in 1997 was R\$110 a month.

8 Cf. Miller (1995) for the case of the reception of an American soap-opera in Trinidad.

9 In Portuguese:

Tigre de papel: Por muito tempo, José Wilker acreditou que fosse uma fraude. Hoje, 20 filmes e 15 novelas depois – além de diversas peças de teatro escritas, encenadas e dirigidas –, ele admite ter "um certo talento". Casado e pai de duas adolescentes, Wilker chega aos 50 anos esbanjando charme, sagacidade e ironia. Aqui ele fala de sua experiência com drogas, conta da militância comunista na juventude, critica o cinema brasileiro, discute fidelidade e se confessa um sedutor – só que de araque: "Quer se decepcionar? Invista em mim". Pegue a sua senha e garanta um lugar na fila.

10 *Boa Forma* ("Good shape") is issued monthly and cost R\$4.50. *Caras* ("Faces"/ "People") is issued weekly and cost R\$4.50. *Corpo a Corpo – a revista da beleza* ("Body to Body – the beauty magazine") is issued monthly and cost R\$4.50. *Mulher de Hoje* ("Woman of Today") is issued monthly and cost R\$4.50. *Raça-Brasil – a revista dos negros brasileiros* ("Race/ Strength- Brazil: the magazine of black Brazilians") is issued monthly and cost R\$ 3.50. This magazine was first published in 1996. All these prices are from 1997.

11 In Portuguese:

Os segredos de beleza de Isabel Fillardis: A modelo e atriz, de 1,72m e 52kg, segue uma dieta equilibrada: "Minha comida tem o mínimo de gordura e sal. Evito arroz, e como, normalmente, salada de verduras, feijão, legumes e carne branca. Massa uma vez ou outra. Não bebo cerveja nem refrigerante. Doces, chocolates e cigarro, nem pensar". Isabel costuma fazer uma hora de bicicleta ergométrica quando tem tempo. Para completar, alonga o corpo antes e depois do exercício. A pele, seca, é hidratada após o banho. O cabelo, por sua vez, recebe massagem duas vezes por mês pelas mãos da cabeleleira Ana Monteiro.

12 *Playboy* is distributed monthly and cost in 1997 R\$6.00.

13 The whole dialogue, in Portuguese (and in "Portuñol", simplified Spanish, to be understood by Brazilians):

Voice-over: "Ela descobriu que o filho estava a-pai-xo-na-do por um jovem estrangeiro.

Mother (to son): "Vocês estão muito ligados, né?"

Son (to mother): "Estamos apaixonados!"

Voice-over: "Mas como turista o rapaz não pode permanecer muito tempo no país."

Son (to mother): "Ele vai ter que deixar o país!"

Voice-over: "E agora? O que eles vão fazer?"

Son (to mother): "Você podia muito bem se casar com ele!"

Boyfriend (to mother): " Yo puedo vultear para España sozinho. Usted pode casar comigo y fico em Brasil com Pedro ou Pedro puede voltar comigo para España y acabar com esta agonia!"

Voice-over: "VOCÊ escolhe o final! Hoje! VOCE DECIDE!"

¹⁴ The lover of Brazilian gay activist Toni Reis, was forced out of the country after his visa expired and immigration authorities refused to recognize the couple's relationship as marriage. Reis' mother offered to marry her son's lover so that he could stay in the country. In: www.lgirtf.org/newsletters/summer96.

15 There are other variety programs where other kinds of goods circulate more than they do in Faustão's show. Sílvio Santos' Sunday show, broadcast by the network *SBT*, distributes throughout the program household devices, travel packages, and money (thrown to the audience as paper airplanes). In *Planeta Xuxa* (Xuxa's Planet), a variety program destined for teenagers broadcast in 1997 by the network *Globo*, the hostess Xuxa distributed a series of products offered by the sponsors of the program. The most unreal and tragi-comic example of circulation of goods in a variety program was to be found in Chacrinha's program (broadcast

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first in the 70s by *Bandeirantes* and by the network *Globo* during the 80's until Chacrinha's death). Chacrinha distributed the oddest goods to the audience – pineapples, pieces of dried codfish, and insect spray were some of the recurrent goods that, together with telenovelas' actors, actresses, and Brazilian popular singers, circulated throughout the program.

¹⁶ By emphasizing the retrievability of the telenovela flow I am not ignoring the fact that its segments are unequally distributed among people: not everybody has access to the same commentaries, the same advertisements, the same magazines, or the same commodities that circulate in the telenovela flow. It will become clear when examining the processes of reception that each viewer experiences and relates to the telenovela flow in a subjective and context bound way.

¹⁷ Sources: Schneider (1996), in Kulick (1998). Barros and Mendonça (1999), in Reis (2000).

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Time for Two Real-Life Cinderella Stories

Débora Rodrigues

Débora Rodrigues's "Cinderella story" intrigued me during my fieldwork, not only because she was a recurring subject of conversation among my informants, but also because she was present in most Brazilian media.

This twenty-nine-year-old female truck-driver was involved with a political movement that demanded agricultural reform and the redistribution of land among peasants in Brazil. The movement, known in Brazil as the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem-Terra* – MST (a literal translation into English would be "Movement of Rural Workers Without Land"), fought for an agrarian reform and organized the occupation of land that was being left unproductive.

Débora Rodrigues took part in a demonstration organized by the movement in the interior of the state of São Paulo. A national newspaper, *O Estado de São Paulo*, covering the demonstration, took a picture of some of the participants. Débora Rodrigues was one of the people in this photograph.

As the story goes, her picture was seen by the editors of the *Playboy* Magazine who decided to invite this unknown *Sem-Terra* (without land) woman to pose nude. Débora accepted *Playboy's* offer, and in August 1997, she was also featured on the front cover of another leading newspaper, *O Globo* (part of the *Globo* conglomerate, which

also includes the television network *Globo*, cable channels, publishing houses, music distribution, and radio stations).

The life-story of this beautiful, twenty-nine-year-old truck-driver and divorced mother of two, who would be on the cover of the *Playboy* Magazine, was spread throughout the Brazilian media: "Without-land and Without-Clothes" (*Veja*, 13 August 1997), "The woman without land has her hair, hands and feet done" (*Folha de São Paulo*, 20 August 1997); "The *Playboy* issue with Débora Rodrigues arrives at the newsstands October 7th" (*Folha de São Paulo*, 03 October 1997); "Débora Rodrigues: Without-land, Without-clothes and now With-TV-program takes all chances and doesn't regret anything" (*Veja*, 24 December 1997).

Débora was invited by several newspapers and television programs to tell her story, share her political opinions, and discuss her plans for the future. Her bodily measures were an indispensable feature in every article or program that ever mentioned Débora's name: 1,71cm, 65 kilos, 90 cm (bust), 74 cm (waist), 98 cm (hips).

The leaders of the MST were split in their opinion about Débora's decision to pose for *Playboy*. While one of them who was considered to be more liberal accepted and welcomed the truck-driver's decision, affirming that he would even buy the *Playboy* issue featuring Débora Rodrigues just to support her, the other leader (according to *Veja* 24 December 97) declared that she was prostituting herself and that her decision was not prudent. While Débora's decision to accept *Playboy's* invitation was unanimously described by all media as being her own choice, the consequences of this choice were debated in different ways – was she selling her body and prostituting herself or was she simply exerting her own rights to her body, appropriating it as a means to improve her life (as most newspapers argued)? There was a definite (and very ephemeral) polemic in the air about Débora's decision.

There was also a great deal of discussion and debate concerning the issue of how much money Débora actually was paid – did she earn R\$20,000 or R\$100,000 (at the time, about the same amount in U.S. dollars)? As the story goes, Débora was initially offered a certain amount of money by *Playboy*. There were then renegotiations between Débora, her quite prominent lawyer (and deputy of the Worker's Party – the PT), and the magazine. An agreement was reached and it was decided that Débora should receive more than she was first offered and

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that she would also have the right to a percentage of the total sales of the magazine – the more issues sold, the better she would be paid. This money, Débora told all newspapers, was going to help her getting back the custody of her two children, who were at that moment living with their father.

In September 1997, Débora was invited by the director of the telenovela *A Indomada*, to participate in the telenovela's last episode, to be broadcast in October of that same year. Débora was to play the role of a newly arrived prostitute at Greenville's brothel. This invitation was not generally regarded as an insult. The prostitutes in Greenville's brothel had been depicted in a very favorable manner throughout the entire plot (see for instance my earlier descriptions of the character Zenilda) and Débora told *Playboy* (December 1997) that she promptly and proudly accepted the offer.

An article in *Veja* (24 December 97) summarizes the main changes in Débora's life: by the end of 1997 she had become one of the most famous women in Brazil, she had been the cover of *Playboy* and the guest of several variety shows. She participated in the final episode of a telenovela, and moreover, she had been invited to host a daily program (*Fantasia*) broadcast by the network SBT. Débora was at least R\$300,000 richer at the end of 1997 than she had been at the beginning of that same year. With the money she earned, she obtained the custody of her children and she submitted herself to a series of small physical interventions: weight loss, new haircut, liposuction, breast implants and an anti-wrinkle treatment. The good looks that led her to become famous, earn money, regain custody of her children, change her life style, were thus "improved" and slightly modified. Débora Rodrigues's physical changes are an illustration of the idea spread throughout the telenovela flow that consumption around the body (loss of weight, new hair cut, liposuction, breast implants, and anti-wrinkle treatment) is a way to embody and naturalize class differences and femininity. Modified and "improved," the body that once managed to circumvent social hierarchies now embodies markers of wealth, status and femininity. Débora Rodrigues's body carries the print of the telenovela flow.

In December 1997, *Playboy* asked Débora Rodrigues whether she was not afraid that her Cinderella story would end, and that she would

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one day wake up and see a pumpkin parked in front of her house. Débora answered:

"I want to enjoy this moment. If it ends, it is still not the end of the world. I would go back to where I was. But I would go back as a changed person. I wouldn't work for anybody. I would go back owning my own truck."¹

By 2001, Débora was no longer under the media spotlight. I heard a rumor that she was working as a "formula truck" driver.

Débora Rodrigues' case is the actual realization of the interpellations that are continually voiced in the telenovela flow. Her physical appearance was a tangible and immediate way for her to enter into a circuit of recognition. Once within the telenovela flow, she underwent aesthetic modifications and made her body into a living manifestation of a certain wealth, status and femininity. Débora Rodrigues is a real-life story of a *You* who actually managed to enter and become part of the telenovela flow. As such, she bolsters the flow and makes it seem accessible to millions of Brazilians whose only contact with glamour, elegance and wealth are the programs they watch and the products they are encouraged to buy.

Denise's Fifteenth Birthday Party

More than two hundred people were invited to celebrate Denise's fifteenth birthday. The party took place at a *salão de festas*, a huge room covering an entire floor, decorated in red and white. At the entrance of this room, the guests, who started arriving around 10 p.m., could see a huge poster-sized portrait of a smiling Denise. Standing right beside that portrait, graciously receiving the arriving guests, was the real Denise, dressed in a red velvet dress, accompanied by her parents and grandparents. After much greeting and pecking on cheeks, all of which was filmed by a professional cameraman, the guests were invited to sit down. Red tables and white chairs were dispersed throughout the room forming an open circle around an empty stage. On the right side of the stage there was a three meter white screen.

At 11:30 p.m. a middle-aged man dressed in a suit took a microphone and welcomed everyone to Denise's fifteenth birthday party.² This man, someone told me, was specially hired to present and

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organize the celebration. His role, as I came to notice, combined the functions of a toastmaster and those of a TV host: "Attention, ladies and gentlemen!" he announced. "We will now show the film of Denise's fifteen years!"

And so we all watched a short film about Denise's life – still photos of her mother's pregnancy, pictures of Denise at age one, two, three...until the fourteenth year. While these images were shown, the guests commented loudly on Denise's sweetness and how much she had grown.

When the film arrived at the fifteenth year, it changed style. It showed sequences where Denise was outdoors, by herself, in a place that seemed to be a park. Another guest told me that these sequences were taken in a sports club with a large green area.

The mini-plot of these sequences was to show Denise in different landscapes, as if she were alone reflecting about life, or as if she were waiting for someone. She is then surprised by the camera (as if that someone arrived) and she smiles at it, and the image freezes in a close-up of her face. The images then changed and the guests could see Denise walking past a waterfall, admiring a flower, or sitting by herself, leaning her head against one hand. Soft, instrumental music played as the soundtrack of the film. A guest sitting close to me commented that this part of the video reminded her a lot about a television program broadcast by *SBT* that arranges dates between men and women. In that program, women are filmed outdoors and they tell a little bit about themselves, their likes and dislikes. In several sequences, the candidates are filmed as if they were waiting for someone who then arrives (as they smile at the camera).

Denise's film ended with a poem written by the birthday girl herself where she briefly commented upon her personality traits, her dreams and her attitude towards life.

When the film finished, the birthday's emcee began again: "Ladies and gentlemen! We are now proud to present the celebration of Denise's fifteenth birthday. We invite to the stage fifteen couples, each of which represents one year in Denise's life."

Fifteen young couples, approximately the same age as the birthday girl, entered the room. The boys wore tuxedos and the girls wore long white skirts and red velvet tops. All the dresses looked exactly the same.

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Each girl carried a white candle that was lit by the grandmothers of the birthday girl.

The fifteen couples positioned themselves forming an open circle. At midnight precisely, the host called: "And, now...Denise!"

Having changed from her red velvet dress into a long white dress and flat sandals, Denise stepped onto the stage enveloped by a cloud of fog. Her entrance was marked with music – the theme from Stanley Kubrick's film, "*2001, A Space Odyssey*."³

Denise sat on a chair in the middle of the stage. The host explained what was to come next: "We now invite Luciana to bring up a pair of high heel sandals, given by Denise's parents as a symbol of Denise's passage from childhood to adolescence!"

At this point, Denise's father entered together with Luciana (a ten-year-old cousin of Denise) to help Denise put on her new shoes.

After this very explicit *rite de passage*, the host announced that it was now time for father and daughter to dance the first waltz. "Blue Danube" thundered from the loudspeakers. As father and daughter danced, they passed by the fifteen couples and Denise blew out each of the couples' candles.

Later on, the host invited Denise's male relatives to dance each a thirty-second waltz with her.

The whole celebration was filmed and simultaneously shown on the big screen.

"Ladies and gentlemen! We will now sing '*Parabéns*' (Happy Birthday) to Denise!" said the emcee. Everybody moved from the stage/dance floor to a table where a huge white cake had been placed. For those who could not see from a closer position what was going on, the big screen was still sending simultaneous images of the celebration. Hence, one could choose to sing for the birthday girl either facing the crowd and the place where Denise was actually standing, or facing the big screen, where a bigger and closer Denise was also standing.

After the candles were blown out, Denise and her parents toasted her birthday with a glass of champagne. Then, supper was served.

After supper, the stage became a dance floor where all guests had the opportunity to dance the latest *pagodé*⁴ songs.

The next afternoon I had a chat with Denise's parents and relatives about the party they threw. The following conversation took place:

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- Thaís: Where did you get all the inspiration to organize the party?
- Virgínia [Denise's mother]: Ah, we've been to so many parties...so we took something from a party that we found was nice, something from another party, and so on...But it took a whole year to organize everything.
- T: I guess there are lots of things to plan...the party locale, the decorations, the food...
- V: We hired a stylist to take care of the decorations, and we are paying the party by installments.
- T: It must have cost a lot!
- V: This is only to give you an idea: the stylist who organized the party, a super queen (*bicha*)⁵ told me – 'You might as well be prepared to sell your car in order to pay me.' Then Jefferson [V's husband] said that we wanted to do things in our own way. First the stylist didn't want us to interfere, but then he noticed he would have to. But, you know, he was impeccable. For instance – the case of the champagne: I wanted a silver bucket with ice, to keep the champagne bottle. We looked everywhere but couldn't find any. Then, at the very day of the party, Jefferson told me that the stylist had a surprise for me – and it was the silver bucket! My friends said I was very tough on the stylist. But I am paying, right? Then I have the right to ask for what I want.
- T: What about the food? How did you choose it?
- V: We went to different *buffets* [catering services] and there they show us different suggestions for...what is the word...*degustação* [samples of the food to be served are offered in these occasions by the catering firm] ...Yes, *degustação*. Then we chose one of these *buffets*.
- T: It was really a nice party.
- [Carina, a fourteen-years-old cousin of Denise comments:]
- C: It was so *lindo* (pretty) to see Denise's entrance. That cloud...it looked as if she was coming from the skies.
- V: That was *gelo* (ice)...
- C: *Gelo seco!* (dry ice, i.e., fog)

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- V: Yes. You know, Denise and I wrote the whole *roteiro* (script) by ourselves.
- T: Ah! The one read by the host?
- V: Exactly. We wrote it together.
[Denise, who until then was just listening to the conversation said:]
- D: I can't wait to see the final video of the party.
- T: Oh, so there will be another video too?
- D: Yes, this one is to show the party, the guests, and the whole celebration. We can send a copy to you! *Ai, ai...*[sighing]. It was so much better to give a party instead of going on a trip.
- [Dona Conceição, Denise's grandmother, comments:]
- DC: It was really a beautiful party! Just like a *novela*. Everything so beautiful! Just like a *novela* ...

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¹ In Portuguese:

"PLAYBOY: Você não tem medo de, um dia desses, acordar e, ao sair de casa, encontrar uma abóbora no portão, como uma Cinderela de verdade?

DÉBORA: Quero aproveitar o momento. Se acabar, acabou. Se for preciso voltar, eu volto. Só que volto diferente. Não volto empregada dos outros. Volto com o meu caminhão."

² Denise's party is a good example of a modern rite of passage among Brazilian middle- and upper-middle classes (Amaral 2000; Del Priore 1994; Magnani 1984). Traditionally, this ball introduced young women to society, marking their social *début*. Even if the ritual has lost some of its initial meaning, a girl's fifteenth birthday is still an important milestone to be celebrated. During the 1980s and 1990s, the most common ways to celebrate this event among the members of the Brazilian upper- and middle-classes have been either *bailes de debutantes* (as Denise's) or charter trips to the USA, or most precisely, to Disney World: chartered airplanes with more than two-hundred teenage girls leave Brazil towards Disney World, where, besides meeting Mickey Mouse and his friends, the girls will have the opportunity to do some shopping all by themselves and to meet young telenovela actors who are specially hired to chat, pose and even dance with some of the girls, thus adding an extra touch of glamour to that special occasion.

Evidently, there are innumerable interpretations of how a traditional fifteenth birthday party should be like. However, a *baile de debutante* has to preserve some indispensable elements – the fifteen couples surrounding the *debutante*, the long white dress worn by the birthday girl, her apparition at midnight and the first waltz danced by the girl and her father.

³ Richard Strauss, "Thus spoke Zarathustra."

⁴ Simpson (1993) explains this music genre as "a style of samba that began developing in the late 1970s and during the 1980s reached huge audiences and sold millions of records" (p. 84). The latest trend since the mid-90s is to write pagode texts with a double meaning. They can either be sung as innocent songs about 'cocks and chickens' or as explicit allusions to sex. Every

such a pagode has a special choreography that illustrates, also in a playful way, the double meaning of the songs' texts. Generally, when people dance to these songs, they reproduce the song's choreography.

⁵ *Bicha* means "faggot." It is interesting here to note that Virginia emphasizes the fact that the stylist was gay. A possible reason for her emphasis is that it might be connected to a more strict gender task distribution, where things related to the home are considered as female. Hence, a man interested in parties and decoration of interiors is consequently effeminized. I was also considering that Virginia's emphasis that she hired a super *bicha*, in other words, someone Virginia considered to be different, to organize and decorate her daughter's party might have been intended to stress the eccentric and extraordinary character of the celebration. Another possible interpretation is that Virginia wanted to emphasize that the event was planned by someone who paid attention to details and who could be counted on to be obsessed with the aesthetic dimension.

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Everything You Would Like to Be, See or Have

The stories of Debora Rodrigues and Denise bridge the telenovela flow and everyday life. In this chapter, I move along that bridge towards the issue of reception. Having examined the heteroglotic form and the interpellative calls of the telenovela flow, I now want to examine how different recipients of these calls incorporate the telenovela flow into their lives.

As mentioned previously, I noticed through fieldwork that in contexts of non-immediate reception, commentaries and references to telenovela plots were fragmented and mixed with other topics. An extract of a conversation I had with some informants illustrates this.

I was talking to Michele, a fifty-five-year-old woman who worked as a staff administrator at a governmental office, her mother, Dona Juraci, a seventy-five-year-old housewife, and Vera, a forty-year-old manicurist. Michele had three grown children from her first marriage and she was now married to Altair, a sixty-year-old engineer at a governmental office. Dona Juraci was recently widowed. Vera was married but had no children. As we talked, Michele played solitaire, her mother mended a dress and Vera peeled some potatoes for dinner¹:

- (1) Dona Juraci: Today, with this weather, the only thing one can do is to watch television.

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- (2)Michele: The only thing I like to watch on television are the films. I don't like anything else.
- (3)Vera : Me too. I only watch films and *novelas*.
- (4)Michele: I like to watch the beginning and ending of *novelas*. I watch the beginning to see how it is going to be, and then I watch the ending.
- (5)Dona Juraci: I don't like the beginnings. I prefer it when things are already happening (*Gosto mais quando já está mais adiantada*).
- (6)Michele: No. I like beginnings.
- (7)Dona Juraci: Take this seven o'clock *novela* [*Salsa and Merengue*, 1996-7, *Globo*]. So much rubbish! Can you imagine that they were having a wake for a pair of shoes? What nonsense!
- (8)Michele: What? I'm not following that *novela*.
- (9)Vera: Oh! It was funny. They were having a wake for Dona Imaculada [a character in the telenovela]. They thought a train had run over her and they were having a wake for her shoes. The only thing they found left after her.
- (10)Dona Juraci: How silly! (*Que bobagem!*)
- (11)Vera: Well, I thought it was funny. Then suddenly Dona Imaculada appears at the wake and everybody looks so stupid...But I don't like Heitor.
- (12)Michele: Who is Heitor?
- (13)Vera: That blond guy. He and another guy are involved with the worst criminality. All the time, one trying to stab the other in the back (*querendo furar o olho do outro*). Even that Portuguese guy is involved.
- 14)Michele: The father as well or just the son?
- (15)Vera: No, only the son.
- (16)Dona Juraci: Who? The Portuguese?
- (17)Michele: Yes, that handsome young man.
- (18)Vera: Oh, I think he is so handsome!
- (19)Dona Juraci: But the father is also handsome.

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- (20)Vera: Yes! It's the father I am talking about! An old hunk! (*Um coroaço!*)
- (21)Michele: Another one who is also getting older but doesn't appear to, is that Tony Ramos [an actor, who was playing the main part in *Globo's* six o'clock telenovela in 1996-7 and the one who presented the episode of "*You Decide!*" discussed in Chapter 4].
- (22)Dona Juraci: Hm, but he had to lose weight to play this character in the *novela*.
- (23)Michele: I read that he went to one of those spas to lose weight. But you know, in a spa, besides all the exercise they do, they present diet food in a very pleasant way. One actually feels like eating it. It's not the same sacrifice that we do when we go on a diet at home. If I had the money I would go to one of these spas to get in shape. Yes. It's really a nice thing.
- (24)Dona Juraci: I bet he has already done some plastic surgery too.
- (25)Vera: That's for sure!
- (26)Michele: Like that cousin of mine - Marlene. Her husband gave her a facelift as an anniversary present. And now she wants to do a lipo [liposuction] on her belly. To get thin.
- (27)Dona Juraci: Yes, but her husband said that he will not pay for this one.
- (28)Michele: She is going to sell her car to have it done. Maybe she has already done it...

This exchange was one of the many conversations in which I gleaned how informants, in their everyday lives and outside of the context of immediate reception, comment on and relate to the telenovela flow.

Earlier in this study (Chapter 3) I questioned the idea of a neatly bounded television program – the telenovela – and I suggested the term *telenovela flow* as a means to foreground the dialogic connections and articulations that telenovelas have with other kinds of media and with various commodities. Based on my field observations, I suggested that

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in their everyday lives, informants experienced telenovelas not as a delimited and circumscribed narrative but rather as a flow, with innumerable articulations and connections. The extract above illustrates this.

The three women's talk indicates, moreover, that there is a general knowledge among viewers about the structure and rhythm of telenovelas (lines 4, 5 and 6). Those viewers who prefer the telenovela when it has already started are probably more fond of following the intrigues and complications of each sub-plot. Those viewers like Michele, who prefer beginnings and endings are probably more interested in following a faster succession of events. The beginnings of telenovelas are generally quite eventful, since they introduce a sequence of main problems and plots to viewers. Endings are also eventful, since they are the occasion when solutions are given and relationships are resolved.

But why would a person who has not been assiduously watching a telenovela want to watch its end? How would s/he understand anything? These questions can be answered from different and complementary points of view. As the conversation with Michele shows, even someone who claims not to follow a telenovela seems to know a great deal about their plots and characters (lines 11-17). One could assume that Michele, like many other of my informants, publicly associated the practice of watching telenovelas with people from a non-prestigious age, gender, or class. By denying her interest in following the plot of telenovelas, she might distance herself from an activity supposedly engaged in by people who occupy low prestige positions (young or old people, women, and the poor).²

On the other hand, one could take Michele's comments as an evidence of the retrievability of the telenovela flow: she does not have to assiduously follow the plot of a telenovela in order to understand what is going on in it. She obtains information about the plots of telenovelas through other texts, such as magazines, variety shows, commercials and casual conversations like this one. Even though she does not regularly watch telenovelas, she is still reached by the telenovela flow.

The extract of conversation quoted above also shows how the subject telenovelas is approached in a very unframed way, without requiring detailed explanations or contextualizations (phrase 7). Dona Juraci

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need not mention the name of the channel that is broadcasting the telenovela about which she is talking, or even the name of the telenovela itself. It is understood, from the way she refers to the telenovela as "the seven o'clock *novela*" that it is *Globo's* telenovela.³

Dissected into several pieces, this example illustrates, moreover, how a conversation about telenovelas can lead to other associations and conversation topics (lines 23 and 26), such as commentaries about telenovela actors, opinions about spas, diets and plastic surgery.

In the analysis of the telenovela flow (Chapter 4), I concluded that the flow constantly hails and invites *You* to enter in dialogue with it, and I identified some of its most frequent interpellations. Even as the telenovela flow presents hierarchies of gender, sexuality, race and class as embodied and naturalized, it also presents consumption centered around the body as a tangible and immediate way to gain access to prestige, money, and attractiveness).

In what follows (and also in Chapter 6 and 7), I examine the ways my informants reacted to these interpellations and how they appropriated, circulated and reiterated flashes of the telenovela flow into everyday situations. My aim is to examine the implications that the telenovela flow has for the ways in which informants make sense of and evaluate their positions in society. It is important to remember that my informants live in a complex society and participate in different social arenas that, like television, exert an influence on the way they see and act in the world. My primary focus here, however, is on how people interact and dialogue with the telenovela flow in their everyday activities. I want to explore how fictional characters and events are made present in everyday life, helping people to comment upon their own experiences by referring to commonly shared knowledge and experiences. I will be arguing that by engaging with the telenovela flow in a dialogic relationship, viewers are able to recognize, scrutinize and sometimes perhaps even question or challenge hierarchies of gender, sexuality, race and class. Through this engagement, they negotiate their positionings as subjects in Brazilian society. In this chapter, I focus especially on the connection between the telenovela flow, consumption and beauty, as it is manifested in two different but yet related ways.

*Cláudia, the Telenovela Flow and Plastic Surgery*⁴

Cláudia was a white, middle-class, eighteen-year-old woman. She was preparing herself for the *vestibular*, an entrance exam every student has to go pass in order to be able to start studying at an university. She was planning to become a doctor and had applied to several medical schools. Cláudia lived in a six-room apartment with her parents and two elder brothers.

I interviewed Cláudia and her best friend Fátima (a nineteen-year-old, white middle-class high school student). Both were dedicated television viewers. As soon as they came home from school, they told me, they turned the TV set on. Television was only turned off late at night, when the last family member went to bed. Every day, Cláudia and Fátima watched an entertainment program broadcast in the afternoons, they "followed" (a literal translation from Portuguese, it means to watch a program with assiduity)⁵ all the telenovelas that were broadcast by *Globo* (Fátima told me that she was dating her boyfriend during the time the eight o'clock telenovela was broadcast, so she could not really follow it), and they both "loved" to watch the commercials shown in between programs. They used to call each other on the phone to comment about a program, or to talk about something that happened in a telenovela, or even to inform each other whenever a favorite celebrity or a particular telenovela actor appeared on the television screen.

In our conversations and even during the interview, Cláudia and Fátima switched easily from telenovela plots to their flow, and they readily commented on their favorite commercials or their favorite variety shows. Telenovela actors and actresses were also discussed and classified as belonging to the ones they "hated" or "loved." Coming trends and fashions introduced by the telenovela flow were commented on vividly. The following extracts illustrate this:

Cláudia: I remember a necklace that Adriana Esteves [an actress] wore in a *novela*. It had a little pearl in the middle...It was so trendy! But I didn't buy it.

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- Fátima: There were also the earrings. Everybody was wearing them.
- Cláudia: Yes, everybody! And last summer it was a pair of shorts. The same ones that are shown in the opening sequence of *Malhação*⁶ [a telenovela], you know? Everybody was wearing them. [...]
- Fátima: I saw a nice bracelet in a shop. But I didn't buy it. Then I went home and saw that same bracelet in a *novela*. The next day I went back [to the shop] and bought it.[...]
- Cláudia: Do you remember, Fátima, when we went out to buy the CD with the songs played in *O Rei do Gado* [*The King of Cattle*, a telenovela]? We were so silly! Instead of buying two different CDs and recording from one another, we both bought the same CD.
- Fátima: And the worst thing was that we only liked three songs on the whole CD. So after only a little while we got tired of listening to it!

The Telenovela Flow and Beauty

The extracts above illustrate how Fátima and Cláudia draw a strong connection between telenovelas, goods, trends and consumption. Once again, they were not alone in making these associations. I was surprised by the attention with which most of my informants observed and discussed the images and aesthetic patterns introduced by the telenovela flow: they meticulously scrutinized and commented on the beauty of earrings, nail polish, hairdos, furniture, cars, decoration of milieus, and the appearance of favorite actors and actresses. For instance, Celita, a nineteen-year-old student who worked part-time in a boutique, told me that she watched *novelas* "to see all the handsome actors and beautiful actresses." The live-in eighteen-year-old babysitter Marina was always ready to comment about the "wonderful clothes Scarlet [the character in *A Indomada*] wore." Roger, a thirty-one-year-old, part-time undergraduate student, asked rhetorically in a classroom essay on telenovelas: "Who can't remember that fashion launched by a

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gorgeous *novela* actress or by a charming romantic lead of the eight o'clock *novela*?"

The connection drawn between the telenovela flow, beauty and consumption is summarized by Júlia's (20, undergraduate student) commentary: "*Novelas* tempt the eyes of the viewers, showing everything that they would like to be, see or have."

Júlia's commentary summarizes several aspects of how informants relate to the telenovela flow: it emphasizes an aesthetic side – the flow shows beautiful things that "tempt the eyes," and it points to the connections linking the telenovela flow to consumption, social positioning and desire – it shows everything viewers "would like to be, see or have."

When Cláudia and Fátima discussed the subject of beauty in the telenovelas, they immediately approached the subject of physical beauty. They both agreed that male beauty was not that easy to pin down – there were actors who had a nice body and a handsome face, but there were also those who were not really handsome but who had a special charm. Charm, they agreed, was very important to make a star out of an actor. When it came to female beauty, on the other hand, they unhesitatingly gave me the recipe for a beautiful woman⁷: she is thin, tall, has a beautiful body (firm buttocks, small firm breasts) and a beautiful face. Their description has several points in common with the ones that follow:

A beautiful woman in the *novelas* has a beautiful body. She is neither fat nor too thin. Just like Luiza Tomé [the actress who played the role of Scarlet, in *A Indomada*], right? She is also a little sensual, teasing (*assanhadinha*). And she wears, nice, trendy clothes. (Carina, 14, middle-class girl. Taped interview.)

Well-trained bodies (*corpos sarados*) trespass the television screen and leave us paralyzed. It can be an adolescent girl with a body that is starting to change, or it can be a stunning woman, kind-of-Vera Fischer [an actress] – perfect body, stunning, marvelous. (Márcio, 27, undergraduate student. Extract from a classroom essay on telenovelas.)

The majority of actors and actresses in a *novela* cast are sex symbols...A great part of the Brazilian society watches *novelas* and is sexually influenced by them... Men dream of having a Vera Fischer [a telenovela actress] in bed. Women dream of having a Gianechini [a telenovela actor] as a

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partner. This forms a very demanding aesthetic pattern, a pattern that is very difficult to achieve, and it gives the population a low self-esteem. In order to achieve this pattern, women start to dress with minimalist clothes, they become easier and quickly surrender to sex because they are afraid of losing their partners, who start seeing them as just sexual objects. Men, on the other hand, worry a lot about their [own] bodies, cars, clothes and status and forget about their [own] minds, as they become superficial and immature. (Leandro, 22, undergraduate student. Extract from a classroom essay on telenovelas.)

It is not very pleasant to be forced to live with the silicone-filled breasts, naked biceps and triceps, buttocks and tiny bikinis that are shown on the television screen. Brazilian *novelas* are turning beauty into vulgarity. (Alessandra, 29, part-time undergraduate student. Extract from a classroom essay on telenovelas.)

What astonishes me most is to see so many women earn *lots of money* and take the place of talented actresses just because they have a *perfect body*. They don't have to say anything, not even know how to act. They just have to show off a body that follows the established beauty patterns. *I don't disagree that what is beautiful ought to be shown*, but I think there are other things more beautiful and important [than beautiful bodies]. (Denize, 24, part-time undergraduate student. Extract from a classroom essay on telenovelas. My italics.)

Beauty and Attractiveness

The examples above reveal certain patterns: bodies shown in the telenovela flow are described as beautiful, perfect and ideal, and are often connected to eroticism and sexuality – "sex symbols" is an expression used by Leandro to describe the beauty of telenovelas' actresses and actors. Carina suggests that a beautiful woman in the *novelas* is "sensual, teasing." Beauty is in this case connected to attractiveness and heterosexuality. Remember that, according to Leandro, "men dream of having a Vera Fischer in bed," and that, according to Márcio, "a kind-of-Vera Fischer" woman is "stunning, marvelous."

Cláudia and Fátima make a similar connection between beauty, attractiveness, and (hetero)sexuality when they at one point told me

that as soon as a telenovela was over, it was very probable that one of its main female characters would be invited to pose for *Playboy*. Among the people with whom I talked, references to *Playboy* magazine were not unusual (see also Browning 1995; Parker 1991). Cláudia and Fátima were no exceptions. They knew about the famous actresses and celebrities who had already posed for the magazine and they also knew about those who had plans to do so. Fátima even explained to me that actresses often refuse to pose as long as they are in the telenovela. "But as soon as the *novela* ends," Cláudia interrupted, "they will agree to pose: because of their popularity in the *novela* they can demand a good payment for the shots, arguing that they will be able to attract the curiosity of many viewers." Both Cláudia and Fátima agreed that this is a way for many actresses to earn lots of money and to keep their names and bodies in the media spotlights. Beautiful bodies are described as potential income sources (one earns money to pose for *Playboy* and one earns money by being a popular media person).

Beauty and Race

It is interesting to notice that in none of the examples above do any informants explicitly connect beauty patterns with race. The relationship between race and beauty has an elusive character – it is present, but it is not mentioned. When I explicitly asked Cláudia and Fátima about race and beauty, they both agreed that being a blond was no longer the utmost representation of beauty. This statement surprised me, since the exaltation of blond beauties in Brazil is practically omnipresent in the media. Television programs and the telenovela flow over-flow with blond (or "blonded") models, actresses, singers, etc. (see Simpson 1993 for an analysis of the star Xuxa, one iconic case). But Cláudia and Fátima pointed out that with the telenovela *A Próxima Vítima* ("The Next Victim," broadcast in 1995, by *Globo*), a new type of beauty appeared in the screens – *a beleza afro* (Afro-beauty), exemplified by actresses such as Isabel Fillardis (see Chapter 4) and Camila Pitanga. It is interesting to notice, however, that both these actresses are light-skinned blacks with straight hair. Their facial features and bodily shapes are quite similar to those of white actresses.

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During my fieldwork, I tried to insist on the subject of blackness, beauty and the telenovela flow: how were beauty patterns connected with race and Brazilianness? I only obtained very vague commentaries from my informants. Could this be because of the sheer dearth of black actors and actresses that appear in the telenovela flow? Or could it be a mechanism among my informants to avoid thinking about race in polarized terms of black and white? I noticed that notwithstanding Cláudia and Fátima's commentary (prompted explicitly by my question about afro-beauties), most of my informants still referred to white actresses (as for instance, Luíza Tomé and Vera Fischer) whenever I asked them to name beautiful women in the telenovela flow. But even though informants tended to associate beauty to white actresses, this association did not necessarily clash with the so cherished myth of racial democracy that still influences how many informants understand Brazilian society: when actresses such as Vera Fischer and Luíza Tomé were mentioned to represent national beauty, it was their Brazilianness, not their whiteness that was exalted. In this sense, Vera Fischer and Luíza Tomé – a blonde and a brunette – seemed to be seen as living examples of a racially and culturally hybrid Brazil. The same could be said about the way worldwide-known Brazilian top-models such as Gisele Bündchen and Cristiana Realí are presented in the national press.⁸

As Media and Cultural studies' scholar Banet-Weiser (1999) suggests, Anderson's (1983) *imagined* community becomes an *embodied* and *visualized* community through televised performances: television functions as an accessible and visible display of national bodies.

The telenovela flow focuses on the display of Brazilian actresses and actors. When my informants discussed beauty they often referred to Brazilian actresses and models, not to international film stars and celebrities. Actresses such as Vera Fischer and Luíza Tomé represent legitimate, Brazilian beauty: a beauty presented as the result of racial and cultural mixture. A beauty that evokes the idea of attraction and interracial sexual meeting, and that is promoted as producing a kind of national desire – expressed for instance through magazines such as the Brazilian *Playboy* or through commentaries such as those of my informants about men who dream of having a Vera Fischer in bed.

The telenovela flow can be drawn on as a source for legitimated and recognized patterns of beauty. Relating to the national imaginary, beautiful bodies that are made accessible through the telenovela flow might be a way for informants to position themselves as subjects in Brazil (i.e., to position themselves within social hierarchies) and/or as Brazilian subjects (i.e., to reflect about one's national identity): Joana, a twenty-nine-year-old housewife, commented that she usually read *Playboy* "to see the women there. All the actresses...I look at them and I compare my body to their bodies...You know, these photos are all so touched up, so I realize that I'm not in such a bad shape, after all!"

Beauty and Malleability

As I previously pointed out, it was striking to notice that the majority of my informants recognized the bodies that circulated in the telenovela flow as being *beautiful* bodies. Joana's consideration of the actresses in *Playboy* was just one of many manifestations of this kind of identification between the telenovela flow's representations of beauty and informants' own understandings of beauty. As far as I could tell, there seemed to be no gap between these two points of view: in other words, what was represented and advertised as beautiful *was* beautiful, in the eyes of my informants. It is interesting to observe the terms used by my informants to describe the bodies shown in the telenovela flow: "ideal," "perfect," "marvelous," "sculptural," "beautiful," "stunning," "well-trained" and "golden" (sun-tanned) bodies are recurring expressions.⁹ These expressions describe and recirculate a beauty that embraces all those people and products who manage to step into the telenovela flow. It is also a beauty that is associated with sexuality, money, and prestige.

In addition, this beauty is described as malleable – "hand-made bodies," "well-trained bodies," "sculptured bodies" (*corpos feitos à mão, malhados, esculturais, sarados*), "silicone-filled breasts," "firm breasts," "firm buttocks" are expressions used by male and female informants to describe the bodies that circulated in the telenovela flow.

Who, by the sight of a perfect, well-trained, fatless body doesn't stop eating that box of bonbons or that cup of ice-cream, and run straight towards the stationary bicycle, or towards anything within reach, just to,

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even if only for a while, look like one's favorite actor? (Márcio, 27, undergraduate student. Extract from a classroom essay on telenovelas)

Commentaries such as the one above occurred with great frequency among my informants. They indicate that the bodies that circulate within the telenovela flow are seen as malleable and perhaps obtainable. Consumption (of for example of a stationary bicycle) might be a step towards "looking like one's favorite actor." But why exactly would anyone want to look like a telenovela actor/actress?

A Dream Come True

At the time I interviewed Cláudia and Fátima about their television watching habits, Cláudia was full of expectations about an important goal she had – she wanted to have surgery on her breasts, which she thought were far too big. As we talked, Cláudia switched topics from personal to professional dreams, freely mixing my questions about her telenovela watching with her planned career as a doctor and the struggle she had to convince her parents to pay for a breast reduction operation.

In what follows, I argue that Cláudia's breast operation intercepts and meshes with the telenovela flow. Even though Cláudia did not explicitly refer to the telenovela flow while she talked with me about her planned plastic surgery, she did use the voices and images that circulate in the telenovela flow to talk about her decisions. In this sense, Cláudia's case is an illustration of how viewers dialogue with the telenovela flow: Cláudia positions herself within and in-between the tensions presented by this flow. Here I examine some of her positionings.

Cláudia told me she had several reasons for having this surgery: her breasts were too big, too heavy, and she could not wear T-shirts or dresses without using a bra: "*Frente-únicas* [a kind of bodice which leaves the back bare] were in fashion and I was completely out. I couldn't wear anything!", Cláudia complained. Now that she had managed to convince her parents to pay for the operation in twelve monthly installments, she felt as though one of her dreams had come true: "I think I will be another person after this surgery!"

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Cláudia was not the only one to anticipate the surgery with excitement. One week before the procedure, her mother provided me with unexpected details:

They've booked it for 7:30 a.m., but we have to be there one hour before that. The doctor said it will take about three hours, because first they do one breast and then the other. She will receive a general anaesthesia, because it's a complicated procedure. They do the nipple first – I think they cut it and then they sew it. They build the whole breast anew. Cláudia is so full of expectations. The doctor said she had so many glands. Too many glands. They will have to go.

I was surprised at these women's willingness to talk about plastic surgery – so many details, so much excitement. The procedure almost seemed to be a public matter. Everybody in Cláudia's family knew about it, her friends and colleagues also knew about it and everybody joked that they were curious to see the results. I commented on this fact with Joana, the informant who introduced me to Cláudia. She offered an interesting explanation:

This procedure means one thing to them: status. To submit oneself to a plastic surgery is to show that one has the money to afford it. It is 'chic' to talk about it. That's why they are talking so openly about it. It shows that they have money.

Indeed, some weeks later, I heard a conversation between Joana and Cláudia's mother. As they were talking about the Italian porn star Cicciolina (who was playing a minor role in the telenovela *Xica da Silva*), they touched upon the subject of pornographic films.

Claúdia's mother:

I don't understand those films. The women have enormous breasts. It's so ugly! Those huge breasts bouncing. That's because *they don't have the money to pay for surgery*. [My emphasis]

Joana:

No, you're wrong. They operate their breasts to make them bigger. It's beautiful.

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Cláudia's mother:

Do you think that it is beautiful? My
God! It's so ugly!

The Telenovela Flow, Beauty, and Class

This discussion points to a convergence between class and a particular national aesthetic (one that values smallish breasts, not large ones).¹⁰ The idea is that physical appearance can denote class, with the implication that modifications in one's physical appearance can be seen as markers of social status, as visual information that situates people socially. In another conversation, Cláudia told me about a friend who also had a breast reduction. Some days after the procedure, this friend couldn't stand staying at home and joined the carnival celebration out in the streets. Now she would have to go through a corrective surgery (*operação corretiva*), because the results of the first one were not good: the scars after the intervention were too evident. Cláudia's mother commented: "I bet that if she didn't have a father who could afford paying for two operations she would have followed the doctor's advice and stayed at home."

Consumption through the body (diets, fashion) and around that body (visits to spas, beauty treatments, surgeries, cosmetics) is seen as a sign of wealth. According to this reasoning, women's sculpted bodies, that is, bodies that undergo certain cosmetic procedures, can be read as signaling wealth, while non-sculpted bodies can be connected to poverty. Carina, a fourteen-year-old middle-class girl, comments that "it is expensive to have plastic surgery. It is only for people who can afford it. You know, my mother has already had surgery, on her breasts, to make them smaller." Marina, an eighteen-year-old live-in babysitter also once told me that she would have a breast reduction operation if she had the money.

In Chapter 4, I showed how the telenovela flow also converged class and aesthetics. Articles and interviews about plastic surgery and about other bodily interventions such as diets, exercise and beauty treatments that famous people undergo in order to look good, all attest to that. Headlines such as "Success makes miracles – how fame, money and a scalpel accomplish great transformations" ("*Sucesso faz milagre – como a*

fama, o dinheiro e um bom bisturi operam metamorfoses" in *Veja*, 17 February 99) illustrate the same phenomenon. Bodily interventions, much like in Cláudia's case, are not a matter of secrecy. In fact, having one's body remodeled is, for many actresses and celebrities, a way to become the center of attention in media coverage. Take the case of Vera Fischer. A forty-something telenovela actress, she is widely considered to be one of Brazil's eternal beauties (my informants' commentaries confirm this). Fischer manages to constantly be under the media's spotlight, thanks to her roles in prime-time telenovelas, her constant private life scandals, and her struggles to maintain her looks. Recently, she had breast implants inserted and she appeared on the cover of the *Playboy* Magazine, in order to show the results of her plastic surgery. Roberta Close (Brazil's most famous transsexual) is yet another example. She appeared twice in this same magazine, before and after her genital surgery. Bodily interventions are connected to class, and to certain national beauty ideals. They are an accepted conversation topic, both in everyday life and in the telenovela flow.

The Telenovela Flow, Beauty and Self-Regard

A point I am making is that Cláudia is positioning herself by embodying some of the complex views of womanhood, class, consumption and bodies, that can be found in the telenovela flow. By desiring to undergo cosmetic surgery, Cláudia was aware that she could be accused of being a slave to fashion – an oppressed woman who remodels her body in order to adapt it to mainstream concepts of beauty. But she argued, appropriating and reiterating ideas from the telenovela flow, that her worries about physical appearance were in fact a sign of self-regard.

In the telenovela flow, it is not unusual to find messages that link vanity and bodily intervention with psychological well-being: "I had tiny breasts. I had silicone implants and now I am so happy" (quote from an interview with the actress Adriana Garambone in *Nova* – April 2000). To take care of oneself, to tone or shape one's body, to worry about one's physical appearance is often described within this flow as a sign that one cares about oneself. A person who takes care of her looks is a self-confident person, someone who likes herself. And, vice-versa, lack of vanity can be interpreted in terms of insecurity, as in the phrase

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"a beautiful woman hiding behind her glasses" (*uma linda mulher por trás daqueles óculos*) used to describe an insecure female character in a telenovela.

Cláudia positions herself within certain tensions raised by the telenovela flow and thereby presents her choice to undergo a cosmetic surgery as that of an active subject and not of a puppet in the hands of a vain, consumption-mad society. She decided to undergo a cosmetic procedure not because she cared about what other people said, but because she wanted to "become another person." It was out of self regard (and not because of what other people thought) that she decided to change her appearance. Right after the surgery, still wearing a protective bandage and full of expectation to see the final results, Cláudia told me:

Right now I am quite happy. It was not so much because of the size of my breasts, but it was because they were so heavy. Oh no, it was so ugly! But now they will become *bonitinhos* (sweet).

By invoking selected parts of the telenovela flow, Cláudia paints mainstream beauty ideals with personalized colors.

The Telenovela Flow and the Production of Feminine Beauty

So far, I have drawn a link between beauty, consumption and class; and between beauty, consumption and self esteem. This kind of consumption through and around the body is also a marker of gender, since it establishes how a female body should look like. Plastic surgery is not only connected with a search for the perfect body, but it is also connected to an improvement of women's femininity. One heading in the telenovela flow caught my attention: "How liposuction can mold your back, belly and bums giving them a more feminine shape" (*Como a lipoaspiração pode modelar as costas, a barriga e o bumbum deixando-os com um contorno mais feminino*. In *Criativa*, March 2000). This article suggests firstly that there are female bodily shapes which are more feminine than others. Moreover, it implies that being a woman is not a sufficient condition to be feminine. By this turn, this article (and the bodily practices it describes) disengages femininity from womanhood. Femininity becomes something that can be achieved through surgery. It becomes aestheticized, it becomes a shape.¹¹ Back to Cláudia:

wouldn't her breasts become *bonitinhos* after the surgery and wouldn't she, by being able to wear *frente únicas* and other "little summer dresses with little stripes" (*vestidinhos de verão com alcinha*), become, as Cláudia herself expressed it, "another person?"

"Sweet little breasts," "*frente únicas*," and "little summer dresses" are obtainable artifices that circulate between the telenovela flow and Cláudia. They raise associations to a certain kind of femininity: a femininity connected to eroticism and (hetero)sexuality. This nationally broadcast femininity can be obtained through proper consumption of disciplinary practices, bodily interventions, diets, etc. This femininity is itself a kind of commodity.

On the one hand, Cláudia's decision could be seen in terms of submissiveness – women's strength is reduced to seduction, to the effort of making themselves pleasurable to someone else. On the other hand, Cláudia's dialogue with the telenovela flow could also be seen as being the appropriation by women of what previously oppressed them – an appropriation of artifices, a play with seduction and beauty ideals.¹² Telenovela characters such as Scarlet (in *The Untamed Woman*), Teodora (in *Salsa e Merengue*) and Xica da Silva (in *Xica da Silva*) are all strong women who use their femininity and their capacity to seduce as a means to obtain what they wanted. Femininity and beauty can be produced through the appropriation of artifices and commodities. Remember how Scarlet/Luiza Tomé interpellates viewers to "provoke desires!" by wearing a certain brand of shoes (Chapter 4).

In Belo Horizonte, and in many parts of southeastern Brazil, consumption focused on the body and the appropriation of artifices is sometimes referred to in terms of *production*. In fact, there is an idiomatic expression frequently used to indicate that a person is well-dressed and beautiful – one can say that a person is *produzida* (produced), meaning dressed-up and nice. The expression *se produzir* (to produce oneself) – to make oneself ready to go out, or to make oneself beautiful – deserves special attention. It suggests, firstly, the idea that beauty is not something that is inherent in the individual (even "natural beauties" such as telenovela actresses have their own "beauty secrets") but that it is something that can be achieved and produced through proper consumption. By "producing oneself" through consumption, one becomes beautiful.

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Within the arena of the telenovela flow, to "produce oneself" might have a very literal meaning: one is turned into a product, one makes a commodity out of oneself. Not only are the intimacies of famous people for sale in newspapers and magazines, their bodies are also made into commodities (beauty advice, diet and gymnastic programs, insurance of certain bodily parts, etc.). Outside of the arena of the telenovela flow, the meaning of "producing oneself" might not be taken so literally. In everyday life, to "produce oneself" might be understood as a way to appropriate certain nationally sanctioned and circulated artifices (such as "sweet little breasts," trendy "*frente únicas*," and "little summer dresses") in order to create a favorable image of the self.

Making Oneself Recognizable

Cláudia told me that what she wanted from the breast operation was to be able to wear clothes according to the summer fashion (clothes that could be worn with no bras), clothes that "everybody could wear," (except those with big breasts). The breast operation was for her a way to achieve normality, a way to become like her friends, and like other women who circulate in the telenovela flow. In other words, in her production of herself as an individual subject, Cláudia wanted to become a copy. By becoming a copy and making herself *recognizable*, she would, at least in her own eyes, open up the possibility for being *recognized* as a fashionable, wealthy and attractive woman (just like the ones that circulate in the telenovela flow). By becoming a copy, Cláudia hoped to feel socially integrated.

Taking these facts into consideration, I could have concluded that the more artificial, the more produced one's looks are, the strongest the evidence of one's femininity or wealth. But such is not the case. The most successful use of artifices (plastic surgeries as well as other bodily interventions) should leave no traces – an appearance of naturalness is the goal to be achieved. It is in this light that we should remember Cláudia's conversation about a friend who would have to submit to a "corrective surgery" in order to take away the scars left after the first intervention. Naturalness, even when it is achieved through artifices is

highly prized. The headlines of a magazine article describing the actress Carolina Ferraz, illustrate that:

More beautiful than ever, she *doesn't* care for beauty patterns, she *doesn't* follow any diet, she only exercises when she has time. But she also has some *beauty secrets*. Check them out! (In *Boa Forma*, 10 October 95, my emphasis.)

Naturalness is contrasted to and achieved by the use of artifices. The correct use of artifices can result in a *natural* good look. Naturalness is highly prized and prized and it brings us back to the question of class – who can afford to buy the right kind of artifices, or to pay for a good plastic surgery?¹³

Am I suggesting then that Cláudia was a victim of the telenovela flow? Am I saying that in her wish to become like "everybody else," she was completely duped? It is certainly tempting to draw such an immediate correlation between the telenovela flow and people's behavior, but anthropologically speaking, this would not be a wise move. By adopting such a position, I would be ignoring the fact that Cláudia, even though she could be classified as a heavy television viewer (watching more than three hours of television a day), lives in a complex society and participates in different social arenas that, much like the telenovela flow, undoubtedly exert an influence on the way she sees the world. My aim here is to foreground correlation, not causation: there are intersections between the telenovela flow and people's everyday activities, and it is not unusual to see people enter in dialogue with this flow in order to interpret, explain, or justify their own actions.

By entering in dialogue with the telenovela flow, Cláudia recognized certain hierarchies of gender, sexuality and class that exist within contemporary Brazilian society. She situated herself within these hierarchies. Through a certain kind of bodily consumption (the plastic surgery and the associations it evokes), she made herself recognizable and opened up possibilities for being recognized as a naturally feminine, fashionable, and attractive woman with access to money.

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I recall a character played by Vera Fischer in the *novela* *Laços de Família*. She was the owner of a clinic for cosmetic treatments and she had a huge apartment in a rich neighborhood, and she drove only imported, top cars, spent most of her time travelling abroad...Many people might get a false impression when they see *novelas*. They might start thinking that all the luxury that Vera Fischer had in the *novela* is accessible. (Orozimbo, 22, lower-class, undergraduate student.)

Meire, the Telenovela Flow, and Consumption

Cláudia's case is one example of how viewers dialogue with the telenovela flow and how they come to answer to some of its interpellations. The parallels between Cláudia's plastic surgery and the telenovela flow foreground how beauty, consumption, gender, sexuality and class can be associated. The next case I examine is about Meire. She too, enters into dialogue with the telenovela flow and responds to some of its interpellations. Meire's case is particularly interesting because it illustrates how viewers' appropriations and reiterations of elements from the telenovela flow are not always successful and do not always achieve a desired effect.

Meire was a nineteen-year-old woman who worked for a family as a live-in babysitter. We met because I lived in the same building where Meire lived and worked. Meire was light-skinned (or "light"/ *clara*, as she describes herself). She had long, curly hair (*cabelo anelado*) that she kept tied in a bun during the time she was working so that it would look less frizzy when she untied it to go out. Meire came from a smaller city situated in the southern region of Minas Gerais. She had not worked long in this household when I first met her. She told me she had been living in Belo Horizonte for five years, four of which she had worked at a family's house as the babysitter of two boys. She had completed elementary school and was now studying at night. Of all the babysitters (*babás*) who lived and worked in the same building where I lived, Meire seemed to be the one who had ambition, and she dedicated a lot of time thinking about what she really would like to do. She told me she saw babysitting as a temporary occupation. She wanted to take acting courses and learn about computers. In our conversations,

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Meire constantly asserted that, in spite of working as a babysitter, she belonged to another, higher class than her colleagues. She told me she came from a well-established family ("*minha família pode*", literally, "my family can afford to buy/have many things")¹⁴ who owned their own house and one building site.¹⁵ Her parents could afford to have her stay at home, but she wanted to earn her own money and decided to move to Belo Horizonte, where an elder sister lived and worked. Meire said she earned two and a half minimum salaries, which was four times more than other babysitters earned (it still amounted to less than R\$300/ month).

The Telenovela Flow, Beautiful Commodities, and Class

Meire was very aware of class differentiation. Conversations about her consumption habits and social life were the means through which she marked her social positioning as being different from her colleague babysitters: she always made it clear to me and the other babysitters who were listening that she preferred to buy quality products and clothes, no matter what they cost: "As people say"¹⁶... If I see something that I really like, I buy it. I just bought a pair of boots that cost R\$110. I really couldn't resist." Taking into consideration the myriad of ways by which Brazilians are encouraged to pay for goods they cannot really afford – checks that can be post-dated by one or two months, installment payments plans for clothes, appliances and even groceries – I believe Meire really was able to buy expensive things. Meire also had a cellular telephone, which she only used during weekends. She also had a boyfriend – "a rich boyfriend," she told me, who "owned his own car." She was proud of having "lots of clothes" (*tanta roupa*), so that she could always have a different dress for each party she was invited to (and she was invited to "at least one party every weekend").

Meire "hated to read" and the only exceptions to this were fashion magazines, because she "loved fashion." She also liked to watch telenovelas. Meire followed the plot of all of *Globo's* telenovelas and she also watched two other telenovelas broadcast in other channels. Her all time favorite telenovela was *Barriga de Aluguel* ("A Belly for Rent," 1990-1, *Globo*), "because it was a beautiful story. She rented her belly, right? But then she didn't want to give it away. To give her son away.

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And she fought to have her son back. And at the end both women agreed to be the baby's mothers. That was so beautiful."

When I asked Meire her opinion about why so many people watched telenovelas, she answered:

"I think they want to learn something. *Novelas* show so many clothes, and then if people (*gente*) want to open a shop, then they look at the fashion in the *novela* and start to sell the same thing. So I think they watch to learn. There are lots of things to learn. And there are also lots of wrong things, too."

"And why do you watch?" I asked her.

"I watch to see different things, because here, in Brazil, there is nothing different to see...If you don't watch television, then you won't see [anything different]."

"And if you would write your own *novela*, what would it be about?"

"It would be a *novela* that would help people...a story about everyday life that you see out in the streets – people who trample upon other people. Some with lots of money, who won't give a cent to the other one who is lying on the ground...I would make a story that would help poor people."

Like Meire, several of my informants touched upon the idea of telenovelas as an instrument to "help people" by giving its viewers access to certain kinds of information.¹⁷

As I have pointed out in Chapter 2, television works as a common reference among Brazilian viewers. It is a means to spread messages and information throughout a country that is fractured by enormous social inequalities. When Meire affirms that "if you don't watch television, then you won't see [anything different]," she is representing a shared opinion among most of my informants: telenovelas work as a means to introduce new fashions (spas, clothes, looks), new technologies (computers, liposuctions, plastic surgeries) or simply "new stuff" (new unexplored landscapes, cars, household devices).¹⁸

According to Meire and other informants, television programs (and telenovelas specifically) help viewers to gain access to information that is otherwise unequally distributed. Television and the telenovela flow translate unknown situations and milieus into recognizable events and places, offering viewers a cognizable basis for understanding and living within a complex and unequal Brazilian reality.

Beautiful Commodities Downplaying Class

Most of the time, in our conversations, Meire related to the telenovela flow in terms of consumption – she "loved" its fashion and bought certain commodities that appeared on it: "I like the music from *novelas*. I had [the CD] *Cara e Coroa* ["Heads or tails," 1995-6, *Globo*], *A Viagem* ["The Journey," 1976, *Tupi*, re-made in 1994, *Globo* and re-run in 1997]... *Salsa e Merengue* [1996-7, *Globo*] was great, with those songs by Ricky Martin. I bought it. I usually buy the international songs..."

Meire related to the telenovela flow as an insider – she was acquainted with it and mastered many of its elements. She carefully scrutinized the dresses and hairstyles of telenovela characters and actresses and she spoke like an expert about the beauty secrets of telenovela actresses:

Dinorá's hair [the name of a young prostitute who was cheated by a man who pretended to love her but who really just wanted her kidney, for a transplant, in *A Indomada*, 1997, *Globo*] is curly, but they wind it up in large rollers and then do a brushing (*uma escova*). That's why it looks so long.

By circulating and appropriating certain commodities similar to the ones displayed in the telenovela flow (in her conversations, Meire referred quite often to things and commodities she either planned to acquire or had already acquired), by showing off her expertise about the beauty secrets of actresses and the fashions of this flow, and by punctuating and introducing her opinions with the legitimating expression "as people say," Meire made herself recognizable (through her body and clothing style) as being someone "who can afford." In this sense, one could say that there is a correlation between Meire and the interpellations issued by the telenovela flow: by being in constant dialogue with this flow, Meire appropriated certain legitimated consumption patterns and reiterated them as an effective way of blurring and downplaying her position as a lower-class babysitter. Her "rich boyfriend," who "owned his own car," and all the parties to which she was invited, were presented as desirable effects (and evidence) of her successful appropriations.

Meanwhile, Deep Inside Our Bodies...

One evening, I met Meire sitting by herself on one of the benches in the building's playground. Something that happened in the elevator earlier that day had upset her. In the building where we lived, just like other residential buildings all over Brazil, there were two kinds of elevators: the "social elevator" ("*elevador social*," which in our building was decorated with marble floor and mirrors), and the "service elevator" ("*elevador de serviço*," which was not decorated at all). All the inhabitants of the building could use either of the two elevators, but there were also rules, some explicit and some implicit, governing the utilization of the elevators by non-residents or servants. An explicit rule was that the service elevator should be used to transport things (like grocery, furniture, suitcases and the like). A not so explicit rule was that workers, cleaners, maids and nannies as well as people coming from the outside whose errands were not of a social kind – such as electricians, plumbers, food deliverers, should take the service elevator. That day, Meire had taken the social elevator.

On her way up, she met a neighbor, a woman in her fifties, who asked Meire if the other elevator was out of function. When Meire answered that it was working, the woman remarked that Meire should, in fact, have used the "service elevator." In this instance it became clear to Meire that she had not been recognized as someone "who can afford." On the contrary, she was recognized as someone who has no place among marble and mirrors. Meire got upset. She told me she answered the neighbor's commentary by asking: "Why are you saying this to me? Is it because I am a mere domestic servant ("*uma empregadinha*")?"¹⁹ Deep inside our bodies, you and I both stink just as much. The only difference is that you have money. But, deep inside our bodies, we both stink."²⁰

She continued by telling me that "there are people who have money, but they don't know how to do anything. Not even how to fry an egg. They depend on other people. Look, it's just like Antonio Fagundes [a telenovela actor], in that *novela* [*O Rei do Gado*, "The King of Cattle," 1996, *Globo*]. He was so rich. Then, once, he got lost in the jungle and he had to eat insects to survive. With all that money!"

This incident marked an interesting and momentary turn in Meire's way of relating to the telenovela flow. In past conversations with me, she had basically related to it in terms of consumption, appropriating and circulating commodities and opinions that would help her to blur and downplay her low prestige position as a babysitter. In spite of her efforts (her hairdo, her dressing style, her accessories, all of which underscored her light skin), Meire was addressed and recognized as someone who should have taken the "service-elevator." At this moment, she renounced all the indicators of status that had failed to make her recognizable as a neighbor (and not as a servant), and she urged the woman who addressed her as a babysitter to do the same thing: "Deep inside our bodies, you and I both stink as much. The only difference is that you have money. But, deep inside our bodies, we both stink." Having failed to raise her own status, Meire tried to lower the status of her interlocutor. And Meire was happy with the effect of her comment: "You know, she didn't say anything else! She just kept looking at me. Just like a fool (*feito boba*)."

Some days after this incident, when I explicitly asked her what she thought about the way telenovelas dealt with social problems, she answered:

It's good that *novelas* discuss these matters. Because in Brazil, there is this kind of prejudice that one should not have a black child, that one should not adopt one...It shouldn't be like that. I believe that just like the seven o'clock *novela* [*Salsa e Merengue*], the one that just ended showed, these things are changing now. People have to learn about it. But you know, most of them don't learn. For instance, prejudice because of money. We've already talked about that the other day. So, it goes like this – if you don't have anything, then you don't count here, you can't be someone (*se você não tem nada, não pode ser nada na vida*). I think that *novelas* can sometimes teach something to people [...] But, as people say...in the *King of Cattle* they taught a lot...there was Antonio Fagundes [the actor] who taught people that money does not always count, because when he got lost in the jungle, he had money in his pocket, but he couldn't buy anything. How do we say... people should learn that.

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The Telenovela Flow, Beautiful Commodities, and Subject Positioning

Meire's engagement with the telenovela flow reflects how viewers, in spite of being active producers of meaning, are bound to a Brazilian context which constrains their own opinions and actions. Meire's reception of the telenovela flow is colored by a permanent tension that takes place in Brazil's contemporary social and cultural politics (DaMatta 1978; Reis 2000; Velho and Kuschnir 1996) and that is discussed at the end of Chapter 4: the intersection between hierarchical traditions (with roots in slavery and the patrimonial legacy inherited from the Portuguese colonizers) and individualistic values (the idea that as citizens, individuals should have the same social rights).

Meire relates in two ways to the telenovela flow. First, she turns around and answers to a recurrent interpellation that runs through it – social differences are embodied and naturalized, but consumption focused on the body (fashionable clothes, cellular phone, hairstyle) can be a way to downplay class and at the same time give access to prestige (all the parties to which she was invited) and attractiveness (she had a rich boyfriend). Through her appropriation of elements from the telenovela flow, Meire tries to position herself within these hierarchical traditions, embodying an idea that she would later criticize: "if you don't have anything, then you don't count here, you can't be someone." In another instance, when Meire's reiterations do not work, she refers to the telenovela flow and to a special telenovela episode in order to suggest that individuals should have the same rights, in spite of their differing social positionings: "Deep inside our bodies," Meire declared, "we both stink." Meire's appropriation and reiteration of elements from the telenovela flow is not simply the manifestation of naive consumerism, nor is it simply a sign of resistance. Relating with the telenovela flow is part of her way of going on with her life, and search for ways of being and belonging.

In this chapter, I have wanted to explore how viewers incorporate segments of the telenovela flow into their lives and daily practices. Important questions and problems in contemporary Brazilian society are reflected in my informants' non-immediate reception of the telenovela flow. This realization sets the stage for upcoming

discussions. This chapter has brought out three important points that should be kept in mind. First, it brings to the fore a dialogical perspective on subject formation – Cláudia and Meire relate to the interpellations of the telenovela flow in order to position themselves in society. But their positioning is only successful when they manage to make themselves recognizable for other people. They depend on other people's recognition in order to confirm their positions as subjects. Second, in their search for being and belonging, Cláudia and Meire represent how some informants draw a connection between the telenovela flow, consumption, and beauty, thus emphasizing the importance of appearance as a visual bearer of hierarchies of gender, sexuality, race, and class. And finally, this chapter introduced the idea of *production* – a positive and sanctioned way to appropriate and manipulate certain artifices in order to create a favorable image of the self.

Having these three points in mind, I will now proceed to analyze how informants appropriate and reiterate the fantasies of seduction, love and happiness that constantly appear in the telenovela flow.

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¹ This conversation is reconstructed from my field notes.

² Most of my informants were immersed within a discourse about the negative effects of television upon unprepared viewers, and associated telenovelas with two particular definitions of popular culture: telenovelas were either seen in contrast to high culture (and thus understood as vulgar, shallow, low culture) or as being part of a commercial, mass culture. By affirming that watching telenovelas was not part of their own interests, informants positioned themselves as active and selective viewers.

³ During the last two decades (but mostly during the 1980s) Globo was the only channel to broadcast several prime-time telenovelas (at approximately six-, seven- and eight o'clock). There were in 1997, as I pointed in Chapter 2, other networks that were expanding their production of telenovelas, but generally, when people referred to telenovelas as being the "six-, seven- or eight o'clock novelas," they were referring to Globo's productions.

⁴ According to *Veja* (06 March 02) during the period between 1994 and 2001 the number of persons who have undergone some kind of plastic surgery in Brazil has raised with 250 percent. In 2001, 350,000 people were cosmetically operated. That means, still according to *Veja*'s research on the statistics held by the Brazilian Association of Plastic Surgeons, that among 100,000 people, 207 went through a cosmetic operation. This number is higher than the one registered in the U.S.A. during this same period (185/100,000 operations). The *Veja* article explains that the raise in numbers can be explained by the relative stability of the Brazilian economy since the introduction of the Real in 1994. Among the most common procedures are liposuction, face lifts, eyelid lifts, breast reduction, and breast implants. The age of the patients has decreased in the last two decades. If during the 80's the average age was fifty-five years, in the 90's it was forty years and it is estimated to be around thirty-five in 2000.

⁵ In Portuguese: *Seguir uma novela*.

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⁶ *Malhação* ("Pumping Up," broadcast by Globo since 1995) differs partly from other telenovelas since it does not end. It is called a "soap opera" even in Portuguese.

⁷ Both male and female informants approached the subject of female beauty in the telenovela flow, while male beauty was not discussed as much. One possible reason might be that telenovelas have more strong female characters than they have male characters. Women's visibility (and the eventual commodification of their bodies) is, in the telenovela flow, greater than men's. To this, it should be added that historically, the commodification of female bodies is definitely not an exclusive Brazilian phenomenon. There are certainly other explanations lying behind the greater visibility of female bodies in the telenovela flow. Here I just mention one of them.

⁸ "Gisele Bündchen shows why she is the world's number 1 of top-models. The *gaucha* [a person coming from southern Brazil] posing together with Valentino, in Paris." (Extract from the cover headlines in the magazine *Caras*, 10 March 00). The magazine *Nova* (no. 319, 2000) had an entire special edition on Brazilian beauties, to celebrate the 500 years since the "discovery" of the country. The headlines on the magazine's cover read: "Beautiful Brazil: 500 years of immigration and mixture. The result? Twelve types of Brazilian beauty: blond, brown, oriental, black, Indian..." ("*Beleza de Brasil! 500 anos de imigração e mistura. O resultado? 12 tipos de beleza bem brasileira. Louras, mulatas, orientais, negras, caboclas, índias...*").

⁹ In Portuguese: *corpo ideal, corpo perfeito, corpo maravilhoso, corpo bonito, corpo escultural, corpo malhado, corpo sarado, corpo dourado*.

¹⁰ There was a trend shift regarding breast sizes in 1999-2000. Big breasts and silicone implants became then a very popular aesthetic ideal. Even national aesthetics are malleable.

¹² See Baudrillard (1990) for another kind of discussion on women and seduction.

¹³ For a further discussion on naturalness and the use of artifice among Brazilian transvestites, see Kulick 1998.

¹⁴ In Portuguese, "*Minha família pode*" ("my family can afford") is an expression that implies economic status.

¹⁵ To earn one's own house ("*casa própria*") is a very important sign of financial stability. To buy a site is generally considered as a good investment. To have enough money to invest in something is yet another sign of economical prosperity.

¹⁶ When talking, Meire punctuated her opinions with the expression "*como se diz*" (how do we say/as people say). I interpret this expression as a sign that Meire is searching for the voices of wealthier persons or mainstream ideas.

¹⁷ Here are some further examples of the ways my informants talked about how telenovelas gave viewers access to diverse and important information:

People with less education, for instance, can be introduced, when watching a *novela*, to different, unimaginable cultures... They can obtain new and important information that can seem to be basic and obvious for us who are well educated. For instance, the importance of using condoms and the existence of other birth control methods. They can understand the gravity of an abortion – many people don't know that it is a crime – and they can get to know more about diseases, such as leukemia which was dealt with by the *novela* *Laços de Família*. And, to the rich people [viewers] it might be astonishing to know and see how people live in shanty towns and how people suffer in order to survive. *Novelas* show the unknown... People belonging to different universes learn, get informed and entertained through [watching] *novelas*. (Júlia, 20, middle-class undergraduate student. Extract from a classroom essay on telenovelas.)

In *Porto dos Milagres* they show people from Bahia, their love affairs and their problems, and they criticize in a subtle way the governor of that state. It is good that *novelas* deal with social problems. We like to see our faces reflected in the faces of the characters, because then we can share the same knowledge and try to solve our tensions. We can also think: "Thank God these things don't only happen to me!" (Bárbara, 18, undergraduate lower-middle-class student. Extract from a classroom essay on telenovelas.)

Novelas might teach something. A good example are Globo's *novelas*. Their plots contain information about cancer, AIDS, homosexuality, abortion and even traffic rules. (Marcelo, 19, undergraduate student. Extract from a classroom essay on telenovelas.)

I recall a scene from a *novela*. I felt imprisoned by it, by all the suffering [expressed] in that moment, and I could see myself in that actress, I could feel her problem as if it was mine, and I felt anguish about that situation. When the scene was over, I started to reflect about some social problems. This scene from *Laços de Família* ("Family Links") enacted by Carolina Dieckman, who played the tragedy of a person who suffers from leukemia, worked as a way to educate the Brazilian people. We stopped and reflected about what can be done to help people who are suffering in a hospital or even at home. (Adriana, 25, lower-middle-class undergraduate student. Extract from a classroom essay on telenovelas.)

Novelas deal with important themes taken from everyday life, such as campaigns against cigarettes, donation of organs, [they] criticize the government, denounce corruption, etc. (Laurita, 27, lower-class undergraduate student. Extract from a classroom essay on telenovelas.)

Examining the extracts above, one can see what kinds of information were considered to "educate," "teach," or "help" (young, and/or uneducated, and/or rural, and/or female) viewers: information about sexuality and sexual practices (use of condoms, AIDS, abortion, homosexuality, pregnancy), about social issues (diseases, violence, social campaigns), about gender relations (parents who separate), and about class ("unimaginable cultures," or about "people who live in shantytowns").

¹⁸ Several informants pointed out which were the commodities and consumption habits introduced by the telenovela flow:

Novelas tell people even what to wear, what to buy, how to cut or wear one's hair, what to eat... (Marcelo, 19, undergraduate student. Extract from a classroom essay on telenovelas.)

Fashion in Brazil is the fashion that appear in *novelas*. Music from *novelas* become national hits. (Luiza, 18, middle-class undergraduate student. Extract from a classroom essay on telenovelas.)

Explode Coração ["Bursting Heart," 1995-6, *Globo*] showed people the importance of personal computers. It showed people that computers are good for the future. (Eglei, 22, drugstore clerk. Extract from an interview.)

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After the *novela Pantanal* ["Pantanal," 1990, *Manchete*] everybody started to travel to that region. To fish and see the nature. (Ernesto, 55, bank-clerk. Extract from field notes.)

¹⁹*Empregadinha* ("a little maid"): the diminutive form can at times be used pejoratively, meaning in this case "mere," "insignificant."

²⁰ The whole passage in Portuguese, as I hurried to write it down was: "*Por que? Porque eu sou uma empregadinha? Olha que por dentro eu e você fedemos do mesmo jeito. A única diferença que tem pode ser o dinheiro. Mas por dentro nós fedemos do mesmo jeito.*"

CHAPTER SIX

Fantasies of Seduction, Love and Happiness – Only for You!

Kelly (*dancing with Antonio*): I was just remembering my fifteenth birthday party. Do you remember, when you pushed me and I fell?

Antonio: Oh, darling! It was so long ago! Couldn't we talk about more pleasant things?

Kelly: Like what?

Antonio: Like that day, when you got me drunk and took me to your room.

(Extract of a dialogue from the final episode of *Salsa e Merengue*, 1997)

Irma (*looking straight into José Lucas' eyes*): Why don't we go for a ride around the farm, so that you can show me some beautiful landscapes?

J. Lucas (*looking down*): I have a lot of work to do. Besides, it seems to me that you're forgetting that I'm a mere farm worker.

Irma: Well, then I'll talk to you as I would to a worker. I want you to prepare a horse for me and then join me for a ride.

(Continued...)

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J. Lucas: You could ask someone else to follow you...

Irma: No. Today I want *you* to come with me!

(Extract of a dialogue from *Pantanal*, 1990)

Teodora (*dancing with Eugênio*): Do you know something, Eugênio? I think you're made to dance with me. When I dance with you, I feel that we're just one.

Eugênio: We are just one. I always knew that. We're just one.

Teodora: No, you never knew that! Only God knows all the trouble I had to open up your eyes and make you realize that.

Eugênio: But now that my eyes are wide-open, can I shut them for a while?

Teodora: Only if it is to kiss me!

(Extract of a dialogue from the final episode of *Salsa e Merengue*, 1997)

Unexpected, improbable and implausible heterosexual romantic relationships are a recurring theme throughout telenovelas. Characters from different social spheres desire and seduce each other, in the hope for love and happiness, and/or in the hope for revenge and justice.

There has been a debate among media- and telenovela researchers about the impact romantic messages might have upon the people who receive them. Some authors (Fischer 1984; Kehl 1979; Mattelart 1986) argue that genres such as telenovelas invalidate any form of social struggle against inequalities because their narratives suggest that "love conquers all." They portray love as the only way to challenge and overcome social barriers. Some voices in the debate on the representation of (heterosexual) love in popular culture argue that viewers'/readers' impulses to formulate demands in the real world are disarmed by the belief that only "love conquers all." Passivity, as Janice Radway (1984:97)¹ argues, is at the heart of women's experience of love in popular culture. A "perfect union with the ideal male" might become a final goal for women engaged with these kinds of romantic messages.

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A different perspective on telenovelas, love and reception is developed by Vink (1988:198)². Vink agrees that love, in telenovelas, is sometimes depicted as more important than power, social positioning, or affluence. He argues, however, that telenovela plots also show that love alone is not enough to challenge hierarchies of gender, sexuality, race and class. One message that seems to run through various telenovela plots, says Vink, is that love brings happiness and gives strength to people to challenge social hierarchies, either through education, hard work or aesthetic improvement.

The main argument to be developed in this chapter has many parallels with Vink's. Love, in the telenovela flow, does not simply strike and conquer all. It is ensnared in social hierarchies and it has to be fought for. There is a focus, disseminated throughout the telenovela flow, on women's agency to get what they want. Seduction strategies are often portrayed as the road to attract the attention of beloved/desired persons. The extracts from telenovela dialogues presented above all illustrate how the telenovela flow presents its viewers with narratives about the possibilities and strategies of producing oneself into a desirable and (hopefully) even lovable person: Kelly, a young female character in *Salsa e Merengue* (1997, *Globo*) gets Antonio drunk and seduces him. Her resulting pregnancy, and later, her child, were also a means to get Antonio to fall in love with her. Teodora, another character from the same telenovela, spends the entire telenovela fighting to "open up" Eugênio's eyes so that he would realize that she was the woman in his life. Irma (*Pantanal*, 1997, *Manchete*) uses her power as a patron to compensate for her failure (as a woman) to convince José Lucas to accompany her on a ride around the farm.

In this chapter, I argue that informants do not become passive and cease to formulate their demands on the real world when they turn around and engage with the fantasies of love, happiness and seduction coming from the telenovela flow. On the contrary, I will suggest that these fantasies persist in everyday life, urging women to act, comment and reflect upon their own experiences. Moreover, these fantasies of love, happiness and seduction reveal a great deal about conflicting and opposing hierarchies that exist in contemporary Brazilian society.

In the first two sections of this chapter, I discuss how and when fantasies of love and happiness are connected to social hierarchies. I examine how maternal and romantic love are represented in the

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telenovela flow, and how they are discussed by my informants. Is there, in the telenovela flow, a "hierarchy of desirability" (Simpson 1993:37), where class, gender and race work as guidelines marking who is desirable and/or lovable? And if so, how did my informants relate to that?

In the third section, I return to the issue of seduction as a form of agency. I will be arguing that seduction (through persuasion, production of the self and enhancement of personal assets) is often portrayed by the telenovela flow as the best road to secure a beloved/desired person. Here again we are confronted with the idea of malleability (already discussed in Chapter 5). Bodies are not the only things that are malleable – femininity and desire can also be molded and produced. But how? I will investigate how seduction and production (in the sense of appropriation of artifices and enhancement of personal assets) are associated with attractiveness and love, and are embedded in a Brazilian context where dreams of happiness (the materialization of imagined and often desired articulations) and social mobility (the possibilities of crossing social boundaries) abound.

The last two sections are case studies (followed by a conclusion) that further illustrate how my informants appropriated, repeated and reiterated fantasies of love, happiness and seduction from the telenovela flow.

Fantasies of Love and Happiness – Maternal Love

- Dona Juraci: It's funny. In the seven o'clock *novela*, Teodora goes to Canada, to be artificially inseminated, and then she becomes the mother of two black children! Black, really coal-black children (*pretos, mas preto mesmo*).³ Teodora was astonished. When she woke up from childbirth, they told her about her children, and she said: 'Oh my God! I think I'll have to send them to Switzerland, because there is so much prejudice here in Brazil!'
- Michele: That's true. I know a couple who adopted a black boy (*um menino preto*). He grew up; he

was almost handsome (*Ele cresceu, até bem apessoado, o rapaz*). But they had a lot of trouble. Because they grow up and they don't want to marry a black person. No, they want to marry a white person. You see: someone adopts a little *preto* (*um pretinho*). They treat him like their own son; they give him clothes, education. But there is a lot of prejudice, they suffer too much. If it was in Switzerland or somewhere out there,⁴ it could work, because there they are different, they can even become models. But here? There won't be any white person willing to marry him. You see, for instance, my daughter. She will never marry a black person (*uma pessoa negra*). No, there is too much prejudice and they suffer too much...*They* [black persons] are different abroad. Exotic. Brazilians are very successful abroad. *We* are different; *we* have a special manner, a swing [*um jeito, uma ginga*].⁵ (Extract from fieldnotes. My emphasis).

This conversation between Dona Juraci (a seventy-five-year-old, middle-class woman) and her daughter Michele (a fifty-five-year-old staff administrator in a governmental office) illustrates what several of my informants pointed out: parental love (and especially maternal love) is "pure" and strong enough to challenge social hierarchies. According to Michele, love between parents and adopted children challenges racial hierarchies (the telenovela character Teodora and Michele's own friend were the examples Michele took to illustrate that).

An extract from Vink's (1988:182) analysis of a telenovela text is just one of many representations where maternal love is depicted in the telenovela flow as being strong and unconditional. It is a dialogue between André, a poor working class hero, and Carina, daughter of a rich landowner (in *Pai Herói* "Father and Hero/ Heroic Father", 1979, *Globo*):

André:

Now, you answer me: do you still love me?

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- Carina: More than anything in the world, of course after my daughter.
- André: Since I don't have any children, I adore you more than anything in the world.

Several informants pointed out that mothers, as they are depicted in the telenovela flow and conceived of in everyday life, are usually an unending source of love and understanding. According to many informants, maternal love for one's children transcends social hierarchies. Sometimes, it can even be extended to transcend what one's children do. Geralda, an eighteen-year-old boutique clerk commented in an interview about a homosexual romance in the telenovela *A Próxima Vítima* (1995, *Globo*):

Sandrinho's mother understood it from the start. She said she loved her son and wanted to see him happy. Jeferson's mother had more trouble in accepting their relationship, but she changed her mind. It's the same thing at home: my mother is more open-minded; she said she would try to understand if one of her sons were gay. My father said he would never accept such a thing. Women accept things more easily; they are more engaged with their families than men are. (Extract from an interview. Fieldnotes)

Discussion about female telenovela characters often led to more general reflections about women and their concern with family and children. Telenovelas' emphasis on motherhood and maternal love might be seen, according to Vink (1988:209), as indicating the importance of the family (and the relationships that stem from it) in a society such as Brazil. At the same time, emphasis on motherhood and maternal love might also be seen as a way to strengthen the link between women's agency and the domestic sphere. Conversations about Sandrinho's and Jeferson's mothers (in *A Próxima Vítima*, 1997, *Globo*) triggered the following reflections:

I was commenting about this [romance] with my mother. Women are always more worried with the family. Men are different. They don't care as much. (Eliane, 22, drugstore clerk. Extract from an interview.)

Women are more open to [the surprises of] life. They accept things more easily. They endure lots of things, even infidelity. They always forgive. And they say it is because of their children or because of their

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families. Men are *soltos* (loose, careless). They worry about money, but they don't worry as much as women do. (Celita, 18, shop clerk. Extract from an interview).

Looking at my ethnographic material, there seems to be almost no discrepancy between the way maternal love is portrayed in the telenovela flow and the way it is reflected in everyday life. Maternal love is represented in the telenovela flow, and discussed by my informants, as being a feeling that transcends social hierarchies.

There seems, however, to be an opposite tendency when it comes to the ways heterosexual romances are portrayed in fiction and discussed in everyday life.

"A Poor Father is Destiny, A Poor Husband is Idiocy"⁶

The title of this section is a popular Brazilian saying that in effect sums up the guiding philosophy of all telenovelas. While love between parents and their children is taken to be unaffected by social hierarchies, i.e., "a poor father is destiny" – romantic love is presented as a choice, an action that one can take to change one's social position.

Dreams of happiness and upward mobility through romantic relationships were quite a common theme among my young female informants. Marina, an eighteen-year-old babysitter commented once in a conversation about the actor José Mayer, who played the role of the wealthy and mysterious Teobaldo, a successful businessman of Egyptian origins, in *A Indomada* (1997, *Globo*): "Who wouldn't want to marry a man like that?"

Patrícia, a seventeen-year-old high school student and her cousin Ana were also admirers of José Mayer:

Patrícia: "I'm crazy about him!"

Ana: "I think he is so charming! Do you remember how wonderful he was in that *novela* when he wore glasses?" [*História de Amor*, 1995, *Globo*. José Mayer played the role of a doctor married to an upper-class woman.]

Patrícia: "He was marvelous!"

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- Ana: "Marvelous! But he ends up with that other woman...that Duarte, Regina Duarte. Oh, they had nothing in common. That woman was tacky, with such a bad taste (*brega, cafona*)."
- Patrícia: "And his first wife was so wonderful. Can you imagine? To exchange her for the other one?"
(Extract from a tape-recorded interview.)

These extracts clearly illustrate a link between desirability, physical appearance, and class position. The desirability of the characters played by the actor José Mayer was undoubtedly connected to his personal assets (physical appearance, charm, charisma) and, not improbably, also to the fact that in both telenovelas he played the role of a wealthy and prestigious man.

The relationship between desirability, age, race and class appear in another informant's playful commentary about telenovela plots:

Some *novelas* tell stories about a young man who meets a young, respectable and wealthy girl, has sex with her, then with her aunt, then with her mother, and then with the maid. (Fábio, 22, undergraduate student. Extract from a classroom essay on telenovelas.)

It is interesting to note how Fábio enumerates the women who had an affair with the same man: young, respectable, and wealthy girl>aunt>mother>maid. The youth and wealth of the girl – "*moça de família*" occupy the highest position, while the poverty and probably non-whiteness represented by the "maid" ("*empregada*") occupy the lower ranks.

The desirability of characters/actors and actresses is also related to their popularity and fame. The simple fact of being someone who participates in a television program or in a telenovela is often enough to legitimate that person's desirability. Fame and stardom invest people with an interesting, attractive and irresistible allure. In a circular movement, fame produces desirability, and desirability might result in fame. José Mayer's or Vera Fischer's (see Chapter 5) impact on my informants can be explained by this interplay of desirability, visibility and circulation through several media. Actors, actresses and characters

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who circulate in the telenovela flow might work as guidelines showing what/who is desirable.

Thelma (a fifty-year-old secretary) once told her niece:

When I came home from work, I turned on the TV. Then I saw a wonderful man, perfect for you, Cláudia! His name is Léo, in the *novela*. [Léo was a white young man who worked as a helicopter pilot in *O Amor Está no Ar*, 1997, *Globo*]. He is now wearing his hair short. It fits him so well. Just perfect for you, Cláudia! (Extract from fieldnotes)

In Thelma's case, it was Léo's physical appearance and his trendy looks that first called her attention. As she presents this character as someone who would be "just perfect" for her niece, she is suggesting, even if only jokingly, certain parameters for how she thinks Cláudia's boyfriends ought to be like. In this sense, the telenovela flow works as a kind of catalogue or memory bank of desirable traits (in Léo's case – masculinity, whiteness, trendy looks, prestigious profession both as character and as actor). It constitutes a well-known and readily circulated standard against which individuals can measure the desirability of others and themselves. For instance, it is not unusual to compliment someone by comparing him or her to a telenovela character/actor/ actress. Tulio, an eighteen-year-old high school student, for instance, was pleased to hear that a colleague thought he was very much like an actor from a telenovela. Smiling, he thanked her for the comparison. Looking like a telenovela actor/actress can be understood as synonymous to being desirable.

But what happens if one does not look like a telenovela actor/actress? What can one do to become a desirable person or to realize one's fantasies about love, happiness and a decent life? A series of detailed narratives about women's ways to attract the attention of the person they desire emerges from my ethnographic material.

Techniques of Seduction, Only for You!

"That Scarlet is a bright woman," Michele once said. "She makes her husband do everything she wants. It's funny to watch." Michele's husband, who was listening to our conversation completed: "Yes, she cons (*enrola*) her husband to do things in her own way. She is always

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wearing daring, sensual clothes, and she talks to him with a sweet little voice ("*uma voz mansinha*"). She really cons him."

Marina, an eighteen-year-old babysitter, also had an opinion about Scarlet's maneuvers: "I really liked to see Scarlet dancing with Teobaldo. She was so charming with that dress. She danced very well and she made her husband so jealous!"

Clearly, watching Scarlet's maneuvers to manipulate her husband amused these informants. The things Scarlet uses to "con" her husband to do whatever she wanted were exaggeratedly explicit and palpable – the clothes, the voice, the allusions to sex.

In Chapter 4, I discussed Scarlet, a character from the telenovela *Indomada* ("The Untamed Woman"). A white woman in her early thirties, Scarlet imposes her will upon her husband through seduction, or, in extreme cases, through lack of seduction: she sometimes threatens her husband to go on sex strikes. In a single character, Scarlet condenses the role of engaged mother (she has a teenage daughter), caring daughter (she and her nuclear family lived together with her parents and a younger sister), caring wife and seductive woman with a stubborn determination to fulfill all her desires. Her aggressive sexuality, manifested through outbursts of lust and a "burning heat" ("*um calor*") that only ceased when she had sex, is conveniently played out within the borders of a happy marriage. Scarlet, the fictive character, and Luiza Tomé, the actress who played Scarlet's role, counsels other female characters/viewers/readers about how to build relationships, "produce" bodies and provoke desire. The search for a happy relationship, in the telenovela flow, passes through production, consumption and manipulation of artifices.

Sexy lingerie, sexy accessories, seductive movements, and a sensual style are described within and outside of the telenovela flow as effective instruments that can be used by women in order to manipulate their sweethearts into a relationship. Several informants recognized in Scarlet, and many other female telenovela characters, a feminine *jeitinho* – a way to seduce, persuade and charm that might eventually work as a step towards a romantic relationship and maybe even towards better life opportunities.⁷

In Brazil, the term *jeitinho* is part of a vocabulary that celebrates how members of a society "slip past institutional and economic barriers" (Rebhun 1999:69 and Barbosa 1992; 1995). *Jeitinho* means a "little

way" to circumvent, bypass, arrange, manipulate. It can be defined as a fast, efficient and improvised way of accomplishing a goal by disrespecting rules and using, instead, one's social or personal resources (Barbosa 1995:36). As Rebhun (1999:71) points, *jeitinho* is not exclusively a Brazilian phenomenon. Similar practices can be found "anywhere poverty, discrimination, bureaucracy, and government control get in people's way." The difference is that the *jeitinho* is used in popular culture and academic circles as an important (and yet ambiguous) category in the process of definition of a Brazilian identity: the *jeitinho*, on the one hand, helps Brazilians to describe themselves as "*debrouilleurs*," as people with a great capacity to improvise and find a way out of difficult situations (Rónai 2001; Buarque de Hollanda 2001). In this sense, it can arouse national pride. The *jeitinho* can, on the other hand, also be associated to lack of morals and with corruption – a way to get around obstacles at the expense of others, by disrespecting laws and defending, at any cost, one's personal interests (Araújo 2001; Betto, 2001).⁸ Many informants recognized that Scarlet, just like other fictive female characters, played out a feminine *jeitinho*, a particular kind of cunning that she used in order to circumvent obstacles in her quest to be desirable and happy.

An extract from a dialogue in *O Dono do Mundo* ("King of the World," 1991-2, *Globo*) illustrates yet another instance when a feminine *jeitinho* is played out. The conversation is between secondary characters – two women in their early twenties, one of whom (Gilda) is in love with a man but does not know what to do to attract him. The other woman, Terezinha, is more experienced and teaches Gilda some tricks. In this scene, the two women are in Gilda's bedroom and Gilda is getting ready to go to work:

Terezinha: Are people supposed to dress like nuns at your job?

Gilda: Why? Aren't my clothes good enough?

Terezinha: You're hiding yourself behind these clothes, Gilda! How do you think he will ever notice you? Men want to see flesh, Gilda!

Gilda: But I'm so thin...

Terezinha: But you're a woman. There was a Hollywood star, Audrey Hepburn. She was as thin as

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toothpick. But all the men were crazy for her! Look here! [She touches Gilda's body, showing that she has curves]. Lift that up! [She gently pulls Gilda's back so that her buttocks are enhanced]. And when you have nothing to show, then you still have to make them believe that you have something!

Terezinha's last phrase crystallizes a recurrent way to portray seduction and a feminine *jeitinho* in the telenovela flow – "And when you have nothing to show, then you still have to make them believe that you have something!" Production of a desirable person is equated with simulation and "make believe." A feminine *jeitinho* to seduce is presented as a skill in "making [men] believe." It is a skill in the art of making oneself *recognizable* as an attractive, interesting, desirable, and lovable woman. It is also a step towards the accomplishment of desired articulations.

The feminine *jeitinho* is depicted by the telenovela flow both as an active strategy that can be played out (just like in Scarlet's maneuvers or in Terezinha's clothing advice), and as a gift – something that is embodied, naturalized, and imbued with Brazilianness (manifested in the form of such cherished traits as creative improvisation, hot-bloodedness and sensuality, cf. Freyre 1933; Parker 1991). In this latter sense, the feminine *jeitinho* comes to represent a *Brazilian* and *feminine* way of being that emanates from the person herself.

The manner in which Joana, a twenty-eight-year-old housewife, retold some important events of an episode in *Xica da Silva* (1997, *Manchete* – recall that Xica is pronounced 'Sheeka') attests to the way informants related the subject of seduction to a Brazilian and feminine *jeitinho* that stems from certain persons:

The first time João Fernandes saw Xica, she was bathing in a waterfall. He was completely paralyzed, enchanted, when he saw her swimming. Can you imagine that? It was maybe the first time he had seen a completely naked woman. You know, in those times, everybody wore lots of clothes, all the time. And there was Xica: naked, swimming, playing with the water, all by herself. (Extract from fieldnotes)

In Joana's retelling, Xica's seductive power emanates from herself and from the way she relates to her body. By taking pleasure in bathing

naked, Xica is presented in the telenovela and narrated by Joana as having a natural, *Brazilian* sensuality. Joana's commentary, I should explain, is directly connected to the description of Brazilian traits (in opposition to European/Portuguese manners) as they were presented in the telenovela *Xica da Silva*, and in other popular and academic arenas (DaMatta 1978, Freyre 1933; Parker 1991). These representations associate Brazilianness with bodies, sensuality, nakedness and cleanliness.⁹ Xica's natural sensuality tells viewers a great deal about a Brazilian feminine *jeitinho*. In the scene retold by Joana, the character Xica is not actively seducing João Fernandes – it is her personal assets, her Brazilian, feminine *jeitinho* that ensnares the attention of that prestigious and powerful man. In Amelia Simpson's (1993) analysis of Xuxa, a Brazilian television mega-star, the subject of eroticism and sensuality as being a naturalized cultural trait also comes to the fore. When asked in an interview on American television about the erotic atmosphere in her television program for children, Xuxa answered that if her show "seemed sexy, that couldn't be helped, since Brazilian women are 'sensual' by nature" (in Simpson, 1993:101). Xica's and Xuxa's feminine and sensual *jeitinho* is portrayed as a naturalized Brazilian trait. These Brazilian and feminine *jeitinhos* that appear in the telenovela flow depict women as both the subjects and the objects of seduction. Brazilian women, according to these representations, cannot help being seducers.¹⁰

My informants seem to agree that women, in the telenovela flow, occupy a central role when it comes to matters of seduction and *jeitinhos*. Female bodies, femininity, seduction and *jeitinhos* also occupy a central role in my informants' appropriation and reiteration of the telenovela flow.¹¹ The underlying idea here is that every woman can make or "produce" herself into a desirable person.

So far, I have shown that my informants were aware of, and amused by the way seduction and *jeitinhos* were presented in the flow. But what are the implications that the telenovela flow has for the ways in which informants make sense of and evaluate their position in society? How did my informants relate to the techniques of seduction and feminine *jeitinhos* presented by the telenovela flow? Were they seen as a possibility or as a necessity in order to accomplish one's dreams? Were seduction tricks appropriated and reiterated into my informants' lives? Were Terezinha's, Scarlet's or Xica da Silva's *jeitinhos* useful for other

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women? Cláudia and Fátima, two eighteen-year-old high school students, laughed at my questions: "Now you're exaggerating, Thaís! People know it's only a *novela*. They [telenovelas] don't have this kind of influence on people!"

Cláudia and Fátima were partially right. I did not find in my ethnographic material any concrete evidence that an informant used exactly the same seduction techniques as the telenovelas' heroines. I did find, however, that many of the women I knew and interviewed used similar clothes, hairstyles, idiomatic expressions, and that they talked about fantasies of seduction, love and happiness. As I have been documenting throughout this study, the telenovela flow is in constant dialogic interaction with everyday life. The reason why viewers recognize Terezinha's, Scarlet's, or Xica da Silva's behavior as a feminine *jeitinho* to seduce is because this *jeitinho* is not only played out in fiction but also in everyday life. My informants' engagement with the fantasies of seduction, love and happiness portrayed in the telenovela flow was perhaps not to seduce. But their engagement with these representations was a way to legitimize their own romantic stories, desires and fantasies. Fantasies, as Ang (1985:135) puts it, do not "function in place of, but beside, other dimensions of life (social practice, moral or political consciousness)." Fantasies construct "imaginary solutions for real contradictions which in their fictional simplicity and their simple fictionality step outside the tedious complexity of the existing social relations of dominance and subordination" (Ang 1985:135). Scarlet's *jeitinho* and its intricate connection to production, Terezinha's emphasis on "mak[ing] them believe that you have something," and Xica da Silva's rewards for being beautiful and sensual encourages viewers to reflect upon and negotiate the relationship and the potentialities between actual and possible lives.

In the following sections I present two case studies that illustrate how two women (Joana and Maria) engaged with fantasies of seduction, love and happiness as a means to talk about their own skills and assets. Both stories, as they were retold to me, are about these women's success in using their personal resources in order to capture the attention of the men they desired. Joana's and Maria's cases are not only about love, seduction or desire. They are also about class, race, femininity and sensuality. In this sense, they are about contemporary Brazilian society.

Joana and Paulo

Joana was a twenty-eight-year-old woman. She had long, straight, shining coal-black hair and, she said (very aware that she was appropriating the phrase from a famous Brazilian novel¹²) "cinnamon-colored skin." Joana was born in a little village in northeastern Brazil and had moved to Belo Horizonte at the age of fifteen to work as the housekeeper of a cousin, and finish her high school education by night. She met Paulo, a white, middle-class university student when she was nineteen and they got married that same year (Paulo was eighteen then). They lived in a four-room apartment (owned by Paulo's family) in an upper-middle-class area of Belo Horizonte. After their marriage, Joana stopped working, quit her studies and became a housewife.

In 1997, during my fieldwork, Joana regularly watched two telenovelas: *Xica da Silva* (based, as I have noted earlier, on a true story, and broadcast at 9:30 p.m., by *Manchete*) and *Maria do Bairro* (the Mexican telenovela broadcast by SBT, at 7:30 p.m.). Once, explaining to me why she liked to watch *Xica da Silva*, Joana emphasized the subject of love as a means to challenge hierarchies of class and race:

This was the first time in that village that a white man dared to openly have a relationship with a black woman. All slave owners had sexual relationships with some of their female slaves. Sometimes they even enfranchised¹³ their favorite (female) slave, and had her live in a little house, close to the big house where they lived. And the woman lived there as his lover. But not this man [i.e., Xica da Silva's lover]. He treated Xica openly as his woman. He even wanted to marry her, but it was forbidden for whites to marry black people...So then she gets pregnant. And because he publicly declared his relationship with her, everybody has to respect her, to call her a lady, to treat her as people treat other rich women. He obliged people to treat her well. And he gave her presents. She had never seen the sea, so he had an artificial dam and a boat built just for her. So nice! Can you imagine the love? I think this is so nice! ...That's why I like this *novela*. Because, you see, we're almost in the year 2000 and still, when people see a black person married to a white person here in Brazil, everybody is astonished. Then I think – if today it is difficult [to challenge

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prejudice], imagine how it was when Xica da Silva was alive. When she went to live together with a white man, and she had her own house, she ordered people to do things for her, she dressed up like white people. It was probably very difficult, terrible for her. She had to fight so much to achieve these things... (Extract from a tape-recorded conversation)

In Joana's narrative, romantic love was the way for Xica to gain access to extraordinary and beautiful commodities (jewelry, artificial dam, boat) and social status (white people were obliged to treat Xica with respect and deference). This is an archetypal case where love, as a Brazilian proverb says, beautifies ("*O amor embeleza*"): not only does it make life and lovers more beautiful, it also brings access to beautiful commodities.

The interplay of love and social ascension, according to Joana, was also at the core of *Maria do Bairro*'s plot. Joana described the plots of Mexican telenovelas, such as *Maria do Bairro*:

The plots [in Mexican telenovelas] are like this: it's always about a very poor woman who falls in love with a rich man (and he falls in love with her), and they get married. Sometimes it can be about a woman who finds out that she had a rich father and then she inherits lots of money.

Mexican telenovelas are recognized by most viewers as being totally centered around the interplay of class mobility and romantic love, whereas Brazilian ones are said to treat these subjects in a more complex way. Most viewers think that Brazilian telenovelas are more realistic, more complex, and better than Mexican ones, which are considered to be more melodramatic, unrealistic and tacky: "They are always about a poor woman who gets married to a rich man or who finds out that she has a rich father...", Rodrigo, a thirty-three-year-old biologist described Mexican telenovelas in exactly the same words as Joana. Both Rodrigo and Joana referred to the intrigues in Mexican telenovelas as being too simple. In spite of that, Joana still preferred Mexican telenovelas to *Globo's* telenovelas, because she found their representation of poverty and class differences more realistic than those of *Globo*. I was surprised by Joana's detailed description of the scenery in Mexican telenovelas:

If someone is poor, then they are really poor, and if someone is rich, then they are incredibly rich. The plots are a little dull, but for instance, if

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someone is poor, then this person won't have a refrigerator. They live in dirt-floor shacks, with walls made of cardboard. They don't have a stove; they sometimes only have a cooker. It's not like in *Globo's* telenovelas, where the poor have fancy refrigerators with two doors! No, [in Mexican telenovelas] they sometimes don't even have water or electricity. (Extract from a tape-recorded conversation)

It is interesting to notice that Joana pays special attention to the characters' access to diverse commodities. Joana's comments about a third telenovela, one she told me she found "irritating" (*irritante*) makes it clear not only that she took telenovelas' representations of social status (who could afford to have what kinds of commodities) very seriously, she also acknowledged that these representations exerted an impact upon viewers. In her description, bright colors, tacky dresses and big earrings are seen as important markers of a certain social status:

In *Salsa e Merengue* [1996-7, *Globo*] there is a rich, nasty woman. She wears fur coats and things like that. Things that don't really exist. And the worst thing is that they [telenovelas] have an influence on people. What about poor people that are watching this *novela* and start believing that the clothes she wears are fashionable? And the poor [in *Salsa e Merengue*] are so tacky (*brega*). They wear bright-colored clogs, very short skirts...green earrings...things that no one wears. They exaggerate, and that makes me angry. (Extract from a tape-recorded conversation.)

Joana argues that a misrepresentation of class tastes (as in the case of the rich character in *Salsa e Merengue* who wears clothes that "don't really exist") can be confusing for those that might eventually want to imitate the character's clothing style.

As I previously pointed out in Chapter 2, questions regarding class differences and upward mobility of characters are a constant theme in telenovelas. Watching the transformation of characters (from poor to rich and sometimes as a corollary and punishment for evil or nasty characters, from rich to poor) is also a source of delight for many telenovela viewers. Joana was one such typical viewer. She explained to me that the reason she really enjoyed watching the Mexican telenovela *Maria do Bairro* was because she could follow the transformation of the main character:

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For instance, she gets rich because she marries a rich man, but she still has a strange taste (*um gosto estranho*) – she buys dresses in far too bright colors or exaggerated patterns, she buys shoes that are also too much. Everything has very strong colors. It's strange that poor people are sometimes like children, they like bright, strong colors... She talks loudly, she uses a lot of slang, she eats like this [here Joana imitates someone eating with gusto]. And then she starts learning. I like to see this transformation. I like to see this climbing (*essa subida*). (Extract from a tape-recorded conversation)

When I said to Joana that it seemed, from what she was telling me, that it was only through romantic love that telenovela women could ascend socially, she immediately gave me an example of a Mexican telenovela where the main female character ascended socially through hard work. But Joana soon admitted that this telenovela was more of an exception and that, indeed, social mobility in Mexican telenovelas was often connected to romantic love.

Both in *Xica da Silva* and *Maria do Bairro*, class ascension was an effect of romantic love to *rich men*. Men were presented in these telenovelas as being the economic providers in a romantic relationship. These telenovelas exemplify not only how desired articulations are imag(in)ed – a rich marriage can be a step toward better life opportunities. They also reinforce the idea that desirability is ensnared with social hierarchies – the desirable/lovable man is also an economic provider.¹⁴ Seduction and a feminine *jeitinho* might be a first step to reach love and happiness.

Joana emphasized that neither *Maria do Bairro* nor *Xica da Silva* were subordinated to their men. They were both strong women; brave enough to fight for what they wanted and to impose themselves within new social circles. That was also why Joana liked these two telenovelas.

By commenting on fictive events from the telenovela flow, and by observing my reactions to her commentaries, Joana could test my feelings towards upward mobility before she decided to present her own background. Joana's preferences for discussing the destinies of characters who managed to question and challenge social hierarchies of class and race through personal abilities, seduction and love could be seen as an illustration to what Schudson (1989:168) once suggested: "People not only attend to media selectively but perceive selectively

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from what they attend to." After getting to know Joana well, she started telling me the story of her relationship with Paulo. The retelling of her personal experience has the same highpoints as her favorite telenovelas: love between a man and a woman coming from very different social backgrounds, personal struggle to surpass prejudices and obstacles, and the final transformations through social ascension.

My parents sent me to Belo Horizonte [from a little village in the northeastern region] to study. My aunt who lived in Belo Horizonte said that she would help me here. I started to live with my cousin and her husband and helped them as a housekeeper. My cousin didn't tell her friends that we were relatives. Not even her husband knew we were cousins. One night I went out with a friend and met Paulo. We talked almost the whole night long and soon after that we started dating. We were so in love! I didn't say anything to my cousin because I knew she would oppose it. But she suspected something. One day, when I wasn't at home, she rummaged my drawer and found some letters. Poems that Paulo had written to me – he was so romantic! – and she got furious! She did terrible things to me. She told me that she couldn't believe that Paulo, a rich boy (*um boyzinho*) could be truly interested in me, a poor woman from the northeast. She did everything she could to crush my hopes and my self-esteem. She said that spoiled young men (*filhinhos de papai*)¹⁵ like Paulo just wanted to "to play with" poor women like me, without having the least intention of having a serious relationship. But I knew Paulo was sincere and that he was really in love with me. I knew he wasn't just a *boyzinho*. They thought Paulo was going to make me pregnant and then leave me, and they didn't want to be responsible for that. You see, many of the young women in my village who leave their families to work in bigger cities usually return home after some months "carrying a packet" [i.e., a baby]. So they sent me back to my parent's home. It was so humiliating! To be sent back home. I had to be really strong. I thought I would go crazy. And then, some months afterwards, Paulo came to live with me. Can you imagine their surprise when they received the invitation to our wedding? Then they all started treating me well. They realized that I was right. (Extract from fieldnotes)

In the eyes of Joana's family, Joana had gone through a transformation, a social climbing (*a subida*, as Joana puts it) that allowed her to stop working and become a housewife.¹⁶ Just like Xica

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da Silva, she also had to fight against prejudice to stay by the side of her love. In the telenovela flow, women who successfully accomplish a social *subida* (climbing) through love all have strong personalities. Joana described her own struggle for her relationship with Paulo in such terms.

I suggest that the stories of Xica da Silva and Maria do Bairro offered Joana a recognizable template for understanding and narrating her own story: Xica da Silva's or Maria do Bairro's stories emphasize the importance of personal skills (one's personality, strength, sensuality, intelligence, smartness, physical appearance, or ability to improvise in difficult situations) in determining and actively controlling how situations turn out – despite one's low social, economical, or racial position (cf. Rebhun 1999:216). Joana was not alone in moving upwards through romantic love. There were also other strong women, like Xica da Silva, who traveled similar paths.

Maria and "Pale Face"

The next case study to be examined here illustrates yet another possible way through which viewers engage with the fantasies of seduction, love and happiness that are spread throughout the telenovela flow. It is the story of Maria, a fifteen-year-old black girl who came from a small city in northern Minas Gerais, a poor and very dry region, populated by a few rich cattle farmers and great many poor people. Maria had not completed elementary school and she worked as a domestic servant in her hometown. One day, the family for whom she worked was visited by some relatives who lived in Belo Horizonte. Maria was invited by one of these visitors to come to Belo Horizonte and work as a babysitter in a friend's home. Maria's mother, who counted on her financial support to keep the household, did not allow Maria to accept this offer. But the following weekend, taking advantage of her parents' absence (they were working in a farmer's fields), she packed up her things and told the visitors that her parents had given their consent to her moving to Belo Horizonte. By the end of that same afternoon, she was sitting in a car with people that she barely knew, heading towards a city she had never seen, to live and work with total strangers.

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Maria told me that a few weeks after her arrival, she wrote a letter to her mother, telling her where she was and what she was doing. She said that her mother wrote back a very angry letter, saying that she was coming to Belo Horizonte to take her home. But when Maria promised to send her 50 percent of the salary she earned (a full salary corresponded at the time to approximately R\$110), her mother let her stay.

Maria was full of energy – eager to get a boyfriend, she anticipated with excitement the few occasions when she actually had time off and could go out. On these occasions, she would let her curl-relaxed hair down and she would put on a *roupa de sair* (party clothes) – a mini-skirt and a T-shirt or a tight mini-dress, which showed off her home-made tattoos: a heart on her left thigh and something that looked vaguely like the letter "M" on her arm. While working, she sang, danced and taught all the latest *pagode* songs to the two-year-old boy she took care of. After some months in the field, I started interviewing her about her television viewing. She showed great interest in being interviewed, and seemed to watch all telenovelas that were broadcast: from the re-runs, broadcast in the afternoon, to Globo's five-, six-, seven- and eight o' clock telenovelas, and two other telenovelas broadcast on other television channels.

Since her working hours were not delimited by a time schedule, Maria worked practically all day long, more or less intensively. It is interesting to notice that in spite of her work (she took care of the little boy, but she was also supposed to do some household tasks such as cleaning and washing), she could, with varying degrees of attention, follow the plot of many telenovelas, listen to the radio, and see her favorite bands performing in variety shows. During her first months in Belo Horizonte, she did not know anyone in her age, neither did she know her way around the city. Therefore, she stayed at home a lot. Once she told me she had not gone outside the building's gate for a whole week. Watching television was her main source of entertainment. Of all the telenovelas she followed, her favorite was *Xica da Silva*:

I haven't missed one single episode. It's so exciting! I'm always hoping for Xica's best and I hate that Violante [a bitter, rich and mean white woman who was also the former owner of the slave Xica. Violante was

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supposed to marry João Fernandes, the rich and influential member of the Portuguese court in Brazil, but he fell madly in love with Xica and broke his marriage engagement.] (Extract from fieldnotes)

When Maria explained to me why she liked the telenovela *Xica da Silva*, she never explicitly touched upon the subjects of slavery and racism, which other informants, such as Joana and her husband Paulo thought were central.¹⁷ When talking about *Xica da Silva*, Maria simply said that she liked Xica, the character, and hated Violante, Xica's worst enemy. Maria watched this telenovela every evening, together with the family for whom she worked – a woman and her husband in their early thirties, the husband's mother, and Arnaldo, the two-year-old boy. As Maria told me, "Arnaldo is a little afraid of some characters from the *novela*, but he only goes to sleep after the *novela* is over."

During the daytime, Maria amused the other *babás* (babysitters) with stories that had several parallels with Xica's adventures. Just like many of my informants, Maria could comment upon an especially interesting event that took place in a telenovela and then connect this event with a similar situation she had witnessed or experienced without necessarily making explicit the articulation between reality and fiction.¹⁸

The other *babás* thought that Maria was a little crazy and that she lied a lot, but at the same time, they all enjoyed listening to her stories. Especially engaging were her stories about her relationship with Arnaldo's grandmother. Maria was afraid of being fired, because of a quarrel she had had with this old woman. According to Maria, this woman had called her a "black bitch" ("*nega safada*") to which Maria responded by calling the woman "an old granny with no man" ("*vêia sem homem*"). The parallels between this interchange and those that took place between Xica and Violante are striking. Throughout the telenovela plot, Violante associates race to class and sexuality – she insistently reminds everyone that Xica was her former slave, and she accuses Xica of being an amoral, overly sexual beast. At the same time, Violante describes herself as being a wealthy, chaste and white virgin, perfectly eligible for marriage. Xica, on the other hand, emphasizes the fact that Violante despite all her money and influence is a "woman with no man," while Xica herself is together with João Fernandes, the most influential man in the region. Maria's quarrel with Arnaldo's

grandmother and Xica's feud with Violante, as they were retold by Maria, highlight a very polemical subject discussed throughout Brazil, namely, the question of racialized notions of sexuality (where dark-skinned and/or non-white persons are described as more sensual and hot-blooded than white persons) and how these notions can be used in opposing ways: non-whiteness, sexuality and sensuality can, on the one hand, be connected to promiscuity and thereby opposed to an idea of family building and respectability. On the other hand, non-whiteness, sexuality and sensuality can, be associated with passion, attraction, warmth, seduction and Brazilianess.¹⁹

Right before Maria's quarrel with Arnaldo's grandmother, Maria told us all that she was in love with someone whose name she did not want to reveal. She referred to her sweetheart as *Cara Pálida* ("Pale Face"). Maria had taken this expression from the character Cuca, in *Globo's* six o'clock telenovela, *O Amor Está no Ar* ("Love is in the air"). Cuca, a white, very self-confident female circus-artist used this expression as a nickname for a dear male friend. *Cara Pálida*, in the telenovela, was a white, young upper-class man, who eventually fell in love with the circus-artist.

To appropriate, circulate and reiterate slang, idiomatic expressions, regionalisms and proper names coming from the telenovela flow is quite a common phenomenon.²⁰ Maria's appropriation and reiteration of the nickname *Cara Pálida* managed to amuse her babysitter friends and arouse their curiosity: "When are you going to tell us who *Cara Pálida* is?" they kept on asking Maria. In my eyes, Maria's appropriation and reiteration of "*Cara Pálida*" adds a new layer of signification to the term. Besides denoting different life styles (just like when the character Cuca used the term to call her upper-class friend), Maria's *Cara Pálida* drew one's attention to the actual color of the man with whom she was supposedly having a love affair – it was a "pale face," a man whose identity could not be revealed, but whose skin-color (and the class associations bound to it) were foregrounded.

After much suspense, and to everybody's surprise, Maria revealed that her very own *Cara Pálida* was the younger brother of her employer (and the youngest son of the old woman with whom she quarreled). He was white, in his late twenties, and had a fiancée. According to Maria's story, this man had openly declared his affection for her, when they were alone in the garage of the building where Maria and I lived.

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By talking very kindly to her, he told Maria that she was nice and beautiful, much nicer than his fiancée. They finally ended up kissing each other. Maria told her girlfriends that she even protested while hearing his declaration, and asked *Cara Pálida*:

But what did you see in me? Your woman is white; she has long, straight hair. She isn't pretty, but everything else is fine...and I'm black (*preta*), with short, bad hair. And then he answered: "It's because you're happy, sensual..." and a lot of things like that. (Extract from fieldnotes)

Here again the parallels with Maria's favorite telenovela are striking: a white man ("Pale Face"), son of Maria's "worst enemy," had fallen for her because she was "happy and sensual," and much nicer than his white fiancée. Maria's words sounded almost like quotations from the dialogues in *Xica da Silva*. Despite that, and as I have previously pointed out, when commenting events from *Xica da Silva*, Maria did not touch upon the themes of racism and class differences, nor did she explicitly draw a direct connection between what she saw in the telenovela and what she experienced in everyday life. She simply jumped back and forth between fictive stories and her own stories, without acknowledging any explicit identification with her favorite character. Were her experiences of racism and subordination so painfully close to the ones in the telenovela that she refused to explicitly recognize them?²¹ I cannot say, and I would have felt embarrassed asking her such an intimate, potentially face-threatening question. My embarrassment, and Maria's palpable silence on the question of race and the eventual parallels that could be drawn between herself and *Xica da Silva*, coincide with what anthropologist Robin Sheriff (2000) observed during fieldwork in a shantytown of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: the subject of racism was avoided in everyday conversations, even between people who knew each other well. Based on informants' elicited commentaries about their decision to avoid open discussions on the subject of racism, Sheriff suggests that silence "should not be read as an absence of political consciousness or knowledge" (2000:127). Instead it should be understood in terms of shame – a feeling that victims of certain kinds of physical or symbolic violence have when they think that they somehow provoked their attackers – blended with a wish to bypass and forget racist experiences, in an effort to protect oneself from emotional pain.

FANTASIES OF SEDUCTION, LOVE AND HAPPINESS

In this light, Maria's silence can be seen as a "perceptible lacuna," rather than a "mere absence" (2000:127). Respecting Maria's lack of explicitness, here I simply draw a parallel between *Xica da Silva's* and Maria's stories: in both cases, fantasies of seduction and love are tied to class, race and sexuality. Romantic love challenges hierarchies of race and class, but it also seems to spring from racialized notions of sexuality where dark-skinned persons are described as more hot-blooded than white persons (remember here how Xica's sensuality is portrayed as something that emanated from within herself) and racialized notions of class, where whiteness is associated with wealth.²² In both stories, subordination, racism, and sexual exploitation are transformed "through the idiom of romance into a story about love" (Rebhun 1999:99). It is also important to remember that both Xica da Silva and Maria had strong feelings towards their *cara pálidas* and that an eventual alliance with such men was for them a way out of poverty.²³

Since stories and actual cases of (often abusive) sexual relations between male bosses and their female maids, babysitters, cooks or servants were a common practice in colonial times and still abound in today's urban and rural Brazil, Maria's friends were in doubt about whether or not they should believe in her story. Was this just another example of Maria's craziness? "But this story was so full of descriptions and details that it could have been true," they all concluded. Maria was fired one week after her quarrel with Arnaldo's grandmother and no one ever got to know what really happened between her and *Cara Pálida*.

Regardless of whether or not Maria's story about her employer's brother had some basis in reality or was merely fantasy, I interpret her appropriation and reiteration of parts of the telenovela flow (the expression *Cara Pálida*, the fantasies of seduction, love and happiness) as a means for her to carry over the thrill of a telenovela plot to her own life-story, thus making it recognizable, legitimate and interesting. Maria's romantic story conferred a certain intensity to her life.

Maria's story can also be heard as an attempt to narrate herself as a complex subject – she might well be "*preta*, with short and bad hair," but a *Cara Pálida* told her that she was desirable. He kissed her. And so, still according to Maria's story, *Cara Pálida's* love, just like the love stories of so many telenovelas, challenged (at least narratively) hierarchies of class and race.

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Fantasies of Seduction, Love and Happiness and the Making of Complex Subjects

In this chapter I have demonstrated that fantasies of seduction, love, and happiness are ensnared (both in the telenovela flow and in my informants' reiterations of it) with certain kinds of transformations. Production, manipulation of artifices and feminine *jeitinhos* to seduce are presented by the telenovela flow and discussed by many of my informants as a way to make oneself recognizable as an attractive, interesting and lovable Brazilian woman. These are, in their turn, paths towards desirable relationships and social mobility.

After the ethnography presented here, some major conclusions stand out. First, I have suggested that fantasies of seduction, love and happiness helped people to reflect upon and negotiate the breach between actual and possible lives. Sometimes, informants' engagement with these fantasies revealed how attraction and desire were connected to social hierarchies. At other times, informants' interactions with these fantasies could work as a means to stress personal assets and/or feminine *jeitinhos*.

Material and/or narrative appropriation of the fantasies of seduction, love and happiness from the telenovela flow could be a means to assert one's participation in, or one's knowledge of things that happen at a national and/or transnational level. Material and/or narrative appropriation could, on the other hand, be a way for informants to relate to the telenovela flow as a cognizable and recognizable basis for understanding and narrating one's own experiences.²⁴

Joana's and Maria's cases were instances when these fantasies of seduction, love and happiness were appropriated and reiterated. But how? Neither of them, in their relationships, used exactly the same techniques of seduction as those played out by characters such as Scarlet or Xica da Silva. But, in Maria's case, I foregrounded a reiteration of Xica da Silva's Brazilian and feminine *jeitinho*. Maria described herself as someone who, despite her hair, her skin color and her low-prestige occupation still could attract the attention of a desirable man. She "could not help" having the seductive *jeitinho* she had. Joana, in her reiteration of the telenovela flow, emphasizes her personal skills (psychological strength, endurance, self-esteem) and

parallels her own story to that of the main character in her favorite telenovela, *Xica da Silva*. Much like Maria, Joana describes herself as someone special. Someone who, despite many disadvantages, still managed to fight for what she wanted.

Moreover, in their engagement with the telenovela flow, both Joana and Maria were concerned with the manipulation of artifices as a means to produce a favorable image of themselves. This is not evident in the way they retell their romantic relationships but it is explicit in Joana's attentive gaze to the associations between class and consumption practices as they were depicted in the telenovela flow; and in Maria's modest but important nuances regarding her clothing style – her *roupas de sair* (party clothes) and her *roupas de trabalho* (working clothes), and her care to keep her hair as straight as it could be.

My point is that these women's reiteration of elements drawn from the telenovela flow provides them with the narrative means through which they can transform their individual experiences into commonly shared and legitimized stories. These two cases represent how informants engaged with the fantasies of seduction, love and happiness from the telenovela flow as a means to mold their own experiences in the shape of fictive, commonly and nationally shared acquaintances and stories. Their engagement with the telenovela flow was one means they had to make their own story recognizable, interesting and thrilling, much like a telenovela plot. Maria and Joana's narratives about how they attracted the attention of desirable men can be seen as a means to position themselves, through their personal skills and assets, as complex subjects. Subjects situated in-between ambiguous hierarchies of desirability, where feminine non-whiteness can be associated to poverty and promiscuity (with the effect of marking a person as ineligible for a relationship); and/or to sensuality, race-mixture and hot-blooded-ness, which are positive attributes used in the description of a Brazilian identity.

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¹ Radway (1984) suggests that women find a vicarious fulfillment of their needs by immersing themselves in romantic fantasies and by identifying with the heroines who manage to attract the heroes' attention to themselves. The practice of reading romances has a vicarious, short-lived therapeutic value.

² In *Telenovela and Emancipation*, Vink (1988) examines the relationship between telenovela watching and the emancipation of women. He comes to the conclusion that "for working-class

women, the novelas can at least have a subversive effect in that they no longer take gender oppression for granted. Although in this case, the class position also has precedence over the gender image: i.e., the insight that the position of women could be different is corrected by the awareness that that kind of thing [i.e., emancipation] is not for 'our kind of people' [i.e., people from the working-class]." (Vink, 1988:248)

³ "Preto" within the context of race discrimination has, in Brazilian Portuguese, a negative connotation and could be translated into English as "Negro." On the other hand, "Negro," in Portuguese is more politically correct and can be translated as "black" in English. There are nevertheless cases when black persons refer to themselves by using the term "*preto*" (Negro in English). It is often unclear whether one is mentioning the *color* black (generally translated as *preto*), or adopting and reiterating a racist terminology.

⁴ Switzerland represents here the opposite of Brazilian society – it is a wealthy country with no social problems (racism included). Money, not race, seems to be considered by the character Teodora to be the parameter in Switzerland used to classify people. Michele seems to be referring to Switzerland also as a predominantly white country, who would see non-white and/or black people as exotic.

⁵ It is interesting to point out, at this point, about the ending of a sub-plot in the telenovela *Salsa e Merengue*. One of the characters, a black maid, meets a German count and becomes herself a countess. But this had not happened when I had my conversation with Michele and her mother.

⁶ In Portuguese: "*Pai pobre é destino, marido pobre é burrice.*"

⁷ Goldstein (1999:569) puts the same idea more straightforwardly: "A woman thus might be able to 'overcome' her negatively valued dark skin or African characteristics by performing as a seductress."

⁸ Several prominent Brazilian intellectuals gave their opinion about what best could characterize Brazilian society. Here follows some of these opinions:

The *jeitinho* persists among the upper classes. There, it is always possible to swindle and circumvent the law, to organize political lobbies in order to defend one's interests, to modify laws in order to skip paying debts, to obtain tax exemption or tax reduction, and even to get out of prison when one is caught. (Araújo, 2001:29. My translation).

We are the country of the *jeitinho* and authoritarianism. The *jeitinho* is a kind of resistance, a way to survive in an authoritarian frame. Everything that one cannot obtain through one's rights comes through the *jeitinho*. The *jeitinho* does not question the frame, it moves within it. (Buarque de Hollanda, 2001:112. My translation.)

One of our greatest talents is our capacity to get along. Are Pokemon popular? Then the guy makes a Pokemon, goes out and sells it in the streets. It is a horrible Pokemon, but it is very cheap and he manages to sell it. Brazilians are fighters. They are persistent – if a guy does not earn so much, he improvises something, opens a business, washes cars, sells sandwiches on the beach. (Madureira and Madureira 2001:123. My translation.)

We are not used to having rights. So, the old man smiles at the bus driver and says: "Would you please open the door?" We should be sympathetic because of the pleasure of treating another human being well. [The bus driver], in his turn, should open the door either if we smile or not. But neither the old man nor we are aware that we have rights. We are so used to not having rights, we are so used to acting with the help of smiles or by bursting out, "I'm an authority," or by saying, "Would you please be kind and help this poor old man." The old man has the right to enter the bus through the

front door [without paying] even if he is in a bad mood. But he does not exert that right. (Vieira, 2001: 235. My translation.)

Our talent comes from our defect. We are perpetually used to improvising and this generates a great capacity for adaptation. We are very creative when it comes to solving problems. (Rónai, 2001:47. My translation.)

Our talent and our defect are the same. In our case, they are two faces of the same coin. It is our creativity, our way to constantly search for new ways to do things. (Gros, 2001:72. My translation.)

Our talent would be improvisation and creativity. [...] Brazilians' capacity to improvise is fantastic and our creativity is extraordinary. (Bornheim, 2001:96. My translation.)

⁹ Several quotes from Freyre (1995 [1933]) illustrate the associations between Brazilianness and cleanliness:

O contraste da higiene verdadeiramente felina dos maometanos com a imundice dos cristãos, seus vencedores, é traço que se impõe destacar. Conde, em sua história do domínio árabe na Espanha, tantas vezes citado por Buckle, retrata os cristãos peninsulares, isto é, os intransigentes do século VIII e IX, como indivíduos que nunca tomavam banho, nunca lavavam a roupa, nem a tiravam do corpo, senão podre, largando os pedaços. O horror à água, o desleixo pela higiene do corpo e do vestuário permanecem entre os portugueses. (Freyre, 1995:222)

And:

Em contraste com tudo isso é que surpreendeu aos primeiros portugueses e franceses chegados nesta parte da América um povo ao que parece sem mancha da sífilis na pele, e cuja maior delícia era o banho de rio. Que se lavava constantemente da cabeça aos pés, que se conservava em asseada nudez, que fazia uso de folhas de árvores, como os europeus mais limpos de toalhas de enxugar as mãos, e de panos para limpar menino novo; que fá lavar no rio a sua roupa suja, isto é, as redes de algodão (...). (1995:112-13).

And:

[N]a verdade foi nas mulheres que os europeus encontraram maior resistência à imposição do vestuário moralizador mas para elas anti-higiênico (...) O que alegavam é que tanto pano por cima do corpo dificultava-lhes o costume de se lavarem livre e frequentemente no rio; às vezes quase de hora em hora. Dez, doze banhos por dia. (1995:113)

¹⁰ A cover article in the newsmagazine *Isto É* (07 May 97) illustrated with the picture of Maîtê Proença, a telenovela actress, and entitled "Erotic Being" depicts sensuality and eroticism as Brazilian traits. Here follows a translation of the first paragraph of this article:

That [televised] beer advertisement crystallizes it all: "Nice buttocks, right, Cabral?" the ghost of Pero Vaz de Caminha comments as he walks by a Brazilian beach, five hundred years after Brazil's discovery. Holding a beer in one hand, the Portuguese navigator Pedro Álvares Cabral has to agree. The country that he once thought would become the extension of the prude European nobility became the motherland of eroticism. Our green forests saw the birth of people who love to exhibit naked bodies, to invent sensual rhythms and dances, and to insinuate sex in everything they do. What Brazilians really like to do is to make their bodies a powerful weapon of seduction. The whole country breathes eroticism.

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¹¹ It is interesting to point that male bodies, male nakedness and male vanity (characterized by a preoccupation with one's looks) are gradually gaining more space in the telenovela flow. In my opinion, it is still unclear whether this new emphasis on certain kinds of masculinity can be understood as a sign of change or whether it can be understood as a presence that simply reinforces through contrast, the representation of femininity in female characters.

¹² In Jorge Amado's novel *Gabriela, Cravo e Canela*, the main protagonist, Gabriela, was described as having "cinnamon-colored skin." A telenovela has been adapted to Amado's novel, which contributed to increase its retrievability.

¹³ In Portuguese, "davam alforria", a technical term that was used in the telenovela and appropriated by its viewers.

¹⁴ The interplay of marriage, idealized gender roles and economy is approached by anthropologist L.A. Rebhun (1999) when she examines the case of people living in Caruaru, northeastern Brazil. Rebhun's observations can be extrapolated to the present case:

Throughout marriage, custom designates the man as provider of major necessities, such as food and clothing, whereas women, to the extent that they have the money, buy extras such as toys or candy for the children. These ideals tend to be realized in most couples' practice models, modified only by the necessity for women to contribute more to major expenses in cases where men do not allocate sufficiently. (Rebhun, 1999:118)

¹⁵ *Filhinho de papai*, literally translated into English as "Daddy's little son." This expression is generally used to indicate that a young, generally irresponsible man, counts on the support of a protective and generally powerful father that backs up his son's actions and mistakes.

¹⁶ Rebhun (1999) makes an interesting observation that could be applied to understand Joana's choice of becoming a housewife:

Middle-class and wealthy women may have both professions and cars, and many attend to universities or engage in volunteer charitable activities that take them out of their house, but for the working class, among which the tension between men's actual and presumed power is greatest, shutting the woman away in the home in imitation of popular images of the white plantation wife of old becomes symbolically important, a pattern not unfamiliar to scholars of working class conjugal relations in other parts of the world. (1999:116-7)

¹⁷ Joana, twenty-eight year-old housewife. Extract from an interview:

All kinds of prejudice are discussed in Xica. They show how badly the slaves were treated. They were treated like beasts. And almost all the owners had sex with female slaves who had to accept that. It was terrible. They couldn't refuse.

¹⁸ Another example from my material illustrates the implicit articulation between themes discussed in telenovelas and everyday conversations: Meire, Marina and I were talking about one of the latest episodes of the telenovela *O Amor Está No Ar* ["Love is in the Air", broadcast by Globo in 1997]. One of the main characters in this telenovela, Luiza, the fiancée of Leo, was abducted by extra-terrestrials. During the time this young woman disappeared, Leo and Luiza's mother were brought together and eventually started a love affair:

Thaís: Tell me, is it just my impression or is Leo fond of Luiza's mother? He wants her, doesn't he?

Meire: If he wants her? He's already got her!

Marina: Really? When did that happen?

Meire: Yesterday, at the end of the episode.

Marina: Oh!

Meire: I think it's ok. Aren't there many older men who marry younger women? What about the gays fighting for their rights to live together? If men are fighting to put an end on this kind of prejudice, why shouldn't women and men of different ages be together?

Marina [is quiet but shakes her head, disagreeing].

Meire: Take Xuxa [a mega-star in Brazilian media] for instance. Her boyfriend is younger than her. I read this in *Caras*.

Marina: Yes, but she can't be much older than him... I once had a boyfriend who was seventeen years older than me. He wanted to marry me, but I was only fifteen... then I had another one who was also older than me, and who also wanted to marry me.

Meire [laughing]: If you had married him, you'd have at least three children by now...but once I dated a boy who was younger than me...no, he was my age, actually. It was so boring! He was so immature! We could not talk about anything.

Marina: Yes, women are more mature than men. That's why it's better with a man that is a little older than the woman.

By moving back and forth from fiction to everyday life, these women found the opportunity to tell private stories and express their moral opinions on subjects that were at least apparently related to the ones discussed by the telenovela.

¹⁹ This double-edged notion of racialized sexuality, as anthropologist Donna Goldstein (1999) points out, seems to be applicable only to black or non-white *women*. The attractiveness of mixed-race and black men, Goldstein suggests, is not valorized to the same extent (1999:568). For a discussion on race mixture, sensuality and Brazilianness, see also DaMatta 1978, Freyre 1933; Parker 1991.

²⁰ Here are some further examples of the way informants appropriated and reiterated slang and idiomatic expressions that circulate through the telenovela flow: Márcio and Gustavo, both undergraduate students, appropriated the slang "*corpos malhados*," "*corpos sarados*" that circulated through the telenovela flow to describe well-trained bodies, and thereby marked their position as up-dated, trendy and urban young men. Andrea, a thirty-year-old middle-class housewife had a dog called "Lindainês," after a character from one telenovela. Sandra, a nineteen-year-old housewife was called "Regina Duarte" [the name of an actress] by her cousins. Thelma, a fifty-year-old lower-class secretary was called, during a period in her life, by the nickname "Porcina," after a female telenovela character. Marina, an eighteen-year-old babysitter, told me that she was using the expression "*Pedro Afonso, meu filho*" ("Dear little Pedro Afonso"), to playfully scold Ivan, the baby she took care of. "Dear Little Pedro Afonso" was a pejorative expression, used by a female character to scold and reprimand her oppressed husband. Marina's reiteration provoked laughter among the people who heard her.

²¹ Fachel Leal and Oliven (1987:91) raise a similar possibility when they try to understand the reasons why lower-class informants consequently excluded a fictive lower-class couple from their retelling of a telenovela plot. These authors suggest the idea of identification through denial: "one refuses explicit identification because it is too painful. It is through denial that the mechanism of identification is reinforced." (My translation)

²² For further discussions on the interplay of class, race and sexuality in Brazil, see Parker (1991) and Rebhun (1999). Wade (1993) approaches similar questions when he investigates the case of racism and race mixture in Colombia.

²³ Goldstein (1999) affirms that stories about upward mobility constitute a genre told by black low-income women in a shantytown in Rio. She examines a particular fantasy that circulated in the everyday conversations among these women – a fantasy of upward mobility (or at least of

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an economic improvement in their lives) through the seduction of older, richer, and usually whiter men. Goldstein compares these women's fantasies to the plots of telenovelas:

This particular theme is not unique to these women, but is rather part of the mainstream; economic mobility through marriage and /or sexual seduction is a favorite theme in Brazilian telenovelas [...] In these telenovelas, the class-based motivation for seduction of a wealthy patron is a familiar scenario [...] (1999: 570).

²⁴ Rebhun (1999:202) comments that the story [from the telenovela *Tieta*] rang true with many of her informants. She quotes one of them:

In my family it's the same as in the *novela*. The history of my grandfather is the following: He left Grandma and went to live with the other woman. He left her with nine children. So she always remained his friend, sent food to him, everything. But Aunt Maria, who was a teenager at the time, never accepted it. No way. She kept crying, saying that he was no good, everything.

So the woman died. He's already old, returned to live with Grandma. It's all right with her. But Aunt Maria, who never married, who still lives at home, she doesn't talk to him, no. She doesn't even look in his face. For her, she doesn't have a father. There was no way. He had to leave there. Daughters never accept the other woman. It has to be either the mother or her. He can't love anyone else (Catrina, thirty-two-year-old, secretary).

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The End...

Novelas are a portrait of Brazil. What you see on the screen is the revelation of a hidden desire, [the revelation] of something that every Brazilian would like to have come true. (Jeferson, 21, undergraduate student. Extract from a classroom essay on telenovelas.)

Novelas don't show Brazil as it really is. They show Brazil as people imagine it, or as people would like it to be. (Fabiana, 20, undergraduate student. Extract from a classroom essay on telenovelas)

Are *novelas* a reflection of the life and customs of the Brazilian people, or do they form habits and culture? [...] *Novelas* are the synthesis of a very complex Brazilian reality. (Max José, 29, undergraduate student. Extract from a classroom essay on telenovelas)¹

In this concluding chapter, I will recapitulate what I have foregrounded in this study. Four major topics stand out. First, a main goal throughout this text has been to broaden the perspective of reception studies; moving the focus away from the moment of broadcast (or from the places where immediate reception might take place) to streets, parties, and everyday conversations and interactions. I adopted a dialogical perspective that emphasized the processes of

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circulation, appropriation and reiteration that take place among media texts, commodities and people, and I proposed a new delimitation of *what* viewers were relating to, calling it the *telenovela flow*.

A second major topic here has been the identification of interpellations issued by the telenovela flow, inviting *You*, the viewer, to interaction and participation. My analysis of how the telenovela flow interpellated viewers both in the sense of addressing them with intimacy, inviting them into interaction, and in the sense of making them into subjects contributes to contemporary debates all over the world on the relationship and impact of media upon people. I argued that an anthropological analysis of the telenovela flow reveals some important aspects of the Brazilian society. The telenovela flow does not only reflect existing social hierarchies in society. It also gives us a glimpse of the complex ways through which social positioning is considered, negotiated, and compensated.

Moreover, throughout this study, I have focused on consumption, commodification of bodies, glamour, vanity, and femininity, and I have examined how these phenomena appear throughout the telenovela flow, and how they are linked not only to Brazilian society, but also to broader, transnational tendencies.

Finally, I came to suggest that by engaging with the telenovela flow, informants from different social backgrounds attempt to make themselves recognizable as subjects. They attempt to insert themselves in different domains of Brazilian society.

Brazilian Society and the Telenovela Flow - Productions and Transformations

The telenovela flow is saturated with images and narratives of female characters and actresses who, in order to achieve love, happiness and social mobility, engage in the production and transformation of themselves and their bodies. These productions and transformations guarantee a place in the world and, usually, in the hearts of the men around them. The telenovela flow presents strategies for women to produce themselves as recognizable subjects within the world they inhabit. So one question is: How do the transformations and productions portrayed in the telenovela flow intersect with a broader Brazilian context? In order to answer to this question, it is necessary to

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look back at the kinds of transformations that are portrayed in the telenovela flow. What changes? Who changes? What are the effects of these transformations?

As I discussed in Chapters 2 and 6, transformations are the motor of most telenovela plots: characters change from poor to rich, from unattractive women to seductresses, from prostitutes to respectable housewives, from elitist whites to politically aware mothers of black children. These transformations in status, knowledge or attractiveness are usually connected to social mobility.

The telenovela flow relates to a broader Brazilian context in the way it depicts the fulfillment of social mobility. The flow presents social hierarchies of gender, sexuality, race and class as being embodied and naturalized. At the same time, however, it also presents strategies to circumvent and transcend (rather than modify) those very hierarchies. In the telenovela flow, the strategies for achieving social mobility are directly related to production and consumption around the body and to narratives and practices of seduction and love. The idea is to compensate a disadvantaged hierarchical position by enhancing other dimensions of one's life that are positively evaluated. For instance, beauty might compensate poverty, wealth might compensate ugliness, sensuality might compensate blackness, feminine *jeitinho* might compensate feminine economic and social dependence on men. By looking at what compensates what in the telenovela flow, we can also see how the telenovela flow works to chart a kind of map of social space, identifying those statuses that invite or encourage transformation and flight, and those that constitute the desired direction or endpoint of that flight.

As we have seen throughout this study, the subjects who most consistently represent and embody transformation and movement across social hierarchies are women. This is suggested graphically in many of the opening credit sequences of telenovelas. In Chapter 2, I mentioned the frequency with which these sequences portray female bodies as being in a continual state of transmutation: from jaguar to woman (*Pantanal*, 1990, *Manchete*), from sand into woman (*Mulheres de Areia*, 1993, *Globo*), from pregnant belly to rising sun (*Barriga de Aluguel*, 1990-1, *Globo*), and from woman into water, stone, and fire (*A Indomada*, 1997, *Globo*). But the transforming nature of female subjects is also a recurring theme in both telenovela plots and in the

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lives of real people. So in the stories of the fictional *Xica da Silva* or *Maria do Bairro*, and in the lives of the real "without-land-and-without-clothes" Débora Rodrigues, or Joana, who watched Mexican telenovelas to relive and enjoy something of her own social "climbing", we see women who act to achieve love, happiness and social mobility. These actions, as we also have seen, typically involve the manipulation of artifice and the production of particular kinds of bodies. Women produce themselves as recognizable agents in order to make things happen – to find a partner, to unite or build a family, to improve their lives. In doing this, these women forge links between divided social spheres and between different levels of social hierarchy. They circumvent social divisions without ever changing them.

Why is it generally a woman who is the channel through which social mobility is seemingly or ideally made possible? And, again – how does this relate to a Brazilian context?

The social anthropologist Angela Arruda (2000) has examined the way women have been represented in the Brazilian imaginary. She argues that an examination of these representations is necessary if one wants to understand gender relations and sexuality in contemporary Brazil. She suggests that women have occupied ambiguous roles in the national imaginary (Del Priore 1993, Giacomini 1992, Parker 1991, Rebhun 1999, Stolcke 1993). First, during the colonial period, women were incorporated into a collective Brazilian imaginary through the nakedness and sensuality of the indigenous woman. During colonization and the process of occupation of the new land, the Catholic church controlled and "tamed" indigenous women's sexuality and gave them the role of reproducers, thus turning them into mothers of the nation. Arruda (2000:66) comments that if the indigenous man had to be christianized through baptism in order to become a member of the society, the indigenous woman had to give herself to a white man in order to transform herself into the mother of the nation. It is important to remember here that the majority of colonizers arriving in Brazil were men. Several studies (Freyre 1933; Parker 1991; Souza 1982) emphasize the fact that during the first centuries of colonization in Brazil, there were almost no white, European women. The foundation of colonial Brazil was almost entirely the result of sexual interaction between white European men, indigenous women, and women of African descent. The discovery of gold in the interior of

Brazil (in the beginnings of the 18th century), the arrival of the Portuguese court to Brazil (in 1808) and later, the abolition of slavery (in 1888) marked an increasing arrival of European families to the country.

Since the beginning of the 19th century and during the Republican period (which started in 1889), a series of scientific and pseudo-scientific ideas originating in Europe influenced the regulation and rationalization of sexual practices (Parker 1991:16). Hygienist policies substituted the church in the prescription of practices guiding the conduct of men and women within the patriarchal family. The patriarchal family has an important place in Brazilian history despite the fact, demonstrated by several historians and social scientists, that there were alternative forms of social organization existing parallel to it (Arruda, 2000; Correa 1993; Parker 1991). The patriarchal family can be seen not only as a form of social organization but also as a collective representation of how Brazilians came to think about their own social organization. The patriarchal family is a system of representations and ideological constructions about gender hierarchies whose impact can be noticed up to the present day.² Parker (1991:62) summarizes these ideological representations as follows: while white males were associated to the image of the patriarch, women were associated to contradictory but nevertheless interrelated images of the spouse and the mother, the lover and the prostitute. With the abolition of slavery, white and wealthy men lost some of the power they had as patriarchs. Their new domain of action was the nuclear family, and, as Arruda (2000: 67) puts it, the man's honor consisted in defending his wife and daughters. For women, this change implied continued emphasis on the figure of the caring, conciliating, and nurturing mother, and its contrast – the figure of woman as a sexual being.

Other academic accounts suggest that such representations of women still persist in the national imaginary (Correa 1993; Parker 1991; Patai 1988; Rebhun 1999; Vink 1988). According to these, women exercise power covertly, through sexual or emotional influence, in order to participate in decisions, acquire material possessions, circumvent (masculine) authority, and get things done their own way. Women's covert strategies are played out in relationships, in sexual practices and in the nurturing of children.³

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My own ethnographic material contains several commentaries that reflect and reinforce these representations of women and of feminine *jeitinhos*. As I discussed in Chapter 6, women, and especially mothers, are depicted in the telenovela flow and discussed by my informants as being more concerned and more engaged than men are with what goes on in the domestic sphere. Women's preoccupation with and focus on family, children and relationships that take place in the domestic sphere was also reiterated in the essays I collected. Thirty-five students (thirteen men and twenty-two women) chose to write essays on the subject of telenovelas, bodies and eroticism. Of these, twenty-six students – all the female students and four men, asserted that nakedness, sex and eroticism were inappropriate to be shown at prime time, since telenovelas were programs watched by the whole family, children included. These essays evidence a predominantly female concern with children and with the "premature awakening of children's sexuality" by the erotic images and naked scenes portrayed in several telenovelas. An extract from an informant's essay illustrates the general trend here:

Wonderful bodies undress in front of the camera and invade our homes as if this was a very normal thing to do. [...] Children are reached by the sex wave propagated through *novelas* since these are one of their best amusements. (Extract from a classroom essay. Lilian, 18, undergraduate student)

While Lilian's opinion illustrates how women are concerned in expressing their engagement with what goes on in the domestic sphere, a conversation with Joana (28, housewife) crystallizes the strategies adopted by women in order to influence decisions and solve problems in a relationship:

Rich women are now going to strip-tease lessons, to learn how to seduce their husbands. I read in a magazine that it started with a socialite in São Paulo, a woman in her late forties, with grown-up children who found out that her husband was having an affair with another woman. She was desperate and did not know what to do to conquer her husband back. She decided to contact a prostitute and paid the woman to teach her about sex – what to do, how to undress, how to please a man in bed. And then she did everything she had learnt to her husband and he was completely in love

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with her again. After that, she started organizing this kind of course to help other women who want to save their marriages. I saw an advertisement in our local newspaper about these courses. (Extract from a conversation with Joana. Fieldnotes.)⁴

Not only is the rescue of a moribund marriage assumed here to be a female concern; in order to keep this matrimonial articulation alive, women are encouraged to dwell in-between traditional ambiguities, playing out the prostitute in order to maintain the status of spouse.

The representation of women as intermeshing multifaceted and contradictory positions (mothers, spouses, lovers and prostitutes) was crystallized by an advertisement I saw spread throughout the streets of Belo Horizonte in 1997. This huge billboard advertised Scarlett shoes as a Mother's Day gift. It showed a picture of Scarlet (or was it Luiza Tomé, the actress that played the role of Scarlet in the telenovela *A Indomada*?) sensuously lying on the floor, smiling at *You*. The slogan of this advertisement, presented in quotation marks, read: "Mothers can also seduce!" ("*Mãe também seduz!*").

This advertisement is another example of the connection between women and transformation: depicted as masters of mediation between extreme positions, women transform themselves from nature (the jaguar, the sand, the water, stone, and fire) into culture (the naked or scantily dressed, seductive woman); they transform themselves from mothers into seducers, from spouses into prostitutes, and from prostitutes into spouses. And perhaps the most fascinating thing, made explicit by this advertisement and imaged by the telenovela vignettes mentioned here, is that women can be all these things (mother and seducer, woman and jaguar, woman and sand, woman and stone, water and fire) at the same time.

The telenovela flow inflates and emphasizes women's capacity to mediate between extreme positions.⁵ It focuses on women's strategies (usually connected to the domestic sphere) to circumvent and solve problems, and it also presents these strategies as being examples of a *Brazilian* (and feminine) way to trickster, a *Brazilian jeitinho* that bridges and/or maintains in close tension the spouse, the mother, the lover and the prostitute.⁶

Promoting and Domesticating Agency?

The transformations depicted by the telenovela flow affect personal relationships, personal assets and social hierarchies of gender, sexuality, race and class. These transformations are depicted as individual renegotiations of the self. As such, they do not imply major social changes. The case of Débora Rodrigues, the one time activist who became a celebrity and posed for *Playboy* makes my point evident: her body and physical appearance opened the doors for her to step into the telenovela flow. Once there, she went through a series of individual modifications (liposuction, hair treatment, silicon implant in her breasts, etc), and gained access to various commodities. She earned money and recovered the custody of her children. Débora Rodrigues's case is a kind of archetypal instance of the telenovela flow identifying the female body as woman's basic asset. As Débora climbed the staircase of stardom, her political engagement evaporated, giving way to narratives and practices of individual mobility, within an unaltered (and unthreatened, at least by her) social system.

Another instance of this same trajectory is Cleonice (in *A Indomada*, 1997, *Globo*), who turns from being an oppressed and subservient woman, married to a corrupt politician, into a popular politician (see Chapter 6). In this case, emphasis is placed on to the woman's personal achievement, not on the social implications that her career as a female politician might have on the population. Again, what is focused on is her individual transformation and personal improvement.⁷ When Teodora, the arrogant, white, upper-class woman in her thirties (in *Salsa e Merengue*, 1997, *Globo*) becomes the single mother of two black children, she rethinks her own biases and attitudes, but she does not even imagine engaging in any kind of collective action against racism.

Remember that most cases of social mobility depicted throughout the telenovela flow are achieved on an individual basis and usually result in some kind of change within the domestic sphere – a marriage, the recovering of one's children's custody, the building of a family.

The telenovela flow foregrounds social hierarchies at the same time that it presents strategies to circumvent, but not alter, these hierarchies. The innumerable examples of social mobility that are found in the telenovela flow can be understood as strategies that allow one to work

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within the system. Mankekar (1999:149) observes that Indian state-sponsored television serials do not depict strategies for mobilizing women as a collectivity. Instead, they advocate individual "upliftment." The same could be said about the telenovela flow. Its focus is on women's individual (not collective) agency and mobility. In this sense, one could say that the telenovela flow domesticates agency because it presents mobility as an individual experience, not as social change.

On the other hand, it is important to remember that these not so threatening, domestic, individual cases of social mobility and transformation are repeated, played out and reiterated everyday, several times a day, and massively broadcast to the whole nation. In this sense, agency is not domesticated. On the contrary, by being transposed from a domestic to a public arena, it is emphasized, discussed and made visible.

Consumption

Intersecting with transformations, productions and social mobility, fantasies and practices of consumption appear throughout the telenovela flow. The telenovela flow could be seen both as a Brazilian product, a product that reflects cultural and social aspects of the society that produces it, and as a commercial, mass product – a commodity which viewers might choose (or not) to buy – that introduces, in its turn, a myriad of other commodities to millions of viewers.

As anthropologist Robert Foster suggested, in some cases, "consumption choices appear to form the basis for nationality as a collective identity" (1999:265). The telenovela flow offers, as I have discussed previously, an available relationship with "Brazil" as a nation. The flow invites people to access to the commodities and consumption practices that typify Brazilian life. Drinking the same beer as the telenovela character, wearing the same shoes as a female lead, visiting the region where a telenovela plot takes place – the appropriation, circulation and reiteration of commodities from the telenovela flow become a way to access to a collective Brazilian identity.

By the same turn, considering the telenovela flow as a Brazilian mass product, one can suggest that its consumption might produce a feeling of belonging, a feeling of collective participation in national rituals and national passions.

The Telenovela Flow, Only for You!

Looming references to necklaces, earrings, shorts, bracelets, CDs, fashion, beautiful persons, beautiful goods, and beautiful stories from the telenovela flow kept reemerging throughout my informants' conversations. Remember Alexia's commentary (Chapter 3): "Today, I'm dressed as *Maria do Bairro*. From top to toe! I am *Maria do Bairro*!" These elements of the telenovela flow were connected to physical appearances and the body, and associated to transformations, productions and social mobility. Do messages coming from the telenovela flow guide people's perceptions of themselves and society?

Denise's fifteenth birthday party (described in the Intermezzo) crystallizes the appropriation and reiteration of transformations and productions depicted throughout the telenovela flow. This birthday party and its spin-off products were Denise's and her family's way to turn and answer the interpellations of the telenovela flow about how beauty, style, personality and the manipulation of personal assets can be a means to circumvent or reinforce social hierarchies.

In a short visit to Brazil, a year or so after the birthday party, I paid a visit to Denise and her parents. The huge poster-sized, touched-up portrait of the *debutante* – the one that had been displayed at the entrance of the party locale – was now hung in a wall of their living-room. It immediately caught my eye and we started commenting about the party once again. Denise remembered the compliments she received because of her portrait – "You look just like a model," everyone had told her. I recalled my previous conversations with Denise and her cousin Carina, and wondered about the parallels I could draw between this compliment – "You look just like a model" – and the girls' opinions about how female beauty is depicted in the telenovela flow. My question to them was "Do you think that *novelas* show certain beauty patterns for women and men?", followed by "What is a beautiful woman in the *novelas*?":

Carina: A beautiful woman is someone who has a nice
                                  little body...(*um corpinho bonitinho*).

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- Denise: She is neither thin nor fat...
- Carina: Just like Luiza Tomé [the actress who played Scarlet in *A Indomada*], right? She wears nice clothes...men want women to have firm breasts and big buttocks, right? Thick thighs.
- Denise: Big buttocks, but not huge. Do you remember that woman we saw on the beach? (Extract from a tape-recorded interview)

Did Denise become like the beauties in the telenovela flow when she "looked just like a model?" Had the party and its spin-off products been a means for Denise to temporarily transform herself into a Brazilian/ feminine/ middle-class subject, just like Luiza Tomé? Was the party a means for Denise to pass from her living-room and step into the telenovela flow?

Back to that living-room. I sat on the sofa and drank *Guaraná* (a Brazilian soft drink) when Denise asked me whether I had already seen her "*book*" of the party. At first, I did not understand her question – was she talking about a book, and if so, why did she use the English word to refer to it? I soon came to see that Denise's *book* was in fact a huge, velvet- covered album containing more than fifty pictures of Denise in different poses, wearing different clothes, in different landscapes. These pictures were taken around the time she completed her fifteenth year. The book was kept in a velvet case (that looked like a massive jewelry box) in the living-room. The pictures reminded me a lot of these brightly colored photos that appear in glossy fashion magazines. This similarity with fashion magazines was not an unintentional coincidence – the term "*book*" is used all over Brazil within the fashion circuit, to designate a collection of pictures that a model presents to different agencies as a sample of his/her work.

As I praised the quality of Denise's *book*, and chose my favorite shots of her, she commented that, unfortunately, her father did not want her to start a modeling career, so she was not allowed to use her *book* for professional ends, even though so many people had commented that she would easily manage to work as a model, since she was so photogenic. At this point, the connection between Denise, her fifteenth birthday party and the telenovela flow's interpellations (where personal assets are a resource that people can use to get around social

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hierarchies), became clearer to me – Denise's *book* could have been her passport towards fame. Through it, her life could have taken a new direction, amazingly similar to those of young telenovela stars, who generally start with a modeling career and then enter the world of acting. Denise's modern version of a traditional fifteenth birthday party kept alive the idea of a "social début" – this party was a way for Denise to step into the telenovela flow, not only for one day, but *book* in hand and with the right person's help, maybe forever.

But why? Why would she (and her family) want to do that?

By reverberating articulations taken from the telenovela flow onto themselves, Denise and her family were making themselves *recognizable* as subjects in terms of economic and social positioning. Denise's party could be interpreted as a means to guarantee, reinforce (and maybe even improve, through future relationships and/or marriage) the socio-economic position of her family. Perhaps the telenovela flow works for Denise's family as a guide in normativity, equipping them with palpable examples of the "right kind of conduct." The appropriation of elements from the telenovela flow to depict events in this family's lives appears as a choice that, almost at no moment, endangers Denise family's project of making their lives recognizable. Throughout the party, Denise's family was in constant dialogue with the world of spectacle and fiction. Their idea of a successful and glamorous party was clearly linked to television entertainment programs. The fact that the family could mobilize the resources needed to produce the party was an assertion of power, in the sense that the family could show that it was able to re-construct a similar world to that of fiction and spectacle, with the important difference that their production of glamour – the party, the video-film and the *book* – were for real.

Stepping into the telenovela flow, stepping into a magic world of beauty, consumption, fame, seduction, love and happiness, was Denise's family's way to appropriate and reiterate national, naturalized and taken-for-granted images and messages about Brazilian social hierarchies. The same can be said of the other case-studies discussed in *this* book.

Cláudia, whose breast reduction operation I discussed in Chapter 5, also conveys the articulation of gender, sexuality, class, physical appearance and the telenovela flow. Cláudia answers back to the risk of being seen as a slave to fashion, an oppressed female who remodels her

body in order to adapt it to mainstream beauty ideals. She answers back with the help of messages found in the telenovela flow: concern about one's physical appearance can be seen as a sign of self-regard. She reinforces her argument, also with the help of messages running through the telenovela flow, by saying that plastic surgery is something natural, something that many people do, especially those who have enough money to afford such a procedure. According to this reasoning, women's produced bodies, i.e., bodies obtainable through the consumption of certain artifices, are a sign of wealth, while non-produced bodies are signifiers of poverty. Produced bodies can also be read as indicating self-regard, while non-produced bodies mean the opposite – insecurity and lack of self-esteem. When Cláudia talked about the effects of her plastic surgery, she was indirectly referring to the possibility of becoming recognizable, of becoming very much like other women who circulate within the telenovela flow; women whose beauty/femininity/sexuality are sanctioned and nationally circulated.

Meire's case (Chapter 5) is yet another example of these same mechanisms – in her reception of the telenovela flow, she appropriated and reiterated elements (clothes, fashions, leisure activities, idiomatic expressions) that enhanced her personal assets in order to downplay her class, and thus become recognizable as someone who "can afford." Meire used elements from the telenovela flow as a resource to circumvent social hierarchies. When she systematically referred to the fashion trends of the telenovela flow and presented herself as a follower of those trends, she was manipulating sanctioned elements, artifices that might have helped her to circumvent or transcend her low status position as a babysitter. In a situation where she failed to do that, she turned towards another aspect of the telenovela flow. "Deep inside our bodies we both stink."⁸ Meire verbalized an equality based on shared humanness, an equality that transcended social positioning. Hierarchy and equality existed side by side in Meire's reception and reiteration of the telenovela flow.

Joana's interactions with the fantasies of seduction and love that circulate in the telenovela flow (Chapter 6) worked as a cognizable and recognizable basis for understanding and re-telling her own life-story in terms of transformations – how she met and married her husband, how he was interested in her in spite of her low social position and because of her personal assets, how she and her family experienced her eventual

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social climbing. The telenovela flow provided Joana with sanctioned and legitimated stories about seduction and love.

Maria's case (also in Chapter 6) foregrounds a series of hierarchical oppositions: feminine occupations (related to the household) / masculine occupations (outside of the household); female employer/female employee; male employer/female employee; black/white; aggressive, uncontrollable sexuality/controlled sexuality; "black bitch"/"old woman with no man"; rich/poor; reality/fiction; Maria/ Xica da Silva; Maria/*Cara pálida*.

What Maria does in her reception and reiteration of the telenovela flow is to juxtapose, crisscross and associate hierarchical oppositions, recasting one into the shape of the other, thus unveiling flip-sides and producing new articulations. In her bricolage of extracts from the telenovela flow with her own private life, Maria turns towards personal assets (that could be compared to the one's of the main character in a telenovela) in order to renegotiate her subject position at a very local level. Through her jumping back and forth between the telenovela flow and what she presents as real-life events, she juxtaposed and complemented blackness and low prestige status with blackness, sensuality and a nationally sanctioned definition of the Brazilian woman. Maria carried the thrill of the telenovela plot to her own life, thus making that life publicly recognizable, legitimate and interesting. Through her dialogues with the telenovela flow Maria positioned herself as a complex subject – a black babysitter who had "short, bad hair" but who also was "happy and sensual."

Practices of Coping and Hoping⁹

What are the wider implications of these particular case-studies? Taken together, don't they reinforce the contested "hypodermic," or "top-down model" illustrating that media has a power to impose its messages upon viewers and that the telenovela flow is capable of shaping human action? If the telenovela flow promotes certain kinds of productions and transformations and if female viewers appropriate and reiterate these features of the telenovela flow in order to make themselves into recognizable subjects, then the reception of the telenovela flow seems to be working towards an inevitable reproduction of already existing hierarchies.

Let me approach the issue of agency from another perspective. Recall the idea that "[o]ne exists not only by virtue of being recognized but, in a prior sense, by being *recognizable*" (Butler, 1997:5). As I pointed in Chapter 3, being recognizable implies that one is exerting influence, appropriating and reiterating the addresses one receives.

Responding to the interpellations of the telenovela flow can be seen as willful attempts to demand entrance into circuits of recognition. Informants engage with the interpellations emanating from the telenovela flow because for them, as an informant once put it, these interpellations reveal "something that every Brazilian would like to have come true." This desire, which is evident in the ethnographic material discussed here, is the desire to be *someone*; the desire to be recognized as a subject within Brazilian society. The case-studies discussed above could all be seen as attempts to gain access to circuits of recognition in Brazil.

By describing the reception of the telenovela flow as dialogic, I have meant to emphasize the active role played by the viewer in the process of repetition, appropriation and reiteration of elements from the telenovela flow. At the same time, I have stressed that these processes of reception are generated within particular socio-cultural contexts. The way viewers turn around and engage with these messages varies extensively and reflects the tensions and contradictions that exist within contemporary Brazil. However, by foregrounding repetition, emphasis and the features selected in informants' appropriations of elements from the telenovela flow, I was able nevertheless to identify some major tendencies and patterns: the emphasis on (female) transformation, (individual) social mobility and the recurrent theme of production through consumption. Viewers' appropriation and reiteration of the telenovela flow is not free floating. It is tethered to particular socio-cultural values.

As I discussed in Chapter 3, there is not necessarily an immediate correlation between interpellations and recognition: interpellations might miss their marks when viewers do not recognize themselves as being the addressees of those calls. Moreover, an individual's response to an interpellation might not necessarily guarantee that person's access into a circuit of recognition. Failure to make oneself recognizable can have the effect of exposing and challenging (through distancing and critical thinking) existing hierarchies. Remember what happened to

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Meire: in a confrontation with an upper-middle class resident of the building where she worked and lived, Meire's appropriation and reiteration of clothes, trends and ways of speaking failed to make herself recognizable as a middle-class person. The possibility (or threat) of failure in viewers' creative appropriations can be noticed in all the cases discussed throughout this study. For instance, Cláudia knew that her breast reduction operation might be seen as submissive vanity. She therefore invoked psychology to legitimize her decision. Maria never really convinced her friends about the veracity of her love affair with her patron's brother. In another case, Alexia (the one who was "dressed as *Maria do Bairro*. From top to toe!") had to explain to her fiancé what she meant when she said to me that she was dressed as *Maria do Bairro* on her sister's wedding.

When Meire failed to make herself recognizable, she immediately adopted a critical position towards the same social hierarchy into which she tried so hard to insert herself. And in this criticism, she selected certain elements from the telenovela flow in order to reinforce her new standpoint. What might that mean? First, I take it as an evidence that the telenovela flow is heteroglotic: at the same time that it repeats and emphasizes certain features (like consumption, social mobility through love and seduction, women as the channel of social mobility), it also presents their flip-sides both in terms of their temporal progression (as the telenovela proceeds, poor should get richer, ugly should get prettier) and in the contrasts that are made or implied (rich implies poor, pretty implies ugly).

Secondly, Meire's failed appropriation could be taken as evidence of the dialogical (transindividual and contextualized) generation of meaning: one's access into circuits of recognition (through, for instance, appropriation and reiteration of elements from the telenovela flow) is constructed and negotiated in everyday interactions. In the social elevator, Meire failed to make herself recognizable as a neighbor or a middle-class woman. On other occasions it is probable that she was indeed successful in downplaying her class and making herself recognizable as someone else than a babysitter. Her emphasis on the fact that she had a "rich boyfriend" works almost as an assertion that she was able to make herself recognizable (and be recognized) as an attractive woman.

Thirdly, failure in making oneself recognizable might be a step towards critical change. Remember once more how Meire suddenly criticized class hierarchies: "So, it goes like this – if you don't have anything, then you don't count here, you can't be someone (*se você não tem nada, não pode ser nada na vida*)." Meire put into clear words here a maxim that she had been trying to circumvent. Her momentary failure and frustration promoted a critical approach to strategies and *jeitinhos* that Meire herself adopted in several other occasions.

Having foregrounded some tendencies and repetitions in the way my informants related and engaged with the telenovela flow, I want nevertheless to make it explicit that there are different nuances in the way this insertion within society is thought of and negotiated. Poorer women such as Meire, Maria and Joana lived under harsher material conditions and had to confront prejudices and oppression on a daily basis. Their engagement with the telenovela flow, besides bringing pleasure, information and amusement, was also a way for them to find strategies (which sometimes succeeded, sometimes not) to make their voices heard, to make themselves visible, recognizable as complex subjects. It can be understood, from the way they tell their stories, that within the middle-class milieu where they lived and worked, they wanted to be seen not only as poor (and black and rural) servants but also as women (and interesting, and intelligent, and seductive). Middle- and upper-middle class women like Cláudia and Denise engaged with the telenovela flow also as a source of pleasure, leisure and information and as a means to try to reinforce or improve their positions. Unlike poorer women, however, they did not need to untether themselves from certain stigmatized social positionings. Instead, they worked towards reinforcing their social status by producing parties and bodies as "beautiful as in the *novelas*."

As the ethnographic material presented here has shown, the telenovela flow offers *You* "everything *You* would like to be, see or have," at least in an imaginary way. An extract from an informant's essay crystallizes that:

Our lives are very different from those of the gallant lead or of the young beauty in the *novela*. All *novelas* have a happy ending, just like fairy tales. Poor people get richer, couples get together, marry, have children...all problems are easily solved and the evil always repent.

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Brazilians see that world of fiction as their own world and they hope that their problems will also get solved easily, just like magic. (Patricia, 20, undergraduate student. Extract from a classroom essay).

Informants' engagement with the telenovela flow should be seen as part of the practices of coping and hoping that make up their lives. Their dialoguing with the telenovela flow is neither duped nor completely subversive, and it does not preclude laughter or pleasure – it is a way for them to imbue their lives with fiction, images and fantasy, not only to momentarily escape from reality, but also as a way to hope and act in order to be recognized as a subject, as "someone who counts," in a society where this is anything but self-evident for the majority of the population.

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¹ Among the forty-eight university students who chose to write an essay about the relationship between *novelas* and the Brazilian society, nineteen of them (nine women and ten men) described telenovelas as imagined and idealized representations of Brazil. Twelve students (ten women and two men) described this relationship in positive terms, asserting that telenovelas did portray a Brazilian reality, since they approached several social themes, such as racism, divorce, social prejudices, economic problems, and politics. Seventeen students (twelve women and five men) were negative in their answers and suggested that the world portrayed in telenovelas had nothing to do with the Brazilian reality. There were two tendencies within this last group: telenovelas were either described as portraying a much better society than "real Brazil," a place populated by "people with sculptural and perfect bodies, who might suffer but, at the end have their suffering compensated" (Manoel, 26); or they were criticized for being too naturalist, exaggerating on the bad things that happen in the country:

The directors of Globo's *novelas* think that they are showing reality, but in fact, they are simply showing prostitution, lack of love within the family, and drugs. They encourage children to become marginal and corrupt. While television networks earn millions, poor people imitate *novelas* prostituting themselves, stealing in the streets, selling drugs in school, just to be able to dress up according to fashion and to buy trendy clothes. (Maristela, 26, undergraduate student. Extract from a classroom essay on telenovelas).

Here are some further examples of how these undergraduate students wrote about the relationship between the representations of Brazil in telenovelas:

Novelas show glamour, power and wealth, things that don't exist for the majority of Brazilians. This is a form of social exclusion and alienation. Some *novelas* fill a social function, like that one who discussed about lost children[...] But many *novelas* don't offer viewers anything new, only infidelity, falseness, selfishness. (Fabiola, 18, middle-class undergraduate student. Extract from a classroom essay on telenovelas).

It is clear that *novelas* deal always with the same stereotypes – good against evil. "Good" is represented by gallant leads and divas, models known all over Brazil. "Evil" is, on the contrary, represented by ugly villains and people who do not correspond to the beauty

stereotype.[...] When finally there is someone poor or an outsider in a *novela*, then she will certainly become rich. (Edna, 19, middle-class undergraduate student. Extract from a classroom essay on telenovelas.)

Brazilian *novelas* sell an image of Brazil that is not even close to our everyday life. [...] In *novelas* everybody is rich and beautiful, life is calm and easy. [...] Characters travel to Europe just for their holidays. [...] Black people are always maids or employees. This is a kind of discrimination, since there are black people who are well-off and have succeeded in their careers. (Fernando, 18, middle-class undergraduate student. Extract from a classroom essay on telenovelas.)

Many *novelas* approach social themes. *Globo's* latest success, *Laços de Família* [2001, *Globo*] is a good example. This *novela* has been discussed and commented throughout Brazil, by people of all ages and all social classes. This *novela* discussed personal relationships, leukemia, and other important subjects that should be discussed more often. [...] On the other hand, who has ever seen a society in which all persons are middle-class? Or in which a husband lives like a gigolo, depending on the exploitation of his wife? These themes are hilarious, but they are not a discussion about social matters. (Raquel, 19, middle-class undergraduate student. Extract from a classroom essay on telenovelas.)

Novelas show an unknown Brazil to the world. Their excessive eroticism gives the impression to non-Brazilians that prostitution is something normal, that vulgar women, murder, robbery, kidnapping and drugs are banalities that we are used to living with. (Luciana, 20, lower middle-class undergraduate student. Extract from a classroom essay on telenovelas.)

It is evident, for us, Brazilians, that the themes discussed in *novelas* have nothing to do with our reality. Eroticism, pornography, give an image of Brazilians to other countries as being erotic people. And in fact, we are normal people – warm, happy, relaxed people. (Luciene, 21, lower middle-class undergraduate student. Extract from a classroom essay on telenovelas.)

Novelas don't reflect the Brazilian reality. They show an idealized reality. Incredibly rich characters living in monumental mansions, and the poor classes are concealed [...] They live [in *novelas*] in normal houses and apartments, there are no shantytowns and they mingle intensively with the rich. (Douglas, 24, middle-class undergraduate student. Extract from a classroom essay on telenovelas.)

Novelas show rich families who live empty dramas, poor people who get rich when they marry a beautiful young woman. They are concealed images of Brazilian landscapes (even shantytowns are different from real live ones). And there is a lot of money that is spent and wasted [by the characters]. All this happens in a country where the majority of the population is poor. Producers want to show their own version of Brazil. (Márcio, 20, middle-class undergraduate student. Extract from a classroom essay on telenovelas.)

I'm proud of Brazilian *novelas*. They show us a tropical country, with wonderful beaches and sun, huge forests [...] and they tell romantic, dramatic, hilarious stories and thrillers. Therefore they are just like our country: a place where everything happens at the same time. And it can even be amusing. (Fabrício, 22, middle-class undergraduate student. Extract from a classroom essay on telenovelas.)

CHAPTER SEVEN

We see in *novelas* the realization of impossible, beautiful and hot love affairs, wonderful people, healthy elders who manage to live well with their retirement payments, women with sculptural bodies, well-trained men, healthy and educated children. This gives us an image of our country as being cleaner and more honest [than it really is]. At the end of each novela, after all tears and all happiness, we go back to our pale reality, with no prospective of change. (Danielle, 22, lower middle-class undergraduate student. Extract from a classroom essay on telenovelas.)

² The family, with its roots in the stereotypical patriarchal model, is the central theme of several academic studies on gender relationships – see for instance Corrêa (1993). DaSilva (1999: 342) argues that "both among the modern and the traditional sectors the family is the central reference point for the construction of the subjects's identity."

³ These representations of women's strategies seem however to go beyond the Brazilian imaginary. Historian Carolyn Johnston (1992) notices similar patterns in the case of American families:

Excluded from most forms of public power until recently, women have primarily operated in the "love economy" of motherhood, housework, and voluntarism; although millions of women have been employed, they have still exercised power only covertly in their homes though emotional and sexual influence. Such covert sexual power relies on persuasion, manipulation, giving and withholding sex; it may be exerted in the nurturing of children and in making men dependent on women for daily needs of all kinds. Sexual power may be used to acquire material possessions, to influence family decisions, and generally get one's way. Covert sexual power works only when it is unseen and undetected, like any subversiveness. (1992, ix)

Johnston's study leads us to consider that the representation of women's strategies may well be, in many senses, a transnational phenomenon. Cultural critic Lori Landay (1999) examines from a historical perspective and North American material, the relationship between gender roles and consumption. She suggests that women, because they had until recently a restricted access to the public sphere, have, in traditional family organizations been given the role of "spenders," translating their husbands' income into commodities:

If husbands are the "earners" and wives are the "spenders," then the only way for women to get their hands on the money necessary to participate in mass consumer culture is through the exercise of covert sexual power, or through circumventing masculine authority [...]. (Landay, 1999:36)

⁴ See Kipnis (1993) for a further discussion on the interplay of sex, gender, aesthetic and consumption.

⁵ Ortner (1974:83) argued that "the universal devaluation of women could be explained by postulating that women are seen as closer to nature than men, men being seen as more unequivocally occupying the high ground of culture." She concludes by saying that the postulate that woman is viewed as closer to nature than man can be interpreted in three different ways: women are seen as occupying a *middle* position between nature and culture; women are seen as *mediating* in the culture-nature relationship; women are seen as having an *ambiguous* status between nature and culture. In my analysis, I have argued that the telenovela flow represents women as occupying middle positions, as mediators, and as having ambiguous status not only when it comes to the relationship between culture and nature but also when it comes to their positioning within different social hierarchies.

⁶ The telenovela flow's focus on women and social mobility might also offer an explanation as to why men were reticent and reluctant in participating as informants on a research about

novelas. After all, these are programs that focus on women's sexual and emotional strategies (played out within the family, or in intimate relationships) to circumvent hierarchies.

As I have shown above, these are concerns which are taken to be feminine in the national imaginary. Therefore, it was important for many men to assert that they were not emotionally engaged with these kinds of feminine matters. On the other hand, they could show that they were engaged with the telenovela flow as consumers of the commodities displayed through it (cars, computers, cellular phones, erotic scenes with naked actresses, and men's magazines such as *Playboy*).

⁷ Mankekar (1999) makes a similar point in her analysis of the content and reception of Indian state-sponsored serials.

⁸ "My blood is as red as his/hers" or "Rich or poor, everybody is the same" are similar expressions (found in Barbosa 1995) that express the idea of a shared biological and physical constitution, a modicum of equality.

⁹ I take this expression and the reasoning it develops from Walkerdine (1997: 44).

APPENDIX ONE

Informants Quoted in Text

Adriana: twenty-five-year-old woman. Part-time undergraduate student in communication at a private university. Her mother is a retired public worker and her father is deceased.

Alessandra: twenty-nine-year-old woman. Part-time undergraduate student in communication at a private university. Her mother is a housewife and her father works as a car mechanic.

Alexia: thirty-year-old executive secretary. Engaged. University degree in communication. Her mother is a housewife and her father worked as a lawyer.

Altair: sixty-year-old man. Public worker. Married. University degree in engineering. His mother was a housewife and his father worked as a bank employee.

Ana: seventeen-year-old woman. High school student. Her mother is a retired primary school teacher and her father works as a bank employee.

Andréa: thirty-year-old woman. Housewife. Incomplete high school education. Her mother is a housewife and her father owned a shop.

Bárbara: eighteen-year-old woman. Undergraduate student in communication at a private university. Her mother works as a teacher and her father has had several occupations.

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Carina: fourteen-year-old woman. Junior high school student (*8a. série*).¹ Her mother works as a secretary and her father has had several occupations.

Celita: nineteen-year-old woman. Worked part-time in a boutique and completed her high school education by night (*3o. ginasial*).

Clarice: eighteen-year-old woman. Undergraduate student in communication at a private university. Her parents are chemists.

Cláudia: eighteen-year-old woman. High school student (*3o. ginasial*). Both her parents have university degrees and work at public offices.

Conceição: eighty-year-old woman. Widow. Incomplete primary/elementary education.

Denise: fifteen-year-old woman. High school student (*1o. ginasial*). Her mother is a dentist and her father works in a bank.

Denize: twenty-four-year-old woman. Part-time undergraduate university student in communication. Her mother works as a seamstress and her father, now deceased, worked as a driver.

Eglei: twenty-two-year-old woman. Drugstore clerk. Complete high school education (*3o. ginasial*).

Ernesto: fifty-five-year-old man. Bank employee. Incomplete high school education.

Fábio: eighteen-year-old man. Undergraduate student in communication at a private university. His mother is a housewife and his father has a white collar job.

Fátima: nineteen-year-old woman. High school student (*3o. ginasial*).

Felipe: eighteen-year-old man. Undergraduate university student in communication.

Geralda: eighteen-year-old woman. Boutique clerk. Junior high school education.

Jeferson: twenty-one-year-old man. Part-time undergraduate student in communication at a private university. Lives with his grandparents. His grandfather is a police inspector and his grandmother a typist.

Joana: twenty-eight-year-old housewife. At the time, incomplete high school education. Her parents are farmers in another state of Brazil.

INFORMANTS QUOTED IN TEXT

Júlia: twenty-year-old woman. Undergraduate student in communication at a private university. Her mother works as a psychologist and her father is deceased.

Juraci: seventy-five-year-old woman. Widow. Primary education.

Laurita: twenty-seven-year-old woman. Part-time undergraduate student in communication at a private university.

Leandro: twenty-two-year-old man. Part-time undergraduate university student in communication. His parents worked as shop clerks.

Luiza: eighteen-year-old woman. Undergraduate university student in communication. Her father is an agronomist and her mother is a sociologist.

Marcelo: twenty-four-year-old man. Part-time undergraduate student in communication at a private university. His father is retired and his mother is a housewife.

Marcelo: nineteen-year-old man. Undergraduate student in communication at a private university. (No further data).

Márcio: twenty-seven-year-old man. Part-time undergraduate university student in communication.

Maria: fifteen-year-old woman. Live-in babysitter. Incomplete primary education.

Marina: eighteen-year-old woman. Live-in babysitter. Primary education (4a.série).

Meire: nineteen-year-old woman. Live-in babysitter. Incomplete junior high school education (6a. série).

Michele: fifty-five-year-old personal administrator at a governmental office. Married. University degree in law.

Orozimbo: twenty-two-year-old man. Part-time undergraduate university student in communication.

Patrícia: seventeen-year-old woman. High school student. Both her parents have white collar jobs.

Paulo: twenty-seven-year-old language teacher. Married. University degree in law.

APPENDIX ONE

Roger: thirty-one-year-old man. Part-time undergraduate university student in communication. His mother works as a teacher and his father owns a small business.

Sandra: nineteen-year-old woman. Housewife. Incomplete high school education.

Thelma: fifty-year-old woman. Secretary. Junior high school education.

Túlio: eighteen-year-old man. High school student. His mother is a housewife and his father owned a shop.

Virgínia: forty-five-year-old woman. Married. Dentist.

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¹ The educational system in Brazil is divided into three parts – 1st degree (*primeiro grau*), second degree (*segundo grau*) and university studies (*nível superior*). The 1st degree consists of eight years: from 1a. *série* to 4a. *série* (alphabetization, elementary/primary education) and from 5a *série* to 8a. *série* (in the text I use the term junior high school when referring to this period). The second degree consists of three years – 1st, 2nd and 3rd *científico/ginásial* (in the text I use the term high school when referring to this period). Children are about six or seven years old when they start school and finish the 2nd degree at around seventeen. There are nevertheless students who, because they have bad grades, have to repeat one or several school years, as well as there are those who quit school earlier or never start it, generally because of economic reasons.

APPENDIX TWO

Interview Questionnaire

- 1) Do you have a television set at home? How many sets do you have?
- 2) Do you watch *novelas*? Which ones and on what channel?
- 3) Do you watch them everyday?
- 4) Which is your favorite *novela* nowadays? Why?
- 5) What other television programs do you watch?
- 6) Do you watch *novelas* alone or with other persons?
- 7) Do you watch *novelas* attentively or do you do other things while watching?
- 8) Do you like to comment what is happening in the *novela* with other viewers?
- 9) Do you think that the things that happen in a *novela* remind you of things that happen in real life? Ex.?
- 10) Is there any character in a *novela* with whom you identify? Someone you admire or who is in a situation similar to yours?
- 11) Do you know people that remind you of *novela* characters? In what ways do they remind you (physically or in their way of being)? What character is that?
- 12) Do you think that people are influenced by *novelas*? How?
- 13) Personally, do you think you are influenced by them? How?
- 14) "A Próxima Vítima" [the 8 o'clock telenovela that was broadcast in 1995] discussed themes such as racism, betrayal, the relationship between men and women, homosexuality. Do you think *novelas* should discuss such matters?

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- 15) Do you think that racism is a problem in Brazil? Ex.?
- 16) Do you think people can learn something from *novelas*? Ex.?
- 17) If a *novela* discusses matters such as racism or homosexuality, do you start reflecting more about these subjects, and discuss them with your family and friends? Ex.?
- 18) Globo's eight o'clock *novela* "Explode Coração" [that replaced "A Próxima Vítima"] show the relationship between gypsy women and men as being very traditional - men work and support their families financially, women stay at home, taking care of their children... Do you think this image corresponds to the actual relationship between men and women?
- 19) Do you think that men and women have different ways of thinking? Ex.?
- 20) From all the *novelas* you have watched, which one is your favorite? Why?
- 21) What kind of *novela* do you prefer (romantic, historical, comedy,...)?
- 22) When did you start watching *novelas*? Do you watch more *novelas* today than you did before?
- 23) Do you have a favorite actress/actor? Why?
- 24) Today's *novelas* show more love and sex scenes, men with bare chests... What do you think about that?
- 25) Do you think that scenes with handsome, scantily dressed actors are specially addressed to please a female public?
- 26) Are *novelas* women's business or do men also watch?
- 27) In your opinion, do all *novelas* have some ingredients in common?
- 28) Should *novelas* always have a happy ending? Why?
- 29) Why do you think that *novelas* are so popular programs?
- 30) Why do you watch them?
- 31) Besides watching television, do you have any other leisure? How do you spend your spare time?
- 32) Personal data: sex, age, educational level, marital status, number of family members, occupation, place of birth and actual residence.

I eventually came to add some further questions:

- 1) How many hours a day is the television set on in your home?
- 2) Question 14 was updated, with the polemical themes that were discussed by the *novelas* that were broadcast during 1997.

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Coincidentally the themes discussed were almost the same as in 1995 (racism, affective relationships between elder women and younger men, homosexuality).

3) Can you tell me what other 'hot' or polemic themes are discussed by *novelas*?

4) Nowadays there are more black actors playing roles both in *novelas* and in advertisement. What do you think about that?

5) How is poverty portrayed by *novelas*?

6) Do you think that a *novela* creates a certain model for what is to be considered beautiful? For instance, is there a pattern, a recipe of what a beautiful woman/man is like in *novelas*?

7) What do you think about the opening features of the *novelas* that are actually broadcast? Do you think they have anything to do with the plot?

8) Are there always women in these opening features, or are other things also represented? 9) Do you watch cable TV? What programs? Have you stopped watching *novelas* because of cable TV?

10) If you were going to write a *novela*, what would it be about?

I had also a short questionnaire for those who said they did not watch telenovelas:

1) Why don't you watch them?

2) Have you never watched any *novela* or is it just now that you don't watch?

3) Do you watch any other television programs?

4) What do you do on your spare time?

5) Do you have any idea about what *novelas* are being broadcast now?

6) Why do you think *novelas* are popular programs?

7) Personal data (as above).

APPENDIX THREE

A Brief Presentation of Some of the Telenovelas Mentioned Throughout the Book

A Indomada – "The Untamed Woman," written by Ricardo Linhares and Aguinaldo Silva and broadcast by Globo, in 1997, at eight o'clock: Helena returns to Greenville, a small town in northeastern Brazil colonized by England, to get married to an arranged husband and make her parents' dream come true, by re-opening a sugar refinery.

A Próxima Vítima – "The Next Victim," written by Silvio de Abreu, broadcast in 1995, by Globo, at eight o'clock: a series of murders link the destinies of several, apparently unrelated persons.

Barriga de Aluguel – "A Belly for Rent," written by Glória Perez and broadcast by Globo in 1990-1, at seven o'clock: Ana, a successful volleyball player lives a happy life together with Zeca, until the day the couple finds out that Ana cannot have children. Desperate, the couple decides to hire a surrogate mother.

Explode Coração – "Bursting Heart," written by Glória Perez, broadcast in 1995-6, by Globo, at eight o'clock: Dara, a young Gypsy woman, engaged to be the wife of a handsome young Gypsy man, falls in love with a rich, married business man through the Internet.

Fera Ferida – "Wounded Beast," written by Aguinaldo Silva and broadcast by Globo in 1992, at eight o'clock: Feliciano Júnior returns under a new identity to the small town of Tubiacanga to take revenge

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on the death of his parents. However, he falls in love with the daughter of his worst enemy.

História de Amor – "Love Story," written by Manoel Carlos and broadcast by Globo, in 1995, at six o'clock: Carlos, a successful doctor is married to Paula, a Rio socialite. He meets Helena, the mother of one of his patients and they fall madly in love with each other.

Laços de Família – "Family Links," written by Manoel Carlos and broadcast by Globo in 2001, at eight o'clock: the intricate story of the everyday lives of several upper- or middle-class persons living in southern Rio. For instance Capitu, a middle-class young woman who works as a call-girl to support her son and her old parents; or Helena, a beautiful and sacrificing mother of a grown-up daughter, Camila, who, besides finding out that she has leukemia, is also in love with her mother's boyfriend.

Malhação – "Pumping Up," written by several authors and broadcast since 1995 by Globo, at five-thirty p.m., *Malhação* is described by the network as a "rap-opera": it started as the story of upper and middle-class adolescents in Rio who frequented the same gym, called *Malhação*. The gym had in 2001 expanded and became a school for middle- and upper-middle class adolescents.

Maria do Bairro – "Maria del Barrio," Mexican telenovela broadcast by SBT in 1997, at seven-thirty p.m.: Maria is a poor and good hearted woman who falls in love with a rich and goodhearted man who is, in his turn, loved by a rich and unscrupulous woman, ready to conquer by any means the attention of her beloved.

O Amor Está no Ar – "Love is in the Air," written by Alcides Nogueria, Bôsko Brasil and Felipe Miguez. Broadcast by Globo in 1997, at six o'clock: Sofia has to fight with some members of her family to continue to be the head of her company. Her daughter Luiza, a troublesome young woman, is abducted by extra-terrestrials.

O Clone – "The Clone," written by Glória Perez and broadcast by Globo in 2002, at eight o'clock: the love story between a Muslim/Brazilian woman with Algerian parents and a Brazilian man is interspersed by several conflicts and the presence of a cloned human being.

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O Dono do Mundo – "King of the World," written by Gilberto Braga and broadcast by Globo in 1992, at eight o' clock: Felipe is a famous plastic surgeon and an unscrupulous seducer. Marcia is a virgin kindergarten teacher who lives in a suburb in Rio. Felipe bets a friend that he will be able to seduce Marcia.

O Rei do Gado – "The King of Cattle," written by Benedito Ruy Barbosa and broadcast by Globo, in 1996-7, at eight o' clock: two families hate each other throughout the years. The destinies of the baron of milk and coffee, and the king of cattle will cross several times, through love and hatred.

O Salvador da Pátria – "The Savior of the Nation," written by Lauro César Muniz, broadcast in 1989, by Globo, at eight o'clock: a deputy tries to hide his extramarital love affair by arranging a marriage between his lover and a very poor worker. An unscrupulous journalist unveils this story.

Pantanal – "Pantanal," written by Benedito Rui Barbosa and broadcast in 1990, by Manchete, at nine-thirty p.m.: José Leôncio is a sympathetic and honest cattle farmer. He is a widower and lives together with Filó, an ex-prostitute. Terêncio is another cattle baron in the same region who acquired his land illegally. Juma, a young woman, lives in a no-man's land between these two farms. Her parents were killed by Terêncio.

Pedra Sobre Pedra – "Stone Wall," written by Aguinaldo Silva and broadcast by Globo, in 1992, at eight o' clock: the heads of two families hate each other. Their respective children fall desperately in love.

Por amor – "Because of Love," written by Manoel Carlos and broadcast by Globo in 1998, at eight o'clock. A story based on the destinies of upper and lower middle-class families living in Rio: Helena, a divorced woman travel to Venice with her grown-up daughter (Eduarda). Eduarda is going to get married with Marcelo after this trip. In Venice, Helena meets a Brazilian man with whom she falls in love. Out of love, Helena sacrifices herself by giving away the baby she is expecting to her own daughter Eduarda, who cannot become pregnant.

Renascer – "To Be Born Again," written by Benedito Ruy Barbosa, broadcast in 1993, by Globo, at eight o'clock: the story of José

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Inocência, a cocoa farmer in Bahia, and his love and hatred relationship with his youngest son, whose birth caused the death of José Inocência's wife.

Roque Santeiro – "Roque, the Saint-maker", written by Dias Gomes and Aguinaldo Silva and broadcast by Globo in 1985-6, at eight o'clock: the population of Asa Branca venerates Roque, a martyr who died defending the city from a dangerous killer. Sixteen years later, Roque returns to Asa Branca alive, and threatens to destroy his image as a hero, martyr and saint, on which the whole town depends.

Salsa e Merengue – written by Miguel Fallabella and Maria Carmen Barbosa, broadcast in 1996-7, by Globo, at seven o'clock: the destinies of two women, Anabel and Barbara cross when Barbara finds she is not really the mother of her only son, Eugênio, and that Eugênio's real mother, Anabel, has to be found quickly to save Eugênio's life.

Tieta – "Tieta," written by Aguinaldo Silva, broadcast by Globo in 1989-90, at eight o'clock: twenty-five years after being sent away by her father and older sister, Tieta returns to her home town in search for reconciliation. However, Tieta's unexpected love affair with her nephew – a priest candidate, shocks her family.

Terra Nostra – "Our Land," written by Benedito Ruy Barabosa and broadcast by Globo in 1999, at eight o'clock: the story of several generations of Italian immigrants and their lives in the New World.

Xica da Silva – "Xica, the Slave Who Gives Orders" written by Adamo Rangel and broadcast by Manchete in 1996-7, at nine-thirty: the story of a black female slave who becomes the most powerful woman in Minas Gerais.

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Based on anthropological fieldwork in the city of Belo Horizonte, this book examines both the content of the telenovela flow and the way the flow addresses You, the viewer.

How does the telenovela flow invite You to interact with it? How might You respond? And what do those responses reveal about how Brazilians think of themselves and their society?

"I haven't missed one single episode. It's so exciting! I'm always hoping for Xica's best and I hate that Violante."

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"I watch [telenovelas] to see different things. Because here, in Brazil, there is nothing different to see... If you don't watch television, then you won't see [anything different]."