

## SERIES CONSUMPTION AMONG YOUNG STUDENTS: NARRATIVES AND CLUES OF INDIVIDUATION\*

LEANDRO R. PINHEIRO<sup>1</sup> 

**ABSTRACT:** We seek to discuss the relationship between individuation processes and cultural consumption of series by young students from different levels of education in public institutions in the peripheries of Porto Alegre, Brazil. Contributions by Danilo Martuccelli and Martín-Barbero are the main references for this study, which was developed based on the application of questionnaires, discussion groups and interviews. Given the relationship between the increase in the consumption of series and the expansion of schooling, we identified that preferences comprise melodramatic narrative elements and reflective-identity configurations, inflecting social individuations towards a certain contextual inconsistency and the figuration of singularization.

**Keywords:** Youth. Narratives. Series. School. Individuation.

### CONSUMO DE SERIADOS ENTRE JOVENS ESTUDANTES: NARRATIVAS E INDÍCIOS À INDIVIDUAÇÃO

**RESUMO:** Buscamos discutir a relação entre processos de individuação e consumo cultural em plataformas de *streaming* por jovens estudantes de diferentes níveis de ensino, em estabelecimentos públicos sediados em periferias de Porto Alegre (RS). Contribuições de Danilo Martuccelli e Martín-Barbero são as referências centrais do estudo que, em campo, desenvolvemos com base na aplicação de questionários, grupos de discussão e entrevistas semiestruturadas. Constatada a elevação do consumo de seriados associada à ampliação da escolarização, identificamos que as preferências graduem elementos narrativos melodramáticos e configurações reflexivo-identitárias, inflitando para individuações sociais construídas entre certa inconsistência contextual e a figuração de singularizações.

**Palavras-chave:** Juventudes. Narrativas. Seriados. Escola. Individuação.

1. Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul – Faculdade de Educação – Programa de Pós-graduação em Educação – Porto Alegre (RS), Brazil. E-mail: leandropinheiro75@gmail.com

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## CONSUMO DE SERIES ENTRE JÓVENES ESTUDIANTES: NARRATIVAS E INDICIOS A LA INDIVIDUACIÓN

**RESUMEN:** Buscamos discutir la relación entre los procesos de individuación y el consumo cultural en plataformas de *streaming* por jóvenes estudiantes de diferentes niveles educativos, en establecimientos públicos ubicados en las periferias de Porto Alegre, Brasil. Las aportaciones de Danilo Martuccelli y Martín-Barbero son los referenciales centrales del estudio que, en campo, desarrollamos a partir de la aplicación de cuestionarios, grupos de discusión y entrevistas semiestructuradas. Verificado el aumento en el consumo de series asociado a la expansión de la escolaridad, identificamos que las preferencias gradúan elementos narrativos melodramáticos y configuraciones reflexivo-identitarias, incidiendo para las individuaciones sociales construidas entre una cierta inconsistencia contextual y la figuración de singularizaciones.

**Palabras-clave:** Jóvenes. Narrativas. Series. Escuela. Individuación.

### Introduction

The problematizations we propose here are close to the macrocontextual readings pointing out the growing social differentiation, diversification of personal trajectories and/or singularization of individuation processes in the present time (MARTUCCELLI, 2010a). We note the expression of such approaches in the study of youth experiences and itineraries, including the production of plural socio-symbolic belonging and the increase of resources for the co-production of socialization among young people, such as information and communication technologies.

An aspect also highlighted in research on juvenile practices and identities concerns the importance of cultural consumption. If compared to the ascendants, the expanded access to symbolic goods would constitute part of the paradoxes experienced by young people today, whose structural possibilities of inclusion (in the labor market, notably) do not necessarily match the consumption of cultural artifacts (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 2017). Setton (2004) has already pointed out, in this sense, the advance of the artifacts produced by the cultural industry concerning the massification of the presence of the school institution among popular Brazilian segments, thus the precedence in the social production of knowledge and in the forms of daily symbolic appropriation.

Thus, our writing is dedicated to the problematization of aspects of cultural consumption among young people, observed in the results of our research with students from public institutions located in the outskirts of Porto Alegre (RS). Given the widening access to content on streaming platforms among these actors, we intend to discuss the growing audience of series to indicate elements concerning the individuation processes of young people, particularly those living in socially impoverished urban contexts.

### Context and References

Some years ago, Renato Ortiz (2007) brought analyses about what he called world modernity and, in this sense, about producing an international popular culture, whose core would be the production of a consumer market. The author pointed out how much our memory is permeated by the icons of mass cultural

production, disseminated in a globalized scenario, deterritorializing the ethical and moral references. In the pulverization of social relations in metropolitan urban spaces, the cultural market and the media, in particular, operate as a kind of social regulator.

In this context, we can situate two current discussions. First, what Silva (2014) calls a “series culture,” set in the expansion of consumption by streaming platforms, the reconfiguring appropriation of classic forms (such as melodrama and the crime genre) and the fostering of communities of engagement and interpellation to consumption.

The second discussion concerns individuation processes themselves. Souza and Maçaneiro (2018) indicate that fictional narratives consumed by young people, relying on magical worlds and epic heroism, interpose a relationship between adversity and agency, establishing, in articulation, moral discernments (good and evil). In this sense, the authors state that “Science fiction of the 1970s and 1980s emphasized the control and use of technologies for the good of humanity and the planet [...] whereas mythological narrative today reissued emphasizes the maturation of the hero through a path of trials, with everyday dramas” (SOUZA; MAÇANEIRO, 2018, p. 15, our translation).

The achievement of cultural industry of wide dissemination and intensive integration into everyday life is part, and one of the promoting agents of reflexive dynamics engendered in modernity, especially in the last decades. Unlike introspection, reflexivity consists of a differentially diffracted capacity to take oneself as an object to follow and enunciate one’s actions from expert norms, directly deferred or captured in networks of informational vulgarization—TV, friends, Internet social networks, etc. (MARTUCCELLI, 2006).

In this context, to reflexivity, we also refer the social production of individualized narratives. Melucci (2001) mentioned that the narration of experiences becomes a significant element of contemporary informational culture, this social practice being one of the means to cope with the challenges of identity, supporting the game of provisional delimitation and the searches for continuity in the face of discontinuities in the individual journey and/or social reality. From this, we deduce that narration is a dynamic between consumption and use, between syntony with the socially engendered plots and the enunciations of the self.

## The Individuation Process

In pondering the conditions of social differentiation and individualization in contemporary social relations, Martuccelli (2007) proposes an approach to the experiences that individuals construct in their social interactions to broaden the understanding of the movements that actors make in the production of their existences. In other words, the specification of relatively independent, individuated units is analyzed in the relationship between structural elements and changes in particular social contexts and the agency constructed by actors in confronting historically given challenges, as the notion of “social proof” seeks to articulate there. Martuccelli (2007; 2010a) defines it as “historical, socially produced, culturally represented, unequally distributed challenges that individuals are forced to face within a structural process of individuation” (ARAUJO; MARTUCCELLI, 2010, p. 83, our translation).

Among the characteristics of the “social trials,” there is a narrative dimension from which the subjects understand their journeys and dispose of constituent challenges as inheritors of an appropriately modern adventure (MARTUCCELLI, 2007). This seems to us the first heuristic link for interpreting the association between “uses and consumption of narratives” and “individuation processes,” as we understand that elements of the challenges faced by social actors may be figured in this interrelation.

In *Forgé par l'Épreuve*, Martuccelli (2006) analyzes a list of eight main structural challenges,

organized into two large groups: those related to social domains—the school brand, work, city streets, family life—; and those concerning the dimensions of the social bond—the history between individuals, the relationship with the collective, the labyrinth of otherness, the test of self. Regarding the latter, the author disposes of trials and socioexistential meanings to indicate from what registers individuals have interpreted their experiences (“the search for personal fulfillment,” “life as a struggle,” for example). Thus, we will take especially the relationship between the individuation process and uses/consumptions of narratives in attention to the “proof of self,” here establishing the second heuristic link of this interrelation by encompassing the reflective work of individuals.

There is, moreover, a complementary task to the identification of social evidence, which is then embodied in the analysis of the bases that sustain the everyday life of individuals, what the author calls “supports.” Martuccelli (2007) seeks to designate the set of supports that sustain the experiences of actors, not in the form of an inventory of the conditions and resources available to them according to social position, but as an existential ecology of the elements appropriated and that are inscribed in the web of effective interdependencies of individual histories. We can, in this sense, consider institutionalized and/or legitimized supports that are easy to identify, but also those that are discrete and obliquely present in everyday life, in articulation with which we place the consumption and production of narratives by the actors.

It is also worth mentioning that, along this path, this author proposes two major processes of individuation that can be appropriated in the study of social relations in Latin America. On the one hand, Martuccelli (2010) hypothesizes the existence of a “hyper-actor” in Latin American societies so that Latin American individualism would not be erected in the fiction of a social contract between preconceived individuals produced by organizations and institutional programs, as in Europe; it would be constituted by practices and skills of people who, to integrate into society, need, first of all, to act and guarantee existence and recognition. This condition is explained, in part, by the way, power is established in our countries. Something that is not established as in the “North”; something that is indicated, but not entirely compelling, like the law that is not always fulfilled, that varies under the circumstances, with the use of violence if necessary. In such a way, this individual needs to act (in the face of the uncertain, the nonfunctional institutions or the arbitrary power) and the maintenance of social ties becomes fundamental to the organization of the experience, and historically, quite delimited networks would sustain the trajectories.

On the other hand, Martuccelli (2010a) analyzes a “social process of singularization,” a mode of individuation whereby the ideal for individuals consists in being someone recognized apart from others by their ordinary and concrete incomparability. The valuation of the “singular” would become a form of relationship with the “common.” No more minor subject to power relations, among the main factors of the trend (in a non-exhaustive list), the author places: the customization and diversification of production and consumption; the customization of institutional services and demands; individual accountability, especially in the world of work; and the interactive (and less statutory) content of sociability relations. In this sense, the author argues that it is necessary to consider institutionalized processes of individuation and actions in noninstitutional spaces and, in addition, the “work” of individuals ahead of the trials that extend along life’s itineraries.

Having summarized the propositions that configure the interpretation of individuation processes, we can establish the referents of interpretation of narratives, in this case, plots in audiovisual artifacts. From now on, we can briefly lay down some of the contributions of Martín-Barbero (1992; 1997) regarding media, mediations, and identities in Latin America.

## Narratives and Mediations

Martín-Barbero (1992; 1997) was concerned with discussing the mediations between systems of production in the framework of capitalism (tributary to standardizations and narrational stereotypes and profit-seeking) and the dynamics of cultural appropriation. In this sense, he proposed that audiovisual production in Latin America was based on the commercialization of the “melodrama” formula, in which potential for adhesion was engendered from the relationship established with everyday morality and, in articulation, with the possibilities of identification and projection launched to the viewers. “Telenovela” would be the most prominent example, by mixing plots that remind us of the old *feuilletons*, composing current themes and technologies, evoking from the popular known formats to industrialized uses (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 1992).

The imbrications between the reproduction of the “melodrama” format and Latin American identity searches, according to Martín-Barbero’s (1997) thesis, are based on the updating of popular orality (*telling a*) together with audiovisual technologies (a secondary orality). The television text would be the main element of interpellation since the TV or computer screen competes with other appeals in the private or domestic space (unlike what happens in the cinema). Furthermore, the melodramatic audiovisual narrative is characterized by a certain dialog with the audience’s reactions, porous to the moment’s themes and facts and constituting an open narrative time. These aspects would make the melodramatic productions significant due to the intermingling effect between experiences and fiction: the narrative configuration of melodrama mediates between the productive mass systematics and the cycles of popular daily life (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 1997).

In his analyses of the production of *feuilletons* and their reverberations in mass cultural production, Martín-Barbero (1992) discusses some of the resources that organized the mediation to widespread consumption. Given the notoriety of the author’s contributions, we reiterate only those taken for the interpretations undertaken in the sequel. First, among the *fragmentation* devices, the author points out the organization by episodes, suitable for popular routines. This one also leads us to the *devices of seduction*, supporting the incorporation of current themes and the blending of plot and everyday life.

Regarding the *devices of recognition*, those that provoke identification, Martín-Barbero (1992) analyzes the slow, double melodramatic narrative in the progressive course of the peripatetic and regressive study of the identity and moral revelations. In this sense, the melodramatic configuration establishes an aesthetic-ethical articulation from the dramatic strokes and thus addresses fears and desires for revenge-justice known to its recipients. If there is a priority for action and moral misfits (rather than existential dilemmas), this is how melodrama moves cultural archetypes.

From our forays, then, we undertake the interpretation of cultural consumptions, seeking to do so via contextualizing mediations, to arrive, finally, at hypotheses about the characteristics of indicted individuation. In this sense, it is important to clarify that it is not about affirming them by reading the plots but about pointing out aspects of relational consistencies and social challenges at stake from the aesthetic shares in the course.

## About our Incursions

We conducted our forays between the years 2017 and 2019 in socially vulnerable localities of Porto Alegre (RS). In the three neighborhoods (Cruzeiro, Lomba do Pinheiro, and Restinga) considered here, we worked with four articulated techniques: the application of questionnaires, the analysis of audiovisual

narratives; the holding of focus groups; and the execution of semistructured interviews.

As for the questionnaires, these asked about consumption of cultural goods, work and student trajectories, support networks, and regular challenges in personal itineraries. The results we will discuss here stem from 583 observations (in order of completion: 257 for Restinga; 146 for Cruzeiro; and 180 for Lomba do Pinheiro). The sample was intentional and not probabilistic, and the access to the students was made according to the agreement of the educational institutions, paying attention, however, to the fact that we had municipal, state, and federal public schools (when they existed in the locations) and the expressive presence of young students (Table 1). This sample type does not allow statistical extrapolations but lends itself to meaningful analyses, particularly if used with the support of other techniques (FIELD, 2009). The instrument used was a structured, self-applied form.

**Table 1.** Distribution of observations per application locations

Level of education	Application locations					TOTAL
	Municipal School – YAE (Final Ts)	State School – High School	Federal Institute – PROEJA	Federal Institute – Technologists	Street	
Elementary School	173				12	185
High School		211	58		10	279
Higher Education				115	4	119
TOTAL	173	211	58	115	26	583

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on the research data.

We then operated a descriptive analysis of the answers and then tried cross-references concerning cultural consumption. So, before conducting the focus groups, we dedicated ourselves to watching episodes of the most cited artifacts (approximately 85 hours of work), to get to know the storylines and better understanding young people's relationship with the narratives that have earned their deference. In this case, the analysis was guided, on the one hand, by the delimitation of elements to be systematized, by what we characterized: characters and relational arrangement of the plots; recurrent narrative configuration in the episodes; and, briefly, photography effects appropriate to the narrations. On the other hand, we operate from the contrast with the melodramatic configuration, observing the devices proposed by Martín-Barbero (1992).

The immersion in the localities happened sequentially. When we observed the recurrence of the preferences for audiovisual narratives in the second neighborhood, we also started to conduct discussion groups in this sense. To do so, we based ourselves on Weller's contributions (2006), to take groups whose members had the shared experience to discuss and that, in this sense, could bring more elements and interpretations about the consumption explained in the descriptive survey. We held four meetings in state schools, one in a municipal unit (youth and adult education, YAE) and one in a federal establishment (PROEJA and technologist courses), among those where we applied the questionnaires, each edition with about ten members. The choice of school units served the purpose of dialog with young students, considering different levels of education and various shifts of classes (daytime and nighttime).

As the last step, we carried out the interviews. In this way, we promote narratives about daily life in the neighborhood and at school and ask about choices and interpretations regarding the consumption of audiovisual narratives. There were six interviewees between the ages of 15 and 29, selected in the focus groups as they had stood out in their arguments about their cultural consumption.

Along with the discussion groups, the interviews represented a way to get closer to the "popular readers," as Martín-Barbero (1992; 1997) points out, seeking to qualify the recognition of the mediations

at play. In this sense, the analysis of the statements took the references to the artifacts, highlighting what enabled or instigated access by young people and the social ties and challenges interpreted by them in the plots and characters.

## Cultural Consumption and Schooling: Initial Problematizations

Let's start our analysis with a little contextualization. Television continues to be the hegemonic media in access to information in Brazil, with news and telenovelas on broadcast TV being the most consumed items. However, the weekly frequency and number of hours devoted to TV are lower among people with Higher Education. On the other hand, pay television, in which many series are found, is more accessed by those with higher income and education. In addition, research by the Federal Communications Office also indicated a growth in Internet access, particularly among those with higher education (SECOM, 2014; 2016).

Another piece of data that deserves to be highlighted for our analysis concerns age. Internet use is more recurrent among young people (SECOM, 2014; KUBOTA, 2016) and access to cultural goods and entertainment tends to expand according to their schooling (SOUTO, 2016), data that are relevant to the study of popular uses and consumption if we keep in mind the historical expansion of youth schooling. For historically excluded segments, school attendance increased significantly between 2004 and 2014 (2.5% overall against 10.6% for young people from families in the first income quintile) (SPOSITO, 2018).

This does not change the recurrence of truncated paths throughout schooling, with cases of failing grades, dropping out, and/or adherence to flow correction policies. However, let's consider that there is still a historical extension of access to school and student experience among young people. We must problematize its effects on the consumption of cultural artifacts in the peripheries.

## About the Indicated Cultural Consumptions

As for the information in our sample, we will initially highlight the most frequent hits and the correlations pertinent to the effort undertaken here. First, we highlight that for Internet, the most cited (in a multiple-choice question) were: "social networks" (83.2%), "music" (50.4%), "movies" (36.4%), and "series" (32.8%). As for TV, the most recurrent were: "movies" (60.2%), "news" (51.6%), "series" (45.3%), "telenovelas" (36.5%), and "sports programs" (29.2%). For both, familiar entertainment options predominated; however, it is worth noting that "telenovelas" would be less frequent than "movies" and "series."

In the intersection between Internet access and schooling levels achieved, we found an expansion of "social networks," "studies," "series" and "electronic newspapers" next to schooling, but a reduction in "music" and "movies." The sharpest swing was among those in higher education (technologists), with "studies" (52%), "series" (42%) and "electronic newspapers" (36.8%) among the top four priorities, along with "social networks." In short, it was indicated that among people at that stage of schooling at the time of the survey, consumption of series on the Internet tended to be higher than at other levels.

As for TV accesses (in which the programming grid allows less navigation, comparatively), the significant oscillations concern what was already mentioned in the national surveys (SECOM, 2014; 2016). We observed that with the increase in education (especially in higher education), there was a decrease in citations for the consumption of "telenovelas," and an increase for "news" and "series."

Let us now take some complementary data. There was considerable dispersion when we asked the preferred topics for conversation (multiple choice). The respondents highlighted several elements, in approximate percentages. However, if we take the themes in association with the schooling in progress, items such as “series,” “studies,” and “politics” increased (by about fifteen percentage points) their citations among those in higher education. If, on the other hand, we were to relate the different options to each other, we could see a specific grouping through the mutual recurrence of quotes for TV series and movies in the options for conversation. This situation was also observed in the Internet consumption. In this case, such a group would also be formed mainly by people who were undergraduate students (more than 50% of the group, against about 20% for the sample as a whole), also associating a relatively higher income condition. We consider, with this, the possibility of the creation of habits of interlocution directed to specific cultural artifacts, assuming the constitution of a practice of cultural sharing and cultivation precisely among those whose relationship with the school institution is longer lasting.

The data analyzed so far allow us to consider the hypothesis that series consumption is associated with schooling (without ruling out economic conditions—qualified access to the Internet network and streaming platforms, for example). Thus, we address Bourdieu’s (2008) notorious thesis, including dispositions to the cultural capital advocated by the school on the one hand and the experience of networks of sociability and cultural cultivation on the other. However, qualitative considerations about audiovisual narratives and the testimonies of young students can give us more elements to understand the inflexion in the appropriation of cultural goods, since we are talking, in any case, about artifacts of popular mass consumption.

## The Relationship with Narratives: What is Consumed and What is Said about it

The questionnaire asked for examples of the artifacts consumed, including audiovisual narratives. Consistent with what was observed earlier, we noticed that citing series’ names was more frequent among higher education students. Nevertheless, we got mentions at all levels.

In this sense, we could summarize a characterization of the tastes in a specific gradient, moving from the valorization of solidarity and reciprocity bonds, evoking family interactions, many times, and under hints of a melodramatic structure, to options with high informational density in the dialogues, with emphasis on political plots and/or identity reflexivities intertwined to the plots. In a way, in this polarity, a more evident approach to interpretive categories associated with abstractions of power and the production of identity-difference occurs, even though they pervade in some way all the audiovisual narratives considered.

If the gradient is correlated to the schooling in the course, referring us to the thesis of the relationship with cultural capitals, some elements permeate the possible strata. In fact, it would be difficult for this sample to make strict attributions of consumption according to sociocultural classes. Moreover, an analysis of the narratives indicates standard configurations and devices in artifacts targeted, *a priori*, at different niches.

## What is Consumed, Signs to the Mediations

As far as series are concerned, it is common to see the customization of the productions, the intensity with which facts, acts, and dilemmas are presented, the quality of the photography, and the improvements in the scripts, all of which are associated with the use of aesthetic resources previously privileged in movie



productions, as attractive to the audience. However, we believe we can elaborate on some additional aspects.

What we will do next is a limited exercise in complementary systematization. We will try to outline a general analysis, eventually articulating aspects of one artifact or another so that, in an illustrative way, we can highlight nuances between plots and characters. Here then, we will borrow arguments from Martín-Barbero (1992; 1997) in his problematization of the enunciation devices of *feuilletons* and telenovelas.

Oh, I don't know, you can suddenly watch a series during a class break; on the bus. We enjoy the time we spend waiting, you know. If I want, I stay here between one class and another and I can watch an episode (Hellen, Higher Education student – Restinga, Sept. 2019).

A first point to take into consideration concerns the *devices of fragmentation*. As Martín-Barbero (1992) already observed concerning telenovelas, the exhibition in episodes of relatively short duration makes the adhesion to the plot viable even for the most overwhelmed popular routines. Consumption is also interpellated by gimmicks that make it easier to follow (summaries at the beginning of the episode, advertising plots about intrigues, etc.). In the case of the technological platforms in vogue, however, we see not only an intensification of this characteristic, but also the possibility of accessing content individually, without the time restrictions given by the programmatic grid of broadcasters and with autonomy to section the consumption according to the ordinary availability, which amplifies the possibilities of fragmentation. This is coupled with a particular technological ubiquity, especially represented by tablets, smartphones and Internet networks.

Formatting by episodes would also operate as a *device of seduction*. In this case, articulated to an open structure, the long duration would allow the plot to become confused with life, which would be made explicit by the communication between reader and author of the old *feuilletons* or between viewers and artists of the electronic media (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 1997). In addition, the sequence is constituted by the instauration of suspense through problematic situations at the end of each episode, inciting the accompaniment of the outcome. Redundancy is also among the seduction devices in telenovelas, allowing the “newcomer” to understand the plot at any point in the sequence. The very repetition of the melodramatic structure would facilitate the delayed or intermittent approach. The interpellation would also make possible a certain inclination towards narration (*telling to*), which escapes the textual format of the novel, addressing popular daily life.

At this point, we should already establish the first differentiation. Although *previews* are used, we don't notice that the redundancy device is present in such a pervasive way in the series. While there is a repetition of the typical dilemma structure and characters in each episode, the scenes do not necessarily provide intertexts relating to what has already occurred, nor does it allow for a hearing-only audience (like many broadcast TV texts). In many cases, each episode is relatively independent of the previous ones, and even the suspense between episodes is not a widely used resource for the series considered. Moreover, the greater explicitness of the fictional condition in many series makes the articulation with everyday life oblique.

## Identification Possibilities

Telenovela represents more or less what we go through in our daily lives. This is usually what happens in our lives, what we go through in our families. Indeed, in a family, nothing is perfect!

There is always the one that “pits one against the other.” So, we end up liking the plot of the telenovela. And in the series too (Lucia).

Depending on the series, we think a lot. And, when you see it, it changes and is quite different from what you think (Jussara).

The series presents more of a story; in the telenovela, it's more reality (Christian).

—Discussion group with high school students – Lomba do Pinheiro, Aug. 2019.

Moving on to “devices of recognition,” Martín-Barbero (1992) states that there was a double narrative in *feuilletons*, which we could also perceive in telenovelas: one in a progressive course of the characters' adventures; another in the opposite direction, revealing the secrets, the origins and the foundations of the injustices until the story resulted in a just situation. In the regressive *feuilletonesque* narration, the unveiling would happen slowly, in the unfolding of certain social hypocrisy or a family crime, and the dramatic blows would be articulated to the moral dilemmas, disposing of ethics in continuity to aesthetics, one more aspect to enhance the connection between narrative and life. Fear and the feeling of justice and revenge would be represented there.

In that telenovela [*The Other Side of Paradise*], it had an act of good revenge, but at the same time not, because she got her way in the end. She became the prison queen and got 15 years, if I'm not mistaken, but she got out in two or three years (Anna).

She hurt many people, man, and lost little (Laura).

But it also has the side of making a different ending, right? (William).

—Discussion group with high school students – Cruzeiro, July 2018.

When we turn to the analyzed series, a typically melodramatic character structure is not apparent. We consider an appropriation of such aspects in the course of the stories, more or less eventually. In the *Daredevil* series, which comes from the Marvel comics, one can see the most emphatic approach, with the protagonist being practically a vigilante who uses his fists. There is, in this case, even a reverse narrative, evoking the hero's family background, with which his moral choices are associated.

In *Lucifer*, the central character is configured by mobilizing an archetype associated with “evil” to shift positions and attitudes. Its visual configuration gathers legitimized signs of social success—elegant clothes, fast car, seduction ability, etc. —initially, the irony with which the protagonist operates with the (nonexoteric) characters stands out, indicating contradictions, ridicule, and social insignificance, at the same time that he presents himself as a comic subject for his gaffes, his assumed lack of moral sense, or his equivocations about trivialities. A preferred audiovisual narrative among the young high school students with whom we talked, already in the second season the characters change sensitively, going into a melodramatic regression: the demon's mother and the family conflicts in this regard appear; the irony loses expression; God, previously alluded to almost as a representative of an incoherent system, begins to gain the connotation of an unfair father; and the dramatic intensity of the lines and gestures in the scenes increases.

They took away his devilish reputation that kills and stings, does and happens. He just wants to enjoy his vacation, pick the ladies up, and drink (Samuel).

*Lucifer* is excellent! Best series! He is a demon that takes a vacation and is very cool. You start enjoying [...] It's cool, I can't explain it! Yeah, and he helps others. And the series is part crime, part romance and part drama. It's all together! And it passes feeling and makes you feel the character, you know. It is not only the guy there who will kill the other guy (Camille).

—Discussion group with high school students – Lomba do Pinheiro, Aug. 2019.

It is worth pointing out that, many times, the configuration of episodes in a series differs from that of telenovelas, for having a patent interweaving between continuity and discontinuity in the plots: the characters' adventures in each episode aired may keep relative independence from their intrigues, being the plot concerning the choices, the dilemmas, or the changes in the protagonists' lives the articulating thread of the set in the course of the seasons.

I really enjoy watching the hero series. They also have their fantasy part, but they have their dramas, the human part. And in the hero's part we manage to escape a little from reality. In the case of Daredevil, he is a blind superhero, but his other senses are much sharper, you know. And he's a lawyer and has a lot of sense of justice [...] So, I think it draws out the serious part of him, of him having his problems and having to coincide that with the part of being a vigilante, right (Richard, daytime high school student – Cruzeiro, Aug. 2018).

For the cases at hand, such imbrication emphasizes the intense agency of the subjects in the face of an uncertain, dangerous, and/or unjust world, and the capabilities they feature do not necessarily make up superpowers (even if the presentation of the character foreshadows the possibility). We want to emphasize that the narrative option seems to be to characterize roles also by weaknesses and misunderstandings.

One perceives, however, nuances in the field of action in which the dilemmas and choices of the protagonists are erected. There are those whose argument lies mostly between moral problematics, with recurrence of family and/or legal-political themes and intrigues (such as *Daredevil*, *Flash*, *Lucifer*, *Supernatural*, *Walking Dead*), and others that, while contemplating acts in this field, shed on social-identity issues or political performances (*Game of Thrones*, *Sense8*). The nuances are further diversified by the tenor of the characters' dilemmas. If, as a rule, we are not talking about figures who are sure of their choices, there are cases in which the anguishes and oscillations experienced are directed especially to the judgments of what would be correct/incorrect/unjust. At the same time, in others, the matter tends to the search for personal recognition and the individual confrontation of certain maladjustment about the context of action (of which examples would be *Grey's Anatomy* and *Sherlock*).

In these contexts, as a rule, the characters, their minority characterizations (by ethnic or gender status, etc.) and, depending on their importance in the plot, biographical details are diversified. So, as mentioned, the subjects are also presented for their weaknesses. In some cases, a character with a differentiated capacity is presented, which can even result from a diagnosed fragility, not consistently socially recognized, but whose singularity operates as a relevant resource for action. Thus, we would not deal with stable and cohesive characters in representing ethical values; artifacts tend to expose figures crossed by dilemmas and misunderstandings, as Martuccelli (2016) already pointed out.

However, there are nuances here too. Let's take some examples. In *Sherlock*, the detective recognized for his intelligence and wit gains additional psychological characteristics here, being portrayed as a rejected person, and labeled a weirdo. Watson, in contrast, portrays the circumstances of an ordinary citizen, between bills to pay and romantic endeavors. Conan Doyle's characters are overwhelmed by everyday trivialities and the quest for recognition. In *Sense8*, several protagonists of different nationalities, distinct gender and ethnic identities, and diverse abilities, with the added peculiarity of a specific sensory connection resulting in concrete mutual support. The metaphor forwards the theme of the interface between difference and equality, making the characterization of characters an artifice of narration of singularities. In *Supernatural* or *Walking Dead*, although they must make difficult decisions and equivocate, the protagonists tend to verse supposed firmness of character and moral uprightness.

It must be emphasized, in this sense, that the identification of predominances does not eliminate the interfaces between the consumptions from the categorizations we propose. The intrigues portrayed in each episode can bring melodramatic character configuration combined with an expression of reflective dilemmas of the protagonists going through their adventures (a combination of which the clearest example is perhaps the series *Lucifer*).

Furthermore, the photography options, including the vividness of lights and colors, tend to emphasize intensities in a complementary way. *Sherlock* plays out investigative police plots amidst sober colors, tending toward grayish and dark tones. A certain London obscurity is present in plots where visuality adds informational and technological elements. On the other hand, series such as *Daredevil*, *Lucifer*, *Supernatural* or *Walking Dead* invest in special effects and/or in dark and gloomy tones that, besides composing an atmosphere of danger or insecurity, associate them with the not-so-subtle mobilization of religious archetypes.

Telenovela is like some movies. You already know what's going to happen and that takes the fun out of it [...] And I don't like the Marvel movies. It's just that heroes always win, you see. Like this, I have been watching *Walking Dead*. I see the various episode. There's defeat there, there's various personage there that I liked that died. When one dies, it's tough, man! [...] But I'm a realist like that (William, night high school student – Lomba do Pinheiro, set. 2019).

Although we recognize that the audiovisual market today operates in the search and production of singular consumer niches, we outline common elements and nuances in the choices of young people in different schooling situations. In general, the analyzed series share, with varying levels of explicitness, the display of insecure, if not dangerous or chaotic, social realities in which the protagonists exercise strong agency to survive or enforce their sense of justice. A certain aesthetic of instability is expressed.

Bah, I like stories about things that happen in the world like this, like *Unsolved*. Series that things of world contexts happen and there is a turning point, you see. Like in a country where a woman gets elected president, and from there, you don't know what the power issue will be like.

(Raphael, Higher Education student – Restinga, June 2017).

The institutions that could support the characters are absent or insufficient, so that the subjects tend to compensate for them through their individual acts or in small collectives. In this sense, some cases evoke family and the legal-police system as support; in others, it is friends and colleagues only. Some highlight moral dilemmas in the face of everyday instability; others, agencies in the face of an oppressive social-political

system to ensure the expression of difference and uniqueness. Some carry *feuilletonnesque* elements; others tend toward an individualized content of ironic and psychologized narratives, with the world as a backdrop. However, in general, plots tend to position the characters based on their trajectories, so that even the villain appears as an antagonist, not as a simple expression of the “evil to be fought.”

Finally, we consider that we are dealing with diverse and mixed reflexive tendencies, which are sometimes directed towards moral and ethical urgencies (including the mobilization of religious archetypes), and sometimes are permeated by political and identity deambulations in a more specific way, even though there are interpenetrations between the propensities. If, for the sample under analysis, we noticed a more regular adherence of people with less education to the first type of argument and, in another way, adherence to the second among those who were in higher education, we must also perceive the meanings of instability and singularization that permeate the narratives consumed in both cases.

We suggest, finally, that devices of recognition with a reflexive and singularist content are configured: all the characters have itineraries to consider, a past that bequeaths problems and injustices from their relationship with a diffuse and/or diaphanous “system” or in the face of specific power relations (with parents, with the police, etc.) that are iniquitous. Moreover, in most cases, the use of a regressive vector unveiling the injustice, the network of intrigues, and the judgment of the villain is not so much used; instead, the unraveling of the self is processed in a reflexive progression. Thus, social identity is not narrated by the discovery of affiliations necessarily, but by facing adversities.

## Sayings and Silences: Intertexts between Narratives and Contexts

In the above excerpts of testimonies, we have tried to restrict recurring elements in the relationship with the narratives. First, higher education students indicated advantages of technological ubiquity and narrative fragmentation, as they said they watched episodes between their daily commitments. It is worth noting that the specialized courses took place in the evening and the students in these were the ones who most indicated that they were working at the time of the consultation. However, there were also nuanced dispositions to plot interpretation, with preference given to those that incorporated contextual readings of a political, identity, or global nature.

Suppose we contrast what they said about telenovelas and series. In that case, it is possible to identify that the former refers to the everyday life and moral conflicts, indicating a clear expectation of justice at the end of the plot; the latter are reported to contain a fictional condition or fantasy story, which scripts would allow for more innovation and diversification. The characters in the series also bring everyday problems and a sense of justice. However, the figurative dynamics do not center on family relationships or, more generally, on the restitution of social ties (with close ones, as a rule). It tends to project the protagonists’ actions into a broader societal setting, with an individualized and agonistic narrative emphasis, with the support of close relational networks being a mainstay. So, it is worth noting that the quotes refer to notions of “realism” for both types of artifacts as if they informed distinctly experienced realities.

Thus, let’s return to some quantitative data, now on the support networks and challenges emphasized by the young people. Family members were the most important when asked about support for routine and/or difficult situations (multiple choice). Still, the percentage and order of prioritization changed according to the level of education attained. If, among those who attended elementary school, family members (91%), God (34.4%), classmates (31%), and friends (25%) were mentioned the most, among those who attended higher education, family members (97.2%), friends (62%), classmates (46.6%), and God (21.3%) were mentioned the

most. As for the challenges considered most relevant in the trajectories, we had the predominance of finishing school (which may be the effect of the place where the questionnaires were applied), but with the following variation: for elementary school, finishing school (74%), loss of loved ones (43.8%), love relationships (37.5%), and violence on the streets (31.3%); and for higher education, finishing school (55.6%), getting a stable job (48.1%), maintaining a love relationship (33.3%), and violence on the streets (26.9%).

These are nuances between fairly strict relational networks. For those in higher education, the challenges and support networks mentioned suggest more extrafamily experiences and, then, the projection of independence through work. Thus, the education-work relationship seems to set an inflection towards individual responsibility for the itinerary more clearly among young people and young-adults. We might first ponder what Lopes (2012) calls the school effect of a “socialization by anticipation.” We noticed that having cumulative success in school nuanced the statements regarding the expectations that the institution projects: often the first to reach higher education in their families, our interlocutors were able to give meaning to schooling concerning the future and, then, in the reading of the occupational scenario that would welcome them.

It is known that people with a college education tend to obtain comparatively better occupations and be better paid. On the other hand, it is also notorious that unemployment and informality rates particularly plague young people in the Brazilian labor market (IBGE, 2019). Added to this is the reality of juvenile employment routines, tending to the intensification of rhythms and flexibility of bonds (CORROCHANO, 2016). Regarding work trajectories, the association with schooling indicated that people attending high school or college could get “administrative jobs,” the latter including technical level activities. However, in general, the itineraries were permeated by informal or precarious formal occupations, in several intermittent and costly insertions, not infrequently versed in individualized performances.

At the interface of the data we mentioned is the experience of individuals who, even in embodying institutional expectations, find themselves associated with inconsistent action spaces, supported by close relational networks. We think that there lies an aesthetic harmony between the individuation produced by the actors (accompanied by their schooling) and the consumption and cultural sharing of series. At this point, we realize that, if aspects of identification with the characters are not always made explicit, we deduce that the dilemmatic, agentic and singular condition of the “heroes” may be the fulcrum in this sense.

## Final Considerations

We seek to establish the analysis of the relationship between access to audiovisual artifacts and individuation processes, especially concerning the experience of the “proof of self.” By taking challenges and consistencies faced by individuals as a heuristic vector, we consider the fruition of narratives as indicative of the tensions between social actors and contexts of action. To this end, we started with a descriptive survey that indicated an increase in the consumption of series in positive correlation with the schooling of our interlocutors. We observed that, despite possible dispositional differences concerning the dominance of cultural capital, the relationship with characters and plots pointed to a preference for figurations of agonistic and reflexive tenor, set in unjust and/or uncertain scenarios.

One can deduce symbols of success, firmness, astuteness, and overcoming, but also the option for characters with peculiar fragilities to be recognized and that become, paradoxically or not, part of their powers in dealing with an unfair, oppressive, or at least insecure world (or one that does not “include,” welcome, or

satisfy them). Thus, as far as the discussion about the appropriations of the narratives of the series can offer us, the individuation of these young people seems to be crossed by appeals to singularization, while emphasizing the need for (individual) agency in adverse contexts.

If it is possible that young people feel in the series a celebration of hyper-actors connected to their urban contexts, we perceive there particularly the interpellation of the “singular,” either by recognition of difference, or by the distinctiveness outlined in journeys of trials. By imbricating melodramatic weaves and reflective characters to varying degrees, the series seems to provide an aesthetic appropriation that we can refer to the agentic individuation. The *feuilletonique* narrative configuration, in its affective-relational emphases and everyday moral intrigues, seems to dialogue with Latin American sociality. On the other hand, it is worth considering that the aestheticization produced in the series watched, among intensified plots, character peculiarities, and photographic effects, potentiates senses to the singular via reflexivity and fictionalization (more acute than in telenovelas).

Then perhaps we should consider the consumption of series as artifices that put the experiences into perspective, configuring oblique symbolic supports for self-testing, given that individuals do not always verbalize at all what instigates them in their fruition. We can evoke, in complement, a thesis by Martín-Barbero (2017). In fragmented urbanities, where the stay and the enjoyment of the city space are obliterated in favor of production and flows, the connection with social media becomes an expression of the link with the public space. Thus, one has to consider the importance of technological ubiquity and the possibility of navigation in social circuits overwhelmed by labor and study; also discuss what is meant by the common aesthetics of instability and agency with narratives.

The relationship between schooling and the consumption of audiovisual narratives, even if it is associated with the domain of cultural capital, is constituted before individual experiences erected in times of modernity-world and from experiences of contextual inconsistency. In these terms, the school institution would collaborate to deflect consumption and the traditional social domination exercised by the media. However, it does not seem to affect the extent of its power in the profusion of metonymic discourses of accountability (MARTUCCELLI, 2007). Having to respond individually *to what is going on*, when associated with stoic and singularist versions, can figure a dignified imperative for existential recognition and result in a plausible mode of action for the interpretation of everyday life.

## Notas

1. In the limits of this article, it will not be possible to go into such contextual aspects in depth. However, we can cite as recognized references in the fields of social sciences and education, for example: Castells (2013); Dubet and Martuccelli (1996); Leão and Carrano (2013).
2. The population consulted is distributed among young-adolescents (15 to 17 years old – 52%), youth (18 to 24 years old – 29%), young-adults (25 to 29 years old – 13%), and adults (6%). Females accounted for 58% of the observations, and for the self-declaration of color we had 47.6% whites and 52.4% blacks (black and brown). Among those who indicated family income (393 obs.), 62.5% indicated up to two minimum wages, 28% registered between two and five minimum wages, and 9.5% more than five minimum wages. Analyses were performed with the *software* SPSS.
3. They were: *Supernatural*, *Flash*, *Daredevil*, *Lucifer*, *Walking Dead*, *Sherlock*, *Gray Anatomy*, *Game of Thrones*, *Sense8* (about ten episodes each). We also watched chapters of the telenovelas *The Other Side of Paradise* and the movies *Fast and Furious* and *Hunger Games* for contrast purposes.
4. National Program for Integration of Basic and Professional Education in Youth and Adult Education (Ministry of Education).

5. We observed oscillation for consumption of series, the focus of this study, also in the intersections with household income and age. However, they were less expressive and did not indicate correlation in the chi-square test, as was the case with schooling ( $\alpha$  0.05). Thus, within the limits of this writing, we chose to deepen the analysis of the latter, which is also congruent with research in the area (BOURDIEU, 2008; KUBOTA, 2016; SETTON, 2004; SOUTO, 2016).
6. The percentage of citations for those who attended elementary school was, in contrast, about 30%.
7. These are: “family relationships” (42%), “love relationships” (35%), “sports” (33.8%), “music” (30%), “friendship relationships” (29%), “study subjects” (28%), as well as “parties,” “series,” “movies” and “telenovelas,” all between 20 and 30%.
8. It is worth noting that, also inscribed in the sociology of individuals, Lahire (2006) already indicated the need to consider the diversity of individual cultural consumption, at the risk of taking general propensities as strict segmentations by class and/or according to the cultural legitimacy attributed to the artifacts. In this regard, the author tries to explain and discuss what we could consider dissonances in the socialization processes of individuals in differentiated societies. Without disregarding it, we will try to highlight, however, the experiences alluded to by the plots and their potential articulation with social challenges and consistencies faced by young students.
9. The names used in the quotations throughout the text are fictitious.
10. Here we refer to Marvel Comics, an American comic book publisher that is part of the Marvel Entertainment Group, which in turn is a subsidiary of the Walt Disney Company. The publisher is known to the consuming public because of numerous characters (Spider-Man, Captain America, Iron Man, among others), which have been highly visible in the world entertainment market in the last decade, through movie franchises with high box office earnings (hundreds of millions, as a rule). See, for example: <https://gauchazh.clicrbs.com.br/cultura-e-lazer/cinema/noticia/2021/09/universo-cinematografico-da-marvel-ja-soma-26-filmes-confira-o-ranking-do-pior-ao-melhor-cktozq44800d1013bfwj3u9bw.html>.
11. By means of clarification, it is worth mentioning that the “agentic condition” referred to in the relationship between young interlocutors and characters in the analyzed narratives alludes to the conventional sociological debate of the interaction between social structures and actors’ agency, but in light of Martuccelli’s (2007, 2010a) propositions. Thus, it means referring to the margins of action of individuals in the face of sociohistorical constraints, on the threshold between *modus operandi* and circumstantial inventiveness, but with attention to the possibility of individuals acting otherwise (*agir autrement*), which seems to us aesthetically intensified in the fluency of events narrated in series.

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## About the Author

LEANDRO R. PINHEIRO is an associate professor at the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) and is part of the teaching staff of the Graduate Program in Education at the same university. He has a degree in Social Sciences from the Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul (PUCRS) and a PhD in Education from the Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos (UNISINOS), with an internship at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. He has research experience in the areas of sociology of youth and sociology of education, emphasizing cultural practices, individuation processes, and experiences of education among young people from urban peripheries.

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