

Daytime Divas:
Excavating Queerness On Argentinean Television And Film

BY

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THESIS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Research Inquiries: Advancing Rights and Debates.....	2
1.2 Methodology: The Study of Media and Gender.....	7
1.3 Situating Queer/Queerness.....	9
1.4 Literature Review.....	18
1.5 The Project.....	24
2. RESIGNIFYING QUEERNESS: QUEER PERFORMANCES AND THE (DE)MASKING OF GIRLCULTURE.....	30
2.1 Methodology: (Re)reading Adaptation.....	34
2.2 The Masking of Queer Fantasies in Children-Themed Films.....	36
2.3 Remaking Family Entertainment.....	43
2.4 The Contradictions in Review Narratives.....	47
2.5 Textual and Visual Narratives.....	59
2.6 Narratives of Adaptation.....	67
2.7 (Dis)Continuities Among Narrative Structures.....	78
2.8 Miss Tacuarembó and the Musical.....	92
3. CONSUMING FEMININITIES: CONSUMERISM OVER FAMILIAL DUTIES ON FILM AND TELEVISION.....	110
3.1 Refritos: Securing and Defining Audiences.....	111
3.2 Melodramatic Paradigms: The Telenovela and its Form.....	113
3.3 Globo and SBT, the Exclusion-Inclusion of Lower-Working Classes.....	120
3.4 Of Origins and Models.....	126
3.5 Of Remakes and Dreams.....	136
3.6 Setting and Characterization: Locating the Consumer-Viewer.....	138
3.7 Milla as the Model of Middle Class Behavior.....	143
3.8 Conclusion.....	147
4. UNLIKELY QUEER DIVAS: THE GRANNY AND THE TRANS-STAR.....	149
4.1 Of Stars and Divas: The Missing Piece of the Puzzle.....	153
4.2 Genre and the Formation of Stars.....	158
4.3 Almorzando con Mirtha Legrand and the Talk-Show Connection.....	166
4.4 Staging and Props: Stairs as a Queer Sign.....	173
4.5 Queer Artifacts: Suppressing Queer Subjectivities.....	178
4.6 Los Roldán: melodrama and queerness.....	183
4.7 Exteriorizing and Containing Queer Domesticity.....	187
4.8 Queering the Talk-Show.....	197
4.9 Preliminary Conclusions.....	202

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

5.	CONCLUSION.....	205
	CITED LITERATURE.....	208
	APPENDIX.....	216
	VITA.....	217

SUMMARY

This dissertation explores Latin American media content generally categorized as women's genres due to the narratives centrality on domesticity and sentimentality. The construction of such fare following a strict ideological construct, have served to reinforce compulsory heterosexuality, the subordination of domesticity to the public sphere, and the maintenance of strict class divisions. However when we take into consideration the role played by queer audiences and that of fans in relation to their stars and content, they ultimately resignify, deconstruct, and read against the dominant discourses that have attempted to silence their libidinal desires and identity. As such, the focus of my study considers the role played by queer audiences and fans in setting up a consumption model which serves as a tool to make evident the fissures in seemingly hegemonic discourses. The main archive considered is geographically contained within Argentina and Brazil and it includes woman's films, telenovelas, and performers who have been constructed as day-time divas by their loyal fans. The first case study on film and television diva Natalia Oreiro serve to establish the model by which queer audiences and fans operate to disambiguate narratives that work against their reality. Queer audiences resignify such content by reading the main text against a myriad of other media content. Such parallel texts include film and television reviews written by fans, musical soundtracks, publicity prints, and star interviews. The model set forth allows for a reconsideration of classic staples of Argentinean television such as day-time talk show *Almorzando con Mirtha Legrand*, constructed on an axis of queerness even though the industry has played down this respect. Ultimately this model of queer viewing questions the role of audiences and how they have been historically constructed to only serve the needs of broadcasters and marketing agencies.

1. INTRODUCTION

On July 22, 2010, after a 15 hour uninterrupted debate, the senate passed a bill extending full marriage rights to same-sex couples. With a vote of 33 to 27 in favor, Argentina became the first country in Latin America to revise a civil code which had previously excluded same-sex couples from obtaining equal rights from the state. As stated by the President of Argentina, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, ‘*we have not enacted a law; we have enacted a social construct*’. The president’s words exemplify how legislative initiatives not only grant rights, but also have the capacity to reconfigure socially constructed norms. Within this political and social backdrop, I explore that the extensions of rights for sexual and gendered minorities not only prevail through legal means, but they also require a social landscape that allow for consent and acceptance. It is through media, specifically through the medium of television via its melodramatic serials that facilitate discussions of same-sex issues in front of a mass audience, that this consent is achieved.

The success of melodramatic serials such as *Los Roldán*¹, day-time talk shows such as *Almorzando con Mirtha Legrand*² and *La Pelu*³, along with filmic melodramas such as *Miss Tacuarembó*, form part of my research archive. Such cultural products shed light on queer subjectivity mostly absent from research on Latin American television. As I argue, these programs signal a change from previous representations of queer characters, which were

¹ *Los Roldán* was a comedic telenovela first airing in 2004 by *Telefe*. This serial narrated the rags to riches stories of the Roldán’s and their struggles to be accepted within their new social status. An innovative element in the production included the inclusion of Florencia de la V, a transgender actress in a leading role.

² This long running daytime talk- show, hosted by veteran screen actress Mirtha Legrand, has been on the air for more than 35 years. The overall format of the show presents famous guests having lunch with the main host as they talk about various topics.

³ After the success of *Los Roldán*, Florencia de la V had a string of media success in other telenovelas and theater productions. In 2012, Florencia became the first transgender host with her own day-time talk show *La Pelu*.

typically relegated to stereotypical secondary roles functioning simply as comedic relief, having little or no effect on the main plot. This same-sex themed programming helps elucidate the inner workings of gender construction on Argentinean television, and through their mass popularity it has initiated a discussion on sexuality and same-sex rights that extends beyond television.

Programs like *Los Roldán* sparked various public dialogues whereby news articles and journalistic programs continued the discussion of gay rights and legislation via these melodramatic characters. It is not my intention to categorically state that such programming has fueled a change whereby sexual and gender minorities have become included within the life of the nation. Instead the research presented here attempts to weigh and expose how seemingly traditional genres have always included spaces and markers from which to question a heteronormative milieu. As seen through the structure and methodology employed, it is my intent not to reach a totalitarian conclusion, but rather a fragmentary one. It is my intent to weigh in on the potential of industrialized media content, as well as on the role of audiences to find just how (in)(ex)clusively or comprehensively queer and same-sex desires and identities have found an outlet for circulation and inclusion. Hopefully this tentative conclusion can help serve as tools from which to read and resignify cultural production as a way of proposing a more diverse and inclusionary society.

1.1 **Research Inquiries: Advancing Rights and Debates**

Sex, tears, love, and vengeance sum up basic elements driving audiences to consume soap operas, or telenovelas, as they are known on Spanish language television. The conjunction of these emotions coupled with technological and artistic developments have turned telenovelas into widely consumed and exported products of Latin America's cultural industry. As research

has shown, telenovelas have situated themselves as a central force in people's everyday life (Mazziotti 2006, Verón 1993). Thus, telenovela and television studies are now an invaluable research endeavor, since a fundamental characteristic of media is its centrality in disseminating prevailing discourses that construct and shape identities. Despite the centrality of telenovelas in Latin America's media industry, within academic research any sort of research on Latin American television continues to be disdained due to its connection to a hyper-emotional appeal, and due to its prevailing low-brow perceptions of *'third-world'* television (Sinclair, 1996). As a result, the trajectory of scholarship on television has lagged in relation to other media such as film and fiction. However, extant studies have focused mostly on two areas: cataloguing the effects and receptions of melodramatic serials on audiences, and equating the ideological underpinnings of melodrama as allegories both reaffirming and circumventing nationalistic discourses (Oliveira, 1993). Within these two major categories of telenovela research, I am interested in the latter, since I find a void on research that problematizes the nation in relation to transgressive, non-heteronormative gender representations. In other words, most research identifies telenovelas based on their formulaic plots summarized as the triumph of love over adversity of multi-generational heterosexual couples. The narrative's closure achieved by the final wedding scene suggests the nature of the genre to perpetuate patriarchal ideologies supported by the institutions of marriage vis-à-vis media networks. Researchers such as Mazziotti (1996) and Martín-Barbero (1993) propose that these fictional unions emphasize family and marital sexuality as ultimate behavioral models that the nation will try to support, through the state's financial backing of several media conglomerates that perpetuate such paradigms. As useful as this model remains in understanding cultural productions, it has silenced other successful national television projects that have centered their telenovela plots

around non-reproductive sexualities and homosexual leading characters, as part of their daily telenovela fare.

The inclusion of traditionally invisible representations of non-heteronormative identities pose several questions that need further review in relation to television genres, public discourses on gender and sexuality, and representations of nation vis-à-vis the media industries. In regards to television genres, telenovelas have been theorized and defined by the juxtaposition of ideological undertones along with technical narrative structures. For example, telenovelas have been defined as episodic and televised closed ended narratives (technical/narrative structures) recounting moralistic tales that do not question the status quo (ideological underpinnings). However as I will attempt to interject throughout my proposed research, this accepted definition is destabilized. A program like *Los Roldán*, which places a transsexual soccer player (performed by a transsexual) in the lead role and who falls in love with a married man, cannot simply be replicating traditional and Catholic values. Instead these *queer-telenovelas* irrupt into and interrupt the public sphere of the media by opening up spaces of discussion and representation traditionally not available. These thematic changes also dislocate the narrative formula of closure through the ensuing religious marriage ceremony. The inability for characters like Laiza (transsexual character in *Los Roldán*) to marry, renders the melodramatic formula incapable of perpetuating marriage and traditional families as the only possible national configuration. Although the plot does not provide the much anticipated traditional closure which most viewers expect and rely on, the gay-themed telenovelas provide another form of pleasure, which will overpower the need of the traditional ending: talk and discussion.

Within media studies in the United States, in particular day time soap operas, important studies have surfaced from scholars in relation to the value of *talk* that emerges from watching

soaps (Brown, 1994; Mumford, 1995; Radway 1984). In summarized form, these authors found soap operas as a genre that exploits its viewers in their reproduction of patriarchal and capitalistic ideologies, thereby subjugating and silencing women's experiences. Nevertheless, these scholars contend that while melodrama may hold and reproduce hegemonic ideologies, this does not mean that viewers simply absorb and do not contend with the messages the audience is receiving. For these scholars, viewers are active participants that can deconstruct and reconfigure the underlined messages of the show. Watching such programming have allowed women to form intricate social networks where they discuss many of the issues they disagreed with the most. In a sense, women watched to resist and debate the images reflected on the screen, simply by talking about it within their social circles, be it their families, friends, or coworkers. The degree of resistance was not only limited to the category of woman, but also influenced by distinctions of class and race. The idea of *talking* according to scholars such as Brown, suggests viewers obtain closure and pleasure from discussing the serial's events that they mostly want to reject or oppose. As a point of departure the research conducted by these North American and Anglo scholars prove to be useful when discussing soap operas. However, care must be taken in assuming that these arguments translate when analyzing telenovelas. It is my intention to adapt and further explore the argument of pleasure and the resistance found in talk but from a Latin American perspective and taking into consideration the telenovela.

While many scholars have explored the gendering of melodramatic serials in relation to the series' ability to reproduce dominant and hegemonic values, the research is silent on exposing the way *alternative sexualities* and identities disrupt the dominant messages of the telenovela formula and in television formats in general. For this reason I feel I have sufficient training in the major arguments and methodologies related to analyzing telenovelas, and the next

logical step calls for research and analysis of the actual (*inter*)texts. Throughout my preliminary research I have found that, when writing about telenovelas, scholars have either focused on the visual text or on audience responses to the serial. What I find missing from this approach is the integration of the visual analysis along with audiences' responses to these shows and the role of the performers in interpreting queer identities. Combining these modes of research provides a much more nuanced study of the telenovela and television programming. By also including research on the written text (the script), I will be able to take into consideration the whole communicative process involved in creating a telenovela: the writing, the staging, the viewing, and the implications of interpretation.

My research on Argentinean television suggests that the construction of an alternative sexuality is closely tied to and configured through a socio-economic lens. In the programming included, there is a hierarchy of social and gendered identities. Those at the bottom, the poor and the working classes are represented as transvestites, transgender and drag performers, whereas the portrayal of gays and lesbians fall into the upper-middle and elite classes. Interestingly the missing group within this hierarchy is the middle class and heterosexuals. A preliminary analysis on my part suggests that the representation of the poor fall into the more traditional representations within telenovelas. The poor are feared and seen as more aggressive; perhaps evincing the latent anxiety the general population has towards more transgressive sexualities and poverty. In the other extreme lies the urban gay, also a stereotypical rendition common to media, where gay men's representation appear as more cultured and refined in comparison to transsexuals and transvestites. The missing social group in this pyramid is the middle class, possibly represented by heterosexuals. What does the absence of the middle-class heterosexuals mean within an Argentinean context that? Traditionally Argentina in the media has always been

represented as a country ruled by the middle class, therefore how does this change in the media's reconfiguration of Argentinean social-class identity?

1.2 **Methodology: The Study of Media and Gender**

In order to carry out the goals proposed above, I intend to fuse critical inquiries from various academic disciplines: media, cultural, and literary studies. The deployment of issues stemming from these various backgrounds will be integrated with the intention of evincing their interconnections, and as a result closing the gap between intellectual divisions that have entrenched the study of media under exclusive academic perspectives. Within this fusion of intellectual traditions, issues of political control of media ownership, (de)regulation, and integration will be addressed through a discussion of gender, genre, and identity. Many of the themes under consideration here have been approached by fields such as literary studies and the social sciences, both employing distinct research methodologies and inquiries to reach a conclusion. In a sense, the necessity to converge various methodologies in this research endeavor not only highlights, but also reflects the current state of the cultural industries. Media researchers such Curran & Morley in *Media and Cultural Theory* (2006) reaffirm the current role of the cultural industries as a medium that is converging through various modes of technological, cultural, and economic drives in the wake of complex processes such as globalization. Therefore, it is imperative for the intellectual *industry* to interconnect as well, and set aside notions that certain subjects can only be approached through the lens of one analytical tradition. Preserving such divisions limits the multivalent readings surfacing from cultural products. Thus in this project I intend to fuse together discourse analysis, identifying narrative structures both pertaining to literary and cultural studies, with case studies-audience research, pertaining more to the disciplines of media studies and the social sciences. The convergence of these fields will

allow me to raise questions on issues of gender, specifically the queering of the airwaves in the context of Argentina's television industry.

Although Argentinean telenovelas are the central focus of this research, it is inevitable to enter into a discussion of the Latin American media industry as a whole, since Argentinean programming is distributed, exhibited and adapted by other Latin American networks such as Mexico's Televisa, the leading Spanish Language media conglomerate in Latin America. Therefore, this research project has the potential to not only broaden the scholarship on telenovelas in its representation of gender and alternate sexualities within the Argentinean television context, but it also foregrounds a discussion on gender construction in a broader Latin American context due to the transnational nature of its industry.

The importance of television and telenovela research is invaluable since an emerging characteristic of media is its centrality in disseminating, propagating, and contributing to prevailing discourses, which can construct and shape identities. However, most of the research on media studies and television has focused on the dominance of English language television and the anxiety it has produced in foreign markets, since the *invasion* of American television has stunted the growth of other television markets. When research inquiries have focused on Latin American television, most studies centered on the role telenovelas have played in expanding markets for Latin America. There is very little information on the role of television in relation to queer audiences and their interpretation of specific genres that seem to speak to their identity. However before continuing it is important to define my use of the term queer and exemplify how I use a term whose use and implications as a theoretical tool emerged in a tradition outside of Latin America.

1.3 Situating Queer/Queerness

The genesis of the term queer as an episteme of critical inquiry, with the capacity to disrupt hegemonic discourses of normalcy, have been documented and historicized at length. Readers looking to find a complete synthesis of the corpus that make up queer theories shall be disappointed. Instead the purpose of the discussion at hand adheres to the need of the researcher to justify the use of a term that adheres to the realities of an Anglo-American and English speaking reality, however employed within a Latin American perspective. The importance of this endeavor stems from the fact that the dimensions of the term “queer” have been historically, linguistically, and culturally aligned within an Anglo-U.S. perspective. The fact that the term was originally employed in a derogatory fashion to mark and separate sexual minorities, until the term is re-evaluated by such minorities, evinces the socio historical specificity of the term within the U.S. context. Therefore how can such a term be deployed to not only describe but name cultural practices and identities that have a completely different tradition? Can the term “queer” stand alone, without the need of elaborating a term that socio-linguistically reference a Latin American reality? Based on the research that I embark on, a succinct answer reveals that I make use of the term in order to describe a series of cultural productions such as day-time programing, and television performers operating under the sign of queerness. I read such performances as highly inscribed within a queer sensibility that transcend the limits of any national or regional designation and or usage. The queerness involved by such performances are queer not because of the limits a nation or a geographic space or language may impose, but instead by how viewers interpret those signs. While the term may have been formed and resignified elsewhere, the sensibilities that the cultural products reflect are compatible with the theoretical understanding of the term queer. It is for this reason that I find a justification for employing a term that does not

emanate from Latin America to describe a performance that remits to a queer sensibility. The queerness invoked in the performances, is rather an urge to break away from hegemonic western constructs which have tried to compartmentalize sexual experiences and desires using strict gendered divisions, all leading to favoring a heteronormative drive. As Michael Warner writes in his introduction to *Fear of a Queer Planet* (1993):

For academics, being interested in queer theory is a way to mess up the desexualized spaces of the academy, exude some rut, reimagining the public from and for which academic intellectuals write, dress, and perform....For both academics and activists, 'queer' gets a critical edge by defining itself against the normal rather than the heterosexual....The insistence on 'queer'...has the effect of pointing out a wide field of normalization, rather than simple intolerance, as the site of violence (xxvi).

While in his definition the use of the term queer seems as an exercise that academics use to disrupt the *regimes of the normal*, it serves as an appropriate definition for me since it is my goal to disrupt cultural narratives such as telenovelas, that in appearance seem to exude a heteronormative normalcy. Also while it originally may seem to be an academic pursuit, one cannot deny the work done by academics that transcend the spaces of the university reaching a wider sphere due to social and political activism. The fact that my archive rests outside of the English speaking Anglo American academic tradition, does not invalidate my need to queer such performances.

Further justification for the use of the term queer is made possible by the increasing permeability of Latin American academics to embrace the term. Within the last ten years, there have been a myriad of congresses, critical literature, and university centers dedicated to the study of gender, sexuality, and identity. Many have adopted the term queer within their title such as the *II Coloquio de Estudios Queer y Literatrúa*, under the auspice of the Universidad Nacional de La Plata and its Centro Interdisciplinario de Investigaciones en Género, held in 2011. A more recent congress that speaks to the interest of Latin American scholars on issues of queerness

include, *Conferencia de Teresa de Lauretis 'Género y Teoría Queer'* sponsored by El Instituto Interdisciplinario de Estudios de Género de la Facultad at the Universidad de Buenos Aires. It is also worth noting the role played by FLACSO and CONICET, the research arms of the Universidad de Buenos Aires that fund research groups and post-graduate studies in the study of queer issues.

The use of the term queer as a critical tool is not only used in Argentina but in other Latin American countries as well. One in particular includes the case of Ecuador and the work being conducted at FLACSO-Andes (Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales). The work of María Amelia Viteri has been crucial in institutionalizing queer theory within the Latin American academy in Ecuador and abroad. However most importantly, the researchers working in FLACSO alongside Viteri have tried to bridge the gap between academic theorization and community activism. Their work has attempted to create dialogue among all areas of society in and outside of the academic sphere. In order to create queer dialogues Viteri and FLACOS have hosted the first *Queering Paradigms 5 (QP)* in a Spanish speaking country. *QP* has organized in the last five years a series of conferences and a book series held in different cities around the world, including Canterbury, UK, Brisbane Australia, Oneonta USA, Quito, Ecuador, and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

While this narrative suggests a certain acceptance and inclusion of the term queer within a Latin American perspective, it does not mean that there are no detractors from its inclusion. There are considerable concerns that must be broached when employing the term. One of the most common caveats against the terms is the difficulty and strangeness some Spanish speakers find when having to pronounce the term queer, which have led some scholars to write it out as cuir. For most people outside of the academic space and or the study of gender and identity, the

term queer is unintelligible. It has not acquired the internationalization and acceptance as has the term gay. Javier Sáez del Álamo, a Spanish sociologist and queer activist adds a positive spin on the ‘foreignness’ of the term. Since the use of the term in Spanish does not hold a derogatory connotation as it once did in English, the word queer in Spanish becomes neutralized.

De algún modo la palabra queer dicha en un contexto hispanohablante queda purificada, es moderna, no da vergüenza ni resulta agresiva (5).

Sáez’s point is situated within the context of Spanish and Latin American academic perceptions of (in) appropriate research endeavors and the distinctions between traditional academic pursuits. He claims that by using the term queer, universities would be more prone to include such a term in course titles and to head research centers initiatives, rather than if they were to use a term such as *Estudios Marica, Puto, Pato*, etc. The fact that a foreign term is more acceptable, speaks to the colonial/imperial legacies which have operated on the global south, also affecting academic inquiries as well. These legacies have diminished the value of local peripheral knowledge, over those conceptions forged within the center of power. I am not arguing that Sáez does not see the inherent problems of imperialist academic discourse. Instead he appropriates them in order to destabilize the rigid boundaries that may exist among various academic traditions. The only issue I do not see fully developed refers to his use of the term ‘modern’ which he endows as a characteristic of queerness. I find this ‘modern’ conception problematic since a recurring argument used by anti-queer movements remit to equating same-sex desire as a solely foreign U.S./European construct. There are many examples that show how the Anglo-European dandy, a by-product of modernity, has been feminized and used as an identity to work against in Latin America. The dandy is seen as someone who has the potential to corrupt heterosexual men. This form of *othering* silences and negates the existence of a local same-sex reality. Therefore I find Sáez’s equation of queerness and modernity requiring more development within the Latin

American context in order to move away from the term queer as a foreign other. Since the whole point of the term is to be disruptive, he adds terms in Spanish that do question not only traditional areas of research, but put in jeopardy the normalcy of heteronormative constructs, though commonly conceived aggressive/inappropriate terms, as he does so with his book title: *Teoría Queer: Políticas bolleras, maricas, trans, mestizas* (2005). Scholars such as Sáez work around it by balancing the “foreign” term with more geographically relevant terms such as *marica*. Whereby both terms feed off each other while maintaining their cultural specificity. While this balance is useful, not all scholars see this balancing act as the only way to appropriate the terms within a different tradition. Such is the case of Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes who uses the term queer to categorize the cultural experiences and identities of Latinos as well as Puerto Ricans on and off the island.

As I interpret in *La política queer del espanglish* (2006), La Fountain-Stokes is able to achieve such goal by adhering to the work already done on bilingualism and Spanglish. In condensed form, the inclusion of queer outside of the Anglo American experience is made possible through the concept of contact languages made available to people who due to various socio-historical contexts, come in contact with multiple languages. Rather than have to maintain just one language, the incorporation of lexicon and grammatical structures from more than one language, as is the case with Spanglish, creates a much more fluid and rich language from which to create knowledge. In order to establish the need for a bi-multi-lingual approach, the author references the work of Frances Aparicio (2000) on the specificity of the English-Only movement. Aparicio’s research finds that the conservative project of the English-Only movement is buttressed by an imperialistic and economic project aimed at silencing the voices of colonized bodies, off and on U.S. territory (142). Thereby, La Fountain establishes the possibility of

deploying the term within seemingly distinct traditions and histories, which allows me to transfer this theoretical apparatus onto my project. While in this particular dissertation, I do not analyze Latino cultural production, I self-identify as a queer Latino scholar working with popular culture produced in Spanish and Portuguese speaking Latin America, as well as with U.S. Latino media. Having experienced first-hand the push for English-Only and the affront to gendered and ethnic minorities in the U.S., I align myself to working with scholars that push for multi-lingual and queer hybrid traditions.

In his opening paragraph La Fontaine states, that the term queer is “un tanto intraductible al español” (141). This affirmation is not presented as a possible problem to those who write about queer issues outside the U.S English-language tradition, instead he sees it as a provocative endeavor full of academic prowess. La Fontaine supports his claim by focusing on the work done by Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel on the literary production of Latinos in the U.S., which favors the confluence of Spanish and English as one language, rather than having to maintain the purity of each language. La Fontaine shares the same conviction:

La convicción de que no todo se puede traducir; más puntualmente, de que los textos bilingües o multilingües pierden parte de su riqueza (se achatan o aplanan) al eliminar o simplificar su complejidad lingüística. En otras palabras, el multilingüismo es esencial para el proyecto estético y la apreciación intelectual y emocional, tanto para los que entienden (y por lo tanto son receptores privilegiados) como para los que no entienden (y por lo tanto se sienten marginados, dislocados o confundidos) (149).

While the discussion that La Fontaine via Martínez-San Miguel hold, refers strictly to the literary production of U.S. Latinos and Puerto Ricans, I find its transference useful within the Latin American context. Due to the process of globalization and the shrinking of borders due to migrations and cross-cultural transferences, it makes it even more urgent to allow those languages and critical traditions in contact to feed off each other. The privilege that multilingual

societies create is not only useful in contributing to academic knowledge, but for broader cultural, social, and political advancements as well.

Yet another supporter who approaches the possibilities of the term queer within Latin America is Magdalena De Santo. In her introduction, the critic states that the term queer acquires a discursive value due to its ability to mutate and change in meaning.

Uno de los pilares característicos de la *queer theory* es la resignificación de la palabra *queer*, cuya trayectoria terminó por invertir su pasado de término agravante: hoy *queer* resulta una oportunidad discursiva de reparación histórica (1).

For De Santos it is precisely the resignification of a term mostly used to serve as an insult and as a category imposed to differentiate that which was seen as different, to eventually serve as a tool to fight oppression. I read De Santos' contribution as stating that the resignifying quality of the term queer in constant flux and evolution makes it possible for anyone who has come in contact with its effects, to appropriate it for his or her discursive needs, regardless of the physical or symbolic location of the critic. She also points out that the Latin American academy is prone and open to incorporating knowledge generated abroad. In part, De Santo recognizes that this trend is mostly due to the colonial legacies that have maintained Latin America dependent on world powers that tend to generate and create trends that influence more marginalized areas. The critic sees this dependence as an inherent problem, but sees the potential in appropriating such knowledge in order to destabilize those discourses working against the marginalized (6). In simpler words, De Santo proposes to use these regimes, in order to show their limits. However opponents are quick to emphasize that while the word changes in meaning, those changes are based on socio political and cultures factors occurring in very specific geographic locals, i.e. the U.S.A. Perhaps the most vocal critic who questions the plausibility of applying the term queer within a Latin American perspective is Brad Epps.

In *Retos, Riesgos, Pautas y Promesas de la Teoría Queer* (2008), Brad Epps delineates his major concerns in regards to the use of the term queer within Latin America. For Epps, rather than propose a new term, he enumerates a series of questions which he does not propose to answer, but rather sees them as important for critics to consider when dealing with queer theories and their application. For example can a critic validly separate a linguistic term that has a very specific historical context? Does the translation of queer as *torcido*, *marica*, *invertido* etc. acquire a political inherence? (897). While these questions remain open, it is clear that Epps' project does not refute queerness but centers his attention on identifying artistic modes of expression that can parallel the reach of queer theory, but within a Latin American tradition. The critic proposes to look into the work of argentine poet and anthropologist Néstor Perlongher. His prose and activism in the *Frente para la Liberación Homosexual*, have allowed critics to look into his writing and artistic production as a tool to liberate those who suffer sexual marginalization. In order to set up his validation for Perlongher's work, he discusses the issues with the term queer.

Epps returns to the initial question posed above in regards to the linguistic and related geographic specificity, by suggesting that the term queer in the United States was first a term used to describe something odd and strange. With time, such as in the 1940s, the term was used to single out gay men in a derogatory fashion. It was not until the advent of identitarian radical gay political groups such as ACT UP (AIDS coalition to Unleash Power) that begin to embrace the concept of queer as a means to resist assimilationist drive of traditional identity politics. Rather than promote gay vs. straight, such groups favored an umbrella term that can encompass all forms of sexual identity and expression without favoring one particular group. In other words, the object is to fight oppression rather than to elevate one specific group, since doing so implies

suppressing others. In his succinct history and events—which he calls *micro-histories* (898), he shows how eventually “queer” was consolidated as a theoretical tool institutionalized by the community of academic scholars. The term achieves significance due to its resignification over time in relation to those *micro histories*. As stated by Epps:

Es precisamente esta historia parcial e interpersonal, doméstica y callejera, verbal y corporal, esta impresión de estar ante una palabra perteneciente a mi lengua materna que era despectiva, injuriosa, y amenazante, lo que difícilmente podría darse –o dárseme– en un contexto no angloparlante y lo que constituiría, para mí, uno de los frenos a la expansión global, si no globalizante, de “queer”....Dicho tal vez con demasiada firmeza, la teoría *queer* no sería nada, o casi nada, sin esas microhistorias interpersonales (902).

For Epps the evolution of the term queer is what it is today due to its evolution from a term that once started as a colloquial term and worked its way into various different spheres such as in politics and in the academy. This forms part of his strongest argument against the imposition of the term in Latin America due to that it has been a term *imposed* by academics. For most people in Latin America the term queer does not mean anything to them, unless they are involved in academic and or identity politics. Epps’ one-directional resignification of the term forms part of what De Santo criticizes.

A mi juicio, el autor entiende el desplazamiento o resignificación de la noción como un movimiento unidireccional que va de la calle a la academia. Para él aquellos “híbridos bastardos” sólo tienen valor cuando una noción coloquial es apropiada por la textualidad académica. Al respecto diría que en nuestra América ocurre lo contrario, una noción importada y legitimadas en la academia pertenece a la calle y a la militancia (5).

For De Soto and as I also argue, the resignification of terms do not necessarily need to follow a specific direction as proposed by Epps. The fact that in the global south, the term begins as an imposition by academic thought does not diminish its value due to the role played by academics already working from marginalized spaces. As De Soto suggests, academics have a political projection that extends far beyond the reach of the classroom. In this way, she is proposing that

academics are involved in various spheres including those areas of social activism aligning the academic to a more public intellectual role, as opposed to one relegated to the *ivory tower*. It is due to these interventions that make it possible for me to analyze cultural products that remit and or are read by its viewers as speaking directly to their queer sentiments.

1.4 **Literature Review**

The study and interpretation of mass media and its subsequent products have been approached by several distinct models. Although each model takes on a different approach, they all have one thing in common and it relates to the perceived effects mass media has had on society. Macnamara summarizes that the earliest approach developed by Shannon and Weaver (1949) assumed mass media had a direct and possibly damaging social effect. Shannon and Weaver's *transmissional model* espoused a one way communicative model where the enunciator controlled the messages emitted to the receiver. Within this model, there is no space for interpretation of the message on the part of the receiver, emphasizing the viewer's passivity and its lack of questioning the all-powerful message. As summarized by Macnamara, the *transmissional model* perceived audiences 'as passive receivers of information' whose content and inherent message were 'delivered like a parcel' (2). This early stage of research defined mass media as a powerful propaganda tool. Many of the precepts of the transmissional model would coincide with Marxist and neo-Marxist theories that attribute enormous power to mass media, even claiming a direct attitudinal and behavioral effect, through a media model known as the "mass manipulative model". As related by Block, Houseley, Nicholls, & Southwell (2001) the mass manipulative model as perceived by Louise Althusser and Herbert Marcuse, media producers mold and shape opinions at the behest of the powerful (95). For Habermas and

Marcuse, mass media's products were produced to maintain the political status quo, whereas Adorno and Horkheimer focused less on the political implications of mass media and centered their attention on the commercial effects of the media. Adorno and Horkheimer categorized media as part of the cultural industry, an industry which 'manufactures information products' as a means of imposing them to viewers-consumers (Curran 45). The manufacturing of culture creates for Adorno a standardized product which loses its artistic ability to contend or criticize society. Instead popular culture and its products are mere standardized goods that lose all of its individuality since they are mass produced. As stated by Adorno "the same thing is offered to everybody by the standardized production of consumption goods" (Curran 280). Popular culture is then seen as the constant repetition of mass produced objects whose repetitive nature make audiences passive and open to the propagandistic and economic needs of the producer. These direct and propagandistic models of mass media created a large scholarship which incorporated the transmissional and the mass manipulative models. One example within the Anglo academy is Humphrey McQueen's *Australia's media monopoly* (1977). Here McQueen traces the imperative of Australia's media moguls to halt the rise of independent networks since it would undermine the ability of a monopolistic industry to control viewers. The opening of the media industry to various players, according to McQueen, would result in a democratization of the air waves and the inclusion of polyvalent ideological views, since each network would try to appeal to a different "niche group", including various economic and social groups. For McQueen, Australia's media monopoly maintain elite control by:

Dividing and demoralizing the working class, because a confident united working class is one of the last things the capitalist wants to face (43).

It is the connections among the elite to media sources that enable the creation of programs that ideologically work to keep them in control.

Latin-American scholarship on the passivity and negative effects of the media on viewers was also very fruitful; however this body of research added another element within this analysis. Adding another layer to the model of viewer passivity and manipulation, scholars such as Dorfman & Mattelart highlighted the imperialistic nature of media and its messages. In *How to read Donald Duck* (1975), Ariel Dorfman exemplifies how American media corporations such as Disney mask imperialist ideologies behind lovable and seemingly innocent characters. Furthermore, Disney's ability to penetrate multiple markets in various regions through quality products which are quickly embraced by audiences, hamper and render impossible the creation of national-local products. Disney's business prominence within the entertainment industry eliminates its competition, thereby creating a 'cultural dependency' heavily relying on products and technologies produced in the centers of power such as in Europe and in the United States. Yet another classic text is Reynaldo Gonzalez's *Llorar es un placer* (1988). Gonzalez's work maps the progression of Cuba's radio and television industry as the imperative of U.S capitalism to expand into Latin America. Gonzalez explains how the Colgate-Palmolive company chose Cuba as its test site for their first Latin American branch-division. This company would employ the same tactics used in the U.S to market their products. In the U.S., Colgate-Palmolive sold their products by financing daytime serials aimed at housewives, thereby baptizing daytime serials with the products they sold: 'soap' operas. However as stated by González, Colgate-Palmolive would not only invest in creating programming but would also fund and provide the technological equipment to first start-up radio and eventually television networks. González's heavy reliance on dependency theory analysis leaves out the role played by Cuban capitalists and political leaders in forging relationships to create a national audiovisual industry; their role in his study is minimized. Although dependency theory helped scholars to theorize and show the

imperialistic nature of mass media, it presented an almost totalitarian model of media, where the ‘dominated’ had no say or power in shaping their national/local industries. Other Latin American scholars such as Elizabeth Fox (1997) acknowledge the imperialistic nature of the U.S audiovisual industry and its impact on the formation of a Latin American industry; however, she provides a much more complex and nuanced foundation by assessing the role of local players in forming the industry.

Fox’s *Latin American Broadcasting: from tango to telenovela* (1997), interprets the patterns of foreign and domestic political economic and social factors that have led to the growth of radio and television in Latin America. Fox’s work is an important contribution to the field since historically studies of the media industry have only focused on two aspects: The first, the authoritarian personalities of the industry’s founders, and secondly, the founder’s connections to high government officials. This investigative approach has its roots in the transmissional model, since programming produced was seen as creating passive and obedient viewers, made to follow the orders of programming approved by the ruling political parties. Fox intends to construct a framework whereby patterns of domestic and international policies conflate, showing how domestic markets accommodate and situate themselves within international demands and the needs of the emerging state. Fox provides case studies that focus on the rise of media networks in countries such as Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, and Chile. Her analysis of Brazilian media is a clear example of how dependency theory can acquire a more nuanced reading.

In the case study on Brazil, Fox focuses on TV Globo, owned by the Marinho family. Although TV Globo is today the world’s fourth largest media conglomerate, dominating Brazil’s media industry, TV Globo’s entrance in the industry has been relatively late. TV Globo’s first air signal was emitted in 1965, 15 years after other networks such as TV Tupi had an already

consolidated position within the Brazilian TV market. Its entrance into the market was made possible by the signing of a \$5 million contract with the Time-Life corporation. Globo's joint venture with a U.S company provided the Marinho family with a large influx of capital and new technologies which allowed TV Globo to quickly crush their well-established competition and establish their stated '*padrão de qualidade*' (formula for quality), based on highly nationalist programming which would showcase the modernity of the Brazilian people. Eventually this *padrão* would come into conflict with the needs of the Time-Life Corp. who wanted Marinho to showcase American programming during prominent prime time schedule, instead of using American programming as mere fillers during less favorable times. The TV Globo-Time-Life venture came to an end when the Marinho family decided to buy out Time Life. Time-Life's buyout was made possible through the family's relationship with the Brazilian military which had taken power. Over several years, the military regime granted TV Globo various licenses which allowed the network to launch more channels and thereby acquire more revenue, earnings which were used to drive out Time-Life. In return, TV Globo would be allied with the military for about 20 years. TV Globo "would become the military's main ally for the implementation of its political, economic, and ideologically authoritarian model" (Fox 58).

The dominance of the transmissional and the mass manipulative models lasted over several decades, yet there were various landmark research studies during the 1960s that questioned their validity. Macnamara defines this second period as the minimal-limited effects model and discusses the role played by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) and Klapper (1960). These scholars concluded that although media does affect its audience, it cannot change or create new attitudes. Instead mass media has the capacity to reinforce existing attitudes (65). Lazarsfeld and Klapper's findings begins to conceive the audience not as a static recipient of information

but rather as an audience that can interpret and reject messages regardless of the success of producers of media to mask its ideological project behind a cultural product. Most of Lazarsfeld and Klapper's media research was informed by the work of Leon Festinger, a psychologist who developed cognitive dissonance theory. According to Festinger, regardless of the amount of input one receives, people will consistently resist messages that are 'dissonant with their attitudes' (MacNamara 66). Besides introducing early notions of audience interpretation which later will be deployed by the ethnographic turn within the study of mass media, it has also led the way to the 'audience gratification model'. This subset of the minimal effects model claims people use mass media to gratify and express their needs enabling researchers to ask for the first time, what do people do with media products, rather than asking what does the media do to its audiences? (68). The shifting of perspectives from media directly affecting its audiences to how audiences interpret and redirect messages emanating from media sources led the way to a third model.

Cultural studies approaches to mass media situated themselves as an interdisciplinary field since researchers approached cultural production by employing research methodologies from various traditional disciplines such as anthropology, literary studies, and cinematic analysis. Also the advent of cultural studies shifted the hierarchies of quantitative vs. qualitative research methods by favoring the latter. New methods of qualitative content analysis began to consider the subtleties of characterization and narrative structures to determine how audiences responded to texts (Macnamara 68). The deployment of these various methodologies were used to focus on how different readers interpret 'text' rather than how the text directs its reader. A key influence according to Curran, in shifting and bypassing the producer's intentions to the 'reader' and how this reader interprets the text is indebted to the theories of Roland Barthes and its formulation of

the ‘death of the author’. Barthes’ work centers on human agency in interpreting, reconceptualizing the role of the reader/audience as active participants in the production of knowledge and meaning (Curran 115). The intentionality of the author-producer is inconsequential since it’s the reader who will construct meaning out of a text, thereby implying that a work will mean different things to different people. However, neo Marxist critics will contend that an audience interpretation does not take place within a vacuum. Readers’ interpretations are framed by dominant structures that shape and reinforce attitudes. Mass media forms part of these structures but it is not alone. Political, financial, and industrial institutions also maintain control and ‘manufacture consent’ by shaping ideology that is presented as if it were value free. Other influential work directing cultural studies includes the work of Stuart Hall’s ‘encoding-decoding model’ (1973) which perceived the role of a ‘critical-reader’ as the one who actively constructs meaning by decoding media texts. The decoding of texts takes place within a ‘matrix of influences’ rather than through the absorption of predetermined meanings (Macnamara 72). Hall supported by Morley and Chen (1996) suggest media producers may encode texts with specific meaning, but viewers will ultimately decode the text based on their own social context.

1.5 **The Project**

The second chapter addresses the ways in which cultural production masks queer signs under seemingly innocuous family entertainment. By queer signs, I am referring to a myriad of genres, aesthetic and thematic markers that queer viewers interpret as speaking directly to their identity. As way of example, I identify a dance and song number included in the film *Miss Tacuarembó* (Dir. Martín Sastre 2010). Extant studies in popular film have documented the way musical numbers, particularly those from the 1950s and 60s, spoke directly to queer audiences

(Clum, 1999; Wolf, 2002). Audiences have identified that in such sequences there is a sort of safe space created by the display of libidinous desires that would normally be repressed outside of that imaginary and fantasized space. As members of a marginalized group, queer viewers saw these displays of sexuality as the only moments where their desires could be made visible. I argue that these markers have formed part of an imagined queer aesthetic. Therefore, where one refers to telenovelas, musicals, women's film, and even pre-teen films, there is an underlined queer connotation assigned to its viewers vis-à-vis the cultural products. In line with this argument, the archive of the following chapter concentrates mostly on Martín Sastre's first feature-length film *Miss Tacuarembó* and the multiple intertexts that help resignify the following film from a mostly pre-teen musical to a queer coming of age story.

In order to uncover the queer signs found in the film, I propose to evaluate the contents of the multiple texts that form part its construction. This approach suggests that film as a *text* is not a closed entity with a stable internal structure. Instead, *Miss Tacuarembó* is a compilation of borrowed codes from various sources. One cannot deny the variety of texts that form part of what one perceives as a stable bounded film. There are a myriad of intertexts such as references to specific telenovelas, pop songs, and celebrities. By recognizing these segmented texts and connections among them, I am acknowledging what Julia Kristeva (1980) refers to as the *vertical axis* of the text (69). Kristeva suggests that the universe of a text is composed by the connections and the relations established by each one, rather than each text as an indivisible and impermeable entity. As stated by Coward & Ellis (1977) any attempt at revealing the meaning of a text requires not the study of its structure, but how those structures come into being; in other words one focuses on its *structuration* (52). As such, the universe of *Miss Tacuarembó* must take into consideration the multiple discursive texts employed by Sastre. I will consider the multiple

paratexts such as the film's trailers, star interviews, film reviews, the film's multiple genres, and the film's pop references as all parts of the discursive universe which frames the film.

The ultimate goal in revealing the film's structuration is to make evident the queer connections that bind these texts as a whole. While the film is packaged and marketed as a pre-teen family oriented film, a detailed analysis of its multiple texts suggests a rejection of such parameters. The film contests the notion of a traditional heteronormative society through the guise of popular discourses on *girl-culture* productions. The guise of *girl-culture* allows for the product to circulate openly without creating discursive disruptions within a mostly traditional industry. As I argue it will be the role of individual audiences to make these connections that set cultural products as subversive texts. The use of gendered and feminized media productions as a source of contention is not new, as may be suggested by the discussion in the chapter. Thus, in the third chapter, I provide a specific example from the Brazilian telenovela (2001) and its original Argentinean film version of *La Pícaro soñadora* (1956) in order to establish that since the formation of television and film, popular audiovisual productions have utilized queer markers as a means of challenging normative ideologies. As I do through the discussion on *Miss Tacuarembó*, in the second chapter I also utilize the intertexts that have formed part of *La Pícaro's* melodramatic and queered universe that have emerged in its multiple transformations and adaptation from the big screen to television.

The discussion of melodrama-telenovelas as a *feminine language* used by mass media to secure an audience base and compete for ad revenue will be expanded in the third chapter through a discussion of a Brazilian telenovela, *A pícaro sonhadora*. This chapter is a partial reprint of an article previously published, where I explored and continue to expand here

women's melodramatic narratives as purveyors of economic policies⁴. I also address the marketing of modernity imposed through neoliberal models and lastly, I discuss the role of consumption as a means of including traditionally marginalized sectors of society via a gendered-queered-economic discourse. In a sense, this Brazilian telenovela defines the transnational nature of Latin American telenovelas: Originally *A pícaro* was an Argentinean radio serial first produced in the 1940s as *La pícaro soñadora*. Its success launched a feature film in 1956 and, thirty years later, Mexico bought the rights to produce this title as a telenovela. Later in 1991 SBT, Brazil's second place network, purchased the right of this serial to launch its telenovela production with the intent of limiting Mexican programming in Brazil. As I will argue, SBT attempts to secure a loyal viewership by attempting to attract the traditional disenfranchised public, who cannot recognize themselves in the screens of Globo's productions. Specifically, SBT will target its first telenovela to young poor female viewers. SBT will carry out its own modernizing project by instructing young women on the responsibilities and proper behavior for Brazilian citizens. For SBT, the ideal Brazilian citizen is not one who imagines itself to follow in middle class values, but one who will consume products. In other words, good Brazilian women are the ones who shop either visually through *SBT's* programming or through the purchase of all their heavily pushed product placements within the telenovela. This can be clearly seen throughout the whole plot of the story.

SBT captured Brazilian audiences not by producing high quality programming like Globo, but by offering their viewers the possibility to dream, but more importantly the opportunity to shop. Brazil's adaptation of Abel Santacruz's original script *La Pícaro Soñadora* emphasized

⁴ Ponti, Martin. "Globo vs. SBT: Dueling Models of Consumption and Inclusion on Brazilian Telenovelas." Ed. Diana I. Rios and Mari Castañeda. *Soap Operas and Telenovelas in the Digital Age: Global Industries, Hybrid Content, and New Audiences*. New York: Peter Lang, 2011. 219-36. Print.

the role of women as mass consumers of goods who must be responsible citizens if they want to succeed and move up in life. Mass consumption, a significant by-product of modernity, granted women a means of accessing the public sphere. This chapter focuses primarily on Brazil's television network and its portrayal of modernity in *A Pícaro Sonhadora*, as the constant search for progress is exemplified in the values of a female consumer. Although modernity generally emphasized the male urban experience, modernity did not drown women's voices. As shown in *A pícaro*, women successfully entered the public realm once they became consumers. Rita Felski in *The Gender of Modernity* (1995) and Roger Silverstone in *Television and Everyday Life* (1994) argue for the importance of gender in framing modernity. They state modernity primarily focused on the experiences of the urban male. Many gendered symbols of masculinity presented images of a public male represented in the dandy, the man of the crowd, and the stranger throughout much of the 19th and 20th century. Therefore, any lived experience in the public sphere such as industry, consumerism, the modern city, mass media, and technologies all were conceived as 'fundamentally masculine', leaving feminine values of intimacy out of the logic of modernism (Felski 17). However, through the media's interpellation of female audiences as consumers, it is possible to include feminized audiences within the larger project of modernity and inclusion.

The fourth chapter continues to discuss the centrality of melodrama in relation to queered television products. I propose that it is possible to dissociate melodrama from its traditional television format, the telenovela, to show how the melodramatic discourse also operates in other formats such as in day-time talk shows. I establish this connection by relating how both telenovela and day-time talk shows have been created to interpellate a mostly

feminized viewer. Both formats whether through their romantic escapist plots or through the discussion of *women issues*, address their audiences as domestic consumers.

I concentrate on the day-time talk show in order to discuss the amorphous nature of the genre and how it is shaped and formed via the role of the star who hosts the show. In order to demonstrate this, I focus on *Almorzando con Mirtha Legrand* and on *La Pelu*, hosted by their respective divas Mirtha Legrand and Florencia de la V. I also problematize the concept of *diva* as a queer term utilized by audiences to disrupt normative televisual ideologies. The construction of a queer diva is also heavily influenced by a melodramatic tradition. Each performer can claim such title due to their connection to a melodramatic form of entertainment such as film and telenovelas. I do concede that, even though *divas* have acquired a queer connotation and the potential to disrupt heteronormative discourses, there is a sense of limit that the term can impose on representing identities. For this reason, I included in the title the term *unlikely divas*. The (un)likeliness stems from the fact that many of the perceived ideologies espoused by divas such as Mirtha evince a highly discriminatory and problematic conception of queerness. Even within this dangerous discourse, queer audiences deconstruct and resignify those messages by focusing on markers of queerness that the divas incorporate. This last analysis helps to reconnect with the overall purpose of the project which is to make evident the tools audiences use to provide a counter reading of dominant media messages. At the same time it reinforces the original idea of the project, which recognizes the importance of queer audiences, even though the industry has denied their existence as a concrete and physical audience.

2. RESIGNIFYING QUEERNESS: QUEER PERFORMANCES AND THE (DE)MASKING OF GIRL CULTURE

A scantily yet fashionably dressed singing Jesus, a biblical theme-park, and a young group of children devoted to ancient Christian martyrs, make up some of the characters and locations in the young-adult film, *Miss Tacuarembó...algún día el mundo será nuestro* (Martín Sastre, 2010). As suggested by the sub-title and one of the recurring lines of the film, “*one day the world shall be ours*”, the film’s main characters Natalia and Carlos share their hopes for a better future. Their desires reflect the lived anxiety in recognizing their marginal position in society. The main characters’ exclusion stems from the town’s strict Catholic moral code working against them by turning both friends into excluded queer subjects. While the Christian moral code exclude Natalia and Carlos from the town’s imaginary, both characters embrace the Catholic ideology of hope that envisions future fulfillment as a strategy to survive their repression. The town of Tacuarembó rejects Natalia’s desire for autonomy from gendered expectations that force her to be an obedient daughter who will eventually marry. Yet Natalia constantly rejects the role of dutiful daughter and wife. Instead she envisions herself as a pop star who roams the world. Natalia’s search for fame stands in as a way out of Tacuarembó, yet her family and peers remind her of its impossibility due to the fact that fame and stardom are not Christian values. For this reason, the town rejects Natalia and categorizes her as different, as strange; in other words, queer.

Carlos experiences similar gendered and social expectations. He experiences constant surveillance on the part of his parents and teachers, from a growing fear that his friendship with a girl might *turn* him gay, even though some of the townspeople, including his mother ask: “*what is a gay?*” While they might not have a concrete definition, the members of the town read Carlos’ behaviors as not appropriate for a boy. Carlos’ love of modeling, recreating music-video

choreographies and his devotion to telenovelas, mark Carlos in Tacuarembó as queer. Within the repressive space of Tacuarembó, their only possibility for self-expression involves resignifying Catholic imagery and practices in order to subvert the town's normative demands. For example, Natalia and Carlos use the church's choir practice as a space for playing together under the pretense of singing about Christ; in reality, they are there to rehearse their pop choreographies. Furthermore, the main characters use prayer, religious themed music, but most of all, they rework notions of hope. The conception of hope follows in line with Catholic theology⁵ which sees the potential of hope to alleviate the pressures of Tacuarembó's strict religious demands. The resignification of Christian practices ultimately render a film that not only criticizes the church's dogma, but uses it as a vehicle for exposing and celebrating queer desires. As I will argue in this chapter, the film exemplifies how queer subjects resignify Catholic motifs and practices, in order to situate in the forefront the experiences of repressed subjectivities. While the plot plays a key role in unearthing and recontextualizing queerness, there are a host of other (non)filmic strategies that require consideration in order to understand the unpacking of queerness, on a film marketed as a wholesome musical for teen girls.

In order to exemplify how the film and its corollary products extend a queer framework, this chapter is divided into two main argumentative sections. The first section focuses on

⁵ The role of hope has played a central role in Catholic theology. In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, hope is defined as "the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit" (CCC 1817). In his second encyclical letter, *Spe Salvi* (Saved by Hope), Pope Benedict XVI emphasizes the indispensability of hope, Pope Benedict writes: "We see as a distinguishing mark of Christians the fact that they have a future: It is not that they know the details of what awaits them, but they know in general terms that their life will not end in emptiness. Only when the future is certain as a positive reality does it become possible to live the present as well" (SS 2).

analyzing the *para-cinematic* strategies, understood as markers that do not form part of the film's narrative. Yet, these elements help to further signify the film for its viewers. My archive of para-cinematic elements cross media and discursive lines by its inclusion of press releases, actor interviews, industry trailers, film reviews, and finally lobby cards. Each of these elements is read as texts that help to buttress and initiate the film's queer framework. Para-cinematic elements are crucial to the film since their function activates viewer expectations, rejection and acceptance of the film long before the film actually premieres, and they continue to circulate long after the film ends. These corollary products create intertextual dialogue vis-à-vis the film's narrative that helps to cement an understanding of the film. Including para-cinematic elements within my analysis responds to the ways in which viewers not only receive, but interpret media products. Since the advent of the video tape and the DVD, added to current advances in technology such as the capacity to download and stream video, viewing and interpreting a film no longer occur within the confines of the movie theater. By the time the viewer has selected the film, audiences have already seen trailers, cast interviews, and websites relevant to the film. Therefore the academic approach to studying media cannot rest solely on the filmic plane, but must include intertextual samples that complete and make up the viewer's field of interpretation. Lastly, the second section centers on the adaptation of the homonymous novel into Sastre's film, *Miss Tacuarembó*. I am interested in the role the author and the director play in adapting a literary text into a similarly perceived medium. I extend a continuation between the literary and the cinematic by plotting the direct transferences and the exclusions from the novel into the film that the director chooses to execute. I am interested in the ways that both texts dialogue in unison, yet this coming together involves a certain degree of resignification of the plot, characters, themes, and ideologies. It is not a direct transference, but one that requires tailoring.

I am interested in the ways the adaptation process reveals queer signs within both works masked under the category of ‘girl culture’. I read these texts through the interpretative lens of *camp* as theoretical and interpretative tools from which to make sense of the queer elements found in the novel and the film. Such theoretical tools help de-center patriarchal norms of compulsive heterosexuality by exposing the queer elements present in Latin American media.

By integrating the para-cinematic texts along with the novelistic and the filmic, I propose to demonstrate the reach of queerness disguised within girl culture and its presence within popular Latin American media. I argue that *Miss Tacuarembó* questions hegemonic conceptions of identity, sexuality, faith, and belonging through its pop aesthetic and its selective casting, all indexing a queer presence. In order to establish the convergence of girl culture along with queer markers, we must read the various intertexts, the multiple cultural texts that comprise *Miss Tacuarembó*. By *intertexts*, I am referring to the ways the film layers and adapts themes, characters, religious iconography, and popular culture references from various cultural productions from the 1980s. Therefore, *Miss Tacuarembó* serves as a prime example of a media artifact constructed from adapted (non)cinematic texts. Any attempt at making sense of the film must initiate a reading of the text in relation to its adapted sources. While this may seem as a common-sense critical practice, many reviews of the film failed to consider the multiple texts that make up the movie. Critics interpreted the adaptation of cultural references and texts as a major flaw of the film. Such rejection mirrors the traditional academic disdain for adaptation seen as an *inferior* copy. The distinction where the original work is seen as superior vis-à-vis its adaptation, manifests itself even more when the original is a novel. This holds true in the evaluation of the *film Miss Tacuarembó*, which is seen as an inferior copy in relation to the original novel by Dani Umpi. The overwhelming rejection of the film as an insufficient

adaptation is also credited to the director's aesthetic choices. By other sources I am referring to the directors choice in adapting structural, narrative, and technical elements directly from telenovelas, pop music and 80's U.S. teen films. The critic's inability to expand adaptation to extend far beyond the reach of the novel is a result of the long history of adaptation studies, as a nascent field out of film and literary studies. Therefore my methodology within this chapter dialogues directly with notions of adaptation.

2.1 **Methodology: (Re)Reading Adaptation**

The methodology in this current chapter follows in-line with the previous chapter. I continue to identify reading tactics that subsume markers of girl culture into queer culture. As I argue, the reading-viewing strategies found here, reconvert seemingly innocent *children-young female* fare into projected sites of queer desires. However, the major difference developed in this chapter corresponds to reworking traditional notions of adaptation, in regards to narrative, filmic and para-cinematic structures. This chapter defines adaptation as the interweaving of various media texts within one seemingly *autonomous* media product. More precisely, my research questions notions of genre's autonomy and authenticity as original and stable. In other words, genres are in essence composed by the accumulation of various adapted works. Therefore, in order to understand a film, one must read the multiple texts that circulate in relation to the film. By expanding the concept of adaptation across multiple media sources, it illustrates the conflation of girl and queer culture. Through a broadened conception of adaptation theory, media commodities purportedly fashioned-out for pre-teen girls, acquire the potential to be read as masked cultural texts that advance the desires of queer audiences. This endeavor takes on a critical look at gendered politics in Latin American television and media, all converging in a

historical period in Argentina, marked by social, cultural, and legalistic changes in relation to the advancement of gay rights.

I am specifically contextualizing the cultural production presented here within the reforms to the Civil Code which the Argentine Congress passed on July 15, 2010. Law 26.618 ratified in the new federal civil code, extended full marriage and adoption rights to same sex couples in Argentina. This contextualization helps to chart the advancements of sexual minorities in the region, and how this practice translates into popular cultural productions. To clarify, the research presented does not imply that it was these specific cultural products that helped pass law 26.618, or paved the way for them, nor did they bring about drastic changes within traditional media industries. Instead I am providing media evidence that reflect reciprocally the socio-cultural changes taking place in Argentina. There are many examples where media products lag behind the social changes; nonetheless here we see the contrary.

This dissertation helps to further the conception developed in the previous chapter in relation to mass commodities vis-à-vis highbrow culture. While academic disciplines such as Television and Cultural Studies have helped to rescue and propose new interpretations of commodities hailing from the popular cultural industries (Mazziotti, 2006), Latin American television still continues to be regarded as debased entertainment that promulgates hegemonic values, further fueling industrial and economic prerogatives over artistic creation. This chapter thereby demarcates and proposes ways of reading cultural texts that evince the presence of queer identities traditionally considered working against, silencing, or simply absent from “seemingly” heteronormative and hegemonic media commodities. The interpretive methodology employed in the analysis of the film *Miss Tacuarembó* is aligned with adaptation studies, specifically associated to scholars that emphasize the importance of examining the intertextual relationships

between cinema and the novel. As Demory notes, “adaptation is not taking one thing and placing it into another context...[since] the ‘essence’ is neither knowable, nor directly representable” (17). While the film *Miss Tacuarembó* is an adaptation of Dani Umpi’s novel, the source text will not serve as the foundation of the analysis. Rather, this project employs Umpi’s novel as one of multiple competing *intertexts* that circulate along with the film, film trailers, reviews and musical soundtracks.

The organizational scheme of this chapter centers on two main discursive sections. The first section, titled: *Intrafilmic narratives: Camp performances* -is organized under theories of adaptation studies as a way of reading the intertextual signs that the film and novel employ in order to deconstruct the heteronormative values. Through theories of adaptation, I map the locations where multiple texts collide; and I dialogue with the fissures that are created by the superimposition of adapted cultural texts. These fissures create apertures within the filmic and novelistic narratives that allow for nuanced readings of Latin American media texts. The second major section titled *Extrafilmic sources: The masking of queer fantasies in children themed films*, interprets the ways in which corollary non-filmic media products such as trailers, lobby cards, and critical reviews create a field of signification, activated pre and post film consumption.

2.2 **The Masking of Queer Fantasies in Children-Themed Films**

The corpus of my research in this section centers on extra-filmic markers, that is, elements related to film, but that are not part of the closed filmic realm. In other words, I am focusing on actor interviews, film reviews, and lobby cards, all of which reference the film directly. These narratives, running parallel to the film, buttress the film in ways that allow viewers to begin making sense of the film, prior to its actual viewing. The media industry makes

these non-filmic texts available since the texts reinforce the packaging of the film. As such, the argument here does not imply that the industry prescribes a defined viewing-interpretation of the film, but rather, that the industry presents viewers with a myriad of texts that they may choose to deploy, in order to interpret the film. Here, I purport to tease out the discourses present in non-filmic texts as a *reading tactic* that enables the indexing of queer markers present within the film industry. By *markers* I am referring both to visual and linguistic signals that spectators can construct and identify as queer messages. This section opens by analyzing the interviews provided by the main actress of the film, Natalia Oreiro, and her role as a *star* in initiating reception for its viewers.

In a televised interview by talk-show host Susana Giménez, Natalia Oreiro promotes the release of Sastre's *Miss Tacuarembó* (2010). Oreiro as the main actress discusses her participation in the film by providing a performative narrative. I find the interview to be a performance due to the carefully constructed discourse deployed throughout her participation in the program, aimed at replicating her image as a successful global star. Throughout the interview, Oreiro lays out her role as a film and television actress, singer, clothing designer, and as a performer who travels the world. The most obvious example showcasing the interview as a carefully constructed performance, rests on the interview itself. Oreiro speaking to Giménez is not a "meeting by chance" but part of the logic of the film industry's marketing strategy and the support that television provides for such cross-platform promotional material.

In popular culture, talk shows are often understood as frivolous and disposable (Timberg & Erler, 2002). Yet, since the 1990s, academics have studied this topical genre, focusing on how talk show talk is connected to everyday conversations and how talk show hosts usurp the traditional role of journalists by influencing viewer politics, health, consumption practices, etc.

(1). Talk shows like *Susana Giménez* reach millions and have the potential to form and mold opinions. As witnessed in the conversation between Natalia and Susana, the episode's topic and conversations are highly planned and structured, serving to inform viewers' ideas regarding an array of topics, such as dating, race, fashion, child rearing, sexuality, etc. (Timberg & Erler 2). Also, the talk show format sheds light on how particular individuals in an episode [i.e. the host, guests, expert guests, and audience members] feel about a particular topic and why, gaining insight into the rationale forming their opinion. Some scholars argued that talk shows function as ideology machines, showing viewers powerful consensus narratives on national and international events and issues (Timberg & Erler 18). The role of the host as well as their selected guests is critical to understanding the function of talk show conversations and their influences on viewers.

As Timberg & Erler have pointed out, the dialogue present in a talk-show is highly performative and constructed to serve the needs of the industry producing the program. Therefore the conversation that ensues meets the narrative requirements for film promotion, such as including a clearly identified film's genre for the public, providing details about the cast, and including a short summary of the main plot. What also evinces this interview as a carefully constructed performance rests on its ability to be replicated. An almost exact interview is provided to Juan Pablo Bertazza, a journalist at *Radar*, the cultural supplement of leftist newspaper *Página 12*. In both interviews, one can trace a dual yet reciprocal denominator. One finds the industry's need to promote its film, and the actors need to maintain their star-status, but they are both dependent on one another. Oreiro's maintenance as a star is predicated on the success of the film, just as the film requires a *star* to attract audiences. Within this narrative of reciprocity, star-power is the main denominator. Therefore Oreiro's performance constructs a

narrative where notions of star power are unpacked in order to sell the film and to maintain her reigning position.

Oreiro's narrative performance is made up of three main fragments that reinforce her supremacy as a cross-platform media star. In the first segment of the interview, Oreiro positions herself as a muse. Within this narrative, it is her star quality that inspires the creative process for the film director to envision her as the embodiment of Umpi's novelistic character. She relates meeting Sastre and Umpi at the *Centro Cultural Recoleta*, where Umpi was performing at an art installation. The theme of the installation centered on celebrating Oreiro's birthday. Oreiro mentions being invited but she did not accept, until she finally decided to see what the installation was all about. During the installation, Oreiro received the manuscript, but she discarded it, as she stated in the interview:

Apenas llegué a casa, la tiré, me divertían pero sentía que esos uruguayos locos tenían otra onda.

One could argue how the installation at the Centro Cultural Recoleta was in essence an artistic performance aimed at bringing together Oreiro with the script. In essence, the art installation was a marketing ploy on the part of the underground artists to generate interest about their work. Nonetheless, the narrative constructed shows an initial rejection based on Umpi and Sastre's *craziness* and their incompatible *onda* with the actress. The incompatibility Oreiro presumes as *craziness* and *onda* stand in as I argue, for signs of queerness, or in this case, an irreconcilable form of queerness on Oreiro's part. It has been documented at length the association of fandom and the over libidinal investment in screen, television, and music divas, as the domain of women and gay men (Farmer, 2000; Dyer, 1990). Umpi's performance at the Centro Cultural in essence reflects the expression of fandom and the worshiping of a diva image. The markings of queerness stem from the director and the author's drive to celebrate and yet parody Oreiro's

duality as a screen diva. Yet her initial rejection, I argue, stems not from her rejection of queerness, since her status as a telenovela diva is predicated on a cult like fan base, made up mostly of young women and gay men. Rather, her rejection rests on the incompatibility presented by Umpi's performance that posited queerness within the space of a non-commercial art scene. Dani Umpi, as founder of the underground pop movement *Movimiento Sexy*, operates on the margins of the market, while Oreiro is a prime example of an actress and singer inscribed within a hegemonic Latin America's media industry. Oreiro and Sastre-Umpi share signs of queerness, but these signs are not completely recognizable for Oreiro due to the former's relationship to the market. Her association to Sastre and Umpi can come together, once queerness is realigned within the logic of commercial-industrial art form. The peripheral non-commercial queerness of Sastre and Umpi must be realized within a more commercial sphere, in order for the 'star' to involve herself in the project.

The second fragment of the interview demarcates Oreiro's realignment of Umpi-Sastre's queerness within a consumerist space. Her acceptance of the role in Miss Tacuarembó and her involvement within the project ultimately allow for this realignment. Her presence at the Susana Giménez show along with Sastre, who plays the piano while she sings, culminates the process of resignifying queerness as a commercially viable cultural product. Oreiro has taken them from the commercially underground art gallery, to the center of the media industry in Argentina. Susana Giménez, as the reigning diva of Argentine television and as a gay icon, helps to further Oreiro's cause. This site of televisual queerness allows Oreiro to project her conception of an "appropriate" form of consumer queer signs. Oreiro recounts how she resignifies the novel from tossed-out novel-script, to her rediscovering the novel at a commercial bookstore. I have

respectively included fragments of the newspaper interviewed followed by the televised presentation.

Apenas llegué a casa, lo tiré, me divertían pero sentía que esos uruguayos locos tenían otra onda. Tres años después, estoy por irme de gira a Moscú y veo en una librería, en medio de grandes ediciones, un librito que decía, en letra rosa, Miss Tacuarembó. Me sentí como una nena que mira por primera vez los zapatos de tacón en una vidriera: el libro hablaba de cosas que tenían que ver con mi infancia y adolescencia pero a partir de una mirada muy fresca. Por eso lo llamé por teléfono a Dani y como él es muy tímido, casi no me dio bola y sólo me dijo qué bien, llámalo a Martín (Bertazza).

La historia es hermosa...viene de hace muchos años. En el 2001, un grupo de artistas Uruguayos que se llamaba Movimiento Sexy, hacen una presentación en el Recoleta y la instalación es festejarles el cumpleaños a Natalia Oreiro...Cuando termina [la instalación] yo diciendo estos *freaks*...era alucinante lo que hacían, pero nunca me habían festejado el cumpleaños en un lugar artístico. Habrán pasado tres o cuatro años, me estaba por ir de gira a Rusia así que entré a una librería a comprarme libros...Entre medio de best-sellers de tapa dura aparecía Miss Tacuarembó, chiquitito, rosadito, y me sentí como una nena mirando una vidriera así como de zapatos de charol y dije, Miss Tacuarembó, esta es la novela! Entré, me la compré, la devoré. La novela es preciosa (Giménez) .

There are several elements present in these fragments that require attention. In both interviews she begins by breaching the time gap that occurred from her having received the script to having rediscovered the novel. The important element here is that she is the active agent with decision power to categorize that which she seems appropriate. Oreiro is the one to discover the novel, even though she had previous knowledge about its existence. As a popular television and film star, she has the power to make these *discoveries*. She reminds the audience of her position as a star by mentioning her tour. There would be no other reason to include this information since it does not have any relationship to the film. Once she establishes her celebrity-fame status can Oreiro resignify the queer non-commercial text as a queer commodity. The last line in the televised interview is crucial, since it emphasizes her power to consume, to actively *devour* the text as a product of mass consumption. Within both interviews, it is clear that the novel becomes

a fetishised object as it is compared to shiny shoes in a store window. Once again she removes the intellectual weight the script connoted at the cultural center and resignifies the text now as a product for consumption, placed at the same level as shoes. For any object, whether they are shoes or books, as long as they are consumed, they bring about the same level of satisfaction. It is this pairing of text to object that reconverts the marginalized underground queer script into an artifact within a space of mass consumption, and only then can this *star* promote the film.

Oreiro's transformation of the filmic text from an underground art scene into a vehicle for her career is also a move by the *star* to reinforce the power and agency she has within the Latin America media industry. Her status of star/celebrity grants her the power to reconvert products into appropriate cultural forms to be consumed by her fan base, composed mostly of young adult girls and queer audiences. Her concluding lines within the interview with Giménez reinforce her connection to queer audiences.

Natalia: Es una película diferente, es espontánea, fresca, atrevida. Muy atrevida, que es lo mejor. ¿No? Ser atrevido y diferente hoy por hoy....

Susana Giménez: Ahora con las cosas que uno ve en la televisión, si no hacés cine un poco atrevido tenés que irte para Shrek.

Natalia: Es mejor. Ese ogro, ¿quién lo conoce?

It is her use of the words *atrevido* and *diferente* that can be read as signs of queerness, due to her status as a gay television and film icon in the southern cone. Oreiro's success and maintenance as star figure, has been due to this *difference* which she highlights. Her lines are also relevant because her decision and her power within the marketing of the film as children/young adult fare, helps in furthering and amassing a greater number of audiences. The fact that the promotion of this movie takes place immediately before the start of winter vacation in Argentina, a period known for its release of children programming, helps her to reach new audiences. At the same

time, by marketing a film with a high index of queerness, it helps to redefine what constitutes appropriate children's programming.

2.3 **Remaking Family Entertainment**

After seeing *Miss Tacuarembó* an immediate research question surfaced: how does a film described by some critics as a postmodern, overly queer tale about a 30 year-old pop obsessed fan, compete in a period of the year marked by the release of U.S teen-young adult themed blockbusters? *Miss Tacuarembó* was released in Argentina during the height of the winter vacation season. In Buenos Aires, the winter vacation break is a two week period characterized by the release and opening of plays, movies, and concerts all aimed at attracting parents looking for safe and predictable family-friendly entertainment. In order to satisfy this demand in the winter 2010 season, Argentina released U.S imports such as the *Twilight* series and *Harry Potter*. Notwithstanding, *Miss Tacuarembó*, based on its thematic and aesthetic composition, does not fit the mold required of the winter break. Sastre's film transgresses viewers' expectations and market-demands due to the multiple genres used in constructing the film's narrative and its aesthetic composition. It is pertinent to mention that Sastre's release occurred at the same time Argentina was debating and voting on a bill to amend the civil code and grant full civil marriage rights to same sex partners. I find it imperative to analyze this move by the industry at a time where the social base is being actively transformed and becoming more inclusive of sexual minorities. Families with young children might find this film questionable and an unlikely choice due to its treatment of sexuality, religion, and social norms. Yet the marketing of the film packaged the film via traditional film marketing strategies such as trailers and star interviews that interpellate a young preteen female audience. The trailers presented avoid destabilizing

traditional family themed narratives by selecting *safe* scenes, triggering viewer recognition of typical preteen movies such as *High School Musical*, along with typical TV family fare such as reality shows, in the likes of American Idol. In this section I will focus on the film's trailer appearing on television prior to the release of the film. Before proceeding, I will provide a brief plot summary of the film, as to guide the reader throughout the analysis of the film.

The trailer presented masks the transgressive elements that family entertainment traditionally conceals. *Miss Tacuarembó*'s trailer portrays an eight year-old girl staring into a TV screen and sighing while watching *Cristal*, a classic telenovela from the 80s. Images of Natalia daydreaming of her life as Cristal immediately help in categorizing the film as a tender coming of age story for a mostly preteen girl audience. The distance between the current viewer and the classic 80's telenovela also helps in evoking a sense of nostalgia recognizable for older viewers. Any threat of inappropriateness that *Cristal* may have held in the past due to a story about unwed mothers and the world of modeling is anachronistic in this current period. Sastre's incorporation of *Cristal* within the trailer inoculates against any possible controversial themes that may be triggered in viewers. The viewer is presented only with an image of a little girl dreaming and escaping via television, through an easily recognizable Cinderella-like story. Through the circulation of such images, the trailer also demarcates the possible gender of its audience: young girls. Furthermore, viewer's awareness that Natalia Oreiro, popular for her roles in mainstream family fare telenovelas, signal to audiences the appropriateness of the film. While actors fight against typecasting, here it shows how it helps an industry secure an audience. Anyone seeing the trailer would expect an actress like Oreiro to portray such role, since her career has been established by her portrayals of the rags-to-riches plot line and characterization. Her presence within the film helps to establish and sustain viewer expectations, signaling *Miss*

Tacuarembó as an appropriate selection for the winter vacation. At the same time, the visual references to musicals like *Flashdance* (1983), alongside images of Natalia and Carlos rehearsing the choreography to the aforementioned musical's main number *What a feeling*, reinforce the nostalgic look towards the 80s as did the use of *Cristal*. The generic label of *musical* helps in not only categorizing the film for its viewers, but it also raises expectations of what the audience should expect to see, such as musical numbers. Images of *Cristal* and *Flashdance* also work in establishing a nostalgic tone, playing on the parent's idealization of their childhood memories and references. While the references might be unknown for younger viewers, who are the targets of the trailer, parent's approval based on their recognition of such cultural references, package the film as a viable choice for the winter break.

Besides images of the actress and the intertextual play among the telenovela and the Hollywood film included, the trailer also incorporates written text as a means of establishing the film as appropriate entertainment. As the images converge, segments of critic-reviews flash across the screen. The reviews state '*Ternura pop*' (Clarín), '*Ilusiones al ritmo de Flashdance*' (Página/12) '*Sastre logra hacer magia*' (Búsqueda). The inserted review invokes the wholesomeness of the film by activating viewers' preconceived knowledge of children's formulaic movies dealing with the realization of dreams. Deploying terms such as illusions, magic, and tenderness all help in aligning this film with other children movies, thus constructing a safe family approved product. However, the most interesting quote states, 'un clásico del futuro'. Minghetti's words suggest the impossibility of the film to be an instant success. It is perhaps due to its treatment of certain themes and aesthetic choices, which shows a break with the forced family-themed story-line that would be questioned by the vacation themed films. Included reviews within the narrative of the trailer serve an intertextual function that supports the

demands of the film industry. The critics review generally found in newspapers and in online film websites serve as a cross-media intertextual dialogue, validating the needs of the producers to sell its product. As the critic is not part of the film production, its textual presence within the film's packaging operates as an objective outside voice. Not only is the trailer presenting images of family approved entertainment, but the *unbiased* critic's reviews show support in that direction. However, there is great disparity among the trailers and the actual film. While it is true that *Miss Tacuarembó* is a coming of age story of a young girl living in a sleepy northern town in Uruguay, it is also a film about her rejection of the moral and cultural values fostered by the Catholic church within her hometown. The town of Tacuarembó is socially run by Cándida, the town's catechist, whose strong devotion to Christian doctrine turn her into a policing force for her students. Cándida constantly reminds Natalia that 'la fama no es un valor cristiano'. When Natalia escapes her hometown and reaches Buenos Aires, she realizes that she is not only too old to continue holding on to her dreams of becoming a star at the age of 30, but also realizes the lack of originality of her childhood dream. Sastre utilizes Cándida as the filmic vehicle to criticize religious fervor and those who use religion as a tool for dominating and regulating social and sexual norms. As I argue, the incongruence between the portrayal of the trailer and the films narrative, responds to the commercial needs of the production company to situate a film within a specific period of the year with very particular requirements that the film does not meet. The director's film openly discusses society's obsession with fame and celebrities while also delving into marginality and isolation in relation to gendered and sexual identities. Through the use of the trailer and its ability to incorporate intertextual information such as film reviews, the marketing of the film can recreate the semblance of family entertainment. However, there is a slippage on this construction of a safe family narrative in the inclusion of the "*un clásico del*

futuro". Somehow, these words can suggest that the film may not be accepted within this current time period, but it can become a classic due to its subsequent evaluation at a future time. The inclusion of these words indicate that the producers of the film perceive that the film's critique of traditional family entertainment along with its normative values that are sustained and reproduced by the market, have the potential to hamper its success. However, the overall packaging of the film drowns the possibility of this specific reading. I find the presence of Minghetti's review as telling narrative constructed to support and extend the reach of the media industry. For this reason, I will focus on reading critics review vis-à-vis the film and the possible contradictions and continuities among the film and its reviews. On the one hand, Sastre's film questions the normative value of family entertainment, yet my reading of the reviews suggests a very different operation. The narrative around the reviews focuses solely on the artistic value of the film, thereby decontextualizing the film from any historical, cultural and social relevance that the message of the film attempts to discuss or portray. For this reason, my next section will focus on the reviews circulating regarding the film *Miss Tacuarembó*.

2.4 **The Contradictions in Review Narratives**

While marketing plays a crucial role in the success of a film, it is not the only factor. Film reviews form part of the discursive narratives that help to form audience's cinematic expectations and perceptions. However, reviews no longer have the potential to *break or make* a film, as they did so in the past, due to the multiple ways viewers choose their entertainment. Audiences are now seen more as producers of their own media, rather than unilaterally absorbing messages from the media industries (Sullivan 2012, Hodkinson 2010, Berger 2007). Specifically, fans following a particular actor or director turn to blogs, personal websites, and social media, as

sources that dialogue directly with the movie and their respective fan base. Yet I continue to refer to reviews as just one more source of textual information that helps to decipher the construction of film narratives. I do not grant them a central position, but rather a shared space among the other extra-filmic elements analyzed within this chapter. Furthermore, many of these reviews included were not only found in print media, but online as well. As such, the reviews under consideration were gathered from online versions of daily Argentinean, Uruguayan and Spanish newspapers, mirroring the transnational capital producing the film. The information gathered about the film represents the three distinct national markets backing *Miss Tacuarembó*⁶. All of the reviews under considerations came from online versions of mainstream newspapers, as well as blogs dedicated to film and popular culture. One of the reasons for using online material relates to consumer-viewer practices that turn to new technologies for sources of information. I am particularly interested in the ways audiences construct their own readings of the information they gather, exerting more control over the content they collect. Once again the power lies in the audience rather than on the industry. As Tewksbury (2000) suggests, since audiences self-construct the content they view on the internet, this gives them more control (23). In other words audiences piece together information they gather from various online sources. This results in viewers less likely to follow the ideological messages constructed by traditional corporate news. Another common trend among the use of online information refers to a greater sense of synergy that is created across media platforms. The online reviews quickly cross-reference and incorporate information among various media sources, such as television, printed sources, film

⁶ While production companies in the United States did not participate in the financial backing of the film, I still included US reviews, as a fourth source. Since I am a Latin American scholar working in US academia, I felt it necessary to include the U.S. perspective since its movie industry has influenced, hindered and supported filmmakers worldwide.

and other online materials; unlike printed material which can only rely on the printed format. For example, many of the reviews included here provided links to the official YouTube page of *Miss Tacuarembó*, the trailer, song bytes, and cast interviews. Review narratives share space with other forms of narratives about the film. In this section I concentrate on analyzing the narratives of reviews as a way of seeing how the critics' narratives dialogue with the film and help to form audience expectations.

During the height of the film's publicity peak very little information was made available in printed format⁷. In contrast, online blogs and online newspapers provided articles and in-depth interviews attesting to the importance of new media over traditional printed sources. The differences in accessing printed versus online material relates to a generational divide, where younger generations tend to employ online sources much more readily than older ones. Scholar has already demonstrated the generational divide that exists between internet use, but research also shows the narrowing gender divide. Traditionally, teen and young adult males have been portrayed and targeted as avid online users. However, female internet users have caught up, and in some cases surpassed men's use of the web for obtaining news and entertainment information. While my research within this section does not quantify what percentage of men or women access such reviews, the objective of my findings points in another direction and goal. My interest lies in analyzing review narratives and how they formulate and generate a discussion about the movie and how it incorporates or rejects the films premise of a broader queer spectatorship framed as family entertainment.

⁷ With the exception of show times and several articles detailing a lawsuit initiated by workers against the producers of the film for non-payment compliance, more detailed information about the film was not available.

After classifying the 25 reviews by source and country, one finds a common trend, similar to what the main actress stated in an interview for *El Observador*: “la gente la va a amar u odiar⁸” (2010). This love/hate dichotomy makes itself present in all of the reviews. Critics praise the director’s aesthetic creativity in treating social issues such as marginalization and gender identity, yet at the same time they criticize how such themes are executed. They specifically reject the overwhelming appropriations and intertextualities of camp subjectivities. Diego Battle states:

Estamos ante una película inevitablemente desapareja y seguramente polémica en su recepción, pero también estamos ante una propuesta artística llena de libertad y creatividad. Es más de lo que mucho cine puede ofrecer en el adocenado y previsible panorama actual⁹ (Otros Cines 2010).

Battle’s critique is contradictory. On the one hand, Battle praises Sastre’s creativity, in light of other formulaic movies found during the winter vacation period. At the same time Battle points out the uneven composition of the film as the source of the film’s main problem. The *unevenness* of *Miss Tacuarembó* is one of the elements mostly repeated by this and other critics in explaining the film’s relative lack of success¹⁰. I find this to be a major critical oversight

⁸ My translation: “People will either love it or hate it” (Oreiro, *El Observador*)

⁹ We have before us an inevitably uneven and surely a very polemic movie, in regards to its reception. It is an uneven movie and yet its reception will probably be controversial, but we also have before us an artistic endeavor full of freedom and creativity. (My translation)

¹⁰ *Miss Tacuarembó* quedó en el puesto 11° con 5.549 entradas en 36 pantallas. Perdió el 64% del público y el 40% de las salas respecto de su primer fin de semana. El total es de 33.000 espectadores. En sus primeros cuatro días, “*Miss Tacuarembó*” fue vista por 15.269 personas en 62 pantallas de estreno. Esto equivale a 246 personas por pantalla. Hasta “*Francia*”, estrenada en 12 pantallas el pasado 17 de Junio (y con muchísima menos prensa) logró un mejor promedio (362). La cifra de “*Miss Tacuarembó*” es la más baja conseguida en años por un título (de cualquier nacionalidad) estrenado en semejante cantidad de salas. Para el grupo Telefe-Argentina Sono Film (coproductores del filme), la marca está por debajo de lo conseguido en igual fin de semana del 2009 por “*100% Lucha: El Amo de los Clones*”, estrenada en 66 pantallas.

found throughout the reviews. The perceived *unevenness*, or its inconsistent use of multiple aesthetics, purposefully turn the film into a market defiant product, subverting market rules and expectations. Critics praise the director's creativity; however when this creativity exceeds the norms and formulas for genre films, critics then reject the film. Critics employ a myriad of terms to describe the film's genre such as pop-fable, musical, comedy, and drama. In other words, they make reference to basic movie genres-terminology easily recognized by most viewers. In part, this corresponds to the role critiques hold as cultural intermediaries who *read* viewer expectation vis-à-vis the film and its genre. If the critic finds no match between the perceived expectations and the director's project, then the film is presented as a failure. However, audiences currently do not solely rely on such narratives due to the availability of competing discourses from television, and multiple online mediums. By focusing only on the viewer expectations in relation to genre films, critics failed to see the director's bigger aim in relation to contesting the dominance of foreign filmic imports, but also in broadening the filmic language of family and teen movies. The critics' silence on the possibilities of the film to reconsider traditional themes escapes the requirements of newspaper-style film reviews.

Critic Alejandro Contreras continues and sums up what many reviews criticized in relation to the quality of the movie. In *Culturamas* Contreras states:

El debut en el largometraje de Martín Sastre tras una prolífica carrera en el video musical no podría ser más desastroso. Que no os traten de engañar con que estamos ante una película de culto a la que todos terminaríamos rindiéndonos, porque no es más que un *refrito* de recuerdos culturales tan mal contruidos y peor interpretados que dan ganas de pedir el dinero que ha costado la entrada de la película¹¹(2010).

¹¹ Martín Sastre's feature film debut, after a prolific career in the area of music videos could not have been more disastrous. Do not let them fool us into thinking that before us is a cult film that we will all fall like. This film is nothing more than a haphazard mixture of badly constructed cultural memories, and even more they are not well interpreted, to the point that it makes you want to ask for a refund for the cost of the movie ticket. (My translation)

I find three striking elements in Contreras' review. The first relates to Contreras' conception on the making of a cult film. Contreras presents it as something that can be imposed upon an audience, rather than something that occurs as a result of fan-audience decisions. His discourse deploys an older model of *audience* no longer accepted by scholars. For Contreras, viewers can be *duped* into believing what ever the industry proposes to release. He does not consider the audience's potential in constructing their own meaning. Contreras thereby positions himself in a position of power and authority. As a critic he sees the potential he has to *warn* audiences, yet his arguments are drowned out by the amount of fan material available on the film. Fans of Oreiro and of camp films will not necessarily curb their viewing habits based solely on reviews. Since for fans, *quality* is measured by more than traditional conceptions of film acting and the craft of film making. The mere presence of the film personality can turn the film into a cult classic for fans. A second point of contention within the review's narrative is the use of the term *refrito*, a term with a negative connotation to describe TV melodramatic works. A *refrito*, refers to the industry's practice of purchasing television formats and *remaking* them for a local market. Since the beginning of the television industry in Latin America, the *refrito* has been an industry norm (Mazziotti 1996)¹². Yet Contreras ignores this *refrito* trajectory and attempts to impose more of an *art house* film model. Also for Contreras, Sastre's cultural references are all transposed through a *refrito* narrative; that is, a television aesthetic composed of recycled and overused themes. Contreras fails to recognize how television influenced Sastre's directorial

¹² Not only formats and script circulated throughout various countries, but the circulation of stars, and technicians was and continues to be a common practice. Some networks such as Mexico's Televisa focus mostly on producing *refritos*, since their business models dictates producing only programming that has proven to be successful. Other networks such as Brazil's *O Globo* do not produce remakes but they do sell their formats and their talent abroad, thereby also participating in the *refrito* process.

vision, an aesthetic that owes its composition to Latin American television. This negation and rejection of a *telenovela aesthetic* limits the analysis of the film and it downplays the current trend in film to incorporate elements from the television industry. Historically, the opposite occurred: television borrowed from cinema its industrial and artistic innovations and techniques, however as the popularity of television spread and occupied a more prominent space in people's daily lives, film started to mimic and incorporate a televisual aesthetic. These two discursive areas: audiences as victims-duped by the industry, and the power of the critic to warn audiences, are found throughout all of the reviews, which I will continue to analyze in this section. It must be stated that Contreras' conception of a duped audience no longer holds within the vast academic literature on audience studies. The media's power to guide and direct viewer decisions/choices has been discredited (Ang 1985, Fiske 1989, and Martín-Barbero 1999), since otherwise it would imply that the producers of meaning lie in the hands of the industry. Fiske points out in *Understanding Popular Culture* (1989):

Popular culture is made by the people, not produced by the culture industry. All the culture industries can do is produce a repertoire of texts....for the various formations of the people to use or reject in the ongoing process of producing their popular culture (22).

The construction and circulation of meaning is therefore in the hands of the people or the audiences. And in relations to the *various formations*, Fiske clarifies that meanings are not stable but vary depending on the various communities of viewers that construct meaning according to their own criteria. This tension between who constructs media messages and the power of the industry has been one of the main topics in media studies. Since the inception of this field, scholars such as Hall (1980) have read media messages as constructs mediated by the interaction of production, texts, and audiences. The conception of a hierarchy has been destabilized by their research. Therefore, what Contreras sees as a *refrito* of badly constructed

cultural memories, queer audiences conceive as a cultural product that speaks to their experiences, based on their available *repertoire* of cultural texts. The aura of the critic emanating from the site of media institutions no longer remain protected or preserved since *audiences* have the power to mold and resignify the industry's cultural production based on their connections to technology.

Another common repertoire that can be analyzed is that of the discourse on acting. The reviews critique Oreiro's performance due to the influence of her work in telenovelas. As it has been traditionally presented, within the hierarchy of acting, telenovela actors have resided on the lower ends of the scale. And Oreiro's incursion within film has always brought about the corresponding negative critiques. In *Culturamas*, Alejandro Contreras comments on the actors' portrayal of the main characters:

Personajes marcados por referentes culturales de los ochentas de dudoso gusto. Ninguno de ellos ni del resto de los elencos se salva de tener que dar vida a unos personajes tan caricaturescos y grotescos que sumados con interpretaciones tan horrorosas como la de Rossy de Palma sólo hace agudizar el mal sabor de boca (2010).

The dominant criticism finds fault with the telenovela elements of caricature and of the grotesque. An element that clearly marks this film as following the telenovela paradigm is Oreiro's portrayal of a dual character. Within the film, Oreiro portrays two characters, the leading role and the role of Cándida, the film's antagonist. The practice of one actor playing both the *good* and the *bad* is a common trend found in telenovelas. In an interview for primetime television, Oreiro relates how she preferred the antagonist's role, but she was chosen for the lead, and this led her to ask the director for permission to play both roles. As recounted by the actress, she relates how "in a movie like this", it was possible. A comment such as a "movie like this" can take on various readings. The first possible meaning relates to the multiple aesthetic and thematic elements taken from the genre of the telenovela and incorporated into the movie which

allows for such recourses. There is a lengthy telenovela corpus of actors playing twins or dual characters. And within the industry, such roles are presented as a feat, due to the technical and the industrial requirements needed to produce the duality by one actor¹³. In trade and popular magazines, many times the actor is lauded for their histrionic ability in creating two very opposing characters, even though the characters do not have a complex psychological profile. Oreiro's Cándida was portrayed with over the top make-up and with exaggerated mannerisms. Such characterization approximate this character to the traditional players of villains found in children's movies and in telenovelas. Not only did the critics reject her portrayal, but they mentioned the lack of depth found in each character.

A problem with the critics' evaluation of television acting is that it has never been recognized as a legitimate and specific form of acting. Specifically, telenovela acting has been criticized for not following the *rules* of acting: such as the realism found in film acting, or the classical form for the stage. Numerous telenovela scholars (Mazziotti 1993 and Verón 1993) have recounted how unjustly the rules of acting from other mediums have been expected and forced upon a distinct television genre with its own rules and requirements. Verón exemplifies how the production patterns of telenovelas have redefined the norms of acting. For example, the inability to rehearse due to a long and continuous shooting schedules have forced actors to rely more on their role of television personality than on their ability to create a character (38).

¹³ Just a few titles of Latin American telenovelas where one actor plays a dual role as a twin: Argentina: Soledad Silveyra-Amor en custodia-2005, Mike Amigorena-Los exitosos Pells-2009, Isabel Macedo-Floricienta 2-2005, Grecia Colmenares-Manuela-1991. Brazil: Benicio Murilo-O Clone 2001, Reynaldo Gianecchini-Da cor do pecado-2004, Gloria Pires-Mulheres de Areia-1992. Mexico: Mauricio Ochmann-Como en el cine-2001, Helena Rojo-Inocente de ti-2004, Alexis Ayala-Yo amo a Juan Querendón-2007, Lucero-Lazos de amor-1995, Gabriela Spanic-La usurpadora-1998.

Este sistema productivo ha ocasionado una consecuencia que me parece decisiva: EN EL TELETEATRO LATINOAMERICANO ASISTIMOS A LA DESTRUCCIÓN COMPLETA DEL UNIVERSO CLÁSICO (TEATRAL Y AÚN CINEMATOGRAFICO) DE LA “REPRESENTACIÓN”, DE LA “INTERPRETACIÓN”. En efecto, en razón de las condiciones de trabajo...cada actor, cada actriz importante interpreta finalmente todos sus personajes más o menos de la misma forma. La “construcción” específica de una personalidad, el estudio de un personaje en el contexto de una historia también específica, no existen más. Resultado: el actor y la actriz de teleteatro gozan de una enorme popularidad en el género, AL FIN DE CUENTAS SÓLO INTERPRETAN SU PROPIO ROL: a través de diferentes personajes, ellos interpretan su propia imagen de actores y actrices célebres de teleteatros. EL ESPESOR “FICCIONAL” DE LOS PERSONAJES QUEDA ASÍ COMPLETAMENTE ABOLIDO (the caps and the bold is the authors) (39).

In short, Verón demonstrates how industry and productive prerogatives have created a new form of acting specifically for television. Instead of developing and executing a character, Verón suggests that the industry leads actors to exploit their TV-screen personality over their ability to construct a character. In other words, the actor is not performing a character, rather they are performing the role of a telenovela star. Therefore, the value of a telenovela actor is measured by their ability to perform multiple telenovelas throughout their careers. Overall, Verón oversimplifies a complex industry made up of multiple companies within various countries with complex acting traditions with their own formulas for producing a seemingly stable genre. Even within one country there exist multiple telenovela models. For example, in the Argentinean market, the production company *Underground* incorporates an artistic director for their telenovelas, whose responsibility is to oversee the development of characters and performances within the logic of the narrative. Whereas when the network *Telefe* produces a telenovela, the whole project is in the hands of the Executive Producer who does not oversee the artistic vision of the product, but whether the product is executed following the guidelines of the genre. In this case, there is no artistic director, but only a scene director who has no decision power for the vision of the product. Their direction is based on the demands of the executive producer, rather

than on their own views. Obviously, these two distinct production models have direct influences on the actor. Whereas in the former, the actor meets with the artistic director during the preproduction stage in order to build and work on a character, the latter receives a script to follow without any specific demands or time devoted to character building. The actor is therefore relying on their screen persona, as Verón would state. His argument is nonetheless useful in its ability to suggest that telenovelas have their own acting logic, therefore when evaluating a work one must apply those precepts, rather than enforcing the conditions for stage and film acting. Therefore, when analyzing Oreiro's portrayal in *Miss Tacuarembó*, critics have to accept and understand the film's telenovela aesthetic.

However, not all critics find *Miss Tacuarembó's* melodramatic/telenovela elements as a major fault of the film. Martín Pérez of *Radar*, a film critic for *Página 12*, states:

Su talento postmoderno aparece diluido en la necesidad de contar, pero sin embargo toda su capacidad para las citas, brillos, y ese humor que subyace en cada uno de sus guiños, siempre dicen presente en **una película inclasificable como una buena telenovela**.
(Bold is mine)

Pérez's evaluation could also take on more than one reading when focusing on the lines I highlight. The first possible reading suggests the film acquires coherence once the viewer recognizes the telenovela elements found in the film. Pérez identifies the work of Sastre as a postmodern rendition that cannot evenly maintain its proposed plan, but its use of humor and of irony holds the film together. Pérez suggests that all of the postmodern intertextual winks render *Miss Tacuarembó* as a cultural product that is difficult to classify as film, but rather more aptly identified using the telenovela formula. Here Pérez is able to distinguish Sastre's aesthetic as hailing from the realm of television. Therefore Pérez's evaluation of the film is more positive, once the reviewer recognizes the director's source of influence. In the first reading of the quote it can be interpreted that the definition of a good telenovela rests on its lack of classification, on a

less formulaic structure. This suggests that the structure and length of a telenovela can allow for more flexibility by incorporating different genres and themes, such as romance, fantasy, realism and satire. Due to the time constraints of films, the director cannot execute a wide variety of aesthetics, since doing so jeopardizes the coherence of genre films. The ability of telenovelas to incorporate multiple forms is a strong point rather than a failure, and Sastre's inclusion of the telenovela aesthetic is deliberate and not a lack of artistic ability, as other critics state. Jonathan Holland in *Variety* (2010) wrote:

Pic bites off too much in an attempt to roll together realism, romance, fantasy, satire, and it doesn't always elegantly handle its time shifts, multiple moods, and genres...all are spectacles about reaching the promised land.

Viewers accustomed to melodramatic/telenovela style narratives would appreciate and not read as problematic *Miss Tacuarembó's* spectacle of diverging and multiple styles. Holland's conception of *all are spectacles* seem to indicate the episodic form of the film, reminiscent of the internal structure of the telenovela. All of the faults he finds in the film can also be used to describe the format of the telenovela: episodic, multiple moods and time shifts.

Holland's evaluation of the film converses with another possible reading of Pérez's review, since the latter's use of ambiguous words such as *diluido* and *inclasificable*, can refer to the problems critics have found with the film. Such words can create another possible reading by suggesting that a movie becomes unintelligible due to the telenovela's influence. The fact that the film has been *invaded* by a different medium makes it impossible to classify the film. Pérez is not alone in categorizing this film as an *uncategorizable*. Sánchez calls it an *artefacto extraño* and Russo labels *Miss Tacuarembó* as an *extraña miscelánea*. I find the insistence on *strangeness* to be the crucial point to explore. My interpretation of *extraño* remits to markers of queerness. Direct references to queerness are silenced throughout the whole packaging of the

film and the reviews follows suit, even though telenovelas are closely linked to a queer domain. There seems to be a generalized inability on the part of the reviewers to recognize its queerness. Yet at the same time, the strange *artifact* obtains coherence, as stated by Pérez's comment by comparing the film to a *good telenovela*.

In the first interpretation of Pérez's quote, the ambiguity of the wording favors the telenovela as a form that incorporates various styles and genres, since it is a form of television that has constantly evolved and adapted from other forms such as the popular theater, novels, radio, and film. The second reading disrupts the quality of the film. My reading favors the first interpretation that suggests that the telenovela as a genre is not a stable and static genre, but one that evolves and adapts to other mediums, as Sastre has done in *Miss Tacuarembó*. As stated in the segment on genres, scholars agree that genres are never static and stable but evolve overtime. This does not negate the fact that the telenovela as a product of the industry must possess and follow certain criteria in order to be marketed and distributed. Nevertheless, viewers' taste and expectations change, forcing genres to also evolve.

2.5 **Textual and Visual Narratives**

The inclusion of the lobby cards within this chapter serve the purpose of identifying the triple play of visual still images, textual narratives, and the use of props designed to initiate audience signification. It is important to highlight that these lobby cards are just one of the initial visual depictions that the viewer sees before and after the screening of the film in theaters, thus suggesting the ongoing and circular nature of the signification process. This circular process does not suggest that the audience's interpretation terminate at the end of the film. Instead there is a relay back to the lobby card, where viewers can determine if their initial

presumptions about the film match their expectations. As audiences enter and leave the theater, the film viewing experience is removed from the limits of the screen and it extends far beyond the theater. The two lobby cards that I analyze here were used to promote the movie and also served as the design for the DVD jacket. The first lobby card was used for the Latin American market and the second one for the Spanish market. Both lobby cards employ very different aesthetics and marketing strategies that help viewers generate meaning through its composition and the display and organization of space within the image.

The first lobby card (Latin American market) under consideration formed part of the still-visual marketing packaging used for Latin America, specifically Uruguay, which saw its first theatrical release. Subsequent to its original release, the film was screened in Argentina, thus completing the film's core target audience within the South American market. The still image utilizes a bright and crisp photographic composition highlighted by fluorescent pink beams; a visual composition recreating 1980's aesthetics. By recreating the look of a past era, the images immediately define the time and space of the action. Also the center of the image is occupied by two actresses: Oreiro as an adult and by Sofía Silvera, who plays the character of Natalia as a child. The retelling of an 80's narrative is made evident by the positioning of the two actresses, suggesting that the film is retelling a coming of age story with the young girl in front and the older actress (Oreiro) in the back. Visually the lobby card creates a generational gap that only the viewing of the story can close. The centrality of the dual images not only provides the visual content for the main plot line (the coming of age story), but showcases the film's genre. While the melodramatic composition of the film might not surface immediately from the still, once the screening of the film occurs, the film's telenovela aesthetic becomes evident.

In the lobby card we have the two Natalias representing two opposed but continuous generational identities: childhood and adulthood. Subsequently the film continues to exploit dualities, not only of its characters, but of the actors as well. The film's insistence on dualities stems from the melodramatic narrative informing the film. As mentioned earlier, the telenovela employs a melodramatic narrative structured around dualities which serve as the motor for the film's dramatic conflict. Some of these dualities include: good-evil, rich-poor, beauty-homeliness, and young-old. Oreiro here simultaneously plays a dual role: Natalia as an adolescent and as an adult. At first the transitions between childhood/adolescence/ and adulthood are clearly delineated, but halfway through the movie, adolescence and adulthood blend together, making Oreiro play a dual role simultaneously, until the point where it becomes hard to distinguish between the temporal/chronological stages of Natalia's life. Audiences familiar with Oreiro's work come to expect this child/adult duality, based on her previous roles. Through the use of logic and through the events that unfold in the story, it is clear that the character is in her thirties. Yet it is Oreiro's repeated performances on television and in other films that make it difficult to see her character as an adult. Her characters are always linked to a post-adolescence pre-adulthood narratives. In other words, fans familiar with her work have to suspend their knowledge about her life and make use of their knowledge about her characters-TV-onscreen personality. One might argue that the meshing of the character's stages of adolescence/adulthood occurs as a result of inexperience on the part of the director/screenwriter, or a general fault of a poorly developed film that casts an older person for the role of a younger one. However, it is not uncommon for telenovelas to cast actors that do not necessarily fit their real age, such as an actor playing the role of a father, when in reality the son is much older than the father. These telenovela conventions are widely celebrated by fans even though critics see

this as yet another *problem* of the genre. This critique picked up by the reviewers, as I argue, does not affect audience expectations, particularly those familiar with Oreiro's work on television. A discrepancy arises when one compares the amount of negative critiques Oreiro receives as an actress, in light of her massive success as a television star. Oreiro is perhaps one of the most recognized and popular telenovela stars in the Southern Cone, and in a number of non-Spanish speaking markets such as in Russia, Israel, and in Eastern Europe. The construction of this dichotomy of extreme success versus critical disdain confirms the uselessness of assigning a value judgment on the actors' histrionic skills, within the context of popular film and television. For this reason focusing only on *acting abilities* hinders an in-depth discussion of popular media, since it can be easily rejected based on its *quality*. Degrees of quality are irrelevant in this discussion since they negate the concept of the audiences' role in signifying and accepting the visual depictions of their favorite actors, which has very little to do with their evaluation of acting skills. As I am trying to show here, there are multiple elements and narratives inside and outside the film that help construct audience signification, such as in this case, the audiences' recognition and awareness of Oreiro's body of work. . With this in mind, I want to clarify that for this argument I am not negating the importance of acting; rather, I am rejecting the importance placed on qualifying acting skills based on parameters established for film and theater acting, which takes us back to Verón's argument on the differences between film and television performances. The relevance of acting within this work rests on what role does acting and an off-screen/onscreen persona play in signifying a film. Oreiro's off-screen persona characterized as upbeat and jovial informs her onscreen performance. As stated by Gentile (2010), no one else from Argentina/ Uruguay could have played the role of Miss Tacuarembó. The critic's statement evinces the recognition of certain attributes of the actress that enable her to

adequately perform her role. Gentile has stated that Oreiro's success in this film and in her previous television productions are predicated on her ability to "infantilize" herself, while still being able to maintain a level of credibility. In almost all of her onscreen performances, Oreiro has exploited exponentially the image of an adult who exhibits characteristic pertaining to adolescence, but at the same time she obtains an ageless quality which cannot be pinned down. This ageless quality is grounded on the importance placed on the industry in promoting youth culture; and telenovelas perpetuate this aesthetic ideal. Also, as I have argued in relation to telenovelas as a genre that incorporates various modes of representation, viewers' understanding of the genre allows them to follow the film's trajectory.

In contrast to the first lobby card, the second image provides yet another visual depiction that accompanies the film's narrative. The second lobby poster was used mostly for the movies' release within the European market, particularly for Spain. For this reason this poster not only includes the image of Natalia Oreiro, but also *la chica Almodóvar*, Rosy Campos. While Oreiro does have a following in Spain, it is not enough as it is the case in the Southern Cone. For this reason *la chica Almodóvar* was included in the lobby card to help market and index the movie for Spanish audiences. Campos' previous work with Almodóvar helps to establish Sastre as having a *tradition* recognizable to Spanish audiences. The existing link between Almodóvar and Sastre become evident, due to the thematic, visual, and structural influences of Almodóvar on Sastre. There are striking similarities among the work of both directors, particularly in their use of melodrama as the organizing genre of their narratives, although both depart on the uses of melodrama. Sastre deals with the melodramatic style closely developed in telenovelas, as a way to critique and discuss regional Latin American issues. Almodóvar references mostly the cinema of Hollywood's Golden Age period, in relation to critiquing popular forms of *Spanishness*.

Acevedo-Muñoz in *Pedro Almodóvar* (2007) defines the cinema of the Spanish director in ways that can also describe Sastre's first feature film:

The films' dependency on intertextuality, camp appropriations of "Spanishness", and generic instability are among their defining characteristics (1-2).
Pedro Almodóvar's films challenge that representation [of the benevolent father figure] by introducing "unorthodox" dysfunctional family units where fathers are absent...(26)

Both directors recur to camp appropriations of their respected nations and create intertextual narratives out of their cultural archives. However, critics differ in how each director explores his own vision. The generic instability within Sastre's film is highly criticized, yet in Almodóvar this defining element elevates and distinguishes him as a leading European director.

Furthermore, Acevedo-Muñoz also distinguishes some of Almodóvar's films in their ability to de-center and weaken patriarchal ideologies found in family and society discourses. Similarly, Sastre continues this theme by making it evident in his critique of patriarchal ideology found in Catholicism and in Latin American *family values*, through the character of Cándida and Padre Clever. This last point shall be expanded upon throughout the discussion of the film in relation to its novel adaptation. Furthermore, Almodóvar's critique of *Spanishness* in Sastre becomes a critique of regional Latin American regionalisms and issues of center-periphery. Natalia Oreiro states in an interview "Yo iría a verla aunque no actuara [en ella] porque es diferente; sale de lo convencional" (Exitonia 2010). And it is precisely the name of Almodóvar that gives the film its *transgressive* status. The presentation of *Miss Tacuarembó* as *different* seems to have had an effect, since in the Málaga Annual Film festival the film headed the category titled *Special Films*. Within the festival, Sastre's work won best film and best screen play within this category. It is

interesting to note how Latin American critics did not think so highly of the film, as did the film committee at the festival. Emilio Bellón writes¹⁴:

Solo el afiche ya me producía cierto recelo; me hacía pensar en una comedia populista con moraleja del cine argentino de los años 70, en tiempos de la dictadura. Había algo que me alejaba cada vez más y más (Página 12- 2010).

At first, for Bellón there were no visible signs of *difference*, but of similarities. Bellón finds similarities with the typical teen-musicals prevalent during the dictatorship, due to the lighthearted fare presented to viewers serving as a mask from the violence the state was perpetrating against its citizens. Yet there are moments where Bellón sees the film's potential to question social conventions and mores:

En esta coproducción, que reúne figuras del mundo hispano, también está en juego la figura del diferente, cuya visibilidad comienza a ser tenida en cuenta en el cine de este último tiempo. Martín Sastre saluda al libro de Dani Umpi y elige como "héroes" a los que se apartan de las convenciones y que, por ello, son mal mirados en el seno de la sociedad. Por eso Miss Tacuarembó pregonaba esa aptitud de apertura y de distensión que nos merecemos (2010).

Bellón finds value in the way Sastre selects a text that centralizes the theme of gendered and sexual identities that depart from normative and hegemonic representation. Bellón values the film's ability to not only entertain but question the value of inclusion and equality for all.

The most striking visual representation in the second lobby card refers to the positioning of the globe and the two child stars holding it up with their legs. The still images show how the weight of the world is upon them. A major theme developed through the film centers on the isolation felt by members whose identities and desires mark them as different, and thereby as

¹⁴ Bellón's overall critique is favorable and states that while the film is not a great work of art, it does have moments of value, such as its critique of hypocritical Christian values that the members of the town hold. However my interests in his review stems from his acknowledgement of the lobby card, which for the critic remitted him to a darker time in Argentina's history.

outcasts from society. For this reason both child stars have their feet propped up not against land masses but over water. They do not form part of the “mass”, but they are hanging over water. That fact that they are positioned away from *civilization* inhabiting a landless territory, the image highlights the *detritorialization* of queer identities. Miss Tacuarembó narrates the expulsion and sense of living in the shadows from centers of hegemonic powers. Natalia and Carlos’ displacement from their provincial society force them to find solace in dreaming about inhabiting the center of a larger metropolis, such as Buenos Aires. Yet their arrival in Buenos Aires does not change their peripheral positioning; rather, their provincial *condition* is highlighted even more. As it occurs in the film, Natalia’s presence and participation within the Argentine reality show stems from the show’s premise to sensationalize and ridicule the provincial background of its contestants; in this case Natalia and her mother. In essence, the image of the union between body and world visually create a metaphor denoting difference and displacement. The metaphor of body and that of a region-country has a long tradition of intellectual pursuit within the Southern Cone. “La metáfora del país-cuerpo, que ya había aparecido en la escritura de Sarmiento en la primera mitad del siglo XIX, se vuelve hegemónica a partir de 1871” (Rogers 2). Rogers states in relation to Salessi’s work on queer subjects, the *Generación del 37* (Domingo Sarmiento, Esteban Echeverría, Juan Bautista Alberdi) establish in their writing and political ideology the fusion of body and nation that would shape political, scientific, and artistic discourse throughout the 19th and 20th century in the Southern Cone region. The nation is in essence a corporal representation that must be observed and controlled as a means of civilizing its difference. And the character of Cándida fulfills that role by surveilling the children of Tacuarembó. Since Carlos and Natalia constantly challenge the rules of Cándida and Father Clever, they are excluded and marked as in need of a cure due to their difference. I find that the

visual representation of their difference is represented through the *inverted* position of the child stars, who look up at a *world* who judge and impose their norms. The term inversion or *inverts* is significant since throughout part of the 19th and 20th century, the term *invert* was used as a label for homosexuality and the term in Spanish through time, at least in some regions took on connotations of someone being strange, different, in other words, queer. The main characters in the film are designated as queer due to their difference, be it through their sexual identity or their refusal to participate within a normative society. And the second lobby card visually demonstrates how children who are seen as different are *inverted* and made to feel the weight of the world on them. It is this visual *difference* depicted in the lobby card that allows for the pairing of Sastre's work with that of Almodóvar.

2.6 **Narratives of Adaptation**

One of the basic questions Naremore (2000) and Leitch (2003) pose while working on Adaptation Studies is: What is being adapted? This simple question proves helpful in deconstructing the institutional weight of film analysis based solely on its degrees of *faithfulness* to the novel (Albrecht-Crane and Cutchins 13). Yet what does *faithfulness* to the novel imply? Under what grounds can we claim faithfulness to a literary text? Since the impossibility for faithfulness has already been established based on the rejected triage of: author as *authority*, the autonomous nature of art, and originality of forms, a new relationship among adaptations must be established. Doing so will allow us to understand the inner workings of adaptation. Herein, I continue to analyze adaptation following Bazin's concept of *equivalences* among forms. Rather than enumerating the differences found among artistic mediums, Bazin suggest tracing the equivalences that adapters have been able to sustain within the terrain of the novel and the film.

Otherwise, as Bazin argues, if the focus rests only on the differences, then the critic is creating a hierarchical evaluation of the forms, always favoring one over the other. I partially depart from Bazin's conception of adaptation which only considers novels and films. One must also consider exterior factors such as the work of the press, the actors, and the audiences in shaping and in *reading* the adaptation process. In other words, the para-cinematic and the *intertextual relays* among forms is absent from Bazin's analysis. Nonetheless I find Bazin's conception of *equivalences* useful in its rejection of measuring the adaptation of novels into films simply by their differences and losses, rather than on their continuities. Generally, those differences have been a condemning factor of popular film over its *founding* text. Instead, I am in favor of delineating the structural *equivalences* found in the dual *Miss Tacuarembó* forms. By the dual forms I am referring to the cinematic, referred here in as *MT-F (Miss Tacuarembó-film)* and the novelistic, referred here in as *MT-N (Miss Tacuarembó-novel)*. I do not suggest that the transference of structures should or can transfer equally, but rather the transferences refer to the signs that travel between forms. By signs I am referring to the ways the plot, characterization, and themes shape and duplicate the work adapted. These *signs* forming part of a structural design transfer depending on to which artistic form they are included, -be it film or in literary texts. While the artistic form may require a change or an adaptation due to the needs of each form, there still lies present the underlining sign. It is for this reason that *equivalences* of signs here do not necessarily mean an exact transposition, but suggests the presence of a trace, a remnant of its sign. The argument I propose here dialogues with the larger scholarship on postmodernism. I am specifically referring to postmodernist thought that sees the fallacy of a text deemed original and thereby superior due to its authority based on chronology and

originality. A canonical expression of this idea can be seen throughout the works of Jorge Luis Borges.

Borges develops the concept of literature as an art form composed of versions in *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote*. In this short story, the main character sets out to rewrite Cervantes's novel and in the end as Beatriz Sarlo's claims: "The idea of the fixed identity of a text is destroyed as are those ideas of authorship and of original writing" (32). The ultimate message from this theoretical story rests in suggesting that power lays not in the text, but in the processes of reading and interpreting the text. In my analysis of popular cultural production, I am also interested in how texts are read and reconstructed. Meaning is thereby conveyed in tracing the transference of signs, its intertexts. In other words, how do the intertextual relays help to initiate dialogue among adapted works? Responding to what is being adapted; this chapter claims that the process of adaptation does not affect the direct transference of form and structure from novel into film. Instead, the adaptation process initiates a continuum in constant dialogue between the work of Umpi and Sastre, thus creating a process that is multidirectional. The multidirectional aspect supposes a change in both the viewing and the interpretative field. Therefore, viewing is not seen merely in relation to the movie, but it is also informed by the novel, along with all the other texts that make up the visual and linguistic field of the film. I am advancing here that the act of interpretation and viewing is not initiated by one central text, but through the wide reach of oscillating texts that the viewer has available. Viewing and interpretation is therefore not static nor definitive, instead interpretation is inscribed within the specific connections established among the wide gamut of texts. Therefore, I will trace the adaptation of *MT-N* into *MT-F* as a process of dialogue and continuity among both works. The work of Sastre and Umpi complement each other in their efforts to present a queer work that rejects forms of

discursive normativity. I trace how both *texts* dismantle patriarchal discourses through their narrative structures. However, before continuing it is important to define Umpi's text. Within my argument I refer to his text as a pop bildungsroman which uses the character of Natalia as a collective voice for those marginalized and excluded.

Scholars working on the Bildungsroman regard the novel of formation as the novelistic genre par excellence of the 19th century that focuses on the formative years and-or their spiritual education of a main character (McAleer, 179). It also marks the acquisition of an individual identity and social rank after a series of rejections (McAleer 179). The bildungs thematically traces the character's growth through their rejection of traditional models and embraces a new social model of which they participate. Ideologically Franco Moretti in *The way of the world* (2000) highlights the genre's paradigmatic emphasis on Modernity. For Moretti the *Bildungsroman* summarizes the drive towards Modernity encompassing both the Anglo-European model of bourgeois capitalism along with the transformation of traditional societies under the guise of reason, progress, and social well-being. In other words, the novel of formation advances the ideals of the Enlightenment within a capitalist framework. It also simultaneously foresees the rise of the self and individualism as a concrete identity resulting from this socio-economic change. (McAleer 180). For McAleer the bildungs functions as a cultural form that not only records but illuminates notions of the self (180).

The narrative logic of the Bildungsroman focuses on the main character's transformation marked by a period of self-analysis and the questioning of traditional norms that ultimately leads the character to a state of self-realization and learning. By focusing on the formative years of the character, the bildungs legitimizes the values of the new social order that the character embraces (Moretti 16). Moretti also highlights the "overvaluation of youth" always aligned to progress

and how this combination clashed with “the static teleological vision of happiness and reconciliation” (Lazzaro 9). Within this paradigm other critics of the Bildungsroman have identified several key characteristics that define the genre. Buckley in *Season of Youth: the Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (1974) characterizes the genre as one that focuses solely on the evolution of the main character (17). The remaining characters are simply satellites serving secondary roles. There is an over emphasis in the subjectivity of the *I*, evincing a tendency for the biographical. Other elements in play include the generational conflict amongst *youth* and traditional social players, as well as a critique of the education system. Among other characteristics Buckley also mentions the main character’s sense of alienation, the conflict of provinciality versus urbanity, and the search for an education-vocation. When the character faces the above mentioned struggles, the protagonist is forced to leave their home. Ultimately the voyage results in a learning experience that transforms the character, allowing him/her to return home after having accepted and internalized the new social order (18). Pilar Bellver-Sáez assigns the character’s voyage as acquiring epic proportions. By *epic* she does not mean the traditional “great achievements” narrated about war or domination, but by the epic proportions that quotidian life acquires. Due to the genre’s centrality of the subjectivity of the self and the main character’s interiority, the everyday acquires a higher state importance. Bellver-Sáez synthesizes Moretti’s vision of the role of the mundane in the Bildungsroman as:

Un tipo de novela que se caracteriza precisamente por glorificar y embellecer la cultura del día a día. Esta glorificación de lo diario convierte al hombre corriente en héroe de una ventura que se contiene dentro de los límites sociales establecidos (108).

The focus on the day-to-day followed by a detailed examination of the personal versus the collective or the public have been taken up by feminist criticism. As a point of departure for feminist criticism, the 1970s marked a return interest for the bildungs precisely for the genre’s

ability to narrate personal subjectivity within a social sphere that does not always advocate for its inclusion. Feminist criticism noted that when quotidian narratives about self-exploration and subjectivity focused on women, those particular novels would be deemed inferior literature. But when those particular themes focused on male characters, the narrative would acquire relevance. Because of this literary double standard, feminist criticism sought to vindicate female narratives of formation. Besides feminists, other traditionally excluded writers re-appropriated the genre as one having the capacity to frame the experiences of those relegated to the socio-cultural, political, and genre periphery. As announced in *The Voyage in. Fictions of female development*, (Abel, Hirsch, & Langland 1983), Abel identified the genre as the ideal battleground for expressing “la experiencia de marginación y progresiva emancipación vivida por la mayoría a lo largo del siglo XX” (13), quoted in *Nilda* (Bellver-Sáez 102). Bellver-Sáez recognizes Moretti’s claim regarding the nature of the bildungs in its diffusion of Modernity. However, the former expands Moretti’s conception by aligning the drive towards Modernity with the experiences of those relegated to the margins by Modernity. For those excluded see the bildungs as a narrative form that can explain such exclusion (102). Furthermore, Tobias Boes acknowledges the role “of feminist, post-colonial studies and minority studies of the 1980’s-1990’s in continuing to expand the reach of the bildungs and its relation to Modernity and the marginalized. Boes contends its reach has also included the plight of the “increasingly global and fragmentary narratives of transformation and rebellion” (231). The novel of formation is not an Euro-American genre, but one that has acquired a global reach contending with the (in)complete projects of modernity, post-modernity and globalization. The Bildungsroman is thereby a genre that seeks to universalize personal experience and in the quest ultimately heightens the importance of personal identity. Bonnie Hoover Braendlin states that

the bildungs theoretically reflects “an author’s desire to universalize personal experience in order to valorize personal identity” (Lazzaro 4). It is therefore no surprise that minority writers, those writing from the margins, have resorted to the bildungs as a way to insert their identity and deconstruct dominant narratives. Fernando Blanco and John Petrus (8) also concur with other critics who highlight the genre’s ability to make subjectivity a central narrative theme that has fueled the work of other minority-marginalized groups.

Blanco and Petrus mention the preponderance of bildungs form in Latino U.S. writers such as in the titles like *The House on Mango Street*, *When I was Puerto Rican*, *Nilda*, and *Dreaming in Cuban*. Within the Latin American context, there is also an abundant bibliography on the form such as in *Arturo la estrella más brillante* and *Pájaros en la playa*. Although they do not find the same amount of popularity among cinematic Bildungsroman in Argentina, in comparison to the novelist bildungs, they recognize the public familiarity with the filmic genre (16). The critics allude to the transnational nature of the cinematic industry in Argentina, as a way to explain the public’s awareness of the form. “El Bildungsroman no tiene una larga trayectoria histórica en el cine argentino. Es importante recordar que en el ambiente neoliberal...los espectadores argentinos...acceden a films de los EE.UU. (316). Blanco and Petrus’s purpose is to establish that the Argentine cinematic public is aware and can recognize the bildungs genre, even though there is no long trajectory of Argentine films within this genre. This critical move is relevant since they want to situate and read the work of director Lucia Puenzo as an Argentine Bildungsroman. My intent is to also read the filmic and the novelistic *Miss Tacuarembó* as an Uruguayan-Argentine Bildungsroman. Whereas Blanco and Petrus argue that the local public can make sense of the bildungs due to their awareness of other international film industries, I suggest a more complicated approach. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, I argue

that viewers make sense of cultural media products by reading the multi layered texts that appear within one product. While I do not negate the importance of the industry's deployment of recognized genres to sell their products, there are varied ways audiences access and construct meanings out of cultural products. While the classification of a literary work has the potential to clarify and allow for a text to be interpreted, it can also acquire a less explanatory effect. A classificatory based on style or genre can have a limiting effect within the discursive range of interpretation, since the text is filtered through a static structured framework. Nevertheless, I find it useful to avoid reading Umpi's novel within a prescribed lens in favor of situating the text within relational terms, at all costs eliminating a prescriptive system of classification. By initiating relational parameters among Umpi's narrative, vis-a vis the literary and cultural heritage of its time, it allows for a broader interpretative field since the text is not limited but rather put into dialogue with other discursive mediums.

It we had to classify Umpi's novel beyond the realm of the *bildungsroman*, one could employ the term coined by Josefina Ludmer, *escritura-literatura post-autónoma*. Benjamin's classic 1930 article *Mechanical Reproduction* was a prophetic piece which saw the role of industries and the circulation of information as decisive factors with the potential to free literature from the sphere of autonomy and originality operating within its own space. Ludmer contends that Benjamin's prophetic ideas have been played out in part by the proliferation of complex and interwoven communication systems. For Ludmer, the literary has been invaded by the need to narrate reality, the everyday. The reality captured modifies every day practices; thereby literature is not confined within its own artistic sphere but turns into a practice (Palmeiro 1). According to Ludmer, literature no longer tries to capture the human essence but rather captures and infiltrates territories. Ludmer defines post-autonomous literature as "esas prácticas

literarias territoriales de lo cotidiano” (Palmerio 1). The territory of the real does not refer to reality following the modernist conception of the real as constructed as a result of socio historical factors fixed in time, but by a reality consumed and circulated by the media, the technological, and the scientific industries (Palmeiro 1). In other words, the real resides only within those webs of communication. Reality is a mediated industrial territory; that is, a product. The literature forged within the territory of the real is therefore an inseparable economic entity. However the opposite is also a basic characteristic: that which is economic can also be read as artistic, as real (Palmeiro 2). Ludmer argues that the loss of strictly literary value in post autonomous literature, a loss of its autonomous sphere in favor of a mediated and industrial territory affected literature as it lost its critical and emancipative power that was once granted by literature’s sense of autonomy and prestige. However Ludmer does not imply that transformational and critical power is lost, rather, that there are many territories that must be analyzed alongside literary space. One cannot stop at literature but extend one’s gaze towards its circulation, reproduction, and its multiple territories in which that reality operates (Palmeiro 3). Palmerio exemplifies the potential of post autonomous literature in the role played by burgeoning non-traditional publishing houses.

In 1998, *Belleza y Felicidad* opened up in Buenos Aires. *Belleza* was a combination of book store, publishing house, art gallery, and sold 99 cent style objects. The purpose behind *Belleza*, as its founders Fernanda Laguna and Cecilia Pavón indicated, wanted to demystify literature by putting it side by side to cheap merchandise. They wanted to close the gap between the value of high culture and popular culture, since the work of high intellectual capacity was situated next to a mass produced item that can be found in any neighborhood store. *Belleza*’s phenomenon led to other projects such as Eloisa Cartonera. In 2003 Cartonera published books,

illustrated and bounded by recycled cardboard made by *cartoneros*, unemployed people who collected cardboard from the streets and sold it to recycling centers. Eloisa Cartonera functions as a publishing house, a school teaching the art of book binding, but it also once sold fruits and vegetables to *cartoneros* for a lower price. They not only published the works of recognized and canonical authors such as Cesar Aira and Ricardo Piglia, but also helped launch other writers such as Dani Umpi, Pablo Pérez, and Washington Cucurto. Eloisa Cartonera is credited for having published the first “queer-trash novel of the 20th century”: *El mendigo chupapijas*. This *post-autonomous* literature found its way into the market, due to the non-commercial publishing houses. Umpi’s literary tradition arose from the burgeoning nontraditional publishing houses in their efforts to promote a post-autonomous literature.

The goal and the discursive reality found in post-autonomous literature correspond to a need to verbally explain every detail at each instant. The written word acquires an immediacy never before seen. Palmerio stated that we write what we are doing “I am getting there” as someone would rewrite in a text message (Palmerio 1). The immediacy of language constructs the present and the written word as no longer circulating within the confines of the traditional literary market. Through the proliferation of technology and alternative modes of communication, images and words travel in new discursive spaces such as in blogs, chat rooms and web pages. Ludmer characterizes these spaces as by a return of the I, the experiences of the self. However the “I” does not correspond to the “I” of the modern subject; it is not an individual but rather a collection of multiple voices (3). Ludmer calls the “post-autonomous “I” a “dispositivo de enunciación colectivo” (3). It is precisely this collective I that structures Umpi’s *Miss Tacuarembó*. Natalia represents the various queer identities and marginalized groups that have been silenced through various artistic and social spaces. The author makes their

voice visible through the character's need to narrate their everyday experiences, since it is in the everyday events where people suffer, internalize and express their sense of marginalization.

During the conference *Encuentro de Literatura y Cine* (2010), one of the roundtables invited author Dani Umpi along with academics and writers Gabriel Lagos y Diego Recoba, and Deborah Rostán, to discuss the cultural production in Uruguay, in relation to adaptation. The focus centered on Umpi's novel and Sastre's film, both described by the members as postmodern fairy tales. Another goal of the roundtable was to consider works generally deemed as lacking artistic value, due to its popular relation to audiences and markets. Nicolás Der Agopían, moderator of the talk, explained that understanding cultural production in Uruguay cannot just include works of *high* cultural esteem, but it must also include works that take into consideration the daily experiences of people living in Uruguay:

...el Uruguay no sólo de la rambla, los días grises y la cultura media lamentándose en un bar. En nuestro país hay también yupis y empresarios, y gente moderna trabajando y paseando en *shoppings*.

Der Agopían's statement relates directly to Umpi and Sastre who see their work as an accumulation of vignettes of everyday commonplace experiences. These experiences are mediated through characters who make sense of the world by their connection to consumer industries and their byproducts. Characters such as Natalia and Carlos constantly quote songs, telenovela characters and even commercials. Natalia constantly refers to people based on the fragrances they use as a way of understanding who they are.

Un chico que acaba de irse y dejó medio MacDonald's maravillosamente impregnado en Kenzo. Me hace respirar hondo y volver a poner los pies sobre la tierra. Un perfume exacto en el momento justo. Tengo la suerte de respirar un perfume tan estupendo como lo es Kenzo Homme. Adoro los perfumes de Kenzo, aunque éste haya pasado de moda y fuese eclipsado en parte por Kenzo Jungle (71).

Her discourse is completely infiltrated by the language of branding and marketing. Natalia's language articulates the frenzied cycles of the market that must renew itself, as she expresses

through the replacement of Kenzo Homme by Kenzo Jungle. She also incorporates the industries abilities to associate and generate feelings and emotions generated by products. Natalia cannot separate the language of branding from her reality. This collective, marginalized voice attempts to situate itself within consumerist discourses, as made evident by the quotes included from the novel. The film follows much of this structure though there are some differences which will be explored in the next section.

2.7 (Dis)Continuities Among Narrative Structures

Narrative structure constitutes one of the main equivalences found among the novel and the film. In *MT-N*, Dani Umpi organizes its text along 83 short chapters where the character of Natalia serves the dual role of the main character, as well as the first-person narrator. The focalization of the novel centers on the adult character-narrator, who through the language of memory recounts her childhood experiences. The time lapse between childhood and adulthood diminish as the novel reaches its closure. Umpi's chapters alternate almost entirely between Natalia's age from six to eighteen years-old, interspersed with her current life as a 30 year-old woman. Similarly, Sastre equivalently transferred *MT-N's* narrative structure by including short scenes that employ flashbacks, as a way of narrating Natalia's past. The short scenes interspersed with flashbacks and *flashforwards*, mirror the novels interspersed chapters. The film's 11 main scenes¹⁵ narrated from Natalia's perspective as a 30 year old adult, recreate Natalia's childhood through a series of flashbacks which center on specific lived moments, until the chronological flow of the flashbacks coincide with the character's present life. It is through cinematic flashbacks that Sastre visually jumps between childhood-adulthood. Sastre was also

¹⁵ I am not referring to the actual number of scenes found in the screenplay, but the division of scenes as present in the DVD of the film. The DVD divides the film into 11 chapters, or scenes as I note here.

able to maintain the novel's first person narrator by employing a diegetic voice-over narrator, where Natalia –the adult- comments on past events. The first scene in the movie opens with the following voice over.

Natalia: El color llegó a mi vida cuando cumplí ocho años. Lo recuerdo perfectamente. Todos creían que la TV era un regalo que la señorita Coitiño nos había hecho. Sin embargo yo sabía la verdad; ese televisor me lo había traído Cristo.

MT-F's first scene opens with images of a child's birthday party. The scene's aesthetic emulates the visual language of 80's home videos, and the design of the frames resembles photographic snap shots. Added to these images, Natalia's voice over immediately begins by situating the viewer within her birthday party. Besides the scene set-up, the narrator also introduces a relationship that will be developed throughout the whole film: the connection between Natalia and Christ. Sastre immediately introduces the role of faith in securing the character's desire for consumer goods, but he also paves the way for establishing the constant presence of Christ in key moments of her life. While the gift of television might not seem as an extremely important life event, television for Natalia showcases a world of acceptance and belonging that she cannot find at home. Television also grants Natalia the power of a language that structures and defines her sense of *difference*. Specifically, through the language of melodrama can Natalia organize her desires and sense of belonging in Tacuarembó. Within the voice-over, one finds a certain dose of contradiction. While she is conscious of the religious limits imposed on her behavior, Natalia acknowledges that Christ grants her a way out of the stifling control of Tacuarembó, through his gift of television.

MT-F's voice over similarly mirrors the opening lines of the novel that also establish the role of the narrator as an interpreter of childhood memories, while also developing the relationship that exists between Natalia, Christ, and television. As the first lines state:

Por entonces en mi casa aún no había televisor color. Teníamos uno blanco y negro de escasas pulgadas y casi no funcionaba. El color llegó el día en que cumplí seis años. Lo recuerdo perfectamente, porque mientras todos mi amiguitos recién bañados me acosaban con regalos y besos prolijos, yo permanecía absorta, ida, frente a mi reflejo brillante en la pantalla pixelada, acariciando los botones suaves del control remoto (7).

While the novel does not immediately establish the Natalia-Christ relationship, the language of the narrative sets up a quasi-biblical parallel between the biblical Genesis and the characters sense of acquired subjectivity. She marvels at the site of her image contrasting the colorful images. The color, that is, the life that the TV provides stands in stark contrast to the *black and white* life that surrounds her. It is as if a lifeless world existed prior to the arrival of color. Colors here stand in for her anemic state prior (black) to and after (color) the arrival of television. Natalia's existence is marked by the presence of an industrialized medium that will help her organize her social and cultural practices, marking a strong contrast with the social constructs that the town has reserved for the character. The contrasting 6 years in the novel, versus the biblical six days of creation, sets up a recurring motif within the text which pairs religious themes and symbols as a mechanism for the characters' survival. It also functions as a means of resignifying religious narratives as personally mediated. This quote is central to understanding Natalia's conception of faith. For her, the relationship that exists with Christ is highly personal and individualized. Christ belongs and functions in relation to her needs. As further explained in the novel:

Cristo estaba a mi lado, de mi lado, con un televisor color virgin para mis ojos grises (7). Y allí estaba Cristo, asegurándome que siempre estaría conmigo y cumpliría todos mis deseos...(9).

No lo hice por Dios. Lo hice por mi televisor resplandeciente y por mi Cristo risueño ... siempre dispuesto a concederme deseos (13).

The essence of Natalia's relationship to Christ does not follow any Christian dogma. Instead it follows a highly ritualistic order, based on her asking for material goods, from a divinity that

only belongs to her, *mi Cristo*. In return for Christ's gifts, Natalia makes herself present at church every Sunday. I find the character's ritual extremely telling of her desires for escape from the town's repressive atmosphere, in the way she re-inscribes religious dogma. She follows the church's teaching on the importance of keeping the Sabbath, but only as a concession towards her demands. In other words, she follows this commandment, not because she believes in the Sabbath, but does so as a way of negotiating with Christ. Her relationship to God also alters her relationship with the townspeople who reject her love of secular values, making her feel she does not belong in Tacuarembó. Natalia's presence in church confronts the town through her regaining of the church's space. Her physical presence at church may appear to others as her rejection of secular values, when in reality she only makes herself present after having negotiated the terms according to her convenience. Her ritualistic practices prove that while a hegemonic discourse, such as the presence of Catholicism in Tacuarembó infiltrates and dominates social and cultural practices, it can never acquire a totalizing effect. Natalia accepts some of the conventions, yet they are on her terms, since as she states, Christ is on her side. Natalia resignifies Christian dogma by decontextualizing the figure of Christ. Within the novel Christ loses its spiritually divine aura and acquires corporality. Christ materializes and becomes a real figure, one that belongs to her and can be found specifically in a Tacuarembó church. "Yo nunca creí en Dios, pero sí creí en Cristo (en el Cristo de aquella parroquia, para ser más específica)" (14). She emphasizes the specificity of a decontextualized Catholic teaching that challenges the indivisibility of God from Christ.

The rejection of the filial relationship established by the Catholic Church extends beyond the limits of religion. For Natalia constantly rejects the ties and responsibilities associated with the traditional family. Sastre and Umpi maintain in their narratives the breakdown of the

traditional family, even when the characters attempt such model. The space of the novel is populated by single/divorced mothers. And the only father that is present is in the form of a priest “married” to God. But even this religious figure is undermined and succumbs to the demands and whims of Cándida, the town’s catechist. The indivisible filial relationship established by Catholic dogma between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, suffers from Natalia’s intervention. She sees a clear separation of filial duty not only within religious dogma, but within her own family circle. Throughout Natalia’s life, the traditional family was something to escape from and to reject.

Mi madre nunca entendió de perfumes, nunca entendió nada. Toda su vida la pasó en su iglesia, limpiando y rezando. Toda su vida la pasó esquivándome, escapando a su condición de madre. Somos muy diferentes. Siempre supe que su verdadera vocación era ser monja y vivir en función de Cristo, mientras que yo creía que Cristo existía en función de mi (53).

Natalia challenges her mother due to her perceived sense of absence. As a child the main character felt her mother used faith as a way out of her role as mother, yet this escape created a sense of alienation for Natalia. For this reason, Natalia cannot conceive herself participating within the rituals of family and religion since she has experienced its negative effects. *MT-N* recreates a world where adults and children live in completely unintelligible words to each other. As seen in the quote above, Natalia complains that her mother does not understand anything, at least in regards to the things that are important for her, such as perfumes, television, and her dream of being a model.

-Mamá, quiero ser modelo.
 -¿Modelo de qué?
 -Modelo de todo.
 -¿Y eso dónde se estudia?
 -No sé...por Montevideo, creo.
 -¿Estás segura que querés ser modelo?
 -Sí, quiero ser modelo como Cristal.
 -¿Te sirvo más ensalada? (118).

Here is another clear example where mother-daughter communication lacks fluidity and any real sense of connection. When Natalia first mentions that she wants to be a model, her mother understands the word *model* in the sense of role model. Her mother, Aidee, prefers that her daughter get involved in the children's church group and carry out good deeds, but Natalia prefers a more secular experience. When an exchange between Aidee and Natalia seems to take on a more communicative aspect, such as her mother taking an interest and asking where one can actually study to be a model, the interaction quickly ends when her mother does not provide an appropriate follow up to her daughter's statements. Instead, she asks Natalia if she wants more salad. Once again, *MT-N* presents the parents' insistence displaying *appropriate* and expected actions such as praying, attending church, and cooking, without a regard to the feelings and desires of their children. As a way out, the characters take refuge in a self-negotiated form of religiosity, where Christ grants her what has been denied to her in Tacuarembó. However, as Natalia gets older, the realization that Christ does not provide for everything she desires takes hold. This realization negatively affects Natalia since it leaves her defenseless in fighting the conservative drive found in Tacuarembó.

¿Eh? ¡Contestame!... ¡Contestame! –grité por última vez, aturdida por el golpe seco de Cristo en el piso recién lavado por mi madre. Lo descolgué de un sopapo impulsivo y el yeso se desintegró como harina sobre las baldosas negras, como si estuviera deseando romperse. El rostro suplicante de Cristo se volvió polvo en menos de un segundo y los alambres tiritaron, temblaron de susto, como un fósil enclenque en una corriente de aire (76).

In this particular section of the novel, a young Natalia cannot understand why Jesus has stopped granting her wishes. There are many things she wishes could change, such as if Carlos' mother died, then they would be able to continue playing together since Carlos is no longer allowed to play with girls. If Natalia's grandmother left their home, she would regain her bedroom all to herself. In essence, all of her wishes have to do with the disintegration of key family members

that create an obstacle to her happiness. Since Christ has stopped granting her wishes, Natalia decides to question him, yet there is no answer. This lack of response causes her to break with Christ by physically putting an end to their relationship.

Her shattering of the Christ statue marks the beginning of a loss in her own self-mediated faith. A terrified Carlos cannot understand her actions. As Natalia's only friend who believes in Natalia's power to dialogue with God, he fears the consequences of her break with Christ. He is concerned that the Three Wiseman and Santa Claus will hear about this and will stop giving them the material goods that they desire. Natalia always understood that the gifts from Santa and the Three Wise Men were actually their parents, yet she continued to insist that while the former were not real, she strongly believed in Christ, as previously mentioned, the Christ in her church. For this reason, when none of her wishes are met, her disappointment is greater, causing her to literally break away from Christ by smashing the image into pieces.

The shattering of the Christ image marks a turning point in the novel as well as in the film. It not only marks the end of innocence, but it also initiates a period where all *familial* and religious relationships disintegrate or are impossible to maintain. By *familial* relationships, I am referring to any bond between members that resemble traditional links among members of a group. From the beginning of the novel, the narrator made clear the lack of connection among children and their parents due to their differences. The impossible union between mother and daughter is consistently rejected. Once Natalia turned eighteen, she left Tacuarembó and moved to Montevideo. She did not see her mother until her late twenties, until Aidee contacts a reality TV show that unites families. For Natalia, the most important part about being on the show had nothing to do with the reunion, instead her enthusiasm had to do with being able to travel to

Buenos Aires and purchase goods not available in Montevideo. In the novel Natalia states the following:

El encuentro con mi madre fue totalmente desaprovechado por mi parte. Toda esa sensiblería televisada durante tantos días no hizo más que aplastarme. Debería reprochármelo, pero no. No sé por qué nunca reprocho mi frialdad. A veces soy fría como una cuarentona menopáusica que dedicó su juventud a militar en la izquierda (51).

Indifference was the only effect of the show. The reunion only forced her to reconsider her coldness, but ultimately it did not faze her, since a willingness to change does not seem apparent. Natalia accepts her perceived coldness towards reuniting with her mother. Her brake from her mother, which she initiated at the age of eighteen, seemed to have taken a total effect for Natalia. Nonetheless, her mother continues to force a relationship with her daughter. On account of having found her, Aidee wants to spend a few days with her daughter in Montevideo. Natalia reluctantly agrees, but during her visit she becomes ill and ultimately ends up staying in Natalia's apartment which she shares with Carlos and his boyfriend Enrique. Aidee's new presence begins to break the bond existing between Carlos and Natalia, the only relationship that had the possibility of lasting. Enrique and Carlos begin to share and enjoy spending time with Aidee and Natalia cannot tolerate this behavior. As she states repeatedly, Carlos is her friend, he belongs to her. In essence, her friendship with Carlos replaced the bond previously in existence between her and Christ. While Carlos did not give Natalia the consumer goods she always wanted, his queerness opened up an alternative worldview different from the one found in Tacuarembó. Carlos' rejection of the town's heteronormative drive and demands for the maintenance of traditional families, granted Natalia an alternative from which to model her life. She did not need to get married, or live the rest of her life with her mother; Natalia now had Carlos and his boyfriend Enrique. However, the return of Aidee and all that she represents for Natalia (familial duty, conformity, and religious devotion) and her mother's intromission in their lives, shatters for

Natalia the possibility of designing the life she wants for herself. In essence, the deception Natalia encounters with Christ repeats itself with Carlos.

Abro la puerta, digo “buenas tardes” y me piden que me calle, que haga silencio. Siento que sobro en mi propia casa, que me robaron. Siento que han creado una dimensión a la que yo no puedo retransportarme (104)

This new relationship between Carlos and Aidee makes Natalia feel alone and invisible in her own home. One of Carlos and Natalia’s favorite activity together included watching television. Even this moment has ceased to exist, since now he watches television with Enrique and Aidee. Ultimately this causes Natalia to feel as an intruder in her own home. To make matters worse, both Carlos and Aidee decided to rearrange Natalia’s furniture, “todas mis cosas fueron manoseadas, todos mis muebles vistos desde esta nueva perspectiva parecen sucios” (149). This motherly invasion in conjunction with Carlos and Enrique’s addition, render Natalia violated. The arrangement of her material goods angered and further isolated Natalia from her friends and family. The bonds of friendship that have lasted so long, now no longer exist. Finding a place to feel at home becomes harder each time. Now, she cannot even find comfort in television or in her own friendship with Carlos, leaving her to conclude, “quiero vivir sola o con un extranjero que esté haciendo intercambio cultural y hable un idioma que no me interese aprender” (150). Natalia’s conclusion always brings her back to the same place; it brings her to her basic instinct of flight.

The novel’s treatment of friendship, religious, and familial bonds suggest such connections are rather momentary and fleeting, at least for the main character. There is an interest on the part of Natalia to remove herself from situations that require involvement and duties, when not initiated by her. She had no problem in her mother visiting, but once Aidee became ill and both Carlos and Enrique begin to bond with her, Aidee’s presence begins to

suffocate Natalia. The new dynamics created by the arrival of Aidee, forces Natalia to shut down and lose faith in the possibility of living life in function to her desires. By the end of the novel, there is no reconciliation between Natalia and religion, her family, or her friends. There is no happy ending for the character. All of the narratives that Natalia held on to as a child, such as the hope that Christ offered her in church and the happy endings of her favorite telenovelas, no longer connected with Natalia. As the roundtable concluded regarding the differences between the novel and the film, they agree that the novel,

Se acuerda una naturaleza dialéctica del fracaso. Ambiente que desmitifica las ansias de alcanzar el desarrollo euro-neoyorquino. Con la novela caemos en razón de estar frente a una inexistencia agnóstica y plurívoca donde nada puede hacerse realidad, donde nada es realidad, donde nada existe. Como dice la protagonista en el texto: “Carlos llora por mí y me promete que nunca le pediremos nada más a Cristo. Yo le digo que Cristo no existe, que es como los Reyes Magos, como los padres” (Umpi, 207).

MT-F however presents a less bleak horizon for Natalia, even though it does further develop the fractured relationships and the impossibility of creating any continuity between friendships and family bonds. The treatment of the dysfunctional mother-daughter relationship finds equal portrayal in the film, although the movie suppresses many of the episodes found in the novel. For example, Aidee going to live in Montevideo with her daughter is not included in the story. Aidee's role in affecting the main character is limited to Natalia's childhood and the moment when her mother decides to seek the assistance of the reality TV show. There is a slight change in characterization on the part of Aidee when comparing *MT-N* with *MT-F*. Within the novel, Aidee's is much more absent in her role as a mother and her portrayal appears mostly in relation to her connection to the church. The film maintains part of Aidee's fervent religiosity; however, the film evokes in the viewer a sense of pity towards Aidee. Audiences see how she fails at connecting with her daughter and her total lack of parenting skills. Whenever Aidee

needs help with Natalia, she turns to the Church, but with very little success. Even the church leaders in *MT-F* are not prepared or capable in dealing with their younger parishioners. A telling scene in the movie depicts Church leaders as disconnected and unprepared when having to find ways to educate children. The scene in question involves Aidee, Natalia, the town's priest Father Clever, and Cándida *Coitiño*, who is the town's religious vigilante. Cándida organized the gathering due to her concern for Natalia's moral and mental health since, in her eyes, the young girl is obsessed with the telenovela *Cristal*. Cándida exposes that the program is dangerous for children since Cristal is a single mother and "entre otras cosas, también es una meretriz". To which Aidee innocently responds, "pero yo pensé que era modelo". Father Clever remains silent through much of their exchange and remits to Cándida, who is clearly the one with the authority. When Father Clever states that Cándida should not exaggerate on the negative effects of Cristal, Cándida interrupts and corrects him. The exchange between both women and Father Clever is telling of the theme found in *MT-N* and *MT-F*, in portraying the incompatibility between familial and religious authority over children. The "father" of the church remains subjected and obedient to Cándida's reprimands and instructions. Natalia who is hiding interrupts them and denies Cándida's statements and claims Christ should intervene and kill her. Father Clever reacts and tells the young girl she cannot use Christ's name to wish people harm. Once again Father Clever is silenced, this time by Natalia who states, "Cristo habla conmigo. Así que puedo hablar de lo que se me antoje". Her defiance of authority and her self-defense stands in stark contrast to her mother's passive statements that simply allow Cándida to continue to intervene in their lives. The way the film is portrayed, the viewer identifies with the young girl, who fights against the demands of strict social norms, as represented by Cándida and the rejection of traditional church teachings. Even its paternalistic structure is rejected by Natalia, who undermines the priest's

position, since as she argues, Natalia speaks to Christ; there is no need for Father Clever. Furthermore as stated by Natalia: “A mi que me importa el Padre si ni siquiera tengo un padre de verdad”. Natalia’s statement requires further analysis, since on the one hand it can be read as a traditional justification for her lack of control. Natalia is unruly because there is no true father figure. However, within the context of the novel and the film, the line acquires a different meaning. Her statement of lacking a father is not referring to her lack of a specific father, but on her rejection of patriarchal order, whether stemming from the church, or from their own family. She does not lament her lack of a father, but rather refuses to continue to reproduce patriarchal discourses that have no relevance to her life. While all of Tacuarembó is subjected to a strict patriarchal order, it is evident from all of the characters that such configuration does not generate well-being for anyone, except for Cándida.

It is no coincidence that the telenovela selected both in the novel and film is *Cristal*. The story of Cristal loosely resembles the social construction found in Tacuarembó. Cristal is an orphan raised by a priest and by the priest’s tyrannical, overly devout mother. While Natalia has a mother, it is evident the Cándida has more control over Natalia than Aidee. Therefore Cándida and Father Clever are mirrored out of *Cristal* characters. In the telenovela, Cristal has to find her real mother and defy her in order to succeed. Cristal ultimately triumphs since she finds her real mother who is a famous fashion designer. As such, Cristal is able to reunite with her mother and seal her economic and familial bonds. Cristal’s familial bonds are doubly strengthened, not only by her having found her mother, but she marries her mother’s adopted son. Sastre’s film subverts the melodramatic drive of the telenovela to restore economic, familial and social order. This part of the telenovela’s plot differs from the novel and the film, since Natalia does not attempt to regain parental love and affiliation, but instead battles to break away from the

constraints of familial duty. Even though the novel and the film make use of the melodramatic *Cinderella*-story *Cristal*, Natalia's story does not end on a happy note.

Los tres integrantes de la mesa concuerdan en que Nati, la protagonista, logra su objetivo solamente en la imagen mediática que nos plantea el film a manera de video clips acumuladamente acelerados.

The panel interprets Sastre's film as having at least two possible interpretations. For Lagos and Recoba, the film's protagonist achieves their dream of *success*. Nati's has a *happy ending*, only when one considered the *imagen mediática* of the film. I am interpreting this *imagen*, to stand in for the musical numbers that the film incorporates. The panel's use of the word *solamente*, suggesting that viewers identify the happy ending only within the realm of the musical performances, creates two parallel narratives: a happy ending via the interpretation of the musical numbers, and a parallel story that refers to the failed family units and the impossibility of religion to serve the needs of its followers. However, Lagos and Recoba do not specify what occurs in the non-musical narrative. By the structure of the quote, it would seem that it is not a traditional *happy ending*. When analyzing the musical performances, it is possible to read a happy ending as the scholars suggest, however it is not enough to focus on the musical performances to reach a decisive interpretation. When viewing the musical performances within the context of the film, we cannot reach any concrete conclusions. The film ends with a musical number that does not help in creating closure for the viewer, therefore it is difficult to establish a happy ending if it is not clear as to how the film ends. The viewer does receive, however, some narrative closure during the climax of the story that takes place during the last segment of the reality show.

The goal of the reality show was to realize the dreams of its contestants; in this case the point was to reunite mother and daughter, but there was an added prize. If viewers sent enough

text messages, Nati would be able to perform live on television. Before this occurs, Nati is revealed as a liar since she claimed she had won the Miss Tacuarembó beauty pageant, but she lost. At this point her performance seems an impossibility since the audience turns on her. Not only did no one vote for Nati during the beauty pageant, but no one will vote for her during the reality show. Taking into consideration the novel and the film's title and how the story is structured, the film builds up its narrative tension in order to see if Nati wins the pageant and whether she has enough votes to perform live. We learn she lost the pageant and it is not clear whether she actually gets to perform at the end of the show. However, what the viewer does see are two musical numbers that shift temporarily the course of the film.

In the first musical number, Nati meets and sings with Christ. In a sense, this performance can be read as a *happy ending*, since she performs with *her* Christ, and the viewer does experience a sense of closure, even though the story had been structured around a different ending. This could have qualified as a happy ending, if it would have occurred within the actual *reality* of the story, and not in the character's imagination. This difference is not addressed by Lagos and Recoba, since their level of interpretation only rests on the aesthetic composition of the film without considering the film's narrative. Both critics identify the aesthetic and the composition of the musical performances similar to that of music videos. I find that their interpretation decontextualizes the musical numbers from the rest of the story; they are interpreted separately from the main narrative. I am not against their decontextualization since it helps show that there are various and multiple ways to read and see a film, yet within their interpretation they do not specify this possibility, it is presented as a fact. If we do follow their interpretation, then we can argue Nati's meeting with Christ encourages her to perform, even though everyone is leaving the set (marking the beginning of the second musical performance).

She sings the first stanza of *What a feeling* on stage and then the screen fades to black, thus suggesting the end. Yet the story continues since the song does not end. While the song continues uninterrupted, the scene changes to Nati singing and dancing in front of the Hollywood sign. Her *arrival* in Hollywood does not necessarily mean she has succeeded, but it could mean she simply left Uruguay-Argentina. This opens up the possibility of many small happy endings: her dancing with Christ, performing on stage while everyone is leaving the set, and abandoning Tacuarembó. Yet again the viewer does not know if her dancing in Hollywood is a projection of Nati's mind, considering that the last few scenes have been built following that formula. These endings do not coincide with the story's main plot line which was to show how she wins the beauty pageant and is voted by viewers to perform live on television. More than a happy ending the combination of the multiple and micro *happy endings* with that of the plot's conclusion creates more of a bitter-sweet ending, considering Nati's difficult upbringing and the subsequent losses that marked her life. Yet her regaining of faith through Christ's visit causes her to move on regardless of her past experiences. This reading thus causes a reconsideration on the main theme of the story. The film reads more as a coming of age story that focuses on queer identity and its relationship to performance and faith, rather than a fairy tale where failure is never an option.

2.8 **Miss Tacuarembó and the Musical**

Current representation of youth in Latin American film have generally been linked to violence and injustice. Films such as *El polaquito* (Desanzo, 2003), *Cidade de dues* (Meirelles, 2003), *La virgin de los sicarios* (Schroeder, 2001), just to name a few, criminalize and pathologize youth, by showing them immersed in a violent and criminal urban space. Similarly, television reality programs add to this existing representation of youth. Within the genre of

realities, youth is presented as highly sexualized and only interested in acquiring celebrity status, as seen on shows such as *Bailando por un sueño* and in the *Big Brother* franchise. In Argentina, another form of reality that has infiltrated television has been those of the *live-camera* shows. These shows utilize images obtained from street security cameras located within impoverished areas outside the main urban centers of Buenos Aires. The images presented show footage of a wide range of young adults from the ages of 16 and up, as they exit and head home from dance clubs. The edited images focus on the fighting that ensues between different urban gangs, over the women and the neighborhood territory that intersect within the spaces of the dance clubs. These shows portray the crimes committed as a result of the consumption of alcohol and illegal drugs. Representations of youth under such programming, only serve to further criminalize and to create an ideological connection between space and body. Those that reside furthest away from the city of Buenos Aires are portrayed as more dangerous, *uncivilized*, and in need of surveillance; once again reproducing the 19th century dichotomy favored by the *Generación del 37: civilización versus barbarie*, the *barbarie* situated in those spaces outside of cosmopolitan euro-centric centers. Therefore when a film such as *Miss Tacuarembó*, described as a pop musical, infused with a camp aesthetic, compete with the more normative images emanating from media, it destabilizes the economically profitable television and film paradigm that furthers the criminalization of youth. Throughout this section I will analyze the role of musicals, specifically the music found in *MT-F*, in order to understand its role in representing queer youth and desires. Here young men dance and are *feminized* rather than presented as pathological violent criminals. Sastre's inclusion of the song *What a feeling* achieves a much more liberating effect on its characters, as opposed to the original as I will describe in this section. For Sastre *What a feeling* is interpreted as a song that forms part of the queer musical archive, and it is

inserted within a film that attempts to recognize queer audiences and their connections to musicals, as a performance that expresses their desires. Through the dance and musical sequences, young men in *MT-F* are *feminized* rather than presented as pathologized violent criminals.

Musicals as a film genre have not been recognized as a typical Latin American cultural product. Yet if we delve into film history, we can see how the musical was a Latin American film staple throughout the 1930s-1950s studio era, not only in Argentina, but in the remaining Latin American cinema producing countries. Early film stars such as Libertad Lamarque, Carlos Gardel, Hugo del Carril, Tito Guizar, and Pedro Infante, all performed in musicals; their rise to fame coincided with their involvement in musicals. Specifically in Argentina, even during the pre-sound era, more than half of the films produced had the tango as a central theme, and as its main musical accompaniment (Aviña 87). Even the first *talkie* *Tango!* (1933) had the musical genre as its title, and the main actors of the period were also internationally recognized musical performers (Aviña 88). Since its inception, the Argentine tango feminized/queered traditional representations of men, since the tango displayed them as highly sentimental, weepy, and unable to exert command of their lives. The tango displayed the anxieties of Argentinean men vis-à-vis the changing roles of women within an incipient modernity. In order to showcase this dilemma, the tango on film fused harmoniously with the melodramatic film plots of the period. As Rafael Aviña states in *Cinema et musique* (2000), “las estrellas pasaron de cantantes a actrices melodramáticas” (90). He finds that Argentine film not only borrowed from the structures and themes found in musical composition, but it also incorporated its artistic talent as a way of constructing its filmic language. “Estrellas que terminan asimilándose a un tipo de melodrama que adopta del tango su sentimentalidad exacerbada y su patetismo” (90). I interpret Aviña’s

finding as a form of adaptation, a sort of *refrito*, whereby the new cultural form of the cinema appropriates and recycles tango music, along with its themes and ideological structures. This recycling allowed newly formed studios, *Argentina Sono-Film* and *Lumiton*, to delineate genres that could be incorporated within a successful economic and industrial form, reproducible for audiences. As early as 1937, the films of José Agustín Ferreira catapulted the career of Libertad Lamarque as one of the first international Latin American stars. The film *Besos Brujos* (1937) is considered a text-book example of a tango musical, since its songs form part of the plot's narrative. In essence, the structure of the musical in Argentina not only borrowed from the tango, but it also followed the formula of the musical as prescribed by Hollywood.

In order to understand what scholars refer to when speaking of the musical as a film genre, we must look at how the genre has been defined. Steve Cohan, editor of *Hollywood Musicals: The film reader* (2002) writes that while by today's standards, the musical is considered an outdated Hollywood convention; the formula has successfully found new venues such as in music videos, in television programming, and in children's films (84). A working definition of musicals suggests that it is a narrative *buttressed* and/or *interrupted* by a series of musical numbers, and musical performances including song and dance. The music can either advance the story, or it can simply put it on *hold* in order for the song to exemplify the inner feelings of the characters, before the plot continues to unfold. For Rubin a key element in identifying a musical involves the ability of musical performances to function as an *impossible* element added to the film's narrative. In other words, a musical can be identified when the narrative of the film is temporarily disrupted by a musical performance, and that musical performance does not necessarily make *sense* within the inner logic of a story.

A musical is a film containing a significant portion of musical numbers that are impossible...contradictory in relation to the realistic discourses of the narrative (57).

This definition helps in clarifying the differences between a movie with music and a musical. For example, when Gardel sings *Rubias de Nueva York* in *El tango en Broadway* (Gasnier, 1934), the fact that he is a night-club performer seems logical for him to sing, but when he *bursts into song* in his living room in front of 5 women, the scene loses its realism and it becomes *impossible*, i.e. it acquires the sign that the film is a musical. This example stands in stark contrast to films which happen to have musical performances, but that do not qualify for the appellation of musical. Such is the case, in the film *Aventurera* (Gout 1950), containing various interspersed musical numbers. The numbers are logical since they take place in a night club and it does not interfere with the film's narrative. The characters do not burst into song. Each musical number exists as a ploy to attract audiences to the film, but that in no way adds to the story's plot.

In order for the *impossible* to appear plausible to audiences, many of the early and classic Hollywood musicals were developed as *backstage musicals*. As Feuer explains, the structure of the *backstage* allowed for the plot to detail the character's lives in relation to their role of *putting on a show*, of showing the lives of performers as they prepare for a given show. Interspersed within the *rehearsals*, the audience would have the opportunity to peek into the private lives of these performers who suffered, loved, and experienced many setbacks, before the impending performance which tended to resolve all of the characters' problems. Feuer insists that ideologically, the *backstage musical* functions as a highly referential story-telling form that *mythifies* the role of performers and their actions. Hollywood musicals in their insistence on 'putting-on a show' evinced the importance of stardom, not only with the industry, but within the plots of the films. One could argue that the *backstage musical* set the ground work for the existence of reality television, since both allow viewers to look into the experiences and *lives* of

its *characters*. As theorized by Thomas Schatz (1981), in regards to audiences, classic musicals, as opposed to other popular film genres, acknowledge directly the existence of an audience:

Whenever musical performers do a number they usually shift their identities from being actors in a drama to entertainers addressing the audience directly (217).

Conventions in filming stipulate that whenever shooting a scene, the actors are shot indirectly; the actor never looks straight-on into the camera. Musicals disrupt this convention by reorienting the camera as performers address the implied audience directly. In many instances, there is a diegetic audience that stands in place for the moviegoer, but when the camera focuses solely on the performer, the film's diegetic audience now becomes extra-diegetic, implying the star's direct performance for the moviegoer (218).

In terms of musical audiences, Paul Cohan notes in his introduction to Hollywood musicals how audiences generally view this genre. Today the musical is viewed mostly as an object of nostalgia that has represented the values and paradigms of a by-gone era (103). While the Hollywood musical no longer forms part of mainstream entertainment, it still preserves and makes itself present within subcultures that invest in the *campy* nature of these stories, speaking directly to gay audiences. Scholars such as Cohan and Paul Roen have illustrated how the Hollywood studio-era musicals spoke directly to gay audiences through the genre's deployment of musical and visual *excess* and *artifice* (103). Even though the plots of most genre films were highly normative in their defense and reproduction of patriarchal and heterosexual values, the inclusion of over the top musical numbers created a subtext, allowing for viewers to read against the film's ideology. Gay audiences isolated the musical numbers from the main plot of the film. For gay audiences, the musical numbers were a way to connect to their gay-camp stars such as Judy Garland and Carmen Miranda (103). Gay audiences decontextualized the musical numbers from the narrative of the film, thereby resignifying the musical numbers as gay-themed texts. At

the same time, viewers initiated an intertextual relationship between the musical numbers and the performers' body of work. In essence, there is a continuum among each musical number and its performer, rather than a relationship between musical number and its film.

Furthermore, Steve Cohan defines the musical as "a highly theatricalized performance of gender. The libidinal energy released in the musical numbers is not linear, that is, not consistent with the conservative, teleological economy of classical narrative" (88). Cohan suggests that the normative and traditional values found in the majority of musicals do not match up with the highly charged desires and sexual language on display through the character's song and dance numbers. He quotes Steave Neale by pointing out that in contrast to other Hollywood genre films, the musical is the "only genre in which the male body has been unashamedly put on display in mainstream cinema in any consistent way" (87). Both male and female characters are on display for their viewers. In many ways, Neale's perception of the musical as a genre that redirects the traditional male film gaze away from the female body contradicts Laura Mulvey's contribution to the field, whereby she equates *femininity with spectacle*. For Mulvey, femininity is consistently displayed and represented on screen in order to please male voyeuristic desires: "the musical would be the genre most responsible for reproducing the reductive binary opposition of female performer and male spectator" (Cohan, 60). In part Mulvey's analysis of the genre fails to consider the capacity of audiences in resignifying the images viewed. In particular it does not account for the role played by queer audiences in destabilizing the strict female-as performer and male-as spectator binary. Instead, it is possible to argue that the musical deploys a feminizing effect upon the traditional male/female binary.

Readers may be asking what does this digression into Hollywood musicals via camp and gay viewers have to do with Miss Tacuarembó and the present project? The work of Martín

Sastre shows the director's dependency on intertextuality and camp appropriations of Hollywood musicals by including a *feminized* genre that makes it possible to read the text as a queer artifact. By having incorporated a very schematic and brief history of early Latin American film, and by providing a working definition of musicals, I can trace how *Miss Tacuarembó* does not depart from its historical, cultural, and geographic roots. Instead there is a strong connection between Sastre and early film makers, since both deal with movies about the *spectacle* of show business and their participants, while also referencing the Hollywood influences that formed part of the director's media landscape.

In essence, *Miss Tacuarembó* can be defined as a classic backstage musical since the main plot builds its dramatic tension from the character's impending performance. It is implied that the viewer wants to see Natalia's two performances that will shape the character's life. The first relates to her participation in the Miss Tacuarembó beauty pageant and the second signals to Natalia's final performance at the reality show, where she has the opportunity to sing. All of the remaining scenes serve to build up to these two moments in the character's life. Throughout the rest of this section I analyze the musical numbers included in *MT-F*, in order to examine the queering effect of the musical. I focus on the songs composed by Ale Sergi for the *MT-F* soundtrack, as well as the use of the song *What a feeling* from the 1983 movie *Flashdance*.

Ale Sergi is the lead voice to the Argentine pop group *Miranda!* His group has a strong queer following due to the ambiguous sounds, messages, and singing style of the group. They have self-labeled their musical style as *melodramatic pop*. While the group has resisted being categorized as a group for *gay teens*, their lyrics and visual aesthetics favor gender ambiguity. A clear example includes the name of the lead singer *Ale*, which opted to shorten his name as a way of avoiding the assigned masculine form of *Alejandro*. Further signs also include their band

name. They chose *Miranda!* in honor of screen and television actor Osvaldo Miranda. He was a leading heartthrob in many films throughout the 1940s, playing alongside some of the prominent Argentinean gay icons such as Mirtha Legrand and Lolita Torres. Even one of his most memorable films, *Los muchachos de antes no usaban gomina* (Romero, 1937), speak to issues of gender identity vis-à-vis societal norms. Yet further signs of *Miranda's!* connection to queer audiences have to do with their 2006 album titled *Quereme! Tributo a las telenovelas*. The promotional single for this album included the song *La extraña dama*, the main telenovela song to a now a queer cult classic from the early 1990s. *La extraña dama's* lyrics were not modified for the male singer, making evident the idea of *extraña* as an equivalent for *queer*. Therefore I find that Sergi's incorporation as the songwriter for Sastre's film, and even the singer's small role within the film, informs viewers that this will not be another normative children's film, with a simple happy ending. Instead they should expect to find many signs of queerness.

Sastre's creativity and mastery of filmic language is made evident in the last half of the film, where the director's sequencing of scenes drive towards narrative closure. This drive towards completion occurs through his weaving of musical performances that integrate or fuse the two main time frames initiated by the story: Natalia's adolescence and Natalia as an adult. *MT-F* dénouement occurs *back stage* as the contestants prepare for the beauty pageant. In this scene, Natalia is positioned on the same plane as the viewer, as both listen to the conversations of the other contestants gossiping about Natalia. The characters reveal that Natalia's mother is not Aidee but *la señorita Coitiño*, the richest woman in Tacuarembó, and the main judge and sponsor of the pageant. This revelation hints at the approaching happy ending, since viewer expectations and knowledge of light coming of age tales would head in that direction. The plot parallels established between *Miss Tacuarembó* and the telenovela *Cristal*, where the mother of

both protagonists are successful women, would seem to guarantee the success of Natalia-Cristal. Backstage, Natalia's fairy godmother appears, played by Jeannette Rodriguez, the female protagonist of *Cristal*. Cristal promises Natalia that everything will work out in her favor. However here is where the film departs from the telenovela model and follows more in line with the somber tone of the novel. Natalia loses the pageant to her childhood enemy María Noel; it is this character who also reveals in the reality show that Natalia never won the pageant, as Natalia had claimed. María Noel's revelation jeopardized Natalia's chances in the show, since viewers had to decide by calling in, if they wanted her to perform a song at the end of the program. Natalia having lied to the public causes their rejection and her running off stage crying. The backstage sequence initiates a series of performances that all lead to the final musical number *What a feeling* that closes the film's narrative.

As Natalia cries backstage, Jesus appears in order to console her. The ideological weight of this scene acquires relevance since it reinstates in the character and in the viewer the importance of never losing hope and faith. Even though the film conveys this message through the religious figure of Jesus, the Christian son of God appears within a completely decontextualized scenario. Jesus is dressed in a shiny suit with cowboy boots, to which Natalia states:

-¡Cristo, qué bien vestido estás!
 -Y sí, soy el hijo de Dios.

Natalia's reaction to the apparition is more concerned with his clothing and his appearance, rather than with the religious-spiritual significance. One must remember that Natalia as a child had rejected Christ and had abandoned her religious beliefs. Here we do not witness a restoration in religious faith, but a restoration of hope and the reconciliation in the importance of performing. Jesus does not appear to restore Natalia's faith, not in the prescriptive Christian

sense where faith leads to salvation. Instead, Jesus instills in the character the power of performance to restore one's position in life. Through the musical and dance number that ensues, the lyrics suggests that Natalia's salvation involves ignoring what people say and seek happiness through performance, at a place far away from home. As stated by Jesus: "Nadie es profeta en su tierra y yo tampoco lo fui. Todo secreto escondido se hace más grande lejos de aquí". The "secret" here refers to her suppressed desire to be a performer which she concealed after having lost the beauty pageant and not having achieved any success in Buenos Aires.

In MT-F, Jesus espouses the theology of fame and performance. He recounts his humble *provincial* beginnings, but now has managed to be a worldwide success:

Nací en un pueblo chico como tú.
Y sin embargo estoy acá.
Ahora vivo de avión en avión.
Todo el mundo me quiere ver...
En Roma se me adora de verdad.
En Roma soy una divinidad.

These lyrics exemplify the mythifying power of celebrity status through the image of a jet setting Jesus. Sergi's lyrics equate Jesus's divinity to his celebrity status, an equation that urges Natalia to return to her *faith*, to return to the stage.

Abre tu mente y cambia tu visión.
Te lo digo yo...
Ahora vete, llegas tarde al Señor.

The *Señor* (*Lord*) referenced here has been *coded* in western Christian civilization as the almighty God who has the power to save and accept in his kingdom his faithful brethren. However, within this song and the context of the film, the *Señor* is not the *Lord*, but the *encoded* tangible space of the stage. It is precisely on stage where Natalia must regain her faith in her abilities to perform, regardless of the rules imposed by the reality program, i.e. society. The

visual and aural impact of the singing Jesus performance also causes the rest of the songs included in the film to acquire a more nuanced reading.

Another key song in the film is *Días de coreografías*. When read decontextualized from the previous song, *Días* served to simply show Natalia's and Carlos's feelings when they were no longer allowed to play together. Their favorite game besides modeling like *Cristal*, involved practicing their favorite music video choreographies.

Recuerdo los días de coreografías.
 Qué bien la pasabas cuando te reías.
 Podemos hacerlo tal vez a escondidas.
 El tiempo se pasa y todo se olvida.
 Nadie nos entiende, seguro que no.
 Tenemos que irnos de Tacuarembó.
 Tenemos que irnos de Tacuarembó.

However when read in relation to *Papá*, a new expanded meaning arises. The children's choreographies were in essence rehearsals for real life, but that they were kept hidden from view. Natalia and Carlos were unable to show who they wanted to be since the townspeople saw them as strange and queer children. Natalia and Carlos reminisce about their childhood, but now as Natalia is confronted by a celebrity-like Jesus, the rehearsals must end. Natalia has to step out and perform. Her final coming out performance is inspired by Jesus driving towards the end of the film. Jesus vindicates performance as a sort of coming out ritual for marginalized queered individuals, as is the case with Natalia. Natalia finally performs a version of the song *What a feeling*, originally sung by Irene Cara in the movie *Flashdance* (Lyne, 1983).

Natalia's performance of *What a feeling* marks the end of the film, but due to the sequencing of images, the viewer does not exactly know exactly how the film ends. Several readings emerge from Sastre's inconclusive narrative closure. One possible interpretation, strictly following the telenovela-musical formula, suggests that it concludes on a happy note.

Natalia has her opportunity to perform during the reality and she has her moment of fame. Most reviews have focused on this interpretation due to their insistence that *MT-F* does not depart from its generic formula. Yet, if one considers the story line in relation to the superimposed music on the visual depictions, a more complex analysis surfaces. The narrative development throughout the film leads the viewer into thinking that Natalia will win the beauty pageant, will find love, and will ultimately get enough votes to sing on the reality show. However none of these events take place. The viewer learns that she not only lost the beauty pageant, but that the person she was interested in romantically, a fellow co-worker, was simply part of the production team for the reality show. Lastly, the revelation of her not having won the pageant resulted in no one voting for her. Instead all of these plot lines are never met. The viewer is presented with a different form of closure, which was unexpected, her reconciliation with Jesus. During the *Papá* performance, both Natalia and Jesus kiss and he promises to return for Natalia. This scene puts into question the whole plot of the film, since it then becomes more about her regaining her faith in performance through her belief in *celebrity* Jesus, more than about her achieving the title of *Miss Tacuarembó*-reality star. However, even this supposed happy ending results inconclusive due to the scenes that follow.

As Natalia steps out to sing *What a feeling*, the audience returns to watch her perform even though they were leaving in anger after having been deceived. She succeeds in capturing their attention and halfway through the song, the visuals change and it shows Natalia singing and dancing by the Hollywood sign. While the song is never interrupted, there is a discontinuity in the visuals. The scene begins with her singing at the reality show and it ends with her in the Hollywood hills. This suggests the possibility of Natalia's success, as displayed by her temporal and geographic displacement. Yet the aesthetics of her dancing in Hollywood do not fit in with

the rest of the film. The pop aesthetic employed by Sastre, heavily dependent on the use of sharp images and bright colors and an elaborate characterization, no longer hold in the last segment. Sastre's last scene acquires a much darker and grainier composition with a Natalia that resembles more the real persona of Natalia Oreiro the star, over Natalia the character. In one of the sequences, she is seen reading the script of *MT-F*, and this does not necessarily make sense within the logic of the story. Is this part of an added bonus scene, or is it suggesting that she is reading a film script about her life produced in Hollywood, or is it simply Oreiro reading the script? Sastre's last scene, rather than representing the culmination of the film, generates an inconclusive reading, up to viewers to decipher. In essence, this last segment shows that all forms of representation are performative in nature, having a significant coming-out value. The use of coming-out here is not limited to the need of queer identities to make public their same-sex desire. It can also be extended to include all individuals that live subjugated within a patriarchal society. In this case Jesus's performance displays his break from the constraints imposed by his father, just as Natalia performs to remove her from her town and family.

The notion of *coming-out* through performance as expressed in the song *Papá* not only helps Natalia to break away from the social constraints imposed by her, but the song also has an ideological stance directed towards religion. Sergi's lyrics suggest that Jesus also breaks free from the constraints imposed on him by his *father*. Here he is turned into a performer and not a religious figure. Jesus' *coming out* occurs through the rejection of the heavenly father. As he sings:

¿Quién lo diría quién me veía,
 en la carpintería,
 todo el día con mi papá?
 Papá, papá, todo el día con papá.
 Papá, papá, ¡qué vergüenza que me da!

The lines show how the songwriter humanizes Jesus through his recognition that his father is not God, but Joseph the carpenter. It is clear that he also does not wish to be a carpenter and finds it embarrassing to be seen working with him. Jesus' embarrassment is reminiscent of Natalia's childhood, who would attempt at all cost to disassociate from her mother. All they want for themselves is to be a star, not a carpenter, a daughter, or a wife, but a performer. His coming out as human also has gendered and sexual implications. Jesus coming out also corresponds to highly feminized masculinity which is made evident from his dancing, but also supported by the audience's recognition of the actor playing the role of Jesus. The role is portrayed by Mike Amigorena, who the previous year had starred in a telenovela with a highly queer plot and playing a gay character. Before this telenovela, *Los exitosos Pells*, Amigorena was an unknown actor. After *Los Pells* he acquired recognition and continued to perform off-screen the ambiguous identity he had acquired from the show. This was lived through his fashion choices. Amigorena was repeatedly photographed wearing skirts, embracing *women's clothes* as suitable for men. Once again, the casting choices reinforce the queer blueprint that Sastre wanted to include within his film. The male characters are feminized and queered as they embrace markers of femininity such as fashion and perceived female sensibility. In the dance sequence, Amigorena strips from his suit and performs the rest of his number in a loin cloth. This is also significant in his *coming out* ritual, since the stripping allows for the display of the male body as an object of desire. As I have stated earlier in regards to Neale's conception of the musical, this genre has been responsible for redirecting the traditional male gaze from the female body to the male form as well. It is Natalia who sits and watches, as does the audience, as Jesus strips, before she joins him in the dance. He does away with traditional men's ware, as is the suit and displays his body for the extradiegetic audience. And even Jesus' posture and poses are not

overtly masculine, but rather lanky and up to certain points feminized as he dances along with Natalia. By the end of this segment both Jesus and Natalia have stripped themselves from and *came-out* from each of their restrictive impositions. For this reason, she is prepared for her final performance, *What a feeling*.

The use of the song *What a feeling* serves Sastre as part of the cultural and filmic blueprint making up the vision of the song. However, the songs decontextualization from its original film, resignifies the lyrics by making it the object of the character's queer desires. By incorporating this song within *MT-F*, the director acknowledges how musicals served as inspiration and as an outlet for queer audiences. The film consistently shows how Carlos and Natalia use the song to release through singing and bodily movements the repressive atmosphere imposed on Tacuarembó by the religious and social mores. In many ways, Cara's song mirrors the plot and the general message of *MT-F*, since the song sheds light onto the importance of the fulfillment of dreams through one's faith in one's abilities, in this case the transformative power of song and dance. As the song states:

What a feeling.
 Bein's believin'
 I can have it all, now I'm dancing for my life.

Here we see how the *bein'*, in other words, her corporeal presence embodied and displayed through dance, has the potential to not only exist-*bein'*, make the body visible, but to also serve as a resource for one's success. It is through dance-movement, a bodily presence that can save and make the character succeed. Sastre's film also mirrors the respective leading characters isolation due to the space they inhabit.

All alone I have cried, silent tears full of pride,
 in a world made of steel, made of stone.

Both Alex and Natalia feel isolated in the dreariness of their towns. In *Flashdance*, Alex inhabits a highly industrialized city, which seems to go against and limit Alex's self-expression:

All alone I have cried,
silent tears full of pride.
In a world made of steel, made of stone.

Her self-expression and movement is restricted by her mechanized work at the welding factory. Her night employment at the gentlemen's dance club, is also highly rigid since she performs set routines. It is not until her audition at the highly selective dance conservatory that she can break from the constraints imposed on her by the daily routines of a highly industrialized society. Similarly, Sastre borrows these images for his movie, even though industrialized Pittsburgh is resignified as a sleepy provincial town with dusty roads, and almost inhabitable. Sastre focuses mostly on the loneliness and marginalized sense of the characters. When Carlos and Natalia rehearse to *What a feeling*, they do so in a park with a bridge that leads to nowhere, in front of a monument of a globe. The images presented of both children dancing in front of this world, suggest they are not part of it, but rather they are standing outside of the globe's sphere. They are outsiders looking into a globe-the world that does not include them; and as it is repeated constantly by the characters, '*algún día el mundo será nuestro*'. It is precisely within this last point, where the film ideologies differ. By the end of *Flashdance*, it is suggested that Alex marries her benefactor, displaying her acceptance into a patriarchal social organization, once again subduing her freedom. The corporal freedom achieved through her dancing is nonetheless stifled by her acceptance of marriage and the passivity implied in her advancement into a higher social standing, which will no longer require her to work. In other words, she no longer needs to *dance to save her life*. However at the end of *MT-F*, it is not clear exactly what Natalia's future holds. Although as I suggest through my reading of the songs and the conjunction of scenes,

MT-F narrativizes performance as a coming out ritual that enables those deemed marginalized a voice from which to enunciate their freedom. It is not about a happy or a sad ending, but a way of appropriating performance as a tool for self-expression.

3. CONSUMING FEMININITIES:

CONSUMERISM OVER FAMILIAL DUTIES ON FILM AND TELEVISION

In the previous chapter I advanced how television narratives and aesthetics have informed current Latin American filmic productions. The relevance and the success of Latin American television and in particular telenovelas, have had a tremendous influence on the big screen, as we see more directors influenced by television. In my analysis of *Miss Tacuarembó*, I explored the director's use of melodramatic narratives, pop culture references, and popular cinema genres such as Hollywood musicals in order to reconfigure traditional family entertainment. Sastre constructed a children's film by utilizing a highly queered aesthetic which attempts to narrate the stories of marginalized youth who choose not to conform to a patriarchal heteronormative structure. Within my analysis, I suggested that Sastre is able to queer family entertainment by masking it through narratives of girl culture. Furthermore, he utilizes film and television genres such as melodrama and musicals, described by critics as malleable forms capable of providing more nuanced readings of femininity and masculinity. I continue to explore the possibilities found in melodrama-telenovelas in questioning gendered norms outside of traditional prescriptive patriarchy. Even though the basic plot lines reproduce traditional values, the underlined ideologies show very contradictory messages.

In order to dialogue with these issues of representation, I find it necessary to analyze *foundational texts* as evidence of a long existing trajectory dedicated to dismantling rigid categorizations. By *foundational texts*, I am referring to films and telenovelas that have served as models of melodramatic narratives that actively destabilized gendered norms. While today one can find many current examples such as in the films by Almodóvar, the work of Sastre, and in queer themed telenovelas, there exists various examples that predate these contemporary

works. By including these *foundational texts*, I attempt to demonstrate that the capacity of current melodramatic works to question static notions of identity are not random nor isolated examples, but rather they are foregrounded on tradition. For this reason I focus on the 1956 film *La pícaro soñadora* (Arancibia) and how this film served as a model for subsequent television productions. In each version of this popular product we see how the form constructs a feminine identity that while it varies due to sociopolitical and cultural trends of the period, the genre consistently defies traditional gendered norms. I find it impossible to discuss current queered television products without seeing how previous melodramatic work ideologically paved the way for such discursive moves. The influence of works such as *La pícaro* had a transformative effect in their capacity to influence directors and producers wishing to explore and deconstruct normative and static identities. The fact that directors such as Almodóvar and Sastre utilize and refer to the melodramatic archive of golden age cinema and early television evinces the nuances and the pliability of these early melodramatic works.

3.1 **Refritos: Securing and Defining Audiences**

In 2001 Sistema Brasileiro de Televisão (*SBT*), a small contender within Latin America's media industry, captured a large segment of audiences away from Globo, the leading multi-media conglomerate in Brazil. *SBT's* rise in ratings resulted in part on the success of the telenovela *A Pícaro Sonhadora* (*The Mischievous Dreamer*), a comedy of errors whose plot centered on the life of a department-store clerk who needs to live at her place of work due to her financial hardship. This story initiated the network's entrance into the competitive world of serialized melodramatic programming. As I will argue, *SBT* marketed their serials to a gendered and an economic niche group, specifically the lower working class young women, which the

hegemonic media industry led by Globo has traditionally ignored. While far-reaching and popular, Globo's programming is ideologically constructed to play on the fantasies and values of the upper middle classes. Therefore it is my intent within this work to analyze the success of *A Pícaro* in its ability to cater to a previously ignored economic niche group, as the confluence of various corporate decisions and socio-political events. Ultimately, the convergence of the social and the corporate allowed SBT to capture viewer's attention away from Globo's programming that only validated the values of an economic elite, regardless of the economic background of its core audience. Specifically in my analysis of *A pícaro*, I am interested in the ways this telenovela constructs a young female identity based on the productive values of consumption as a way of avoiding societal's traditional roles for women. I also find it impossible to separate the ideologies found in the plot from the corporate and industrial drives that produce such programs.

In terms of corporate motivations, I am referring to *SBT's* deal with Mexico's Televisa. This joint venture granted *SBT* access to Televisa's successful scripts, while also providing technical and artistic support for reproducing Televisa's telenovela model in Brazil, a model already successful throughout Latin America. *SBT* selected *A Pícaro* due to Televisa's categorization of this serial as a product aimed at audiences from the lower socio-economic classes. *SBT's* decision to produce a telenovela conceived as a product for a specific economic niche group comes as a clear response to Globo's overt marketing to an audience whose ideologies resemble those of the upper middle classes. As it has been documented at length by scholars (O'Dougherty, 2002), *Globo's* programming targets and plays on the fantasies of the middle class' inclusion into the upper and elite classes. In other words, it is my intent to examine how the poor and the working classes are transformed into participants-viewers and consumers of the Brazilian industry through *SBT's* selection of programming and corporate alliances.

It is not coincidental that this interpellation or inclusion of the working classes is addressed by SBT's programming during the early-1990s, when Brazil's economic collapse further widened the gap between the working and middle classes. Nonetheless, the representations of these economic events by Globo were presented as events affecting only the upper middle classes (O'Dougherty, 2002). Globo's exclusion became evident to other networks such as SBT who was able to capitalize on Globo's failure and began addressing the needs of an audience not previously accounted for by the major networks. In order to make this case, the analysis here will center on the period between 1990-2001. These years corresponded to the rise and fall of Fernando Collor de Melo's presidency along with his failed economic plan, Globo's exclusion of the lower social classes from its programming, and finally SBT's strategic selection of telenovelas aimed at Globo's ignored audiences. Gaining these audiences was a way of establishing ratings for a relatively new network. This chapter focuses on *A Pícara Sonhadora* because it was the first telenovela produced by a Brazilian network to specifically target the lower working classes. The plan by SBT created a precedent for the network to follow and for its competition to consider. As much as this paper focuses on media's prevailing economic discourses reflecting and interpellating audiences, part of the analysis here also rests on the role played by telenovela models-paradigms in mediating viewers and industries. Since there are various telenovela models I find it important to define these models not in an exhaustive manner, but in relation to the needs of this chapter.

3.2 **Melodramatic Paradigms: The Telenovela and its Form**

Sex, tears, love, and vengeance sum up some of the basic elements found in most Latin American telenovelas. The conjunction of these emotions coupled with technological

developments and formulaic plot lines have turned serials into widely consumed and exported products of Latin America's cultural industry (Allen, 1994). While the telenovela industry is typically referred to and envisioned as a cohesive and unified national media entity, it is in fact fragmented in regards to both the product's internal ideology as well as on the discursive and ideological drives of the industrial-corporate entity producing fiction. Telenovelas as a whole do not encapsulate univocal messages emanating from one hegemonic industry, even when scholars, industry insiders, and fans speak of Mexican, Brazilian, Peruvian telenovelas. There is no unified national industry but rather multiple private corporate enterprises that while they may receive national subsidized funds, their economic investment remains in the hands of private investors. Making up the industry include multi-lingual, multi-national corporate networks that collaborate across economic and corporate borders (i.e. through the circulation of scripts, television formats, and actors), but ultimately act independently based on their own economic models and paradigms of what constitutes their media industry.

Despite its approximately fifty-five years of existence, the telenovela paradigm with its strict formulaic plots have, for the most part, remained untouched. However, what has varied relate to the network's approach to the formula. For example, telenovelas produced by Televisa have been described as extremely weepy, Manichean and baroque (Lopez, 1995), whereas those produced by Globo incorporate elements of realism, satire, and known to question society's taboo topics, while still maintaining its faithfulness to the melodramatic mode (Mazziotti, 2006). These models have defined not only the telenovela for its networks, but it has equated each network's formula to its specific country. That is to say, when viewers think of Mexican telenovelas, they are expecting the Televisa formula, regardless of other smaller Mexican companies that may be producing other types of serials. Specifically, telenovelas are serialized

narratives produced in Latin America by Spanish-language and Portuguese-language television networks, where the narrative comes to an end after a predetermined amount of episodes. Most telenovelas range between 90 to 150 one-hour episodes that air throughout the day, including during prime-time. In contrast to Anglophone soap operas, such as those produced in the United States-*General Hospital*, the United Kingdom-*EastEnders*, and Australia-*Neighbours*, they have an indeterminate amount of episodes airing exclusively during daytime. Due to time scheduling, Anglo soap operas have been deemed a *woman's genre*, a *housewife genre*, whereas telenovela audiences appear to be more heterogeneous, yet vary depending on time-slot segmentation based on age, sex, and socio-cultural level (Mumfurd, 1995). For example, in Mexico, the five and six o'clock telenovela targets a younger pre-teen female audience, while the 9 o'clock telenovela is projected to the coveted prime-time audience groups of adults between the ages of 18 to 35. Although telenovelas and soap operas share a common history found in the radio dramas of the 1930s, there are clearly marked differences. As stated by scholars, such as Estill (2005) and Mazziotti (2006), unlike the Anglophone soap operas, Latin American telenovelas have been heavily influenced and inspired by the sentimental chapter novels published in installments during the nation-building period of the 19th century. The connections between serialized narratives and literature penned by specific authors continued into the telenovela, particularly in the early years of the television genre.

During its initial years, the industry cultivated the success of various authors such as Caridad Bravo Adams, Celia Alcántara, Nené Cascallar, Alberto Migré, Abel Santa Cruz, and perhaps the most recognized of all, Delia Fiallo. All of these authors were referred to as *authors* and not as script writers, emphasizing the narrative and the artistic quality of each of these authors. The industry also used them in order to help market and reach audiences, as each author

had a very distinct and recognizable style. Arnaldo André, one of the leading stars of the 1970s and 1980s, once stated in an interview that he recognized the importance of telenovela authors within the industry. In many cases, they had deciding power in terms of casting, and production related decisions, since it was their vision that the industry was portraying. He recalled that when acting he could not modify, improvise, or even digress slightly from what the author had written, otherwise he ran the risk of being fired by the author. Whereas now, he states that faithfulness to the script has become much more flexible since the author has been replaced by writing teams. In part this change reflects the industry's shifting in paradigms that began to take place in the 1990s. Whereas once the success of a telenovela rested on the author and on the actors, since the 1990s the marker of success rests on star power. However, as I argue, while the author is no longer a key figure in the *branding* of the telenovela, the author has been displaced in favor of the *refrito*. As presented in the previous chapter, *refrito* refers to the industry norm of recycling former successful scripts, rather than investing in new material. According to the industry, the logic of the *refrito* model perceives that a telenovela that succeeded in the past has a higher chance of replicating its success in the present. A new *untested* script presents a higher level of risk, as opposed to a *refrito*. Mexico's media conglomerate *Televisa* consistently makes use of the *refrito* as its model of production. Besides the higher probability of success that a *refrito* may bring into the production equation, there are other industry perceived benefits, such as lower costs. Since the company utilizes its former scripts, there is no need to pay or secure author copyrights. In the 1990s *Televisa* bought the rights to the works of Delia Fiallo and Abel Santa Cruz, thus facilitating the recycling of texts in perpetuity without the need to invest in new stories. Furthermore by owning the text, there is no need to involve the author within the decision making process of producing a telenovela. The use of *refritos* has reconfigured roles

and duties within the industry. While the author and the producer played a significant role in organizing the production from their respective areas of expertise, now having removed the author, the producer is responsible for both the technical and the artistic-narrative aspect of the production. However, as I argue, the *refrito* does not remove completely the aura of the author. While telenovela titles change, viewers are informed regarding what the *refrito* is based on. In other words, viewers are privy to the source/sources of the remake, which can be traced back to one of the *original* telenovela authors mentioned above. The author's lineage remains within the *refrito*, not in its actual textual form, since the scripts have been *updated*, but on the overall faithfulness to the main plot. Above all, the trace of the author's aura within the *refrito* allows the telenovela to retain a hint of classicism by acknowledging and referencing the *golden age* of telenovela organized around specific authors; without the industry actually having to continue nurturing and developing new talent.

Perhaps another formal characteristics defining telenovelas, besides the common trend of the *refrito* as specified above, has to do with the generic disposition of serialized narratives in their use of the melodramatic genre. As stated by Peter Brooks' now classic study *The melodramatic imagination* (1976), the critic defines the form as a parable to identity framed within the confines of a love story. He acknowledges that melodrama is a literary genre since as he states one can identify in a wide variety of works a "coherent aesthetic system, with a repertory of expressive features and devices that can be subjected to analysis" (ix). Brooks emphasizes that, more than a genre, melodrama is a way of representing, imagining, giving structure to the text. For that reason he refers to the term *melodramatic imagination*, in order to make sense of the texts emerging out of the French Revolution and extending into present representations such as in film, music, and theater. In melodrama, the search of one's self takes

place in a dualistic world where good always triumphs over evil, thereby restoring order in a seemingly chaotic world. Specifically, melodramatic plots situate love struck couples in a society where sentiment and love fulfills all the necessary requirements for narrative closure. The couple's ensuing triumphant union not only closes the narrative, but it also restores the order temporarily threatened by its evil characters. Through the romantic union of the couple and the downfall of the evil characters, melodramatic narratives serve as moralistic tales showcasing the triumph of heterosexual love over adversity, and anything that may challenge the status quo is suppressed.

Understanding the telenovela paradigm helps us to understand how the media industry constructs a product easily identifiable for and by its consumers. However, there are also other paradigms, such as those deployed by academic scholars that affect the reception of telenovela programming through its critical research. This criticism has evolved from defining the telenovela as a dangerous ideological tool of capitalism, to its ability to create and forge an identity. Once again, it is not my goal to provide the history or the backdrop of this evolution of criticism, but rather to guide and situate the reader within the prevailing discourses and how this essay positions itself vis-à-vis the existing discourses. Despite the success of the telenovela to situate itself as the staple of Latin American television, there has been a tendency to deride this tele-visual genre due to a "perceived" lack of artistic and cultural value. For example, Baldwin's (1995) research employs the metaphors of "toilet training", and "waste management" to describe the business tactic of private Russian television industry in purchasing older Mexican telenovelas to fill their time-slots, after the fall of the Soviet Union and the advancement of capitalism. Although references to telenovelas as "trash" surface periodically, it was not until the rise of Cultural and Television Studies in the 1980s that serialized narratives began to be regarded as

valuable cultural products (Ang, 1985; Allen, 1992; Mumfurd, 1995; Modleski, 1982). Within the Latin American context, researchers such as Jesús Martín-Barbero (2000) and Nora Mazziotti (2006) turned the telenovela into a legitimate object of study. Mazziotti focused mostly on cataloguing the various telenovela models developed by the major producers of serialized fiction, such as México, Venezuela, and Brazil, while also positing the social practices surrounding telenovelas. However, many of the studies conducted focused solely on the *major* media players, such as Globo in Brazil and Televisa in México, in their capacity to influence and mediate between social practices and the cultural industries. While the work of scholars like Mazziotti shed light on such important issues, there is a lack of attention on secondary media players such as *SBT* in their attempts to situate themselves in a market dominated by media sources with a long history of governmental and private sector support. In part, my research wishes to question how minor media players navigate saturated airwaves and create and secure an audience. Ultimately, my research inquiries advance our understanding of how in the search for new audiences, the industry recycles plots and reconfigure characters in relation to gendered, social and economic identities. Through *A pícaro sonhadora* one can observe how the working classes are interpellated through Milla, a character who can be interpreted as queer due to her desires and aspirations for consumption.

In his introduction to melodramatic serials, Allen (1995) characterizes the genre of telenovelas as a discursive tool advancing the tenets of modernity operating throughout Latin America. Dramatic serials have played a key role in fueling consumer capitalism:

The telenovela has been discussed in terms of its relationship to modernity: the economic, cultural, and psychic reorganization of society around the demands of consumer capitalism. Modernity has certainly been an important issue....for scholars of Latin America; however, the project of modernity is of current not just historical interest. Television has been seen as an important instrument of modernity in Latin America (11).

For Allen, serials played an instrumental role in framing and transmitting the drive of modernity. Serials began as products launched by corporations in order to promote household products over promoting artistic pursuits, turning serials into ideological vehicles for modernity. Furthermore, the fact that Latin American telenovelas are episodic, they have inevitably restructured people's daily life around the need to consume a cultural product and the consumer goods that these products launch through advertisement (1995). Allen's consideration will be taken up within this chapter, since through the unpacking of plot, characterization, and setting it is possible to see this product as a tale for and by modernity. This occurs through the main character's over-acceptance of a consumer identity that is transmitted to audiences who identify with the leading character of the telenovela.

A reading of this telenovela's ideology presents itself as a model for and about the imperatives of a neoliberal agenda, based on the restructuring of *SBT*. Therefore, *A pícaro* juxtaposes the plot's tale of modernity restructured via the neoliberal agenda taking place in Brazil. As mentioned previously, the fact that *A pícaro* is a remake of a Mexican telenovela, which in part was also a remake of a 1956 Argentinean film, demonstrates the insistence in showcasing several tenets of modernity, such as consumer culture within Latin America.

3.3 **Globo and SBT, the Exclusion-Inclusion of Lower-Working Classes**

Throughout the 1990s, Brazil experienced a series of political and economic events that framed and dictated the nation's television programming. The airwaves were saturated with the return of democracy and the triumph of Collor de Mello's presidency. This initial period of hope contrasted against the staggering inflation, the ousting of Collor de Mello due to corruption charges, and the disintegration of the Brazilian banking system. Brazil's turbulent political and

economic situation was mediated by television giant Globo, which portrayed the crisis as a transgression perpetrated not against the country as a whole, but as an affront against the upper middle class (O'Dougherty, 2002). While Globo reaches 90% of Brazilian households, the network ideologically envisions itself as a crusader of the upper middle classes. Its nightly telenovelas construct a viewer-citizen identity that envisions Brazil as an opulent progressive country led by an elite middle class (Straubhaar & Viscasillas, 1991). As I argue, Globo's overt catering to this minority led other smaller networks vying for a share of Globo's audience, to cater to the ignored-invisible masses.

Globo began as a small family-owned television station, without any political or military connections. This separation between media and government was short lived, but initially possible since funding and investments came from foreign investors. In 1962, Roberto Marinho started TV Globo through financial and technical support from Time-life Corporation. This audio-visual venture helped TV Globo establish the needed infrastructure to reach every corner of the country, while also aiding U.S. investors in propagating American consumer goods (Fox, 1997). However by 1971, Globo achieved network status and consolidated production of its programming comprising mostly of telenovelas and news programming. Its consolidation allowed Globo to produce between 12 to 14 hours of original Brazilian programming, which served as the leverage needed to push out U.S. programming from prime time hours. Globo's consolidation via programming also allowed Marinho to implement his personal corporate model of programming known as *Padrão global de qualidade* (Fox, 1997). Marinho's model of *global quality pattern* set strict guidelines for television programming, which conflated both technical production principles along with highly ideologically charged programming. Marinho's *padrão* served to favor the government for financing Time-Life's buyout and forging a new relationship

between the state and the media (Fox, 1997). The main focus of Globo's programming centered on marketing Brazilian products and *Brazilianness*. Brazilian identity would be mediated through the goals and aspirations of the upper middle class and foregrounded through state intervention. Brazil would be marketed through one of Globo's mottos "*Brazil, as it should be*".

State intervention reached its peak after several military coups beginning in 1964. In order to maintain power, the regime used corporatist institutions such as mass media to mobilize public support and to assert their legitimacy. Case in point, the last two military governments of Geisel and Figueiredo (1973-1985) perceived citizen discontent initially due to faltering economic growth. The regime's response implemented inclusionary policies via symbolic inclusion through the media (Straubhaar, 1989). Several campaigns were launched to make Brazilians feel proud about their country. Slogans such as "Este é um país que vai para frente" (This is a country that progresses) were constantly displayed on television. According to Straubhaar, Brazil's most powerful network, Globo TV, united with Geisel and Figueiredo by incorporating these *feel good* campaigns within their programming. The telenovela became Globo's and the regime's favorite outlet by incorporating within their storylines images of a "positive Brazil" which has been able to recover economically (Straubhaar, 1989).

However, this close relationship between Globo and the military regime did not prove eternal. The periods of rupture can be traced between 1974 and 1985, during the transition to civilian rule. During the transitional period, many civilian and social organizations demanded and campaigned for elections of civilian candidates. Led by state governors, local leaders, regional media excluding Globo, and mass street demonstrators, took to the streets for more than four months in 1984 to challenge the regime's leadership. Many non-Globo newspapers and radio programs covered the demonstrations while Globo continued to maintain minimal and

“negative” coverage of the demonstrations. For example, after a major rally in São Paulo on January 25, 1984, TV Globo’s evening news program, *Jornal Nacional*, spent only 45 seconds to report on the demonstrations in favor of direct elections. Globo treated the demonstrations only within the context of a city festival. Nonetheless, the constant and visible coverage by secondary independent media created enough pressure for Globo to reassess their practices. Just three months after the January demonstrations, Globo aired a one hour special documenting and presenting a major election rally in Rio. Many segments were re-broadcasted throughout the day, even interrupting their prime-time telenovela lineup (Straubhaar & Viscasillas, 1991).

One hypothesis for this shift evinces Globo’s realization that they were falling behind its audience. As stated by Straubhaar, although TV Globo has generally created consensus by exercising ideological leadership through their widely watched programs, the network is above all a commercial enterprise, reluctant to loose audiences. Also, it’s also important to note that Globo’s frustration with the regime and its granting of television licenses to other networks, such as the Manchete Group and SBT, led Globo to distance itself from the state. If the military regimes were not going to support Globo’s market domination, then in turn, they would not support a perceived failing regime.

Globo’s distancing from the state was further evidenced by their support of middle class struggles during the Collor de Mello’s presidency. In 1990, Fernando Collor de Mello took office as the first democratically elected President of Brazil in 29 years. His presidency soon faced the challenge of battling inflation which at times reached rates of 25% per month. Collor’s answer was to launch the "Collor Plan," which reduced the circulating money supply by forcibly converting large portions of consumer bank accounts into unspendable government bonds (O’Dougherty, 2002). At the same time President Collor increased the printing of currency, a

contradictory measure to combat inflation. However, the presidency's most polemic economic plan, leading to his overthrow, included the plan to freeze bank accounts containing more than 1,200 *cruzeiros* for a period of 18 months, as to avoid currency flight from the banking system (Baker, 2009). However, elite groups with close governmental ties received insider information, allowing several economic sectors to withdraw and to transfer their money to foreign accounts. Brazil became further divided after Collor's measures since the middle class felt punished and betrayed by the ruling elite and the government. His presidency suffered the most when in 1992 Collor was accused by his brother Pedro of corruption, spearheaded by Congress and the press. In October of that same year, the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies voted to bring charges against him, which eventually led to his impeachment and the impossibility to hold political office for eight years. Collor mediatized impeachment hearing concentrated mostly on the plight of the middle class, portrayed as the real victims of Collor's mismanagement and corrupt policies (O'Dougherty, 2002). The working class and the poor were never interpellated in the corruption charges. The media and particularly Globo focused on how the middle class, their targeted audience, lost socioeconomic standing during Collor's presidency. The sole focus of the media on the upper middle class totally disregarded the experiences of the lower working classes. This focus or exclusion? Not clear what your referent is. inclusion was made possible by the break up of the media monopolies through sales of government owned television channels, which in part were bought by Silvio Santos, allowing him to create *SBT*. Globo's sole focus on the aspirations of the middle class left a representational void in regards to socially marginalized groups, as in the case of the lower working classes. However emerging media networks that obtained from the government broadcast licensing filled that void by catering to the symbolic inclusion of

marginalized audiences. *SBT* became one of the networks that benefitted from the government's media deregulatory policies.

The most recent rendition of *A Pícara* was produced by Globo's home rival, the SBT network. Silvio Santos is the owner, CEO, and leading on-screen talent of the second-ranked broadcaster SBT, boast as stated by their unofficial motto *we're number two and proud of it*. Initially SBT began capturing audiences in 1981 as Santos hosted a 12 hour Sunday variety show. Santos' show served as the vehicle for two private lotteries, *Baud a Felicidade* (Treasure Chest of Happiness) and *Telecena*, financed by the Grupo Silvio Santos. His presence as *CEO* and on-air talent highlight's the networks insistence on the cult of personality and on the ability to rise above poverty. *SBT's* ideology contains elements of classic neoliberal discourse. Neoliberal discourse pays homage not only to the self-made-man, but to individual success, serving as a model for others to emulate. Several male neoliberal *heroes* include Carlos Slim, Bill Gates, Steve Jobs and Donald Trump. Silvio Santos pertains to this group of *neoliberal men* who were able to benefit from state and economic deregulation. The dream of overnight economic success is a constant theme of the network since its anchoring programs are lottery shows. Also, the public is very aware of Santos' overnight rise to fame and fortune-- he went from underemployed street vendor to CEO. Due to these lotteries, Santos' group has grown into a \$1.5 billion-a year industry, of which SBT retains \$400 million from sales and ad revenue. Such growth has led advertisers to accept that SBT's lower-middle income core demographics merit attention. However, in 1990, Santos' most significant deal was with Televisa, Mexico's and Latin America's largest Spanish-language media conglomerate. Both networks signed a \$200 million dollar contract, granting SBT the right to produce in Brazil any telenovela script owned by Televisa within a ten year period (Cajueiro, 2001). *SBT's* pact with *Televisa* proved

successful since the ratings for each imported novela ranged between 11 to 16 points. Such numbers sparked the interest of sponsors. Economic returns were substantially rewarding for SBT since it required very little investment in importing already produced telenovelas. Santos' familiarity and experience with Televisa's products facilitated his entrance in the competitive world of telenovela production. SBT began producing their first *Televisa* telenovela based on a *Televisa refrito*: *La Pícaro Soñadora*, translated into Portuguese as *A Pícaro Sonhadora*. With this first production, SBT was able to steal a share of Globo's audience by producing Televisa-style telenovelas known for their 'baroque scenery' (Martín-Barbero, 2000) and their extreme weepiness, when compared to Globo's productions known for their realism and openness towards taboo topics. Besides thematic similarities, SBT followed Televisa's production patterns closely (Cajueiro, 2001), such as keeping costs to a minimum by increasing the speed of production, thereby producing more finished products available for distribution. Also following Televisa's production strategies, SBT's first and subsequent telenovelas capped their expenses to a maximum of \$43,000 per episode-- almost half of what Globo spends on a single episode. In order to limit expenses, each telenovela was limited to a range of 90 to 96 one hour episodes, of which only 35% of the scenes were shot on location. The cast kept under 30 members and contained only a handful of recognized actors, preferably ones that have not worked recently, enabling the company to control and leverage wages. All in all, SBT built their telenovela business by following the rule of quantity, speed, and cost, allowing them to produce a budget conscious product that yields high profits through loyal viewership.

3.4 **Of Origins and Models**

The film *La pícaro soñadora* (1956), directed by Ernesto Arancibia for Artistas Argentinos Asociados, centers on the life of Silvia Vidal -- a young law student who has moved

from her provincial city of Rosario to the capital city of Buenos Aires. Silvia worked in the Rosario branch of the department store Gándara, and was transferred to the main branch in Buenos Aires. During the day she works as a salesgirl in the toy department, and in the evenings she studies law at the Facultad de Derecho. This light comedy infused with melodramatic elements derives its narrative impetus from Silvia's inability to find housing, forcing her to secretly live for a period of six months at her workplace. While working, she meets Pedro Cáceres, a new toy salesman who she has to train. Pedro's real name is Freddy Gándara, the heir to the Gándara department store fortune. He decides to hide his identity since he does not want to entice Silvia with his fortune. Instead he wants to win her heart with his charm and personality. Pedro and Silvia soon fall in love and all identities and housing situations are revealed and forgiven due to the healing restorative power of love. As I will argue in this section, through plot and character development, *La pícara soñadora* questions the rigid gendered, social, and cultural norms and tastes of the late 1950s Argentinean society. Yet, at the same time, it paints a new picture of modernity which includes the experiences of women and their role within this narrative.

The opening scene begins with a close up of *La torre de los ingleses*, a clock tower marking 6:00 am. As the scene progresses, it shows Silvia waking up and getting ready for work. Time is a constant reference in the film as it helps to define Silvia's character as responsible and hardworking. Viewers are constantly reminded that she studies until 1 am and then wakes up at 6 am. Her perseverance as a student and as a worker, established early on in the film, serve as Silvia's redeeming qualities which serve to counteract her dishonesty for living and using without payments, the department store's products. The opening sequence not only successfully delineates the main character, but it also reconstructs certain social, cultural, and historical

moments in Argentinean history, as well as evincing the history of cinema in Argentina. This initial argument can be elucidated through a detailed explanation and analysis of the last segment of the opening credits, which I transcribe below.

Las escenas naturales de esta película fueron filmadas en Gath y Chaves Ltd, Facultad de Derecho, Biblioteca Nacional, a quienes agradecemos la gentil colaboración prestada.
Vestuario de Mirtha Legrand: creación de Vanina de War.

The montage of the *Torre de los ingleses*, coupled with the words transcribed above, specifically in reference to the filming in Gath y Chaves, reflect the history of European colonization, imperialism, and the subsequent imposition of European tastes and values as markers of distinction, class, and progress evinced throughout much of Argentina's history. British imperial influence in Argentina has been visible through much of the early invasions of the 18 and 19th century that attempted to control the port of Buenos Aires. While military invasions failed, British imperial effects succeeded throughout part of the 19th and 20th through direct investment in resources and infrastructures. The clock tower -- a gift to the city -- is emblematic of British cultural imperialism, since this gift manages to position itself symbolically as it looms and watches over the area of Retiro¹⁶, which houses the main train station and transportation hub in Buenos Aires. Retiro was partly built and funded by the British, to protect and facilitate the arrival and export of Argentinean beef and wool from the interior of the country to the port and eventually shipped off to Europe. In a sense, the growth of a national infrastructure and economic sustainability were predicated on the needs and interests of foreign markets. Similarly, the arrival of film and the rise of the cinematic industry also began via England since British

¹⁶ Retiro station modeled and designed after Victoria Station in London was also designed by British architects Conder and Follet beginning construction in 1909 and opened in 1915. The engineer Reginald Reynolds, was also an English national and the steel structure for the building was made in Liverpool, England and it was reassembled in Buenos Aires.

ships first brought the equipment needed to upstart what would become Argentina's emerging cinematic industry. While *La pícara* was shot in 1956, long after the initial British imperial intent, this movie makes visible this history through its selection of locations and monuments that reflects this past. I am not arguing that this was a conscious move on the part of the director to critique or offer any critical commentary on imperialistic influences. Rather, I argue that there is an unconscious move on the part of this film to index and showcase luxury, refinement, and progress which in Argentina has been intrinsically linked to Europe, even if these markers of modernity evince an imperialistic-neocolonial relationship.

As stated in the opening credits, the filming took place in Gath y Chaves, Argentina's largest department store, founded in part by Alfred Gath-- a salesman of men's British garments. It is in this location in which the story takes place, conjugating European refinement with Argentinean creole elite traditions as a means of constituting appropriate tastes and class status. The decisions made by the production in terms of wardrobe selection indexes the importance of European influences in establishing appropriate tastes and class status. As it is mentioned in the credits, the designer in charge of the leading lady's clothes is Vanina de War -- a French designer who opened her boutique in Paris but due to WWII, as her name suggests, moved to Buenos Aires and became an eclectic designer to film stars of the period.

While the packaging of modernity in the credits seems to be imposing a very rigid reading of the movie, the classification of this movie as a light comedy with hints of melodrama permits a more nuanced reading. This is possible through melodrama's ability to treat topics that are usually not discussed with themes of modernity, such as emotions and gender roles. Since melodrama deals directly with love and couples, it is inevitable to speak about this construction and representation. One of the more distinctive elements related to the representation of social

and work life is characterized through the almost total absence of men. This absence creates a visual proliferation of women not only within the traditional private spaces for women, but in public spaces as well, typically reserved for men. The first example can be found in the workplace and the role played by women in running the Gándara's store. While the head of the company is Pedro's father (Nicanor), he is almost none existent, a kind of ghost like figure which no one in the store has ever seen. Nicanor's lack of leadership could probably be a result of his subordination to his mother who is responsible for the finances of the store; Nicanor is somewhat depicted as an employee of his mother. This matrilineal vantage point is only visible to the viewer since his mother works from the private space of the home. However, within the fictional reality of the film, the characters are exposed to a patriarchal line of leadership. Yet, Silvia is the only one who is quick to criticize Mr. Gándara's non-existent leadership, as she quips to Pedro: "¿Existe el Sr. Gándara? Nadie lo ha visto". Silvia states this when she first meets Pedro and he informs her that he is going to be interviewed by Mr. Gándara. Silvia is surprised since no one has ever physically seen Gándara Sr.

The critique of Nicanor's leadership style is heightened and ridiculed towards the end of the film when Pedro and his grandmother try to convince Nicanor to accept Silvia as his girlfriend. Pedro and his grandmother tell Nicanor that Silvia still does not know that he is a Gándara. Therefore, he must dress down as a poor worker when visiting Silvia at her home. Nicanor is unaware that Silvia lives in the department store. Both Pedro and the grandmother take him there at night and enter the closed and dark store through its showroom and Nicanor does not know where he is. The presentation of Nicanor as an owner only interested in the economic aspect of the business was also criticized early on in the movie by Silvia, but at first it seemed as only an opinion:

El señor Gándara sólo conoce un poquito de allá arriba. Aquella cueva llena de teléfonos...Nunca se ha asociado a los rincones de este mundo que él cree lleno de números y que está lleno de sueños.

Nicanor's inability to recognize his own store confirms Silvia's comment. Also, Nicanor's lack of recognition shows the strict division among the workers and the owners in relation to the space they inhabit. Nicanor moves between his mansion and his office, only using the elevator to enter the store. Therefore, when they used the mechanical stairs, he was disoriented and confused. Gladys (Nicanor's wife) even confused the store with being in a subway due to the mechanical stairs, merging two common spaces (i.e. the subway and the store) that are traversed by the working class. While the viewers and the workers marvel at the beauty and refinement of the store, Gladys simply conflates these two spaces and shows that she and her husband belong to a higher realm far removed from the spaces and people around her. Nicanor and Gladys inhabit the space of economics and business transactions while Silvia, Pedro, and his grandmother reside in the sphere of the emotions, dreams, and consumer objects that attempt to simulate or reach that goal. As stated by Silvia, "Hay que variar, es que cambiando de cama cambio de sueño." These lines are pronounced by Silvia when her godfather is trying to find her to wake her up, but cannot see where she is because each day she picks a different bed in the showroom to sleep in. Both realities, however, collide through the union of Pedro and Silvia. This union representing the triumph and power of love in overcoming socio-economic differences is a melodramatic convention. While the movie shows the happy union of these two classes and the role played by the working class in molding this rigid class system, ultimately the message of the film reverts to a traditional ending. The reversal occurs as the working class represented by Silvia are subsumed and absorbed into the upper class, as she marries a Gándara. The upper classes are humanized through Silvia's background yet they still maintain their control

and power, and the filmic reality represents the disappearance of the working class. While the film's ideology continues to espouse traditional readings of class systems and structures, there are still breaks within the narrative that allow for a subversive reading in relation to gender and class roles, such as the construction of male characters, particularly Nicanor, alluded to in the previous section.

Besides the use of humor to ridicule certain behaviors upheld by Nicanor, the film deploys the theme of greed, avarice, and marriage by convenience as unconstructive ideals employed by men. Nicanor is presented as obsessed with numbers and making money to the point of sounding greedy, and within melodramatic-comedic films such behaviors and aspirations are presented as undesirable. For example, in one scene when a customer complains about the price of the toy, Silvia later tells Pedro that “Ese Gándara es medio ladrón”. And in one of the earlier scenes when Nicanor first appears, he is talking to his son about the importance of Pedro marrying Elvira, since that would be a convenient marriage for both families. Elvira Varela Fuentes is a socialite whose father is described by Nicanor as a *tilingo*. The word *tilingo* refers to an Argentinean archetype of superficiality that is interested in showing the money they have or presume to have. Pedro's father laughs about how Elvira and her father will be coming to visit them using two separate cars. This makes Gándara Sr. laugh and call them *tilingos*. Even though he criticizes their extravagances, he still wants Pedro to marry Elvira since the Varela Fuentes family owns a plastic manufacturing plant. The union between the Gándaras and the Varela Fuentes will grant the former a better price on plastic for the toys that the Gándaras sell. Gándara's contradictory behavior is later suppressed by his mother who stands up for Pedro by stating that one should be able to marry for love and not for convenience, as she was forced to marry. The abuela's comment could be seen as subversive to a traditional patriarch society as

was the society of the 1950s Argentina, since she not only rejects and criticizes her father's push for a marriage that made her unhappy, but she also makes it very clear that she was not happy with her marriage, thereby undermining the importance of her husband. And now she oversteps her son's plan to marry Pedro off to Elvira. Her only recourse to sidestep her father's, husband's and her son's authority is through the discourse of romance and affection. The *abuela's* appeal to emotions, a sphere melodrama has constructed as feminine, grants her a space to criticize the status quo. When the emotional argument cannot convince Gladys and Nicanor that a poor salesgirl without a fancy last name can marry Pedro, the *abuela* stands-up and firmly says: "El único [apellido] que ahora importa es el apellido que tengo yo. Porque la casa Gándara soy yo." This is also said in a scene when Nicanor says that he is the father and he will make the decisions. Clearly the grandmother oversteps Nicanor's supposed power as male head of the household. She is able to situate herself in a position of power by claiming authority as it's her name that grants status and power. The line also plays on the linguistic particularities of gender distinction, enabling a metonymic move that joins the physical *casa* with the symbolic inferences that the word implies. Since the word *casa* is feminine the grandmother would be the natural one to assume within it her position of power, sidestepping her son.

In regards to the other male employees, with the exception of Pedro, they are all managers. Yet once again they all simply receive orders from Mr. Gándara by phone, relating them back to the employees. Mr. Mendiono is the only one with an active role; yet all he is concerned about is dating Silvia, which repeatedly fails. Within the narrative, Mendiono's character allows Silvia to show off her ability to manipulate men. Mendiono is gullible and easily confused by Silvia's ability to evade his advances. The movie highlights her *picardía* in obtaining what she wants, such as days off for studying. Comedic entanglement surface from

male characterization; the film continues to show the impossibility and failure of male control and surveillance through the character of the two detectives. Another of the main plot lines revolves the police trying to find Rosa Quintana -- a single mother who stole from the Gándara's store in order to pay for her newborn's medication. Rosa used to work with Silvia in the Rosario branch and now the police think that Rosa is staying with her friend in Buenos Aires. While she is staying with Silvia at the store, the police are unable to track down where Silvia lives. They follow her around all day but they always fail and this leads to comedic relief. The two detectives are not portrayed very seriously and they constantly make mistakes, such as falling asleep at the library when they were stalking Silvia as she was studying for the night. Since *La pícara* is a light comedy, there are no *evil* characters. Here the comedic elements situate all of the male characters except the leading character as possessing a fault that result in a situation leading to humor and where this humor positions Silvia above her male counterparts. The construction of Silvia's character also allows for a more nuanced reading of gender roles within this melodramatic comedy, concluding with a traditional ending. While the film offers certain stereotypical lines in regards to female behavior, such as Silvia referring to her talkative nature "las mujeres vemos un teléfono y se nos va la mano", the totality of the film reflects a more liberated and career oriented femininity.

One of the premises of the story is Silvia's desire for dreaming: "Trabajo y estudio y sobre todo sueño". Within her life equation of work, study, and dreaming, one knowing the melodramatic formula would quickly jump to state that it has to do with marriage and love. However, as I argue, this is far from true. Silvia's dreams are all related to self-improvement, and the path she chose was working and studying. All of her energy goes into those two activities to the point of deferring love and romance until the end of her career. She makes it very clear to Pedro that

their relationship will not develop until she has completed her studies. In fact, it is through her example that the film sets her up as the model to emulate even among men. Pedro states to his parents that one of the reasons why he wants to marry her is that she has taught him life's true meaning: work, studying and love, since prior to their meeting he was simply a socialite. His grandmother is quick to reply that Silvia has turned him into a man. It's through Silvia's example that Pedro found his place in society. Pedro says: "Yo la admiro. Solita y trabaja, estudia y le manda unos pesos a su mamá." His admiration stems not only from her ability to work and study but from the fact that she is alone. The fact that she is alone in Buenos Aires is another important element since the film highlights the possibility for single women to not only live alone and take care of their own best interests, but also suggesting the possibility of free movement, without the ties of family or a husband. At first she states that, "cuando vine de la provincia creí que esta ciudad iba a devorarme" but it did not, evincing the possibilities for success that women can have through their own independence, work, and education. However, there are lines in the movie which question women's abilities and honor when they are left alone. One of the detectives concludes Rosa must be guilty of theft since she was unmarried and with a child: "Cuando hay un hijo y falta un marido muchas son capaces de todo". His sentencing statement can take on a different reading if we focus on the words *son capaces de todo*. This can take on a different reading, one that does not show men's anxieties towards women's independence and shifting gendered roles. One could read this as women are indeed able and capable of doing whatever it takes to survive. Within the movie, upward mobility and the free movement of women in and out of various public and private spaces is a constant theme. Women in *La pícara* seem to invade spaces, such as in the work force, libraries, universities, and spaces of public leisure. Once after work, one of Silvia's coworkers invited her

to a movie, suggesting the possibility of female independence that stems from work and into their daily leisurely activities.

3.5 **Of Remakes and Dreams**

Specifically, SBT's *A Picara* acquires some minor changes when its transformed from a movie into a telenovela. Silvia and Pedro become Milla and Carlos and the Gándara store becomes the Sole-Rockfield's. Similarly to Silvia, once the department store closes for the day, Milla enjoys all the goods offered by the shopping center without having to pay for a single item, since the only security guard on premise is her uncle. Nevertheless, Milla's honesty is unquestioned since she keeps records of all the items used in a little book, something Silvia does not do. Once having completed law school. Milla plans to reimburse the Sole-Rockfield's, accompanied with a detailed explanation of everything used. After all identities and living arrangements are revealed, the couple marries and lives happily ever after. In terms of Milla's unpaid expenses, the Rockfield family generously forgives Milla's debt, since she is now a Rockfield and everything that she has done is simply the act of a *pícaro*, a mischievous act as referenced by the title. It is worth mentioning that the title of this telenovela created some controversy due to the uses in Portuguese of the word *pícaro*.

While the word *pícaro* exists in the Portuguese language to mean mischievous, it is not a commonly used word. In colloquial Brazilian Portuguese the derivation of the word *pica* from *pícaro* is used in place for a vulgar form of the word penis. Due to this meaning, before the telenovela aired it created a series of spoofs and a lot of media buzz since most people found that the title *The Dreaming Penis* was not apt for a serial targeting a younger female teenage audience. Nonetheless, Santo's telenovela executives kept the original title in order to exactly reproduce

every element of the Mexican version, which in its original airing proved to be very successful for Televisa. The decision taken by SBT executives reinforced the corporate imperative of results based on former and verifiable success, versus the importance of social, cultural, and linguistic relevance. However, for this essay the spoofed title is very revealing since Milla will *penetrate* a higher economic sphere through marriage and her physical insertion in a space created to index the lifestyle of a higher class, as shopping centers do. In a sense *pica* stands in for Milla, and what the spoofs have done is transpose the male organ as a feminine tool, which is supported linguistically since the gender of *pica* in Portuguese is also feminine. The linguistic play on words is ultimately reducing the male experience in favor of the feminine through the resignification of the term *pica* and validating the female experience over the male, which modernity has limited. Specifically, though the analysis of setting, plot, and characterization, I argue that *A Pícaro* is a vehicle of modernity in its advancement of a capitalist ideology framed within the story's discourse of a strict work ethic, the dream of a liberal education, and the drive for personal independence and progress. However, this tale of modernity supports the gendered experiences of women. The ideology of modernity within the structural elements of the story come into play with the embedded ideology found in the structure of the story while also found in the industry and the nation undergoing neoliberal restructuring. In order to elucidate the convergence of modernity with neoliberal restructuring, this essay will first discuss an analysis of the structural elements of the story (setting, plot, and characterization) and will conclude with an explanation of the industry undergoing neoliberal changes.

3.6 **Setting and Characterization: Locating the Consumer-Viewer**

SBT captured Brazilian audiences not by producing high quality programming like Globo, but by turning lower socio-economic viewers into virtual consumers of mass produced products. It is suggested that the audience's identification with the main character, who inhabits a department store and consumes its products frenetically, allows the viewer to visually consume along with their heroine. Case in point, the majority of the scenes where Milla is consuming the store's products occur at night, when she is alone in the store. The only witness to Milla's consumption is the viewer, a virtual accomplice accompanying Milla on her nightly shopping sprees. The department store becomes the site where Milla and the viewer revel in the enjoyment of consumption and the status and benefits that these products provide. It is in the Rockfield's store where Milla is able to have a space to live, study, work, and ultimately find a husband who loves her and allows her to continue shopping, since he is the owner of the store. What enables this happy ending is Milla's identification with the consumerist lifestyle, which allows her to reach her dreams. Her identity as a consumer serves as a model for those who identify with the leading character.

Equating the department store as the space that helped forge a consumer identity is well documented by scholarly research (Nava, 1997; Felski, 1995). Traditionally, the department store has been the institution most closely identified with the creation of modern consumerism. As stated by Nava:

The department store was from the late nineteenth century central to the iconography of consumer culture; it exemplified the ubiquity of the visual in the new 'scopic regime', and should be read as one of the archetypal sites of modernity which both produced and was produced by the experience of women....Woman played a crucial part in the development of these taxonomies of signification –in the acquisition of goods which conveyed symbolic meanings about their owners- since it was women who went to the department stores and did the shopping (64).

Nava's argument is grounded on a larger gendered analysis that validates women's participation within modernity. For Nava, modernity has typically emphasized the male urban experience. However, by focusing on consumption, particularly in the experience of the department store, which is a modern construct, women's participation within modernity is made visible. As Nava suggests, as consumerism expanded throughout the latter part of the 19th and 20th century, women moved into public spaces, such as that of the department stores, which in turn invaded the interiority of the home with mass produced goods. Therefore, for Nava, consumerism and consumption are key terms associated with women's entry into public life, a phenomenon she attributes to modernity. Introducing a term such as modernity may result problematic due to its multiple meanings; it can denote a particular historical periodization, a distinct project usually associated with the Enlightenment, or a type of social experience identified with the forms of public life developed in major industrialized cities. Nonetheless, as Nava states, modernity is a "constructed narrative" which in this chapter will be defined as the constant search of progress, exemplified in the values of consumerist middle class society (57).

Specifically, the department store permitted women's entrance by directly targeting them as shoppers, and as a work force, as is also the case with Milla. These particular shopping venues simulated the entrance of lower socioeconomic class women into the middle class by targeting lower middle class women through objects perceived as upper middle class items (61). Objects for sale were turned into spectacles, worthy of theater-like presentation. Department store design and construction evoked other sites of spectacle, such as museums or exhibition halls which housed under one-roof unheard of quantities of goods, thereby allowing customers for the first time to physically see, touch, and try the products without any obligation of purchase. Mass consumption turned department stores into a tourist attraction, allowing people to enjoy

commodities regardless of whether the customer actually bought the merchandise. The mere act of the spectacle implies consumption, at least in the visual form. Fashion displays, free make-up samples, fancy coffee shops and restaurants were all included in the design of the department store to allow customers the opportunity to visualize themselves using and participating in these pleasures in order to index the lifestyles of the middle class. Similarly this is what Milla does for her audience. As she consumes each product she is modeling the behavior expected of her audience. It is not coincidental that Milla's selection of specific dolls became instant sold out items in real life, since the audience had to also consume what Milla was buying. Also the shopping center, by offering diverse buying opportunities, created an urban public female made to 'feel at home', since the merchandise around her belonged to the private realm. Targeting female shoppers and female employees was intended to make women feel comfortable for socializing and above all spending money. Whether imaginary or real, the capacity to socialize and consume within the confines of the department store constructed a female identity in relation to their private-public spheres and the objects perused or purchased (Nava 72).

Reflecting upon public and private spaces leads us to establish a connection between Habermas' conception of private and public spheres. Habermas claims the period during World War I marked the disintegration of the public liberal realm due to factors of democratization, the interpenetration of state and civil societies, the decline of the patriarchal bourgeois family, but most importantly the arrival of mass consumption (1991). Habermas traces the emergence and development of the terms public and private taking into account a linear historical phase. As pointed out, the neat historical procession of events clouds the terms private and public, when they come into contact with an industrial society. Habermas explains the mutable characteristics of the terms through the following example. Generally, state buildings considered public are not

always opened to the public since they house personal and private information. Besides reflecting the mutability of the terms, the example displays how the terms not only oppose each other, but also depend on one another. To exemplify, Habermas distinguishes how citizens in ancient Greece participated in the political (public) scene by obtaining private autonomy over their household, by participating as masters of their home within a patrimonial slave economy (1991). The public here functions as a 'status attributing factor', whereas, during the Middle Ages, it constituted a social sphere. According to Habermas (1991), representation of the self, or a valuable cultural production, has since the Middle Ages expressed itself within the public realm. Worthwhile representations make themselves present only in the public and never in the private. Habermas' last point raises serious problems by diminishing the value of cultural artifacts created within the private realm as not being worthy or possessing the capacity of transferring outward successfully. However, because the term public is not strictly fixed and depends on the private, one can argue for public experiences produced in the private sphere acquire equal value as those occurring in public. Similarly in *A Pícaro*, Milla's domestic circle is centered in a public area as is the department store. Milla's interiority is made public visually as it reaches the viewer's home and the viewer's private desires are realized along with the protagonist through their identification. In *A Pícaro* we can clearly see how the public sphere ultimately depends on the private. Within the public sphere Carlos' father appears to be the person responsible for the store. However the father's public corporate persona is controlled by his mother, from the space of the home. It is Carlos' grandmother that makes all of the store's decisions. Ultimately it is the matriarch -- who operates from her home -- that is responsible for the department store; and she will be the one to intervene and defend Milla when the truth about her status is revealed. It is the matriarch of the family who understands Milla's manipulation of

the public sphere to benefit her private concerns and realizations. The conflation of the private and the public can also explain the success of the telenovela which is predicated on its viewer identification with a consumer-viewer who will be made public from the space of the home-department store, the economic desires of an underrepresented class. When Milla shops so do its viewers. Specifically, consumption turned the private into a public affair, where various social statuses come into contact.

The working class achieved social emulation and status through their buying experiences within the department store. As stated by Vleben (1953), the consumer establishes social status by imitating, equaling, or attempting to excel the buying habits of people in higher economic status. Similarly in *A Pícaro*, Milla strives to enter the middle class by studying the liberal profession of law, but meanwhile she wants the benefits of that class, but cannot afford the lifestyle. In order to alleviate her needs, Milla opens her own line of 'credit' or 'loan' which she intends to payback once having completed law school. The middle class commodities consumed by Milla not only help her to live a better life, but how she uses the goods creates an idealization of that social class. For example, our pícaro believes sleeping each night on a different bed guarantees a better tomorrow. However, any bed will not suffice. The more luxurious the bed and its accompanying beddings, the easier it becomes to face the cruel world in the morning. According to Milla, quantity and cost results in happiness, a theory that owners of shopping centers intend to expand to the masses through sales. In other words, for consumers, an upper middle class lifestyle can be achieved through consumption.

3.7 **Milla as the Model of Middle Class Behavior**

In *A Picara*, the middle class does not exist as an actual social class, but functions as an ideal worth reaching. Within the Brazilian context, middle class is defined as a socioeconomic group that rejects governmental institutions, shows aversion towards politics, and holds a strong consumerist attitude. The excess or the intensity of consuming is the indispensable marker of middle class identity (O'Dougherty 2002). Belonging to the middle class in the early nineties meant traveling and consuming outside of national borders. Family trips to Disneyworld, with an obligatory stop in Miami to purchase household appliances to take back to Brazil, became the norm for those who could afford to travel. Brazil's economic situation led the middle class to consume frenetically. This accumulation of goods would counterbalance the loss of economic status; thus, this was an attempt to reclaim the middle class status that the economic plan executed by the presidency of Collor de Mello, in the early nineties, helped to disintegrate (O'Dougherty, 2002). Consuming outside of Brazil was a conscious political move on the part of the middle class, to show the government that they were tired of their archaic protectionist laws, high prices, inefficiency, and corrupt system. Here, in a way, the middle class was advocating for neoliberal restructuring. Furthermore, trips outside of Brazil served as a rite of passage for the middle class, as a way of acquiring cultural capital associated with modernity, and allowing them to participate within a transnational social circuit, which would situate Brazilians in the first world. Because saving was impossible, middle-class people found themselves dragged into frenzied consumerism characterized by the stockpiling of goods. However, as argued in this essay, viewers of *A Picara*, the lower socio-economic classes, are able to shop frenetically, as does the middle class. However, the former consume visually through the medium of television. In turn this viewership allows SBT to gain a loyal audience.

SBT created the possibility for its ignored viewers to visually shop through audience identification with Milla and the access she has to the department store.

Actually characters in the telenovela never reach middle-class since they simply jump from poverty to wealth. Middle class exists only as a dream never able to materialize. All the characters in *A Pícaro* fit into the lower working class or fit into the wealthy realm. The portrayal of the working class fits within two categories: Either they work arduously to reach financial success or they steal in order to make easy money. Our *pícaro* Milla embodies both combinations because she works in a toy store during the day, goes to law school for an education, and at night she “borrows” merchandise enabling her to envision herself as middle class. Constructions of the wealthy characters similarly follow a dual vision. Either they are extremely generous aristocrats, or they embody evil social climbers. The telenovela characterizes those people who become rich without a proper education as social misfits and opportunists. For example, the Luchinis, an Italian family who immigrated to São Paulo, represent social misfits due to the patriarch’s lack of education. Although they amass a great fortune from their pasta factories, they cannot achieve the social status of the aristocrats, and thus are perceived as the “petty bourgeoisie.” Other characters make fun of their ‘nouveau riche’ status. In *A Pícaro*, selling pasta is not a prestigious job compared to selling mass produced commodities in a department store. Pasta is simply part of daily sustenance but mass produced merchandise and a liberal education allow people to reach a dream and to socialize outside of their own class.

The telenovela presents formal education as the only acceptable way to ascend socially. High society does not frown upon Milla once she enters that class because she received an education. *A Pícaro Sonhadora* presents the idea that education provides people with an

appropriate degree of socialization, particularly necessary for immigrants. Milla's uncle is an Italian immigrant who feels blessed living in Brazil because of all the opportunities the country has given him. Although he has no home or money, he feels he has been able to raise Milla with the "right" values. He will do everything possible to help her graduate and suggests that Milla live in the department store, suggesting education and consumption is the dream of the working immigrant class' inclusion in society. Milla's clear record keeping is what keeps her illegal activity "legal." In reality Milla consumes through "credit" which she intends to pay back with interest, once she graduates from law school. And what better way to end the story than to have someone pay for your credit debt. It is also interesting to note that Carlos' character is also pretending. By pretending to be a simple worker, in a sense he is policing not only his workers, but he is also learning about their lifestyles and taste. In other words, Carlos is learning marketing traits that will enable him to run the company much more successfully once he takes control of the store. Also the story suggests Milla will be working as a lawyer. It is interesting that the romantic story combines both law and consumption along with the policing of the social classes. Through her knowledge of the law and her position as new elite, consumption would be protected and increased through her understanding of the laws. This is pure neoliberalism at work, the institution of the law protecting the free market. If we were to extrapolate Carlos' knowledge of the working class, added to Milla's personal knowledge of the poor and law and her new economic status, it can turn Sole – Rockfield's department store into one very successful economic venture.

The story's plot and thematic development reproduces Western values and desires inscribed within the grand narratives of modernity; whereby the fulfillment of progress and order are achieved through the tenets of education and a strict work ethic. However, the telenovela's

deployment of these master narratives of modernity are extended through a transnational media industry undergoing neoliberal transformations. According to Harvey (2005), neoliberalism is an economic practice aimed at liberating entrepreneurial restrictions that hinder free trade. Instituting a framework of a freely functioning market enables the state to secure individual private property rights, and individual liberties that translate to entrepreneurial freedoms. Neoliberalism glorifies the entrepreneur as the ideal citizen who through its investments and capital accumulation encourages the disbursement of wealth among the various social levels both locally and globally. This type of citizen can only surface within a state that protects 'freedom' through the maintenance of a strong military and legal-legislative body. The road to a neoliberal state include turning over state owned and regulated enterprises to private business. Neoliberalism sought this separation since powerful corporations in alliance with an interventionist and a regulatory state were seen as socially unjust and oppressive, at a time when the West was 'threatened' by communism and fascism. The withdrawal of state intervention has consistently retracted throughout various nations since the 1970s. The retreat is characterized by massive deregulations, privatizations of national resources-industries, and the gradual decline of state intervention and investment in social programs (Harvey, 2005). The state's retreat would economically create a trickle-down effect, benefiting society as a whole if productivity is continuously increased without the intervention but rather the support of the state. The trickling down of wealth would not only eliminate poverty domestically but also worldwide, since free market and trade create interdependent transnational economies dominated by global entrepreneurs. Beginning in the late eighties and reigning throughout the nineties, the neoliberal model replaced and attempted to end the role of the state and its interventionism known as the corporatist model (Harvey, 2005).

Latin American television industries such as SBT, evinces neoliberal ideologies and practices that coalesce within the modernizing goals of its programming, such as *A Pícaro*. Its plot shows elements of a disjunctive ideological construct that can deploy multiple hegemonic processes. Ultimately, *A Pícaro's* plot search for modernity constructs viewers-consumers within the confines of the Brazilian nation while the needs of the neoliberal television industry producing *A Pícaro* must re-inscribe the telenovela not as a local or national product, but as a global product that can be placed within a diverse market. The transnational industry producing *A Pícaro* forgoes the national in favor of tapping into a continental market that can situate its product within a global economic order of television distribution. The disjuncture created by the telenovela's need to produce local programming, which can be distributed massively within a competitive continental market extending from Latin America to other global television networks, is ultimately linked by the common thread of consumption.

3.8 **Conclusion**

The Brazilian network SBT discovered a way to produce a successful telenovela that targets female audiences from lower socio-economic levels whose dream, at least as it is presented by the telenovela, is to reach middle class standing. Through *A Pícaro*, SBT provides its viewers the opportunity to symbolically participate publicly by urging them to purchase their products, either visually, or in actuality, while also allowing them to socialize. In turn for providing women a vision of class ascension, the network gained high profits, thereby implicating everyone in the process of modernity. *A Pícaro Sonhadora* is a clear example of melodrama that interpolates the traditionally ignored lower working classes, but at the same time it serves the needs of a neoliberal middle class which ultimately wants to maintain their control-

status. Their status is maintained by acknowledging that the working classes also spend, buy and use credit. In turn the working classes become dependent on the upper middle classes to finance their dreams, keeping them in a never ending cycle of debt and aspirations. SBT's influence in media has been evinced in its ability to reach a segmented audience by drawing on their dreams and aspirations.

At the same time, the insistence of the narrative on consumption redirects the character from focusing on more traditional roles for women such as marriage and family life. Both the telenovela and the film suggest a female identity predicated more on the relationship between consumer goods and desires over their *natural* need to fall in love and marry. For this reason the traditional family home has been replaced by the department store.

4. UNLIKELY QUEER DIVAS: THE GRANNY AND THE TRANS-STAR

The previous two chapters situated cultural production as having the capacity to mobilize queer signs that can be decoded by viewers. I focused mostly on the intertexts such as songs, film trailers, and actor interviews in order to make sense on how the industry evokes and incorporates queer signs within these texts. Throughout both chapters I have also hinted at the role played by popular actresses such as Natalia Oreiro and Mirtha Legrand in helping construct media messages. In this chapter, I propose to closely look at the role that performers play in queering media products either through their performances or through audience's resignification of the star's body. Therefore the archive of this chapter includes an analysis of daytime television divas Mirtha Legrand and Florencia de la V.

Mirtha Legrand and Florencia de la V embody two very distinct models of performers, who have become divas in their own right. While there may be stark differences among them due to their generation, ideology, and cultural relevance, there exist multiple similarities in how they have positioned and fashioned out a space for themselves on Argentinean television. Both have embraced the title of diva, in their recognition of a loyal fan base that have followed them throughout their careers. Chronologically, Legrand is the oldest reigning diva of Argentinean TV, due to her presence on her 45 year run and still ongoing program, *Almorzando con Mirtha Legrand (AML)*. Added to her experience on television, rests her 20 year career as a film actress, being one of the last remaining *stars* of the often called 'golden age' cinema. Legrand bridged two industries experiencing transformative changes, among them the decline of the cinematic industry and the upstart of a new experimental medium known as television. Legrand's transition into television further fueled her continuity and presence by securing new audiences far removed from her former film career. While these new audiences might not have seen her

films, her aura as one of the few remaining *golden age* stars constantly circulates within her show, as a reminder to younger audiences of the place she holds. It is precisely this duality, her aura as a former film star added to her daily presence on television that has allowed her to transcend the title of *star*, in favor of the term *diva*. However as the title suggest, Mirtha performs the role of an unlikely queer *diva*. The dominant messages presented on her show negate the existence of queer subjectivities even though the staging, the language, and Mirtha's campy hosting style is indebted to queerness. I am interested in how this internal contradiction does not impede Mirtha from becoming a *diva* in the queer sense.

In contrast, Florencia de la V's transformation from *star* to *diva* does not follow in line with the first. This difference stems from her considerable shorter career, never having achieved comparable levels of recognition, as in the case of Mirtha. The markers of stardom such as having acquired leading roles in film, television, and theater productions, is rather missing from Florencia's artistic resume. Yet the title of *diva* has been self-imposed by the transgender actress and recently turned talk-show host. Florencia de la V has been in the media approximately twenty years, but she has never had a leading role on television. It was not until she invested her own money in producing and starting in her own popular theater productions, that her fame has been consolidated. This fame has allowed her to secure a daily talk show in the likes of Mirtha. However, one can see how Florencia has opened a space for herself through her own investment and self-branding as a *diva*. This active self-construction also stems from her being a transgendered woman. While her transformation from male to female was not lived on television, her audience has seen her acquire more signs of femininity, not only in her physical appearance, but also on the types of roles she has played. For example, in the telenovela *Los Roldán*, she played a transgender woman. However, in more recent productions, such as in *Un*

año para recordar, she played a telenovela diva. As I will develop here, Florencia de la V has adopted the identity of a diva for her on-screen roles. She embodies the queer diva's body that traditional queer audiences have been accustomed to seeing on television, but here it occurs through her own performance of such identity. While in different degrees, both women make use of markers and signs commonly related to queer culture and identity. Their fame and position as divas are predicated on their use and deployment of such markers. In both instances, the divas have constructed and perpetuated their on/off screen identity of divas, in relation to their participation with television audiences. It is both their connection to their audiences and the genres of programs that they develop, which allows them to situate themselves as divas.

When speaking about divas, the term generally refers to a handful of screen and musical performers, whose image is idolized by a devoted fan base. Names such as Bette Davis, Joan Crawford, and Judy Garland, are just a small sample of performers categorized at some point of their careers as divas. In part, the title of *diva* has been constructed by the industry through their portrayal of the star's onscreen performances in order to meet the needs of the particular film studio. Hollywood relied on its *star-system* in order to promote and distribute its films. The Hollywood star system was one of the staples of the studio era period comprised between the 1920's, until its demise in the 1960s. Studios, along with their highly organized publicity departments, turned ordinary actors into stars and divas through press releases, interviews and magazines, all in place to develop and sustain the star's status. While the economic and industrial force cannot be denied in positioning such performers, there exists another major force at play: the role of fans in accepting/rejecting and even transforming a performer into a *diva*. The conception and construction of fandom has had, since its inception, a highly gendered connotation. Men who are portrayed in the media as fans of certain divas are linked to a

feminized discourse which ultimately queers their identity. Brett Farmer's work in *Spectacular Passions* (2000) establishes how queer spectatorship has appropriated certain stars, film, and television genres into 'elaborate formations of sub-cultural capital' whereby generating 'special signification' for gay men (26). As Farmer argues, gay spectators have used cinema and its performers in directing, contesting, and living out their desires (25). However, I find in his research important lacunas that fail to see how specific genres and their performers in Latin American media, while not openly acknowledging such 'sub-cultural' groups, have incorporated signs that queer audiences have deemed pleasurable and meaningful. It is not just queer spectators constructing and refiguring images, but they are doing it via a highly coded queer text. There is reciprocity between spectators and the genres-industry, even though the former may not openly acknowledge the existence of the latter. A clear example of this reciprocity occurs with Legrand's program, which mobilizes a sleuth of queer signs even though the ideological messages of the program reject queer subjectivities. It is for this reason that I suggest through the title that Legrand forms part of an unlikely queer diva.

The close relationship between gay male audiences and film and television divas has a long documented trajectory, not only in academic literature, but in the popular press as well. The investment of gay audiences and their *divas* has almost been naturalized as a given. As Brett Farmer has argued in *Spectacular Passions*(2000), any man who follows a certain star or a specific genre such as musicals, soaps, telenovela, is immediately identified as gay. It is not my attempt to prove otherwise, since I am a queer male who at different points in my life has followed and continues to follow certain stars, not to mention my investment put into the research, which studies gay divas and queer cultural productions. Rather than frame my research on the stereotype of categorizing someone with a strong investment in certain cultural production

as queer, I find it more productive in shifting attention from the viewer vis-à-vis the actual cultural product. As I argue here, it is the product, be it the telenovela, performer, or television program that construct their narratives from queer markers and signs. It is not that there is a natural attraction between gay men and certain programming, but rather, the industry employs within their programming visual and discursive signs of queerness that interpellate certain viewers susceptible to those signs. While there might not be an official *gay agenda* coming from the producers, as in the case of Mirtha, there are many elements in her shows which hint at queer imagery and aesthetics. My research proposes to further expand the field by incorporating a queer perspective that has traditionally been silenced from the research. Research on Latin American performers and in particular Argentinean stars matter since currently stars and celebrities have a ‘lasting effect on everyday life’ (Redmond 2). Stars have the potential to shape cultural practices and customs in a society that relies on media messages to dictate trends, behaviors, and opinions. Before proceeding, I find it pertinent to provide a brief review of the academic literature in relation to the study of stars-divas and to the study of the genres that they mold: the talk-show.

4.1 **Of Stars and Divas: The Missing Piece of the Puzzle**

In part, the research presented here is motivated by the need to document and analyze from an academic perspective, television and film performers who have constructed their on and off screen diva identities through signs of queerness. The imperative to document these findings stem from the lack of information on such performers, even though they have contributed greatly to their industries, and have shaped audiences tastes and social investments. Gabriela Fabbro, the only academic scholar who has written a book length study on Mirtha Legrand, *Mirtha*

Legrand: Del Cine a la Televisión: La Perdurabilidad de un Clásico (2006), also finds this lacuna in the research.

Poco son los libros que sobre nuestras actrices se han escrito en nuestro país. En realidad, pocos son los libros que analizan nuestro cine y nuestra televisión desde una perspectiva más teórica y académica, sin caer en descripciones banales y frívolas (117).

Furthermore, if there is a lack of research on the more hegemonic performers and their works, then it is safe to hypothesize that there is a greater silence in analyzing the way more marginalized queer performers have contributed to the medium. There are multiple performers such as Libertad Lamarque, Tita Merello, and Lolita Torres, who have had the potential to be read as performers whose star image stands in relation to queer aesthetics. Instead, most of the academic material on these performers tend to follow a biographical perspective that also catalogs the performer's films. Fabbro explains this paradigm in relation to how cinema has been studied in Argentina. Traditionally, the study of film has not been organized around the stars, but rather through chronological descriptions of director, plot and thematic elements (118). In other words, the star becomes divisible from the film's narrative. For me, this approach is problematic because it limits the reading of cultural production within the confines of only the narrative discourse. It does not account for the role played by other elements such as the performer's off-screen persona, the industrial imperatives, and the socio-historical influences that frame the readings of media production. The study of television does not fare better since it has followed the form of film study. There are countless books that summarize chronologically television programming, but they fail to develop a critical discourse on the possible cultural meanings of such programming.

Within the study of stars/divas, researchers find the year 1979 as a foundational date for the study of star and celebrity culture, due to the release of Richard Dyer's canonical book, *Stars*.

The release of this study generated greater academic interest in the subject and it reconfigured the limits and parameters of how the subject is broached. Traditionally stardom was analyzed through the academic lens of film studies (Redmond & Holmes 6). Dyer's work was novel because it centered on the ideological function of stars within a capitalist system of production. He read stars such as Marilyn Monroe and Judy Garland as cultural and ideological signs that articulated the pleasures and desires of their audiences (Redmond & Holmes 6). He was particularly interested in the ways audiences, particularly gay men, viewed and constructed meaning from stars that provided contradictory, disruptive, but at the same time, reconciling ideas about identity, gender, political and social ideologies (Redmond & Holmes 7). Ultimately, Dyer removed the study of stars from a strictly 'history of film' approach, mostly serving to catalog the work of the star within the industry's trajectory. By removing the star from their role as only characters within a film narrative, and by including the role of their on/off screen performances in relation to audiences, Dyer decentered the study of stardom. Multiple perspectives such as the role of political economy, social structures, and role of audiences began to be included within the study of stars. Barkers credits Dyer for this shift, but also rightly points out that the study of stars had a longer tradition that requires recognition. He finds it important to revisit the works of Max Weber, Walter Benjamin, and Adorno and Horkheimer.

Max Weber's influential study, *The Nature of Charismatic Domination*, functioned as a precursor to star studies, since it saw the potential and the inner workings of charisma as a force exerting power and influence. As a late 19th century anti-positivist sociologist (Redmond & Holmes 14), his work was mostly concerned with political order in modern societies, and how authority and consent was organized without the use of force. Weber finds that in modern societies political order and authority is organized through elaborate bureaucratic mechanisms

that have been normalized in their ability to appear as logical and rational. The rationalization of bureaucratic organization has become a permanent structure of modern society, to the point that it structures the experiences of everyday life.

Bureaucracy is a permanent structure and is well adapted, with its system of rational rules, for the satisfaction of calculable long-term needs” (Dyer 82).

Weber here is specifically referring to the political and economic needs of people. Bureaucracy structures and affects people’s everyday economic and political needs. However, all other needs that lie outside those realms fall under the influence of those who can mobilize charisma.

For Weber, prior to the arrival of bureaucratic organization as a hegemonic form of human control and regulation, there were other structures in place: patriarchy and charismatic authority. In relation to patriarchy, Weber refers to the power of monarchical rule in binding people legally, due to their recognition of an impersonal ruler that structured the economic, social, and cultural life of its feudal subjects. The legal authority of the patriarch was many times shared and negotiated by other powerful forces having charismatic authority. Here he references the power of religious figures. Weber aligns charismatic authority within the realm of religious figures. He attributes in those that accept a charismatic authority an ‘exceptional sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character’ (Redmond & Holmes 14). Those who assent to charismatic authority establish a relationship dependent on the worship of a deified figure vis-a-vis a follower who reads and accepts the symbolic signs established by the ‘authority’. Of all three forms of societal organization and control, Weber finds charismatic authority the most unstable. Charisma is an ‘inherently unstable form of leadership because it relies solely on the beliefs of followers who may/can switch allegiances’ (Redmond & Holmes 14). The charismatic leader is endowed with a ‘certain quality’ that differentiates them from ‘ordinary men’. The

charismatic leader acquires a ‘superhuman, a supernatural’ quality that only s/he can mobilize, until their followers no longer find their distinctness as functional to their needs.

Scholars working with ‘stars’ inevitably have found Weber’s conception of charismatic authority as compatible with later developments in star-diva studies, even when Weber was referring strictly to the religious and political realms. Scholars have found in Weber a theoretical precursor speaking on the cult of personality since the media industries have mobilized this ‘quality’, when constructing their stars. This early work acquires greater value since it considers the role of its followers in assenting or rejecting the rule of the charismatic individual. Within ‘star studies’ the follower has been resignified as ‘audiences’. Yet what is missing from Weber’s conception that becomes much more problematized and elaborated is the notion of negotiation. *The Nature of charismatic domination* sets up a transversal hierarchical relationship between authority and follower. While followers have the ability to change or reject their leaders, there is no space for negotiation among both groups. Weber seems to suggest that there is a series of ‘qualities’ that get approved or rejected with no elaboration on the mechanisms on either side to reproduce or reject these ‘irrational’ charismatic qualities. Cultural studies’ goal to problematize the ways in which power and presentation is negotiated will elaborate these concepts of the charismatic in their study of stars.

Another work serving as a precursor to theorizing ‘stars’ belongs to Marxist philosopher Walter Benjamin. In *Art in the Age of Mechanical reproduction* (2008), Benjamin argues that advances in media technologies have depleted traces of artistic presence in the work of art, thereby diminishing and depleting the work of art’s aura. Benjamin specifically refers to photography and to the commercial cinema of Hollywood. These artistic traces, or essences, Benjamin labels as “aura”. For Benjamin, technology has repositioned art from their spatial and

temporal point of origin, as the objects are endlessly reproduced. In essence, even though Hollywood films appear to be original and different, Benjamin finds that the industrial nature of the industry creates the illusion of originality. Hollywood ‘pictures’ create the illusion of originality through small modifications in plot, characterization and performers. This conception is further elaborated by Adorno and Horkheimer in their evaluation of Hollywood as a cultural industry (Redmond & Holmes 15). However, Benjamin disagrees due to the same technological mechanism in place that reproduces and moves the ideological imperatives of the film industry. One of the mechanisms that recreate a false sense of originality refers to the industry’s construction of ‘stars’. The film industry perpetuates the ‘spell of the [actor’s] personality’ as an auratic marker. However, Benjamin finds these auratic qualities as empty since they are ‘prefabricated’. These ‘original’ personalities are pre-established by the industry’s promotional machinery. Therefore the star and its created personality become a commodity available for consumption (Redmond & Holmes 15). Adorno and Horkheimer validate Benjamin’s conceptions, since they also see the ‘star’ as a tool serving the economic and political needs of capitalism (Redmond & Holmes 15).

4.2 **Genre and the Formation of Stars**

As much as it is important to situate the academic study of *stars*, I also find it necessary to include the role that genres have played in situating stars/divas. In my assessment of Legrand and Florencia de la V, I argue that their status as divas have to do with the genre that they appropriate: the daytime talk-show. However, it is difficult to study talk-shows given their lack of definition. A common generalization may be that we all have a general understanding about talk-shows, or we can at least identify one. However, the talk-genre comes in multiple formats

and varieties. In order to meet the logic of an industrial capitalist form of production, the television industry operates and sustains itself by creating formulaic genres in order to be able to reproduce them. Nonetheless, the talk-show has remained an amorphous genre. Wood (2009), Shattuc (1997) and Tolson (2001) concur that the academic study of talk-shows has faced not only issues with classifying the genre, but also being able to offer a critical assessment of those differences. Helen Wood's study *Talking with Television* quotes Haarman on the lack of specificity found in contemporary academic research. Wood states:

Commentators have ignored the distinctions between talk shows, but more recently academics have seen the distinctions between different formats as crucial to understanding them. Haarman refers to the term “talk show” as a portmanteau term that has been used to describe a range of formats including conversation between elite peers, round table, or group discussions, interviews, debates, topical discussions between experts and ordinary people, and talk between people, normally not peers, with interventions from a studio audience” (18-19).

Within Woods analysis of the talk-show via Haarman, one concludes that while the distinctions among the supposed formula have been looked over, there lies a tendency in contemporary television criticism to overlook the various modes that the genre has created. My research within this chapter follows in-line with Woods and Haarman's assessment in the need to focus critically on the development of the talk-show genre and its specificity on Argentinean television. If the study of the talk-show genre has overlooked certain particularities of the form, it is safe to argue that it has also neglected the cultural and industrial production emanating from the *Global South*. In order to situate my study of the talk show vis-à-vis the host's ability to shape and redefine a genre traditionally targeting female daytime audiences, I open the following section with a brief overview of the major approaches taken by *television studies* in their assessment of the talk show.

A cross section of academic debates and inquiries into *Television Studies* reveals a common trend: the segmentation of the debate into two main camps. One can identify a polarized view that extends into all forms of television programming, such as in the following formats: soap operas, game shows, sit-coms, and dramas. The same holds true for the talk-show genre. Some have seen the genre as an exemplar form fomenting an open and public space for debate that reinforces democratic access to information. On the opposing end to this debate, scholars claim this particular genre presents the illusion of a democratic and participatory exchange between industry and audiences, when in reality it is perpetuating consumption masked in the form of information. Scholars on this end of the debate see audiences as duped victims of an industry that exists to perpetuate dominant discourses that audiences internalize and ultimately reproduce through their consumption. What both opposing camps share is their interest in the role played by audiences in the exchange of information between the industry/medium and its receptors. For Wood (2009) the redeeming qualities of talk shows and their capacity to open spaces for democratic dialogue stems from their cultural studies approach. By employing a postmodern reading of television talk, such proponents suggest even hegemonic discourses do not hold up against viewer tactics which fragment and deconstruct language based upon their viewing habits. This form of analysis recognizes audiences as a multi-vocal group that read media messages against the grain, rather than as a mandate. The opposing camp, positioned and influenced by the Frankfurt School, does not grant audiences the capacity to dismantle hegemonic messages inscribed within the logic of capitalism (Wood 18). Regardless of their position on the industry and effects on audiences, both camps' frameworks operate from Habermas' historical notion on the rise of the public sphere.

In their analysis of television discourses, Wood, Shattuc, and Tolso give an account of Habermas' theory on the rise of the public sphere in 18th century England, in relation to the advent of capitalism. The emergence of an independent public sphere, separate from the state and the church, initiated its separation by the emergence of a market economy. The growing bourgeois capitalist class created a public sphere that balanced the power of government by opening up spaces for democratic debate that was separate from the traditional sites of the church and the state (Wood 19). Through its independence from the church and state, also parallel public institutions such as universities, libraries, independent press, and coffeehouses run by citizens with independent sources of income fueled democratic liberal thought within the public sphere. As Shattuc states, "the public sphere's authority was derived from the fact that the ideas therein generated had to do not with private interest but with the public good" (88). Habermas contends that the rise of a public sphere through capitalism opened up public spaces for democratic discourse in the incipient media outlets of 18th century Europe, such as through the press and in the literary salons. Such contention has been used by media critics who extended Habermas theories into current media outlets such as in television. As explained by Wood, the talk-show "provides a site with seemingly few exclusionary practices, encouraging the participation of the general public in political debate" (20). Furthermore, talk-shows recreate a public performance where multiple voices come together in a nonhierarchical manner. That is, the voice of the "expert" speaking in laymen's terms, come in contact with the guiding voice of the host, along with that of the "ordinary people" that make up the audience as well as the participants of the show (Wood 20). In other words, the talk-show becomes an exemplary site for subordinating the voice of the expert, the voice of the media source as an institution, to that of its real *stars*: the talk show participants and audience members. There is an insistence on the

part of media critics to favor the everyday language that talk-shows advocate as a sign of the eroding hierarchical discourses on performance, expert knowledge and class-social distinctions that may surface in a public forum. The accessibility to “common sense” knowledge over those of “experts” conforms to the ultimate project of a genre attempting to attract and inform a wide segment of viewership. Wood includes Durham Peters’ contention on the ability of talk shows to dismantle discourses of expert knowledge that muffle the voices of everyday people by employing a reading of Habermas theories. As explained by Wood, Habermas prizes conversation, reading and plain speech as worthy forms of discourse for a democratic culture and is hostile to some performative arts (21). Media critics have particularly focused on defining democratic culture in its potential to dismantle the voice of *experts*, since it is these voices that emanate from controlling entities that stem from the church, the state, the medical field, intellectuals, etc. Performance and the concept of theatricality are yet another form expert discourse that hinders the possibility for public and democratic debate due to its highly structured language. Yet television, and in particular talk shows dismantle theatricality and performance. The boundaries between performer and viewer are blurred in a genre where the studio audience members are also the performers; therefore, for these authors, “the talk show is the most eloquent example of the crisis of theatricality” (Wood, 20).

Tolson via the work of Carpignano and Dahlgren reevaluates the role of theatricality and performance due to the genre’s ability to disassemble the distance traditionally found between the audience and the performance of the show (15). The dismantling of this division is a result of the ‘the transparency of production techniques used in talk shows. One of the more obvious techniques includes the presence and the reference to technicians working on the show such as camera crews and operators on set. Their presence breaks with the conception of a *fourth-wall*

by making evident how the performance comes to life. The presence of the technicians on set breaks with the *magic* of television. Furthermore, the erosion of performance occurs through the blurring of traditional roles in spectator-performer; talk-shows heighten this distinction. Television formats have heightened this distinction throughout various forms such as in sit-coms and in late-night talk shows. In the former format, the show insinuates the presence of the audience through the use of a laugh track. The inclusion of such device creates the notion that what the viewer is watching is a performance. Yet this over emphasis on convening a closed performative space cancels out its recreation. The inclusion of *programmed* moments when audiences are supposed to react suggests that audiences are no longer spectators but part of the show. In talk shows, this becomes even more evident as audience members become central to the operation of the genre. Throughout the history of talk-shows on U.S. television one can see how audience members take center stage alongside the real guests. One could document at length the audience's involvements in part of the talk show as they fight, interact, and offer commentary, such as on older talk shows such as Geraldo, Sally Jesse Raphael and more contemporary shows such as Jerry Springer. The same holds true for Latin American talk-shows such as *Entre Moria y vos* and *Laura en América*, where audiences compete for centrality through their vocal interventions. Due to the blurring of roles assigned to audiences-guests, and the clear presence of production techniques, Carpignano (1990) concludes that 'the talk show is the most eloquent example of the crisis of theatricality' (Wood 20).

The optimism described above suggests that talk shows open-up a public space for the representation of everyday experiences through the inclusion of diverse voices; this has not remained unquestioned. Even in works such as Joshua Gamson's *Freaks Talk Back* (1998), where the main argument suggests talk-shows have questioned notions of heteronormativity and

has entered complex discussions on gender and sexuality, there still exists an ambivalence which questions the so-called multiplicity of voices. As Gamson suggests, audience members are presented and packaged as *freaks* to serve only the needs of a *shock-style* programming. This form of entertainment underscores that it is *shocking* because it temporarily disrupts the implied heteronormative ideology of the show (Wood 20). Yet ultimately the *freaks* are contained within the logic of normative television, displaying such identities as a form of entertainment and not as a means to question society's norms. Other scholars such as Nicholas Garnham (1990), David Sholle (1990), and Michael Schudson (1992), have not been keen in presenting talk-shows as having the potential to recreate a democratic public sphere open for multiple voices. Instead they see the transformative power of *talk* as an impossible and naïve ideal (Shattuc 88). Their argument is ultimately grounded on Habermas' conclusion in *The Structural transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989), which concedes the development of talk in the public sphere more as an ideal than an actual fact (Shattuc 88). Habermas finds that the rise of monopoly capitalism in the twentieth century has crushed the distinct divisions existing between the state, the public sphere, and capitalism. Their interdependence has eroded due to corporate media outlets which present itself as independent voices, but in reality serve its own corporate and economic model (Shattuc 88). Due to the corporate and capitalistic model, mass media allows voices to emerge as long as they do not question or jeopardize the dominant model of the industry. Shattuc acknowledges a sense of nostalgia stemming from the loss of the bourgeois public sphere.

This nostalgia for the loss of the bourgeois public sphere is deeply intertwined with a kind of politics where clear categories of power are maintained: a class, culture, and gender hierarchy based on the centrality of the educated white bourgeois male (89).

The critics nostalgia for the so-called loss of the public sphere can serve as a powerful tool to dismantle the industry's categories of power, particularly that of the bourgeois (heterosexual) male. If critics can identify a possibility for talk on television to dismantle dominant ideologies, then it must suggest that the industry's hegemonic discourse contains fissures from which to undo them, at least from the position of the audience. This shift suggests that attention must be paid to audiences and how their viewing habits resignify, if at least partially, the messages emanating from media.

Ien Ang contends in *Desperately seeking audiences* (1991) that 'before there was television, there was no such thing as a television audience'. Ang hints to the fact that audiences are in essence a produced category by the industry (3). Therefore *women* is a category constructed by an industry that may or may not refer to real women, but rather presents women as a category. Television as an industry needs an audience in order to sustain and increment its capital accumulation, needs to present to advertisers a viable consumer. In order to do so, the industry needs to not only identify audiences, but must enter into relations that can interpellate their desires and tastes. Ang sees this dual presentation and relations as a complex process since ultimately for the industry the audience is an 'invisible and unmanageable mass'. In order for television to function within the logic of a consumer driven market, the industry as an institution creates what Hartley calls 'invisible fictions' of audiences (3). The creation of an *invisible fictions* functions as a map to read and access audiences that can be served to advertisers. As part of these fictions, institutional knowledge about audiences are also formulated by other discourses executed by audience research firms, marketing campaigns, and industry focus groups (Shattuc 48). Understanding audiences under this structure of *invisible fictions* and as a category produced by an institution departs from the cultural studies approach to studying television. The

latter has focused mostly on identifying the possible reception of television programming by considering the visual and the narrative styles techniques that configure a text. While the former focuses mostly on seeing cultural production from its institution framework and the practices that may arise from such industrial conventions.

4.3 **Almorzando con Mirtha Legrand and the Talk-Show Connection**

Classifying *Almorzando con Mirtha Legrand* as a *talk-show* presents several problems in regards to nomenclature. While the term *talk-show* exists as a format of the local industry, it is a term that mostly remits to *foreign* television styles of programming. In other words, the term connotes a television staple not forming part of the canon or imaginary of Argentinean television, as is the case with the marathon-length variety shows, news broadcast and telenovelas.

Furthermore applying the term to *ALM* adds on another classificatory problem since the term within the local market has been used in very prescriptive instances, such as to describe late-night programming led by a male host interviewing celebrities, in the likes of U.S programming like the *Tonight Show*. In other instances, the term has been applied to daytime programming where *ordinary* guests discuss personal issues in front of a studio audience, mediated by a host and *experts* that offer their professional advice. In other words, the concept of *talk-shows* have been seen and reproduced on Argentinean television following the US form of production, performance and staging. Perhaps it is for this reason that shows reminiscent of popular U.S. talk shows such as *Oprah* and *Jerry Springer* have not been long lasting or extremely popular with Argentinean audiences. These direct copies without modifications for local markets have not fared well.

Entre Moria y Vos is a clear Argentinean example of a prescriptive talk show in the likes of *Jerry Springer*. Moria's show was the only successful talk show of this kind, and even then, it

did not last a long time on the air. Indicative of this trend was its short three year run from 2000-2003. Moria, the main host, along with her producers included topics such:

I'm gay and I don't accept my gay son.
 My husband is cheating on me with a transvestite.
 My mother ruined my life.
 He has always lied to me: he is not my father and he is gay.

These short, yet representative titles evince a highly sensationalist format. Each show revolves around interfamily relationships that include revelations dealing with a sexualized or gendered identity. The exploitive nature of the format that employs a highly sensationalist *mise-en-scene* has caused many to question the validity of this type of *talk* as therapeutic and of serving a social need. Instead, it has been described as feeding on the acquisition of testimonies with the purpose to circulate their stories for a profit. Television that preys on the narratives of pain and suffering has been described as the product of a “vulture culture”. In the forward to *Vulture Culture* (2005) Hammer and Kellner have described *vulture culture* based on the works of Quail, Razzano, and Skialli (2005) as:

A complex set of ideological practices “by which media scavenges the narratives, discourses, knowledges and everyday common-sense of our culture and presents them back as information, spectacle and entertainment” (xi).

With their implied promise to help its guests and viewers at home, talk shows commercialize the pain and anxieties of all those involved. If we apply the researches conception of talk show as executing a form of *vulture culture*, then the categorization of *ALM* as a clear example of this type of programming becomes possible. While *ALM* does not fall under prescriptive definition of talk shows based on structure and performance, the conception of vulture culture based on the exchange of exploitative narratives realigns it within this televisual category.

Almorzando con Mirtha Legrand also functions as a *talk-show*, since it retains one of the key elements that make up the genre: the importance and dominance of *talk*. It is not simply the

fact that there is dialogue, a conversation; otherwise all programs have the potential to be categorized as *talk shows*. Instead it has to do with the purpose, the use value and the packaging of *talk* as a commodity that becomes profitable and reproducible for its industry. Therefore, *ALM*'s inclusion into the category of the *talk-show* becomes evident as it is a program that drives to commercialize and reproduce *talk* as its main commodity of exchange. As such, the presence of *talk* becomes the dominant classificatory feature that feigns an attempt to bring about reflection, discussion, and ultimately a consensus among the carefully selected participants. However, some classic definitions of *talk-shows* include in their list the presence of a real-life studio audience; and their absence may suggest that *AML* does not belong within this category. However, I argue otherwise. While on *AML* there is an absence of a studio audience, there is the implied viewer that participates from their domestic space. Through the repetition of several linguistic cues such as *please explain to the viewer*, *the viewer wants to know*, *let's not talk over each other otherwise the viewer will not be able to follow*, are just a few of the reiterated phrases by the host in an attempt to acknowledge an audience. The presence of a real-life studio vs. an implied-imaginary audience does not necessarily guarantee a more participatory *talk* where various voices are included. In *talk-shows*, every interaction is controlled by the production. In other words, the real-life audience becomes merely a prop that speaks and reacts when instructed. Part of the commercial success stems from this highly fine-tuned industrial production process that organizes and neatly packages narratives around talk. The lack of an in-studio audience does not change the classification of *AML*. Instead, I argue that the symbolic home-audiences acquire a much more participatory level as opposed to the prop quality of in-studio audiences. If the argument that suggests *talk-shows* require or allow for higher participatory levels by the inclusion of a studio audience, then with programs with symbolic audiences, I argue have a

potential to include higher levels of participation. By this I mean that the home viewer as an *audience* not only participates through their viewing habits, but also participate through their rejection/consumption of mass consumer goods that the show/industry attempts to market. Viewers therefore also participate through their symbolic consumption of the program as well as through their tangible purchases. Lastly, the home viewer as a consumer participates through acceptance or rejection of the lifestyle that the program displays, as I will develop in a later section. The absence of direct talk among audience-guests-hosts, therefore does not eliminate participation, since as described above, other codes and markers of interaction exist for the viewer.

I insist on the classification since it allows me to stress the importance of how such programs generate *talk* as a commodity for exchange and not necessarily to inform viewers or create major changes in society. At first this statement seems to contradict a large part of my research that grants cultural productions the possibility to bring about and sustain social changes in relation to an acceptance of queer identities. Now I have suggested the contrary by stating that the *talk* that is created is just another consumer good created by the visual industries with a profit bearing intent. What seems to imply a contradiction is resolved through my insistence on analyzing genres. If we address genres only from the perspective of the industry then the discussion centers only on establishing how formats and genres such as *telenovelas*, *women's films*, and *talk-shows* operate within a capitalist market that commodifies cultural production solely for profit. It also turns viewers into consumers that through their habits reproduce hegemonic values, and consumer-industry demands. However, when we shift the analytic focus to the role of audience practices and or align audience practices with industry analysis, the result becomes much more nuanced. Combining practices along industry demands allows me to

inquire how certain genres, in this case *talk-shows*, generate trans-media conversations that go beyond the limits of the studio. By trans-media conversations I am referring to *talk* as a tripartite discursive category: *talk* that is generated by the show and the ancillary media that discusses what was talked about in the show, and ultimately the *talk* generated by audiences. In this last instance *talk* becomes a practice central to the genre. Subsequently, as a researcher in Latin American media in relation to gender and identity, I am interested in the ways such genres remit and use markers from queer culture and how audiences utilize these practices as a means to resignify traditional discourses on gender and sexuality.

The study of *ALM* in the academic literature has focused very little on the concept of genre as a way of understanding and situating the cultural product. While there is a downplay in the role of genre, due to an aforementioned difficulty in categorizing what constitutes a *talk-show*, it is clear for Fabbro that *ALM* is not a *talk-show*. Fabbro finds that in *talk-shows*, the underlined structure of the program operates on creating controversy that seems more exploitative than as a means to generate true discussions.

El testimonio es el eje de la dinámica: la controversia y la denuncia son su fundamento temático y el sentimentalismo o golpe bajo son ingredientes infaltables. Por el contrario, la conversación en ML enriquece, ayuda a la coherencia e intenta el diálogo y el encuentro (185).

For the scholar, *ALM* differentiates itself from *talk-shows* in the ability of the host to create a coherent dialogue among the various guests. Fabbro describes it as a meeting of the minds mediated by a host who knows her limits. There is no attempt to solve or judge, but to create a space for dialogue (185). “ML apunta a una participación clara por parte del espectador, que se convierte en un asistente más a la mesa de los almuerzos” (186). While there is recognition on the part of the scholar on the relevance of *talk*, what separates it from other similar genres relates to Mirtha’s ability to remain neutral and partial. It is specifically this *balance* which allows the

viewer to be another participant, an invited guest to the *table*. My reading of Fabbro's rejection of the *talk show* genre as a category based on exploitative talk is unproductive for my study of *ALM*. Fabbro distinguishes and grants Legrand an ability that I find lacking. The scholar uses words to describe Legrand's abilities as a host as *balanced, open, informed, and lacking judgment*, whereas I find it to be the complete opposite.

Legrand's permanence on television stems from her ability to foment a confrontational irrisory interview style that pits guests against each other, and a host that judges and defines the limits of conversation. I argue that a large segment of her audience watches precisely for the *train-wreck* effect that Legrand creates with her *incisive* questions. That is, the moment where Legrand's questions create an uncomfortable situation for the guests and it becomes evident that the guest wrestles between answering her accordingly without breaking from the decorum of the show's set-up: a fancy lunch setting-a guest in one's home. The sense of discursive violence, or *hate speech* towards the LGBTQ community that Legrand's comments/questions pose does not turn her into a target for reply due to her surrounding and position as host. The space of the refined lunch table-her home-territory, shields her from retort. The show operates on notions of decorum and etiquette even though it is recreated in a studio. Guests are forced to comply and follow the rules of etiquette that the show reproduces. Therefore as an invited guest, one cannot turn against its *gracious* host. Added to this inability to reply based on space and etiquette there is an additional element that forces guests to restrain themselves: the longevity of the program and the host's age. Whether people agree or disagree with her style, Legrand is portrayed and seen as a television institution and as one of the last remaining stars of golden age cinema. Guests tend to either disregard and minimize her comments or they simply choose to respond outside of the studio such as in other programs. However, no one wants to be the one to argue

with the *diva-institution-grandma*. Even within the rigorous and scholarly study that Fabbro presents, one finds an implicit and underlined reverence that the scholar shows towards Legrand. It is precisely this reverence that occludes Fabbro from seeing how Legrand's intervention as a host incorporates all of the check-list categories of the *talk-show* that Fabbro originally finds lacking. Nonetheless, Fabbro's attempt at defining the genre of *ALM* against the traditional conception of *talk-shows* does not minimize the value of her study.

I find this distinction to differentiate *AML* from talk shows productive in that it helps Fabbro to establish the role and influence of the host as the ultimate and defining characteristic of *AML*, above any other marker that has traditionally defined *talk-shows*. Fabbro makes sense of the success and longevity of the show based on reading the role of the star-host, as opposed to referring directly to the role of the genre. As she clearly states, 'varios géneros nacen por las estrellas que los construyeron, y la televisión no está ajena a esta interdependencia' (105). Rather than create a series of check-list items that make up the genre, Fabbro acknowledges the power of the *star* to organize and define the format. There is an interdependence established between the medium of television and that of performer. Mirtha as a performer, a *star* with an acquired knowledge and trajectory within the movie industry, applies that knowledge to the *new* medium of television by creating a program that only she could host-create. No one else, at least in Argentina, can *copy* the format, since Legrand is clearly linked to its creation and maintenance.

Esta forma estética adoptado afirma la idea de *clasicidad* que desde un comienzo tuvo el programa. No es innovador, no intenta nuevos caminos o búsquedas; por el contrario, se queda en su fórmula (que por cierto le ha dado treinta años de éxito) y la traslada a través de los años (107).

As Fabbro suggests, the permanence of Legrand on the air not only stems from her ability to mobilize her on-screen *star* power, but also Legrand's power to operate within the realm of that which is *classic*. According to Fabbro, Legrand creates a *classic* since the show-format is self

created and the format incorporates the symbolic imaginary that revolves around golden age cinematic stars. Legrand transfers that filmic category onto television. I find Fabbro's approach to understanding cultural production via its performers very revealing and productive. Since it is my goal to make sense of cultural production via the complex web of mediations that exist between audiences, performers and the industry, Fabbro's model helps to structure this argument. As useful as her model remains, it lacks the counter hegemonic readings that queer audiences transpose onto the image of Legrand. However it is necessary to add that audiences' transference of a queer sensibility onto Legrand is not unidirectional, but rather also a result of the text they develop.

As developed in the previous chapters, the queer aesthetic is also elaborated by the industry, yet it chooses to mask the presence of a queer signs under the performance of etiquette and class values. Lastly the *star-host* incorporates signs of queerness in her performance of the film diva. The show's insistence on transmitting bourgeois values and notions of etiquette are deconstructed and ultimately resignified by audiences. I propose to elaborate how *ALM* is structured to reproduce class standards and mores, but ultimately these signs of distinction and *aristocracy* succumb to queer appropriations that evince a camp portrayal of such hegemonic values. In order to dialogue with the queer signs found present in *ALM*, I will focus on the staging, conversations, and intertextualities that occur on the show.

4.4 **Staging and Props: Stairs as a Queer Sign**

As Fabbro has stated, the structure of *ALM* has for the most part remained untouched throughout its run. I identify three main segments that the show includes which have the potential to emit queer signs. Legrand's first segment includes her grand entrance where she

displays her clothing and *converses* with the home-viewer through direct address. Within this segment the host also promotes consumer goods and thanks the various sponsors. Once this segment is completed there begins the first commercial break and, upon its return, the announcer introduces the lunch guests and shows them all sitting around the table. The *lunch* segment is the longest one since this is where various topics are discussed. Some shows have been mono-thematic, like the one I will describe in the next section, but the majority concentrates on various topics that begin and end based on the commercial breaks. Within this second segment one can see how television organizes and delimits talk around the industrial logic of the format; rather than through the free display of natural occurring situations. Lastly, the show concludes with the final segment where the host invites the guests to go into the living room generally for tea or for a champagne toast. I will center my discussion around the first two segments since they have formed part of the queer Argentinean imaginary.

Her *grand* entrances, mannerisms, and ways of address have been parodied and referenced by queer audiences. Such is the case with her entrance which opens the show. As various scholars working on queer investment on divas show, it is very difficult to provide concrete proof as to why audiences favor or select certain stars as vehicles for queer desires. As previously mentioned, Dyer has noted that stars such as Betty Davis, Ethel Merman, Bette Midler, and Judy Garland are prime examples of divas with strong queer following due to stars' ability to fragment notions of classic beauty that Hollywood has perpetuated. Also, the singularity and struggles that these stars have had to face also reinforce their iconic power for gay audiences. While this proves useful for my research, I find that a different element signals stars such as Legrand as queer icons. The high investment on part of queer audiences rests on counter readings of class/economic status that Legrand exudes. The marginalization of queer

individuals is not only grounded on their conceptions of sexuality and identity, but this gendered identity has also excluded certain queer subjectivities from the economic and productive spheres of society. Due to this exclusion, divas who construct their image on the excesses of class and wealth serve as a site for queer audiences to position their desire for inclusion. At the same time there is a rejection of those values as they are played out in the parodies as forms of social class oppositionality.

In the earlier shows, Legrand would descend a small flight of stairs onto a central open space where the viewer could see on the far left a living room set up and on the far right her desk. These two spaces were enclosed within the visual confines of a studio designed to resemble a *fancy* home. The common signs deployed by the television language to suggest *refinement* included columns, large windows with lavish sweeping drapes, a white piano, and other household decorations such as crystal chandeliers and statues. However the key element in the symbolic and yet concrete television language includes the presence of stairs as a clear marker of refinement that television language has cemented into people's imaginary. Up until the late 1980s Argentinean telenovelas and other programs that recreated home-life, used the prop of the stairs as a distinctive marker that differentiated between the space of the *poor* and the *rich*. Since most telenovelas of the time were all filmed in studios, the stairs served as a metonymy of a mansion. Similarly, in the 1950s, the presence of a white telephone marked this class difference. In relation to the stairs, I find that it is a useful prop not only to immediately mark the social class of the *star* who *inhabits* such space, but it also renders it as an extremely performative prop of queer dimensions. By a *performative prop*, I am referring to the ability that stairs have in capturing the image of the *star* as the camera directs the viewer's line of vision to detain upon the body upon its descent. The presence of the stairs aids the performer in their representation

that suggests the position of superiority, represented by the height, versus the observer who is watching from below. It is not coincidental that this prop is included in *ALM* since the show is in part informed by the *star*'s filmic past. Various world *golden age* cinemas utilized the spatial configuration of home through the (ex)(in)clusion of stairs to signify class distinctions. However it also grants an aura of superiority to the diva who descends it.

The film *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), directed by Billy Wilder, is a classic example of the conjugation of stairs-space and its connection to the film diva. The prop of the stairs in the aging star's home, helps to establish Norma Desmond's lavishness and opulence. Desmond's final descent forms part of the movie's classic scene, as she *descends* mentally, thinking that she is making her grand entrance while filming a movie, whereas in fact, she has lost all sense of reality and will probably end up in a mental institution. The relevance of this scene for this particular work on divas rests on the performance of stardom. Not only is Norma performing for what she thinks is her come-back to cinema, but there is also the performance before the reporters as she descends the stairs. She is playing a double part, that of a character in a movie and her diva persona for the reporters. This dual performance occurs within the space of the stairs, which, as suggested previously, functions as a prop that helps to establish the character as a diva. I use this example to demonstrate two main points that transfer to *ALM*. First, I highlight the audiences' ability to read such props and spaces in relation to the performance of stardom and *divaness* based on their awareness of cinematic language. This pairing of stairs-home along with a female character signals to viewers not only the person's class and social standing, but it also signals an identity connected to stardom, as commonly seen in classic golden age cinemas. Its inclusion on *ALM* functions as a way to connect *Legrand* to her cinematic past as a justification for her place within the television industry. In other words, her trajectory speaks for

her; it positions her as an authority due to her connections to the industry. Using Fabbro's term, the use of her cinematic past serves as a tool that positions the show as an instant classic; it validates her presence.

As previously mentioned, I differ in Fabbro's position, which leads to the second point argued in this section. The distance found between Legrand's cinematic past and her television show does not maintain the show in its long television run because it invokes classicism. Instead *ALM*'s success rests on the show's ability to be read as a *campy* product that parodies the strong commodifying effect the show circulates. Within this last point I am not suggesting that all viewers deploy counter readings, but rather as a researcher of media I bring it to light as a way of excavating the queer signs that the show operates and circulates hidden behind the mask of glamour and class. Legrand's presence as a diva/star initiates the commodification process imposed by the structure of the show. Legrand's performance all leads to her embodiment of a star who markets bourgeois values and ultimately consumer goods. As the research on talk-shows has shown:

Shows and TV in general represent an elaborate mechanism to reach the woman consumer in a sphere normally separate from retailing: the home (Shattuc 50-51).

The initial and opening segment of the program is dedicated completely to Legrand modeling of her couture outfits, make-up, shoes, and jewelry. All these items displayed link her body as a site for product placements. Apparently as a marketing strategy it works, due to the constant financial backing of the show by various brands that index a lifestyle worthy of a star. However, there are contradictory signs presented that put into question the very concepts of elegance and class that the show circulates. Legrand can be seen promoting her jewels bought on the exclusive Alvear Avenue while at the same time recommending Avon creams that have a completely different target market.

The exacerbation of these markers of class and distinction are appropriated by queer audiences who revel in the opulence that Legrand demonstrates. Even though she has become a queer *diva*, her show has consistently presented problematic views when discussing same-sex desires. In the following section I will provide a key example of how even though the show operates on a queer aesthetic, it still manages to portray same-sex desire and queerness as subjectivities that need containment and suppression. The example provided below comes from the second segment which positions all the guests at the lunch table conversing on a specific topic. The example also comes from one of the shows Legrand has dedicated to debating gay marriage. I will begin with one of the questions Legrand posed.

4.5 **Queer Artifacts: Suppressing Queer Subjectivities**

Roberto, te voy a hacer una pregunta muy delicada: la pareja de homosexuales, suponte que adoptan a un chico, cómo tienen inclinaciones homosexuales, ¿no podría producirse una violación hacia su hijo?

A day before the Argentina Senate would debate the *Ley Igualitaria* which would grant same-sex couples full marriage and adoption rights before the law, television carried out its own debate in multiple political, gossip and in general entertainment programming. The daily talk show *Almorzando con Mirtha Legrand* was no exception. Legrand invited three people in favor and three against. As Louann Haarman states in *Performing talk* (2001), “seating arrangements and the physical characteristics of the studio may condition the kind of interaction typical of the program” (44). The variety on the guest selection and their seating arrangement, at a first glance suggest an optimal configuration for a lively and friendly debate among the guests. The interspersed debating among those for and against the *ley igualitaria* visually decentered typical debate configurations where two sides exist as a unified block, arguing in front of an opposing team. Here the ultra conservatives canonical lawyer and professor at Universidad Católica de

Buenos Aires sat next to Maria Rachid, gay activist and president of the INADI, a government agency dedicated to eradicating discrimination. However, the visual and spatial configuration aimed at creating a balanced and cordial conversation over lunch came to an abrupt end when the hostess asked the above question.

Legrand's inquiry into whether gay male parents had a potential to rape their male adopted children put an end to any fluid and logical conversation on the topic of gay marriage and adoption. The tension created by the question not only broke with the goal of the program, but it forced a reconfiguration of the televisual language purported by the show up until that point. By televisual language, I am referring to the technical use of stage setting, use of lighting, and camera work, all in place to convey a certain mood through the visual configuration of such tools. If the staging and set design of the show was supposed to show an amicable gathering of refined guest/friends around a table, the tone of the hostess' question could not maintain such staging. The promise of a debate as proposed by the staging, the topic itself, and the background of each guest ultimately succumbed to further marginalize and mark as deviant the guests that did not comply within the margins of heteronormativity. As Hammer and Kellner (2005) suggest in their introduction:

Although talk TV promises to provide a democratic space for public debate, it often exploits its marginalized guests and presents them as abnormal and as freaks, at odds with the so-called normalized experiences and values of the hosts...(13).

This shift from amicable to tense was shown through a change in the camerawork. Pre-question, the camera tended to take long shots that visually depicted the totality of the table and their guests, or it partially showed a fragment of the table, which one could see half of the guests in dialogue. However once the question was posed, such visual frame could not persist. The camera shots were tighter, much more focused on displaying individual close ups. Guests were

no longer seen as friendly lunch guests talking with each other, but rather as representatives, defenders of their ideological viewpoints. They became ‘talking heads’ for their view points. Also the shift from wide and long shots to tight close ups also respond to the impossibility of maintaining the lively interaction that had existed among the guests. The question and the subsequent answer silenced and shocked the guests, and as such, the camera could not focus on portraying such mood.

The opportunity and the potential to discuss a hotly debated topic, even within a frivolous space, crumbled. Instead of discussing gay rights, the topic was conflated with issues of pederasty and sexual abuse. The screen became a venue for further pathologization of gay subjects as sexual deviants preying on small children. Roberto Piazza responded to the question with an assertive *no* and went into a personal narrative that exemplified the differences between parenting and pederasty. At the time Piazza had recently published *Corte y Confesión* (2008), recounting his childhood and the physical and sexual abuse inflicted upon him by his older brother. As recounted by the author, the purpose of the book had multiple objectives: to serve as a form of therapy, to help him come to terms with speaking about his abuse, and to help fuel his campaign for *Ley Piazza*, which sought to raise sentences for those convicted against sexually abusing children. Despite Piazza’s cogent argument, Legrand was not able to differentiate among the topics that Piazza advocated.

Piazza’s reaction to Legrand’s question did not evince any initial shock or dismay. Instead the designer, as mentioned previously, gave an eloquent answer that exemplified through personal experiences the differences between sexual abuse and sexual-gender identity. While Legrand’s question had the potential to offend, Piazza used the opportunity to talk about his plight against child abuse. However the media’s response and coverage of the *Legrand incident*

continued to put the spotlight on Piazza. The constant repetition of Legrand's questions on almost every news and entertainment program silenced Piazza's answer given on the show. The coverage of the Legrand-Piazza incident competed with that of the 24 hour marathon-like debate held in the nation's congress, which the media also closely covered. The week of the debate over gay rights queered the visual, spatial and the discursive space of the media conflating multiple perspectives and 'actors' involved with the issue. The media ultimately conflated, Piazza-Legrand, civil protestors for/against gay rights, politicians, and law makers all vying for a space to project their view on the issue. Interestingly, there was no distinction or measure of what should predominate. The frivolity of Legrand's talk show occupied the same discursive space of politicians and law makers debating the issue of gay rights. This treatment further justifies and validates the scope and archive analyzed here. In other words, that which may be traditionally portrayed as frivolous, insignificant, and 'throw-away' as television programming is typically portrayed, here we see how it competes and runs parallel to discourses held in the center of juridical and legal power, as is the case with the debates held in Congress.

The media's reaction to this 'lunch incident' was overwhelming; it was covered by every news channel, all the political themed shows as well as by the gossip shows. While all programs condemned Legrand's question, the level of condemnation differed depending on the general ideology of the channel, presenter and genre of the television show. The programming on the more conservative and right-winged *Grupo Clarín*, both their cable and open air programming composed mostly of news and political programming condemned the question, but posed it as evidence that Argentina society was yet not ready for the Ley Igualitaria. While their argument seemed to advocate for more debate and discussion, the ultimate goal was to delay the law. This claim could be supported by the guests the channels repeatedly invited: lawyer Gabriela Micchetti,

who ultimately voted against this law and the various laws that followed, such as the right to abort and Ley de género. The coverage by the afternoon gossip programs such as *Intrusos* and *Bendita TV* and *Vivian Canosa*, covered it by condemning Legrand, but they employed a more humoristic and benevolent tone towards Legrand. The hosts of programming like *Bendita TV* and *Intrusos* would recount the incident by laughing and relating the whole incident as yet another embarrassing moment on Legrand's programming. At the same time, their comments emphasized that Legrand is an 85 year-old traditional woman, therefore she should not be taken so seriously. They would compare it to speaking to one's own inappropriate grandmother, who says whatever is going through their mind. The problem with this approach is that it minimizes Legrand's role as a communicator and the responsibility she has to inform accurately and responsibly, particularly within the specific social and historical moment whereby Argentina's human rights issues were being debated. To simply brush off her comments as one would an 'inappropriate' grandmother does not recognize the role played by media commentators in setting and perpetuating discursive agendas.

Legrand has remained a queer diva even while situating same sex desire as a deviancy. A possible explanation for this incongruity is that queer viewers watch for the excess that Legrand's image provides, without really focusing on the ideologies that the host manifests. This seems to suggest that the talk-show is not viewed for the conversation that it includes, but rather for the staging and performance that the show represents. As an unlikely queer diva, Legrand attracts viewers by the excess of status, respect and freedom to do and speak her mind, even if she is incorrect, simply through her years of experience and longevity on screen. The power that she exerts could be an underlined desire that marginalized subjectivities do not have and wish to hold. This desire for visual presence and excess is played out through the genre of

the talk show. However one must keep in mind that the formula of the talk show is highly unstable since it is the host that sets the limits of defining its format. As has been described, Legrand's past as a melodramatic actress of the golden age cinema incorporates the language of melodrama-film found in her films and transposes onto the television format. Therefore the language of melodrama helps define the form of the talk-show as developed by Legrand. As I will demonstrate in the next section, I will continue to explore how divas, in the case of Florencia de la V, become a diva. Just as Legrand, Florencia de la V constructs her image through the language of melodrama, specifically the telenovela. It is her experience with this medium that will allow her to construct her own form of talk show that also displays queer signs. I will begin my discussion of Florencia de la V by providing background to her first telenovela, *Los Roldán*, which many have categorized as the first gay themed telenovela in Argentina.

4.6 **Los Roldán: melodrama and queerness**

Los Roldán does not innovate in terms of its general plot since it follows the main structure of most telenovelas: the struggle between two families with opposing social and economic status and how through the social construct of marriage and love they overcome their differences. As the title suggests, the story is told from the perspective of one of the two families at war (the Roldans vs. the Uriartes) over the leadership of Lozada Corporation. The patriarch of the Roldans is Adalberto (Tito), a widower and a poor market vendor who rescues Mercedes Lozada, an elderly rich woman who was attempting to commit suicide. Mercedes' decision to end her life is brought on by her realization that her family, the Uriartes, only care about her money and the position that they will inherit once she steps down as president of her cosmetic company. As a form of revenge, she decides to temporarily step-down as president and appoint

Tito as the interim-president, even though he has no education or experience. Mercedes's decision side-steps Emilio Uriarte, the person who had been waiting for such title. Tito accepts Mercedes' offer and the whole family leave their working class neighborhood of Paternal and relocate to Mercedes's mansion in the upscale neighborhood of Barrio Norte, right next door to the Uriartes. The *refined* family will do everything possible to regain control of the company and save their neighborhood. The repeated attempts to eradicate the Roldans from the Uriarte's sphere of influence fail, since each member of the Uriarte family, including the dog, will fall in love with one of the members from the enemy family. The love that ensues between each of the characters reconciles their socioeconomic, cultural, racial, and gender differences.

From this brief synopsis one can identify the main themes that have helped to define the melodramatic genre of telenovelas. *Los Roldán* is full of climactic announcements in relation to reversal of fortunes, class conflicts, forbidden love, the centrality of family life and the triumph of good versus evil. As Reginald Clifford states:

Telenovelas usually engage people in the intimacy of their home, the site where Silverstone (1994) suggests that one community forms to view another; it is the site of conflicts, rituals, and sharing in dimensions that are gendered, generational and class-oriented (94).

The class-oriented struggle among the Uriarte-Roldán stems from the former to acknowledge the possibility of class advancement. The entrance of a working class to a higher socio-economic sphere is presented as highly conflictive, since it implies the visibility of non-normative sexualities and racial differences that have been used to categorize the lower working classes. *Los Roldán* viewed from the perspective of an economic elite as represented by Emilio and Chichita suggest that the family's advancement has the potential to contaminate the purity of an exclusively affluent, white, and sexually normative society. As suggested by their full name, Uriarte de la Casa, the first last name references the patrician-*criollo* land-owning families that

forged the modern Argentine nation, through the repression and exclusion of those deemed socially, sexually and racially inferior. The addition of *de la Casa* added to the patrician-*criollo* name further connects those patrician values to the sphere of the home, which functions as a metaphor for the nation. The Uriarte de la Casas protect the purity of the nation, which will be questioned by the Roldans. The encroachment of the working classes and the perceived danger of their advancement is verbalized early through the episode where Chichita narrates how Violet, her French poodle is *raped* by the Roldan's *illegitimate big black dog*. Not only does the scene serve to reproduce within popular narratives the anxieties of the elite, it also helps to foreshadow what is to come: the destabilization of the white and economic stability of the ruling classes. Within this framework, it is the Roldans who are the dark and sexualized predators that through miscegenation destabilize racialized and sexualized normativity of the Uriarte home. As I will argue, the greatest threat to the ultra-white and sexually constrained framework will be contested by Tito's brother, Raúl. Since the first episode it becomes clear that Tito's brother is really Laisa, a transwoman fully integrated within the Roldan's family circle. Within the family no one refers to her as Tito's brother, but rather as his sister. Ultimately, it is Laisa's affair with Emilio Uriarte de la Casa which will reconfigure the white and sexually constrained heterosexual family that melodrama has consistently reproduced, by his separation from his wife and his union with Laisa. The anxiety that may be produced from the advancement and integration of racially constructed gendered minorities is made palpable for audiences, particularly by a network described as the *family network*, through the recourse of sentimentality and humor that *Los Roldans* utilize.

Within this section, I categorize *Los Roldán* as a queer telenovela that for the first time on Argentinean television problematized and opened a discursive space from which to question non-

normative sexuality. As an extension from the first two chapters, I continue to explore the role of cultural products in representing and transforming societies from the perspective of the media industries. I argue Laisa Roldán is a key character that challenges notions of gender and sexual identity by including her struggle as a transgendered woman navigating society's acceptable limits. I do not argue that *Los Roldán* achieves a major transformation of gender and sexual roles since the story does reflect an internal contradiction. Laisa's story evinces a desire to constrain her sexuality and social visibility within the confines of a working class domestic space. At times the story suggests that sexual minorities are best kept within the sphere of the home since the productive world of the public sphere is presented as incompatible. The story evinces a need to *domesticate* and contain Laisa within the confines of family life into a quasi-assimilationist model that requires her to fashion out her reality following prescriptive heteronormative family values. At the same time, Laisa's story presents moments that signal a breaking out from the domestic constraints of family life in order to enter the *productive* world of the public sphere, represented in the telenovela by the spaces of the industries that she will participate in.

Los Roldán reflects this tension of *domestication* with *irruption* by using Laisa as a vehicle for its representation. Within this framework, the telenovela becomes a site where the private and public spheres struggle to conflate within the medium of television. At the same time, the intimacy that the medium suggests through the revelation of family conflicts that occur within the confines of people's living rooms is ultimately made public by audiences. Jesús Martín Barbero discusses the externalization of the intimate as a result of the pleasure that audiences obtain from talking about their *novelas*:

The full meaning and pleasure [of telenovelas] are found not just in the text but more in the discussion of the family, neighborhood, work place and friend networks (2000: 156-57) (Slade, 57).

Los Roldán as a melodramatic cultural product centralizes the issues of gender and race by situating it as a private/public conflict. At the same time, audience members doubly reproduce the private/public conflict through the exteriorization of the pleasure the telenovela produces in wanting to talk about the personal problems of its characters. In order to understand the display of queer identities within the telenovela I will look at the show's intertexts as well as the character of Laisa, played by Florencia de la V, one of Argentina's most famous transgendered actresses. This role consolidated Florencia's position as a comedic actress and also led to a successful career as a theater producer and as host of her own daytime talk show. I will analyze the opening credits as an intertext that presents the conflict of exteriorizing domestic conflicts, to later exemplify through various scenes how Laisa navigates these dilemmas. I will also discuss the evolution of Florencia de la V's participation and inclusion in her own talk show in order to connect the discussion to the larger issue of the chapter in relation to *divas* in their incorporation of queer signs and melodramatic gestures to situate themselves as daytime talk-show divas. Florencia de la V, along with Mirtha Legrand, constructs her image via melodramatic performances and by mobilizing queer tropes and signs that signify them as unique daytime divas.

4.7 **Exteriorizing and Containing Queer Domesticity**

The success of *Los Roldán* as suggested by record levels of ratings and popularization of various actors, introduced nightly controversial issues. Issues such as gender identity, sex reassignment surgery, and the role of transgendered individuals in Argentine society were

discussed nightly within a program slated as *family programming*. In order to analyze the treatment and presentation of the above mentioned issues, I will be looking at the first 15 episodes, since they lay ground to the main plot lines and characters that will be developed throughout the remainder of the novela's run. My first discussion of *Los Roldán* will focus on the opening credits, since I consider it a key intertext that helps audiences construct and sustain viewer meanings and expectations. Analyzing opening credits within my work serve a dual purpose. As mentioned previously, the credits as a narrative text helps to visualize how cultural industries represent and package not only themes, but also the ideological implications of the show they are producing. In less than two minutes the industry producing the particular telenovela is able to summarize the main plot, themes and ideologies on play. The second motive has to do more with a personal research endeavor that calls attention to this much disregarded text. Many times the opening credits are disregarded by scholars, as evidenced by a lack of academic research. Through their visual representations and musicalization, opening credits play a central role in codifying and packaging the text it accompanies.

The packaging of the telenovela through the opening credits reveals the industrial nature of the genre by introducing the network's logo as the first visible image on screen. Its visual presence not only helps to establish proprietary rights, but most importantly for the viewer, it helps to initiate and sustain expectations about the chosen product. Based on that *Los Roldán* is produced by *TeleFe*, one of the two leading networks, viewers expect a quality *family appropriate* product, as it is produced by a network touted as the channel for the whole *familia argentina*. Thereby, the initial inclusion of the logo alerts the viewer about the industry producing the telenovela, it helps to meet its viewer quality, and it puts a stamp on the appropriateness of *Los Roldán* as a family approved telenovela. In the credits' one minute and

thirty-six seconds, through the sequencing of images, scene recreations and musicalization, *TeleFe* meets such expectations.

In regards to the use of music, the song selected to accompany the credits is *Gente Buena*, sung by 1960's teen idol Palito Ortega. This selection further solidifies the overall family tone of the telenovela. Ortega as a teen idol of the 1960s is deployed as a marker of not only nostalgia, but of the safeness and lack of controversial messages that his songs have invoked. With hits and lyrics such as *La felicidad*, *Despeinada*, *Bienvenido amor*, Palito has been marked as a *safe* performer who does not question society's status quo. All his songs deal with the power of love to make you *good*. In regards to the song *Gente Buena*, its inclusion also helps to define appropriate models of behavior, as suggested by the title of the song. The lyrics will reinforce what classifies as good/bad people, through very direct and simple lyrics that employ rhetorical questions to convey its message. I have selected the three main fragments.

1. ¿De qué sirve la soberbia?
¿De qué sirve aparentar?
Si en las cosas más sencillas
está la felicidad.
2. Menos mal que mucha gente,
gente buena de verdad,
esos que tienen de todo
y no han perdido la humildad.
3. ¿De qué sirve la riqueza
cuando no se tiene amor?
¿De qué sirve tener todo
y vacío el corazón?
Muchos miden los valores,
solo por lo material.
Es mejor ser millonario
en amor y en amistad.

The questions posed by the lyrics suggest that goodness is aligned with valuing characteristics that are clearly assigned to the poor-and the working class characters in the novela: being down-

to-earth, humble, loving and friendly. In contrast, unproductive values linked to the upper middle class and elite characters include greed, arrogance and forgetting one's origins.

Ultimately, the song serves as a model to follow. As the chorus repeats: *uno vive mucho más la vida si hay amor, si hay amor*. Love trumps all obstacles by allowing you to live a full life. The three main fragments included here are clearly aligned and directed to characterize the two main groups of characters in the telenovela. Fragments 1 and 3 define the Uriartes, who apparently seem to have it all, but in reality are miserable since they lack humility and love. As the song states, it is better to have nothing than to lead a materialistic life. Here money loses all of its exchange and use value when not linked to love. In order to convey this message visually, each member of the Uriarte family appear alone, disconnected from their familial relationships, but rather linked to their *professional* and or social standing. Emilio, the patriarch of the family is shown standing outside of his home, in a close shot which makes him appear larger than the size of the home, as to suggest his importance within that sphere. Yet he is framed outside of the home; it is empty, devoid of an appropriate love since all he cares about is his role as future president of the Lozada Corporation. Next, his wife Chichita appears in a more feminized space within her garden tending to Violet, her poodle, which she treats like her own daughter. If that were not clearly enough, her new married name Uriarte de la Casa further connects her to the domestic realm, yet as Uriarte, she is shot from the outside of the home. Leaving once again the home, the center of family life is constructed as empty and abandoned. Lastly, their son Facundo is portrayed getting into his car and speeding off, to suggest his rebellious nature, but also his departure from the home. The lack of familial unity and appropriate *love* values expel all characters from the space of the home. To contrast this model, fragment 2 encapsulates the values of the Roldans who triumph because they have always remained faithful to love. It

becomes evident from the sequencing of images that love is intricately connected to family life. As described earlier, the presentation of the Uriartes as isolated from each other, as a broken family, reinforce not only the story's message, but *TeleFe's* founding ideology on reproducing traditional family values. For this reason, the credits sequence the presentation of the Roldans by visually reinforcing the unity that exists among each other. Most of the scenes show them working together, as they are packing to move into their new mansion. The moving and packing as a family suggests that the Roldan's actively work as a unit to construct and maintain their family. There is no other identity but their relationship to each other, as opposed to the Uriartes which are identified by their economic-social standing/role. Furthermore, the backdrop to the Roldans packing occurs in the street of their old neighborhood, as a way to connect them to their community. They are shown as greeting and waving at neighbors and when they drive away, all together in their bus, their neighbors run behind them to wish them luck. And to make it extra clear that a close-knit family that work together alongside its community is the melodramatic preferred narrative, the final shot shows the back of the bus which reads: *aguante la familia*, which loosely translates to *long live family*.

From the credits and the eventual episodes, the viewer is introduced to Laisa, the transgender member of the Roldán family. Laisa's character is completely integrated within the domestic sphere of family life. From the first episode everyone refers to her as *tia*, *hermana*, and *cuñada*. All the terms employed to define her mark Laisa as another woman, but her position within her clan is delimited by her familial affiliation, as suggested by the first three titles. As the story develops, other epithets used to characterize Laisa begin to distance her from a domestic/familial affiliation in order to reinscribe her within a more performative and queer space. While the terms employed do not shed their connection to womanhood, there is more of

a queered identity as she is described as the *queen of the carnival*- *la reina de la murga*, and a *diva*. While the shift from a more familial to a performative identity may suggest an expulsion of the queer body away from the site of the home, there is not a complete break. The performative terms given to describe Laisa are in essence linked to a greater public space, however this is a space closely linked to the home. Whenever Laisa performs for her local neighborhood family club, she becomes *la reina de la murga*. The whole neighborhood acknowledges her talent not only as a dancer but as choreographer. Throughout history, carnival has been a momentary safe space for queer identities to *parade* and occupy a central space in the celebration. The display of masquerades and costumes allow for the libidinal excess, which ultimately the advent of Lent will suppress. It is this *allowed excess* by the celebration of carnival that allows Laisa to be part of her neighborhood and enact socially acceptable social relationships within her immediate community. While her performance grants Laisa an opportunity to be visible, it is a short lived and momentary occurrence. At the same time, the visibility that is allowed is mediated by the logic of heteronormativity that *permits* a momentary and sanctioned suspension of such rules. Furthermore, her public visibility is also a limited one, since it is confined within the limits of her neighborhood club. While in appearance the club seems as an outside entity, in reality the club is an extension of the home due to its location and those that have access to that space. As I argue, *Los Roldán* as a family show safely presents a controversial topic/character such as that of a transgender identity by removing any links to *deviancy* and connections to subcultural groups to which transgender individuals are generally associated/represented in the media. By turning Laisa into a relatable sister and aunt character, audiences can identify with her and embrace her as one of their own. Just as there are scenes where she demonstrates her sexual desires, there are many others where she portrays the typical

domestic expectations given to sister and aunt characters on telenovelas. Added to the halo of family domesticity that turns her into a safe and recognizable character, the added comedic scenes that accompany her story arc also neutralize and resignify the media's representation of transgender individuals as pathological, dangerous, and in need of confinement. Media scholars such as Steven Edward Doran (2013) have noted a tendency in western television in relation to an increase of queer subjectivities that are clearly linked to the space of the home (95). While his analysis focuses on U.S. television, I still find his argument very cogent in its assessment of queer identities on the small screen.

As developed by Doran, television has increased domestic representations of non-heteronormative sexualities. Shows such as *Will & Grace* (1998-2006), *Queer Eye for the straight Guy* (2003-2007) and more recently *Modern Family* (2009), just to name a few, showcase gay characters as either connoisseurs of domesticity, or as clearly participating within its constraints. Doran deploys the term *homodomesticity* to characterize the increased trend to locate queer identities within domestic spaces. The ultimate goal for Durand is to question this change of paradigm. Before situating queer identities within the domestic space, the prevalent representation located non-normative sexuality as a subculture hidden from view that needed to be controlled and possibly eradicated. This led the scholar to questions whether the perceived inclusion of gays within a middle class suburbia signaled a triumph of LGBTQ activism, or whether it is simply a forced assimilation orchestrated by the dominant hegemonic political, social, and economic elites to situate queers in a *safe* and unthreatening position (96). Within this duality of triumph versus assimilation, Durand finds the latter as the most prevalent ideology found in narratives about queer identity in media. I concur with Durand's reading since *Los Roldán* demarcates the limits of the queer experience within the domestic sphere of the home.

Any attempt by Laisa to break out of the home is rather momentary and ultimately brings her back to the center of the home. Therefore, media's representation of the burgeoning of gays within domestic spaces does not equal advancement for the community due to the cultural construct of domesticity. Domesticity is a concept that stems from a highly patriarchal rhetoric that has reinforced prescriptive gender roles predicated on compulsory heterosexuality. Durand sees the assimilation of queer identities within a domestic sphere as a push to *suppress*, *deflect*, and *defer* an alternative queer subjectivity. Durand reads programs such as *Modern Family* as "pursuing assimilation into the dominant culture while advancing a model of proper gay subjectivity based on the avowed rightness of heteronormativity and neoliberal consumer citizenship" (97). Notions of what constitutes *proper* subjectivities are framed within the vantage point of heterosexuality, which the closer one reaches its social and economic realm, the more acceptable the *other* becomes. Also as I suggest, complying with homodomesticity permits a queer visibility but on the terms dictated by a normative society. In any attempt at escaping from the supposed safe zone of the home, transgender individuals have to deal with violence and rejection.

In *Los Roldán*, the exertion of violence towards transgender individuals appears not in a physical sense, but in symbolic form. Laisa faces gender violence towards her by being denied an existence. Violence also plays out in the form of situating transgender individuals as incompatible within the productive circles of the public sphere. Within the story, Laisa is confronted with gender violence as she tries to obtain employment at Lozada corporation. Even though now the Roldán's have become rich, Laisa wants to work for her brother who is now president of Lozada Corporation. Besides her desire to help her brother, she wants to be in the company since it will allow her to also work with Emilio Uriarte, her love interest. While all the

reasons she provides are presented within comical situations, the interview she has to face with her brother's assistant and the subsequent conversation with her brother mirror the marginalized position transgender individuals face in Argentine society. Whenever Laisa is at Lozada Corporation people laugh and create rumors about her due to her appearance. Her extravagant clothing and make up mark her as transgender and therefore incompatible with the *classic* and corporate look of the company. From the start of the interview, the assistant is quick to reject Laisa.

Cecilia: No podés venir a trabajar acá vos.

Laisa: ¿Porqué no puedo trabajar acá?

Cecilia: ¿Un título... algo que hayas estudiado?

Laisa: Bueno, yo tengo, eh... yo me recibí de corte y confección. Yo iba a un colegio industrial, maestro mayor de obras, pero no estoy recibida.

Cecilia: Yo te pido que me entiendas. Yo no sé muy bien que es lo que hacés, a lo que te dedicás... lo que sabés hacer, lo que no sabés hacer...

Laisa: ¿Qué me querés decir? Decímelo de frente.

While it may be reasonable for Cecilia to ask Laisa for credentials that would match the employee with the appropriate position, it becomes evident from Cecilia's tone and how she looks at Laisa, that Laisa does not fit the corporate profile. The confrontation forces Laisa to confess that she dropped out of high school and based on the high school attended, it is highly probable that it was an all-boys school, which would have been extremely difficult for someone questioning their sexuality and identity. Her demand for Cecilia to come out and *say it*, suggests that Laisa understood from the exchange that she had been discriminated. While Cecilia might not have discriminated against her directly, the reasons for Laisa's marginalization due to her identity, makes itself evident during the interview. Cecilia as a white heterosexual woman with access to multiple resources excludes and prevents marginalized subjectivities from participating in productive circles. Laisa's identity as a transgender woman has excluded her from acquiring the necessary tools to enter a normative and productive sphere of society due to the marginalized

status and treatment transgender individual face. On her return home, once again she has to confront the only family friend, Jorge, who continuously fails to acknowledge her as Laisa and repeatedly calls her by her birth name, Carlos. Jorge tries to console her but on his terms.

Jorge: Basta, escuchá lo que vamos a hacer. Te voy a regalar un pantalón pinzado que me compré en *Ricardo Sport*. Te compramos una chomba y te dejás de joder. Volvé a ser el Raúl que todos queremos y no te van a joder más. ¿Sabés que contento se va a poner tu viejo en el cielo?

Laisa: Vos Jorge no entendés nada. No te das cuenta. Esto es más profundo que eso.

Jorge's advice instructs Laisa to repress her identity by forcing upon her an identity that Laisa finds incompatible. Jorge simplifies Laisa's struggle as simply an issue of dressing up; as simply a difference that can be altered by one's clothing.

As the story develops and the Roldán's acquire a higher economic status, Laisa reinvents herself as a television diva, leaving aside her working class neighborhood street performances. Nevertheless, this shift from *reina* to *diva* maintains a sense of marked queerness that becomes acceptable since it is linked to a more consumer-driven and yet domestic space. Laisa hosts a small, low-budget cable daytime talk-show which begins to rival Chichita's own show, *Chichita de Casa*. Both shows are in the likes of *Mirtha Legrand*, which interpellate mostly a female viewership through lifestyle segments on fashion, gossip and beauty tips. The success of the show signals an incorporation into the productive sphere of work, although it continues to perpetuate the acceptable spaces for queer bodies such as entertainment that is linked to feminine spaces.

While here I seem to suggest the inability for media to allow queer subjectivities to present new forms of representation and inclusion, I do find that *Los Roldán* marks the beginning of a long battle. In terms of queer visibility, the success of the telenovela allowed for Florencia de la V to have a career in the entertainment industry. Her interventions on Argentinean media

have not always been linked to portraying characters the play off her identity as a transgender person. As a successful theater producer and owner, she has been able to not only finance the type of productions in which she participates, but also by the type of productions she finances for other actors. However, even though Florencia's participation on *Los Roldan* lasted occurred more than ten years prior to the start of her real talk show, the role she played in *Los Roldan* followed her throughout her career.

4.8 **Queering the Talk-Show**

On April 17, 2012 Florencia de la V became the first transgender woman to host her own talk show on Argentinean television. Once again the issue of defining the show's genre becomes difficult since, as Fabbro states, in many instances the *star* of the show plays a key role in such definition. The stable formulas that genre imposes lose their rigidity when the power of the star, in this case Florencia, molds the structure of the show. The industry has marketed the show as a *magazine* since it meshes various segments that include sketches, information, gossip, and celebrity interviews. However, as I did in the analysis of *Almorzando*, I will extend the notion of *talk-show* to include Florencia's show *La Pelu* as a talk-show due to the prevalence of discussions that arise throughout the show as a result of the host's interventions. In the following two sections I will analyze the show in relation to talk and to the queer signs on which the show operates. As a way of concluding, I will return to Mirtha Legrand in relation to Flor de la V to assess the role of stars/divas in maneuvering their position in the industry through their relation to queer signs and aesthetics.

La Pelu as television format presents a hybrid genre due to the structure of the show. The program constantly blurs the distinctions between fiction and reality as the various segments are

incorporated within the main narrative. As the title of the program suggests, the setting is a hair salon by the name of *Biuti Flor*. The show is owned by Silvina played by Silvina Luna, and the star hair stylist is Florencia, simply referred to as Flor. Alongside Flor works her sister Gladys (Gladys Fiorimonte) who helps out in the salon and serves as her sidekick. From the beginning the lines of fiction/reality are blurred through the character's name, but also through the character's role within the show. Just as Flor is the star hair-stylist, so is Flor the main host of the program. Within this fictional setting they enact various sketches that are interrupted by guest celebrities who participate within the fictional show but also talk about their current projects. There is a back and forth between the fictional story of *La Pelu* with the real conversations that take place between Flor and the guests. If one compares the narrative that *La Pelu* constructs in relation to the host, one finds striking similarities to the ideological structures found in *Los Roldán*.

In *Los Roldán* the narrative around *Laisa* centered on the tension found between the need to contain her within the safety of domesticity, and her need to participate in a public sphere without the weight of the family. The tension between domesticity linked to femininity and that of the public productive sphere is resolved in the story of Laisa's realization as a talk show diva. However, as mentioned earlier, this resolution gives the appearance of a liberation from the domestic circle. Ultimately, she is linked back to a feminized and queer space by performing her role as a talk show host that give women advice on daily routines. While the telenovela presents characters that defy heteronormativity, transgender characters are included following the logic of a heterosexist world. We find the same construction within *La Pelu*. *Flor* as a hair stylist reiterates the popular conception that trans individuals only have certain outlets of productivity; either as hair stylist, sex workers, or relegated to the *invisible* sphere of the home. Florencia's

performance in *La Pelu* conflates both the public persona of the hair stylist as a productive individual. But also, as the show is produced by a *family oriented* network and its airing during the lunch hour schedule suggests, the queer body is realigned once again to the safe space of the home. In other words the show reenacts *homodomesticity*.

The performance of *homodomesticity* occurs through the various biographical/unipersonal testimonies that the host gives about her life. Florencia's need to recur constantly to a biographical discourse stems from the *bildungsroman*. Marginalized subjectivities recur to personal biographies and personal anecdotes as a form of disrupting dominant discourses that have marginalized their existence by silencing their voice. While her unipersonal conversations about her life and inclusion within Argentinean society help to redefine who is included within the media's national imaginary, there is an imposed assimilationist discourse fomented by Florencia. Many of the monologues that she initiates relate to her being a mother of twins, a wife, but also a woman of great economic means. As we also saw in the telenovela, Flor establishes herself through her familial standing as mother/wife. However, what receives the most attention relates to her economic status that allows her to present herself as a lady of leisure that travels the world. This last detail is what allows her to construct herself as a *diva* in the likes of Mirtha Legrand. The working class connections Florencia constructed through her character in *Los Roldán* and in subsequent productions are transformed by the host's interventions. Florencia resignifies the queer body as the embodiment of refinement and glamour, even if within the limits of a familial domestic space. Within her showcase and performance of glamour and wealth there is tension that arises between class anxieties and queer subjectivities.

Florencia attempts to distance herself from the connections that have been traditionally cemented between trans individuals and poverty as a result of their marginalization within society. I find it revealing how popular television critics who attack and devalue the work Flor does on television, refer more to a reconfiguration of class status, rather than to the fact that as a trans person she lives her life as a woman with children and a husband. The biggest controversy about the show and Florencia was articulated in an interview given by Marcelo Polino, a local gossip journalist. Polino published a book, *Todo lo que sabe* (2013) where he reveals anecdotes about his professional relationships with various television personalities. His publicity tours throughout various programs always focused on criticizing Florencia for *forgetting where she really came from*. The new and glamorous Flor is no longer seen as comedic. Several hosts concurred with Polino's statements revealing that queer bodies entertain when they are linked to a working class-poor background as it helps to create comedic situations with sexist and class undertones. These critiques initiated a week long discussion airing on various programs which discussed issues relating to transgender individuals but always framed through Florencia as an example. Florencia's anatomy was constantly being discussed and questioned whether or not she had a sex change. Others kept referring to her as a man even though she had changed her sexual identity legally. *FALGBT* (*Argentinean Federation of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and trans*) intervened in these conversations. *FALGBT* released a statement which alerted the networks with possible legal sanctions if the attacks and misrepresentation of Florencia's identity did not end.

En las últimas semanas arreciaron desde diversos sectores cuestionamientos hacia Florencia enfocados especialmente en el proceso de reconocimiento de identidad de género y su reciente maternidad, violentando el principio de respeto a la identidad de género auto-percibida consagrado en la ley 26.743. Asimismo estas expresiones, exhibidas reiteradamente en numerosos programas y canales, contravienen el principio de contenidos no discriminatorios de la ley de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual.

Thanks in part to the law 26.743, commonly referred to as *Ley de género*, citizens have the legal recourse to change their sexual-gender identity without the need to have medical, sexual reassignment surgery, or psychological evaluations. Self-perceived identification is allowed through the *ley de género*. Because of the fact that her right to an identity was criticized publicly on television, FALGBT had the legal recourse to assign a media observer that would regulate the treatment and discussion of queer individuals. If there were any breaches of rights, then the media source would be sanctioned since also the new *Audiovisual and communications law* prohibits discriminatory language and actions based on sexual and gender orientation.

Florencia's reaction to the violent comments that negated her rights as a transwoman and the support she received from FALGBT were also included in *La Pelu*. On the last segment of the show she asks to speak a few words. The segment acquires a highly performative charge which leads Florencia into a personal testimony. She highlights that she lives just like any other married woman who has to raise young children. Throughout the whole testimony she refers to her condition as mother and wife. Her testimony is accompanied with soft music that gives the monologue a highly melodramatic tone. Right before the end the music stops and she proceeds to remove her makeup.

¿Saben una cosa? Me miro al espejo, y digo: '¿Vergüenza de qué?? ¿De qué? ¿De amar?'
¿De ser distinta? Por eso hoy me comprometo señora Presidenta, me comprometo a trabajar con todos los gobiernos. Porque no quiero que ningún hombre, mujer, adolescente o niño sientan lo que yo sentí. Como comunicadores tenemos un deber. Si una persona se refiere de forma discriminativa, yo en mi programa diría 'momentito'.

This particular moment is significant since it the first time Florencia acquires a political identity. She states her commitment and responsibility as a communicator to aid in demarginalizing members of society who are vulnerable. It reinstates the purpose of the media as an institution

that serves the public need and not as a site to reproduce long standing prejudices. She concludes the show by showing her newly acquired government document and states:

Mi nombre es Florencia Trinidad, señora del doctor Pablo Goycochea, madre de Paul e Isabela, mujer y argentina.

These lines are significant since they frame the whole discussion, once again by bringing it back to a *homodomestic* sphere which reiterate her identity in terms of her familial relationship as wife and mother. However, her last statement relates her identity to her nationality. Florencia conflates her gender identity not only within the confines of family life but now inscribed within the boundaries of the nation. Her queering of the talk-show through her personal narratives also turns her into an *unlikely diva*, since the media industry tends to favor a normative heterosexist identity with middle class aspirations. Florencia's connection to melodrama and status as a diva allows her to circumvent these normative values even though many of her interventions suggest a *homodomestic* model.

4.9 **Preliminary Conclusions**

One of the reasons why this section is labeled 'preliminary conclusion' has to do in part with the type of research conducted in this chapter. When working with popular culture and with real-life people such as Flor de la V and Mirtha Legrand, it is difficult to conclude and reach a definitive answer about them, since they are constantly evolving. Not only are they evolving due to the needs of their audiences, but they also react based on the social and cultural changes taking place at the time. To clarify this further, even though Mirtha Legrand has hosted basically the same show for over thirty years, the socio-political and historical context has not remained the same. Even though Mirtha's ideology has not changed, forever holding on to her conservative and right-winged comments, the context and reality of the country has changed in the thirty year

run: a dictatorial regime, the return of democracy, the triumph of the neoliberal project, and the demise of such project. Therefore one cannot read *Almorzando* the same way one did in the 1970s as one may do so now. When reading either *La Pelu* or *Almorzando*, our understanding of the show and the work conducted by audiences change and are shaped by their lived experiences and social contexts. For this reason I have tried to delimit the analysis of this chapter within the context of the passage of gay rights legislation and how different mediums and performers reacted in light of these events.

I am able to conclude that based on the specific cultural context of the nation, both Mirtha and Flor are unlikely divas, however for different reasons. In the case of Mirtha, her unlikeliness as diva is due to the contradictory feelings she elicits from her fan base. As previously stated, her fan base is made up in part by a large queer audience. At first this fact seems rather incongruent since her ideological stance, which are well known by her audiences, work against queer fans' personal claim to a more inclusive and wider conception of gender and identity. However she is still able to remain as the reigning queer diva of television due to the way audiences and fans resignify her messages within the changes occurring socially and politically. Similarly, Flor de la V is also an unlikely diva. If we follow the traditional model set-up by the first diva on Argentinean television, Mirtha Legrand, we are able to see that Flor breaks form such mold. While she may not fit within the establish mold of what a diva may mean in Argentina, fans have embraced her as such. This acceptance has come about by Flor's own managing of her public persona and her participation on various television performances, as described in the chapter. However her status as a diva is doubly complicated. Not only does she not fit within the mold of a *traditional diva*, but she also embraces a homodomestic model. Such model is not always compatible with that of a queer identity since the project of queerness is to

evade all forms of compartmentalizing that recreate hierarchies which ultimately elevates and suppresses other identities. Lastly this model of *unlikely divas* that are set up by audiences point to the role played by audiences in constructing intelligible narratives that speak to their desires and dreams via the role of the media industries. The question that still remains open is how can audiences use those narratives that they construct to start creating change that can truly transform societies. This remaining question is what gives research on queer media and popular culture its validity as a research endeavor. Here there is not an attempt to wage how people react to messages, but how do people construct messages that have the potential to change social constructs. Ultimately the goal is to see what models one can use to make society truly pluralistic and inclusive of all forms of diversity.

5. CONCLUSION

This dissertation has given me the opportunity to construct a model from which to read popular cultural productions by considering the role of queer audiences, in light of dominant discourses found in formulaic content. In part, the undertaking of this dissertation has served among other things, to consider the potentiality of queerness in reading cultural production in Argentina and Brazil. As I have shown, while there are still active debates which highlight the positive and the negative consequences of applying a *foreign* term to describe Latin American media content, I still adhere to the discursive powers of queerness. I find that the term regardless of its socio-historical, political, and linguistic specificity, has the capacity to transform society. Since the whole project behind queering society is to reject the *regimes of the normal*, this discursive tool serves to construct a more inclusive society. This inclusion is not carried out simply by granting rights to some and limiting it for those who have not yet organized. Instead, queering society operates by highlighting and doing away with those mechanisms that continue to perpetuate inequality.

Specifically, the model employed here requires broaching media content by considering the multiple parallel texts that circulate and compete for signification by its consumers. By competing texts I made reference to materials that have been seen as corollaries or as byproducts of the industry, when in reality audiences use them as if they were part of the main text. As I have shown, fan reviews, star interviews, and print media are read in conjunction and or against the television shows or films being consumed by audiences. This way of reading media allows audiences to resignify content based on their interest and desires, rather than by solely subscribing to the ideological content offered by the industry. The three main case-studies

analyzed here, not only focus on the performers described as divas by their fans, but I have also contextualized each case-study by considering the social, political, and historical backdrop of said content.

While I have found this model to be productive in giving voice to audiences, which are normally subsumed to the margins whether due to socio economic class, as shown in the chapter on La Pícaro, or ignored based on the gendered identity, as in the case of Miss Tacuarembó, there are some limitations that were not addressed in this dissertation. One of the main issues responds to the potentiality of audiences as active creators of meaning. I find that I have provided sufficient examples of how audiences are able to resignify messages and insert themselves within various narratives that have traditionally excluded them. However, as researchers we need to address whether this inclusion or recognition of audiences translates to any tangible social and or political victories for marginalized minorities. I do narrate how in the case of Florencia de la V, the constant attacks she was receiving made her take a political stand by getting involved and using her power in the media to push for her rights. However it is still too soon to tell whether her personal involvement has had any effect. It is for this reason that I have tried to contextualize all of my case studies within their respective historical and political backgrounds, as a way to show how media, audiences, and social changes dialogue, interact and transform each other. Yet this reflection between audiences, media and society does not imply that there is necessarily greater acceptance of minorities, but simply more dialogue. Still, this is a radical change from other media models which have presented a much more unidirectional approach, whereby media made no attempt to consider *marginalized* audiences. The one-directional approach served the needs of an industry while considering the imperatives of economic and political elites that allowed for media's growth and maintenance. By including

models that show the potential audiences have in starting to break from that one-directional approach, it signals a step forward in providing a different relational approach that involves all players. However we need to now wage how such models can be used for tangible changes that go beyond the symbolic and discursive realm in media.

Ultimately what I am advocating after having completed this project is a queer model for reading cultural content that can transcend the limits of academic discourse, with the ultimate goal of creating spaces for dialogue between the academy, the cultural sphere, and society at large. In fact this goal is well aligned with the notion of queerness as a tool of dissent as it has been deployed in Latin America. As I have highlighted in the debates around the adoption of the term queer and in its potential for change, some Latin American scholars adopted the term since they were able to see its power to transform society. However they point out, as I also suggest here, that the term queer as a tool can only work if researchers take a different approach to their academic agenda. In other words, scholars must interconnect with spaces outside of academia, in order for real change to occur.

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