

THE REALITY SHOW AS A PSYCHOPOLITIC DEVICE AND THE IMAGINARY BODY

O REALITY SHOW COMO DISPOSITIVO PSICOPOLÍTICO E O CORPO IMAGINÁRIO

EL REALITY SHOW COMO DISPOSITIVO PSICOPOLÍTICO Y EL CUERPO IMAGINARIO

Denise Cristina Ayres Gomes

PhD in Social Communication, master's in communication sciences, Bachelor's in Social Communication - Journalism. Professor of Educational Design Technology at the Federal University of São Paulo.
denise.ayres@unifesp.br



0000-0002-6303-5775

Andrea Ferreira Passos

Master's in Social Communication, Bachelor's in Administration and Philosophy, MBA in Marketing and Communication. Federal University of Maranhão.
andreaferpassos@yahoo.com.br



0000-0003-0051-3810

Received on: 05.13.2024

Accepted on: 07.28.2025

Published on: 12.14.2025

ABSTRACT

This article examines regimes of bodily visibility and (self-)surveillance in contemporary society, using the final episode of the reality television program *Seca Você*, conceived and hosted by Maíra Cardi. We ground the analysis in Maffesoli's theory of the imaginary and in Han's (2020) notion of psychopolitics. We also generated a word cloud with IRaMuTeQ to identify the most frequent terms: "to eat" (111 occurrences), "God" (102), and "weight loss" (82). The principles of neo-Pentecostalism are evident in the program, which operates as a psychopolitical apparatus, calling for constant self-surveillance and dietary constriction. The show also functions as a vehicle for the imaginary, mobilizing images that compose a bodily imaginary presented as fully attainable.

KEYWORDS: Body; Reality show; Psychopolitics; Imaginary; Communication.

Introduction

Contemporary society rejects the fat body; amorphous, heavy, unproductive, unbalanced, and synonymous with poor self-management. Fat carries with it a range of undesirable meanings. Postmodernity exalts form, physical vigor, beauty, and youth, which must be embodied in thinness. Media discourse promotes a range of injunctions for achieving good shape and thus creates rituals for obtaining a thin body, transforming it into a spectacle. Weight loss reality shows dramatize and intensify the effect of reality, leading us to believe that this imaginary body, resulting from media strategies, is achievable by anyone and is therefore a real body.

Postmodernity converts body shape into spectacle. We live in hedonistic times (Maffesoli, 2014) in which investments in the body mobilize society. Overweight or obese people emerge as a challenge and are elevated to the role of reality show star. Exhibited to exhaustion, the saga toward fitness requires discipline and rigor. The

media narrative shows the path of pain and self-denial to achieve thinness; a kind of ordeal, purging of suffering and its consequent redemption.

Thinness, however, has not always been worshipped. If fat people personified wealth and health in the medieval world, where hunger and disease were widespread, in postmodernity, they came to be reviled as synonymous with poor self-management. The development of technology and medicine, combined with changes in consumption habits, made the thin body an example of health, success, and self-control. Starting in the 1950s, a pandemic of weight loss formulas invaded the media. Gurus and weight loss recipes, guides, diversification of medications, and scientific discoveries such as appetite suppressants fueled the race for a slim body. "Weight loss diets have become one of the paths to finding oneself and happiness with others, an instrument for social integration and family balance" (Sant'Anna, 2016, p. 130).

The idea of thinness is omnipresent in the media as a commodity to be voraciously consumed through images. While the slim body is exalted as an ideal of health and beauty, overweight individuals are often stereotyped as negligent of their health (Mendes, 2016). The internet is an environment that promotes discourse on health, body, and lifestyle, especially through the emergence of digital influencers (Sacramento, Magalhães, Abib, 2020) who seek to gather crowds capable of consuming images and, consequently, other goods and products.

This research is part of a master's thesis that studies Maíra Cardi's reality show "Seca Você" (Lose Weight). We aim to understand how regimes of visibility and surveillance promote the thin body in contemporary society, based on the reality show. We analyzed the last episode of the program available on YouTube¹. As a methodological approach, we based our reflections on Maffesoli's theory of the imaginary (Maffesoli, 2010, 2014, 2020, 2023; Silva, 2020) and the concept of psychopolitics (Han, 2020) and extracted the most frequent words from the episode using the word cloud tool Iramuteq.

Psychopolitics and the production of the bodily imaginary

The cult of the body is part of the postmodern ideology of health, happiness, and self-esteem. If in the past the body was related to the inner self, in contemporary times it is embodied in the contours and vigor of form. The valorization of the body is a symptom of the imaginary of the ideal body, free of imperfections, vigorous, thin,

¹ The channel makes the episode available, but often takes it down. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8e_Fkzh3dU&list=PLCv7FO7Ef04jNZGINiHiI5JnIEwfjBRSC&index=1

young, and desirable. Birman (2020) states that thinness, as a code of beauty in our society, has transformed fat people into sick and monstrous beings, who are at the same time deformed, ugly, and anti-erotic. The fat, therefore, is related to disease, while thinness is still synonymous with health.

Health as a sign has become a central value in contemporary society, an object of worship and injunctions. [...] Well-being goes beyond the absence of disease and corresponds to the constant search for physical perfection, the avoidance of pain, the maximization of performance, the prolongation of life, and satisfaction in all areas (Gomes, 2019, p. 8).

The gaze and recognition of others tend to influence and shape the misshapen body, playing an essential role in the construction of one's own identity. Maffesoli (2010) points out that when the body takes on a central role, a sense of familiarity arises through small groups that share the goal of expressing a language through bodily symbols. The body is conceived as a form of language, through which social meanings pass.

If all sorts of impositions fall on the body to achieve good shape, it is to the psyche that investments converge, aiming at mental optimization and emotional balance capable of controlling appetites and dietary excesses. "Today, the body is freed from the immediate process of production and becomes an object of aesthetic or technical-sanitary optimization. Thus, orthopedic intervention gives way to aesthetics." (Han, 2020, p. 40).

Foucault called the techniques of subjection of bodies, characteristic of modern disciplinary society, biopower (2012). Institutions subjugated bodies, shaping behaviors to maximize production. The modern Promethean mentality conceived of life in a utilitarian way, aiming at the improvement of the individual. Reason should guide actions toward a future of abundance.

The crisis of modernity has called into question the centrality of reason. The logic of networks transforms the relationship between space and time and leads to an overabundance of information. Hermetic institutions and knowledge give way to the permeability of networks. Neoliberal capitalism and technological development free the body from hard and repetitive work, making it an object of worship for the attainment of health and fitness. "Liberationist hedonism has been succeeded by a

hygienic, anxious, and medicated hedonism under the aegis of growing concern for health" (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2015, p. 238).

Biopower transmutes itself by acting insinuatingly and pervasively on individuals. It is not the body that is captive, but above all the soul, the psyche. Neoliberalism acts on desires, the immaterial, the senses, to seduce and make each person responsible for the conduct of their own life. This is psychopolitics (Han, 2020), that is, the psyche taken as a productive force and oriented towards consumption.

The body as a productive force is no longer as central as it was in the biopolitical disciplinary society. Instead of overcoming bodily resistance, psychic and mental processes are optimized to increase productivity (Han, 2020, p. 40).

The media becomes a privileged instance of psychopolitics or power over the psyche. The media device structures social life and becomes a mechanism for the production, circulation, and consumption of meanings and, therefore, a vector of the social imaginary. Myriad pieces of advice, goods, and products circulate on social networks with the aim of engaging the public. The appeal of fitness and health attracts internet users and gives rise to new ways of co-opting individuals.

Psychopolitics is shifting mainly to the internet, where people are spending more and more time. Health is one of the main topics searched for on the internet, reaching 47% of users. Brazilians spent an average of 9 hours and 13 minutes per day on the internet, with 3 hours and 37 minutes spent on social media alone in 2023. The country has 144 million active social media users (Digital 2024: Global Overview Report, 2024).

The data highlights the power of meaning that circulates on the internet. Images are the protagonists of the media scene, bringing people together and stimulating emotional communion. Hence the aesthetic ethics referred to by Maffesoli (2014); the logic of feeling connects people in an empathetic and ephemeral way. "What brings a group together, whether large or small, is no longer a planned and pursued common goal, but the affection experienced in common and in the present." (Maffesoli, 2023, p. 6, our translation)². The internet allows for spontaneous, playful, and intense connections; and the reality show *Seca Você*, available on YouTube, acts as a vector for aggregation, sensations, and sharings.

² Ce qui rassemble un groupe, plus ou moins important, ce n'est plus l'objectif planifié et poursuivi en commun, mais l'affect éprouvé en commun et au présent.

The media is, therefore, a catalyst for the imaginary. We understand the term imaginary in the sense of Maffesoli (2020, p. 8): "it is the set of beliefs, representations, phantasmagorias, cultural and everyday creations that allow us to express and give shape to this common feeling." The imaginary is the magma that allows social cohesion and the feeling of belonging to a community. The media produces an imaginary body, that is, an image that is coveted, desired, and the result of communication and marketing strategies. This body, which translates into images, embodies well-being, self-control, and happiness. The images of the *Seca Você* program are consumed and imbued with values and meanings that mobilize the audience.

We can say that reality shows, as a transgender product, constitute a psychopolitical device, but also a "technology of the imaginary" (Silva, 2020). It is a mechanism that acts through the seduction and voluntary adherence of participants and internet users, modulating emotions and behaviors. "The technologies of the imaginary are devices for crystallizing an affective, imagistic, symbolic, individual, or group heritage that mobilizes these individuals or groups" (Silva, 2020, p. 47).

The social imaginary takes hold through contagion and occurs in the acceptance of the model of the other (tribal logic³), through dissemination (equality in difference) and through imitation (distinction of the whole by diffusion of a part) (Silva, 2020). It is possible to see that the weight loss experiences shared in the media encourage a sense of belonging and acceptance. The relationship between the subject and the body is associated with interaction with others. Corporeality "is the general environment in which bodies are situated in relation to each other [...]. It is, therefore, the horizon of communication that serves as the backdrop to appearance" (Maffesoli, 2010, p. 134).

Reality shows and performance of self

Media society transforms the banal into spectacle, elevating it to an imagistic and consumable good. Everyday life is staged before cameras. The reality show fits the contemporary imperative of self-performance. Contemporary society demands continuous effort toward self-improvement, and the reality show displays the individual's saga of overcoming challenges. With reality shows on social networks, the audience interacts in real time and can shape the narrative to drive engagement. The

³ Tribalism, for Maffesoli (2014), is understood as elective affinities, groups that come together out of empathy, without obligation, but for the pleasure of being together, sharing emotions, and the feeling of belonging.

reality show deploys strategies to grant its narrative the appearance of the real for market purposes.

A hybrid, transgender phenomenon, reality shows not only blur the boundaries between reality and fiction, but also between public life and intimacy, actors and ordinary people, games and contractual activities, performance and soap operas. (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2015, p. 446).

The program "Seca Você" (Lose Weight), available on YouTube, promotes identification, short-term rewards, and the feeling of belonging to a group and being validated by it, if people are willing to follow the advice. This "body-object-image" is part of the contemporary imagination as a commodity to be consumed in a spectacularized way. According to Baudrillard (2020, p. 22), everyday life is governed by a "mentality sensitive to the miraculous," in a "belief in the omnipotence of signs," whose promise of happiness calls on people to consume images.

Reality shows began to appear on influencers' social feeds with diverse appeals to engage the public and capture markets. "In this consecration of the banal and the infra ordinary" (Lipovetsky & Serroy, 2015, p. 284), Maíra Cardi selects amorphous and flabby bodies, thirsty for change, to undergo a ritual of sacrifice to reach the redemption of fitness and thus be accepted by the social group. This ideal body calls for efforts, discourses, and practices, and it is also inscribed in the imaginary, since it is dreamed, desired, and saturated with meanings that result from media strategies. For this reason, the program acts as a psychopolitical device, which calls for permanent vigilance and constriction and incites people to believe in the program's efficacy. It is also a vector of the imaginary, referencing images that are consumed by the public and bind the social group through appeals to emotions, transcendence, and the immaterial.

Engagement on social networks is predominantly emotional. The internet invites unreflective and instantaneous action that can elicit reactions. Contemplation or close examination does not belong to this constantly flowing environment, which calls for playful and casual interaction. The logic of liking predominates online. "The like is the sign, the analgesic of the present. It dominates not only social media, it dominates all spheres of culture" (Han, 2021, p. 14). Emotions are subjective, fleeting, situational, and performative (Han, 2020). During the episode, Maíra asks viewers to watch on their

television for greater focus, and to share with three friends, expanding the audience to sell more products.

Shared emotions mark contemporary bonding, an aesthetic ethic related to feeling that saturates the social body. The program aims to engage, to arouse emotions, and to predispose the public to consume Máira Cardí's brand, which sustains her celebrity and monetizes clicks, and to encourage purchase of the Seca Você product. According to the presenter's website:

Seca Você is an innovative program, based on a unique methodology, whose objective is to take care of you from the inside out. Having a beautiful body is much more than that, it is the consequence of knowing how to live in a healthy way and of understanding that our mind commands and designs our life (Seca Você, online, 2023).

The participants in the reality show have bodies that do not fit the image of health and physical vigor, so they are suitable for remodeling by reprogramming their bodies, transforming them into acceptable and desirable objects, the participants become a source of inspiration for the audience, embodied proof of the effectiveness of the influencer's weight loss program. The molded body is the rational justification for joining the show and consuming products. The emotional atmosphere involves the audience in a playful, euphoric way, in a sharing of emotions. The audience watches the reality show and witnesses the transformation, consumes images, comments, shares, and enjoys. The mediatized body is, above all, performative, since it participates in a staging, a narrative that moves and is a commodity to be consumed. The reality show is imbued with the beliefs, values, and aspirations of the collective.

The reality show "Seca Você," available on YouTube, is a recording of the programs "Seca Você" and "Cura Você," which are sold by the company Seca Você Renove Consultoria LTDA. The goal of the reality show is to attract customers willing to buy weight loss programs on the internet. As broadcast on the program, participating in "Seca Você" is a turning point in life in order to achieve health. The presenter emphasizes the importance of facing pain and overcoming it. In an algophobic society, pain is condoned because it becomes a spectacle and aims at self-optimization.

[...] participation is the cornerstone of the spectacle - an environment in which pain is a symbolic reality. More than passive acceptance of this principle, which is not at all underlying, the program achieves active, often manic engagement in this mechanism of causing suffering" (Viana, 2021, p. 14).

Maíra Cardi is a digital influencer who declares herself a weight loss entrepreneur. In addition, Cardi acts as a *life coach*⁴ and leads the largest weight loss program in Brazil, according to her own statements. Launched in 2015, "Seca Você Renove" has gained many followers, including famous actors and singers such as Cleo Pires, Anitta, Ludmilla, Larissa Manoela, Lexa, Tiago Nigro, Sorocaba, Maiara, and Maraísa, among others. Although the influencer has a legion of fans, Cardi also has a history of lawsuits and controversies, as widely reported in the media.

At the beginning of the reality show, Cardi claims to have numerous degrees, but for her, what matters is experience, love, and dedication. Among her educational background, she claims to have studied biochemistry, quantum physics, journalism, psychology, hypnosis, and mind therapy, among several *coaching* courses. Despite her education, Maíra makes several basic mistakes in Portuguese, such as "brusinha [blusinha]"; "exemplos sensacional"; "as conta"; "quatro cartela" (Seca Você, final episode), among many others. The mistakes cause identification with the participants and with the audience, since they are women with lower purchasing power and educational levels, as they themselves present themselves.

Maíra Cardi's channel makes the reality show available, which was broadcast live, allowing for the sharing of emotions of the moment, the euphoric and enthusiastic connection transformed into engagement. The reality show leads one to believe that health and physical fitness are an achievable reality for all who are willing to engage in the rituals.

In fact, the prevalence of appearance is, on the one hand, a reality (a set of realities) sufficiently verified to be taken seriously. And, on the other hand, it is an anthropological constant found in different places and times. This must also be remembered. The theatricality (spectacularization) of bodies that we see today is just a modulation of this behavior: form is exhausted in the act, it is an

⁴ Life coaching involves supporting the coachee (client) in discovering, creating, and sustaining what they most want and deeply desire for their life. Available at: <https://www.slacoaching.com.br/artigos-do-presidente/o-que-e-life-coaching>. Accessed on: July 14, 2023.

efflorescence, it is sufficient unto itself. There are countless areas where this can be observed. Certainly, in those who make this their profession: from fashion, advertising, through various media images (Maffesoli, 2010, p. 155).

The program emphasizes the painful experience of being overweight. The narrative depicts the failure and devaluation that participants face, placing them in charge of self-management. The weight-loss reality show is a form of psychopolitical exercise (Han, 2020). The participants' exposure to the audience, their countless trials and misfortunes, and the achievement of pre-established goals highlight the injunctions placed on the body. Contemporary fitness dietetics also implies emotional control. In this therapeutic culture, emotion and subjectivity become prominent factors in explaining the various aspects of existence (Furedi, 2004) that are susceptible to intervention.

Excess weight, suffering, and failure are redefined to unfold the reality show's plot. What would be banal and intrinsic to personal existence becomes public knowledge and evokes identification. The reality show's participants aspire to changes they say they cannot achieve alone. The slogan repeated by Máira Cardi "you don't eat food, you eat emotions!" appeals to the psychologizing discourse that evils are within us and that we therefore need to have self-control.

Religiousness and entrepreneurship

The emergence of neo-Pentecostalism has had a significant impact on Brazil's religious landscape. Although most of the population, about 64.6%, identifies as Catholic, Pentecostal, and neo-Pentecostal groups represent a considerable portion, totaling 22.2% of the population⁵. This significant number demonstrates the growing influence of Christian entrepreneurial appeal in Brazilian society.

For journalist Rodrigo Nunes (2022), the ideology of entrepreneurship that has prevailed in recent decades has roots in various sources, but in Brazil, it is important to consider the "growing influence of evangelical churches that promote the so-called 'prosperity theology' and the boom in the self-help and *coaching* industry" (Nunes, 2022, p. 64). *Coaching* can be analyzed as a kind of vicious cycle in entrepreneurship,

⁵ <https://www.terra.com.br/noticias/brasil/numero-de-evangelicos-cresce-61-no-brasil-diz-ibge,c0addc840f0da310VgnCLD200000bbccceb0aRCRD.html#:~:text=A%20propor%C3%A7%C3%A3o%20dos%20evang%C3%A9licos%20em,para%2022%2C2%20por%20cento.>

involving the constant demand for self-improvement for the market, transforming itself into a business opportunity.

Maíra Cardi describes herself as a weight loss *coach* and mentor for Brazil's largest weight loss program. The *coach* is a mentor whose only venture is himself, teaching others the secrets of business success. In the case of the artist, she has already helped "more than 600.000 women"⁶ lose weight with her program.

The prosperity theology of neo-Pentecostal churches suggests that adherence to God's principles is accompanied by material wealth. This belief system equates material success with divine will and fits comfortably with *the coach's* idea when Maíra Cardi states in the episode that God gave her the mission to change people's lives through food. The essence of this argument is the idea that "Jesus Christ has already redeemed humanity, so that every follower has a legitimate right to wealth, health, and success in this life, here and now" (Souza, 2011, p. 14).

Neo-Pentecostal movements are based on the testimonies of supposedly successful people to hold events and campaigns in the name of prosperity (Souza, 2011). The same occurs in the program, in which those who have already lost weight seek to convert overweight individuals to achieve prosperity. Aspects involving God, ritualistic evangelical music, testimonials, and prayers create a religious atmosphere.

Sanches (2019) highlights the importance of the concept of enterprise to underpin the understanding of sociocultural phenomena in his analysis of the subject-enterprise. Amidst the comprehensive mediatization of life, social relationships emerge that highlight the cult of the body as a form of personal entrepreneurship, where "the cult of corporeality has undoubtedly become the only possible dimension of self-care, as there is no longer an essentialist and metaphysical debate surrounding the soul" (Sanches, 2019, p. 7).

The figure of the enterprise acts as a "guiding metaphor for contemporary life." According to the author, the entrepreneurial individual constantly evaluates investment opportunities in their psyche, emotions, finances, education, information, culture, and physical well-being (Sanches, 2019, p. 5). Thus, the performance of the "entrepreneur of oneself" and the emphasis on the need to employ skills and behaviors to add value and take care of the body reflect the logic of psychopolitics or control over bodies to achieve success.

⁶ <https://www.estadao.com.br/emails/gente/quem-e-maira-cardi-e-por-que-ela-e-acusada-de-terrorismo-nutricional-nprec/>

When success is believed to be solely the result of individual effort, failure is not interpreted as a sign of unfavorable circumstances, but rather as a burden of guilt and shame, motivating even more dedication and effort. In this scenario, success and the very concept of entrepreneurship take on a quality of relentless optimism, anchored in the relentless pursuit of happiness and positive expectations for the future. (Nunes, 2022).

The media encourages individuals to conform to certain standards that are associated with rewards. Reality TV invokes the Christian logic of suffering to obtain gain: a slim body and prosperity. Everyday life, however, shows that there are more individuals who fail than those who do; contemporary society always produces many more losers than winners.

Methodology

The research is part of a master's thesis that studies the reality show "Seca Você." For this article, we analyzed the last and longest episode⁷ of the series, broadcast live on April 13, 2022, on YouTube, which obtained 313.173 views. Cardi's channel has 1.16 million subscribers and 97 videos⁸.

As a methodological approach, we based our reflections on Maffesoli's theory of the imaginary and the concept of psychopolitics (Han, 2020) and extracted the most frequent words using the word cloud tool Iramuteq. The episode was downloaded from YouTube in video format and the audio was extracted in mp3 format. We used the Office dictation feature (ALT+') to transcribe the audio files. The text files were transcribed into the language of the Iramuteq program in *txt format*. We adapted the text to the language of *the free software* Iramuteq, developed in the *Python* language, which uses *R software* to propose statistics and materials for multidimensional analysis of texts in general. In this work, we used the word cloud method, highlighting the three most frequent words in the episode. Figure 1 shows the word cloud containing the frequencies recorded in the analyses.

As a selection criterion, we chose to include in the word cloud the words that were most repeated in the speeches of the analyzed episode, in order to provide a

⁷https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8e_Fkzh3dU&list=PLCv7FO7Ef04jNZGINiHiI5JnlEwfjBRSC&ab_channel=Ma%C3%ADraCardi

⁸ Data collected on March 24, 2024.

comprehensive view of the imaginaries triggered. From the full transcription of the episode to the identification of keywords with the help of IRAMUTEQ software, each step was guided by the intention to understand the regimes of visibility and surveillance applied to bodies in contemporary times.

Figure 1
*Wora cloud*⁹



Source: Prepared by the authors, IRAMUTEQ, 2023.

The methodological approach allowed us to extract lexical patterns, semantic connections, and discursive nuances that enriched the analysis, revealing how media discourse contributes to the symbolic construction of health, the body, and performance. For the selection of *the* verbal and image *corpus*, criteria of thematic relevance and discursive density were adopted, prioritizing passages in which bodily transformation was evident. Thus, we describe passages that narrate suffering, appeal to faith, and show examples of overcoming adversity.

To construct the sample of passages, the choice was based on criteria of thematic relevance, prioritizing scenes in which the participants' statements and the presenter's mediations made explicit the symbolic process of bodily reprogramming. Another important criterion was discursive density, that is, the volume and depth of meanings produced around physical and moral transformation, since the episode is long and many scenes are repeated. Scenes with a strictly advertising focus or without

⁹ The image presents a word cloud created from the main analytical concepts explored in this article. Originally designed in Portuguese, the cloud highlights terms such as *Body, Imaginary, Power, Discourse, Politics, Surveillance, Media, Feminism, Gender, and Biopolitics*. These keywords synthesize the theoretical framework developed throughout the text.

a direct link to the objectives of the analysis were excluded. Based on this articulation between discourse and image, the word cloud was consolidated as an auxiliary tool, highlighting the predominant words, and enhancing the understanding of the meanings activated by the reality show.

Maíra Cardi on stage

The last episode of the series lasts 4 hours, 46 minutes, and 54 seconds and was broadcast live on YouTube directly from a theater. Before the reality show begins, a video is shown in which Maíra Cardi narrates the role of women today. The video emphasizes that, in addition to being wives and mothers, women want to be successful and bring money home. Over the course of five minutes, the narrative is interspersed with images that show the busy daily life and aspirations of the female universe. The influencer's distressing questions and the music have a dramatic tone and emphasize the social demands for women to be successful in all roles and even to be thin.

How, being manipulated daily, suffering from food abuse by those we love most, suffering from social idealization, brainwashing, and being forced to be Wonder Woman without ever having been welcomed or learned the path to get there and be happy [...] Why do you push in everything you can't push out... yes, you don't eat food, you eat emotions! [...]. Obesity is the second leading cause of death in the world. How long are you going to leave your life in the hands of this system that kills a little more every day? (Introduction to the final episode of the reality show).

Body shape is associated with an inner self that needs to be restored in order to achieve balance and change one's life. The influencer thus gains ascendancy over all areas of the participants' lives. A body that is out of shape tends to cause discomfort and is therefore subject to intervention. In the opening segment, Maíra speaks directly to the viewer, saying, "You are a victim of the system," which, according to her, profits from illness and does not want people to be cured. The final question calls on women to act and change the situation.

The obese person is an ambivalent figure in contemporary society. On the one hand, "they appear to be victims of the economic, industrial, and food systems that provide them with low-quality food, contributing to their ignorance about nutrition"

(Sant'anna, 2016, p. 140). On the other hand, they have the right to free choice, "thus incited to have Herculean strength, either to lose weight or to resist the demands placed on them to lose weight" (idem). Reality shows exploit this ambivalence by highlighting the blessed bodies that have abandoned their negligence to invest in themselves.

The condition of victimhood weakens, appeals to emotion, and Máira claims that people are manipulated by the system, placing herself as someone privileged who has managed to perceive and reveal the conspiracy that manipulates everyone. The influencer can then help others in this mission. Máira will show the way.

The reality show begins and the curtains open. A band on the right side and at the back of the stage plays stimulating music. The influencer enters the scene wearing a black lace dress that shows off her legs and her right arm bare amid the dry ice fog. A small audience listens attentively to the presenter. "We are live. There is no improvisation. It is as real as it gets." Soon after, the presenter contradicts herself: "This was all prepared for you." (Final episode, *Seca Você* reality show). The omission of the word "show" in the program's title seeks to mask its fictional nature and reinforce the idea that it is a faithful portrayal of reality and highlight that it is a portrait of reality. The opening lines seek to lend authenticity to the program, although it is contradictory to claim that there is no improvisation and that it is real. If there is no improvisation, there is a script, a narrative designed to be shown.

The program broadcast live on YouTube is a metanarrative, since it is a narrative based on the reality show that was recorded and, in part, presented. A new story is created, seeking to lend authenticity with the live participation of women who have already lost weight.

Cardi tells her story. "I started from nothing. I had literally R\$ 800 in my account when I decided to start this game that turned into this dream; not my dream, but the dream of all of you, the dream of transforming the lives of so many people." (Final episode, *Seca Você* reality show). The lines have emotional appeal and create a connection with the audience. The desire to have a beautiful and healthy body calls for action. As Han (2020) points out, emotions unite, reach people, and are performative.

Máira shows the recorded scenes from the reality show with the participants. Sexual abuse, an evil stepmother, panic syndrome, poor appearance, suicide attempts, and many tears set the emotional tone for the narrative, in addition to the dramatic music. "If you hadn't talked to me, hadn't appeared on the reality show, I wouldn't be

alive," says one of the participants who attempted suicide five times. The presenter begins a prayer and highlights the importance of gratitude: "May God fill your hearts with gratitude" (Final episode, *Seca Você* reality show).

The participants express their gratitude for having been chosen to be part of the program. Máira interviews one of them and says: "You know it wasn't me who chose you, it was God." (Final episode, *Seca Você* reality show). Thus, Máira would be the connection between the participants and transcendence, giving a mystical tone to the narrative and placing herself as the bearer of the prerogative of being the divine spokesperson. The women participate in the performance, showing their pain and ready to deliver catchphrases: "Do you want diabetes, a stroke, or do you not want to get stuck on the bus turnstile?" asks one of the participants on stage. She herself got stuck on the turnstile, so her testimony lends authenticity to the story and encourages other fat people to desire thinness. The audience laughs at the self-mockery. In addition to diseases, what stands out is the social embarrassment to which fat people are exposed. Beyond the roulette wheel, fat has no place in the social scene. "When they meet you on the street, where's the other half?" Máira asks another participant. The fat half, like an evil entity, has disappeared. The one who takes the stage, just like in life, is the thin half, who has controlled her appetites and has emotional balance.

When calling the participants to the stage, Máira explains the objections to dieting, such as lack of money, discipline, and disorganization. According to her, everything can be overcome with willpower and the discovery of the emotional problems that led to uncontrolled eating. Máira celebrates: "You have seen 233 kilos eliminated, and you will see more here on this reality show!" (Final episode, *Seca Você* reality show).

Psychopolitics and the construction of the imaginary body

Over the course of more than four hours, we identified the most frequent words in the last episode of the reality show from the cloud generated by the Iramuteq tool. "Eat" appears 111 times; "God," 102 times; and "lose weight," 82¹⁰ times. During the

¹⁰ The term "program" appears 72 times. However, the word "weight loss" appears in third place, with a total of 82 occurrences, based on the etymology of the word "emagrecer" (to lose weight), which comes from the Latin *emacrescere*, meaning "to become thin," along with its derivatives. Thus, added to the forms derived from the root "emagreço" (3), "emagrecer" (51), and "emagrecimento" (28), they total 82 occurrences.

episode, YouTuber Maíra Cardi constantly repeats "it's not about what you eat, it's what's behind it," suggesting that people who overeat are hiding something.

We see that "eating" is associated with lack of control and sin; excess must be regulated through personal effort, the constant search for lean meat, submission to penance in exercise rituals, and a small, balanced diet. The suppression of bodily pleasures will lead to a greater good: health, beauty, and recognition. Food needs to regulate the healthy functioning of the body, and fat people overeat because they are sick and emotionally unbalanced. Fat people need commitment, limits, and guidelines in pursuit of good health.

But if I'm saying that weight loss has to do with pain, it has to do with the soul. We have something in common there. People who can't lose weight don't have a problem with the difficulty of losing weight, they have a problem with dealing with some pain. (Maíra Cardi, Final episode, *Seca Você* reality show).

Emotions play a fundamental role in contemporary society, having been gradually detached from public life since the 1960s and becoming an instrument of mobilization linked to individual control (Furedi, 2004). Therapeutic culture, therefore, is a form of psychopolitics, associated with the subjective management of desires and emotions. The media occupies a privileged place for the expiation of internal evils that appear in the media scene. Digital influencers command the dramatization of pain and the conformation of the body, a repository of emotional excesses.

The bodies that parade on Maíra Cardi's reality show approximate the ideology constructed by the influencer. Maíra is the embodiment of fitness and self-control, displaying a body that was built to be shown in the media for marketing purposes.

Food is part of the typically contemporary bodily and sensory pleasures. In a hedonistic age, the act of eating should be a pleasurable experience. If gluttony is one of the five deadly sins, according to Christianity, postmodernity intensifies pleasures in all forms. Maíra revisits the religious and punitive bias of overeating. The fat body must be banished, flagellated by the rigor of a diet that translates into the strategies of the weight loss program. "233 kg less, eliminated, and a lighter stage, my loves, an infinitely lighter stage, but not only a lighter stage in terms of physical weight, emotional weight, and a lighter stage in terms of pain." (Maíra Cardi, Final episode,

reality show *Seca Você*). The reward is a slim body, prosperity, and public recognition in the media scene.

[...] it can be said that the group creates the fat person. It is clear, then, that the issue of fatphobia is not really about the body of the person considered fat, but rather about the people who are bothered by the image of that body based on a media narrative that encourages this prejudice and discrimination. After all, body dissatisfaction is a reality not only for those who are overweight and obese, but also for those who, despite not being in this situation, fear for their body image (Arruda, 2019, p. 32).

The word "God" is repeated 102 times. The appeal to transcendence is a strategy used by reality TV to conjure up personal strength in the face of the magnitude of the sacrifice. Those who "sin," or rather, eat, have hidden inner pain, hidden traumas that need to be revealed and purged through weight loss and the spectacle of the stage. "The fat person becomes all the more present and frequent, even hurting the eye, the more he is denounced" (Vigarello, p. 291). The projection of Instagram *reels* during the program shows the fat bodies that the participants left behind, along with all kinds of misfortune.

Fat is the very embodiment of the evil that has been fought. God is the being to whom we turn, the strength to win the battle against the desire to eat, laziness, moral weakness, and the manipulative system that makes people fat. "Our body is our temple. How do you take care of your temple? How do you take care of your home? By putting food that God made in it or by putting man-made junk in it?" (Maíra Cardí, Final episode, *Seca Você* reality show).

Youtuber Maíra Cardí is the incarnation anointed by a higher being to help in this ritual of atonement and lead amorphous bodies to redemption, to good shape. "The selection for this program was made by God, right? God united purposes" (Maíra Cardí, Final episode, *Seca Você* reality show). Thus, the presenter combines syncretic practices that mix psychology, neo-Pentecostalism, and entrepreneurship. For Han (2022, p. 18), influencers behave like redeemers. "Followers thus participate in a *digital Eucharist*. Social media resembles a church: *Like is amen. Sharing is communication. Consumption is redemption.*"

Maíra's reality show is, therefore, a liturgy. In this ritual, the body is an asset to be managed with perseverance and faith. "I take you out of hell, out of your hell. I take you out of pain, out of your pain. And then, my dear, hell loses. Not to me, it loses to God." (Maíra Cardi, Final episode, *Seca Você* reality show).

The word "lose weight" is repeated 82 times. The redemption of the ritual of sacrifice to which the participants submit themselves is a slim body, closer to perfection, healthy and vigorous, the embodiment of effective self-management. If fat incites scorn and revulsion, thinness deserves applause and public recognition, as it is the new trophy of the digital age. The body, subjected to all kinds of misfortune, finally finds relief from the psychological and emotional pain it embodies. The thin person is one who has managed to atone for fat and internal conflicts and, above all, achieves health, balance, and acceptance by the audience.

The presenter's repeated statement "it's not about what you eat, but what's behind it" calls for constant self-monitoring in search of the hidden pains that become tangible in the craving for food. "It's the emotions behind it that hurt you" (Final episode, *Seca Você* reality show). Self-styled as a "behavioral analyst," Maíra appeals to the discourse of authority that would legitimize her advice. The presenter leads us to believe that she has the necessary knowledge to encourage participants to lose weight. The influencer embodies what she says. Her slim body and vigorous physique seem to confirm her preaching.

During the reality show, the music played, the tone of voice, and the dramatic appeal work strategically to highlight the participants' insecurity, low self-esteem, and anxiety. Thus, eating is swallowing the pain. The mouth that chews is also the one that stuffs itself and remains silent. Evil belongs to the individual domain, and only the person can overcome their misfortunes. "Palliative society depoliticizes pain by medicalizing and privatizing it. The social dimension of pain is thus also oppressed and repressed" (Han, 2021, p. 30). We live in times of "image densification, which does not ignore the potential of the media as catalysts for a contemporary ideal of living, in the present, the highest performance of bodily forms." (Mendes, 2016, p. 18). "*Seca Você*" is a psychopolitical device to make people believe in and desire this imaginary body.

Final considerations

The body is, at the same time, a biological and symbolic record, that is, beyond its organic dimension, it is traversed by meanings. Therefore, the body is an expression

of an imaginary, a space of investments that articulates discourses, sensations and practices. The reality show "Seca Você" is part of contemporary dietetics, transforming physical fitness into a commodity to be consumed, aestheticized, and spectacularized in the media. There is something magical about reality TV; a call to overflow the self in shared senses. The body that shows itself and transforms into an improved version of itself longs for consecration; the woman who was once forgotten and mistreated wants, at last, to find happiness in the apotheosis of the media spectacle.

The catchphrase repeated by presenter and influencer Máira Cardí, "it's not what you eat, it's what's behind it," encourages people to discover and reveal their own setbacks that have resulted in a fat body. Participants are called upon to change, to undergo martyrdom to atone for the sin of overeating. God is revered as the being who will give them the strength to walk the path. The presenter proclaims her advice and leads the participants to redemption.

The women who participated in the reality show or the formerly overweight women show themselves to be self-determined and empowered. Once they have achieved thinness, they are ready for other victories. The body is an enterprise that must be managed daily and displayed as a trophy for one's efforts. The thin woman is fertile and balanced, as testified by a participant who became pregnant after losing weight, while the fat woman is relegated to the harshness of heavy and repetitive daily tasks. The slim and vigorous body can dare, try new experiences and relationships, while fat is associated with laziness and condemned to failure. This body must be shown to earn the public's reverence and attest to the effectiveness of the presenter's weight loss program.

The sculpted body is an object of worship and injunctions to achieve good shape. As a technology of the imaginary, reality shows spectacularize the banal, transforming fat into a monstrosity to be banished. Thus, balance is restored, a well-lived existence far from the misfortunes associated with fat. The image lends credibility to the influencer who, between invocations, wiggles, and spectacularization, converts fitness into a consumable and profitable commodity.

The principles of healing, revelation, and prosperity, which are distinctive of neo-Pentecostalism, are also evident in the program when the artist declares that she has received a divine calling capable of transforming lives through her vocation, emphasizing that God is the foundation of all change. She points out that without faith, achieving goals becomes impossible. The episode is permeated by a religious sphere.

Thus, it is evident that the concepts of psychopolitics, imagination, and corporeality converge in the understanding of the contemporary body as a symbolic artifact, constructed at the interface between media, market, and subjectivity. The thin body, exalted by reality shows, is less the result of individual choices and more an expression of devices of power that operate through seduction, faith, and emotional control. Psychopolitics acts on the psyche, calling on individuals to engage in self-management and constant vigilance; the imaginary provides the meanings and images that sustain this quest; and corporeality becomes the visible surface of performance and belonging. “Seca Você” shows that, more than losing weight, it is about performing a collective, sacralized, and media-driven ideal of success and overcoming adversity. In the end, the body not only loses weight, it is molded to be seen, admired, and consumed.

The reality show is a kind of effervescence of the collective that connects through media images. The slim body, a contemporary totem, an object sacralized by the audience, takes the stage and performs its best performance; the improved version of itself. Maíra and her enchanting body make us believe that it is possible for any woman to leave her mundane and problematic life behind and transform herself into a goddess, as she herself refers to the participants. In an algophobic society, all conflicts must be purged, if possible, in the media scene where happy endings must reign, unlike in ordinary life.

References

- Arruda, A. (2019). *O peso e a mídia: uma autoetnografia da gordofobia sob o olhar da complexidade* [Tese de doutorado, Universidade Paulista]. Programa de Pós-Graduação em Comunicação, Universidade Paulista, São Paulo.
- Baudrillard, J. (2020). *A sociedade de consumo*. Lisboa: Edições 70.
- Birman, J. (2020). *O sujeito na contemporaneidade: espaço, dor e desalento na atualidade* (3a ed.). Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira.
- Datareportal. (2024). *Digital 2024: Global overview report*.
<https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-global-overview-report>
- Foucault, M. (2012). *História da sexualidade I: a vontade de saber* (22a ed.). Rio de Janeiro: Graal.
- Furedi, F. (2004). *Therapy culture: cultivating vulnerability in an uncertain age*. Routledge.
- Gomes, D. C. A. (2019). A saúde como autorealização: o imaginário na fanpage “Melhor com Saúde”. *Revista Mídia e Cotidiano*, 13(1), 7–28.
- Han, B. (2020). *Psicopolítica: o neoliberalismo e as novas técnicas de poder*. Âyiné.
- Han, B. (2021). *Sociedade paliativa: a dor hoje*. Vozes.
- Han, B. (2022). *Infocracia: digitalização e a crise da democracia*. Vozes.

- Lipovetsky, G., & Serroy, J. (2015). *A estetização do mundo: viver na era do capitalismo artista*. Companhia das Letras.
- Maffesoli, M. (2010). *No fundo das aparências*. Vozes.
- Maffesoli, M. (2014). *O tempo das tribos: o declínio do individualismo nas sociedades de massa* (5a ed.). Forense Universitária.
- Maffesoli, M. (2020). Prefácio. In C. F. Guttfreind, J. Silva, & P. Joron (Orgs.), *Laço social e tecnologia em tempos extremos: imaginário, redes e pandemia* (pp. 97–113). Sulina.
- Maffesoli, M. (2023). L'émotionnel. Dialogue avec Michel Maffesoli. *Sociétés*, 160(2), 5–10. <https://doi.org/10.3917/soc.160.0005>
- Mendes, P. (2016). *Saúde imaginária: a reprogramação do corpo no reality show* [Tese de doutorado, Universidade Federal de Pernambuco]. Repositório UFPE. <https://repositorio.ufpe.br/handle/123456789/20158>
- Nunes, R. (2022). *Do transe à vertigem: ensaios sobre bolsonarismo em um mundo em transição*. Ubu Editora.
- Sacramento, I., Magalhães, T., & Abib, R. (2020). As musas fitness como corpos dóceis: uma análise de processos de normalização do corpo feminino na cultura contemporânea. *Revista Fronteiras*, 22(3). <https://doi.org/10.4013/fem.2020.223.07>
- Sanches, J. (2019). O sujeito-empresa da era neoliberal. Trabalho apresentado no GP Estéticas, Políticas do Corpo e Gêneros, XVIII Encontro dos Grupos de Pesquisa em Comunicação, 41º Congresso Brasileiro de Ciências da Comunicação.
- Sant'Anna, D. (2016). *Gordos, magros e obesos: uma história do peso no Brasil*. Estação Liberdade.
- Seca Você. (2025, julho 25). *Episódio final* [Vídeo]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8e_Fkzh3dU&list=PLCv7FO7Ef04jNZGlniHil5JnlEwfjBRSC&index=1
- Seca Você. (s.d.). *Site oficial do programa*. <http://www.secavocerenove.com>
- Silva, J. (2020). *As tecnologias do imaginário* (3a ed.). Sulina.
- Souza, A. R. de. (2011). O empreendedorismo neopentecostal no Brasil. *Ciencias Sociales y Religión*, 13(15), 13–34. <https://doi.org/10.22456/1982-2650.19962>
- Viana, S. (2021). *Rituais de sofrimento* (2a reimpr.). Boitempo Editorial.
- Vigarello, G. (2012). *As metamorfoses do gordo: história da obesidade no Ocidente da Idade Média ao século XX*. Vozes.

RESUMO

Objetivamos compreender os regimes de visibilidade e vigilância corporais na contemporaneidade, a partir do último episódio do reality show “Seca Você” de Maíra Cardi. Embasamos as reflexões na teoria do imaginário de Maffesoli e o conceito de psicopolítica (Han, 2020) e extraímos as palavras frequentes utilizando a nuvem de palavras da ferramenta Iramuteq. “Comer” aparece 111 vezes; “Deus 102”; e “emagrecer”, 82. Os princípios do neopentecostalismo são evidentes no programa que atua como dispositivo psicopolítico, conclamando à vigilância e à construção permanentes. O reality show é também vetor de imaginário, referenciando imagens que constroem um imaginário corporal que parece ser plenamente alcançável.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Corpo; Reality show; Psicopolítica; Imaginário; Comunicação.

RESUMEN

Nuestro objetivo es comprender los regímenes de visibilidad y vigilancia corporal en la época contemporánea, a partir del último episodio del reality show “Seca Você” de Maíra Cardi. Basamos nuestras reflexiones en la teoría del imaginario de Maffesoli y el concepto de psicopolítica (Han, 2020) y extraímos las palabras más frecuentes utilizando la nube de palabras de la herramienta Iramuteq. “Comer” aparece 111 veces; “Dios”, 102; y “adelgazar”, 82. Los principios del neopentecostalismo son evidentes en el programa que actúa como un dispositivo psicopolítico, que exige vigilancia y construcción permanentes. El reality show es también un vector de imaginaria, que hace referencia a imágenes que construyen una imaginaria corporal que parece totalmente realizable.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Cuerpo; Reality show; Psicopolítica; Imaginario; Comunicación.