

The discursive construction of class taste in soap opera: enunciation and mediatization of semiprecious jewelry consumption in *Império*¹

A construção discursiva do gosto de classe na telenovela: enunciação e midiatisação do consumo de semijoias em *Império*

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Abstract *Based on the concept of mediatization (COULDRY; HEPP, 2013), this article discusses aspects of the production of meaning of class taste through discourse analysis of the soap opera Império (Empire) (Globo, 2014). The study, based on the enunciation of a “class ring,” shows an opposition between luxury taste and popular taste as a class difference, and the production of meaning of consumption of tangible and intangible products by popular classes. The discussion was based on studies by Bakhtin and Volochinov (2002), Bourdieu (1983, 2008), Fiorin (1997, 2005), Maingueneau (2008), Landowski (1997) and Lipovetsky (2009).*

Key words: *Soap opera; taste; social class; mediatization; consumption*

Resumo *Com base no conceito de midiatisação (COULDRY e HEPP, 2013), o artigo discute aspectos da produção de sentido do gosto de classe por meio da análise do discurso da telenovela Império (Globo, 2014-2015). O estudo baseado na enunciação sobre um “anel de formatura” mostra ao mesmo tempo a oposição*

¹ Soap opera written by Aguinaldo Silvia, directed by Rogério Gomes and shown on Rede Globo at 9:00 pm, from July 21, 2014 to March 13, 2015.

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entre gosto de luxo e gosto popular como diferença de classe e a produção de sentido de consumo de produtos tangíveis e intangíveis pelas classes populares. A discussão foi baseada em estudos de Bakhtin e Voloshinov (2002), Bourdieu (1983, 2008), Fiorin (1997, 2005, 2008), Maingueneau (2008) e Landowski (1997) e Lipovetsky (2009).

Palavras-chave: *Telenovela; gosto; classe social; midiaticização; consumo*

Introduction

This article is a brief analysis inserted in the list of studies on soap opera and consumption developed in Brazil that have been characterized by the interdisciplinary approach of comprehensive issues related to material and symbolic consumption of/in TV fictions. An aspect which already has been thoroughly research, addressing the study of fictional television language and its representations to the material and symbolic ramifications integrated into practices, uses (CERTEAU, 2007) and reception, going through issues that intertwine and become complex in communication (HALL, 2003).

In this article, we discuss some aspects of the production of meaning of class taste by studying the discourses of a scene from the soap opera *Império* (*Empire*) (Globo, 2014-2015). The concept of mediatisation (COULDRY; HEPP, 2013) and taste are starting points. The study focuses on the enunciation by some characters about the “class ring” object which makes it possible to observe not only the opposition between luxury taste and popular taste as class differentiators, but also the meaning of inclusion and exclusion in the consumption of tangible and intangible goods by popular classes. In addition to the authors mentioned above, Bourdieu (1983, 2008), Fiorin (1997, 2005), Maingueneau (2008), Landowski (1997) and Lipovetsky (2009) constitute the main theoretical references for this study.

Although the focus of our analysis is the production of meanings of consumption through discourses broadcast in a soap opera and is located in what is conventionally called the production center, the importance of reception research regarding consumer studies of Brazilian soap operas should be emphasized.⁴ One aspect of these works is interests the objectives of this article, since it is characterized by discussion and

⁴ It was highlighted among such researches: *Vivendo com a telenovela: mediações, recepção, teleficionalidades* (Living with a soap opera: mediations, reception, television fictionality) (LOPES; BORELLI; RESENDE, 2002), *Telenovela nas relações comunicação e consumo: diálogos Brasil e Portugal* (Soap opera in communication and consumption relations: Brazil and Portugal dialogues) (TONDATO; BACCEGA, 2013), *O tecer das emoções Femininas em Vila Pouca do Campo: A telenovela Senhora do Destino* (The weaving of the female emotions in Vila Pouca do Campo: The lady of destiny soap opera) (TRANQUILIN-SILVA, 2006)

ARTICLE

analysis of the correlation between the practices of material and symbolic consumption as an integral part of the constitution of citizenship in contemporary society permeated by communication (CANCLINI, 2008). In this sense, along with Canclini (2008) and Baccega and Orofino (2013), consumption is understood in this article from an approach that sees “consumption practices as cultural practices.” (OROFINO, 2013, p. 67). In conjunction with binomial consumption and citizenship, Tondato (2010) points out, joining Canclini’s (2008) thoughts, that currently:

Being a citizen includes exercising the right of symbolic and cultural consumption, defining material consumption. It is through symbolic consumption that the individual-subject dialogues with the society of its time, informing its interlocutors about its identity, its habits, positioning itself in the world. (TONDATO, 2010, p. 6)

More specifically, we are dedicated to understanding the meanings produced from the enunciation and discourses of characters of the soap opera *Império* from the social and symbolic uses of a consumer product: a class ring.

In this context, it is worthwhile highlighting some aspects of research that studied the relationship between soap operas and the consumption of material and symbolic goods. The book *Soap opera, consumo e gênero: muitas mais coisas* (*Soap operas, consumption and gender: many more things*) (ALMEIDA, 2005) is very important to the discussions outlined in this article. In the book, the author reports reception research that was held with residents of Montes Claros, Minas Gerais, for the soap opera *O Rei do Gado* (*King of Cattle*) (Globo, 1996-1997). Among other results, her work shows the importance of the plot for material and symbolic consumption practices of the interviewees who were based on the soap opera when purchasing and using clothing, accessories, furniture and decorative objects. According to the author, in addition to being a product showcase, the soap opera is a disseminator of lifestyle. In this sense, it is more incisive than advertising during commercial breaks since the products used in the soap opera gain more of viewers’ time and attention.

Another work that deals more directly with many facets of the relationship between soap operas and the consumption of material and symbolic goods—from the perspective of the displacement of the old approaches that put consumption as a consequence only of economic rationality (CANCLINI, 2008, p. 60-66)—is the book edited by Orofino and Baccega, *Consumindo e vivendo a vida: soap opera, consumo e seus discursos* (*Consuming and living life: soap opera, consumption and its discourses*). The work offers a wide overview of researches that consider consumption practices, among which is the consumption of soap opera, from an approach that points

toward the politicization and reflexivity previously refused by theories of society and culture, which, even in their critical trends, considered consumer as a subject determined by purely economic, commercial and instrumental rationality (OROFINO; BACCEGA, 2013, p. 7).

For Hamburger (1998), among other things, soap operas disseminate throughout the country the glamorous world of consumption of the urban middle classes, through the acquisition and use of the latest releases in electronics, decoration and clothing by the characters of the stories. Tondato (2011), in turn, analyzes the blog *Sonhos de Luciana* (*Luciana's Dreams*) of the character who has the same name in *Viver a Vida* (*Seize the Day*) (Globo, 2009-2010), and discusses the role of the soap opera in promoting and disseminating new styles and ways of life showing “differentiated daily practices and technological innovation, promoting desires, increasing sensitivity to new expectations of consumption” (TONDATO, 2011, p.12). In another text, Tondato (2012) analyzes the issue of social differences through the study of eating styles of families in the soap opera *Fina Estampa* (*Looks & Essence*) (Globo, 2011-2012).

Focusing more directly on the empirical object of this article, in the soap opera *Império* (Globo, 2014- 2015), by Aguinaldo Silva, it was found that its main narrative arc is built around a family who owns the jewelry shop *Império*. José Alfredo Medeiros, patriarch of the family, controls

the company with the help of his three children and wife, with whom he maintains a marriage to keep up appearances. The family often argues due to family disputes over money and power. The family discord intensifies with the arrival of a new heiress, Cristina, who will be recognized by José Alfredo Medeiros as his daughter and heiress of his fortune. The structure of the soap opera's plot around the family jewelry allowed the semiprecious jewelry brand Rommanel⁵ to merchandise their goods, as it will be dealt later.

Thus, this article seeks to investigate aspects of the taste and value meanings produced by discursive and narrative construction for the semiprecious jewelry in order to reflect on the mediatization process. For this, discourses on class taste will be analyzed based on some specific parts of the plot, focusing on the characters Maria Clara (Andrea Horta), José Alfredo de Medeiros's daughter (Alexandre Nero) and *Império's* designer, and Cristina (Leandra Leal), José Alfredo Medeiros's illegitimate daughter, who over the course of the story takes over the company.

Mediatization

In a broad way, "mediatization is a concept used to analyze critically the interrelation between changes in media and communications on the one hand, and changes in culture and society on the other" (COULDRY; HEPP, 2013, p. 197). This concept becomes important for the given discussion, since the soap opera plays a key role in building Brazilian social imagery, including in relation to the meaning of social classes and consumption (LOPES, 2009) of tangible and intangible goods.

Referring to consumption specifically, Almeida (2003) states that the soap opera can be a showcase not only for products, but also for lifestyles associated with goods. For the author, soap operas work similarly to television advertisements, with the advantage of having more time and space to include consumption. They not only show the viewer/

⁵ According to the company's website, Rommanel manufactures 18k gold-plated, Rhodium-plated and steel jewelry. The brand has stores throughout Brazil and resellers work. Available at: <http://www.rommanel.com.br/>. Accessed on 02/05/2015.

consumer a long story, but they familiarize “the viewer with diverse worlds, several lifestyles and conceptions that are used by advertising to promote goods and services” (ALMEIDA, 2003, p. 42). In addition to demonstrating didactically the use of certain goods, soap opera allows an identification between the product and its ideal user. However, it is worthwhile to highlight, based on Certeau (2007, p. 93), that the relationship established between the products present in soap operas and the viewers has not only an economic aspect, but it is “like the repertoire with which users carry out their own operations,” indicating that consumption implies more complex operations that reveal not only economic, but social and cultural issues. Similarly, Bourdieu (2008, p. 95) states that “the consumption of goods assumes – without a doubt, always and in different degrees according to the goods and consumers – a work of appropriation,” which “contributes to produce the product he consumes through identification and decoding.”

For Canclini (2008, p. 42), the appropriation of consumption stands out for consumer participation, since “when consuming one also thinks, chooses and reworks social meaning” – and “it is necessary to analyze how this appropriation area of goods and signs intervene in more active forms of participation than those who usually receive the label of consumption.”

Sodré (2014, p. 109) states that mediatization is a descriptive concept “of a process of qualitative changes in terms of social setting as a result of the articulation between electronic technology and human life.” The author emphasizes this concept “for supporting the hypothesis of a socio-cultural mutation centered on the current functioning of communication technologies” (SODRÉ, 2014, p. 109).

Trindade and Perez (2014) discuss mediatization in relation to media presence in the creation of habits and consumer attitudes as well as in the construction of links of meanings between the expressions of the brand/products/services and its consumers. Studies of mediatized consumption “seek to understand the ways of presence and consequences of the actions of the advertising system (via companies’ brands, products

and services)” (TRINDADE; PEREZ, 2014, p. 3). Focusing more specifically on the advertising system, the authors state that the communication of brands through this system generates practices and cultural references of consumption. Thus, from a communication perspective the ritual of consumption is perceived “as a mechanism that articulates the meanings of products/brands in people’s lives, so that the presence of the advertising system is constitutive in this consumer relationship” (TRINDADE; PEREZ, 2014, p. 05.). Considering the soap opera as part of the advertising system, an integral part of the mediatization of consumption context, it is possible to argue that among the meanings produced by the soap opera there are those constitutively related to consumption practices, knowledge and use of consumer and cultural goods.

Class taste and values

Taste in this text is treated in a social and symbolic perspective, as considered by Bourdieu (2008) and Fiorin (1997). Taste, in the theorists’ view, is not a natural property of human beings, but a faculty shaped by sociocultural context, full of meanings that are linked to the identities of social beings and the objects to which it refers.

For Bourdieu (1983), taste is formed according to the access that different social classes have to cultural capital. These distinctions form varied lifestyles, in which tastes are configured and manifested by body dispositions, behavior and consumer goods. These latter items range from the most basic, such as food and clothing, to the most complex, such as the cultural consumption of art works. But despite inequalities, Bourdieu explains that there is an ideology of natural taste dictated by the ruling class, which conceals social contexts that affect material lifestyles.

The most fundamental social differences would be able to undoubtedly be expressed in a small symbolic device reduced to four or five elements, such as Pernod, sparkling wine, mineral water, Bordeaux, champagne, whiskey, about as completely as through expressive systems apparently

more complex and refined than the worlds of music and painting offer to the concern of distinction. (BOURDIEU, 1983, p. 84).

For Bourdieu (2008, p. 97), “the unifying and generating principle” of such practices can be found in the “class *habitus*, as an embodied form of class condition and the constraints that it imposes.” Still, according to Bourdieu (2008), the taste of popular classes would be related to a more immediate need, the body, while the upper classes would be dissociated from such urgency. When it comes to art, for example, the sociologist explains that popular taste sees aesthetics itself separated from function, clear content – different from the aesthetics of the upper classes, who have more contact with cultural capital that is considered legitimate. The tendency of the popular class is to associate art with its own life, without a distinction between form and content. “Be it at the theater or the cinema, the popular audience has fun with the oriented intrigues, from a logical and chronological point of view, for a happy end” (BOURDIEU, 2008, p. 35).

Fiorin (1997), in discussion based on Bourdieu’s perspective, adds a semiotic point of view to the issue. According to the author, taste is like a skill that makes the distinct indistinct, “which means that it exists for the relation, in and for the difference” (FIORIN, 1997, p. 15). In accordance with the theorist, the subject acquires a relational definition with the object, called modal existence, characterized, for example, by one wanting to be combined with the object and one not wanting to be compared to the others’ taste.

Fiorin states that in its most abstract form taste is the establishment of discontinuity in continuity, difference in undifferentiation. “What was distinguished is overdetermined by euphoria, while continuous, undifferentiated is seen as dysphoric” (FIORIN, 1997, p. 15). The basic semantic category would be exclusivity versus inclusivity.

In this line of reasoning, Fiorin also points out ideological and social issues related to taste, in accord with what Bourdieu (2008) discusses about legitimate taste.

The dominant taste becomes good taste and therefore serves as a standard for the future, becoming a must do. So if the taste in sense 1 (preference) is of the want-to-do order, the taste in sense 2 (ability to discern beauty and defects in the spirit of products) is of the must-do domain. Who does not conform to this must-do is sanctioned: it is tacky. One likes what is needed to be liked. (FIORIN, 1997, p. 22).

In other words, the production of meanings related to good and bad taste in the soap opera is translated by reflection and refraction related not only to objects in the film's enunciation, but mainly through the discourses that make them ideologically perceptible as full of value in the context of enunciation. It should be remembered, in this sense, the discussion of Bakhtin and Volochinov (2002, p. 32) on the ideological evaluation that constitutes of the sign, because "a sign does not exist only as part of a reality; it also reflects and refracts another one. It can distort this reality, be faithful to it, or understand it from a specific point of view, etc. Every sign is subject to ideological evaluation."

The words of Appadurai (2008, p. 56) must be considered, who proposes, when addressing luxury goods, that one considers "luxury goods as not exactly in contrast to the needs (a contrast full of problems) but as goods that are mainly *rhetorically* and *socially* used, goods that are simply *materialized symbols*."

In case study proposed by this article, it is still valid to remember Bourdieu's statement (2008, p. 54) in relation to esthetic dispositions,

which tend to put the nature and function of the object represented aside, besides deleting any "naive" reaction, in other words, horror before the horrible, desire before the desirable, godly reverence before the sacred, as well as all purely ethical responses to take into account only the representation mode, style perceived and appreciated by comparison with other styles – it is a dimension of the global relationship with the world and with others, of a lifestyle, in which the effects of particular conditions of existence are expressed in an unknowable way (BOURDIEU, 2008, p. 54).

Taking into account the purpose of this study, it is still important clarify that the scene of enunciation (MAINGUENEAU, 2008), considered

in the *corpus*, appears as the space in which the subjects of enunciation are established through discursivization; in other words, “the creator mechanism of person, space and time of enunciation” (FIORIN, 2005, p. 43). By speaking, the individual not only establishes herself as an enunciator, but also as the space (through adverbs) and time (through the tenses) of the enunciation act. Relying on Greimas (in FIORIN, 2005, p. 42), it is possible to say that the subject in the act of enunciation “builds the world as an object while it builds itself.”

Still in relation to enunciation, for Bakhtin and Volochinov (2002), the appropriation of language by the subject occurs through a semiotic understanding that is socially constituted, since every utterance builds itself directed and is conditioned by two forces that act on the individual and the social. Thus, for Bakhtin and Volochinov, “the individual enunciation cannot be dissociated from the social and historical context in which it is inserted or with dialogues in a constitutive and interpretive way” (MUNGIOLI, 2009, p. 592). It is through enunciation (i.e., discourse’s concreteness) that it is possible to observe that “different social classes are served by only one and the same language. Consequently, in every ideological sign contradictory value indices are confronted. The sign becomes the arena where class struggle develops.” (BAKHTIN & VOLOCHINOV, 2002, p. 46).

Landowski (1997) discusses the idea of taste not only between subject and object, but also between subject and subject. For him, there is an object and subject taste. In the latter, there is taste to please someone. The pleasure can be achieved due to the object taste of whom she wants to please, because these objects are part of the composition of the subject’s identity, which ends up becoming the object of the other’s taste.

Thus, there is belonging to social class groups, as shown by Bourdieu (2008), through access to distinct cultural capital that shapes behaviors, lifestyles and diverse tastes. In this sense, the objects “speak” of this belonging to a group.

Still, the taste referring to these objects can undergo changes so that belonging to a reference group is maintained. Landowski (1997)

explains that certain taste inconstancy, especially to follow certain fashions, is common and configured in what he calls “to look and to be,” or the main and underlying program. The underlying program encompasses changes in preferences and choices for the individual to keep coherence with what she wants to be, to the main program, where her group of belonging lies.

***Império*, semiprecious jewelry and taste**

The discussion undertaken in this work regarding the meaning construction of “good” and “bad” taste in the soap opera *Império* is structured around the discourses of Maria Clara, and some of her family members, and Cristina, in the scene broadcast on December 31, 2014. The scene was broadcast days after Rommanel’s greater merchandising actions in the soap opera, which were launched at a cocktail party of the collection designed by Maria Clara. This is a semiprecious jewelry collection, called Rommanel *Império*, which was launched in the real market.

In other actions of the brand, characters appear using Rommanel rings, earrings and necklaces, like Maria Clara, Amanda (Adriana Birolli), Juliane (Cris Vianna), Érika (Letícia Birkheur), Danielle (Maria Ribeiro), Du (Josie Pessoa) and Bianca (Juliana Boller). It is important to note that these characters are part of both the rich and the popular core of the story.

In the scene transcribed below, Cristina, a girl from a poor background who worked in a vendor market, named by her father – who simulates his own – is in charge of the company. Cristina is not accepted by the José Alfredo Medeiros’s wife and legitimate heirs. They do not wish to divide the inheritance with the illegitimate daughter, who appears in their lives once she becomes an adult.

To enter this new family, Cristina goes through a style change to please other subjects and to suit her new social place: executive of an important company of precious stones and jewelry, a fact that does not go unnoticed by Maria Marta as will be seen later in a passage selected for analysis. In this passage, Maria Clara and José Pedro also refer to

loyal customers, the “A” class, the market niche. That is, circles to which they belong.

Because, after all, whether the reference group is identified with a certain professional environment, or elsewhere, with a particular social group, or is defined, as a common rule in terms of generation affinity, what resources do their respective members have to express in a simple, clear and continuous way, their preference for the groups mentioned, apart from the adoption of conducts that show, emphatically if necessary, that the valuation principles they use to define their personal position in various matters, in each moment coincides with the ones that “everyone” considers more suitable in the regarded community (LANDOWSKI, 1997, p. 106).

At the time, the Império company faces a major financial crisis and the solution found by Cristina involves a change in relation to the products produced and sold by the jewelry shop, which in turn will mean a change of the brand’s customers. Her proposal is that the jewelry shop should start producing and selling class rings and jewelry for men. Maria Clara and her brother José Pedro (Caio Blat) – the two most active children in the company who see the presence of Cristina, in charge of the Império, as a theft of their rights as legitimate inheritors– resent the proposal, because these products are not part of the company’s proposal. The class rings are considered “popular,” and therefore would not meet the prestige gained by the company over years, of its image and brand identity. Below is the transcript of the dialogue, from which some excerpts were extracted, which extended over two different scenes of a chapter.

José Pedro: Class rings? Do you think you will save Império with this weird idea?

Maria Clara: I told her that class rings are entirely out of fashion.

Maria Marta: Guys, as if she understands this, God.

Cristina: You are absolutely right, I am no expert in fashion. But I know that what was in vogue at a particular time returns. It was like this with flared trousers, checked shirts, moccasins.

Maria Clara: That little top you used to wear on the hair. . .

[Laugh]

Maria Marta: Oh, sorry, that little top that reminds one of the widow Porcina . . .

Cristina: You can mock all you want . . .

Jose Pedro: It is not mockery, Cristina. It is simply that you are out of touch. You are able to confuse a bad piece of clothing with luxury jewelry. . .

Cristina: But high luxury is not paying the bills, José Pedro. You know this better than they do. With so many people graduating each semester in this country, each time more . . . I myself will graduate soon.

Maria Clara: So, you are legislating for your own cause. No, not for this. I can recommend a very good shop where you can buy a ring.

Cristina: It is not this, Maria Clara. I am thinking of the public, and a growing public. The class ring can go back to being an object of desire. Imagine Império manufacturing a collection for these young people, a beautiful collection, prepared, with a nice advertising campaign.

Maria Marta: In short, she wants to make Império Chinese.

Maria Clara: From this to start making beads and carnival stones is a jump.

Maria Clara: I said that I disagree with your proposal because, to tell you the truth, I actually found it ridiculous. So, Cristina, do not count on me to design crap class rings or jewelry for grown man. I'm out.

Cristina: Will you refuse to do it? Is that right? Are you sure?

Maria Clara: Absolutely sure. I studied for years to make women's jewelry, charming, eternal. It is what I am specialized in. I cannot suddenly start designing with beads...

Maria Marta interferes to say that Cristina's idea is reasonable, because they are immersed in a crisis.

Jose Pedro: I do not believe you could agree with the change in Império's profile. Mom, Império has a brand. It has an established market niche, loyal clientele.

Cristina: And all this did not prevent us from falling into bankruptcy. Loyal clientele, stagnant niche, but that does not buy constantly because the cost is high.

Maria Clara: Just don't forget one thing, the crisis has not been established just because the jewels are not successful.

Cristina: What will help us now is launching more affordable, attractive and fast selling products.

Maria Clara: People, designing class rings and pendants for man is not my style.

Cristina: Maria Clara, you are being selfish and unreasonable.

Maria Clara: I do not mean to be. Cristina, it is not because my father gave you power that I will say amen to your typical ideas, of someone who does not value our place in the market. Our public is and has always been the A class, not C. If I say yes to you now, tomorrow you will have the great idea of putting my entire collection to be sold in the vendor market.

Based on the utterances above, some elements will be discussed, as the characters' speeches are constituted by ideological signs that encompass contradictory value indices. In the same way, as Barros (2011) warns, the ideological issues of the text are in the discourse. "The internal examination of the text is not enough, however, to determine the values that the discourse conveys. For this purpose, it is necessary to insert the text in the context of one or more ideological formations that assign, in the end, meaning to it" (BARROS, 2011, p. 83).

In the scene in question, there is taste opposition marked by Cristina's social belonging on the one hand, and Maria Clara, Maria Marta and José Pedro's social belonging on the other. First, it is worth highlighting

Cristina's "taste change" when she begins to work at the Império company. At the beginning of the story, while working in the vendor market, the girl was dressed in jeans, a strap shirt and a little top (mentioned in the dialogue) tied on the head. When joining the company, Cristina starts dressing according to a standard identified as executive, has loose, well-kept hair and makeup. In other words, she complies with the rules of a new social environment in order to be accepted, which corroborates Landowski's (1997) statement about the demonstrations of taste affecting conduct and behavior standards for the operations of inclusion and belonging to a group.

Thereby resuming Fiorin's (1997) relational idea when addressing the most abstract form of taste, through the basic semantic category of exclusivity (discontinuous and distinguished – euphoric) and inclusivity (continuous and undifferentiated – dysphoric), it is necessary to point out that the exclusivity is also inclusion, in the sense of belonging to social groups, and inclusivity is also exclusive, as all tastes are distinguished from an "other."

In the case considered here, it is possible to suggest that in the scene analyzed there is a fundamental opposition between luxury taste and popular taste. The first identifies with the euphoric and the second with the dysphoric. The table below shows the constitutive oppositions of the characters' discourse in the transcribed scene.

Luxury taste (Maria Clara, Maria Marta and José Pedro)	Popular taste (Cristina)
Eternal	Chinese
Luxury	Out of fashion
A Class	C Class
Loyal public	Vendor market
Fashion	Out of fashion
For a few	Chinese
Inaccessible	Accessible
Traditional	Graduation orientated

Table 1 - Basic semantic categories

Source: Prepared by the authors

First, in the case of “graduation orientated” in the right column, it is important to explain its ties with “the popular” in the text analyzed and its discord with the notion of “traditional” in relation to the concept of social class position. That is because, currently, educational ascension is no longer restricted to a few people, and therefore does not represent itself as a “distinctive expression” and cannot autonomously express a “practical affirmation of an inevitable difference” (BOURDIEU, 2008, p. 56). Inevitably associated to the prestige/social value of university graduation⁶ itself, in a society in which the idea that even the poorest⁷ can access university education, the class ring also symbolizes a rise achieved later by the less wealthy. Thus the expression “out of fashion,” used by Maria Clara, unveils her class’s sentiment in relation not only to an object, but also to people (and therefore to social class) and all social practices that still unfashionably value an object unable, in her view, to symbolize greater status and differentiation.

Moreover, in the table above, in the right/popular taste column, there is reference to the values linked to the jewelry series idea, made in large scale and at a low price, explicit in the words “chinese” and “vendor market.” And in the left/luxury taste column, there are the values of the original’s model.

As explained by Baudrillard (2006), products (also understood as culture and education) reaching the middle and lower classes are no longer the same ones the elite has access to. They are diluted. Middle- and lower-class people consume the remains of the high bourgeoisie, who have already categorized these products as “out of fashion.” The model is destined for the privileged and the (Kitsch) jewelry series is for the rest, Baudrillard explains.

But, the opposition between model and series reveals now contradictions in itself, which is exposed in the text’s discourse. Because,

⁶ The plot reinforces the great effort by the character to complete higher education, doing extra work, like selling chocolate cake, to pay tuition fees. It is important to highlight the merchandising of the institution UNIESP in the soap opera.

⁷ As an example of public policy directed to the democratization of access to higher education, the Programa Universidade para Todos (University Program for All – PROUNI) was mentioned. Available at: http://siteprouni.mec.gov.br/o_prouni.php. Access on: May 1, 2015.

as Lipovetsky (2009) explains, the original style is no longer luxury's privilege: "all products are, from now on, rethought bearing in mind a seductive appearance, the model/series opposition became blurred, it has lost its ostentatious hierarchical character" (LIPOVETSKY, 2009, p. 189). It does not mean that the extremes disappeared, the author clarifies, but they no longer show an incomparable difference.

Thus, Maria Clara, Maria Marta and José Pedro's discourse is an attempt to reassert an exclusive, luxury and differentiating position that is already ambiguous in our current consumer society. There is also contradiction in the words "traditional" and "eternal" versus "fashion" because fashion itself exposes the logic of ephemerality (LIPOVETSKY, 2009).

Similarly, the fact that Maria Clara is the designer of the new collection for Rommanel disagrees with the values that the family tries to convey in this scene. Semiprecious jewelry are not considered high luxury products *a priori*. Rommanel manufactures gold-plated and steel jewelry, which are not necessarily destined for the "A" public, nor are they so inaccessible in terms of value.

In this case, it is argued that the brand Rommanel is linked to these luxury taste values in an aspirational sense. Customers of the brand aspire to certain luxury and class desires and status, which are not necessarily part of the products in more concrete terms, but the brand's desired image. As noted previously, not only Império's core of rich characters use Rommanel's products along the soap opera, but the "popular" core characters too.

Furthermore, it should be noted that despite Cristina's discourse not being aligned to what can be identified as the brand's discourse in terms of refined taste "for a few people," her utterances play an important role in the production of meaning of popular taste valuation and the possibility of upward social mobility, materialized by the graduation and the ring. These are transformation symbols of a young lady graduated in Business Administration in a faintly-prestigious faculty – as her brother José Pedro often emphasizes – after her hard struggle. The class ring

can be interpreted as “C” class’s gateway to Império’s luxury world and a symbol of social transformation through education. It gains, thus, materiality as symbolic capital and, to some extent, as a “worship object” (BOURDIEU, 2008, p. 73). The brand Rommanel, when linking itself to the plot, begins to compose the interdiscourse market in which the aspiration of the “popular” for the luxurious is revealed, seeking to materialize itself as something different, that is, as something that is for a few people, fashionable and symbolizes the legitimacy of the desire for change in social status.

The discourse on class taste in the scene chosen disqualifies popular taste, considers it as out of fashion and reaffirms high-class taste as legitimate and universal. Cristina says she does not understand anything about fashion but she does understand the company is failing and needs quick profits. Thus, her discourse is not stated on the same pillars of her interlocutors, revealing, in a certain way, her not belonging to their universe in terms of values and consumption and, therefore, their social class. Her discourse is intended to be articulated through the objectivity of the balance sheet of the company, which is dire. From a taste point of view, her arguments reaffirm the discourse of her sibling and Maria Marta. Unlike her, in the passage analyzed, although they are presented as arrogant during the soap opera narrative, Maria Clara, José Pedro and Maria Marta have not had their tastes denied but reaffirmed as values that identify Império’s image. Only Maria Marta seems to be more attentive to Cristina’s arguments, doing so only because she takes them into account from a financial point of view.

Good legitimate taste is still considered luxury, A-class taste. However, it is penetrated by new logics of the popular, affordability, semiprecious jewelry and class rings. And, in a certain way, by Cristina’s trajectory as a go-getter who built xxxxxx through her own efforts and with exceptional willpower, as constantly stated during the soap opera, emphasizing her “individual path” (BOURDIEU, 2008, p. 104). Discourse about the market, advertising, consumption and individualism are glimpsed as characteristics of upward mobility. This is in line with

what Lipovestky (2009, p. 184) claims about the consumer society: “[T]he society centered on the expansion of needs is, first of all, the one that reorders production and mass consumption under the law of *obsolescence*, *seduction* and *diversification*, the one that passes the economic to the orbit of fashion.”

The discourse of the scene analyzed reaffirms the individuality and subjectivism aimed at personal satisfaction in consumer desires, which shows the connection between the logic of capital and media representations of consumption and social class, an aspect that had already been seen in Campbell’s work *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (2001).

Final considerations

The article focused on the study of aspects of the production of meaning of class taste through discourses of the soap opera *Império*. Through the discourse analysis of a scene, it was possible to see the elements in utterances that compose the discursive plot through which it becomes possible to observe the social construction of ideological signs (BAKH-TIN & VOLOCHINOV, 2002) and their refraction in relation to social classes in regard to taste (both “good” and “bad”). The study of the characters’ enunciation in the object “class ring” object led to the observation of the opposition between luxury taste (good taste) and “popular” taste (bad taste). The soap opera discourse reaffirmed the luxury taste of the ruling class as legitimate and universal. However, it is observed xxxxx, although it was mixed with popular values. This is a matter of market, social mobility and individual consumption discourse in our society. This is the context in which media discourse and tastes are anchored, as the mediatization of consumption occurs, established by the construction of links of meaning that make consumer habits and attitudes possible in the expressions of brand/products/services and their consumers.

Thus, based on the enunciation and its interdiscursive possibilities, discourse analysis is, thus, effective for a study that seeks conjunction between social/ideological aspects and media texts. As part of a certain

historical and social situation, media texts can reproduce existing hegemonic discourses but also transform them as, at the same time, the media and their cultural products – and more specifically the soap opera here – participate in a daily dynamic, where signs are constantly reframed. Such reproduction and transformation are perceived by the verb-visual composition of discursive enunciations analyzed in this work.

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