

Balancing Political Economy and Cultural Studies: Creating the Social- Critical Telenovela in Brazil

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So what?

- Brazilian telenovelas became very socially engaged, critiquing issues, raising issues
- Writerly medium, very driven by major writers
- Huge impact on national identity,
- Often set social agenda, issue awareness
- Substantial geo-cultural regional and Lusophone transnational impacts
- Substantial global export impact, especially starting in 1990s
- Helped consolidate consumer capitalism

Complex structure and agency

- Negotiations within structure of one of the first developing world media powers
 - Negotiation to redefine key television genre
- Subtle relationship between artistic circles; military, economic and political power, and mass media development
 - Glocalization, hybridization of genre
 - Commercial media, advertisers power
 - State power
 - Artistic and managerial agency

- Political economy predicted
 - Originally assumed cultural homogenization resulting from internationalization
 - Promotion and consolidation of consumer economy
 - Even by national programs
- Cultural studies and critical cultural industries
 - Impact of agents and agency
 - Emergence of national cultural forms
 - National culture could be linked to political mobilization

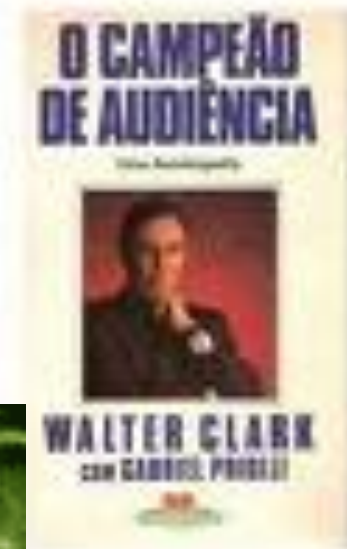
Roberto Marinho and Joe Wallach



Oral history interviews with Joe Wallach, March-July 2007

Hybridizing Brazilian programming within the modern network

- After six months of in 1965, Wallach dumped Hollywood import contracts
- Hired in the best programmers, directors, writers from competitors
 - Walter Clark
 - Jose Bonifacio, Daniel Filho
 - Dias Gomes
- Research, adjusting mix of novelas, comedy, variety, music, news
- Developing their own acting talent for novelas



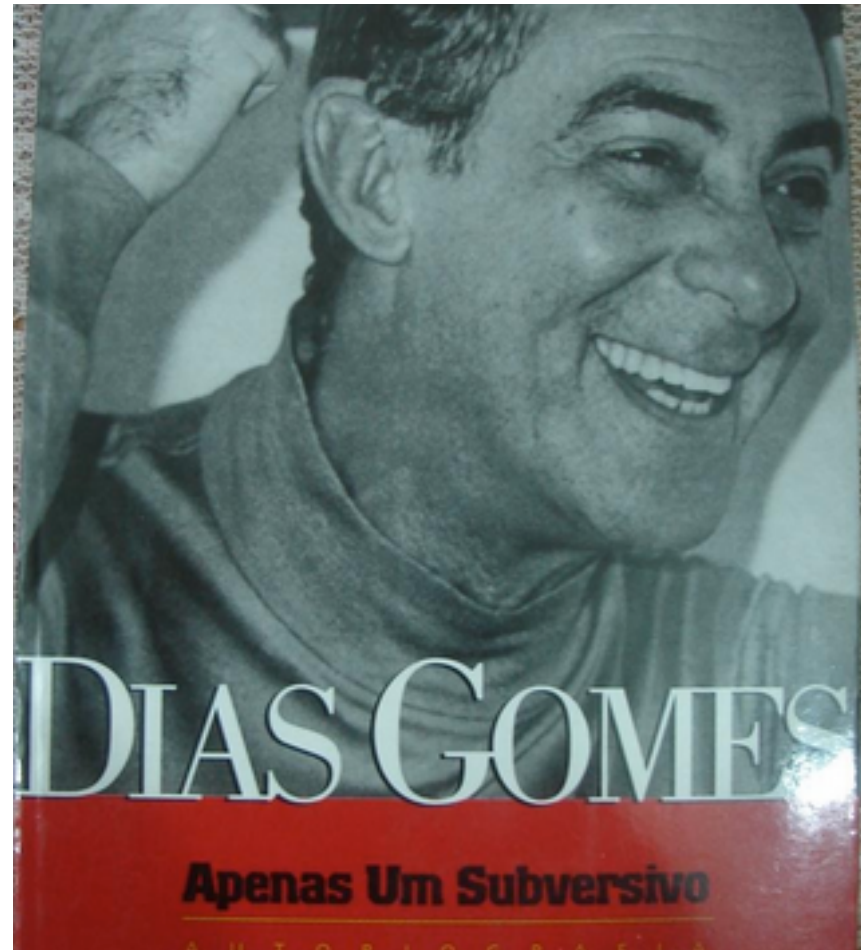
Nationalizing telenovelas

- Replacement of Cuban writers, scripts in Brazilian TV
- Realistic drama
 - Reaction to 1968 success of “Brazilian” Beto Rockefeller on TV Tupi
 - Janete Clair, “Selva de Pedra,” more urban, realist, incisive, still romantic



Dias Gomes

- Had been a Communist Party of Brazil (PC do B) activist,
 - Invited to be on central committee but left party in 1970
- Hoped to live from being a playwright
- Plays like *O berço de um herói* censored by regime after 1964



Nationalizing telenovelas

- Replacement of Cuban writers, scripts in TV Globo
 - Hiring theatrical, film writers
 - Many leftists, Dias Gomes, Lauro Cesar Muniz
 - Hiring film directors to change visual style of telenovelas, Daniel Filho



From “teatro popular” to the social telenovela

- He thought his kind of theater could really only work with a large, working class (“popular”) audience, an impossible dream because theater was becoming more elitist. “Now they were offering me a really large, truly popular audience, beyond our wildest dreams.” p. 255

O Bem Amado (1973)

- He had written Bem Amado as play, then film script, then rewrote fourth time as telenovela, first in color, "I saw it as aesthetic experiment, Would it be possible to create a true work of art on television?" p.275



- "In each of these episodes, I always looked for inspiration in political events, satirizing and criticizing 'the system,' in times when the Censorship did not permit that. O Bem Amado was a small window in the big wall of obscurity [or darkness] that the military regime created.

O Bem Amado



Commercial competitiveness outweighed military ties, loyalty

- “at our television station, we had many communists and Marinho would say to the government, ‘you take care of your communists and I’ll take care of mine.’ Joe Wallach
- Final telling example, 1984 Diretas Ja campaign – TV Globo initially supported military by mischaracterizing, minimizing Diretas Ja rallies, but when began to lose audience over it, quickly switched to support

Theoretical considerations

- Political economy
 - Capitalist consumer economy consolidated by these telenovelas (Oliveira, Schiller)
 - National identity sympathetic to system reinforced
 - Military needs served, but also commercial network, writers (huge national audience for teatro popular?)
- Cultural studies
 - Vibrant national genre created, social, political, ecological issues; land reform, etc, raised
 - Audience active engaged

Theoretical considerations

- Critical media industry studies
 - Complex negotiations between military, network owners, producers, writers clarified
 - Writerly genre/medium created (the name over the title is the writer's)
- Global media studies
 - Localization by Time-Life, Wallach intended
 - Glocalization by Marinho, Wallach, Boni achieved

Thank you!