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Infectious repetition-differentiation in an on-line debate on sexualities: Textual friction, scale shifts and resemiotization potential

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Infectious repetition-differentiation in an on-line debate on sexualities: Textual friction, scale shifts and resemiotization potential[1]

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Abstract

In 2014, Globo TV - the leading Brazilian TV network - aired a soap-opera featuring a lesbian couple whose relationship ended up taking center stage, shifting from its initial focus on a love affair involving straight people. After being initially rejected by the audience, the show gradually gained popularity, triggering both backlash and support concerning same-sex marriage and alternative family bonds. Part of that debate took place in digital environments (social networks, blogs and websites), and in this paper I approach one such context: the comments section of an online newspaper where participants respond to a brief article on the two female characters and the allegedly widespread rejection of their love story. Concentrating on this online interaction, I analyse the pragmatics of iterability and probe the tension between the possibilities for repetition and renewal, taking repetition and difference as intertwined domains. Both theoretically and methodologically, I draw on contemporary studies in the field of sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology and to the so-called philosophy of difference (Deleuze 1994), and I map communicable cartographies (Briggs 2005) by (i) tracing part of the Discourses that precipitate and spread infectiously through this online environment; (ii) by investigating how they interpellate interlocutors and locate them in the sociocultural world; and (iii) by keeping an eye on the interconnection between textual friction, scale shifts and resemiotization (Blommaert 2005, 2007), processes which interlaced vertical / asymmetrical scalar values and more horizontal, and nuanced, perspectives. Scrutinizing audiences' uptake, the study sheds light on oscillating movements around meanings attributed to sexuality - from normalization toward transformation – and it shows that communicable cartographies can be resisted, alternative meanings explored, and cemented plots re-imagined.

1. Semiotic mobility on the web

In 2014, Globo TV – the leading Brazilian TV network – aired *Em família*, a primetime *telenovela* (soap-opera) whose opening plot dealt with varied interwoven storylines on family drama, adultery, and love triangles, developed along mainstream heteronormative premises. In later episodes, however, the show started featuring the relationship between Clara, a simple bored married straight young woman, mother to an eight-year old boy, and Marina, a sensual successful lesbian photographer. The initial flirtation matured into a full blown love affair, leading Clara to disclose the infatuation to her family (parents, sisters, loving husband and son).

The madly-in-love couple ended up taking center stage, a scheme which, in a country anchored in Catholic tradition such as Brazil, gave rise to a lot of controversy and heated responses, triggering both backlash and support concerning alternative family bonds. Some fans reacted not only against same-sex pairing but also against the destruction of a "happy" family. Conversely, according to a whole lot of others, gay love was legitimate and the characters had the right to live it to the fullest. Moreover, they demanded that the sexual innuendo between the two women be portrayed as

[1] I am grateful to Luiz Paulo Moita-Lopes and Daniel N. Silva for their insightful comments on a first version of this paper.

explicitly as the intimate scenes involving the straight couples in the show. So as Marina and Clara's relationship deepened and turned out to be quite steamy, many fans rooted for their bonding while others sided against it. Amidst these contrasting stances, a special concern gained ground: would a kiss between the two women be aired on a primetime program at a Brazilian television network? This question sparked all sorts of speculation and dispute among the audience.

A great part of that contention took place in digital environments (social networks, blogs, websites and the like), and it produced Clara/Marina (Clarina) shippers[2] and texts which proliferated on the web. The hashtag #clarina, different fanfics in Portuguese and English (*All of me*, *Clarina day by day* etc.), and the virtual campaign *Globo makes Clarina happen* are just some of the examples of how the lesbian narrative became a viral phenomenon, following transnational trajectories. This is characteristic of the intense transit of semiotic artifacts which marks contemporary communicative landscapes. As semioticized commodities (Agha 2011; Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999), everything in the production and consumption of cycles of discourse moves at unprecedented speed – ideas, texts, images, discourses, knowledges, and identities. Propelled by the development of not only Web2.0 technologies but also media contexts in general (digital, televisual, and print), this escalating process intensifies the identity-alterity dialectics, increases the tension between known and alien meaning repertoires and, as a corollary, enhances performances of surveillance and the protection of perceived identity borders. Although violent language games are a very well-known outcome of this kind of attrition, very often leading to physical violence[3], they may, conversely, result in subverting conventional familiarities and/or shaking normalizing apparatuses (Butler 2004; Puar 2005; Lima 2014; Lewis *et al.* 2014; Moita-Lopes 2015) – as illustrated by the *Clarina* event.

In previous work I delved into repetition-transformation activities concerned with the negotiation of gendered cultural identities on the internet (Fabrício 2014, 2015). In this paper I shall explore the reification-dismantling of the heterosexual matrix in cyberspace, concentrating on the comments section of the digital version of a popular Brazilian newspaper, in which participants discuss the love affair between Clara and Marina. Addressing their online interaction, I examine how both replication and reorganization of heteronormativity coexist in that environment. In so doing, I observe the pragmatics of iterability and probe the tension between repetition and renewal possibilities, proposing to take repetition-difference as an inseparable pair. Theoretically and methodologically, I draw on contemporary studies in the field of sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology and to the so-called philosophy of difference (Deleuze 1994), to map communicable cartographies (Briggs 2005) by (i) tracing part of the Discourses that precipitate and spread infectiously on this Internet site; (ii) investigating how interlocutors get interpellated by them and are located in the sociocultural world; and (iii) keeping an eye on the interconnection between textual friction, scale jumps and resemiotization (Blommaert 2005, 2007), a process which interlaces vertical / asymmetrical scalar values and more horizontal / symmetrical, perspectives. With this

[2] According to the Urban Dictionary, the term "shipper" "comes from supporting a relationship. To ship something means a person wants two characters to get together and/or shows support for two characters already together." Fans who believe two characters should be together (from books, movies, television, video games, and even actors/actresses) call themselves shippers.
<http://pt.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Shipper>

[3] A quick glance at international events in the beginning of 2015 sets a gloomy scenario. The Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris, Boko Haram massacre in Nigerian city of Maiduguri, and the intensification of Islamophobia, xenophobia, and of the Western "War on terror" are examples of reciprocal acts of racism and extreme violence in a rapidly changing world.

framework, I scrutinize textual mobility and its potential for the reinvention-of-tradition.

2. Textual circulation and the logic of difference

Meanings and their textual life are not static. They are always in motion, and are the outcome of their circulation and trajectories across different layers of social life – temporal, spatial, situational, institutional etc. Moreover, they emerge out of intense processes of reflexivity – human beings' unique capacity, upon establishing social relations, to engage simultaneously in both pragmatic and metapragmatic communicative activity (Agha 2007). Individuals, in their semiotic relationship with physical, intersubjective and social surrounds, place all kinds of signs – linguistic, gestural, imagistic etc. – in the world, while also indicating how they are to be interpreted. So for example, on the one hand, they intermingle ways of talking, looking, moving and gesticulating; they coordinate other people, gadgets, times, places, social voices and beliefs; they make use of specific facial expressions, pieces of clothing, accessories, and so on. On the other, they imbue these diverse *object-signs* with symbolic values that index normative codes, social types and standardized practices (Agha 2007:23) – that have to be rendered "recognizable to others (and ourselves)" (Gee 1999/2005:23).

It is the co-occurrence of such signs that leads authors like James Paul Gee (1999/2005) to employ the term Discourse (with a capital "D") to refer to all socially situated semiotic activity as language interlaced with "other stuff" – ways of

> "combining and integrating language actions, interactions, ways of thinking, believing, valuing, and using various symbols, tools and objects to enact a particular sort of socially recognizable identity" (p.21).

By the same token, Blommaert (2005:207) conceives of identities as a semiotic potential, i.e. particular sign configurations organized in specific repertoires. A few observations on the construction of the homosexual couple in *Em família* may help delineate such approach a little further.

Clara and Marina amalgamate a series of signs related to race, gender, class, beauty patterns and bodily regimes. Both are white, educated, upper-middle class, "feminine", slim, and fit. In addition, they dress smartly and circulate (and act) in trendy spaces and social events – restaurants, parties, art galleries, fashion shows and so on – associated with sophistication, glamour and faddism. Resources such as music, food, drinks, clothing and hair style, and technical elements such as framing, angle, illumination and the like (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996) contribute to the projection of a voguish atmosphere, produced by an indexical complex that can be easily identified by the target audience.[4] Metapragmatically, these semiotic choices attend to contemporary gay and lesbian movements, and (trans)national political Discourses and public policies on sexual rights.[5] Pragmatically, however, they find a way of harmonizing indisciplined

[4] As one of the largest media companies in Brazil, and in the world, RedeGlobo (Globo Network) and its broadcast programs have the capacity to cover almost all the Brazilian territory, reaching a high percentage of the country's population. In the case of the telenovelas – one of its most popular products – the number of potential viewers escalates, including people of very different social backgrounds.

[5] In Brazil, consider, for instance, the Estatuto da diversidade sexual (Charter for sexual diversity), elaborated in 2011 by the Comissão Especial da Diversidade Sexual (Special committee for sexual diversity); and the 1ª Conferência Nacional LGBT – Direitos Humanos e Políticas Públicas (the first national LGBT conference in Brazil) in 2008, which demanded new relations between the state and other

corporeal practices and heteronormative ideologies that replicate narrow understandings of race, class, gender and sexuality – a phenomenon captured by one of the posts in the focused online forum:

> **Comment (a): Cassandra**
> Para a situaçao ficar aceitável colocam duas mulheres bonitas, queria ver se colocassem uma mulher feia de cabelo curto,calçando um tênis masculino,com uma bermuda caindo,se teria alguma torcida.Para esta situaçao parecer normal dentro dos nossos lares colocam um pouco de beleza.Mas no meu lar nao. tenho um controle nas mãos para mudar de canal na hora desta palhaçada!
> *To make it more palatable they choose two babes, I'd sure like to see the reaction if instead they chose some ugly woman with cropped hair, wearing a pair of men's sneakers andsome loose-fitting, low-waisted destroyed cutt-offs, if they'd get much support. So the situation can generate more acceptance they add a little glamour. But not at my place. I've got the remote in hand precisely to change channels when this crap comes on.*

One could thus argue – after Duggan (2002) and Puar (2007; 2013) – that alternative sexualities and body practices fall prey to a kind of homonormativity, regimenting what it means to be "properly homo" and thus "othering" non-white, poor, stout, unfashionable corporealities within the LGBTTQs culture. So what the above post seems to confirm is the idea that transgression is tamed by liberal gay rights Discourses while preserving a traditional and hierarchical moral order. Valorizing and stratifying strategies of this kind can be associated with the notion of *scale*. I tackle this issue for a moment below.

Blommaert (2007, 2006) employs the term 'scale' (taken from the field of social geography) to allude to the fact that social events evolve amidst different scale-levels that run from the strictly local (region, neighborhood, home and family, for example) to the more macro domain (State, country, the media, religion etc.) with several intermediary layers. To this spatial image of horizontal spread, the concept of *scales* adds the idea of verticality, suggesting that "processes of distribution and flow are accompanied by processes of hierarchical ordering" (2007:1). In addition to this view of power-invested spaces implied by the concept of stratification, the scale metaphor approaches time and space as deeply connected dimensions, so that every instance of interaction would have all at once a one-time, unique and trans-temporal quality, condensing and anchoring historical time in a specific site and moment. This enmeshed dimension TimeSpace is objectified in everyday communication through semiotization processes which are reflexive in nature: our daily interactional encounters and the TimeSpace moves that they entail indexically point to the social order, to different centers of authority, patterns and valorizing systems (i.e. Discourses) that interlocutors are attending to. The following interaction, extracted from my data, provides a compelling example.

When the *Em família* soap opera is recontextulized in an online opinion article (to which I will turn later), it generates the following exchange in the comments section:

> **Comment (b): Berta** [6]
> Nossa que coisa mais ridícula, a mulher larga o marido pra ficar com a outra mulher e ainda quer que o filho pequeno aceite essa relação (...)
> *How ludicrous, the woman leaves her husband for another woman and above all wants her young kid to accept it (...)*

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areas of social life, going beyond the health system – education, culture, entertainment and human rights in general.

[6] All nicknames have been altered to preserve participants' anonymity.

Comment (c): ROY
Definição de família. ("Homem e Mulher e Filhos"). O resto é gambiarra.
Definition of family. (" Husband and Wife and Children "). All the rest is patch up job.

The interactant in the first comment positions herself emphatically against the program's narrative plot, orienting to the situation at hand – the televisual event in focus, four specific characters, and the social roles they play (wife, husband, lover and son). The sign she employs to qualify the experience – *ludicrous* – indexes the heterocentric parameters guiding her critical performance. Roy, on the other hand, operates a scale-jump, moving from the here-and-now of the show to a wider, more general sphere. He does so by calling forth a stereotypical definition of family which he presents between quotation marks as if citing from a source of "authority" – a dictionary, or perhaps the Bible. This move indexicalizes a "superior" epistemological status, so to speak, projecting marked asymmetry between Roy's contribution and Berta's. Moreover, he capitalizes the nouns (*Husband*, *Wife* and *Children*), ascribing them universal values. These actions operate in two different ways: as well as shifting the conversation from individual stances to powerful taken-for-granted centers of credibility, they make explicit the higher position that the concept of traditional family occupies in the invoked TimeSpace scale. "All the rest" – a sign that excludes and disallows other possible meanings – is repudiated as sheer "patch up job".

This brief exchange illustrates people and texts moving in social spaces through a continuum of layered horizontal-vertical sites which engage them unceasingly in power relations crossed by scale-alterations – scaling, rescaling, out-scaling, and so on. Individuals and their semiotic production are ranked according to prevailing norms and valorizing systems, which as well as varying from context to context, pursue pluridirectional paths. The more multiple their itinerary, the more shifts and consequently the more textual attrition they trigger.

So the framework sketched above characterizes reflexivity and metasemiotic activity in general as a central facet of meaning-making. The everyday local enactment of identity-difference performances is entangled with wider frames of reference, i.e. perduring formations such as social structure, norms, patterns, culture, power, and ideologies, configuring a relationship that may support, challenge or transform social organization. Put differently, the perceivable world we inhabit comes into existence through semiotic displays that entextualize sociohistorical canons and circulating Discourses which we adapt – with different levels of awareness, or no awareness at all – to specific interactional moments.

Such an understanding of (meta)semioses may well characterize Discourse as a Foucauldian apparatus (Foucault 1980), as Agamben (2009:14) does in his expansion of the concept:

> "I shall call an apparatus literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings. Not only, therefore, prisons, madhouses, the panopticon, schools, confession, factories, disciplines, judicial measures, and so forth (whose connection with power is in a certain sense evident), but also the pen, writing, literature, philosophy, agriculture, cigarettes, navigation, computers, cellular telephones and – why not – language itself, which is perhaps the most ancient of apparatuses…"

If one accompanies the authors discussed in this paper in their perception that Discourse practices and their complexly interwoven elements produce dynamic semantic chains – in spite of their regimentation by wider systems of knowledge – one can invest not only in the identification of apparatuses but also – and more importantly – in the pursuit of new ways to disassemble their apparent inertia. I believe that theoretical concepts such as *communicability* (Briggs 2007a, 2007b) and *repetition* (Deleuze 1968/2004) may provide a step forward in the understanding of how the dialectical transaction between discursive and metadiscursive features of communication may rearrange durable constructions.

2.1. *Communicability and repetition*

Under the rubric of fields of communicability, Charles Briggs sheds light on three aspects of the fast contemporary circulation of signs, texts and ideologies. Firstly, communicability refers to the way texts themselves project "their own point of origin, modes of circulation, intended audiences, and modes of reception" (Briggs 2007a:556). In the itinerary across different locales, social realms, scales, and genres that they imagine, texts find audiences and along the way, put forward communicable cartographies that, doing boundary work (Briggs 2005), interpellate interlocutors into inhabiting particular sociocultural constructions and positions. Sign users, in turn, may accept, doubt, refuse or challenge the suggested semantic design and projected territory. Secondly, communicable maps are contagious and, like microbes and viruses, have the capacity to disseminate, metapragmatically conceiving of communication as a linear path between two fixed points – as the Saussurean "speaking circuit" (Saussure 1959/1916:11) might suggest. Nevertheless, from a pragmatic point of view, epidemic spreading is necessarily unpredictable and more rhizomatic in nature. Thirdly, such multidirectional movement does not happen in scale-free social fields. Rather, communication takes place amidst tensions, struggles, friction and chance, being not so much a matter of mere transmission of thoughts, ideas or messages but rather a complex process of creation-in-transformation.

Those familiar with digital media domains and with the propagation of the viral phenomena they promote may have a good grasp of Brigg's virality metaphor. Furthermore, if one associates the latter with Clough and Puar's discussion of virtual text infections and the interplay between repetition and change that they entail, the implicit comparison becomes even more tangible. According to the Clough and Puar (2012:14),

> "the viral is transformative; it has an open-ended relation to form itself. In this sense, the viral takes on characteristics, albeit selectively, which usually are attributed to the virus. At play is the virus's ability to change itself as it replicates and disseminates (…) In its replications, the virus does not remain the same, nor does that which it confronts and transits through. Viral replication swerves from the performative 'repetition with a difference'; it is replication without reproduction, without fidelity, without durability. It is this generative differentiation that is repeated. It is the repetition that *is* the difference …"

This Deleuzian-inspired delineation makes it possible to think of texts as continuously folding, unfolding, refolding over themselves, producing complexes of 'repetition' that keep reshaping meanings. The essentialist opposition between identity

and difference is thus called into question. Both would be sense-making operations exercised over a field that Deleuze (1968/2004) refers to as the domain of "indifference" (p. 36) – a space of complete indeterminacy and nothingness upon which semiosis imposes itself, capturing in meaning a state which is in fact an "undifferentiated abyss". In such amorphous and swampy scenery, difference is individuating; it is a productive force, drawing boundaries and projecting infinite and repetitive specifications (Hughes 2009). This process produces incessant discriminations, classifications, determinations and over-determinations by way of a limited repertoire of representational strategies, among which identity occupies a central role – the others being analogy, opposition and resemblance. Identity is hence produced through processes of differentiation, the former having no privilege over the latter (Deleuze 1968/2004) – a proposition which overturns long-standing assumptions concerning the logic of difference.

What are perceived as fixed identities would thus be forged differentiations which keep returning as "the same" – ignorant of the very representational transactions occurring in an open, limitless and imprecise space; unknowing of the recurrence of difference; and unaware of the repetition-difference dialectics. What "reappears" as a "clearly-defined" sociocultural entity, or as a "bounded" identity, is not identity but historically-produced difference – perhaps a strategy to deal with the sense of vulnerability that fluidity and imprecision may occasion. No wonder, therefore, that the philosopher qualifies the identity procedure as a "poor recipe for producing monsters", i.e. imagined overarching organisms which maintain a "unilateral and precise relation to the indeterminate" (Deleuze, 1968/2004:37). 'Identity monsters/beasts' make distinctions, delineate their contours and perfect them through repetition, hence rendering them livable and perceivable as "harmonious" concepts, against which all difference is measured. But the etching and crafting practices that brought them into existence are forgotten, and they tend to be experienced as having been always there, in identifiable social realms. In a Derridean vein, we can say that, pragmatically, the iteration (i.e. repetition) of semiotic resources across multiple sites, temporalities and scales of social life produces both identity stabilization – some level of fixity being operational on a daily basis – and difference. Iterability retrieves and repeats available signs and simultaneously reconstructs them anew (Derrida 1977). And meanings emerge out of this particular mode of circulation.

To address this complex movement – which tends to gain more and more scalar contours on virtual landscapes as people (re)blog, (re)tweet, (re)post, (re)tumblr all kinds of semiotic artifacts – one has to move, Agha (2005) suggests, from a concern with bounded communicative events and, I would add, with the production of "clear-cut" differences, to a concern with semiosiss across encounters, placing Discourse practices within an ample sociohistorical framework. Going beyond the here-and-now of communication brings one into the nomadic realm of meaning-making, in which differentiating acts are maneuvers to cope with indeterminacy.

In what follows I will try to elucidate these arguments, by operationalizing them as analytic lenses. I will look in detail at how repetition-difference occurs on an Internet article commenting on the Clarina love affair.

3. Textual friction, scale jumps and resemiotization potential

Discussions involving the Clarina phenomenon occurred in many different digital sites and generated a profusion of texts whose trajectories I tried to follow as a

methodological strategy to investigate sign circulation, repetition and differentiation. In this pursuit I have tracked different paths, many of which integrate a large corpus, generated through different techniques (print screen and video recordings, for example). Here I would like to consider a specific destination: the website of a wide-circulating Brazilian daily newspaper – *Extra online*. I will refer to the cultural section of the publication – titled *Telinha* (roughly translated as 'Small Screen') – which includes information on TV celebrities and on-screen programs, soap-operas, sitcoms, variety shows and, according to its editorial, "everything that happens on stage and behind TV cameras".[7] All-encompassing formulations of this kind help us to delineate the profile that publication projects.[8]

It positions itself as being committed to "knowing, producing knowledge and informing" and to "report[ing] on facts, analyz[ing] them, provid[ing] opinion, consciously trying, as far as possible, to be free of any kind of bias". These actions would characterize good journalism, good quality, and social responsibility. Although the editorial acknowledges the impossibility of "100% impartiality", by adopting a "pluralistic approach" it tries, to provide different angles and viewpoints on facts, not favoring specific opinions, themes or events. "There cannot be taboo issues. Everything that is in the public interest should be published, analyzed and discussed", it goes on, always discriminating fact from opinion, in a "transparent" way. The alleged target readership includes "people with all levels of instruction" and leads to the employment of "clear language about issues that interest all".

Stances of this kind – which indicate communicability at play – justify the inclusion of taboo topics such as sexuality and new family formations on the website's agenda, as well as the avoidance of "all forms of prejudice"; by the same token it contemplates direct communication with the audience by providing interactional spaces to "listen" to readers – the comments section in *Telinha* being one such space. These brief guidelines suggest a communicable cartography which seems to orient towards the idea of a smooth linear flow between the newspaper, "good quality" information (i.e., clear, transparent and correct), and the public.

It is within this communicable map that, on June 3 2014,[9] Carla Bittencourt, the journalist in charge of *Telinha*, posted an opinion article whose main headline read "'*Em Familia*' [In the Family]: Clara and Marina start going out together but haven't yet kissed". The direct reference to the soap opera show was framed by an image of the two characters, in which Marina kisses Clara on the cheek. Right below, the first lines of the report announced: "The public reaction to the couple Clara and Marina couldn't be worse, so much so, that Manoel Carlos [the author] was never given the green light to write up the scene of the soap in which they finally kiss." By shaping the entertainment product into journalistic discourse in this way, the columnist constructs a tabloid frame, projecting a communicable cartography which positions the public in agreement with the alleged public repudiation, thus mapping, in a linear fashion, the text's itinerary in a specific TimeSpace domain, its sensationalist circulation, and readers' responses to it.

The post generates 377 comments, promoting iteration, recirculation and resignification of signs indexing gender, sexuality and family traditions. By and large, contributors divide themselves into two opposing poles, either resisting or accepting the projected subject positions on the communicable map. Others take an intermediate

[7] The editorial can be accessed at < http://extra.globo.com/principios-editoriais/.>
[8] *Extra online* is linked to Globo network.
[9] The news report can be accessed at < http://extra.globo.com/tv-e-lazer/telinha/em-familia-clara-marina-comecam-namorar-mas-sem-beijo-12692082.html?exibirFormulario=true>

stand. It is noteworthy, however, that a significant number of posts (177 to be more precise) question the epistemic value of the news with statements like the following:

> **Comment (d): Luiz**
> QUEM DISSE QUE HÁ REJEIÇÃO DO PÚBLICO? PORQUE VOCÊS INSISTEM NISSO, SE A GRANDE TORCIDA É POR CLARINA.
> *WHO SAYS THE PUBLIC REJECTS THEM? WHY DO YOU INSIST IN SUCH A POSITION, IF PEOPLE ARE ROOTING FOR CLARINA.*

Besides displaying emphatic approval (signaled by the use of capital letters) of the relationship between the two women and challenging the text's preferred reading, several other interlocutors (like Lucia below) enact critical performances regarding an enduring sociocultural taboo, questioning comments whose content indexes prejudice, intolerance and homophobia:

> **Comment (e): Lucia**
> "Os loucos, às vezes, se curam. Os imbecis, nunca." (Oscar Wilde)
> *"The insane are sometimes known to recover.The foolish, are never."* (Oscar Wilde)

By posting an ironic quote attributed to the famous writer Oscar Wilde, Lucia promotes an interesting scale shift. She positions any dogmatic contributions and their authors within a specific group, "the foolish", a sign indexing narrow-mindedness and ignorance. This generalization, encompassing society at large, constructs bigotry as an incurable disease, even worse than madness, the long-standing prototype of social deviance, according to Foucault (1961/2009). The differentiation-producing grading system operates perhaps on a diagonal scale, as it constructs verticality in an oblique way. In rejecting all sorts of insulting remarks found in the encounter on *Telinha*, it juxtaposes vertical and horizontal layers, calling for more symmetrical social positions to the detriment of hateful ones. Comment [f] below is but one example out of the 86 contributions which perform the injurious acts against which Lucia seems to be reacting:

> **Comment (f): Maria Brito**
> Esses autores deveriam pensar que existem milhares de pessoas que não são gays e que não gostam dessa exposição exagerada desses casais em novelas, querem enfiar goela abaixo do telespectador essa COISA, não deixo minhas filhas assistirem.
> *Writers should keep in mind that there are millions of people out there who aren't gay and who don't approve of this overt exhibitionism of couples such as these in soaps, they want to force-feed us this THING, I won't let my daughters watch it.*

Such stances are extremely violent and destructive in that they index a bodily ontology – an expression I borrow from Butler (2009:2) – which discriminates 'livable lives' and bodies that matter against precarious and dehumanized ones, not worth living. The deictic resources "that THING", besides indicating the ranking system at play, give visibility to how the apparatus of language and the apparatus of sexuality (Foucault 1980) lock together, and capture people's actions, reactions and perceptions in their ordinary practices and minute activities. Here, repetition-difference works according to the thoughtlessness of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1991). Usual stratification and orienting power centers seem to stand on a 'petrified' ground, upon which any differentiation move seems to be impossible as calcified distinctions keep "re-appearing". Observe how the identity, analogy, opposition and resemblance strategies work in full blast.

Comment (g): CANDY
Nada a ver essas duas. Papeis ridículos de uma novela mais ridícula ainda. Todas as lésbicas que conheço, tem uma certa masculinidade. Essas duas não convencem. Isso não é homossexualismo, é pouca vergonha mesmo.
These two are a joke. Two characters that are a joke in a soap that's even more of a joke. All the lesbians I know, have a certain macho-quality. These two are way off. That's not homosexuality, it's sexual immorality.

Comment (h): Keyla
Para CANDY e outros com a mesma opinião. Quer dizer que se a mulher gay não é masculina é pouca vergonha? Independente de novela, rotular como a pessoa deve ser ou se vestir por ser gay é preconceito. Sou lésbica, não sou 'masculina" e minha namorada também não! (...)
For CANDY and others of the same opinion. So in your opinion if a gay woman is not macho-like then it's sexual immorality? Leaving the soap aside for a moment, labeling how a person should be or should dress is simply prejudice. I'm a lesbian, I'm not "macho" and neither is my girlfriend! (...)

Comment (i): ROY
Podem espernear, gritar, tiras as calças pela cabeça, mas não adianta, falar que é homofobia, preconceito, ignorante.Não é normal.Claro que a vida é deles, a minha é a minha e eu afirmo não é normal.
You can fretand fuss all you want, scream your head off, it's no use, call it homophobia, prejudice, ignorance. It isn't normal. Sure it's none of my business, it's their life, my life is my own and I say it isn't normal.

The social category 'lesbian', the resemblance 'macho-like', the implicit regimenting analogy between lesbians and men, and oppositions such as true/fake lesbians, macho/feminine, heterosexuality/homosexuality, morality/immorality and "their/my life" keep iterating an order of submission and subordination, in a repetitive web whose articulation is difficult to be broken. CANDY's assertive performance, signaled by moral judgments (such as "*a joke*" and "*it's sexual immorality*") and by all-encompassing propositions (as in "*All the lesbians I know*" and "*These two are way off*") index powerful essentialist discourses wich recycle the language and sexuality apparatuses. The latter, the driving force of governmentality, administers and regulates living beings, but without ever completely dominating them as Keyla's stance illustrates. Her contribution, "*I'm a lesbian, I'm not 'macho' and neither is my girlfriend!*", projects an alternative conceptual game which, in escaping the traditional semantic chain at play, produces some kind of differentiation – and a more flexible one – in apparently solidified identities. Its meaning-potential is, nevertheless, undermined in the face of an infelicitous perlocution. Roy, in a move similar to a previous performance (cf. statement [c] above), once again invokes "normalcy" as the familiar anchor to pin drifting meanings down in 'firm' soil (comment [i]).

The terrain is vibrant, though, and if we examine other contributions, we are able to detect incessant sign recontextualizations, resemiotizations and differences that produce intermediary and transgressive positions, as the transit between scales follows unexpected tracks. All in all, they resist the communicable map projected by the online article whilst envisaging other possible routes. In alternative paths, horizontality may prevail over, or run parallel to, verticality, constructing more nuanced scalar effects. Due to the limited scope of this paper I will concentrate on only one emblematic instance.

Observe comments (j)-(p):

Comment (j): Daniela
Sabe o que vc faz com a sua filha? Educa! Explique pra ela que existe outras formas de amor, sem ser o heterossexual. Que pessoas do mesmo sexo podem sim se amar e não tem nada de errado nisso. Que caráter é muito mais importante que orientação sexual.
You know what you do with your daughter? Teach her! Explain to her that there are other kinds of relationships besides heterosexual ones. That people of the same sex can indeed fall in love and there's nothing wrong with that. That reputation is much more important than sexual orientation.

Comment (k): Clara
A Globo agora em toda novela é falando o homossexualismo Deus me livre, quer forçar a gente a aceitar pouca vergonha até nojo.
Globo network nowadays every soap is always plugging homosexuality Lord almighty, they wanna make us accept this indecency [makes me] wanna puke.

Comment (l): full-of-it
Antes de fazer qualquer comentário envolvendo o nome de Deus, as pessoas deveriam primeiro ler a Bíblia! Deus deu o livre arbítrio a todos. Se homo sexualismo é errado segundo as Sagradas Escrituras, cabe a ele julgar, e só a ele!
Rather than make comments in the name of God, people ought to read the Bible first! God gave everyone free-will. If homo sexuality is wrong according to the Holy Scriptures, it's up to him, and to him only, to judge!

Comment (m): Madalena
Pros ignorantez de plantao: relaçao homoafetiva é parte do conceito de familia, conforme decidido pelo STF com efeito vinculante ha 2 anos atras. Nao gostou? Corre pra igreja mais proxima e paga o dizimo! E nao desconte a sua falta de sexo criticando Clarina, pq isso é recalque puro!
In case the dumb trollz haven't heard: homoerotic relationships are categorized as family as determined by the Supreme Court's binding resolution 2 years ago. Have a problem with that? Run to your nearest congregation and pay the tithe! And don't take it out on Clarina for your pathetic love life coz that's a major hang-up!

Comment (n): Lia
Parem de usar o nome de Deus pra justificar o que é certo e errado. Ele ama a todos por igual, independente das nossas escolhas. Tem tanta guerra acontecendo, pessoas passando fome e morrendo, crianças morrendo que eu dúvido que Ele está preocupado com a opção sexual de cada um. Se situem.
Stop using God's name to justify what's right or wrong . He loves us all equally, in spite of our choices. There are so many wars going on, people starving and dying of hunger, children dying that I doubt He is worried about people's sexual preferences. Get a hold of yourselves.

Comment (o): Pedro Castro
Minha preocupação agora é com a Heterofobia. O mesmo respeito que vcs gays querem os heteros também querem. Afinal somos de uma geração - de bem pouco tempo atrás, diga-se de passagem - de que homossexualismo era feio e nojento. OK OK OK agora não é mais ?!? Paciência para a desconstrução de ANOS de crenças. Dentro desse contexto, quem está sendo preconceituoso com quem? TENHAM PACIÊNCIA GAY E LÉSBICAS - Crenças não se destrói da noite para o dia, mesmo que se queira.
What worries me nowadays is Heterophobia. The same respect you gays demand we heteros also demand. After all we're part of a generation that – from not so long ago if you don't mind my saying – thought that homosexuality was ugly and disgusting.. OK OK OK now it's no longer ?!? A little patience with tearing down YEARS of social values. In this context context who is discriminating who? GIVE ME A BREAK GAYS AND LESBOS - beliefs don't change overnight, even if you want it.

Comment (p): Kátia
(...) Podemos e devemos viver respeitando as diferenças, porém, neste assunto, o melhor aliado é o tempo (...)
(...) *We're willing and able to live together respecting differences, however, regarding this topic, you gotta give it time* (...)

Upon reconstructing the gay storyline, many participants show no complicity with dominant formations. Daniela's comment in (j), which addresses a previous remark produced by Maria Brito in (f), disprivileges binary oppositions such as man/woman and homo/hetero and, defying the vertical axis of normative sexuality, challenges her interlocutor to change her daughter's conservative mindset through education. One could argue that she strategically repeats elements of the family apparatus, adapting them to surrounding co-texts and using them in reverse. When she brings in a sign (*reputation*) that is highly-valued in the traditional moral order, she seems to be disengaging from repressive power and putting it at the service of more symmetrical relations – a move that 'makes a difference' in the sense that it counterattacks moral normativity on the same discourse ground, thus highlighting its contradictory logic. This reversal strategy is even more compelling in the following exchange involving Clara, full-of-it, Madalena and Lia.

In (k), Clara invokes the authority of "*Lord almighty*" – a scale-shift operated by many other participants – downgrading homosexuality with signs that index ideas of subalternity, inferiority, sin and abnormality. Contrariwise, full-of-it (l), Madalena (m) and Lia (n) employ the same biblical and religious repertoire, but add new authority centers, invoking the Holy Scriptures, a legal register (as, for example, in the reference to the *Supreme Court's binding resolution*) and human-rights discourses. Such elements index a different apparatus and achieve alternative scalar effects as they enhance more collective and communal perspectives, thus sidestepping traditional power and its asymmetrical *modus operandi*. Their remarks in favor of *homoerotic* relationships are indexical of scalar rearrangements which, in line with contemporary discourses concerning democracy and social equity, conceive of sexual freedom and free bodily practices as valid parameters for all. The hitherto enacted power game is somehow briefly suspended, giving way to empathy and a sense of responsibility to the other – a phenomenon Silva (2015) has identified in an ethnographic study carried out in a different context.[10] This kind of sign circulation, according to which people start talking more horizontally, gradually gains ground – even in face of offences such as "*dumb trollz*", "*Run to your nearest congregation and pay the tithe!*" and "*pathetic love life*" in (m).

In (o) and (p), Pedro Castro and Kátia tellingly remind us that change (or, for the purposes of our discussion, differentiation concerning identity 'monsters') does not take place all of a sudden, especially when it involves historically solidified social values. However, when Pedro asks for "a little patience" in his assertive position against what he names "Heterophobia", he somehow acknowledges the limitations and obstacles created by apparatuses of all kinds, which obstruct, but never completely curb, possibilities of transformation – a move followed by Kátia in "*you gotta give it time*".

It is curious how the two interlocutors call upon the slowness of time vis-à-vis the accelerated TimeSpace of contemporary exchanges. In their reference to a specific kind of temporality, they project a universal communicable path, according to which hetoronormativity, a long-term tradition, is being debunked by one single couple, at the

[10] The study investigates competing communicative models emerging within the project of making Rio de Janeiro a safer place for the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympics.

micro level. This sort of scale shift – and the hasty logical leap from local experience to generalization – is at the basis of stereotype and discrimination formations, whose operation depends on the regimentation of social time, circulation, space and even change. Whether we call these processes governmentality (Foucault, 1991) or bio communicability (Briggs 2011), what seems to be at stake in the performed sociabilities of Pedro and Kátia is how minutest actions in ordinary situations may exercise micropower, by condensing and sustaining historical boundaries and struggles.

However, amidst epidemic stagnation, there is always room for detours and micro resistance, as meanings are always wandering about, producing some level of differentiation or transmutation. Hence, some participants seem to smooth along when they suggest that their interlocutors abandon the polemic debate and resemiotize it. While Pedro and Kátia appeal to the sluggish passage of time, Ana and Vanessa below resort to other abstract concepts:

> **Comment(q): Ana**
> quem não quer ver desliga a tv ou muda o canal....MAS PRA QUEM SE PERMITE DELEITE-SE QUE É LINDOOOO O AMOR
> *if it bothers you, turn it off or change channels... BUT FOR THOSE WHO ARE FREE... ENJOY COZ LOVE IS BEAUTIFUUUULLLL*
>
> **Comment (r): Vanessa**
> (...) É uma oportunidade rara de mostrar na televisão que homossexuais são gente de verdade, gente que sente, que ama. Um final positivo é imprescindível pra derrubar preconceitos.
> (...) *It's a one in a million chance to see homosexuals portrayed as common, everyday people on TV - people with feelings, people who fall in love. A happy ending is more than welcome to help do away with prejudices*.

The general signs employed, alluding to love, freedom, feelings and personhood, iterate taken-for-granted universal values, which are, notwithstanding, presented as tools against prejudices, characterizing a more positive encounter with alterity, bypassing the dominant communicable map. Indeed, the identity strategy keeps being reanimated as an orienting criterion, drawing boundaries between differences. Social categories like homosexual, heterosexual, lesbian, gay, macho, woman, man, husband, wife, family, couple, people, public and so on are insidious throughout. However, despite recycling all-embracing classifications, they modify, at least locally and in a capillary way, a contagious regimen, since each time they re-appear they get inserted amidst accompanying co-texts that, besides pushing them into less travelled routes, make them act differently, in more flexible and pluralized ways.

4. Toward an ethical politics of desire

This paper has examined how repetition-differentiation, as the propeller of constant circulation, is a crucial and potent element in meaning-making. Focusing on text trajectories as a methodological strategy, it has explored the way in which signs, amalgamated in texts, become themselves figures of repetition in repetitive milieux. Rather than identical doubles, this mobility produces infinite differentiations and spaces – quite invisible in their subtlety, but nonetheless significant – that can shake structural understandings of the social world.

The epidemiological framework materialized in the concept of communicability has been productive indicating that, in their multidirectional comments, interlocutors both iterate cemented signs and signal the swampy ground they stand on, interlocking

contagious interpellation and agentivity. One can thus say that in spite of its projection of infectious linearity, the concept of communicability also encompasses degrees of unpredictability and serendipity which eschew overdetermination and, from an analytical standpoint, operationalize Deleuzian and Derridean reflections concerning repletion-difference and iterability-transformation.

The analysis of interactions and performances on the *Extra online* website have made visible how repetition in communication brings in different rhythms, intensities and metrics, configuring a complex of differences where sameness and identity "are said only of that which differs" (Deleuze 1968/2004:69). In the case at hand, in observing how ordinary communicative acts keep producing different texts about different texts, within complexes of repetition-differentiation, the analytical movement could detect the articulation of new registers that dislodged phallocentric approaches to gender and sexuality. Furthermore, it has shown that the maintenance of social organization and surveillance apparatuses has more to do with provisional and adaptable arrangements than with the mere reproduction of powerful social structures. It has also indicated that, if these agreements are constructed through restless semiosis and intense reflexivity, they are prone to become more malleable and change over time, as ceaseless circulation and replication of signs are incompatible with immobility, even when they get entangled in habitual semantic nets.

Difference can thus be said to be a productive force, whose emergent qualities in interaction are worth noting. Operationally, it projects discriminating borders onto indeterminacy, forging the bounded social objects and 'identities' that we are familiar with. Micropolitically, on the other hand, as the borders are fluid and their plasticity can acquire new configurations through semiotic activity, it acts in the preservation, reorganization or dissolution of social apparatuses. The skill with which some of the interlocutors in this on-line forum crafted new ways to deal with the verticality of power relations, gearing it towards horizontality and reversing the historically sedimented matrices that guide conventions of desire, highlights micropolitics in the making. Although this kind of turnaround can be said to be fleeting, the way many participants indexed more flexible regimes concerning gender, sexuality and bodily practices projects visibility onto the workings of replication-renovation that incisively governs our semiotic experiences. Differentiating boundaries have continued to be drawn; identity claims have been laid; but they have ceased to be givens and have emerged as possible choices (cf. Beck in Slater and Ritzer 2001). The identity beast is thus humanized and briefly discontinued, as plurality and imprecision prevent terrorizing.

Such local movement can be extended to viral communicative events in general. Rather than creating a patterned tapestry of discourses that are well aligned with one another, it projects a multiscalar semantic web which, in continually folding and unfolding over itself, produces complex, disarticulated and unstable arabesques. The latter, besides disrupting dichotomous thinking and imploding regimes that allegedly tell the truth about genders and sexualities, cannot be captured by positivist descriptions or statistical procedures. Because sign mobility occurs, upon a closer look, in a non-linear fashion amidst ambiguity and constant flux, it can only rely on methodologies with a queer potential. I believe that following text trajectories, observing communicable maps and exploring processes of difference /iterability have shown themselves to be fruitful pathways.

So by scrutinizing audiences' meaning-making strategies and their reorganization of signs, this study has shed light on oscillating movements around meanings attributed to gender and sexuality – from territorialization and normalization toward fluidity and renegotiation. It has shown that communicable cartographies can be called into

question, alternative meanings explored, and cemented plots re-imagined. It is within such reinvention-potential that some participants can be said to have envisaged a new politics of desire, one that is more diverse, integrative and creative, and thus more ethical.

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