Pega-Niguém! A Competition for Symbolic Power - an Interpretative Ethnography of the Carioca Preoccupation with Physical Appearance

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M2 Anthropology

Master's thesis:

« Pega-Ninguém! A Competition for Symbolic Power »

An Interpretative Ethnography of the Carioca Preoccupation with Physical Appearance

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Readers : Yves Winkin
          & David Berliner
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2. Introduction

2.1. What Anthropology is to Me

Ever since I started university, the usual question of « What do you study? » is often followed by « But, what is anthropology actually? ». With the years, I slowly came up with an explanation, one that seemed to resonate with those who would pose the question and whom had occasionally never even heard of the discipline. Firstly, I always answer that anthropology is the study of human beings, that anthropologists look at what we have in common and where we are different. Often, this is then followed by elaborating on the latter, by explaining that humans have always tried to make sense out of what they are doing. We all eat, drink, sleep, make babies, get sick, grow up, become old and eventually pass-on, maybe not in that order, but various combinations have been tried and tested. However, is it all just about surviving? Human beings are very inquisitive creatures, we are forever trying to find sense, make sense and apply sense to what we are doing. We coat our survival strategies with layers of meaning.

In layman’s terms, this is how I try to explain the concept of « culture ». Now, depending on the level of interest I can gauge in my interlocutor’s reaction, I may proceed to introduce the idea of a dynamic between these layers of meaning, and our behaviors. Using simple and relatable examples, this dynamic shows how common conceptions and representations have arisen from our material and social forms of surviving. Coming to shape our understandings of the world and thus, framing our social conducts that, themselves, are then explained through meanings. Social interactions, in a particular context, produce particular meanings, which, in return, frame particular social interactions.

This never-ending story has been present since the conception of humanity and will continue to underwrite it until its end. We try to make sense of the world that surrounds us, and the life that we live inside it. That is where we are alike. Different environments allow and produce different forms of surviving and hence understanding. That is where we are different. There is evidence to suggest that all around the world and at any point in the history of humanity, humans have loved, experienced fear, laughed, or cried. Again, in that, we are the same. However, the meanings, conceptions and representations applied to these differ between each given social world.
2.2. About this Paper

What anthropology means to me reflects the way I am trying to work and what I am going to attempt to show throughout this essay. I spent five months in Rio de Janeiro, trying to understand the particular rapport Cariocas appear to have with the body and beauty as the role physical appearance plays in social interactions varies with each socio-cultural setting. Symbols, emerging from diverse circumstances and backgrounds, compose layers of meaning, which are then applied to the way one looks. My aim here is to depict the carioca [refers to the inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro] rapport with the appearance and put it into its context to reveal symbols deriving from Rio's particular frame of references. As one can only indicate things from one's own perspective (Blumer, 1969:22), I must depict the way it appears to me. As an ample part of the ethnographical material I collected consists of immaterial elements such as, exchanged glances or displayed attitudes, I believe the context of my field research plays an important function in the narrative of my findings and I therefore dedicated a significant space for my personal experience in this paper.

I seek here to lead the reader through Rio and show, through a combination of first hand experiences, conversations, readings and observations, how I came to understand the meanings framing the Carioca's singular rapport to beauty. Though I am very aware of the limits of the chosen approach, I'm of the opinion that the nature of this paper and the overall task (being a closure of the completed degree in anthropology and the documentation of my first medium-term field observation) is well placed to focus on the student's personal interpretation of the experience on the field. I hope thus to convey what I came to understand in Rio, regarding the preoccupation with physical appearance, in an interesting and thought-provoking manner.
3. Research problem

This paper has will attempt to paint a picture combining my field research and my interpretation of the carioca preoccupation with the physical appearance. I will try to present how, according to me, social identities and associated symbols of power are produced, enacted, (re)negotiated and experienced in social interactions of the Cariocas [inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro].

This paper is structured in accordance with the following. Succeeding a short introduction describing my first contact with the carioca culture, I will begin to define the object of my investigation. To set the decor, I will present the cordiality that provides the basis for the particularity of the personal interactions present in Latin American culture. I will then show the importance of the social identity in the context of the Brazilian, and more particularly, the carioca society. Identity is here understood as a capital invested symbolically and used as a coping strategy to counter a deeply unequal and unreliable social structure.

Finally, I will describes social spaces of exhibition and examination such as the beach, academias [gym], social media and carnival and present the normative function permitted through the visibility and democratic access characterizing those places. Thus, social identities within this structure are (re)negotiated through symbols of social mobility, modernity, control and sexuality by investing in the enhancement of the physical appearance, the consumption of aesthetic practices and the strong use of social media.
4. A Gringa in Rio

4.1. The Field

My field for this research consisted of a total of 4 months spent in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. I had heard of the high plastic surgery rates and I was eager to understand the underlying values promoted through such practices. Rio, famous for its beautiful beaches and women, had thus triggered my curiosity. Before my departure I was told and read many stories adding to the fantasy of the place, stories of carnival, Samba, beaches and violence were some of what I would have to confront once I arrived there.

My field was composed mainly of observations and casual conversations (that often taught me more than most of my formal interviews); I got a membership into a gym, I made Brazilian and Gringo friends, I lived in different places, I attended lectures at the federal university and had some classes at a Portuguese language school. I spent ample time on the beach, at parties and experienced carnival; these in fact became the stage for the most interesting scenes to understand the carioca preoccupation and representations surrounding the appearance and the body, but also in terms of conceptions on gender.

I formally interviewed the psychologist mentioned above, Gaga (36), who was born and raised all his life in Rio; Carol (26), a medicine student who grew up in Vittoria (Brazil), came to Rio to work and underwent breast implant surgery 4 years ago; and Patricia (20) a young girl who was born and grew up in a favela whom I met working at one of the hostel I stayed in.

4.2. As a Baby Growing Up

On my very first day, I went down to the beach with Gaga, one of my first informers. He was born and bread in Rio, and graduated with a degree in psychology ten years ago. As he noticed me observing all that surrounded me intensely, he told me: «At this point, you are like a baby, like a child who doesn't get anything of what is happening around him. Your mind is blank. It is going to be filled, days after days through your experience here. You are going to start to understand slow the things that make no sense for you now. »¹ He was so right. I guess what he was describing is what we called «the cultural shock». That moment when, everything around you has no resemblance of familiarity, nothing is like what you know or are used to. I had to come to understand the customs, the codes, the meanings, the norms, the values, all the things

¹ Gabriel (Gaga), Carioca, 30 years old
² Spanish Journalist, Spain, 28 (?) years old
³ Eduardo, Carioca, 27 years old
⁴ Pedro, Carioca, 32 years old
⁵ Paul, Belgium, 53 years old
that make what we may call the « culture ». I also had to learn more about the history, the social classes, the politics, the religious institutions, all the things that compose what we may call the « social structures ». This learning I could only do through spending time and experiencing the Carioca life as much as I could. As this first impression of what I could see around me; a beautiful beach filled with tiny bikinis, tanned and fit men and women, matched all the cliché's but had no depth or meaning to me yet.

4.3. First Impressions

Another informer, a Spanish journalist who was working in Rio for three months when I met her, gave me a really good piece of advice. It was on my third day there. We were talking about Rio and the topic of my thesis. She was laughing as I was commenting on what I had seen so far and how shocked I was. She told me: « I remember I said all these things too the first time I came to Rio, I think everyone who comes from Europe does. Now I am used to it, I don't notice it so much anymore. »

She told me I should write down my initial raw impressions before I began to become accustomed to what was all around me. She was so right. Not only did I get used to it with the time, but also pretty quickly a sense of social pressure began to brew inside me and weigh on my thoughts and behaviors. Like a baby growing up, the more I would understand the implicit codes and norms, the more I would start conforming to them or, on the contrary, reject them. Whether I chose to reject or conform, either way it meant I was beginning to understand the so called 'unspoken' « rules », the local social norms. The term refers to everything that goes unsaid but is known and felt by the individuals of a given society. All the norms and constraints that are embodied in the group and constraining for the individual.

My first impressions, shaped into a list, were indeed really interesting to read once I was back in Belgium. At that point of reflection I realized that even within the first few weeks I had become aware of everything very quickly, but that it would take a lifetime to truly understand and comprehend all the ins and outs. The list mentioned: big bottoms, a lot of curves, the waists, overt bodily exposure, no complexes, beautiful people, hyperactive city that never sleeps, incredible amount of sport, women’s curves, beauty standards are voluptuous, plenty of skin, colorful, tight and revealing clothes.

---

2 Spanish Journalist, Spain, 28 (?) years old
4.4. Fitting In

Even though Gaga's baby metaphor felt really accurate, it was not completely true. My mind was not blank like he said. It was filled with all the social interactions that had composed my life experience to that point. My particular context and background had filled my mind with norms, meanings and conceptions regarding how people act, behave, look, dress and so on. The first phase of the cultural shock, before the understanding process really started, was a comparing phase. I would apply my own meanings, on the carioca social world. Like Blumer (1969) explains in his essay on symbolic interactionism, it is through social interactions that the meanings started to arise to me. It is through the gazes and attitudes towards the way I was presenting myself that I could rectify, adjust and find the way to fit in. However, to fit in ought to be done in a way that makes me feel comfortable. The process of fitting in was therefore founded upon a mix between my own personal standards and values and those of the new context I was now in. I was sometimes subjected to contradicting systems of the different norms, that being the ones I was socialized by and those that I was now immerged in. A great depiction of this for me is exemplified by when I bought a really small bikini that I would not dare to wear in Belgium but that I was comfortable to wear on the beaches in Rio. Nevertheless, even though I aligned more to the dressing norms of the carioca than the Belgium norms in that case, I still could not unleash myself entirely into the Rio norms and buy myself a g-string bikini. I was still too permeated with the Belgian bikini standards and would not have felt comfortable wearing it, even if everyone around me was.

4.5. Being a Gringa

As a gringa, my position was special. On one hand I would never be able to fully grasp the social meanings and their associated symbols. My observations and interactions in Rio were shaped by this irremediable fact: I was an outsider. I looked like one, I behaved like one and I was treated like one. As much as I started to interoriate some of the prominent social norms and understand some of the different social categories, my socialization had not been based on them and my « reading » of the culture was initially achieved through my own conceptions. With time, experiences, discussions and readings my understanding of « what was going on » slowly got more accurate. Nevertheless my attempts to fit in were voluntary rather than necessary. The immersion in the carioca culture was to be temporary and hence the felt pressure to conform to norms lessened.

On the other hand, it gave me a more contrasted sight on aspects that perhaps insiders would not question. It is precisely the contrast that allowed the differences to stick out. This
particular initial « cultural shock » allowed many of the intricacies of Rio's socio-cultural setting to harshly become apparent to me, which would gradually fade back into the peripherals. Subsequently, by deconstructing these differences, the similarities which are widely shared in our social experiences revealed themselves. Similarities such as our need to fit in, to align with the norm, to seek validation and comfort all compose a content that can be found in an infinity of different forms around the globe. The particular form that content takes in Rio had become my obsession, and my goal was to comprehend hidden and unspoken meanings underlying mainstream practices.

Coming and going between Gringos and Brazilians revealed itself to be a very fertile method of investigation. My remarks, as an outsider commenting on what I had observed or thought about, would draw Brazilians' attention on aspects of their own culture. The conversations that consequently emerged were often rich and offered me a precious insight into their conception and representation of the given topics. A further insight and interesting perspective came from those who had previously travelled to Europe and willingly shared their observations and thoughts. For instance, quite ironically, a Brazilian friend once told me he was shocked the first time he saw a women tanning topless on a beach in Spain.

Conversely, my discussions with the Gringos concerning our varying experiences and feelings towards the culture and behaviors of the Cariocas would help me to validate my observations and isolate the particularities of the carioca culture. Some of the Gringos had traveled in Latin America and would compare Rio to the places they had been to before. All in all, conversing with Gringos and Brazilians about Rio highlighted the headlining topics and the general tendencies in regards to the cultural behaviors.

Topics like beauty, sexuality, preoccupation with the appearance, familiarity, machism or social inequalities, are inherent to Brazilians and confronting to Gringos. Explanations given to these multi faceted issues vary from one person to another, there are many different versions that I heard which justify the above and comparing mine to theirs legitimated my observations in a sense.
5. On the Beach

5.1. Revealing Outfits

The way people dress was one of the first things I noticed. However, this was a beloved topic of conversation amongst gringos alike, sharing their shocking observations and comparing the Brazilian dress code back to the customaries of their own homeland. Bright colors and extravagant patterns present a strong contrast with the quite sober and monotone fashion of the average European.

Both the beach culture and the climate give Cariocas the perfect platform to dress very sparingly. It is not uncommon, in the Zona Sul (South Zone) (the closest area to the ocean), for people to roam the surrounding streets in their swimming suits. Young, old, fit or fat, the exhibition of oneself comes very easily and naturally to Cariocas. The famous travel guide « Le Petit Routard » (2017) mentions Brazilian’s ease to exhibit themselves adding that revealing outfits are not considered provoking (p.342).

Female clothing is remarkably contouring to the female curves. High waist shorts, tiny tops showing the belly bottom, bra straps, the back, the cleavage or all of these at the same time, is quite the norm.

When I first arrived in Rio, I felt a noticeable distance between myself and the locals as a result of my clothing and dress. All of my shorts were low waisted and my tops were long and wide, my clothing in general was modest and not revealing. It took me a little while to get used to the Brazilian dress code for women. At first I would stare at some girls and be shocked. I couldn't help to think: « If this was in Belgium, people would think she is a prostitute! ». Clothes that I would describe as vulgar are very common in summer. Neon colored fishnet dresses on top of underwear, huge cleavages with many decorative straps, see-through shirts or dresses, all sights that were quite foreign to me. These clothes, designed to direct the attention towards the sexual assets of a woman, do not discriminate, they are seen everywhere and on women of any age, color or size.

5.2. Beauty Standards

Brazilian beauty standards differ from that of Europeans. In Europe, the body shape idolized for women is quite skinny, this is further depicted by the mannequins that are displayed in the shop windows. In Rio, contrastingly, the mannequins utilized in shop fronts present more voluptuous curves. Shops and even street sellers offer foam push up bras without straps and fake
foam bundas that women can make use of to increase the size of their 'assets'. This ideal was again highlighted to me as my carioca friend Camila confessed to me she is too skinny for Brazilian standards, while my Italian friends and I agreed that she would definitely be considered on the larger side amongst Europeans.

Overall in Brazil, the ideal female body type consists of wide hips, large thighs, a skinny waist and, at the epicenter of it all, a big bunda [bottom]. This is topic is commonly discussed and disputed back and forth amongst Gringos, whom are more than often surprised when comparing the differences between the visual aspirations of European and Brazilian girls. During my time I met several girls, who had a large bunda in my eyes, however they proceeded to tell me they had wished it were bigger. « It's never too big! ³ », « The bigger the better! ⁴ » joked my carioca friends as I was mentioning this fact to them.

Upon first impressions, Cariocas have an air of liberation and an ease to expose themselves without fear of judgment, in some ways an existence without inhibitions. « When European women come to Rio, they feel better about themselves. »⁵, « In the US fat women would never wear a bikini, I think that's the biggest difference. »⁶ « I love it, they have no shame, no self-consciousness. »⁷. My first impressions were not too dissimilar to those described above. However, as time went on, I began to ask myself if this really was the result of a liberated freedom to expose themselves, or rather a subjectification through social pressures.

### 5.3. Carioca Beaches

Situated, but never resting, the city of Rio is submerged amongst some of the world’s most breathtaking landscape, large rock formations and jungle. Carioca beaches line the coast, mosaicked promenades and avenues are a melting pot of Cariocas and tourists. Long bike lanes stretching the distances of the beach, are frequently dotted with exercising and stretching stations, and a constant demarcation of kilometers covered for the incessant flow of joggers, skaters, cyclists and skateboarders. Down on the sand, all different demarcations of various forms, of what seems to be, perpetual exercise are played with passion; football, volleyball, foot-voley and raquete. Next to the water the extremely popular game of « Brazilian football » is played by dozens of groups of usually three or four people. Often ephemeral gyms, made out of

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3. Eduardo, Carioca, 27 years old
4. Pedro, Carioca, 32 years old
5. Paul, Belgium, 53 years old
6. Tom, USA, 24 years old
7. Laura, France, 20
ropes, plots and hoops are set up on the beach in the morning and the evening, when the sun is not too high. The beaches, divided into Postos, are wedged between frequently spotted Quioske on the street side, selling food and drinks. On the sand, Baracas, little tents set-up daily, which rent beach chairs and umbrellas, sell drinks and snacks and provide showers and wet paths offering beachgoers some respite from the burning sand.

Cariocas enjoy the beach with their families, friends or even colleagues. These appearances can range from a short foray to an entire day. Some bring portable box-coolers filled with food and drinks, others make use of the colorful beach sellers who are covered in merchandise while they walk the beaches back and forth, shouting and even sometimes singing their offerings of the day. Ice cold beers and water, biscuits, sandwiches, empanadas, açaí, ice creams, bikinis, sun glasses, hats, speakers, hammocks, grilled cheese and gambas are some of what is on offer throughout the landscape of the informal beach economy.

5.4. The Exposed Body

Most gringos are easily noticeable because of their «fraldas» [diapers], as the Cariocas call the bikini bottoms. One day on the beach in Copacabana a Danish friend of mine was lying on her stomach, a Brazilian woman (probably in her 60s) passed by and proceeded to wedge my friends fralda even deeper between her buttocks to transform it into a thong. Comparatively, Brazilian bikinis cover remarkably little skin, originality is expressed through bright colors, different shapes or straps. Bikini bottoms vary in size from tanga to dental floss, likewise, bikini tops are quite revealing and side boob is commonly exposed. No matter the age, from young girls to old ladies, they are paraded by all. Men, mostly wear sungas, short tight swimwear.

Brazilian beaches and specifically those of Rio are famous for their body exposure and beautiful people. Many traveling blogs and guides talk about it. Gringos never cease to be amazed by the spectacle of Brazilian bodies on and around the coast. Represented on post cards, sand sculptures, in songs, and so on, the Brazilian bunda [ass] is famous around the world and celebrated by Cariocas. Cariocas are nationally and internationally renowned for their revealing outfits, as was further confirmed by many passing comments and popular jokes. I recall, watching a news report on television one day and asking my Brazilian friend if it was in Rio, she replied «No, it's in São Paulo. You can tell because people aren't naked [laughs]»

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8 Naraya, Carioca, 19 years old
5.5. Beach Culture

Often quoted as an explanation, the combination of the beach and the climate appear to create a context where one's body begins to take the place of one's clothes in the presentation to others. A Californian tourist once said to me « It's like that [the preoccupation with the body] all around the world, it's a beach culture. You also find it in California or in Sydney »

Another statement in relation to the above was during my interview with Carol, she said « [...] It's because in Europe it's cold so no one sees the body. » Additionally, to illustrate her self-dissatisfaction concerning her breasts, she expressed how embarrassed she used to feel on the beach « I would keep my tee-shirt on at the beach! Can you imagine?! »

Social norms concerning outfits on Rio’s beaches are quite unique and play an important role in the popular imagination built around Rio de Janeiro. Gringos might feel comfortable or embarrassed in such a context, they may choose to describe it with terms ranging from « liberated » all the way to « obscene ». Nevertheless, it is a well-known particularity of Rio and whether people are shocked or amazed this singularity is noticed by all. It is an inescapable reality, one that engulfs cariocas and tantalizes tourists. I myself, along with the many other tourists, fed this popular stereotype surrounding the beaches of Rio, by employing the most extreme examples while I described these differences to my friends and family in Belgium.

5.6. The Maintained Body

Aside from the revealing outfits, another indisputably noticeable aspect associated with the Carioca make-up is the amount of fit bodies in the landscape. Muscular, firm, polished, « flawless » bodies are to be seen all around the beach. Many men display a muscular body on which every muscle is defined. Many women possess a curvy, voluptuous silhouette. Their skin is firm, with no imperfections, marks, stretches or cellulite. Well-contoured bodies are sculptured with no excess fat. Visible abdominals, well maintained body shape and beautiful skin are very common features to be found on the beach, most commonly visible amongst young people, although it is not rare to encounter similar traits amongst the elderly. It is important to be aware that this portrayal of the landscape is a generalization excluding the vast amount of Cariocas who fall outside this cliché of physical impeccability. However, my intention through these photos and statements is to depict the feeling one may get while observing Ipanema’s beach-goers. Furthermore, this caricature of perfection is often reproduced in the discourses of travellers and

9 Tom, USA (California), 24 years old
10 Carol, Vittória, 26 years old
tourists. « Everyone is fit here. »\textsuperscript{11} \textquoteleft\textquoteleft Everyone looks good. \textquoteright\textquoteright \textsuperscript{12} \textquoteleft\textquoteleft Brazilian girls are so hot! \textquoteright\textquoteright \textsuperscript{13} \textquoteleft\textquoteleft All the guys are muscular here! \textquoteright\textquoteright \textsuperscript{14} these are only a select few of the numerous comments I collected on the topic. A paraphrase which could best represent the first impression Gringos may experience based on what they see on the beaches of Rio could be: « Overall, there are fit and good looking people, feeling comfortable with their bodies ». This is how I can best summarize my initial feelings coupled with all that I read (on travel blogs and guides) and heard from Gringos.

A topic I prefer to leave for later is the dimension of sex appeal, it is a large component of the fantasy associated with this city and originates from the revealing outfits and the fit and voluptuous bodies. This is a common association made with Latin countries and their people, often imagined to be more romantic and passionate than Westerners.

6. Photos [Part 1]

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Figure1.jpg}
\caption{Copacabana Beach}
\end{figure}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{11} Brandon, USA (Boston), 28 years old
\textsuperscript{12} Zac, England, 30 years old
\textsuperscript{13} Stefan, Switzerland, 36 years old
\textsuperscript{14} Mathéo, France, 19 years old
\end{flushleft}
Figure 2 Women on Ipanema Beach

Figure 3 Sand Castle in Ipanema Beach

Figure 4 Three Ladies on Ipanema Beach

Figure 5 Group of People on Leblon Beach

Figure 6 Man and Women on the Waters Edge

Figure 7 Young People Posing on the Beach
Figure 9 Two Men in their Sungas

Figure 8 Three Women in their Bikinis
7. Interpretation

7.1. Extrovert Expressions of Culture

Physical appearance and its presentation, as shown above, are components of the carioca culture, which are obvious to the eyes. As Clifford Geertz's (1973) suggests, «[humans] are animals suspended in webs of significance they themselves have spun (p.5) » culture is hence these webs and its analysis shall therefore be an interpretative one, in search of meanings, « construing social expression on their surface enigmatical. (p.5) ». Enigmatical to me was the space the body is occupying in the carioca society. Extrovert expressions of the culture are the necessary starting point of an analytical interpretation of that culture. If culture is what is self-evident, what « goes without saying », then the « shock » dimension of the « cultural shock » is rooted in the enigma, the incomprehension of these « extrovert expressions of culture ». They make the anthropologist, not yet aware of the underlying « web of significance » permitting these behaviors, ask himself: « why? ».

As Geertz (1973) prescribes in his book, interpreting a culture's « web of significance », ought to be done by isolating its elements, specifying the internal relationship among those elements in order to characterize the whole system in some general way, « according to the core symbols around which it is organized, the underlying structures of which it is a surface expression, or the ideological principles upon which it is based (Geertz, 1973:17). » The time spent in Rio, my field interactions and literature researches, slowly allowed me to understand underlying social structures, as well as accumulated history or Brazilian communication patterns. Slowly, I could begin to perceive the web. Core symbols slowly became more obvious to me and allowed me to interpret behaviors in terms of meanings. What symbolizes a fit body? What is the underlying message? What are the meanings at stake associated with the carioca preoccupation with the physical appearance?

7.2. Definition of the Object of Investigation

Before commencing the deconstruction of the web of significance in which these extroverted expressions are suspended, it is important to clarify what exactly are these expressions. Often, on the field, I got lost, I was not sure what I was talking about anymore. I would talk about a « preoccupation » defined as « extreme or excessive concern with something » but never knew what the « something » actually was. Was it the health? The body? The beauty?
7.2.1. Health
Firstly, my main focus was the body and its transformation. An impressive amount of workout and stretching stations dotted around the city quickly sets the tone. On average, Brazilians exercise on a daily basis. Beaches and parks are busy with people running, playing team sports, following an outdoor class or simply exercising. People of all ages and all sizes are to be seen practicing sports, all around the city. One day I was conversing with a homeless person, probably in his 50’s. He sat down next to me and I quickly jumped at the chance to practice my Portuguese. Our conversation was really basic and he was asking me easy questions as he could tell I was just a beginner. He asked me what sports I was playing and I answered « nada » [nothing]. His reaction was completely unexpected and gave me a direct insight into the place of sports in the Brazilian culture. He burst out laughing and did not cease for 5 minutes. He kept repeating « nada?! nada?! » as if it was nonsensical. He started shouting at his friends, sitting a few meters away. I could not understand exactly what he said, but the situation was obvious, they all began laughing and mimicking sports to me for absolute confirmation: « nadar ? » [swim], « volei ? »[volleyball]. To trigger their reactions I was exaggerating and answering não [no] to every sport they would pose to me, this would make them laugh even harder every time, look at me and each other with big round eyes, as if what they were hearing was unfathomable. I then asked them all what sports they were doing. Most of them said they swim, run, play football or go hiking on one of the morros¹⁵ [mountains] and the idea of a young reasonably-healthy looking person not doing any sport seemed to be of great curiosity and evidently very amusing. « This bunch of homeless in their 50s are more sporty than most of my friends back in Belgium » I could not help to think.

7.2.2. Body
At my Portuguese language class the book we were using, « Introduction to Brazilian Portuguese », not only taught the basic grammar, but also presented the Brazilian culture through many exercises. In the first unit, right after the section « greetings and introduction », a section titled « Belleza e Saúde » [Beauty and Health] was aiming to provide us with vocabulary for describing others and ourselves. Four little scenarios were describing the physical appearance of four characters in criteria of size, height and beauty and they mentioned vocabulary such as ‘diet’, ‘exercising’ and ‘supplements’. By mentioning these topics within the first few pages of the book it attests to the intertwining of the physical form with the definition of one's identity.

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¹⁵ The city is home to more than 15 morros [mountains] and most of them are run through with hiking tracks.
Furthermore, the title of the book’s page and the descriptions demonstrate how health and beauty are closely intertwined concepts.

7.2.3. Beauty

Beauty, as shown in the list of my first impressions above is also an element of the culture often referred to when talking about Brazil. The country is world-known for its beautiful people, particularly, beautiful women. Many times during interviews or conversations, people would refer to the « natural » Brazilian beauty. Once an Argentinian artist who had lived in Rio for 6 years, said to me «It is like nature took the most beautiful assets of each race and made it into the most beautiful mix.»  

Most famously, the typical Brazilian appearance features light eyes (usually green or grey), olive skin, big lips, slightly almond shaped eyes, a small-non-protruding nose, a voluptuous body with a well-rounded bottom, wide hips and strong thighs.

The majority of the Brazilian population is « mulatto » [mixed-raced] and this mix of Indigenous, Latin, African, European, Arabic and Asian origins result from the miscegenation that according to Freyre (1933) is a particularity of the Brazilian colonization. Contrarily, when compared to other Latin American colonies where sexual relation with the indigenous or slaves was a major sin, in Brazil, it was more than tolerated, in fact it was promoted. This was a way for the Portuguese royal family in Brazil to establish themselves using procreation strategies as a way for family expansion. Beauty is hence a component of the Brazilian culture, it is important to Brazilians locally, as exemplified above, and they are internationally recognized for their beauty as well as their sexuality, which I will elaborate on later.

7.2.4. Appearance

Conceptualization

Thus, the « extrovert expressions of the culture » are connected with broad topics such as (but not limited to) health, body, beauty which have lead me to define the overriding theme of my research. Authors have used several terms throughout their works to define the phenomenon. Laurent (2012) speaks about beauty, Malysse (2002) invented the concept of « corpolatry » defined as an idolatry of the body, Edmonds (2009) mentions a « necessary vanity ». I decided to talk about « appearance », sourced from Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model of social life.

16 Gaston, Argentina, 42 years old
Goffman’s Definition
Appearance functions as a stimuli giving information about the social status of the performer (p.15). The concept of « performance » refers to all the activity of an individual in front of a particular set of observers, or « audience ». Through this performance, the individual gives meaning to himself, to others, and to their situation. These performances deliver impressions to others, which communicates information that confirms the identity of the individual in that situation. The audience is constantly attributing meaning to the performance and to the individual, whether he is aware of it himself or not. Goffman coined the term « impression management » to refer to one’s desire to manipulate others’ impressions of him/her using three main sign vehicles: setting, appearance, and manner (p.132-150). This paper proposes to investigate the role played by the appearance, valued and endorsed by the carioca society. In Rio, as a result of the particular social settings, « status symbols », obvious signs or symbols of a respective status, are to be read through the physical appearance in its most concrete sense, the body and the aesthetical quality of an individual (p.24).

What Goffman calls the « front stage » behavior suggests a set of behaviors, actions and interactions performed by an « actor » in front of others, who compose an « audience ». These set of behaviors represent internalized norms and expectations that are shaped in part by the social setting, the particular role we play within it, and our physical appearance. A further section of this paper describes popular carioca front stages and the normative and competitive dimension produced by the singularity of their settings (p.61).

7.3. Peeling off the Layers of Meaning
In order to start peeling off the layers of meaning and allow the web of significance to appear, the next chapter aims to present Brazilian communication patterns and preponderant personality traits. Thus, I hope to help the reader to add some color to the Brazilian picture I am trying to paint, as Brazilians tend to be passionate, expressive and emotional characters. Furthermore, as meanings arise from interactions (Blumer, 1969:2) it is thus necessary to have an idea of these social interactions to begin to understand how specific meanings are produced in a certain context.

The Brazilian social structures will then be assessed to situate these interactions in a specific context. Using my experiences on the field, I will attempt to give the reader the sentiment of the extremely stratified society that characterizes Brazil and more specifically, Rio de Janeiro. Ultimately, this uncovering process outlined above will expound upon the widespread idea amongst Brazilians of an investment in a ‘physical capital’.
To further cultivate the image of my field observation popular social spaces will be described and their normative functions presented. The beach, the *academias* [gyms], carnival and furthermore social media are universes vastly frequented by Cariocas and are valuable points to deconstruct in order to delve further into the layers of meaning. My personal experiences and quotes extracted from my discussions on the field will be used to emphasize Brazilian particularities.

Lastly, important symbols coding physical appearances in Brazil will be presented and connected to the country’s history and current reality. Social mobility, control, sexuality and modernity represent qualities strongly associated with power in the carioca social configuration, qualities which I hope to give the reader a sense of, through the depiction of my observations. Ultimately, I will explain my personal reading and interpretation of the carioca web of significance, before to conclude.
8. Brazilian Cultural Traits

«The social world is accumulated history (Bourdieu, 1986: 47).»

To make sense out of social interactions in Rio de Janeiro and more generally in Brazil, one must understand the Brazilian characteristics in terms of communication patterns and cultural values. This chapter will present the theories of Hall (1976) who coined the concept of High/Low Context Cultures as well as those of Ting-Toomey (1999) and Hofstede (1980) who reinforced his theories by further developing the concepts of the « Individualistic/Low-Context to Collectivist/High-Context spectrum » as a tool to categorize communication systems and cultures. It will then try to connect these theories with the concept of the cordial man theorized by the Brazilian author Buarque de Hollanda (1995) in order to describe the Brazilian cultural identity and its specificity in terms of interactions.

8.1. Hall’s High/Low Context Concept

According to Edward T. Hall (1976), communication forms within distinct cultures can be described in terms of Low-Context Systems or High-Context Systems. Furthermore, within a given culture, subcultures, institutions and individuals can occupy different positions on the LC/HC spectrum. It is important to note that as is often the case regarding theories about the social world, no culture or individual sits completely at one end of the spectrum. Nevertheless this dichotomy between LC/HC communication systems is a helpful tool to understand the Brazilian society in terms of social interactions.

In social interactions shaped by a Low-Context communication system the message is explicitly expressed, usually through words. There is very little room for double meaning. There is no expectation for the receiver to add contextual information to understand the meaning of the message. A well-known example of a low context culture is the USA. American movies often provide all the information needed, everything is said explicitly in the dialogue and there is thus little room for misinterpreting what is occurring.

On the contrary, in a High-Context interaction form, a big part of the communication is implicit and can also be non-verbal. It is expected to be understood according to contextual information such as the rules or norms or the social, moral or religious expectations. To continue with the example of cinema, French movies for example leave space for interpretation. As an American friend of mine once put it as he was complaining about a French movie he did not understand « You almost have to know the complete history of France to be able to appreciate
The concept of High-Context, which includes Brazil and Latin American countries, is useful to grasp not only the nature of communication amongst humans, but also, the cultural preponderant behaviors. Since "the level of context determines everything about the nature of the communication and is the foundation on which all subsequent behavior rests (including symbolic behavior)" (Hall, 1976:92), understanding high-context qualities provides keys to comprehend broader cultural values.

8.2. Ting-Toomey and Hofstede’s Continuation of Hall

As mentioned above, the works of Ting-Toomey (1999) and Hofstede (1980) elaborate and thicken Hall's (1976) concepts adding depth to the understanding of the Brazilian High-Context cultures.

Ting-Toomey developed dimensions relating to both LC and HC context, listed below for clarity:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Style</th>
<th>Dominant values</th>
<th>Logic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Indirect/direct</td>
<td>• Group-oriented/individualistic</td>
<td>• Linear/spiral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Status-oriented/person-oriented</td>
<td>• Mutual-face concern/self-face concern</td>
<td>• Context-based/verbal-based understanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hofstede identified different “organizational value patterns” across cultures which are divided into 6 dimensions. Although, his book focuses on the work environment it is still relevant to understand dominant cultural Brazilian values. The six dimensions are again listed below for clarity and measure:

- Power distance
- Individualism versus collectivism
- Masculinity versus femininity
- Uncertainty avoidance index
- Long term orientation versus short term normative orientation
- Indulgence versus restraint

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17 Brandon, USA (Boston), 28 years old
Overall, Brazilian society is classified according to Hall’s concept as a High-Context system, further developed by Ting-Toomey as displaying indirect and status oriented style of communication, group oriented (collectivism) and mutual-face concern values and spiral logic and context-based understanding. According to Hofstede Brazilian culture entails a high power distance, strong collectivity, intermediate masculinity, high uncertainty avoidance, intermediate long-term orientation and indulgence. These specific characteristics will be elaborated upon below.

8.2.1. Communication Style

In an indirect style of communication the sender would use cautiously selected words to guide the receiver to the desired point. As an example, this occurs when expressing discontent in a scenario where there is a great difference in power between the protagonists involved. Commonly, everything said is taken with a grain of salt and it is then the receiver’s responsibility to decipher the underlying meaning of the message according to the given context.

Status-oriented style holds respect towards hierarchy and obedience in high regard. It involves relationships based on a hierarchy of power. However, In Brazil the hierarchical order is deeply rooted, extremely present and runs through every layer of society. Formality is avoided as much as possible (Buarque de Hollanda, 1995; La Rosa, 2013). As a result, status is of high importance, perfectly depicted by the famous line « Você sabe com quem tá falando ? » [Do you know who you’re talking to?] theorized by the Brazilian anthropologist Roberto DaMatta (1982), who used it to describe how an interlocutor would remind one of their inferior social status. According to the author, in Brazil there is « person » and « individual ». « Person » is someone with power and a social position allowing him, through the use of his social capital, to bypass or ignore the laws that apply for the rest of the « individuals ». As the saying goes « for individuals, the law, for persons, everything! ». Social status is extremely important and deep-rooted throughout Brazil.

8.2.2. Dominant Values

Individuals with group-oriented values consider the group before the individual and define themselves through their relationships with others. In Brazil, the central group is the family. It is the most important social unit (Buarque de Hollanda, 1995; Reis, 1996; La Rosa, 2013) but it is not the only, church and spirituality represents another important group to which one would identify (Ibid). Sports are also a strong group-based identification. Many Brazilians can be seen boasting tattoos that celebrate their favorite football team or samba school to which they tend to be immensely loyal. Brazilians identify strongly with group belonging.
**Mutual-face concern** refers to the importance given in preserving relationships in cases of conflict. Even if the outcome does not please everyone, keeping the relationship between the two parties intact is more important than the actual facts at hand. This is a common observation whilst spending time amongst this culture and it is quite apparent in a scenario of argument amongst Brazilians, they begin to create drama as quick as they are to calm it down and start laughing together.

**8.2.3. Logic**

*Spiral logic* is a holistic type of logic that values the multiplicity of available sources to gather information. This characteristic couples well with an indirect style of communication and mutual face concern values as information may be delivered in a misleading or embellished form.

*Context-based understanding* means that there is something to be read "between the lines". One must have a strong understanding of the context to completely comprehend what is being communicated, as messages have a heavy contextual connotation. People often speak profusely employing vocal tones, facial expressions and gestures, when writing it is generally with an elaborate or poetic fashion, overall these characteristics are an integral part of communication as Brazilians are generally very expressive people.

**8.3. Hofstede’s Six Dimensions**

**Distance to power** is a scale that measures to what extent less powerful stakeholders of institutions and organisations within a given country, expect and accept, that power is and will be distributed unequally. Different distributions of power are accepted and justify the greater benefits attributed to those who hold the positions of power within a society. In Brazil, in general, inequalities amongst people are acceptable and the hierarchy is to be respected. As mentioned above, symbols of power and status are highly important for indicating ones social position and communicating the necessary respect to be shown.

The *Collectivism dimension* of the Brazilian society refers to the degree of interdependence among individuals. It is an important characteristic in the Brazilian conception of society. From birth onwards, Brazilians are integrated in strong, cohesive groups, which vow to protect its members in exchange for loyalty. Especially the extended family, which sits at the epicenter of Brazilian society, as pointed out above under Dominant Values. For example, in the work environment, an older person who is a powerful member of the family is expected to provide or assist a younger relative to find a job within the company. Furthermore, trustworthy and long lasting relationships are important, meetings often begin with general conversations in order to get to know each other before conducting business.
Masculinity in these terms refers to a society driven by competition, achievement and success. Whereas, the dimension of femininity defines a society, where quality of life and care for others are dominant values. Brazil sits in the center of this femininity/masculinity spectrum. As much as the extreme inequality in opportunity produces a propension to competition and thus a quest for success (Edmonds, 2002; Malysse, 2001) enjoyment of life and social bonding are valued qualities in the hierarchy of life, which on the other hand, may be attributed to the weather and laissez-faire nature of Latin culture.

The Uncertainty Avoidance Scale measures the propension to which members of a culture feel threatened by the unknown of the future and hence have created beliefs and institutions to avoid ambiguous situations. The majority of Latin American countries, including Brazil, score high on the scale. This indicates a strong need for rules and structures to make a given society a safer place. However, the individual need to follow the dictated rules is weak. Brazilians value good and relaxing moments in their everyday life, chatting with colleagues, enjoying a long meal or dancing with guests and friends. I was told an unimaginable number of times to « relaxa » [relax], even though I am not an overly stressed person and I like take my time. Westerners often appear to Brazilians as highly-strung people, who need to organize their daily schedule to the minute. Brazilians on the other hand allocate time within their daily schedule to relaxa and enjoy the moment with company, they tend to have very fluid arrangements and relationships with time (Hall, 1976). They are very passionate and demonstrative people and emotions are easily expressed through their body language. Expressions of affection are a common part of daily social interactions. Smiling at or embracing one another has an air of intimacy and authenticity even when greeting new acquaintances, so much so that many westerners describe their firsts contact as heart warming and are astonished by how affectionate Brazilians appear.

Long-term orientation dimension describes how societies maintain links with their past while dealing with challenges from the present and future, either by being strongly attached to norms based on traditions or by being driven by modernity. Brazil is strongly connected to its past and history (DaMatta, 1982; Buarque de Hollanda, 1995), while also undergoing a « modernity » boom in most recent decades (Reis, 1996; Edmonds, 2002). Hence, the country holds a score of intermediate in this dimension.

Brazil is classified as an indulgent society, one that shows a tendency to enjoy life and have fun through recognizing their inner impulses and desires. Brazilians demonstrate a rather positive attitude and a penchant towards optimism. This fact is easily noticeable on a daily basis by the ease of Brazilians to smile, laugh and give a thumbs up. It is not rare to see people singing to themselves in the streets. Commonly greetings follow « Oi! » [Hi!] by « Tudo bom? » [All
good?] and the question is most often answer by « tudo ótimo! » [Everything is great! (Literally: everything is optimal)]. Most tourists cannot help to notice the Brazilian « alegria » [joy, enjoyment] and hence often describe Brazilians as « happy people »

8.4. The Cordial Man

8.4.1. Particularities of Brazilian Colonazation

In addition to these cultural theories, the « cordial man » is a concept that Buarque de Hollanda (1995), a Brazilian historian and anthropologist, theorized in his book « Raizes do Brasil ». He describes it as the opposite of the European politeness, which is theorized by Elias (1939, The Civilizing Process). Gaining familiarity with the concept is very useful to understand Brazilian conceptions of the social word.

In order to do so, it is helpful to go back in time. Like a person's childhood, a country's history can often be a portal into its current socio-cultural situation. That which follows, aims to summarize key occurrences that are responsible for the distinctiveness of the Brazilian colonization, these include the implementation of sesmarias, the Lei da Boa Razão and the emigration of the Portuguese royal family in 1808. These three aspects of the Brazilian history are important elements to apprehend the dynamics of favoritism and particularism, and thus, the constant blur between private and public interests present in the Brazilian society nowadays (La Rosa, 2013: 47).

8.4.2. Sesmarias Policies

Policies of sesmarias refer to the time during Portuguese colonization (16th-19th century), when several Portuguese families could establish ownership over wide sections of newly discovered Brazilian land. Over the years however, the royal power confronted difficulties maintaining control over these landowner's activities, due to the vast distances between the estates, which resulted in a preference based system by yield and export capacities rather than common regulation. “In the rural domain, the land owner authority was never challenged. Everything was done according to his will, and often, in a capricious and despotic manner” (Buarque de Hollanda, 1995: 80). As these properties were almost entirely self-sufficient, they were hardly supervised by public laws. As a result, in order for the people to survive a personal connection with these families became of grave inherent value as they supplied all the necessities to life.
8.4.3. Lei da Boa Razão

The « Lei da Boa Razão » [Law of Good Sense], enacted in 1769, outlines that within Brazil, Roman Law is to be applied where there are gaps in the judiciary system, when these gaps are not covered by Roman Law, one is to result to the notions of common sense. Thus, encouraging judges and lawyers to base their decisions from a place of common sense (La Rosa, 2013: 49).

8.4.4. Emigration of the Portuguese Royal Family

Brazil is the only former colony in which the royal family, its court and a large amount of the Portuguese state apparatus emigrated to, adding approximately 15,000 people to the then current population (La Rosa, 2013: 51). Resulting in personal connections gaining a level of significant importance in daily life.

8.4.5. Origins of Favoritism

Throughout its history, Brazil developed dynamics of favors and affective logic where personal connections and status were rewarded, while rationality and impersonal ruling were avoided (Rocha, 2004). These typical qualities of Brazilian society are imperative to grasp in order to comprehend the role played by symbolic power within social interactions. This question will be addressed in further chapters showing how, the negotiation with symbolic power relative to identity and status, play a role in the carioca relationship with the body.

8.5. Buarque de Hollanda’s Cordial Man

The expression « cordial man » originates from a letter written by the Brazilian poet Ribeiro Couto addressed to Alfonso Reyes, a Mexican intellectual. He described the cordial man as a sentimentally available individual and saw it as the common denominator that connected the regions of Latin America and distinguished them from the rest of the world.

"(How good it is in the villages of our America, either in my Brazil or your Mexico, when there is a French salesman selling fabric or a German engineer who is studying the local geology, and we invite them for lunch! When they get to our door, we immediately yell: - Kill another chicken!)... We are people that like to talk, smoke mindfully, listen to the sound of the guitar, sing folkloric songs, invite foreigners for some coffee at our houses and recite poetry to the moon. This sentimental availability is ours [...]." (Couto, 1932: 3).
In *Raizes do Brazil* (1995) Buarque de Hollanda reused the term cordiality for its accurate connotation to the Brazilian affective reasoning. He describes in his work how the agrarian patriarchal family permeated all the levels of interaction within the Brazilian culture, and thus, prevented people to develop independent thought and ethical and impartial mind frames. This statement that Brazilians have a constant need to operate under the dominance of an emotional mind frame rather than an objective, rational one, is at the core of his work.

Recurring throughout all High-Context cultures, Brazilians have a strong sense of community values, but the laws that characterize their public sphere are inefficient and overruled by personal connections. Thus it is essential to befriend as many people as possible to guarantee survival (La Rosa, 2013: 58).

Many characteristics of the cordial man described by Buarque de Hollanda are in line with Hall's classification of High-Context societies. The fear of impersonal distance, the need to be included, the emotionality, the lack of objectivity and exactness, the indirect communication style and the silent rules in society are all topics that are exposed by Buarque de Hollanda and align with Hall, Ting-Toomey and Hofstede’s concepts of group-oriented values, spiral logic, indirect and status-oriented style of communication and context-based understanding (La Rosa, 2013).

### 8.6. Informality as a Norm

The Brazilian cordiality, as described by several authors (Buarque da Hollanda, 1995; Freyre, 1933) is the opposite of the European politeness described in Elias' (1939) works. In order to manifest respect, the European courtesy expects people to deal with strangers from a polite distance. According to Buarque da Hollanda (1995: 117), Brazilians fear social distance and show their respect through their visible desire of creating intimacy with others. People call each other "amigo"[friend], "tio"[uncle], "amore"[love] employing diminutives and nicknames to create this sense of immediate closeness. In Brazil, the Portuguese language has no way of formal speech, students address their professors with their first name, people smile, wink or give a thumbs up and greetings are always followed by the famous "Tudo bom?" [All good?] even for a short interaction between two complete strangers.

At first, I would act in a way that I understood as polite, but the reactions I received would cause me to feel unsettled, according to codes I was not yet able to process. Exemplified by an ordinarily habitual scenario of doing the groceries in a busy supermarket, I would at first move to allow people the space to pass, however the reactions I would receive would tell me this was an outlandish gesture. Normally, people just walk pass and brush themselves against each
other to negotiate their way through the crowded shop. The Brazilian conception of personal space is very close, in terms of proxemy (Hall, 1966), concept that describes the physical distance individuals maintain during interpersonal interaction, varying with different cultural groups.

This closeness is not only felt in the physical form during personal interactions, but also existentially in social relations. Since cordiality implies that treating someone with respect is treating that person with closeness, Brazilian society is closely interconnected, and the culture is open and public on many levels. There are people out at all times, socializing, eating, relaxing. Old people play cards in public squares, chess on the public tables, sit on their stoop, eat out and have coffee in the street, do sports, go to the beach, play music, dance and have street parties. Culture and weather are often associated in common dialogues amongst travelers, as the sunny weather is often referred to as the big factor permitting the openness, warmth and communal nature of hot countries. In comparison with the introversion, coldness and privacy of cold countries, to speak in very broad terms.

8.7. Cordiality and the Body

Malysse (2002), using the work of Elias (1973) argues that the body has been erased from the European social world through what Le Breton (1993) also calls « the ritual body disappearance » in social interactions. « In the occident, the body is considered essentially as a material entity, a biological organism most of the time controlled by natural processes, and so, anti-social, and the logical social interactions have just a little space in the occidental conceptions from what stimulates and keeps the body physically. (Malysse, 2002: 3) ». The body has been privatized through civilization processes over millenniums, experiencing isolation, religious prohibition and social barriers, limiting its social use to the intimacy sphere. The communicative functions of the body are reduced along with its participation in the social life, thus becoming a simple personal image. The European maintains his body separate from others’ during interactions. « In the social scene, this pantomime - refined by several attempts and corrections - demands from each person a strong view of the inside in the social limitations connected with the body, showing a severe and strict self-control, a kind of attitude that does not allow a cordial and spontaneous meeting. (Malysse, 2002: 4). » « Gringos don’t know what to do with their bodies. » A Chilean friend once said, illustrating quite well the differences felt through the « techniques of the body » (Mauss, 1935) utilized between westerners and Latin Americans. «They cannot dance, they cannot relax, they cannot...make love [laughs]! »

18 Amelia, Chile, 29 years old
8.8. My Personal Experience with Cordiality

My very first contact with the Brazilian cordiality took place on the plane as I was flying into Brazil, I could not quite figure who from the Brazilians around me came together and knew each other and whom had only started to talk on the plane. They just seemed to be one large group, all talking and joking together. I remember thinking « no it's impossible that they all came together, they must have met here. » and later the opposite « no, it's impossible that they've just met, they seem so close ».

Later, I came to understand it better, through several westerners having personal links to Brazilians. A Liechtensteiner married to a Brazilian girl, a British who had moved to Rio to live with his Brazilian girlfriend and an Italian from SüdTirol who has Brazilian relatives through his uncle as he is married to a Carioca. All of them spoke Portuguese, had spent a fair amount of time in Brazil and really tried to integrate into Brazilian social circles and make true friends. All giving me a recount of their struggles to build meaningful friendships. "At first you feel like: "waw this is so great! I have so many friends in Brazil!" but then you realize that they don't care."19; "It's really easy to meet people, have good conversations, be invited to events, ... But it's so hard to crack that first level and make real friends!"20; "Actually I find it really superficial. [...] If you are friends with everyone you are friends with no one really."21 Conversely, the Brazilian girlfriend who had spent ten years in Europe, the three last years of that time in London, told me how she found English people really ‘clicky’ and dependent on their social ‘clicks’.

"They always meet up with the same group. They drink before together, they go out together, they stay together, they come back together... they just do everything together! [...] I found it really hard to mix with people and their groups. There is like a group from work, a group from uni, a group from a friend, ... and they talk only about work, only about uni, only about people they know. For example when I was trying to bring my friend from work to another group, they would get really awkward, they’d continue to talk about work and they wouldn't really make any effort to integrate the person into the conversation. (Sara, Brasilia, 36 y.o.)"

I had actually noticed myself how easy Brazilians were to converse with. They would not sit awkwardly next to a friend of a friend they did not know without starting a conversation. Even

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19 Peter, SüdTirol, 32 years old
20 Zac, England, 30 years old
21 Stefan, Switzerland, 36 years old
with beginner level Portuguese, they would always be really patient, help me, talk slowly and ask simple questions so we could converse on my level. I always thought and worried about how boring it must have been for them to talk to me, but the situation kept happening, with a lot of different people so I came to the conclusion that Brazilians feel really at ease to converse with strangers. I would have small conversations with so many people, on the bus, cashiers at the supermarket and sellers on the streets. In these exact same scenarios my friend had described in England, I met so many people and had so many conversations, whether it was during parties, on the streets, or during Carnival. When I compare to my experiences from Belgium, I draw upon the circumstances of my non French-speaking friends who learnt French during their stay. This process was difficult for them as my Belgian friends have a reluctance to operate outside of their comfort zone. This can range from speaking in a different language, adapting their language to suit others or to not sharing many common references to discuss. In Brazil I had so many conversations about really trivial topics in a mix of my broken Portuguese and their broken English. Their social and inclusive nature is extremely noticeable.

During my time in Brazil I spent two nights in São Paulo with a Brazilian family. My Portuguese was the weakest in the group, however the inclusion and warmth that I experienced through their jokes, nicknames, interest in Belgium, basic questions and general affectionate behavior was more than I had experienced while staying at the family home of my Dutch friend in Rio. Overall, my norms of a more reserved interrelation requiring greater time to develop aligns more with my experience while at my Dutch friend, as my parents are likely to have acted the same way. However, the difference between the two experiences was notable.

To generalize my impression in comparative terms, in Belgium, relationships need time to build and flourish, and once they are established their is a dimension of loyalty to them. What this Brazilian girlfriend said about the importance of the group, the ‘click’, allowed me to realize that same fact about my own culture. Personally, my whole social life always revolved around my group and even if overtime it evolved in the long term, it was actually very closed and fixed in the short-term. Brazilians, on the contrary appear to be very independent and fluid, in terms of friendships and social connections. People I had met twice would greet me with a really warm hug and big smile, with sometimes more enthusiasm than my actual friends.
8.9. Virtual Cordiality

This enthusiasm, facility to bond and affection is also very present on social media. In Brazil it is common after even a spontaneous conversation with a stranger even after no more than 5 minutes to add him on Facebook, what's app or Instagram. While on the contrary, in Belgium there have been repeat occasions when I have met the same people and none of us would have added each other on Facebook.

Once A Brazilian friend of mine had a 15 minutes monologue complaining about the use of social media in Brazil. "People add each other on Facebook all the time but they would never meet up, they just like and comment on each other's posts." That same friend once showed me one of his former profile photos to convey his resemblance with a famous actor. This photo is shown here, as one can see it is of good quality but by no means out of the ordinary. However, I was astonished when I saw that the photo had 354 likes and 31 comments. I am certain that none of my Belgian friends have ever had that many reactions to a photo online, even if it was an exceptional photo. Overt time, I became aware that this was not out of the ordinary in Brazil.

Figure 10 My Friend's Profile Picture

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\(^{22}\) Peter, Carioca, 26 years old
My friend above complained:

"Every one spends so much time on social media, it's so annoying […] even if you don't want to post anything yourself, you don't check out the newsfeed and you just want to answer to people, it takes so much time! People make Whatsapp groups for anything and they send so much stupid stuff in there. […] On Snap Chat you have a fire emoji next to a person’s name if you send each other a photo a day for five consecutive days, we have a saying for this: « never let the fire die ». So basically you are supposed to send each other photos all the time! Sometimes at parties people only take selfies and send snap chats, it's so boring! They send a photo of the party like it's so good but it's a photo session more than a party. And then they post, then everyone likes and comments and then they have to answer all the comments […] (Peter, Carioca, 26 y.o.)."

The Italian from SüdTirol made a similar comment:

"I went to a birthday party and it was nice but nothing crazy. People were taking a lot of photos. A lot of people added me on Facebook. The next day, when I saw all the photos and the comments on Facebook, I found it so weird. The birthday girl was saying things like: “thank you so much for last night, it was a magical moment shared with my dearest friends, you are so important in my life and I will never forget last night etc.” She wrote quite a long text on that tone. But I was there, I saw what the party was like and it wasn't that emotional and they didn't seem to have such a good time or to be as good friends as it seemed to be on the photos and what she wrote. (Peter, SüdTirol, 32 y.o.)."

The Brazilians I would talk to on Facebook would use so many emojis. Love hearts, smiley faces, kisses, winking faces, thumbs up, food, beer, the list goes on. A lot of my European friends would complain about the amount of notifications on what's app from their Brazilian friends. I had many conversations with Gringos about the online habits of Brazilians and they all voiced a shared consensus that Brazilians use of social media reflected their high levels of cordiality.
9. Body Message

The French anthropologist Stéphane Malysse (2002) who focused his works on the « body cult » in Brazil wrote a paper describing how the body and its expressivity play a role in interpersonal relations. Touch is really important and Brazilians are very tactile. People hug each other, lean on each other, touch each other's arm when talking and girlfriends or relatives hold hands when walking down the street. It is not rare when a person wants someone to let him or her pass that they would touch their back, gently tap their shoulder or hold their arm. I was always surprised at first when that would happen, because if someone taps my shoulder in the street I expect it to be an acquaintance. According to Malysse, the body's sociality is central to the Brazilian conception of the person and people's first reading of a person is, above all, corporal. "Brazil valorizes the body, and that connection with the concrete is a base to the Brazilian social life cordiality […] Due to its important role in the social interactions, the body, in Brazil, must be understood not only as a cordiality way, but also as a body message (Malysse, 2002: 2)."

What the message is or tends to be is better explained with a further understanding of the social context in Brazil and more specifically in Rio. As a result of such an unreliability of the state, Brazilians have learned to « do their best with what they have », a quality which is strongly exemplified in Favelas. The « jeintinho Brasileiro » refers to this exact quality and is a common trait amongst Brazilians. By describing how I have come to understand and experience the instability of the social system, I hope to demonstrate that power is an important asset that Brazilians compete for. Power can take many forms and is enacted and performed in many ways, one of which is through using the appearance as a display.
10. Social Structures

« Conflicts with the body are present almost everywhere, but crystalize issues of each society (Bordo, 1992:130). »

10.1. Corruption and Inequalities

In this chapter, using what I have discussed and observed on the field, I will explain how the Carioca society is deeply divided and unequal. The trust in the government or public institutions is hindered due to frequent and almost systematical corruption and systems of favor. Therefore Brazilians, in this case Cariocas, have a historical propension to resourcefulness. In such a context, identity plays a role of capital (Edmonds, 2002; Laurent, 2012). Social position determines ones access and opportunity within the social space. Hence, The social status is a component of strong individual identity and in these conditions the appearance functions like a business card (Malysse, 2001).

During my stay, one of the biggest bribing syndicates of all time was discovered, recordings of the Brazilian President Temer aired that he had been bribing actors of anti-corruption investigations (called Lava Jato investigations). This led to the discovery of a corruption system that had been going on for decades, it had involved over 1,800 politicians from 28 different parties and transactions valued over several hundreds of millions of Reais23 (Brazilian currency). As a result, the population demanded the impeachment of Temer and new elections.

Jean- Jacques Rousseau (1762) theorized the Social Contract based on the idea of shared interests between the state and the people. Eluding that life in society shall hence be ruled by contract and that the individual renounces his natural rights in exchange for protection by the state. Participation in the state entails various duties, which are offset by rights and as a result a sense of civil responsibility.

On the contrary, several Brazilians have told me the same story (though with slight variations from one person to another) of the first Portuguese colonies that kept big parts of the production sent to Portugal for themselves. Colonial authorities and landowners were free from strict control, as authorities in the homeland had no means of tracking what was produced and what was sent home. Thus, the sentiment of a system that was always corrupted and a country born on an unequal and a self-interest driven basis is widespread.

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23 Source: TheGuardian.com
10.2. Favor Systems

10.2.1. A Network of Interconnected Interests

Brazilian social structures are based on networks of favor founded upon inter-connected interests and resources, which are unequally distributed. There is corruption at every level of society. At the beginning of my stay, the police were on strike, as they had not been paid for several months\(^\text{24}\), Brazilians explained to me that the police had continued to work as they received private money for protection over certain areas of the city. This was when I really understood what corruption is. It is an interconnection of needs and means. These policemen needed income to survive and the state was not providing, forced to find the money elsewhere, the need to survive met the means of protection. Inversely, private individuals needed the police for protection of their commercial activities and therefore, the needs of protection met the means to survive.

10.2.2. A Means to Cope

In Brazil, the government and the state are commonly known to be unstable, corrupted and unreliable. As a result, money, capital and effective means of action rule. The peoples' reliance on themselves and their personal networks to survive is thus deeply rooted. Many Brazilians I talked to about this mentioned to me the «jeithino Brasileiro». The concept theorized by the Brazilian anthropologist Roberto da Matta (2004), refers to the Brazilian ability to bend the rules and find a way to solve the situation against the odds, it is frequently referred to as an inherent part of the culture. It can be summarized as: «making the best out of what you have» or «optimizing one's options».

Brazil, being a high-context system, has been traditionally characterized by its high power distance and status-oriented style. In such societies, individuals have a higher tolerance for unequal distribution of power and, thus, must develop behaviors to help them navigate within this disproportionate system (La Rosa, 2013; Edmonds, 2002). A survey conducted in 2006 in Brazil showed that 98% of the participants knew someone who had engaged in illegal actions and 69% admitted to acting illegally themselves. Furthermore, 75% of the participants admitted that had they been a politician under the same circumstances there would have also been a strong

\(^{24}\) Source: Plus55.com
inclination to perform the same acts of corruption. Many Brazilians have told me to not trust anyone. I slowly became aware that the comforting and familial projection of cordiality was in fact exposed solely on the surface as a result of the underlying lack of trust. There is thus a distance kept from one individual to another deriving from suspicion. Hence, relating to the definitions above of high-context cultures, it is important to read between the lines, be street smart and understand the situation according to the context. In this spirit of trade and mutual aid, not only raw commodities, but personal connections become as much of a resource. To call upon Bourdieu’s (1986) terminology, social capital is of great value in such favor systems.

10.3. A Stratified Society

« Violence, marginality and poverty are risk factors for an extreme preoccupation with the body (Uribe, 2006: 72). »

In Brazil, The Quality of Life index is 40% inferior to Belgium and in Rio de Janeiro it is even more inferior to Belgium by 59.5%. In a social setting where the economic capital makes the law and it is common knowledge that no one, especially the state, can be trusted, it makes sense for people to invest in the one thing that is theirs and will be forever, a guaranteed capital, their bodies (Jarrin, 2013: 175).

10.3.1. Favelas

Brazil is a highly hierarchical and stratified society. The country, newly advanced economically is part of BRICS although 6 percent of the total population lives in favelas [slums]. Favelas, also called comunidades [communities] were born in the late 19th century with the abolition of slavery when former slaves improvised squat houses and were expanded with the rural exodus in the 40s to the 70s. Rio de Janeiro as a state has recorded approximately 1000 favelas. The majority of favelas are located at the peripheries of the city and the most renowned are situated on the hillsides. The Zona Sul of Rio is home to the richest neighborhoods in Latin America (Copacabana, Ipanema, Leblon). Fancy neighborhoods are located at sea level and the moment a change in gradient is apparent the border of a favela is confronted. Thus, One can

25 Source: Silvia Cervellini; Brazilian marketing company IBOPE Intelligencia. Sample 2001 participants.
26 Belgium: 149,44; Brazil: 89,89; Rio de Janeiro: 60,73; Data from Numbeo.com; This website was mentioned or used as a source by many international newspapers and magazines including BBC, Time, The Week, Forbes, The Economist, Business Insider, San Francisco Chronicle, New York Times, The Telegraph, The Age, The Sydney Morning Herald, China Daily, The Washington Post, USA Today and dozens more.
27 Source: Britanica.com
simply step from the highest class of society to the lowest in an instant. The further inland, the poorer the neighborhoods, and in each of them are favelas that follow the same pattern. In the Zona Sul, all the buildings have front gates and doormen. Gated communities are entire neighborhoods that one cannot enter without passing through a security gate (sometimes with a fingerprint). A simple act of taking the bus or walking with a bag puts the fear in a lot of Brazilians due to the risks of being robbed. Poverty issues are overt, overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, poor nutrition and pollution result in high infant mortality rates and rampant disease throughout the poorer favelas. A lot of people live in the streets with children and some families live all year round on the beach. Social classes are also linked with ethinical belonging, whites tends to be more strongly represented in higher classes and blacks in lower classes (Costa Ribeiro, 2007: 21).

During my stay in Rio, I lived in two different Favelas in the Zona Sul. I was genuinely surprised to realize that they were like tiny cities on their own. They have supermarkets, banks, restaurants, bars, hairdressers, beauty salons and shops, containing everything that you need, and more, for daily living. Main streets have public lights and moto-taxis or combis ensure the transportation of inhabitants. In some of the larger ones, the city intervened and built stairs or elevators for the Copa Mundial and the Jogos Olimpicos (2016). Many Favelas steal electricity and water from city distribution. Usually, on the morro [hill], it is « the highest, the poorest ». The hierarchy is inverted, nicer houses, apartments and infrastructure are located at the bottom of the morros, while ascending upwards the built environment becomes increasingly modest and less well kept. Favelas resemble an embodiment of the jeitinho Brasileiro. Built completely organically, blurring the barriers between legal and illegal, formal and informal, they represent the Brazilian resourcefulness and the ability to « make the best out of what one has ».

10.3.2. Mutual Cooperation

People rely on each other and communities are strongly bound, every one is familiar. People yell information to each other in the street, from their windows or even the rooftops. One day I didn't have my key and I was waiting at my front door, sitting on the « street », a young boy stuck out his head from the neighbor’s window and asked me if everything was fine. I told him I had no key to open the doors (the first door was shared with some neighbors and the following led into my place), so he proceeded to yell at the neighbor on his rooftop, who yelled to a second one I couldn't see, who then got a third one to come and open the first door for me. In the meantime, the almost teenager offered me some water and the only thing he said to me was

Source: www.dataworldbank.org
“você tá linda” [you're pretty]. Every one helps each other and trades favors and services, from lending someone a ladder to helping someone build a new slab for their home. Overall, People depend on each other and social life is based on connections.

One day a man who had traveled to Europe in his young years was talking to my friend from Lichtenstein and his Brazilian wife at a cafe in the little streets of my favela. He told them: « Look at this. This would be impossible in Lichtenstein... I have no milk for my coffee right? » he began yelling: « Leite, leite! Algum tem leite?! » [Milk, milk! Someone has milk?!] Shortly after he started calling for milk, some man passed his head through the second floor window of a house close by « Tenho leite amigo! » [I have some milk my friend]. He then came down with some milk and joined the group for a coffee. He arrived laughing, holding the mans shoulder, he gave him a thumbs up after pouring the milk into his cup and shook everyone's hand, these two men who had just met seemed to my Liechtensteiner friend like they were best friends since childhood. This anecdote from a favela is a great example to illustrate the Brazilian cordiality and sense of mutual aid.

Eduardo, a Brazilian friend of mine once explained to me: « You give because you know that one day you are going to be the one who asks. It's always good to know people. It's like « you give me this, I'll give you that » [...] I always say that Brazilians are profiteers [laughs]. If they are nice to you it's because they want something from you »29. Whether it is called taking advantage or cooperating, the point is that the Brazilian system is based on networks of favor and every level of society functions on this interconnecting system.

10.3.3. Gangs

These lines between formal and informal are further blurred by the running of local political elections for the favelas, where a community leader is voted into power. However, the real power rests with the mafia and the gangs who truly rule the favelas. Favelas are ruled by these gangs who operate a network of services and interests, using a lot of different actors whom are all ruled by a drug lord. Young boys sit in strategical locations with guns and walkie-talkies, like a network of eyes surveying the streets.

Edson, a Carioca who was dating one of my flatmates for a short time, grew up and still lives with his parents in Rocinha (the biggest favela in Latin America). As we were having dinner one night, I asked him many questions about the gangs, their systems and their organization. I had heard many stories from various people but with him, I had access to first hand information. Amongst other things, he told me:

29 Eduardo, Carioca, 27 years old
People always know when the police are coming, because the gang pays them to get information [...]. Also they buy weapons from the police sometimes. [...] The gangs start in prison and then spread into favelas through the key members. [...] Some politicians have connections with the mafia and the drug lords. One time a politician’s son was on a plane with a lot of cocaine, he got caught but let off with nothing. [...] Every one knows that every body is corrupted and everyone has interests. [...] A lot of celebrities get their drugs from these gangs. [...] Once, David Beckham came to Vidigal [a famous favela] and his car got stolen, he called the drug lord and asked if he could get the car back because he had just bought it.» As an answer to my shocked face and wide-open mouth he replied «Yes it’s like this! Of course! In Brazil it's everything like this. (Edson, Carioca, 29 y.o.) »

10.4. Hybrid Society

Favelas and the poorest parts of the city are well known for being dangerous, due to the frequent shootings between gangs, drug dealers or the police. Most taxis or Uber drivers refuse to go up into the favelas and I was warned many times about the present danger. However, On the other hand, I once overheard a conversation between a little girl and her mother in the favela, the mother was telling her child that they had to take the bus and go to the city center to do something, the little girl’s reaction to the idea of having to go to the city was «Maé, tô com medo ! » [Mum, I’m scared!]. Favelandos [favela inhabitant] grow up with fear for the danger of the city and conversely, people from the city for the dangers of the favela. Rio felt like an infinite amount of different worlds sharing only the same geographic location of the city.

This hybrid Brazilian society in terms of social classes, ethnicities and cultures leads social identities to be constantly revealed and theatricalized through the appearance and the self-image incarnated by the body (Laurent, 2012: 458). Thus, appearance constitutes one of the many forms through which identity and social hierarchies of race, class or gender are (re)negotiated. As Edmonds (2007) puts it "beauty is an unfair hierarchy that can disturb other unfair hierarchies (p.377)" and Brazilian beautified bodies reflect the emancipatory power of beauty as a capital challenging traditional hierarchies. Attractiveness short-cuts other levels of power (Edmonds, 2010: 17).

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30 After verification, I found out that Gustavo Perrella, the son of Zezê Perella, (a politician who also used to be the president of the Brazilian football team Cruzeiro Esporte Clube) got caught on a helicopter with over 445 kg of cocaine on board in 2013 and only the pilot was arrested. Source: TheGuardian.com

31 I could not verify this information.
11. The Ideal Body and Its Messages

« The ideal body is a social construction for which individuals are both products and producers of social meaning (Ochoa, 2011, p.354). »

11.1. Gaze

According to Bourdieu (2001), the efficiency of the gaze depends on the relative position of the perceiver and the perceived and the degree to which the schemes of perception and appreciation are known by the person to whom they are applied (Bourdieu, 2001: 65). In Rio people stare at each other commonly and eye contact is maintained. I often overheard gringos telling anecdotes or complaining about how uncomfortable it would make them feel. This sharp gazing, also described by several authors (Laurent, 2012; Malysse, 2002) can be read as an integral component of Brazilian communication and body expressivity. The gaze is never vague but always active, encounters are first visual (Malysse, 2002: 3) and the inquisitive gaze tries to read the appearance to ascertain a social label (Laurent, 2012: 459).

Many men, when making eye contact, smile, wink or openly comment: « Linda ! » [Pretty]. Men of all ages, from young age to elderly, overtly scan and follow the passing girls with their intrusive gaze. It is socially acceptable to adopt an attitude of sexual interest and flirtation. In some cases, the gaze is blatantly used to express a positive evaluation. In other cases, the gaze can be used to convey a negative evaluation. In both cases and in general, Brazilians are very expressive people, allowing their body language to be rather explicit.

Gazes and open reactions function like a rating system. The expressivity of one’s attitude clearly communicates the underlying assessment. One day two male friends of mine were discussing this Brazilian trait and saying that most women were being nice to them while most men were often quite rude to them. Contrarily, in my experiences it was more commonly men who were friendlier and of more assistance while women would judge me with their gaze and display a rather antipathetic attitude.

The implicit hierarchy of beauty frames the inter-personal visual interactions. Once I had figured that out, I often used it against unwanted male attention. I would transmit my most disgusted look, sending a message of shock and then smile displaying an arrogant attitude communicating « in your dreams! » with my body language and facial expression. This technique would be extremely efficient as it instantly pushed away unwanted attention, as if I was speaking in their language. A few times, my friends and I overheard angry comments of « she can't look at
me like that! » sometimes adding « look at her! », confirming the unspoken beauty ranking that rules visual interactions. The expression « out of someone's league » attests that such an implicit beauty hierarchy is most likely present in all countries. What makes Rio particular is the immense value attributed to the aesthetical hierarchy in the social world, to such importance that Laurent (2012) calls it « the appearance tyranny » (p.434).

11.2. The Body for Others

The objectification of the appearance, the rating and ranking performed through the gaze and discourse of others, gives the individual an idea of what he is « worth » in the eyes of others. This informs him of his assets and flaws according to the popular aesthetical standards. Gazes and reactions of others give a normative feedback, creating one's relationship with their own image. However, these reactions are based on one's perception and appreciation, which themselves are shaped by the social structures at the heart of social interactions (Bourdieu, 2001: 60-65). The normative experienced body is hence present in most societies but takes particular forms depending on the different meanings applied to different physical elements. In Rio, the social structure translates the specific socially valued appearance into symbols of power. With further investigation it may be possible to conclude, that the value attributed to an appearance may vary with a given society depending on the layers of meaning and associated symbols within that society, but invariably it is founded upon symbolic power.

The impression given to others regarding one’s social status and hence power, is managed through displaying signs and symbols specific to a particular social setting. Just like a business card (Malysse, 2001), the appearance allows itself to be read, by individuals sharing the same context, through decoding « layers of meaning ». The following sections will further present peeled off layers of meanings, describe the most popular front stages and expose central symbols Cariocas associate with power.

11.2.1. Similarity

Overall, the ideal body type produces similarity. Goffman (1979) explains how displays provide the evidence of the actor’s alignment in the situation and are important insofar that alignments are (p.69). In Brazil, the individual’s alignment with the dominating beauty standards has a normative and inclusive function (Jarrin, 2005: 6). Transformation of the body, through plástica [plastic surgery], exercise, diet and esthetical consumption aims towards a unique direction, a supreme model. According to Edmonds (2002) plástica is a technique to « level out »
the social field, erasing an injustice originating from culture as much as from nature. It comes to conform to the aesthetical model collectively produced by media and admitted by society (p.216). In the interview I conducted with Carol, it appears that the first reason for her to get an intervention was to fit the standards of beauty. She expressed many times her strong insecurities harming her self-esteem and social life,

« I am tall and my breasts were too small for my height. I used to hate it. [...] I was jealous of my friends and other girls with normal sized breasts. [...] My Mum paid for it because she knew I really needed it. [...] Now I feel so much better, more confident».

The following quote from an interview conducted by Edmonds perfectly encapsulates this will to fit in: « I didn't get plástica to become prettier, but to become common, normal, or even equal to everyone » (Edmonds, 2002: 231).

11.2.2. Distinction

In the West of Rio a neighborhood is located planned after Miami, called Barra. It is home to some of the wealthiest parts of the carioca population. « They don't want to mix with the rest of the population »32 [...] « they want to show that they are all different, that they are better you know »33, the population of Barra is often referred to in the terms of this class distinction. The beaches of Barra majorly consist of the ‘ideal’ body type, the transformed and perfected appearance I was looking to investigate. « You won't see any fat people there »34, « Everyone is perfect there »35. The population of Barra represents the elite and displayed the body message that goes with it.

11.2.3. Social Confusion

Not all beaches are like Barra, in Rio, most beaches are attended by people from every social class and origin. However, beachgoers covering next to nothing, are left without many options to display their social status, hence the beauty hierarchy gains a position of symbolic power over the social hierarchy. Poor or wealthy, in this setting it is the beautiful people that attract the attention. Tourists are easy to spot and maybe harder to read, the gazes amongst Brazilians attempt to read the identity and guess the social status. A carioca friend of mine once said as a joke: « When I see fat people I know that they are poor...or they are lazy! [laughs] »36.

32 Sara, Carioca, 26 years old
33 Raissa, Paulista, 25 years old
34 Eduardo, Carioca, 27 years old
35 Luana, Carioca, 24 years old
36 Vanessa, Carioca, 31 years old
Laurent (2012) calls « social confusion » the moment where social boundaries get blurred, for example when on the beach the wealthiest and the poorest share the same space. Wearing nothing but their skin and swimwear, the distinction of class cannot be demonstrated through the same codes. There is a saying « Não existe mulheres feias, só existe mulheres sem dinheiro » [Ugly women don't exist, only women without money exist] which illustrates the idea that appearance and social class are intertwined. On the beach people can « cheat », they can use the beauty hierarchy to re-arrange power, allowing feelings of empowerment and superiority over less attractive people and mislead the attention of the higher-class.

11.2.4. Body of Upward mobility & Body of Class

According to Laurent (2012), in Rio, the body, physically remodeled, accumulates two great functions. It expresses the ruling social order (social, political and economic hierarchies) and, at the same time, the necessity to conform to aesthetical standards, these are identically valued across all groups composing society. In such a context, « social confusion » occurs when one cannot distinguish between the « body of class » and the « body of upward mobility » (p.453-455).

Wealthy and poor are affected the same way by issues associated with appearance (Edmonds, 2009). As an example, a young girl from the favela who matches the standards of pretty and fit will attract more attention than a wealthy girl of the same age who is slightly outside these norms. Through the gazes and reactions of others, the two girls will get a normalizing assessment based on their appearance. The favelanda could hence afford to look at the rich kid with disdain and both would understand the content of this gaze. This example is not uncommon, the expressivity and status-oriented traits of Brazilian culture often allow the attitudes to be easily read.

Social settings ruled by specific norms, such as, the beach, carnival or even social media foster this social confusion. These settings, constitute main stages for individuals to present themselves and display signs of either higher social position or social mobility, thus, communicating the desired performed appearance. « I am worth what you can see » says thus the body message.
12. Social Spaces

12.1. Display and Examination

In the section below I will present in brief a few ‘front stages’, these environments are the most popular carioca social spaces where the impression is managed. These social spaces are a big part of the carioca culture and hence I believe are important. In this section the focus is to present an image and background for which the reader can use as a foundation to continue to build upon with the further ideas introduced. Thus, it will not consist of an in depth analysis of the topics discussed.

Common amongst the following places described below is their public aspect and their democratic accessibility allowing social confusion. The open nature of these social spaces permit the display of oneself and the examination of others, hence a comparison and formation of a hierarchy of individual's appearances. The norms and codes regulating these spaces differ from a « regular » day-to-day setting. The ‘observer’ and the ‘observed’ are roles which are always present and are shared amongst all. The performed appearance gives a normalizing tone to the presentation of the self in these spaces. Like the Panopticon model used by Foucault (1975), no one knows when he/she is being watched, but the understanding is that it could occur at any instant. Hence, the sheer exposure and visibility produce a normalizing control over appearances.

12.2. Beach

The beach in Rio is, above all, a public space of leisure and socialization. Urban beaches, like the ones of Ipanema, Copacabana and Leblon are busy at any time of the year. The beaches relatively recent (last decades) democratization of access has placed extremely varied social groups in the presence of one another and as a result radically modified the rapport to the body (Malysse, 2002: 2). The Zona Sul has become a place of body liberation, a new space, which instigated the emancipation of a body without the mask of clothes. The beach hence speaks a double language, one of tolerance and one of social discriminations (Ibid, 2002: 2). « Aside from these social discriminations, the idea of an aesthetical competition, resulting in an aesthetical ranking operated by expert gazes, constitutes the visual foundation of reciprocal recognition of the different members of these groups, gathered by the unifying principle of normal (Malysse, 2002: 2; my translation). »

Carioca beaches are characterized by movement, physical activity and body exposure, it hence becomes a zone of physical maintenance. Public places of malhação [exercising] become
places of exhibition and hence seduction through the gaze (Laurent, 2012; Malysse, 2001). The beach becomes a front stage on which the appearance is performed and the gazes scrutinize and examine. These performances imply meticulous codes and body techniques ruled by the interpretation of the « body-self ». The tendency on the beach is not to open one's mind to different forms of beauty; it is on the contrary, the increasing unification and simplification of the model, reinforcing it to make it more functional (Kaufman, 1995).

Exposure to the beach germinates the awareness and various feelings of one's body. The bodies self-awareness, positive or negative, constitutes a space for « appearance dictatorship » (Laurent, 2012). Bodies in movement irremediably attract the attention. The front of the beach, next to the water constitutes the more visible part of the stage. A simple act of entering the water exposes oneself to the audience's attentive gaze. It is also were cariocas play Brazilian football, exposing their bodies and techniques to the entirety of the beach. The actors are forever interchanging the role of the observer and the observed. The « bodily outfit » appears to be built as much, if not more, for others than the one himself. It is not rare for men to stand, stretch or exercise on the beach (opposed to lying down like most women) with an alert gaze, always scanning with an invitation for eye contact.

12.3. Academias

Academias, very popular in Brazil (the country with the second most gyms to inhabitants\(^{37}\)) are a particular space of display and exhibition as not only the body is showed but it is also the place where it is transformed. The population is vastly varied which delivers the message « anyone can do it ». Ratos de academias [gym rat; refers to the expression rato de biblioteca [bookworm]], as Cariocas call them, often push their bodies to extremes. Men mostly focus on the waist up, while women generally focus on the waist down. As much as a woman's bunda is « never too big », it seems like a man’s chest obeys the same rule. Hypertrophied bodies in action seem to say that one can always do better and that the sky is the limit, competition is fraught and no one is ever at the top, a perpetual internal battle instigated by the surrounding external competitors. Large mirrors covering the walls reflect the image of the self and offer a multitude of angles from which to observe others' bodies, compare and rank oneself against others.

\(^{37}\) Study: IHRSA Global Report 2015 (International Health, Racquet & Sports-club Association); Source: Ativo.com
I started to go to the gym myself as part of my field observation. I was often surprised by the profile of some members (young boys and elderly or pregnant woman). Going to the gym impacted my relationship with my body. I began inspecting and judging myself in changing room’s mirrors before and after every session. I would rate everyone and compare myself to the female members. One day, as I approached an exercise machine I saw the amount of weight an elderly lady was lifting compared to me, I became aware and came to understand the competitive feeling that such environments can produce. Being surrounded by sculptured bodies introduced a sense of distance between my own body and the aesthetical norms.

12.4. Social Media

12.4.1. The Era of the Ordinary Individual

When the physical appearance is controlled and invested in it then deserves the finest presentation. All these efforts have to be displayed and optimally employed in the production of the «self-for-others». Social media is therefore, a perfect platform to exhibit one's best ‘assets’. It allows the control of what is shown, how it is shown and, additionally, enables a direct feedback. Watching and being watched inspires rating and ranking of each other, further aligning the individual’s presentation of self to social norms. In similar fashion with the beach, where people observe and compare their bodies with those of strangers, social media offers a window into others' lives and a front stage on which they can perform. Poulin (2009), calls the «era of the ordinary individual» an upcoming trend that exposes oneself online using the ordinary daily personal actions to produce and show one's own existence.

Brazilians with access to the Internet (58% of the population) are very active on social media. «As the country becomes more technologically friendly, the tech culture has become deeply ingrained into Brazilian society. The country's population, especially millennials, has become reliant on the Internet and social media platforms. [...] The country leads Latin America in the number of social media users. [...] Brazil comprises the second-largest national audience on Facebook, after the United States. (Steckaman & Andrews, 2017: 28-29).»

Alberto’s exaggerated comment below echoed how I often felt about some of my Brazilian friends and their habits to pose and post all the time. «They live their lives through Instagram and see themselves through selfies»38. In this «era of ordinary individuals», Poulin (2009) argues that a successful personal identity requires social visibility and, conversely, social visibility is proof of one's success in his quest for individualized identity (p.19). The vast amount

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38 Alberto, Guatemala, 30 years old
of comments and likes that one receives on each post, function as an external validation, feeding the ego. Gaga framed this phenomenon in the following way during our interview:

« It's superficial. It's a personal market you're setting about yourself. Like a platform for the perfect self and body. There is a lot of instruments to edit the « perfect body », the « perfect life ». It's a platform in the distance, a false sense of sharing. (Gaga, Carioca, 30 y.o.)»

12.4.2. Selfies and Poses

I had never been exposed to such frequent use of social media as when I was in Rio. With my Brazilian friends (but not only) I had the feeling that every movement of our life had to be reported over Facebook and Instagram. I once spent the weekend in a Brazilian family and I have never had to pose so much in my life. We would wake up, have breakfast, take a selfie, get ready to leave the house, take a group photo with the parents, take a selfie while waiting for the bus, take a selfie in the bus, take a selfie while waiting for the metro and then again take one in the metro. It was this pattern for the whole weekend, selfies and photos were taken of everything we would do. We would pose with the food we were eating, pose in front of the touristic spots we would go to, constantly reenacting all our activities while posing for the camera.

One instance that illustrates the difference between our conceptions of posing and taking photos, was profound when my host, who was shooting her friends using an unusual angle, commented: « I like that it is really natural. », I couldn't help but reply: « It's not natural, they are posing. » to which she answered « Yeh but it's not like all the other photos. »

One day we went to see the sunset from a park called sunset park and utilised the beautiful orange light for selfies and photos. Our visit to the park quickly developed into a photo shoot, filled with individual photos from the front, the back, silhouettes, close ups and photos varying the composition of the group. This lasted for 20 minutes and then we left the park. This was again repeated when we travelled to two laneways frequented by tourists, which are covered in graffiti. The aim was spotting the best graffiti to pose in front of, pose, take the photos and then immediately decipher which are the most satisfying and proceed to edit them with an array of filters and various options, all before populating their virtual profile with another new post. This process is repeated indefinitely: posing, editing, posting.

Several times they forced me to pose in front of different settings, they themselves would

39 Sara, Paulista, 26 years old
nonchalantly pose in front of the lens like a model. Projecting a smile, testing various postures, poses and attitudes, while their friend would shoot away, the whole process had an air of ease and fluency. Again the array of varying poses and group compositions between the six of us lasted for approximately 40 minutes and then we left. This scenario of viewing the graffiti as only a backdrop for attaining the perfect setting with the perfect pose, created the sentiment that their experiences were only lived through a camera lens or screen and that the sole purpose of any moment was the optimization of their virtual profile.

**12.4.3. Private (Public) Photo Shoot**

In Rio, it is very common to see people posing in public and taking selfies, whether on the metro, before a run, at a restaurant, or just for the simple act of a mum spending time with her kids. It is not unusual to ask a friend or a stranger to take the photo of oneself in the street and pose individually or in a group. Saving a selfie as one’s phone background is very common amongst Cariocas. The beach, especially at sunset, is a beloved decor for extended photo sessions frequently lasting up to 45 minutes. Often shot by friends or relatives, even the mum or aunt, the poses performed (usually by girls), mimic the ones of models. Not uncommonly, rather ‘provoking’ poses of kneeling at the waters edge, holding their hair back with a mischievous smile, or kneeling with spread legs with their hands in between and a flexed arched back, ensures the encapsulation of the crucial elements for the ideal post. It is not rare to observe the average person posing rather seriously, as a spectacle for the audience of a brimming beach, often with a camera of high quality. The photos below are a few examples to illustrate the above.

**12.5. Carnival**

**12.5.1. Central Traditional Celebration**

Carnival is one of the most well known celebrations in Brazil and attracts hundreds of thousands of tourists each year. One the most famous is in Rio the Janeiro, mostly due to the reputation of the *samba* schools, who compete for 4 days in the *Sambódromo* [a stadium specifically designed for *samba*]. The *samba* schools are real institutions and people follow them like any popular sport. They display the colors of their favorite *samba* schools, know all the songs and the famous dancers.

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40 Source: Instagram.com
Carnival is a big moment in Rio, people plan for it all year, it has become an heirloom amongst many and more than a passion for others, a Brazilian girl I met during carnival told me: «I made 7 different costumes this year, one for each day, including two group costumes. As soon as carnival is over I start thinking of next year and buying material to make new costumes.» 41. Apart from the samba schools, there are also streets parties, which are called blocos [refers to the block or the neighborhood]. There are more than 450 different blocos prevalent in the city. Officially, carnival begins at the end of February and lasts for a week, but the reality is that this loud and colorful spectacle continues for an entire month, peaking in the last two weeks of February. Realistically, commencing with the first pre-carnival blocos at the beginning of February and coming to a close with the last post-carnival blocos at the beginning of March. Rio becomes engulfed it is transformed into one giant celebration, the metro runs 24/7, shops cover their windows with wood, many roads are converted to pedestrian traffic only and at every time of the day and night, all over the city, people are dressed up and covered in glitter.

While in Europe common dialogue for summer and the beach allusion getting into shape and presenting well, in Rio people get fit for Carnival. Pedro, a Carioca I met one day through a university friend once told me that his group of friends usually begins the preparations at the end of November or beginning of December. «We eat well, we go to the academia. [...] Carnival is really important, you want to look as good as you can. Every one does their best. [...] That’s why I love Carnival, because all the girls look so sexy [laughs]!». 42

12.5.2. The Beija Tradition

Carnival is in the middle of Brazilian summer and temperatures can reach up to 40 degrees. Costumes are often short and rather revealing. Most boys are shirt less and a lot of girls wear bikini tops. Sweaty bodies covered in glitter, streets crammed with couples dirty dancing to loud music without much room to move all combine to produce a sexual tone emitted all across the city. Furthermore, the carnival tradition is to record the most amount of beijas [French-kisses]. Everywhere people are kissing with various intensities. Many people told me at different occasions: «Kissing is not more than a dance here! It means nothing.» 43.

I witnessed several times situations where two people pass by each other, make eye contact and not more than a smile was needed as a sign of agreement to start kissing, they would

41 Sara, Carioca, 26 years old
42 Pedro, Carioca, 32 years old
43 Amongst others, Carnival Girl, Amazonia, 20 (?) years old; Pedro, Carioca, 30 years old; Camila, Carioca, 23 years old; Zac, England, 30 years old; Vanessa, Carioca, 31 years old
then casually proceed to continue on their path, sometimes without a single word said throughout the whole interaction and even three people kissing together is not uncommon to witness. All my friends at carnival got kissed several times. Camila, a carioca friend of mine, told me that at the age of 12 she kissed 24 different guys over the carnival period. Every guy (but also often girls) that I would talk to or even just make eye contact with would try to kiss me. Some people ask for a kiss without anything except for the slight gesture of pointing at their lips, communicating with the same manner in which one would ask for a lighter. It is common for Brazilian couples to decide to « be on a break » for the Carnival period or to break up because of it.

Carnival, in the image of Rio, is extremely diverse and each bloco has a different spirit. Some blocos considered « alternative » broadcast a message of love and tolerance. In these blocos most people wear beautiful homemade costumes, overt bodily expression is frequent with some girls only wearing accessories to cover their nipples such as flower, tape or jewelry. Often these blocos have connections with LGTB [Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, Bi-sexual] movements. Some men apply make up and wear thongs while some women let their body hair grow. Every one kisses each other but there is no pressure to do so, no « beija » chanting, no forced kissing. Some blocos are explicitly declaring their opposition against the social pressure to kiss people at carnival. It was at one of these blocos a girl introduced me to the idea of « commercial » blocos in the Zona Sul area, most commonly, along the beach in Copacabana, Ipanema and Leblon: « There it is all the non-educated people with no respect »

Indeed in the « commercial » blocos, the atmosphere is different, a commercialized feel is apparent, people put less effort in their costumes and often buy the typical accessories available at most shops. I saw several girls being forced to kiss. I also saw several times an encounter between two groups of guys and girls, spontaneously selecting whom they would like to kiss. Then, the next formality would be to attempt to convince the girls to kiss each other. At first the girl would say no, however, the persistence of the group was often coupled with a gentle coerce, eventually achieving the desired result paired with a customary buttocks grope, before the two groups would casually separate and go on their way.

One bloco consisted of a long street with a wall along one side and people standing on it behind a rail. They would point at people down in the crowd provoking everyone to begin chanting « Beija, beija! » [Kiss, kiss!]. That person who was singled out would hold onto the rail, climb up and French-kiss the person who had called for the kiss. All to the applause and excitement of the crowd. This situation even happened in the reverse, one partygoer climbed up

44 Carnival Girl, Amazonia, 20 (?) years old
the wall, stood in front of a girl he desired and asked to kiss her. Initially, she was hesitant, but under the pressure of the crowd chanting « beija! » she eventually agreed, during the intense beija a grope of her buttocks was all a part of the action. Whether I was mentioning the sexual aspect of carnival to gringos or Brazilians alike, everyone agreed.

12.5.3. Beija as a Normative Feedback

Personally, I experienced several guys grabbing my arm or the back of my head pulling me towards their mouth for a kiss. Once, a guy kissed my neck, without any pre-text, as he was passing by. My reaction was instinctively aggressive, to the sheer disbelief of many attempters. On two separate occasions, I found myself strongly inclined to assist a girl who appeared to be uncomfortable and forced into a situation out of her control. I shouted at them: « Ela não quer! » [She doesn't want to!]. For me this was standard reaction, however the second time I found myself in this position a friend of the girl held my arm and gave me a thumbs up: « Que brava amiga! » [So brave of you my friend!]. Her facial expression was of great content also resembled shock. I remember saying to my friends « I do not understand why the girls in carnival do not react more assertively ». Brazilian girls are well known for their strong personalities and their passion. It is not rare to see a girl telling off a boy, sometimes even hit their arms. My friend Camila shared with me her feeling about this, explaining me that the number of people kissed functions like a normative feedback:

« I think that there is a social pressure to kiss for Carnival, if you do not want to do it people call you prude, a virgin or a lesbian or something like that you know, like it is an insult. [...] When you are young, it makes you proud that boys want to kiss you; it is like an ego thing. For Carnival kissing is not a big deal so I think some girls do not even consider saying no. You just do it and that's it. [...] [laughs] now that I say it like that I realize it sounds really bad actually! [laughs] (Camila, Carioca, 23 y.o.) »

12.5.4. Celebrated Social Confusion

Brazilian carnival is a mix of cultures, initiated as a European catholic celebration, it evolved and took many different forms before becoming what we know today. African rhythms of samba, which were introduced in the 70s are now a major component of the celebrations. It is a time of excess, losing ones inhibitions and of liberation. Carnival’s spirit is to relinquish the weight of one's identity for a week and mix social classes. Poor and rich become unidentifiable

45 Source: Rio.com
(in theory). Everyone ceases work and takes time off to celebrate. It perfectly embodies « social confusion » and in fact, celebrates it.

Carnival is a time of permissiveness and visibility (Gontijo, 2004: 305). It is the ultimate front stage where the appearance is performed and examined. The high rate of alcohol consumption enforces liberation of the inhibition and carelessness. The presentation and production of the self in such a context is exaggerated and embellished with extravagance.
13. Photos [Part 2]
Figure 11 – 28 Posing on the Beach (#IpanemaBeach & #LeblonBeach on Instagram.com)
Figure 129 Group of Men Playing Brazilian Football

Figure 30 Group of Men Standing on the Beach
Figure 31 - Celebrating Carnival
14. Associated Symbols

The body of work below will delve further into the meanings taken by the physical appearance through the analysis of the associated symbols described below. To comprehend the Cariocas’ attitude towards appearance, it is primordial to further investigate the main meanings symbolically associated with the body message, as people act towards things according to the meanings these things have to them (Blumer, 1986: 3). My goal is to allow the reader to « read » the carioca culture through these symbols, thus peeling back the layers to reveal the underlying meanings.

14.1. Social mobility

14.1.1. An Uncertain Future

In Rio de Janeiro, enhancement and transformation of the body and the aesthetic appearance is closely linked with one's position in the social space. The body has acquired a special meaning and the ideal body is culturally understood as a means for having a better life (Ochoa, 2011: 351). Camila, a carioca friend of mine was telling me that many of her friends talk about finding a rich husband. They make jokes when in front of the mirror while preparing for the night: « Gotta look good tonight, who knows if I meet a son of a billionaire, single and looking for a beautiful girlfriend. »46. Of course these are jokes but to Camila they reveal an underlying reality. Beauty becomes a capital in which to invest.

Social upwards mobility is a long term effort and investment, not only is it a constant ongoing personal path of determination but the ‘complete package’ also requires luck and often personal connections. The « traditional path », one through a good education is difficult and does not always result in a well-paid job. In Brazil, salaries are low, economic recession is prevalent, education system lacks consistency and funding and throughout society, there is little opportunity. As an example, the public university UERJ had to close its undergraduate programs due to budget cuts from State governments and main research funding agencies following the economic crisis of 2015 (De Moura & De Camargo Junior, 2017: 33). Service providers, such as cleaning, maintenance, security, and the university dining hall did not receive pay for several months. In the main hall, as gesture of aid, students and other members of the public began

46 Luana, Carioca, 24 years old
donating cans of food and various sanitary products. Intuition fees for public universities are supplied by the state, however access is reliant upon passing a test and commonly a well-regarded primary and high school education, which is most generally associated with private schooling. Thus, getting into good universities in hope of getting access to good jobs requires a long-term economic investment.

**14.1.2. Favela Cinderella**

Thus, investment in a good physique is associated with lower boundaries of access and more tangible immediate results than an investment in a good education. In the eyes of those without this apparent opportunity a strong physical appearance can provide the access to profitable future connections, a professional sport or modeling career or even an upper class marriage. The USA is famous for the ‘American Dream’: the image of a self-made business-man who reached the top from starting at the bottom. In Brazil the dream is of a «favela Cinderella» who escaped her poor conditions by marrying a rich man, got scouted on the beach and became an international model or, as many of the world famous football players from Brazil (Ronaldinho, Pele, Ronaldo), access to a better quality of life through a successful athlete career (Jarrin, 2007; Edmonds, 2009).

The future is uncertain and tumultuous; Brazil is subject to constant instability regarding politics, economy and social policies. Further increasing the tangible value of one’s body and its assured capital. Socially, this investment in one’s physical property is valued and understood culturally as making the best out of every opportunity for a better life. A good appearance facilitates the encounters between equally beautiful people through an advantage granted «at first sight» (Malysse, 2002: 127). The ideal body and the means of attaining it, are related to socioeconomic, political and gender issues (Ochoa, 2011: 353). A Belgian neighbor of mine, who has been living in the favelas since 8 years of age and in Brazil for more than 15, once made this caricatured comment: «Here it's more valued socially to do push ups than to read a book. [...] people feel like it's more useful to invest time and effort in their bodies rather than their brains. »

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47 Paul, Belgium, 53 years old
14.2. Hygiene and Modernity

14.2.1. Identity by Consumption

Sanabria (2016) argues that historically, hygienist movements in Brazil produced the body as a site of intervention. In the early 20th century, hygiene and cleanliness played a central role in the processes of social differentiation and classification since a physical and moral education was necessary to produce healthy bodies. Former "colonial families" were transformed by hygienist control movements, as religious and patriarchal codes of conducts were replaced by "infinitely variable hygienic and increasingly aesthetic ones (Sanabria, 2016: 33)". Hence work, hygiene and class are closely intertwined and central to Brazilian contemporary class relations.

Consumption, identity and body are closely linked (Laurent, 2012: 439). Gradually, over time and according to one’s financial situation, the body becomes a site of intervention, enhanced by new purchases and practices. The Zonal Sul is home to an impressive number of gyms, nutrition stores, beauty salons, pedicure and manicure salons, hairdresser and barbershops, laser hair removal salons, and so on.

Carol, the Brazilian girl I interviewed was telling me that:

« In Brazil it's normal to go to the dentist twice a year minimum and whiten your teeth, or go to the beauty salon and to the gym a lot, or to buy nutrients or expensive organic food, ... I mean not everyone buys the expensive food of course, but I mean, it's really normal to spend a lot of money to take care of yourself. When I was with my German boyfriend, he would always joke about that. He was always saying that I waist so much money on my appearance. [...] For him it is unnecessary but here it's really normal. [...] In Germany they spend a lot of money for the clothes. They always buy new clothes, sometimes really cheap just so that they can change often. [...] Here we have the sun, we don't need so many clothes [laughs]. » To which I said :

« Your body is your clothes. » and she answered : « yeah, exactly! The body is the clothes. So you try to have a good body. For example here most people have tattoos, It's really normal. People get tattoos when they are 16 or 17. It's like jewelry [laughs] [...] to decorate your body, to make it more beautiful. (Carol, Vittória, 26 y.o.)»

As appearance tells a lot about one's social status; beauty and bodily care become important means of social ascension. It becomes a space from which social hierarchies are renegotiated (Sanabria, 2016; Malysse, 2001; Edmonds, 2002).
14.2.2. Social Distinction Through Hygiene

« The interior (rural zones) remains an important category of alterity in Brazil and often serves as a narrative foil to explain the substantial changes that have taken place in urban Brazilian society. Crucial to this process of differentiation is the concept of modernity, as implicit in the idea that people from the interior are atrasados [behind], or still hold to backward or ignorant traditional beliefs (Sanabria, 2016: 33-34). » Camila, while once telling me about her Mum at work (university professor in sociology), illustrated this idea quite well: « If she doesn't « look nice » to go to work,... hair and nails done, make-up on, nice clothes and shoes, ... people would think she is a farmer or something [laughs] »48. While another friend would constantly insist that « in the city, it is normal»49 to take 2-4 showers a day, go to the beauty parlor, the gym, hair removal salons etc., the distinction she always made emphasizes the idea that maintaining one’s appearance is of higher ranking in the city than the country-side.

14.3. Control

14.3.1. A Controlled Body Means a Controlled Life

Not only the appearance but also the effort that one puts into attaining and maintaining it is of high social value. Most women go to beauty salons for their nails, body and facial hair. When I told a Carioca friend that I had never been in a beauty salon before she was really surprised, almost shocked that a European gringa like me, with money, had never been to a beauty salon: « Serio?! »50 [seriously?!] She then felt inclined to inform all her friends who had an identical reaction of surprise. They told me « Here in Brazil, everybody goes to the beauty salon! Even favelandos go! It's really normal [...] It is really weird if you don't go!»51.

Similarly, for men, this act of maintenance is projected through frequenting the gym, generally, from a young age on. « People who don't go are considered alternative »52 Walter a Brazilian friend once told me. On once specific occasion, I was asking a Brazilian couple if they went to the gym. One husband said: « No, not really. »53 and the other answered that « Yeh,
Later in the conversation I found out that the husband who was not really going was actually going 2 to 3 times a week. It was a surprise to me to realize that he considered that as « not really going », he told me that his husband would sometimes go twice a day and therefore, three times a week felt like nothing to him.

When I myself got a gym membership, the trainer who made my program told me I had to go 6 times a week. I was going to a chain gym called SmartFit who have gyms all over the country. It was a very heteroclite environment, young teens, buff men, elderly people, some very fit, others very average and even some overweight people. There was also a pregnant woman that I would see quite often in one of the gyms I was going to, I then saw her after she had given birth, which must have been quite shortly after.

Many people wear clothes with motivational quotes such as: « no pain, no gain », « stop calling it a dream, call it a plan », « when you want to stop, remember why you started ». The body is treated like an individual property of which each of us is responsible (Poulin 2009, Laurent, 2012). Control over one's body suggests control over one's life and hence the access to a better, more constructed life (Poulin, 2009; Ochoa, 2011; Bordo, 1992). The carioca environment, constantly surrounded by fit bodies and people doing sports implicitly sends a message « if everyone can, why not you? » similarly, this popular advertisement featuring fit men in wheelchairs that says: « what's your excuse? ».

Many Cariocas spent great energy on their appearance. My Guatemalan roommate Alberto, who was living in Rio for four years when I met him, told me that many Brazilian girls he used to date were often « obsessed » with their appearance: « They count the calories of what they eat, they take hours to get ready, they take selfies all the time […] » The more the body is molded and exhibited, the more it is artificially constructed and distanced from its naturality, the more it « is » (Poulin, 2009: 20). Interiorized binding control maintains youth (Poulin, 2009: 21), the body and the appearance become subject to a constant effort and monitoring. Treated like a machine, the body has to be fueled, maintained and customized, each individual piece of it is optimized, enhanced and transformed.

14.3.2. Docile Bodies

The ideal body is a controlled body (Bordo, 1992; Ochoa, 2011). Beauty is acquired through sacrifice, meaning controlled food, exercises and medical intervention. Bordo (1992) shows how body management has moral meanings. According to Bordo, preoccupation with fat,

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54 Mack, USA (Michigan), 28 years old
55 Alberto, Guatemala, 30 years old
diet and slenderness is the most powerful normalizing mechanism of the century. Ensuring the production of self-monitoring and self-discipline (Bordo, 1992: 186). The moral and the economy, apply a code to bodies in terms of its self-containment and control of impulse and desire (Bordo, 1992:191), based on excess weight, lack of will, self-control and/or power (Ochoa, 2011: 344; Bordo, 1992: 192). On the contrary, the tightened and controlled body symbolizes an upward aspiration achieved through a battle with the self (p. 197-198).

In Rio, the publicity and closeness of the culture tends to reinforce the normalizing social pressure of self-improvement and self-transformation. Furthermore, symbols of self-control and power are greatly valued due to the uncertainty of social structures. As a result, for one to reach the ideal body shape and achieve the ultimate reward of exposing the body without embarrassment or hesitation to the gazes, it is advisable to learn to enjoy this level of discipline as a condition for one's identity recognition (Laurent, 2012: 440).

Susan Bordo (1992) uses the concept of "docile bodies" to refer to the self-improvement and self-transformation achieved in the service of the norms (p.186). She uses the concept from Foucault's (1975) works on 'power and body', where it is established that docile bodies are produced through « examination » which is achieved through firstly, « hierarchical observation » and secondly, « normalizing judgment ». The concept matches perfectly with the dynamic I described above as this « examination » is felt through the gazes and expressive reactions of others.

14.4. Sexuality

14.4.1. The Sexual Reputation of Brazil

« The most exotic images associated with Brazilian culture are highly charged with eroticism, perpetuating the myth of sexual permissiveness. Anything is possible south of the equator (Reis, 1996: 79). ». The sexual dimension of the carioca landscape is an aspect that cannot go without mentioning and is often raised by many authors (Laurent: 2012; Malysse, 2002; Edmonds, 2001-2009). Travelling-blogs or gringos’ conversations about Rio are full of references to the « sensual », « erotic » or « sexual » qualities of Brazilian men and women. Often transmitted as evidence to the fact is the carioca dress code, dancing skills and flirtatious approach.
14.4.2. Dress code

As explained above, the dress code is quite revealing and displays a «sexual availability» (Poulin, 2009: 11). According to the historian Montreynaud, the fashion industry has made a historical turn as what used to look disreputable has became commonplace, highly influencing popular clothing (Montreynaud, 1993: 44-46). In Rio, I saw many times little girls wearing lipstick or tiny high heels. My friend Camila was explaining to me her bra-stuffing techniques that the girls used to undertake in her college. She explained to me that because of the heat Cariocas do not own «jackets to hide behind, like in Europe» and hence, body curves are constantly visible. Consequently, clothes are used to highlight those that are seen as one’s best physical assets, the curves and the sexual body parts.

Displays of «femininity» and «masculinity» are strongly expressed through clothing and attitude. Likewise these gender displays that are «often dialogic character […] provide the evidence of the actor's alignment (Goffman, 1979: 69,71)». The appearance performed through a transformed body portrays portraiture of sexy women and strong men. The «eroticized body» (Malysse, 2001; Laurent, 2012) displays strong genderfied bodily attributes and material manifestations.

Interestingly, I was often told I look like a child or a lesbian, never displaying any make-up, with a skinny body not very curvaceous and no sign of any sartorial or aesthetic effort, I was not displaying my sexual dimensions in their language, and therefore, I must have been either a child or a lesbian. People often thought I was around 16 years old. A taxi driver once asked my friends who was the little girl they were traveling with. When asked, he said he thought I was 14, and at that time I was 23. He thought I was almost ten years younger! During carnival, I was quite taken back by the amount of girls that wanted to kiss me. One of them gave me the explanation: "You look like a lesbian, …a Brazilian lesbian. Your wide clothes, your pyjama-like shorts". To get her to push the analysis of my appearance further, I started quoting all my displays considered feminine: "But I've got make-up on, I am wearing these big golden earrings and necklace, my top reveals my stomach and bra straps and I have long hair decorated with feathers." She laughed and answered: "That's nothing! It's obvious that you don't care. You didn't put in any effort, you are just not trying to be sexy." According to her comment, the alignment was hence based on sexual disposition. She also told me that all of my gringo male friends looked asexual because they were so skinny.

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56 Camila, Carioca, 23 years old
57 Carnival Girl, Amazonia, 20 (?) years old
14.4.3. Dancing  
Brazilian « body techniques » (Mauss, 1973), as mentioned before, through Malysse’s (2001) work, is more expressive and « in tune » than that of Europeans, whose process of civilization disconnected themselves from their bodies (p.3). Even more present in the social space, the relationship with the body has a long history in Brazil. The ancient Cadomblé is a ritual dance performed on a terreiro [yard] by the many followers of Umbanda, an old African religion born in Brazil and still very popular today. Additionally, is the popularity of Samba, born out of slavery it is an African musical tradition in Brazil that is still strongly followed and celebrated. Furthermore, myths about the Tupis (the most important indigenous peoples in Brazil), who used to live completely naked and consider movement and identity strongly intertwined have a deep connection to the body and were often quoted to me as why Brazilians are so in touch with their bodies. These three examples testify of a Brazilian conception of the body deeply rooted in its Indigenous and African cultures and in fact, most Brazilian music styles have the same basic rhythm than the ancient rituals mentioned above.

Gaga, in the interview gave me his opinion on the topic:

« Since the colonization, we lost the content of this connection to our body. The forms are still present in today's society but the content is empty. [...] Because of the strong influence of occidental culture, to which dancing, rhythms and bodily expression was seen as animal behavior, these are societies where it is the intellect that matters (Gaga, Carioca, 30 y.o.).»

It is always funny to watch Gringos and Brazilians at parties and, in comparison, observe the awkwardness gringos appear to have with their bodies. The ease with which Brazilians grasp rhythm without any apparent effort, makes all others else seem as if they are incapable. Sertanejo, samba, bossa nova, MPB, música nativista, pagode, choro, embolada, funk carioca, and many more Brazilian music styles each with a corresponding dance are well known to all.

The main movements are connected to the hips this adds to sensuality of rhythm, which is further exemplified when a couple performs the dances. A Brazilian girl who went on exchange in Paris for 5 months once told me « Everyone was telling me that the way I dance is really sexy. I was like « No, people, it's not sexy, it's normal ». It was so annoying! Sometimes I would go dance in a corner, by myself. » 58

58 Vanessa, Carioca, 31 years old
Recently, the *funk carioca* has become very popular. This Brazilian music style, originally produced from the *favelas*, is danced through the ‘twerk’ creating a very sexual connotation. Furthermore, « commercial funk », a music style further derived from *funk carioca* mainly carries messages of sexuality, mostly in sexist and violent terms. This spectacle of many girls ‘twerking’ at parties, often with guys behind mimicking a sexual act or spanking them, has shocked more than one gringo. I personally have heard many gringos commenting on the dancing style and abilities of Brazilians (usually girls). « *In Europe, if you dance like that everybody thinks « she's a slut », « she really wants it tonight ». » 59.

### 14.4.4. Flirting

**The Brazilian Game**

Flirting is another skill Brazilians are famous for. To add some depth to my own experiences and those of my friends, I read several blogs 60 and their comments sections, which described the Brazilian flirting and dating scene in comparison to other countries. These blogs described Rio as the « ideal mating environment » 61 and the « game » 62 of the men is described as « excellent, confident and aggressive » 63, « dead-on eye contact, fearless approach [and] direct seduction » 64. While girls are described as « the complete embodiment of female sexuality » 65 who « love to be seduced […] , to feel desired and see men doing all they can to stay with them » 66. I decided to utilize these blog articles and mainly their comments, written by both Brazilians and Gringos, to highlight the flirtatious and dating culture present in Rio, as I found it difficult to depict this myself without falling into an imprudent generalization. I endeavored to select the extracts I thought were most representative and relevant of the present dimensions. The accuracy of the facts is less important here, but rather the general sentiment that is given by the composition of the extracts quoted.

59 Amongst others, Stefan, Switzerland, 36 years old; Mathéo, France, 19 years old; Laura, France, 20 years old
60 Source: blogs: MaverickTraveler.com; TravelALaDentelle.com; RioStories.BlogSopt.com; NYTimes.com
61 MaverickTravelers.com
62 MaverickTravelers.com
63 MaverickTravelers.com
64 MaverickTravelers.com, Comment Section: American female, 29 years old
65 MaverickTravelers.com, Comment Section: American male, 33 years old
66 MaverickTravelers.com, Comment Section: Brazilian female, 27 years old
The Beija Culture

Often mentioned is the rapidity with which the first kiss is performed or the amount of romantic/sexual experiences amongst Brazilians. These blogs and their comments report past episodes and opinions of the strong flirtatious atmosphere apparent in the carioca night scene. Often employing very strong statements such as « highly sexualized country »\(^{67}\) or characterizing some flirtatious behavior as « completely inappropriate »\(^{68}\).

With the following set of comments, I would like to contextualize by drawing a picture of the scene with others’ words:

« At first you notice that you’re seeing couples kissing in public more often than you’re used to. REALLY kissing. Couples locked in deep, open-mouth kisses that last for minutes, just right out in the open, on buses, on street corners, in bars. THEN you notice that after the kiss finally ends (ten minutes later) they walk in opposite directions and each of them start kissing somebody else! So, the flirting here seems to pretty much START with deep kissing. Before you even know the other person’s name. The kissing doesn’t mean anything; it’s almost an introduction, a game, a sport. » (RioStories.BlogSpot.be)

« A kiss doesn’t signify intimacy in Brazil, but kissing quickly is normal and is part of the mating ritual. » (MaverickTravelers.com)

« Going in for the kiss barely a minute after talking to you. »

(TravelALaDentelle.com)

« A man can kiss many girls in a night; in fact teenagers like to compete over it. Kissing 20 girls in a night is not unheard of. » (MaverickTravelers.com – C.S.: Brazilian female, 28 y.o.)

« French kiss 10 to 20 girls in one night. » (TravelALaDentelle.com)

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\(^{67}\) MaverickTraveler.com, Comment Section: Brazilian male, 34 years old

\(^{68}\) MaverickTraveler.com, Comment Section: Brazilian female, 26 years old
« I am Brazilian, and here when you hit 30 years old if you are an average guy (not VERY ugly, dumb or fat) you will have had sex with 100 to 200 girls. The same goes for girls. » (MarevickTravelers.com – Comment Section: Brazilian male, 36 y.o.)

Pega-Ninguém

The following comments better illustrates the normalizing dimension of the carioca flirting scene:

« Brazilian men are trained from a young age, like in their preteens, to try really hard to get girls. » (TravelALaDentelle.com)

« I grew up going to micaretas [type of party] and kissing more than 10 girls in one night and seeing friends doing even more so. From my experience, in my teens, if you were not a guy who could kiss lots of girls you would be mocked and ostracized, and be called a pega-ninguém [get-no one] – a guy who can’t get a girl. However, not everyone was like this, or every time […], but it was something that everyone would expect of you, even if you are not a model-looking guy. I went to Europe some times and was really surprised to see that just a few guys have the guts to approach girls. The clubs and the parties were like full of guys just speaking with themselves. Not a Brazilian reality. […]. » (MarevickTravelers.com – C.S.: Brazilian male, 27 y.o.)

« I also found European guys less interested in girls, in comparison to Brazilians – they don’t try to get girls like Brazilian guys do, they don’t talk about girls as often as Brazilian guys do, therefore they are not so judged or praised for their ability in getting girls. » (MarevickTravelers.com – C. S.: Brazilian male, 31 y.o.)

« In Brazil if you are not holding her hand and trying to kiss her within the first 5 minutes she thinks that she is ugly or that you are not attracted to her, or that you are gay. » (MarevickTravelers.com – C.S.: Brazilian female, 20 y.o.)

« Girls probably thought he was gay when girls smiled but he didn’t approach.»
(MarevickTravelers.com – C. S.: Brazilian female, 22 y.o.)
« They [the girls] expect and want to be hunted, and the only thing they require from you is a good performance. » (MarevickTravelers.com – C.S.: Brazilian male, 26 y.o.)

« If you wait too long to kiss the girl, your friends will think you are a pussy and the girl will think you are not that interested in her. » (MarevickTravelers.com – C.S.: Brazilian male, 25 y.o.)

It appears in the above set of comments, that flirting functions as a normalizing system and that from a young age the capacity to « get girls » is valued amongst boys, conversely, the interest girls receive from boys indicates their value in terms of beauty and as a result, attractiveness, being sexually desirable is a mean to fit in.

A Competitive Environment

Additionally, many comments mention a « competition for sex », giving the appearance that there is a competitive market where one’s worth is traded for an equal amount amongst men and women. In this setting, a beautiful appearance is associated with power, for men it is the power to get a lot of girls and for women it is the power to win the attention and hence the choice. Conversely, having the power is associated with easy access to sexuality. « Money makes everyone attractive »69 a friend of mine once said to me.

« When a man is interested in a women, he wants to be the best of all men around her, he wants to be THE man. » (MarevickTravelers.com – Comment Section: Brazilian male, 20 y.o.)

« Too much jealousy amongst girls.» (MarevickTravelers.com – Comment Section: Brazilian female, 27 y.o.)

« If you show up in a Camaro, you don't have to do anything. You just point at the girl and that’s it, it's as simple as that. » (MarevickTravelers.com – Comment Section: Brazilian male, 34 y.o.)

69 Vanessa, Carioca, 31 years old
A Cheating Culture

The last set of comments refers to the realm of cheating. My interpretation of the popular phenomenon, is to look at it as the encapsulation of the many dimensions of the culture mentioned above: including, the independence and fluidity of Cariocas in their social relationships, the passion and emotional reasoning described by the concept of the cordial man and the Brazilian ability for making advantages of situations, often made under the table, embodying the jeinthino Brasileiro.

« Cheating is common, hard to find a couple from the 70s, 80s or 90s who hasn’t suffered with cheating. People suffer with that behavior. » (MarevickTravelers.com – Comment Section: Brazilian male, 37 y.o.)

« Cheating is a huge culture here. » (MarevickTravelers.com – Comment Section: Brazilian female, 37 y.o.)

« American men have other good qualities –their faithfulness, for example. Brazilian women often say that Brazilian men are safados [shameless] and love to chase the fairer sex. Americans actually mean what they say (at least more often than Brazilians do). » (NYTimes.com)

I would like to reiterate that the use of paraphrases above is not to be interpreted literally. It is important however for the reader to have an idea of the sexual dimension present in the discourses, gazes and presentation of oneself in Rio.

Association with Power

In his works, Roberto Reis (1996) attempts to read the configuration of sexuality in literary and mass culture through images of the family and the woman, tracing the lineage from the former agrarian patriarchal social setting to current times. As Buarque de Hollanda (1995) states it, family is the mandatory model of every social composition in Brazil (p.106). Family ethics, as well as slavery, permeated all the social spheres (Reis, 1996: 81). In the periods of Brazilian configuration of a seigniorial establishment, the patriarch was the absolute center of power being the owner of the estate, family and the serfs (p.85). In the slaveholding patriarchal family, the ethics made all sexual relations possible and desirable for the white man (in brothels or with his slaves), while premarital chastity and marital fidelity are reserved for the white woman (Reis, 1996: 84).
Reis explains how the abolition of slavery, the industrialization and urbanization of Brazil in the 19th century, and the rise of liberalism, left the patriarch with his wife being his only remaining property (p.85 - p.89). He shows how, in the Brazilian Portuguese language, the terms referring to the male genitals and its use for penetration are based on the semantic field of power. When having sex, a woman dá [gives] and a man come [eats] (can also mean defeat, in chess for example, a piece "eats" another one).

He states: « the representations of sexuality in Brazilian cultural discourse say much about this society and its culture. (Reis, 1996: 80).» He shows through a smart and rich analysis of the Brazilian literature how sexuality is associated with power. For example (p.108-109), in "Brazil," a poem by Olavo Bilac (1865-1918), he depicts that the conquest of the land is also equated with taking the land in sexual terms. Metaphorically, this link between the conquest for land and sexuality lead to the erotic submission of the colored women and the exaggerated and pathological sexual profiles in naturalist works.

Reis (1996) explains that in a number of fiction works closely associated with the 1930s, (a period in which women were rapidly gaining power and the patriarchy was being questioned) the desperate need to make the « male order » prevail in such a changing universe, is translated into the efforts of subduing women. Sexuality, therefore, ceases being sexuality alone and becomes a metonymy for the greed for power (p90-96).

« Since this intricate relationship between sexuality and power emerges in so many other discourses, I will argue that it suggests itself an important trait (in psychoanalytic terms) of the Brazilian collective unconscious (Reis, 1996: 109). »

14.5. Power and Competition

14.5.1. My Personal Interpretation

Overall, my personal reading of the carioca web of significance and my interpretation of its layers of sense came to apprehend the social world as a competition, which is best defined as « a situation in which someone is trying to win something, or be more successful than, someone else »70. Considering this definition, the idea of an ongoing competition first came to me at a party, as I was thinking about the flirting scene in Brazil. Later, I could comprehend it on a broader scale and I developed the idea that various social spaces function as front stages where the aesthetical hierarchy (Laurent, 2012; Edmonds, 2009) is enacted and produced publically. Described above, The Beach, Social Media and Carnival, appear to be stages of choice, allowing

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70 Source: Dictionary.Cambridge.org
social confusion and a premeditated presentation of self through the production of appearance, displaying implicit signs of social mobility, modernity, control and sexuality. The layers of sense composed by these symbols, if completely peeled off, reveal the core symbol permeating through the layers above, that being, the one of power. In my opinion this is a dimension present amongst all cultures, materializing in various forms and means dependent on the particular context of a given society and in this case translating into symbols specific to the Brazilian context.

14.5.2. Power

Power, as defined by Michel Foucault (2000), implies, firstly, a question of capacity. Secondly, it brings into play a relationship between individuals or groups (p.337). «Power is inscribed in a field of sparse available possibilities underpinned by permanent structures (p.340).» The Brazilian «permanent structures» are unstable and unequal, shrinking down the «available possibilities» on a rather individual level. Individuals thus have to use strategies to make their path in society. Foucault (2000) defines strategies as the means employed to attain an end or the ways one seeks to have advantage over others (p.346). Just like the Favelas organic building, or the famous jeintniho Brasileiro, Brazilians, in general, do not have a large array of options, driving them to the position of the «best one can do with what one has», and as a result optimizing their capital. Economic capital is limited to the higher ranks of society and gaining access to it is quite a laborious struggle. Social capital, contrastingly, is the most accessible and resourceful capital available, further exemplified by the ‘collectivist’ traits apparent in Brazilian society71. Appearance, functioning «like a business card», can grant a «prime to beauty» (Malysse, 2002: 15) and enhances the production of social capital and hence the capacity of an individual. Thus, «Physical capital» is simply another form of capital, an investment, drawing in social capital and/or economic capital, translating into power.

Relations of power are then exercised through production and the exchange of signs (Foucault, 2000: 338). In Rio, a big part of it is produced and displayed through the appearance. The particular Brazilian social setting, described by many authors (La Rosa, 2013; Uribe 2006) has resulted in an escalation to the current level of norms and standards concerning the physical appearance. Competition is tough and the level is high, as simply attaining the level of norm requires time, money (aesthetical consumption) and discipline (effort). Beauty is associated with wealth and power, as one needs money to look good and needs to look good to make money. The saying «não existe mulher feia, só existe mulher sem dinheiro» [ugly woman do not exist, only

71 See section “Brazilian Cultural Traits”
woman without money exist] is the perfect illustration of the above statement. It demonstrates that a wealthy individual (especially women) is understood to be unconditionally good looking. This belief leaves no space for the natural processes (even if some are more fortunate than others) as modern aesthetical consumption (plástica, beauty and hair salons, healthy food, academias, and so on) enables anyone (who can afford it) to look the way they want to if they want to (Laurent, 2012).

14.5.3. A Constant Comparison

This idea of an ongoing competition amongst actors, as mentioned above crystalized itself in my mind at a party consisting of mostly gringos, which allowed me to read the situation better due to our shared « webs of significances ». All the participants, inebriated from the alcohol, were dancing in a circle, projecting and presenting their selves while evaluating the ones of others. In a party setting, codes and norms are slightly different from that of daily life, drunk actors, normally in such settings, act like an exaggerated version of their usual self. Gazes and attitudes imply mutual evaluation and classification of the actors between the parties. The presentation of the actors' selves and the effort put into it (outfit, grooming, dancing, being part of the fun, etc.) is evaluated by the others and enacted by the actors in a looser fashion than permitted in the setting of daily life. The evaluation from others is felt through the attention received, the gazes and attitudes towards the individual.

I remember thinking to myself « every one wants to be the best ». This rough simplification then allowed me to sense a constant mutual comparison between individuals and myself included. Partly consciously I had rated and ranked all the participants according to the combination of my personal and shared ideals, models and standards regarding looks. As very little conversation is often made at a party, appearance would become the focal point of my evaluation, I would internally negotiate my position regarding my ranking of the person, by slicing all the elements apparent to me before creating a personal general impression.

One occasion while walking around Ipanema with a male French tourist, I was about to comment on the size of the girl’s bunda when he commented on how muscular all the guys were. Without realizing, we were both comparing ourselves to the local norms as we were slowly identifying them. Comparison implies similarity and if the evaluation applies to everyone, the comparison is often based on individuals sharing similar categories (of gender, age etc.). Social spaces of exhibition and display such as the beach, social media, academias or Carnival are thus,

72 The genderification of the appearance norms is a highly interesting dimension that unfortunately, I cannot elaborate on here, for space and clarity reasons.
as well, social places of comparison, evaluation, hierarchization, in other words, of competition.

14.5.4. Dynamics of Competition

According to Foucault (2000), power is a « conduct of conducts » (p.341) which means, in other words, the capacity to alter others' behavior. In the flirting scene this could be translated into the capacity of one gender to alter the others’ behavior, such as seeking and gaining the attention. Hence the normative feedback to one's appearance can be reliant on the « success » of the flirt. Many Cariocas have made comments in the spirit of: «Here you always have to be the hottest if you want to keep your partner»73. This obviously exaggerated statement, illustrates perfectly the competitive environment present in the flirting/dating scene.

According to me, what happens when flirting reflects dynamics taking place on a broader scale. At the macro-level, the social situation is such that access to the higher ranks of social classes is restrained. The irregularity and uncertainty of Brazilian social structures offers only a few opportunities of social mobility and improved quality of life. The competition is tough. Media and celebrities send messages of a better life through consumption (Poulin, 2009) contradicting the reality prevalent in Brazil. The appearance, a place where identities are (re)negotiated, can display distinction or similarity as argued above. The higher ones in the beauty hierarchy distinguish themselves from the rest and the ones in the lower ranks seek social recognition through conformism to ideal models valued by society (Jarrin, 2007; Laurent, 2012).

73 Amongst others: Vanessa, Carioca, 31 years old; Luana, Carioca, 24 years old; Pedro, Carioca, 32 years old; Bruno, Carioca, 29 years old; Natalia, Carioca, 25 years old
15. Limitations

It is necessary to insist on the fact that this paper aims to attest of tendencies rather than a pure reality. The issues dealt with cover many aspects and forms. What I have stated here are popular tendencies I have observed and read about. I also met many Brazilians that did not fit my descriptions. It is nevertheless also through individuals who did not fit these norms that I came to learn more about them, as many Brazilians I met were also complaining about a various array of wide spread topics regarding their culture. However, it is with absolute certainty that the Brazilian relationship with the body is different to the European one. It is to be noted, that the finer particulars of these differences still vary from one person to another, and as a result addressing the general tendencies is necessary to commence grasping the idea. Yet, it is important to remind oneself how an infinite amount of nuances further complicate the topic.

Though the social world is too varied to generalize, I chose to attempt to depict a relatively clear picture of my experience in Rio. Considering this, I am aware that it can result in the silencing of various pivotal dimensions, such as the Brazilian conceptions of gender and gender roles. Truthfully, each chapter could be the topic for another thesis in itself. However, my task at hand in this scenario was to make a selection and sacrifice much of the data I collected on the way, as I am sure is not too dissimilar to most ethnography works. As a result, I am aware that some topics were not depicted in the depth they may warrant. My aim with this paper is to share my interpretation of ‘extroverted expressions’ of the carioca culture. However, it was also necessary to constantly consider the size, presentation and format of my work and hence deliver a balance between my discoveries and the size of the paper.
16. Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to illuminate how, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the nature and presence of the body in the social space allows the appearance to play a pivotal role in the construction of individuals identities. The struggle with appearance and the body is shaped through the experience of the 'body-for-others', which is constantly exposed to objectification and the hierarchical classification performed by the gaze and discourse of others. This evaluation is produced by schemes of perception and appreciation deriving from the social structures, at the heart of social interactions (Bourdieu, 2001: 63).

In Brazil, social structures are characterized by their instability and unreliability. Corruption and favor systems are well known strategies spread at every level of society. The Brazilian capacity to « find a way » (legally or not), famously, the jeitinho Brasileiro, testifies to the popular propension to resourcefulness. Culturally, social interactions are shaped by the concept of the 'cordial man' (Buarque da Hollanda, 1995), which refers to the Brazilian passion and the rejection of formal distance. This widely informal socio-cultural context, based upon personal connections and the individuals ability to « make his way » in society, have helped establish beauty as a 'physical capital', in which it can be invested in for its symbolical association to power.

In these settings, signs of control, modernity, sexuality and social mobility, attest to a powerful individual identity, displayed through the exhibition of a transformed, polished, perfected appearance. The prevalence of the apparent social values, representing the means for a better life, takes their roots in a Brazilian context of extreme structural inequalities and an emotional reasoning based in the culture. Hence, the appearance becomes a place of identity (re)negociation (Edmonds, 2007:377).

The beach, the world famous carnival celebration or furthermore social media, can thus be understood as 'front stages' on which the impression is managed. The physical climate and the publicity of the socio-cultural settings allow bodies to be exposed to constant examination through hierarchical observation and normalizing judgment (Foucault, 1975: 136). Overall, I hope that this paper will have provided the reader with a visual and descriptive analysis of the carioca preoccupation with the physical appearance.
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18. Appendix

18.1. List of Informers

18.1.1. Brazilians

**Non-Cariocas**

Sara, 36 y.o.; Brasilia; Traveled in Europe for ten years, lived in London for five where she met now lives in Rio with.

Walter, 27 y.o., State of Rio; Has been living in Rio for 5 years to study Law.

Carol, 26 y.o., Vittória; Has been living in Rio for 5 months to work as a Doctor. Had breast implants in 2013. I organized a formal interview with her.

Sara, 26 y.o., São Paulo; I spent the week-end in her family with an Italian friend of mine.

Raïssa, 25 y.o., São Paulo; Married to a Lichtensteiner. They stayed in Rio for 6 month. Travelling back and forth between Brazil and Europe for 3 years.

Carnival Girl, 20 (?) y.o., Amazonia; Came to rio to study. Important informer regarding the body message.

**Cariocas:**

Camila, 23 y.o.; Law Student. Important informer. She had been on exchange in Europe (Portugal) for 6 months in 2016.

Gabriel (Gaga), 30 y.o.; Psychologist. Important informer. Has been working on many socio-cultural projects including in *Chapéu Mangeira* the first *Favela* where I lived. I organized a formal interview with him.

Patricia, 20 y.o.; Was born and raised in *Chapéu Mangeira*, the first *Favela* I
lived in, now works there in a hostel.

Eduardo, 27 y.o.; Hostel manager, grew up in *Copacabana*.

Peter, 26 y.o.; Physic student and science teacher for high schools. Important informer concerning Brazilian use of social media.

Naraya, 19 y.o.; Psychology student, Evangelist.

Pedro, 32 y.o.; Works at a jewelry shop.

Edson, 29 y.o.; Was born, raised and now works in *Rocinha* (the biggest Favela in Latin America). Important informer concerning the mob organization in the *Favelas*.

Bruno, 29 y.o.; Did his Master in the USA where he met Mack. They are now married and live together in Rio.

Luana, 24 y.o.; Student.

Vanessa, 31 y.o.; Has been on an exchange in France for 5 months in 2014.

Sara, 26 y.o.; Law student.

Maria, 23 y.o.

Natalia, 25 y.o.

**18.1.2. Gringos:**

Spanish Journalist, 28 (?) y.o.; Has gotten a contract to work in Rio for 1 year. She had been here for 3 months when I met her. Has many Brazilian friends. Had been to Rio three times before (10 months in total over a 5 years period).

Bradon, 28 y.o., USA (Boston); Was born in Brazil. Has travelled a lot in Brazil
(between 1 and 2 years in total over his lifetime).

Mack, 28 y.o., USA (Michigan); Met Bruno in the USA, they are now married and have been living in Rio for 11 months.

Gaston, 42 y.o., Argentina; Has been living in Rio with his wife for 5 years.

Armani, 28 y.o., Canada; On an exchange for 5 months at PUC (Rio).

Amelia, 29 y.o., Chile; Came to Rio for Carnival.

Tom, 24 y.o., USA (California); Was traveling in Latin America. Stayed in Rio for a month.

Peter, 32 y.o., SüdTirol; Has Brazilian relatives through his uncle who married a Brazilian in the 80s. Was staying in Rio for 3 months with some colleagues for work.

Paul, 53 y.o., Belgium; Has been living in Brazil for 15 years, now has a guesthouse/restaurant in Chapéu Mangeira. Married a Brazilian.

Laura, 20 y.o., France; One of my flatmates.

Zac, 30 y.o., England; Has been living in Rio with his Brazilian girlfriend (Sara) for 6 months.

Mathéo, 19 y.o., France; On exchange year in Lima, he was traveling in Brazil for a month and stayed in Rio for a week.

Stefan, 36 y.o., Switzerland; Came to Rio for a Brazilian girl he loved. Has been living in Rio for 8 month.

Alberto, 30 y.o., Guatemala; One of my flatmates. Has been living in Rio for 4 years.