Soap opera reception in Greece: Resistance, negotiation and viewing position

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Abstract

This thesis aims to contribute to debates concerning the possibility and nature of resistance in the consumption of popular culture. I attempted to delineate the patterns through which Greek male and female viewers construct and use the meanings of domestic and foreign soap operas, in the context of their everyday life.

The questions that have guided my research have been the following: how do men and women of different social backgrounds relate to soap operas of different ethnic origins? Do their discourses and practices challenge the soap opera text and its ideological currency? Do they empower them in any way? What is the role of gender, class, and national identity in this process?

I conducted in depth interviews with 35 soap opera fans (19 women – 16 men) and their qualitative analysis led me to distinguish between three viewing positions, that is, the attitudes, pleasures, and practices that characterized the patterns of reception that I encountered: the *aesthetic* position, the position of the *social observer,* and the *ironic distance* position. Several viewers negotiated between two positions according to the social dynamics of the viewing setting and the text's ethnic origin.

These positions are further analyzed in relation to gender, class and age. The marked differences in the reception of indigenous, as opposed to foreign soaps, underline the significance of ethno-cultural identity. The cultural meanings and uses of soap opera may differ substantially, depending on the social group of the viewers. The thesis concludes that resistance does not always involve oppositional readings and that it is still a useful notion to describe certain practices and discourses in television reception that take place at a personal, social and symbolic level.

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Introduction

This thesis aims to contribute to debates about the possibility and the nature of resistance in the consumption of popular culture. Moreover, by exploring in depth empirical accounts, I will attempt to delineate the patterns in which male and female viewers construct and use the meanings of domestic and foreign soap operas, in the context of their everyday life.

Although there is a respectable and well-established body of research and scholarship under the subject of soap opera and active audiences, there are still several challenges and unexplored issues that gave rise to this particular project. First of all, the notion of resistance, in relation to active audiences, has been one of the main grounds on which Cultural Studies has been criticized. Active audience theorists have been accused of being populist defenders of popular culture, infatuated with their subjects of research, and thus, producing romanticized accounts of texts and audiences with no political or critical sharpness. Resistance is a multi-faceted phenomenon that needs to be properly demonstrated and then theorized, and this thesis aims to do that by examining the possibilities and forms it presents. In the aftermath of the Cultural Studies 'boom' in the 80's and early 90's and its backlash, it is crucial to re-think notions that have guided active audience research.

There are several areas that have not been adequately addressed so far, and which would enrich our understanding of audiences and their practices. This applies particularly to the study of soap opera audiences, which has particularly enhanced active

audience research, and has traditionally favored gender, overlooking class, ethnicity, race, age, and other important characteristics. By talking to both men and women soap fans, and looking at how their viewership and practices are affected by their social and historical position, I aim to add a much needed dimension to soap audience work, which will also shed more light to the process of resistance. Moreover, by exploring how domestic and foreign texts are received, and how cultural expertise and identity affect one's understanding and program related practices, I am addressing issues of cultural imperialism and the role of national identity in television reception, which again, have not been emphasized by previous work.

These concerns give my thesis its theoretical relevance, but besides them, this project was born and shaped out of my own personal interest in the subject. Unsurprisingly, watching soaps has been a pleasure I have shared with friends and family since my late teens. Being an 'insider' helped to appreciate and become fascinated by the academic study of soap opera, to which I was exposed accidentally in my college years. Soap opera discourse was for me a lived experience and to explore its possibilities has since yielded an ever growing interest. Being a soap fan was also a catalyst in my fieldwork. Meeting and talking to soap opera fans of all ages and backgrounds was easier and made me realize how complex the relationship between soaps and their viewers is. This experience modified my expectations and preconceptions created by my own previous experience as a soap opera fan.

The stories I was told while conducting this research were also valuable in demonstrating how terms like dominant ideology and power relations refer to phenomena that are experienced in the realm of everyday life. The question of media power in our media-saturated world, is more pressing than ever, and the answers take several forms: public and private; political and personal; local and global; micro and macro. This thesis is about power, and one of its tenets is that one cannot by any means equate the power to resist an ideological message with the power in the hands of those who produce and broadcast these messages in the first place. Nevertheless, the sitting room and the viewers' discourse can illustrate how power is exercised and negotiated. These specific, localized sites must always be included in our approach to media power and cultural hegemony.

Therefore, my thesis is an attempt to place the notion of resistance in a social, concrete perspective by exploring the specificities that shape viewers' discourses and practices. Rephrasing this attempt in a research question, that would be:

- How do men and women of different social backgrounds relate to soap operas of foreign and domestic ethnic origins? Do their discourses and practices challenge the soap opera text and its ideological currency? Do they empower them in any way? What is the role of their gender, class, and cultural identities in this process?

In the first chapter of the thesis I will position myself vis-à-vis the theoretical background and the basic notions that have informed my work, drawing

mostly from literature on audience research. I have tried to break away from the 'encoding/decoding' model of reception, which despite its indubitable role in the development of audience studies, has also bequeathed several problems in the methodology and interpretation of relevant research. I have drawn from newer attempts in the understanding of audiences, and I have tried to rework the concept of resistance, thinking also about agency, empowerment and fan investment.

In chapter 2 we will take a brief look at Greek television, Greek soap operas and how these are established in Greek society, in an effort to contextualize the people, places and texts I will be talking about. In addition, I am arguing that Greek soap opera is historically linked to other forms of Greek popular culture and has a very explicit role in defining and invoking a traditional notion of Greekness.

Chapter 3 focuses on issues of methodology with a review and an evaluation of the methods I used. Moreover I will acquaint the reader with the participants of the study. The fourth chapter will introduce the notion of viewing positions, as the distinct patterns of viewership that emerged in my analysis, which will be useful in relating resistance to particular aspects of viewership and audience characteristics. I will go over the distinctive features of each position and examine the factors that lead some viewers to shift between two positions.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 will deal with gender, national identity, and class respectively, and their role in soap opera reception and its possibility for resistance. In chapter 5 I will first look at the

differences in the identities and practices of male and female soap fans, and then examine how gender representations are received and whether patriarchal ideologies are contested. The analysis continues with the question of national identity and in what ways do foreign or domestic soaps activate it. The role of cultural expertise in reception of Greek soaps is assessed and compared to the interpretive framework of 'We Vs Them' that characterizes fans of foreign shows. The issue of class is brought up next, while we explore the 'class-ification' of soap texts and fans. I will look at how class shapes viewers' perception of realism and ideology in soaps, how modes of reception differ according to class, and how class difference can be interpreted as 'otherness' and fuel oppositional, yet not progressive, readings.

The 8th and final chapter will deal with more specifically with resistance, reviewing fans' accounts in relation to theoretical concepts like evasive and semiotic resistance, or empowerment. The degree to which these accounts can be thought of as evidence for the above theories will be thoroughly assessed. The complex ways in which gender, class, age and national identity are articulated in producing viewing positions and specific responses (resistant or not) will be illustrated throughout this work, as they could never be conceived as isolated, objectified notions.

1. Theoretical Background

Audience research can boast of diverse roots: media effects, uses and gratifications research, literary criticism, feminism, cultural studies, and interpretive micro-sociology are those mentioned by Livingstone (1998:193, 211) in her attempt to identify the 'what next' for the agenda of audience research. The inter-disciplinary nature and history of the field has bequeathed challenges in theory and method, while several long standing debates [which according to Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) constitute 'normal science' (15) for certain paradigms of audience research] could be ascribed to disciplinary and meta-theoretical divisions.

Questions of power and dominance are at the heart of media culture, and therefore the study of the audience is also a highly political endeavor. Ang (1996) is right to suggest that theoretical alliances may reflect political and ethical decisions and thus, she considers attempts of convergence between different perspectives as dubious. In this light, it is wise to position one's work clearly in relation to existing work that has been done on audiences. This project examines the possibility of resistance in the consumption of foreign and indigenous soap operas in Greece and is situated in the tradition of the active audience research, an area that has been defined to a great extent by cultural studies, in its search for theories and methods.

This chapter presents the theoretical framework that has informed my thesis. In the first part, I will look at how audience research of the 80's and 90's was developed within cultural studies, engaging with the main concepts and theoretical models that have preoccupied the field. Next, I will address the empirical research that

has been done on soap opera audiences and specifically the work dealing with gender, class, and national identity. In the last section, I will focus on theories of resistance and empowerment and the debates they have elicited, and finally, establish for the reader how I will use these concepts in my thesis.

1.1 Cultural studies and the new audience research

It is almost canonical for historical overviews in media studies to plot the notion of the 'audience' by dividing it in three phases of research: media effects, uses and gratifications, and the encoding/decoding model (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998; Croteau & Hoynes, 1997; Livingstone, 1998; Morley, 1992). Each of these paradigms has put forward a different thesis for the power balance between the media and their audiences. Since this is not an historical text, I will only go back to the particular moments and phases that are relevant to the scope of this study.

The work on audiences under the cultural studies perspective, in contrast to uses and gratifications research, for example, differs in the political dimension that characterizes the program of cultural studies (Ang, 1996a). 'The term *culture*, as used in the phrase "cultural studies", is neither aesthetic nor humanist in emphasis, but political' (Fiske, 1992a:284). It is a site of lived experience, where meanings are produced, circulated and contested by social groups (Brown, 1990). Cultural studies

> is not about interpreting or judging texts or people, but about describing how people's everyday lives are articulated by and with culture, how they are empowered and disempowered by the particular structures and forces that organize their lives, always in contradictory ways, and how their everyday lives are themselves articulated to and by the trajectories of economic and political power (Grossberg, 1998:67).

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Grossberg's statement indicates how cultural studies discards elitist notions of culture, emphasizing the negotiation of power in the context of everyday life through a struggle for meanings. Ideology is a key concept in this struggle, as different meanings favor different social definitions and categories for different social formations. For Althusser (1971) ideology constructs identities and hails its subjects through language, practices, and rituals (functions of ideological institutions, like the school, the church, the media). This notion of ideology was helpful in the development of a theoretical basis, but it also presented several problems because of its rigidity (see Hall, 1997). Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony, as the prevalence of the interests of a particular group in spite of the existence of various conflicting voices within a given society, filled a significant place in the theoretical repertoire of cultural studies, partly because it opened up Marxist analysis to the study of popular culture (Fiske, 1992a; Kellner, 1995; McGuigan, 1992).

1.1.1 Hegemony

The concept of hegemony extends the notion of domination by force to include culture as a 'strategic battlefield in the struggle to define the terms of conflict' (Martin-Barbero, 1993:74) between the dominant and the subordinated groups. The former controls the latter to the extent that the subordinated see in the interests of the dominant group something that reflects their own interests too. Hence, social domination is not a stable and total imposition but an

> appropriation of the meaning of life through power, seduction and complicity.... The importance of the popular does not rest on its authenticity or beauty but rather on its sociocultural representativity and on its

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capacity to make material and to express the ways of
living and thinking of the underclasses (*ibid.*).

This is an important point that stresses the dialectic
of culture and domination which will be revisited in our
discussion of resistance. In order to make hegemony
palatable, the dominant group has to make concessions
and leave certain spaces for resistance. Nevertheless,
neither process will ever be complete: there is an
underlying tension and negotiation and in this 'gray area'
we can locate popular culture as the agent of two
antithetical forces. The struggle takes place wherever
conflicting discourses fight for prevalence and
acceptance so as to naturalize the conditions of
hegemony and to gain the opponents' consent for their
own subordination (Brown, 1994). In this constant
conflict dominant groups are favored, since historically
they have controlled modes of production, but the process
of resistance and struggle is never-ending (White, 1992).

The role of cultural studies is to understand the
ideological mechanisms of cultural production, which the
dominant use in creating consensus, and the tactics of the
subordinate in their appropriation of what is offered from
above (Ang, 1996a; Fiske, 1989a). 'Making culture –
"production in use" – can be empowering to subordinate
and resistant to dominant understandings of the world'
says Storey (1999:168), without implying though that
cultural consumption is always empowering and resistant;
it can also be passive, and the theory of hegemony points
to this contradiction exactly.

*1.1.2 Cultural consumption as poaching: the art of
making do*

The work of Michel de Certeau (1986) on cultural
consumption has been the theoretical backbone of
numerous studies on popular culture (e.g. Brown, 1994;

Fiske, 1989b; Harrington & Bielby 1995; Jenkins 1992).
De Certeau focuses on the way ordinary people use, or
'make do' (xv) of cultural products and how they perform
an entirely new kind of production through consumption.

De Certeau describes urban spaces of culture which
are pre-fabricated, institutionalized, and pre-written by
the elite in order to contain and control a body of
subjects. He calls these systematic manipulations of
power relationships 'strategies' because they are
functioning according to a set ideological frame, from an
institutional locus of control, and in effect, they are the
techniques of the strong. On the other hand, 'tactics' are
the tricks of the weak in order to 'reappropriate the space
organized by techniques of cultural production' (xiv).
Tactics resemble guerrilla warfare: they are
unpredictable, invisible and take the opponent by
surprise. Artfully, the means they use to fight are
provided by those who control cultural production. De
Certeau names this practice 'poaching', meaning the
'insinuating into another person's text the ruses of
pleasure and appropriation' (xxi).

Poaching is a process of reproduction and
reappropriation. Like nomads, we dwell on meanings and
pleasures that we derive from the text. Using it we make
it our own and adjust it to our own desires instead of the
other way around[1]. A convincing example that de Certeau
provides is that of conquered peoples of South America,
who accepted the imposed rituals, laws and practices only
to use them in subversive ways, 'quite different from
what their conquerors had in mind' (xiii). Another
ageless tactic of resistance is *'la perruque'* (24), which is

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[1] De Certeau takes the speech act as his basic premise in his
argument on consumption. When we speak we use language and
perform an operation *on* it at the same time. So is the case with
other non-linguistic practices.

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the trick of the worker to use paid time in order to engage with activities not related to his or her job, an act which proliferates according to de Certeau in all cultures and in the most ordered spheres of activity (science, government, industry, etc.). *La perruque* is a tactic of evasion, by evading order and control, and appropriation, by appropriating time and space to fit one's desires and needs at the expense of the dominant (Fiske, 1989b).

Although tactics are creative ways of resisting imposed structures, one must not forget that they are 'determined by the absence of power'(Frow,38). They are acts of transgression that feed back into the system, as Frow indicates:

> The peculiar ambiguity of the problematic of transgression lies in its total dependence upon the law that is being transgressed.... De Certeau proposes destabilization of power, but only on condition that the hold of power is maintained (1991:57).

This point is crucial regarding the use of de Certeau in the study of audiences. Tactics may help ordinary people to get along with the system, but will not fundamentally change their condition. Ultimately, power stays in the hands of the dominant, and as Frow says, de Certeau's notion of domination is monolithic, in that it is either totally held or not held at all.

Frow brings up another problematic area in de Certeau's model, which also relates to the study of popular culture and audiences. This regards the vague and generalized notion of the dominant and the subordinated, namely, the 'elite' and the 'people'. One of the premises of hegemony is the existence of several antagonistic groups, whose inter-relationships shape and are shaped by the circulation and dominance over communications and ways of life. In de Certeau's work

power is singular and centralized, subjected to a singular formation of oppressed individuals.

> There is no room here for the complexities and confusions of hegemonic struggle; for struggles and rivalries *between* the groups comprising 'the people'; or for complicity in and acceptance of domination (Frow, 1991:58).

De Certeau also suggests that since poachers act in isolation, without an organized ideological program, or a systematic use of time and space, they will not get to keep the meanings they poach. Unable to 'settle down', bound to be nomads in the spaces controlled by the strategists, poachers are unable to form a permanent culture.

Jenkins (1992), though, suggests otherwise, considering fans of television programs like *Star Trek*. The subcultures he discusses are successful examples of de Certeau's poachers, who use the authorial text in order to produce their own meanings and give to it their own voice and trade mark, resisting and challenging the text's values. Engaging in what he describes as a participatory culture, these fans produce new meanings and texts which redefine the existing narratives, as well as their relationship to their programs. The commercial narratives become their own when they are shared with other fans: they are injected with extra-textual awareness and are negotiated between different levels of discourse and different modes of viewing. The creation of a stable and organized community on the basis of cultural reproduction is overlooked by de Certeau.

De Certeau's model of cultural consumption has been appropriated by cultural studies. The central role of the reader and her/his creativity in taking over meanings/texts/practices, the possibility of resistance in everyday life, and the constant struggle between consumption and production in a system of dominant

power, are features that lend themselves well to the study of popular culture and its consumers. Nevertheless, there are several tensions in this model that tend to be overlooked in its lavish use by new audience research, a point that will be addressed later in more detail.

1.1.3 The active construction of meaning

The never-ending struggle for social domination takes place at a discursive level: it is a battle for meaning. The role of the reader in receiving cultural forms has been debated in media studies. The break from textual determinism and the 'hypodermic needle' model (Morley, 1992:45), as well as the individualistic accounts of the uses and gratifications research that shifted all agency on the reader's part, took place in Hall's (1980) 'encoding/decoding' model, which theorized the reader as an active maker of meaning, placed, however, in a complex system of social, historical and discursive structures that mediate the communication process.

The 'encoding/decoding' moment in the history of audience research is extremely critical, and despite its problems, its influence is evident in its ubiquity in media studies textbooks. Hall managed to pull 'a balancing act' (Kellner, 1995:40) in that he tried to articulate resistance and ideology, in acknowledging

> the power of the mass media to shape and enforce ideological hegemony, the power of the people to resist ideology, and the contradictory moments and effects of media culture (*ibid.*).

This successful negotiation, which explains the proliferating body of research, is according to Abercrombie & Longhurst (1998) a result of Hall's discarding simplistic Marxist notions of ideology as false consciousness that necessarily distorts people's view of the world, while retaining a Marxist account of the ways

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power is obtained and distributed. Moreover, the semiotic understanding of media content as texts emphasizes the role of the reader, and the construction of meaning.

The first audience study that put Hall's formulation to the test was the celebrated *Nationwide* research by David Morley (1980) with Charlotte Brunsdon, launching the tradition that the CCCS established in audience work. For the most part, Morley's findings confirmed the model, but there were several surprising aspects that pointed to an more complex account of reception than the one suggested by Hall. For example, working class apprentices and middle-class bank managers produced dominant readings, when one would expect that their class difference would be reflected in their interpretation of the show. Such findings led Morley to conclude that 'class position in no way correlates with decoding frameworks' (Morley, 1992:118). Nevertheless, he did state that the differences between readings were established on the individuals' position on the 'cultural map', and their access to 'various cultural repertoires and symbolic resources' (*ibid.*).

The empirical application of the 'encoding/decoding' conjecture revealed several shortcomings, which Morley (1992:120-126) himself identified and tried to work through. The whole model presented a mechanistic account of communication, and the notion of the 'preferred reading' was especially problematic. Firstly, it invokes intentionality on the part of the author/producer of the text. It is not clear whether such a reading is a property of the text or an effect of the reading practice. Equally problematic seemed the notion of decoding, as it conflates several processes that are entailed in media reception, i.e., attentiveness, perception, recognition, comprehension, interpretation,

and response. Other authors have also pointed to the rigidity of the typology of dominant/negotiated/ oppositional readings and the need to include in the model the viewing context of the audience (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998; Jenkins, 1992; McGuigan, 1992).

In his critique of Hall and Morley, Schrøder (2000) considers the exclusive focus on ideology and the 'preferred reading' as the main problem of the 'encoding/decoding' approach. Even in the case of non-fictional texts — not to mention ideologically ambiguous programs, such as soaps — the identification of a single preferred reading is epistemologically dubious and presupposes the analyst's unachievable objectivity and neutrality. Schrøder also identifies the possibility of non-hegemonic texts and wonders how Hall's model would deal with their reception analysis. In his discussion, the rigidities of the model, especially in its research practice, are analyzed and lead him to conclude that

> we need to re-conceptualize the dimension of reception that has to do with the ideological evaluation of readings... to distinguish between readers' subjectively experienced agreement or disagreement with the media text..., and the researcher's 'evaluation' of the role played by readers' positions in hegemonic struggles (2000:236).

The notion of polysemy (crucial in Hall's formulation), according to which media signs have not a fixed meaning but are open to numerous interpretations, is critical in this respect. Different authors hold different understandings of polysemy in their work: some, such as Hobson (1982) have stated that there are as many versions of a program as the individual members of its audience, while others like Morley argue that texts might be polysemous but there are always structures that narrow down possible meanings. Fiske (1998) makes a point about polysemy and popular culture, when arguing

that for a text to be popular it has to be polysemous in order to speak to the heterogeneous audiences it will address. Moreover, it is polysemy, according to Fiske, that enables opposition to hegemony, and resistance. Clearly, all these concepts are closely entwined, and this is important to keep in mind when we consider the debates about resistance.

The model that Schrøder proposes distinguishes rightly between polysemy and opposition as two separate processes, the latter involving 'the individual's conscious awareness of difference: it necessarily occurs in the face of a position that one acknowledges and then rejects' (244). Hence, self-awareness of opposition is deemed a necessary component of an oppositional reading. In addition, the model theorizes reception in six different dimensions, developing Morley's (1992) criticism of the 'decoding' formulation to account for the multifaceted process of reception. Schrøder's dimensions are the following:

- Motivation, or the involvement between the reader and the text; the degree of the reader's interest; whether the text is remindful of certain experiences. In other words, the viewers' investment.
- Comprehension of the media message, denotatively and connotatively, according to micro- and macro- social processes, ranging from complete divergence to complete correspondence.
- Discrimination, that is 'whether audience readings are characterized by an awareness

of "constructedness"' (247). Schrøder places ironic and camp readings in this dimension[2].

- Position, which includes the attitudinal response of the reader: whether s/he will accept or reject what is perceived to be the message of the text.

- Evaluation, where 'we leave the domain of the "subjective" readings, entering the objective domain of social discourses where the analyst, drawing on... political analysis... relates readings to the continuum of ideological positions from "hegemonic" to "oppositional"' (250). Certainly, the domain of social discourses is not 'objective' and Schrøder recognizes that this dimension will often be ambiguous or non-applicable, because an ideological position might not be easily resolved.

- Implementation, finally, referring to whether readings are fed into social/political action.

This model offers several advantages to someone working with audience discourse, in relation to Hall's 'encoding/decoding' and I employed it in my analysis of the interview material. I find particularly useful its account of readers' motivation and investment, an issue that has not been adequately addressed by previous analyses, and which highlights the contextual factors of reception. Also, it distinguishes between progressive and oppositional readings (evaluation/position), and

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[2] In my opinion ironic readings can also express the viewers' position, because irony implies a certain tension or negotiation from the part of the viewer that motivates him/her to respond ironically. This negotiation, especially when it is reflexive, indicates the viewer's attitude (position) towards the message. This argument will be empirically illustrated in Chapter 8.

additionally, it questions the political significance of reception (implementation), in the light of the over-politicization of resistant readings. Moreover, it allows 'researchers with differing views on the power balance... to analyse and discuss the stabilizing or oppositional role... [of] audience readings' (Schrøder, 2000:254). Lastly, in distinguishing between separate processes, that do not take place necessarily or sequentially, it offers the possibility of systematic terminology and 'conceptual tools' (*ibid.*) for the precise analysis and discussion of audience discourse.

Schrøder's model is a relatively new development in audience research, but the importance of the wider context of television viewing was something that Morley (1986) addressed soon after the *Nationwide* study. The need to study television watching in the setting where it takes place signaled a major methodological trend in audience research: the ethnographic turn (Ang, 1996a; Morley, 1997), which I will examine next.

1.2 Active audiences

> It seems that the myth of the passive viewer is about to be shattered (Hobson, 1982:135).

Following Morley's post-*Nationwide* call for an 'ethnography of reading' (1992:130), researchers turned to concrete audiences in order to understand the complex processes of media reception. Most studies focused on audience members of specific genres or shows, and soap opera attracted particular attention. In this section I will selectively review this body of work. I shall only touch upon the studies and the issues that are relevant to my thesis, paying attention to the way that social formations have been accounted for, as well as the evidence for resistive, oppositional, and playful readings that these studies show. Most of them study soap audiences, so I

will first examine why soap opera has invited this kind of attention.

1.2.1 Why soaps?

The relatively recent approaches to the study of soap opera were part of the feminist concern with women's genres and the pleasures and contradictions that they posed for their viewers. Brunsdon (2000) offers an excellent account on the role of soap opera as a platform for feminist critics to explore several questions concerning the genre, but most importantly, about their own speaking positions (217). Soap opera played a strategic role for feminist media studies and one must relate it to the broader concern about the revalorization of popular culture that emerged in the 70's. Earlier work on soap operas, dating from the first radio dramas of the 1930's in America, perceived them as a cultural form of the lowest quality, aimed specifically at powerless housewives (Buckingham, 1987). Soap opera appeared as the perfect candidate for feminist study, and the fact that a subordinated audience was given the chance to speak up was emphasized in most soap audience work (Ang, 1996a; Brown, 1994; Hobson, 1982; Seiter *et al.*, 1989).

One must also emphasize the formal qualities of soap that render it the quintessential television text (Brunsdon, 2000; Fiske, 1987; Modleski, 1982). Soap operas represent everything about television as a medium: 'seriality, intimacy, domesticity, repetition and the mundane' (Brunsdon, 2000:31). In addition, their universal themes lead to worldwide popularity (Ang, 1985; Liebes & Katz, 1990; Schrøder, 1988) and thus invite questions of cultural identity.

What is more relevant though in our discussion is the possibilities that the soap text offers to its reader for

evasion of ideological control and, arguably, resistance against it. Ideology is inscribed in all texts and there are several strategies that try to structure and narrow the meanings one could make of them (Fiske, 1998; Morley, 1992). Nevertheless, one of the strongest arguments concerning soap opera texts concerns the audience's higher interpretive control. Firstly, soaps lack a definite narrative closure, professed as the main ideological determination of texts, and thus invite the viewer's input (Allen, 1985; Fiske, 1987; Modleski, 1982; Stempel Mumford, 1995). As Geraghty (1991) indicates:

> the establishment of truth, the aim of most narratives, is... subject to conventions which quite overtly postpone resolution, making us aware that fiction is not the inevitable and uninterrupted revelation of the truth (19).

Secondly, the fragmented organization of the narrative with its continuous interruptions also emphasizes the role of the audience and its participation in hermeneutic acts (Allen, 1985; Modleski, 1982). The multiplicity of characters and storylines and the lack of an overarching central hero/heroine creates a complex narrative that can accommodate several positions and alternative readings, constituting a fragmented spectatorial viewpoint (Allen, 1985; Brunsdon, 1997; Modleski, 1982).

Soap operas represent a culture that values femininity and its sphere of activities: there are strong women characters who operate as problem solvers, sources of insight and support, and who react dynamically in the narrative; there is a diegetic emphasis on dialogue and gossip, celebrating the oral culture of women; finally, they require from the viewer competencies that have been traditionally feminine, such as the mastering of personal relationships and domestic issues. (Brown, 1994; Brunsdon, 1997; Geraghty, 1991)

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The validation of the feminine element may either empower the female viewer, or can also point to the contradictions inherent in such representations of femininity (Brown, 1994; Geraghty, 1991).

Furthermore, the constant disruption of order, usually concerning the dissolution of stability in family life, marriage and romance poses a threat for patriarchal structures that are naturalized by dominant ideology (Brown, 1994; Feuer, 1984; Joyrich, 1988; Lovell, 1981). Soap operas revel in excess: exaggerated melodramatic storylines, over-the-edge acting, conspicuous music soundtrack, extreme close-ups to glorify emotional responses, extended end-of-scene shots (Butler, 1986), and other formal characteristics that comprise what Fiske (1987; 1998) has called semiotic excess. These textual aspects 'may be read against the hegemonic surface' (Feuer, 1984:8).

Soap operas play upon their own conventions, which are so firmly established that come to be expected and recognized by their viewers (Geraghty, 1991). Hence, the constructedness of soaps becomes apparent and their genre-skilled audience can easily take a distanced viewpoint and act as critics and commentators. Finally, the soap opera text, because of all these characteristics, but especially its narrative structure, begs to be talked about. The suspension, the gaps, the gossip, and the open-ended sense of future invite the viewers to discuss narrative possibilities, solve puzzles, recount storylines, gossip about the latest happenings, and even relate the soap stories to their own personal lives (Allen, 1985; Brown, 1994; Brunsdon, 1997; Hobson, 1982; 1989).

These issues were first raised by scholars who analyzed the soaps textually. Most of these accounts were careful not to celebrate uncritically soap operas as

liberating texts. The underlying hegemonic process and the strong ideological load of the texts was always considered, but the potential for more challenging readings of soap operas was also acknowledged. The theorists considered the soap viewer active, emphasizing the narrative complexity and the active involvement that was required for the enjoyment of the programs. It remained to be seen whether these insights would be confirmed by actual soap audiences.

1.2.2 Redeeming the audience

Dorothy Hobson's (1982) work on *Crossroads* is the first serious defense and ethnographic study of soap opera. Although she did not articulate a defined theoretical position, she identifies an active audience with a high degree of knowledge about fictional conventions and an even stronger sense of ownership over the soap narrative. Hobson believes that the viewer has complete control over the meanings that the soap opera text offers and that

> there is no overall intrinsic message or meaning in the work, but it comes alive and communicates when the viewers add their own interpretation and understanding to the programme (*ibid.*, 170).

Although such observations have led some critics to view Hobson as a proponent of an extreme thesis of active audience (McGuigan, 1992; Seaman, 1992) she does not make any strong claims about audience resistance or empowerment; she certainly does not politicize or theorize the subject in a way that other authors have been criticized for.

Interestingly, one can find in Hobson's book (1982) contradictory instances where she argues, for example, that social problems are portrayed in *Crossroads* in a way that 'the audience finds [it] acceptable and they do not

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reject the messages' (123). She goes on to say that the familiarity of the characters and the unexpectedness of the storylines 'carries the "message" more effectively' (124) than real life situations or news programs. This is an important point concerning the ideological structure and nature of the narrative, but she does not address it as such. Nor does she address instances of audience members making oppositional or resistive readings.

On the contrary, Janice Radway's (1987) ethnography of romance readers is characterized by more tensions, as the author struggles between her position as a feminist, vis-à-vis the patriarchal values of romances, and her wish not to undermine the pleasure they yield for their readers (Ang, 1996a; Storey, 1999; Tulloch, 2000). Studying a community of romance readers, Radway found that the mere act of book reading constituted a symbolic resistance against the oppressive conditions of their domestic lives and a temporary refusal of imposed roles. 'As a result, they at least partially reclaim the patriarchal form of the romance for their own use' (1987:184).

However, Radway also maintains that reading romances does not challenge patriarchy in a material way. By providing readers with satisfaction on the level of fantasy, romance reading may prevent them from gratifying their needs in real life, or changing the conditions that make them seek this satisfaction in the first place. Nevertheless, Radway urges us to see the meaning of the act of reading beyond the meaning of the text. Romance reading stems from dissatisfaction and desire to change and comprises a limited, but nonetheless valid protest:

> If we ... look at the ways in which various groups
> appropriate and use the mass-produced art of our culture,
> I suspect we may ... understand that although the
> ideological power of contemporary cultural forms is

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enormous ... interstices still exist within the social fabric where opposition is carried on (1987:222).

Ien Ang has criticized Radway for what McRobbie calls 'a 'recruitist' conception of the politics of feminist research' (cited in Ang 1996a:103). In her 'feminist desire' (*ibid.*) to see women become more involved with feminist discourse, she disconnects herself from her participants as someone who 'should worry responsibly about the effects of fantasy on women' (Radway, quoted in Storey, 1999:103), undermining thus the value of their pleasures.

Pleasure has been a salient concern in Ang's work on soap opera. In *Watching Dallas* she tries to understand how viewers generate pleasure from soap opera, but she manages to refrain from the danger of 'overpoliticizing pleasure' (1985:132). Through her analysis of letters by *Dallas* viewers who either hated or loved the show, she observed that the ideology of mass culture was adopted by those who condemned it, while those who liked watching it and still spoke from that ideological position used *irony* in order to reconcile their pleasure with the belief that all mass produced entertainment is of bad taste and should not be enjoyed by those who can appreciate high culture. By 'ironizing' *Dallas*, they would create a distance between them and the 'bad object' and thus build a 'higher' identity for themselves since their pleasure would stem out of ironic social practices. Others would use irony on the surface but they would confess that they secretly enjoyed it for what it was: a melodrama. In these cases the viewers lacked an ideological framework that would enable them to construct a positive identity to contain their pleasure. The discursive strategies they used are not as legitimized and established as the ideology of mass culture. Using

the populist ideology, some maintained that each person is entitled to his/her taste. This ideology prescribes that by definition a taste judgment should be rejected because it restrains freedom. This rationale could help form a positive identity against the ideology of mass culture, but very few respondents conveyed it because, it is a 'practical', anti-intellectual ideology.

Ang, in this context, invokes the work of Pierre Bourdieu who has distinguished between the popular and the bourgeois aesthetic. For Bourdieu 'art and cultural consumption... fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences' (1984:7). Cultural hierarchy has always favored disinterestedness, distance and inner control over the aesthetic object, removing pleasure from the aesthetic experience. Taste, while ideologically represented as an innate charisma, is a way to classify and be classified. Consequently, distinctions in taste can be translated to social distinctions of class, gender, and education. Whereas elite art affirms one's superiority, a taste for the popular does the exact opposite. The contradiction on the basis of the pleasure that the viewers feel and the identity that they try to form for themselves is very much a political issue, which will be further explored in this thesis.

The particularity of Ang's research method does not enable her to offer any 'radical contextualism' (Ang, 1996a:66) that would probe deeper into the viewing experiences of her respondents. Her analysis reveals that soap opera reception is a complex cultural practice, but one would need to explore other constituents of the viewers' identities.

In the work of David Buckingham (1987) on *Eastenders*, the focus is on the younger fans of the program. The author argued against a simplistic view of

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young people as passive and easy to manipulate. These viewers could easily enter the text and at the same time keep a critical distance without sacrificing their pleasure. Their awareness of the show's constructedness allowed the children to ridicule the text, and be closely involved with it at the same time. 'The essentially playful way in which they were able to move between... different positions suggests that they had a considerable degree of autonomy in defining their relationship to television', the author concludes (200).

Moreover, some children (especially the older and more articulate ones) acknowledged the soap's address to them, through the show's young characters, for example, and judged it as 'patronising' (201). Others were gender and class conscious and Buckingham observed how *Eastenders* facilitated their expression of frustrations and worries about class struggles. Not many studies have brought up the issue of class, in relation to soap reception, but we shall look at the notable exceptions next.

1.2.3 Soap audiences and class

The concept of class was used early in active audience research because of the emphasis it placed on power relations and how they affect cultural practices. Cultural hierarchies are ultimately statements about class relations, as the work of Bourdieu (1984) shows. He distinguishes between economic, cultural, social and symbolic capitals. The symbolic capital is catalytic in reproducing inequalities because only legitimate cultural capital (of high symbolic value) is a strong social currency. Based on that we would expect then that viewers of different social backgrounds would display different kinds of involvement with soaps. Moreover, we

could say with certainty that soap opera as cultural capital would not mount up to a significant symbolic capital, given its association with the popular aesthetic[3].

Because of its feminist tradition, soap opera research has always been oriented towards gender. Women viewers tended to be studied as a homogenous audience based on the grounds of their femininity. The over-emphasis on gender overshadows other important constituents of viewers' identities and their experience of television (Ang & Hermes, 1991; Seiter et al., 1989; Van Zoonen, 1994). It is as if women only bring into the text their femininity and leave out their class, their education, their ethnicity, and generally, their social background. According to Skeggs, the concept of class was abandoned in cultural analysis during the '80s and '90s as a modernist artifact with no relevance outside theory, being replaced by terms like 'difference' (1997:7). Class is indeed a structural aspect of subjectivity that elucidates subject positions and institutionalizes different forms of capital; it should be re-established in research despite the difficulty to define and measure it.

Dahlgren (1998) has also commented on the absence of class from recent media research in relation to other analytical factors, like gender, race or ethnicity. Surely, one must not over-determine any one structural factor; humans operate on an articulation of social formations and the cultural codes that they prescribe and we must study how they are negotiated through media reception (Ang, 1991; Morley, 1992; Tulloch, 1990; 2000). Ang and Hermes are wary of an essentialist use of social class

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[3] Unless one watches soap using codes of the bourgeois aesthetic, like ironic distance. Ang's ironic respondents often referred to their enjoyment of 'high' culture, to show that they engaged with *Dallas* in a dominant way.

to explain differences in soap opera reception. They recommend that

> rather than treating class position as an isolatable 'independent variable' predetermining cultural responses, it could best be seen as a factor (or vector) whose impact as a structuring principle for experience can only be conceptualized within the concrete historical context in which it is articulated (1991:314).

Their critique of such 'classificatory' tendencies stems from what they read as contradicting evidence from two soap audience works, which are among the very few to address the issue of class (Ang, 1996a; Tulloch, 2000).

Seiter and her colleagues conducted an ethnographic study of soap opera fans in Oregon to explore several themes that had preoccupied feminist critics writing on soaps. They found that women fans 'showed a conscious, full-fledged refusal of the narrative's demand for sympathy and understanding' (1989:238). The reason behind this lack of identification was the class difference that the working class viewers perceived between themselves and the soap characters. The character of the 'whiner', passive and dependent, was received with hostility, while the strong villainesses were admired and 'discussed in terms of transgressing the boundaries of a traditional pattern of resistance for women within patriarchy' (239) In sum, the researchers conclude that class plays a major role in working class women's resistance against such textual positions, and they also noted that the viewers' criticism was 'expressed only in terms of realism and escapism, where a complaint about class norms... is answered by a validation of their function as escapism on these very same grounds' (241-242).

The authors did not encounter any apologetic accounts, such as Ang's conflicted *Dallas* viewers, and

they attributed that to the different 'social construction of femininity' (242) between American and European viewers. A reason could be moreover that their sample was mostly comprised of working class women, who did not feel the need to justify themselves vis-à-vis the mass culture ideology (in other words, they displayed codes of the popular aesthetic).

In my view, the above findings are not so far removed from what Andrea Press (1991) observed in her study of women and television serials through the angle of class and age. Specifically, Press found that working class viewers expected serials to be realistic and used realist criteria to evaluate television characters. This search for realism made working class women more resistant, critical and less prone to identify with characters. 'They are extremely critical of television characters, and there seems to be little propensity... toward identification with those characters' (175). A finding that troubled Press was that working class women perceived the representations of reality in television as accurate. Due to the ubiquity of middle-class images and values on television, working class women think of those images as natural and real. 'In large part, working class women criticize television content for its lack of reality; yet the concept of reality used here corresponds to television's portrayal of middle-class life' (*ibid.*). On the contrary, middle-class respondents tended to identify with television characters and develop a personal and positive relationship to them. Although they did not find television shows and characters realistic, they would nonetheless identify: realism was not an issue for them.

Comparing the findings from both studies, there is much more convergence than Ang and Hermes actually thought. Even if Press was researching less involved

audiences with broader viewing habits (i.e., not fans – an important detail), she also concluded that working class women would not identify with characters and that they were more critical about television, based on expectations of realism. To me, these findings resonate with Seiter and Kreutzner's. Moreover, the fact that middle-class participants in Press's project did identify and develop positive relationships with TV characters makes sense and might suggest that Modleski's (1982) conjecture of the ideal mother, could actually have an empirical basis[4]. This would also imply that class might play a major role in the way women experience pleasure through soap opera viewing.

1.2.4 Local audiences and global television

According to Ang (1996), cultural identity displays the articulation between global and local processes of cultural politics. The proliferating discourses of globalization, EU policies concerning local cultures and identities, and the global rise of nationalism are some of the factors that make this subject a challenge for cultural studies. For Ang, cultural identity must not be defined under the 'limited and limiting' (1996:138) emblem of nationality, but as encompassing several other sources, like gender, class, race, generation, locality, ethnicity, religion, politics, and so on. She is dubious of the rhetoric of a pure and autonomous national identity that must be protected from foreign threats to its integrity – a discourse usually aimed against Americanization. Ang asks:

> If American popular culture seems so attractive to so many in the world, how do people incorporate it in their activities, values, fantasies, and so on? ... Here, then, lies the critical potential for an ethnography of audiences that

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[4] The Oregon study claimed to refute Modleski's hypothesis.

> evinces global and historical consciousness as well as local detail. (1996:148)

The enormous popularity of American soap operas across the world has led researchers to study their reception in several local sites. Such work is informed by concerns about cultural imperialism and 'Americanization'. Liebes and Katz (1990), working within a 'uses and gratifications' paradigm, argued that it is simplistic to assume that American ideology is spilled into innocent minds, since meanings are generated through a negotiation between the symbolic resources of the viewer and the symbolic repertoire of the text. Their famous *Dallas* study indicated that cultural background played a key role in the way Israeli groups of different ethnic background interpreted the show. Each group used different semantic techniques in order to negotiate the meaning of the narrative and interpreted the show using different discourses: the Arab group saw *Dallas* as a moral tale, the Russians as an ideological ploy, while the more 'westernized' groups made playful readings, identifying with the characters through jokes and ludic commentary. Such readings were predominant among Americans, who were positively skeptical about the representation of their society, unlike the Israeli groups who were convinced by the show's representation of America. Being immersed in television genres, Americans were more sophisticated and critical viewers.

It is also noteworthy that different ethnic groups established their identity by setting alien values against their own, while at the same time they approached the text with their own cultural experience. The authors suggested that in contrast to Americans, the Israeli groups used the show as a forum for moral evaluations

and discussion of several issues, from sex roles to politics and family issues.

Schrøder (1988), found, too, that Danish audiences received *Dynasty* based on their cultural background and the mastering of the program's generic codes. For example, a Danish couple he interviewed referred to a dialogue between Alexis and Ashley (Ali McGraw), where Ashley said to Alexis: "*watch out, Alexis, remember the Boston Tea Party!*". Whereas any American would have instantly caught the pun and interpret the phrase as a warning against the British-born Alexis, the Danish couple of participants had registered that particular line in a completely different manner. Being more familiar with soap opera generic codes (emphasis on scandal/gossip) than American history, they speculated that Ashley referred to an actual tea party that had taken place in Boston and which had to do with a dirty secret from Alexis' past.

Other fans, especially the ones who watched in a distanced fashion tended to use the text in order to test their cultural discrimination and confirm their superiority over American morals, values and aesthetics. They would assume a condescending stance towards the program in order to justify this guilty pleasure. Moreover, viewers seemed to accept the unrealistic twists of the narrative, with the excuse that: 'when it's American one accepts all sorts of things... we like to sit down and swallow it' (1988:77). This quote is extremely significant: we are witnessing the deliberate suspension of disbelief, the intentional 'loss' of one's critical resources in order to enjoy *Dynasty*. This viewer admitted that the same storylines in a Danish series would seem unbearably artificial.

The findings of the above studies suggest that viewers' control over foreign texts is limited. Nevertheless, these authors (particularly Liebes & Katz) do not address in their work 'power dimensions of class, gender, age, religion and ethnicity, the differences they detect are read off as a somewhat transparent expression of dominant cultural differences' (Tulloch, 1990:212). These differences are ascribed to 'cultural values' that are not properly contextualized[5]. That is, the social and cultural differences *within* the ethnic groups must have surely articulated with the processes that Liebes and Katz observe (Morley 1992). Cultural identity here is used as an umbrella that overshadows other, overlooked, formations.

Moreover, in order to grasp the role of national identity in television reception, and its negotiation with other structural aspects of one's identity, we must also look at how *indigenous* texts are received. The fact that home-produced shows have been more popular (Silj, 1988) than American ones in their local markets does not say much. There has been an emphasis on the reception of American-ness, without a comparative understanding of how domestic texts are received. Not every soap around the world displays the same narrative, thematic, and aesthetic characteristics. For example, Kreutzner and Seiter (1991) have concluded that German soaps are more closed and patriarchal than the American programs which have been so widely analyzed. American and indigenous soaps do not necessarily yield similar pleasures, recognitions, identifications and resistances. If cultural studies, and particularly audience research is to expand

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[5] The work of Miller (1995) on the reception of *The Young and the Restless* in Trinidad is an exception, being a properly contextualized account of the cultural elements that activated the soap's appropriation.

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from its Anglo-Saxon centeredness, then these issues should be adequately addressed.

1.2.5 Resistant audiences

The ethnographic turn in audience research shifted the emphasis from 'decodings' to the appropriation and use of television programs in the viewers' everyday lives. Television consumption does not end at the point where the 'message' is perceived and interpreted. Television is watched in a domestic context and is very much a social medium, involving the viewer's use and circulation of meaning in a social context.

Fiske (1987) talks about 'tertiary texts that the viewers make themselves out of their responses, which circulate orally or in letters to the press[6], and which work to form a collective rather than an individual response' (124). The tertiary text has been considered the primary site of resistance, mainly because it is a discourse that is generated and controlled by the viewer, taking place at a social level. Morley's *Family Television* revealed the sitting room as a site of power struggles between genders and generations, and television as 'a common experiential ground for conversation... a focus, ... a method for engaging in social interaction with others (1987:22)'. Hobson (1989) also highlighted the role of soap operas in the work place, as a topic of conversation, and a means of a shared discourse about private issues that would not be addressed otherwise.

Lee and Cho (1990) studied women viewers of the controversial Korean soap *Sand Castle,* which portrayed the aftermath of a marital infidelity, in which the wife decides to leave her unfaithful husband. The Korean

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[6] Message boards and mailing lists on the Internet, as well as fanzines are also sites where tertiary text would be found (Baym, 1998).

women of the study lived in America, but their homes functioned under strict and traditional Korean values. Their husbands discouraged them from watching soaps, and soon the women created their own 'video-club', watching programs together when their husbands were out. This video-club became a forum in which they evaluated their marriages in relation to *Sand Castle*, feeling comfortable to share personal experiences of subordination and conflict. Some women even changed their relationships by employing the tactics used by the soap character, in order to revenge their neglecting husbands. 'Thus, the pleasure women find comes not from absorbing the dominant ideology but from their conscious resistance to the political power their husbands exercise' (Lee & Cho, 1990: 33).

In Brown's (1994) work on soap opera there is also a shift to women's discourse and oral culture as constituted by soap opera talk. Using de Certeau's, Foucault's, and Fiske's work, she explores whether soap operas and fan discourse can create the possibility of resistance against dominant patriarchal ideology. She argues that resistive pleasure presupposes: social discourse (the articulation of resistance to other subjects); belonging in a group that provides the safe boundaries where such pleasures can be expressed and appreciated; strategic knowledge that creates for fans a distinctive set of meanings that others cannot understand; and finally, affective response, such as laughter, or the women's ability to critically distance themselves and laugh about the absurdity of their social roles. 'Laughter becomes an empowering position... because it indicates an awareness of and distancing from the power of the media' (1994:150). Moreover, there is the overtly political discourse whereby women directly challenge and

redefine their roles, and trace the ideological role of patriarchal values like romance and marriage. In these practices she traces the possibility for actual political change, as such readings are a necessary first step to awareness. So, in Brown's terms, women soap fans make use of a hegemonic text, but they derive from it their own pleasures, which challenge hegemony. In addition, they recognize and question their own oppression, and also form bonds with other women, by sharing these experiences – a practice that empowers them.

Brown does identify certain limits to the development of resistive positions. Resistance stems from the experience of subordination, so texts lacking hegemonic contradictions concerning women's roles cannot elicit such responses. In addition, resistance relies on the social, political and cultural positions of the audience members. Having said that, Brown does not really address these issues when presenting her data. She does give an extensive context about the women who speak these positions, but the specificities that negotiate resistance are not clarified or accounted for.

Another area of audience research that highlighted resistant reading practices is work on fans. One of the aims here has been to restore the marginalized status of fanship. Fans have been characterized and represented pathologically as obsessed individuals, emotionally and socially inept, isolated, out of control, and irrational (Jenson, 1992). Fanship is also associated with low-brow cultural forms and a lack of critical appreciation.

Recent work in cultural studies, though, has looked at fan culture through a non-elitist perspective. There has been considerable attention to the way fans - because of their expertise and knowledge of production – can be critically distanced and demanding when it comes to their

object of affection, while at the same time they experience intense pleasure and closeness to the text. Moreover, the construction of a fan community with a shared semantic background is an empowering, affirmative factor for the their identity and relationship to culture (Abercrombie, 1996; Grossberg, 1992; Harrington & Bielby, 1995; Harris, 1998; Jenkins, 1992).

Although most of the researchers of soap audiences refer to their respondents as 'fans', very few have looked at institutional soap opera fanship. Harrington and Bielby (1995) studied extensively American soap fans (organized in clubs), and the soap industry (production networks, fan clubs, magazines) using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Harrington and Bielby look at fan pleasure not as a means to an end, but as 'pleasure for pleasure's sake' (120). They emphasize that organized soap opera fanship is an activity that does not marginalize people, but which is integrated into their everyday lives without the experience of power tensions:

> [The] richness and diversity of the fan experience is overlooked by scholars who view fanship simply as an ideological reaction against dominant or oppressive social institutions. Fanship is not always a reactive response by marginalized groups.... we do not find soap fans' control over space to be fundamentally organized by ideological concerns.... The concept of agency more adequately captures the general process of intentionality that is obscured by a focus on hegemonic resistance (1995:177-179).

The authors argue against the conceptualization of fanship by theorists like Jenkins (1992) and Fiske (1992b). Their argument rather links into Ang's (1985; 1996a) view of pleasure as an experience which should be autonomous from political processes and hegemonic struggle. Furthermore, they highlight the concept of agency in the context of cultural consumption, which has not been adequately addressed by many audience

researchers (except Tulloch, 1990), as well as the role of fanship in the construction of fans' identities. Both these concepts are of key importance in the theorization of resistance, even if this is not the purpose of Harrington and Bielby. Are they right in removing soap pleasures and discourses away from 'ideological concerns' (*ibid.*)? Although I am also wary of over-politicizing audience responses, there are soap viewers whose investment is indeed based on ideological concerns, so I retain a more flexible understanding of audience pleasure.

In this section, we covered a long period of audience research based on the premise that viewers are active in making meanings from television texts, and furthermore in sharing those meanings with others and appropriating them in their everyday lives. An important step for this work is the realization that the use of cultural forms may have a different meaning than the form in itself – and besides that, meaning may be structured but it is not fixed.

The major preoccupation of soap audience research has been gender, through a feminist perspective. As Brunsdon (2000) argues, feminism and soap opera have enjoyed a strange relationship of symbiosis and particular tensions. There have been, though, pleas to break from the 'prison house of gender' (Ang & Hermes, 1991:315) and ask questions that have not been asked in relation to soaps. One such concern is how masculinity is negotiated with a text so abundant of feminine pleasures. Do male audiences generate different meanings and pleasures out of this traditionally feminine territory, or do soaps give up their feminine spaces in order to accommodate masculine identities? This work aims, in antithesis to previous research (i.e. Brown, 1994), to

conceptualize soap audience resistance outside gender subordination.

Class and other social categories have not been extensively addressed by the studies mentioned above – and especially in a way that would situate them within other subject positions. It would be simplistic to account a reading formation (Tulloch, 1990) through a single social category, but it would be equally simplistic to dismiss every structural frame and be left with an individualistic and idiosyncratic model of the audience.

Finally, in some studies there is frequently a blurring between fans and viewers. Barker and Brooks (1998) invoke the concept of investment in their research on cinema audiences. Fans place higher investment on their preferred show and are familiar with production details, generic codes, and historical information, material that contributes to their input in the research. A fan will make different meanings from a random viewer, be more enthusiastic, engage in practices that make the program acquire other meanings, and so on. This is why one must carefully contextualize the histories and the discourses of the audiences, and ethnographic methods can be helpful in this task (Ang, 1996a)

The next part of this chapter will be devoted to the discussion of resistance, in which I will address some of the criticism that cultural studies has faced in relation to resistance theories, and I shall attempt to clarify my own understanding of the concept.

1.3 Resistance revisited

The first accounts of resistance in cultural studies were given in research on subcultures at the CCCS and were based on the way their members engaged in practices and rituals that signified resistance against the

dominant culture. The development of active audience research and the view of media texts as open, led to the thesis of audience resistance. The work of John Fiske is *par excellence* associated with the thesis of semiotic democracy (Best, 1997; Curran, 1996; Morley, 1992), which argues that audiences have enough freedom to make their own meanings from texts and use these meanings in any way they want to:

> Fiske... makes 'the popular' a terrain of struggle where audiences resist domination, struggle to produce their own meanings and pleasures, and evade social control and manipulation. Political struggle is thus displaced into 'struggle' for meanings and pleasure, while 'resistance' is equated with the evasion of social responsibility (Kellner, 1995:139).

Moreover, the pleasure that audiences experience when engaging with popular texts, came to be considered as an empowering, resistant position and a rejection of dominant meaning systems and structures. Consistently, the criticism against Fiske's project has been spilled over to other scholars within cultural studies, leading to a crisis in the field (Livingstone, 1998), and to what Kellner (1995) calls the fetishism of audience pleasure and resistance.

Most of the polemics against cultural studies focus on issues of cultural populism, romanticized notions of resistant viewers, political superficiality, theoretical sloppiness, unawareness of the history of media studies, extreme contextualization and localization, and failure to account for economic/political determinants of culture (Corner, 1996; Curran, 1996; Garnham, 1997; Gitlin, 1997; McGuigan, 1992; 1997; Seaman, 1992). In addition, cultural studies theorists have been called populist in their re-evaluation of popular genres as texts that can be read in subversive and oppositional terms on the basis of their mere popularity. The celebration of

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viewers' resistance to and subversive use of popular
culture has been criticized, firstly as a self-fulfilling
prophecy of researchers-fans who praise their own
cultural affiliations, and secondly as uncritical
interpretation and generalization of selective and
localized fieldwork, which fails to take into account the
economy and the production of popular culture. Finally,
cultural studies has been accused of diffusing popular
culture as a surrogate for politics (Gitlin, 1997).

These criticisms are not ungrounded and several
cultural studies proponents have shared these concerns.
Ang writes that

> revalidating the popular alone can be a banal form of
> cultural critique if the popular itself is not seen in a
> thoroughly social and political context. In other words,
> audiences may be active in a myriad of ways in using and
> interpreting media, but it would be utterly out of
> perspective to cheerfully equate 'active' with 'powerful',
> in the sense of 'taking control' at an enduring structural
> or institutional level (1996a: 139-140).

Morley (1992) also acknowledges that it is foolish to
equate the reader's power to interfere with the meanings
of a text with the discursive, institutional power of the
media industries – those who set the agenda and construct
the texts. Moreover, the limits of polysemy have been
recognized by most scholars in the field of audiences who
recognize that semantic structures restrict the range of
possible interpretations (Cobley, 1994; Condit, 1994;
Hall, 1980; Morley, 1992).

In Fiske's writings, one will also find not so
'exuberant' (Ang, 1996a:139) discourse which has been
overlooked by his critics, probably because of the
irresistible confidence of his tendency to exaggerate and
generalize findings of modest and small-scale research or
textual analyses. To quote Fiske himself on the structural
limitations of meaning making:

> This audience activity of producing a variety of socially
> pertinent meanings ... is thus an activity structured along
> the lines of domination and subordination. The text is no
> do-it-yourself meaning kit from which any meaning can be
> made, nor one in which all meanings are equal. The text
> not only delimits the arena within which this production
> of meaning occurs, it also attempts to guide and control
> this process (1989b:28).

Or on the links of popular culture and politics:

> We must not expect such links to be direct or immediate –
> rather, we must expect them to be diffuse, deferred, and
> not necessarily entailed at all. Sometimes the political
> potential of popular culture may never be activated, even
> within the realm of micropolitics... (1989b:165)

Fiske has been attacked on the grounds of overestimating the potential of identity politics. Nevertheless, to abnegate any possibility of resistance or agency from the act of cultural consumption is as fallacious as over-blowing it in the realm of political action. Fiske (1989b) has distinguished between the different layers of resistance and the different realms where it can or cannot take place, a fact that is overlooked by his critics. The marginal tactics of the media audience to make the most out of what they have not themselves chosen is what Fiske means by 'cultural democracy' (Ang, 1996a:140). Fiske's rhetorical exaggerations can be read as such and not necessarily as uncritical and naïve formulations. As Storey indicates:

> Working with hegemony theory may at times lead to a
> certain celebration of the lived cultures of ordinary
> people, but such celebrations are always made in the full
> knowledge that what in one context is 'resistance' can
> become very easily in another 'incorporation' (1999:163).

Nevertheless, this area of research suffers from a failure to clarify, contextualize, and situate resistance in the appropriate perspective. As Condit maintains: 'It is not enough to describe a program or an interpretation...

as oppositional. It is essential to describe what particular things are resisted and how that resistance occurs' (1994:442). We need to be clear about what comprises resistance, under what circumstances it occurs, and what it means for the social agent who demonstrates it. Clearly, we cannot be totalizing about such practices and responses because they operate very subtly in the arena of meaning, social identity and the contingencies of everyday life. In the words of Jenkins:

> Readers are not *always* resistant; *all* resistant readings are not necessarily progressive readings; the 'people' do not *always* recognize their conditions of alienation and subordination (1992:34).

It is necessary, thus that I attempt to unpack and specify how the issue of resistance will be approached in this thesis.

Fiske distinguishes between television's financial and cultural economies. In financial economy, a television program is a commodity which is produced and sold and which in turn produces and sells a particular audience to advertisers. This line of thought can explain a program's popularity, its meanings and its ideologies functionally, as determined by that economic base. Nevertheless, television, and all commodities for that matter, hold a cultural value too, and hence, we need to expand our focus to include the cultural economy, where - in the place of monetary values - meanings and pleasures operate as currencies:

> The original commodity (be it a television program or pair of jeans) is, in the cultural economy, a text, a discursive structure of potential meanings and pleasures that constitutes a major resource of popular culture. In this economy there are no consumers, only circulators of meanings, for meanings are the only elements in the process that can be neither commodified nor consumed: meanings can be produced, reproduced, and circulated only in that constant process that we call culture (1989b:27).

Commodities, as texts, carry ideological meanings that reflect the values of the groups that produced them. Nevertheless, their consumption does not necessitate the recognition and assimilation of those ideologies. People cannot produce their cultural commodities on a mass scale, Fiske admits, but they can be widely creative in using them and deploying the 'art of making do', in de Certeau's terms. As Lovell states:

> There is no guarantee that the use-value of the cultural object for its purchaser will even be compatible with its utility to capitalism as bourgeois ideology, and therefore no guarantee that it will in fact secure the 'ideological effect' (1980:60).

Grossberg has written on excorporation[7], or the process of taking the cultural objects that the dominant system offers and turning them against their hegemonic purpose, excorporating them into a resistive practice/discourse. 'Rock and roll reverses the hegemonic practices of incorporation... [it] removes signs, objects, sounds, styles, etc. from their apparently meaningful existence within the dominant culture and relocates them within an affective alliance of differentiation and resistance' (1984:233). In this context, then, resistant practices can be seen as *bricolage*; instances of *poaching* the resources that capitalism offers and adapting them to fit one's own pleasures and needs. 'No marketeer or advertiser can determine, though they can certainly seek to influence, the message-making of our consumption', writes Willis (1990:137). It must be emphasized that the resistive quality of this poaching practice is largely symbolic. Willis maintains that the tools for such processes are language, drama, body, and creativity as symbolic resources which will be used to 'produce the

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[7] The opposite of being 'incorporated' in dominant ideology.

possibilities of oppositional, independent or alternative symbolizations of the self' (139).

Fiske (1989a) distinguishes between political, social or organized resistance, which operates in the social realm, and the interior or internalized resistance that works within the realm of the cultural. A further distinction he makes is that between pleasures of evasion and those that are realized through semiotic resistance, that is, by producing oppositional meanings. However, evasive pleasures can also produce resistance:

> Evasive pleasures produce the energy and empowerment that underlie the production of meanings (possibly resistive) of self and of one's social relations that may eventually result in politically active resistance (1989b:54-55).

These notions are somewhat conflated, at least to my understanding. Is pleasure the necessary requirement to produce possibly resistive meanings? The notion of pleasure, at least in the sense that Fiske discusses it here, is not helpful in differentiating between semiotic and evasive resistances.

Pleasure has been used in this discourse in relation to empowerment, another quite ambivalent term. Grossberg attempts to clarify it:

> Empowerment refers to the reciprocal nature of affective investment: that is, because something matters... other investments are made possible. Empowerment refers to the generation of energy and passion, to the construction of possibility (1992:64).

Empowerment differs from pleasure, since 'pleasure can be disempowering and displeasure can be empowering' (*ibid.*). Furthermore, empowerment does not guarantee any form of resistance or evasion of dominance. Here, both of these notions are theorized as enabling possibilities, and the concept of investment (Barker & Brooks, 1998) is underlined. Such practices

can be resistive to the extent that they contribute to one's social identity as different, or oppose dominant ideologies. For such a step to take place, agency is also essential: one has to be aware of her or his actions as opposing a certain discourse and to engage in such actions with a sense of intentionality and deliberation. Another key element in this notion of resistance is that these practices and pleasures are the result of the subjects' symbolic creativity (Willis, 1990). The meanings constructed out of their encounter with popular culture belong to their own repertoire of symbolic practices and resources, and become part of their identity, their social relations and a culture that they themselves construct.

Buckingham suggests that 'we avoid the easy assumption that these semiotic struggles and resistances have political consequences, and that those consequences are necessarily "progressive"' (1993:210). My research has been conducted on the premise that this kind of resistance to media power and ideology is being practiced at a symbolic level. Nonetheless, I agree with Jenkins (1992) that poached meanings are not transient and can actually work up to a shared culture among social groups. This culture is marginal, certainly, in comparison to the centralized power of the media and the dominant structures that control relations of production. The empowerment a viewer or fan experiences when laughing at a particularly sloppy scene, or the subversive pleasure of making a collage of the worst publicity shots of soap characters, cannot in anyway be equated with the power in the hands of those who set the agenda (Morley, 1992); those who control the production, distribution and broadcasting of television programs. Little they care, 'the powers that be' (a popular term in soap fans' lingo)

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whether the fans oppose, negotiate, or resist the daily dosage of 'messages', as long as they keep coming back for more and make advertisers happy. Regardless, though, of how insignificant viewing processes may seem in the light of media power, there is no reason that they should remain unstudied, unproblematized, and discarded as not 'relevant' or as 'too micro'. The aim of audience research is not to celebrate the critical abilities of audiences but to investigate them and bring them forward; analyze and map them on the polymorphous and diverse media landscape that surrounds us.

Hence, in my analysis I consider resistant readings the audience responses, which do not just evade or oppose the dominant meanings of the soap (Fiske's evasive and semiotic resistance), but which also display *an awareness and deliberation* from the part of the viewer. This aspect is in my opinion the distinguishing mark between polysemy and resistance. Such readings constitute an articulation between the notions of discrimination and position, as theorized by Schrøder (2000). Moreover, another aspect of reception that I consider resistant is the pleasure that is generated by the viewers *themselves*. This happens when fan practices and discourse (the appropriation of soap meanings), replaces the text as the main source of pleasure. Such uses of soap are empowering, as they enhance viewers' social identity. I have also taken into account what soap means to the people as a cultural activity, irrespective of its ideological meaning, that is, the symbolic meaning of soap for its fans, which can also be empowering. In the viewers' accounts, these aspects are displayed in several instances that I coded as resistant:

- Meta-statements concerning flagship ideological messages, that is when a viewer appears to be

conscious of the non-innocence of the text. (e.g., 'they try to make us like Greek police')

• Statements that are overtly political or that point to the industry/market side of soap opera. (e.g., 'the aim of soaps is to make more episodes and thus more money')

• Statements that are reflective and conscious of subordination and oppression, as for example observations concerning women's roles in soaps and how they are experienced in everyday life, where the text or their spoken text gives to people the space to voice their concerns (see Brown, 1994).

• Parody of the soap, as an example of distanced reading which aims at twisting the intended message for the viewer's own pleasure.

• Social uses of soap opera, where elements of the show are extracted and reworked at a different level. The viewers' pleasure there relies upon their own creativity and communication, giving them the freedom to do whatever they want with the text, and enrich their social relationships.

All of these instances will be further analyzed and contextualized in the discussion of my empirical evidence. Obviously, resistance here takes place at several levels simultaneously: from the reader's semiotic contact with the text, to its social use outside the boundaries of the viewing experience. It's true that these processes should not be conflated, however, they all share the viewers' awareness of their role as recipients of cultural forms, as well as the ability to dissociate themselves from this role, comment on their relationship to television and at times channel it to further activities which they control.

1.4 Conclusion

In his article 'Elusive Audiences' Peter Dahlgren asks the following questions:

> Just how interpretatively active are audiences, under what circumstances should the interpretations be deemed an instance of resistance, and further, just how polysemic is television output? (1998:301)

My thesis attempts to tackle these questions in a localized perspective of soap opera consumption, looking into formations of gender, class, age, and the role of national identity and how they might be articulated with the construction of meaning in everyday life contexts. In this chapter I tried to lay down the theoretical framework that has informed my research, like the Gramscian notion of hegemony, de Certeau's model of popular resistance, and recent models of audience reception like Schrøder's.

Next, I examined the audience studies that are most relevant to my research, moving from Hobson's ethnographic study of *Crossroads* viewers to more recent ones which focus more specifically on resistance, like Brown's. Most of these studies look at soaps as feminine texts and they evaluate women fans' encounter with patriarchal ideology. I wish to expand my perspective to the study of men and soap opera, without breaking away though from the feminist position. No single social category can determine one's relationship to television, so I analyzed my participants' input using as well, class, national identity, and age. Such formations must not be used as 'black boxes' that can account for differences among viewers: we must rather explore how they are negotiated with relations of power and demonstrate how they are expressed and dealt with in the context of people's everyday lives. In order, thus, to adequately grasp this relationship, we must now look at the cultural

and social environment of the participants: urban Greece
of the late 90's.

2. Longing for the past: television and soap opera in Greece

It would be impossible to understand the processes and dynamics of soap opera reception in Greece without a familiarity with the country's history, politics and social organization. This chapter will present a brief account of Greek television, with an emphasis on soap opera, in order to acquaint the reader with the thesis' local context. I do not aim to provide an extensive review of Greek history, society, and its media, but to highlight the elements that are important in grasping the relationship between Greeks and soap opera. I will attempt to show that Greek television reflects the deep-rooted paradoxes and conflicts that have structured the country's development and the unique role that indigenous soap operas play as popular narratives that interpellate Greeks with a historically and socially significant mode of address.

The first part of this chapter is a concise introduction to Greek history, politics, and social formations. The second section will address the development of Greek television from its stumbling first steps to the deregulation from the state and its impact. Finally, the third part will introduce Greek soap opera, its relationship to other popular narrative forms in Greece, and its role in the media landscape.

2.1 History and people

Caught geographically between the East and the West, Greeks have struggled for a unified historical, cultural and social identity in the midst of turbulent historical and political forces that have shaped their country and perpetuated periods of identity crisis.

Tsaoussis argues that this 'crisis of identity is the central problem in modern Greek society, the constituent element of modern Greeks and the axis around which our later history revolves' (1983:17).

To trace the historical conditions that have structured Greek society one would have to begin with the four centuries long occupation under the Ottoman empire. Sociologist Nikos Mouzelis (1978) states that while industrialization was under way in the Western countries, Greece under Ottoman rule (1453-1826) remained an agricultural economy. The cultural and scientific advances of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment did not reach the Greeks. However, the 18th century saw an impressive development in Greek commerce and maritime and the establishment of diasporic communities in key metropolitan centers. It was this newly developed bourgeoisie and diasporic intelligentsia that brought home the ideas of Enlightenment and French revolution and raised national consciousness[1] in order to finance and lead the Greek war of independence in 1821, which was won with the intervention of the Great powers (England, France, Russia). The non-existence of industry, the role of a Western-orientated bourgeoisie in opposition to the local notables, and the dependence on foreign political and financial involvement were key factors for the future (under)development of the newly constituted Greek state (Kavvadias et al., 1986; Mouzelis, 1978).

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[1]While the Orthodox Church was initially against the revolution and never favored 'modern Greek enlightenment' (as the import of Enlightenment ideas is traditionally called in Greece), it had nevertheless played a key role in maintaining the national and cultural identity of Greeks intact during the long occupation. The Patriarch was for Greeks not only a spiritual leader but an ethnarch. 'It is not surprising that even for a modern Greek religion and nationalism are inextricably linked: to be a good Christian is to be a good patriot and vice versa' (Mouzelis, 1978:159).

The political arena following the war of independence was dominated by conflicts between the traditional oligarchy and the Bavarian monarchy, imposed by the foreign powers, that ultimately strengthened the parliament. Nevertheless, 'civil society' had never been cultivated in Greece: politics followed a fierce tradition of patronage and clientelism, which was the *modus operandi* under Ottoman occupation. Parliamentary conflicts never represented class interests or differences: parties were strongly personalistic and centered around clientelist networks. This state of affairs soon led to an over-expansion of the administrative State, providing employment in the lack of any industrial development[2]. These features of early Greek politics have proliferated ever since and in combination with the imported political institutions explain, according to Mouzelis,

> the *relative autonomy of the Greek State* in relation to the class structure. For clientelism not only kept the peasantry, as a class, outside the sphere of active and autonomous politics, it also slowed down or actually prevented the political organization and the ideological coherence of the dominant social classes (1978:17).

A major turning point in Greek history was 1922: territorial pursuits in Asia Minor turned sour when the Greek army was defeated in 1922, resulting in over one million Greek refugees from the Asia Minor settling in Greece. The refugees brought with them skilled labor, entrepreneurial skill, and considerable savings. Moreover, a sizeable influx of foreign capital came in, including international aid and foreign loans following the debacle, which created a breakthrough in the

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[2] Administrative bureaucracy was so enormous that by 1880 the number of civil servants for every 10000 citizens was seven times higher in the meager Greek state than in the United Kingdom (Mouzelis, 1978).

industrial sector, as well as in banking and finance. Greece was entering a capitalist mode of production, in a peripheral sense of the term though, displaying a very different kind of capitalism than the Western model[3] (Filias, 1991; Mouzelis, 1978).

The impetus was not undermined by the political instability of the thirties, but was halted by World War II, which began heroically when the Greek army defeated the Italians in the autumn of 1940. When the Germans occupied Greece in 1941, the Greek Communist Party managed to mobilize the peasantry and the working classes against the Germans, taking a leading role in the resistance movement. The failed efforts of the Communists to take political power after the WWII led to the Greek civil war (1947-49), a very painful and ideologically 'hot' historical event that has caused deep wounds in Greek society[4]. The development of the economy became the main political discourse over the next decades and the governments of the fifties and sixties took an active, paternalistic role in ensuring that Greece 'catches up' with the rest of Europe (Mouzelis, 1978).

The following crisis that Greeks witnessed was the Junta of the Colonels in 1967. Lacking any popular consent, as well as any ties to the economic elite or the middle classes, the colonels did not manage to endure the rising pressures from below. After the Turkish invasion in Cyprus in the summer of 1974, the leaders of the

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[3] In contrast to West European countries, where capitalist industrialization was a slow and organic process that effectively incorporated the less dynamic sectors of the economy and boosted them with technological advances, capitalism in Greece took an 'enclave form' (Mouzelis, 1978:38), meaning that the dynamic industrial sector could not transfer its productivity to the rest of the economy.

[4] Obviously, the Civil War was the outbreak of long-dated social schisms and orchestrated by numerous political agencies, including foreign intervention.

armed forces asked Konstantinos Karamanlis (former prime minister and leader of the conservative party), to step in. In the same year, Greeks voted for Karamanlis as a prime minister and decided to let go of monarchy. At a political level the last quarter of the 20th century has been marked by the entrance of Greece in the European Union and the desperate efforts to modernize industrial production, communications, and boost the economy.

These features of under-development that have portrayed Greek economy were articulated on the level of social formation. The predominance of small scale, family owned units in all sectors of production, the weight of the tertiary sector in the economy, the weakness and state control of trade unions, the large numbers of independent workers, as well as the over-expanded public sector, have prevented a clear conception of the social conflict between labor and capital (Filias, 1991).

According to most social theorists, Greeks are characterized by a rather diffused and vague class positioning and consciousness (Filias, 1991; Kavvadias *et al.*, 1986; Mouzelis, 1978; Tsourvakas, 1996). The mass urbanization that took place after WWII led to an unprecedented mobilization in all social categories, and because of the factors mentioned above, as well as the peculiarities of Greek politics and the dominance of anti-Left ideology, this has created a state of *class-less* social classes with wide internal inequalities.

It must be clear to the reader by now that every generation of Greeks has seen radical changes taking place in their lifetime, changes with profound effects on their social and financial condition. An entrepreneur in his forties, for instance, who could be financially positioned in the upper middle class, might well be the

son of a worker who left the village where his father worked the land. Education has also played a key role in inter- and intra-class mobilization (Kavounidi, 1996; Kavvadias et al., 1986). The much desired institutional diploma is a sacred token and culmination that signifies a rise in the social hierarchy[5]. Hence, there has been increased mobility in the Greek social formation and a lack of continuity and 'civil society' that would lead to a clear distinction and conception of social classes.

The rapid and hasty process of modernization and economic growth according to the model of the West has also had significant cultural effects. Even from the times of the Ottoman occupation, ideas of modernity were always imported from foreign sources via a cultural elite that was strongly linked to the West. As a result, the cultural evolution of Greece has been characterized by a contradictory symbiosis of bourgeois Western thought and traditional, pre-capitalist elements (Tsourvakas, 1996). There has been an omnipresent conflict between the influence of Western modernity and the national, hellenocentric tradition of Christianity and ancient Greek heritage, reflecting vividly the same contradictions that divided Greeks for centuries[6].

Such polarizations between strongly ideological discourses are among the facets of the identity crisis that was mentioned in the beginning of the chapter. What we can extract from this rather sketchy account of some historical and social aspects of Greece, is that her

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[5] Greece has one of the highest rates of university graduates in Europe (Kavvadias, et al. 1986). University education is state funded and controlled and (unsurprisingly) inextricably linked with Greek politics.

[6] An example of this conflict and its ideological force is the debate on the official language, between the proponents of katharevousa, a cumbersome, archaic version of modern Greek considered to be pure and close to the Ancient Greek ideal, and demotiki, the spoken language. The war for which version would be taught to schoolchildren lasted a century (Mouzelis, 1978).

development has not followed a rational pattern, due to the peculiarities that I highlighted. The Greek state acquired a parliament without a civil society; entered a capitalist mode of production without proper industrialization; incorporated bourgeois ideologies and lifestyles without an organic middle class. It should not come as a surprise, thus, that all these contradictions and paradoxes that have dominated Greek society have in turn stigmatized the development of its television, as we will see in the section that follows.

2.2 The development of Greek television

The close ties between television and politics in Greece are not only due to the medium's initial, legal identity as a public service, operated and controlled by the state[7]; the most important feature of its early development is its official establishment by the Junta in 1967. Up to then broadcasts had been experimental, with no proper studios, equipment, staff or resources. The Colonels immediately saw the potentials of television as a tool for propaganda and instillation of national ideals (Tsourvakas, 1996; Valoukos, 1998) and quickly financed the setting up of an adequate broadcasting service, EIRT (Greek Foundation of Radio and Television). The fact that television was institutionalized in this context marked its administrative organization, structure, ethos, and programming (Kastoras, 1990).

Television was not seen at the time as a source of profit; although there was advertising on public television during the Junta period, the medium was not

[7] Besides the state, the armed forces also had the legal right to set up and operate radio and television stations so as to inform, educate, and entertain the army, as well as raise the morale of the nation. The armed forces took advantage of the legislation and installed YENED in 1965, which started operating in 1970 (Syngellakis, 1997; Tsourvakas, 1996; Valoukos, 1998).

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commercialized. Decisions on programming and staff (administrative, creative and technical) were taken solely on the basis of political interest, ideological purposes, and as always, clientelist[8] networks (Karter, 1986; Kastoras, 1990; Komninou, 1989; Tsourvakas, 1996). Information, rather than entertainment, was emphasized in the programming in the Junta period, with news, talk shows, sports, and cultural programs. The content was largely helleno-centric and political, as television was the dictators' blatant ideological mechanism. The weak funds did not allow the purchase of much foreign material, with the exception of documentaries and a few serials, like *Peyton Place*. The seventies saw the first indigenous productions of drama, which will be discussed in more detail in relation to the current soaps. This period sets the tone for the later development of Greek television: strong political intervention, lack of rational organization and planning, and the same bureaucratic and formalistic character that distinguishes public services in Greece (Kastoras, 1990; Komninou, 1989; Syngellakis, 1991; Tsourvakas, 1996; Valoukos, 1998).

Despite the efforts for change that characterized the period of political restoration following the Junta (1974-81), Greek television was stuck in the same politically controlled pattern of administration and decision-making. The process of modernizing the economy and integrating advanced technology and sociopolitical institutions of the West stumbled over increased state intervention, populist and cliantelist politics, and the economic traps of peripheral capitalism. There was an increase in production, wages, and consumption of newly imported products, but underneath the surface Greece was still

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[8] This means that someone would be hired or promoted as a 'favor' to a politician, or based on his/her political connections, affiliations with the governing party, etc.

lacking the infrastructure and rational policies for development (Mouzelis, 1978; Tsourvakas, 1996).

The changes that took place under Karamanlis did not reach very deep in the structure of Greek television, which had by then reached considerable audiences. The public service was renamed ERT (*Greek Radio Television*) and the 1974 constitution rendered radio and television under direct state control which had the responsibility for 'the objective and fair broadcasting of news, as well as products of literature and the arts' and 'securing the programming quality required by their social mission and the cultural development of the country' (quoted in Syngellakis, 1997:102). In action, this meant excessive pro-government reporting. State intervention and control over the content of the media was a natural occurrence. Moreover, television's role as an ideological vehicle and clientelistic network of the governing party was maintained. There were developments in equipment and technology, but most of the resources were spent on maintaining and reproducing the monstrous, bureaucratic, administrative edifice that proliferated well into the nineties.

Programming continued along the same lines with an increased informative role and the same emphasis on political communication and promotion of national heritage. Entertainment was also enhanced with more foreign imports, serials, quiz shows, and the screening of Greek popular movies (Tsourvakas, 1996).

The governmental hegemony over television broadcast continued to be its distinctive feature over the 1981-89 period of the socialist party rule, but according to Tsourvakas (1996) it took on a more commercial and populist character. In 1982 YENED had become ERT2, a civilian state-owned service and in 1987 ERT1 and ERT2

merged to form a single company, ERT[9]. Governmental intervention over hiring of staff and broadcast content reached an all-time high. As Syngellakis (1997) reports, during that eight year period ERT had thirteen directors and chairmen, and sixteen news directors: the average stay was eight months. The first European satellite in the country was also put in operation, allowing reception of foreign channels.

The conspicuous consumption of the eighties reached considerable heights in Greece, as populist governmental policies and increased financial aid by the European Union created a wave of *nouveaux riches* and unprecedented social mobility (with severe consequences for the economy). The arrival of many multinational companies and new imports increased the Greeks' consumerist choices resulting in a mentality of spurious assimilation of 'modern' cultural elements and a blind awe towards anything foreign, which was paradoxically adjoined with a sense of Hellenic grandeur (Tsourvakas, 1996). Tsourvakas also notes that in television, these social contradictions are evident on the joint popularity that both Greek serials and films and the newly arrived, foreign soap operas enjoyed. He describes this period as essentially contradictory: programming had a populist character with increased entertainment in the form of serials (foreign and domestic) and sports, as well as a cultural profile with many documentaries and educational material.

By the end of the eighties the pressures for deregulation were pending: the people distrusted the media, while the politically charged atmosphere was not in tune with the democratization of the country and the promises of change that PASOK, the socialist governing

[9] Even later the state channels changed into ET1 and ET-2, until recently when ET2 was yet renamed NET (*New Greek Television*).

party, had made. The big boom took place in 1987, in the FM radio waves, as several mayors of the opposing conservative party established non state-owned municipal radio stations; an action which PASOK was compelled to legally support. The government was not so tolerant though when the mayor of Thessaloniki installed a television station, TV-100 and took him to court. The case reached the European Court of Justice where the mayor won at the expense of the government, as the Greek state monopoly of the media was found to be in breach of the Treaty of Rome. In 1989 the coalition government opened the way for private television (Doulkeri, 1999; Papathanassopoulos, 1993; Syngellakis, 1997; Valoukos, 1998).

The new decade found Greek television with two privately owned channels: MEGA CHANNEL and ANTENNA TV. The fact that all of the private channels that have been operating since 1989, attracting the vast majority of viewers, did not hold proper licenses typifies the bizarre element of Greek reality. The space that opened with the 1989 deregulation has been characterized as tele-cannibalism by Papathanassopoulos (1993).

Theoretically, of course, things are different. When the coalition government *de facto* recognized the situation and gave into deregulation, new legislation was passed providing for the new era. In particular, ESR[10], a new broadcast regulating body, was founded as an independent, self-governing entity, with its own budget and administration. Its role was to dictate codes of practice for broadcasting stations, to give out licenses for municipally ran stations, to examine TV stations' function, and to penalize the channels that would break the rules of practice spelled by the ESR. However, the

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[10] *National Radio and Television Council*

Council has no executive role in licensing privately owned stations, and is there only to give suggestions to the government. The final call is up to the minister of presidency: as always political affairs interfere with any given public activity. Even if the creation of ESR seemed at the time a promising and progressive change, it was soon evident that it was only a silent government puppet (Papathanassopoulos, 1993; Zeri, 1996) A number of ESR regulations concerning licensing, media concentration, advertising, protection of citizens and consumers, and the protection of the Greek language are in effect defied everyday (Syngellakis, 1997)[11].

Deregulation did not take place after careful planning, assessment of the infrastructure, and an evaluation of the potential market. As all social changes in Greece, it was introduced sloppily, hastily, and caused a hysterical stir. Apart from the two major channels (MEGA and ANTENNA) which are semi-legal, there is a large number of other channelswith illegal or pirate status. Syngellakis (1997) reports that in 1993 there were more than 100 television stations and 1500 radio stations that were operating without being regulated in any form, a situation she calls the non-regulation of deregulation, or a deregulated deregulation. From this plethora of broadcasters, ANTENNA and MEGA compete for the highest ratings, while ALPHA, STAR, and the state channels follow[12]. Table 2.1 shows the ratings for the years 1998-2000:

[11] At the time of writing the role of ESR is being re-evaluated and new legislation is being examined in the parliament concerning its executive powers. Moreover, the subject of channels' licenses is also being reappraised, but as any decisions have not been finalized yet I have not included this issue in my discussion.
[12] MEGA is financially backed by the country's largest publishing house, the Labrakis Group. ALPHA (the former SKAI) is also owned by an established publishing company, while the major stock-holders of ANTENNA and STAR are well-known businessmen and entrepreneurs.

	ET1	NET	MEGA	ANTENNA	ALPHA	STAR
1998	5,5	3,2	19,9	21,7	15,6	16,0
1999	5,1	3,4	20,2	22,8	17,3	14,6
2000	5,5	4,3	23,8	21,55	16,6	13

Table 2.1. Greek television: percentage market share - April 1998,
October 1999, October 2000 (Source: AGB Media Services).

The proportions of the media explosion in the small
and unpredictable Greek market must be elaborated.
Private television had a direct effect upon the other
media. Its glossy format meant that existing media were
forced to undergo a facelift. Established newspapers and
magazines updated their format, specialized TV
magazines hit the market along with dozens of lifestyle
magazines, offering insights into the lives of the new
celebrities. The arrival of private television caused a
buzz in the corporate world too. Competition gave rise to
a growing demand for specialized marketing and media
research companies, sophisticated public relations and
advertising campaigns. The developing stream of
advertising was enormous, targeting the media with the
largest share of the pie. From 1990 to 1991 the
advertising costs for television had a 57% rise, while
85% of this money went to MEGA and ANTENNA TV
(Xydakis, 1992). ESR regulations attempting to limit the
extent of advertising in between broadcasts have been
defied to a point of ridicule, when for example
ANTENNA in spring '98 programmed (at least) three five
minute advertising breaks in twenty minutes of content
during *Lampsi*, its prime time everyday soap (Valoukos,
1998).

The new state of affairs found the two state channels
completely unprepared to deal with their private
antagonists. The decline of state television was
spectacular. Until the autumn of 1989 the average

viewership ratings were 75,2% for ET1 and 59,2% for ET-2 (Valoukos, 1998), which fell dramatically as Table 2.1 shows. This fall meant a considerable loss of advertising revenues for the two channels. Since most of the state subsidy went into administration maintenance costs, there were not enough funds to compete with private television and its glossy appeal (Tsourvakas, 1996).

The blatant commercialization of television swept up Greek living rooms. For the first time viewers were exposed to a constant flow of broadcasting, twenty four hours per day[13], filled with glamorous serials, dressed up Greek dramas, beautiful faces, fast action scenes, CNN-like news programs with blood and gore, plenty of nude flesh, and endless copycats of American shows. Tsourvakas (1996) observes that from 1990 to 1996 television content was clearly dominated by entertainment, which was indeed the most popular part of the programming, especially foreign shows that were now being purchased and broadcast in large quantities, while news and information fell dramatically[14]. Viewership rates were raising constantly: in a 1999 study it was found that 26,50% of Greeks like to spend their free time at home reading a book, only 16% go for the newspaper, while a majority of 56% watch television. Only among the university educated did the majority (42% compared with 32%) prefer books to television (Doulkeri, 1999).

The transformation of Greek television due to deregulation reflected the profound changes that were taking place in Greek society. The major political parties, without their dominant founding figures of the past

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[13] State television used to broadcast from late afternoon until a few hours past midnight.
[14] During the last two years though this situation has been reversed, as we will see.

decades, represented interchangeable ideologies and economistic discourse was the trump card on their programs. Neo-liberal rhetoric reached its peak and a veritable boom in consumption took place. The steady privatization of the public sector and the entrance of numerous Greek companies in the stock-market enormously changed the economic landscape and raised spectacularly the standard of living.

In such a context, sex, violence and melodrama set the tone in which television speaks to the Greek people. O'Donnel, in his study of soap operas around Europe suggests 'that glamour, at times tending towards mild eroticism and even forms of soft pornography, is the currently dominant *mode* of commercial television in Greece' (1998:96). Maybe as a reaction to the uptight state television material, or following a steady universal path towards the commercialization of sex, private television in Greece introduced nude sex scenes in prime time serials, nude adverts, semi-nude TV presenters, soft pornographic material in late hours, and generally, an over-emphasis on sex. No wonder it seems that 99% of women on Greek television are physically attractive, young, slim and glamorous.

Violence and melodrama also make up the dominant language in which everything is conveyed. News is an area which functions in Greek television in such a context. A typical story in private channels' news programs will display extremely graphic violence. Tragedies, dramas, killings, and sex scandals overshadow political news, while references to cultural issues are limited to celebrity watching. There will be blasting music to set the tone, graphic titles to underline the public danger/outcry, multiple cuts and panning shots, reporters who poetically lament in the sites of disaster,

and several other techniques which heighten the emotional tension of the viewer. State channel news are certainly less extravagant, less dramatic and as a result less viewed (Michailides, 1994; Papathanassopoulos, 1997).

In a very short period Greek society went once again through marked changes and television-hungry Greeks saw their choices being multiplied overnight. Despite some critics' observations, though, concerning the dominant patterns of viewership (Tsourvakas, 1996, most notably), a decade after the arrival of private television several things have changed. The most impressive change, in contrast to previous years and to what Tsourvakas and other critics have been describing as the loss of Greek culture and a dominance of foreign television, has been the audience's demand for indigenous programming and its increased supply by the private stations. The current trends show that domestic dramas and comedies top the ratings and lead the channels' programming, whereas foreign shows lose their following steadily. Old Greek films that have been screened repeatedly over the past three decades still get very high ratings, even in parallel to the latest Hollywood films broadcast (Halvatzakis, 2000; Petroutsou & Andritsaki, 2001). A Greek critic writes:

> The uncontested dominance of indigenous serials is surely not due to a patriotic exaltation of the channels, but is mainly related to the general entertainment and artistic preferences of the audience – not just television audiences. Whereas in the late eighties the majority of schoolchildren listened to foreign music, in the last years most young people go out in the infamous 'hellenadika'...[15] Who would have thought that in the era of... globalization, in the wake of the European monetary

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[15] The 'hellenadika' is a cultural product of nineties hybridity: clubs that play popular Greek music but whose 'trendy' décor, layout and atmosphere does not resemble the venues that originally played Greek music back in the eighties.

union, Greek channels would be transformed into guardhouses of Greekness? (Tziantzi, 2001)

What we see here is a 'rediscovery' of Greekness that as Tziantzi notes, is not limited to television but characterizes all aspects of cultural life. The return to Greekness, however, has not been unaffected by Western influence: Greek popular culture, from serials and magazines to pop music and videos is a hybrid of western and traditional Greek forms and that is why its main followers are younger audiences, since older generations cannot recognize themselves in either formal element.

Tsourvakas' (1996) prediction of the decline of information and news related programming has also failed to materialize. The latest ratings show that most channels have almost doubled their percentage in news and shows of informative character – again, following an increased demand from the audience (Halvatzakis, 2000; Petroutsou & Andritsaki, 2001). The format of the news has also changed though: their length has doubled (even tripled in the case of ALPHA), and their dramatization techniques are even more intense, covering trivial issues (Papathanassopoulos, 1997). The fact that some news broadcasts were moved from the 20.30 slot to 19.30 (or 19.45) also means that they are now competing with prime time series, something that affects their content directly (Diamantakou, 2000). Looking at a 1995 survey of news audiences, however, Papathanassopoulos (1997) reports that Athenians were cynical concerning the objectivity of news programs: a 76% criticized the private channels for distorting events for the sake of rating success, 16% said that private channels constructed the events, while only 10% agreed that news represent reality. These numbers do not constitute the

most powerful data but they do express a general tendency.

Such trends became evident in 2001, when a general fall in viewership was coupled with a 25% fall in advertising revenue for television channels. This loss reflects the universal crisis in broadcasting and advertising that accompanies the fall of global stock markets (Metaxa, 2001; Papathanassopoulos, 2001; Petroutsou & Andritsaki, 2001). Clearly, the future for private television in Greece is challenging, as audiences have become increasingly satiated, demanding if not more quality, at least something different (Petroutsou & Andritsaki, 2001).

The account of the development given by this section shows the idiosyncratic and irrational character of Greek television. Its close relationship to political institutions and its manifest ideological role as a transmitter of governmental agency and power constructed a mistrustful and cynical television audience. There was no pretense of objectivity or transparence: the viewer knew that what was transparent about this process was the government's influence over television content. The introduction of private television in the nineties changed the scenery dramatically and took audiences by storm. Moreover, the issue of cultural identity becomes relevant as we witness the response of Greek audiences to a sea of foreign programs that are initially revered only to be replaced by their Greek counterparts, reflecting a general trend in cultural life. This issue will be examined and addressed in the next section, which deals with the phenomenon of Greek soap opera.

2.3 Soap opera in Greece

Soap opera in its everyday form arrived relatively late in Greece: the American daytime *über*-soaps, like *The Bold and the Beautiful (BB)* and *The Young and the Restless (YR)* were the first to be broadcast. Likewise, the first Greek attempts at the genre materialized in the private channels. Soap opera in Greece, then, is very much a phenomenon related to commercial television, which has, though, its roots in earlier forms.

I will begin my discussion with the foreign programs that traced the history of soap reception in Greece. Their 'ancestor' is none other than *Peyton Place,* first broadcast in 1968 by YENED. The Greek public was amazed by the steamy prime time soap and it was a big success. Newspaper editor Vaggellis Roussis in a personal interview in 1998 identified *Peyton Place* as a landmark for Greek television: it was the Greeks' first encounter with American television drama, and basically a new way of life. *Dallas* and *Dynasty* also created their own myth as the glamour and glitz they portrayed was also something new for the Greek audience. Both series were rerun in the nineties by smaller private channels, but both went unnoticed, probably because by then *BB* had monopolized soap lovers.

In a way, the launch of *BB* signaled the first changes in Greek television. Broadcast daily from March 1987 on ET1, it immediately attracted spectacular audiences. The saga of the Foresters, a family of LA based fashion designers took Greece by storm and a cult of *BB* characters reached an apogee, with merchandise, stickers, visits of the actors in Acropolis and appearances on Greek television. After privatization, the soap moved to

ANTENNA[16], then SKAI, and finally to STAR which still airs the show that enjoys a considerable following by fans but not the fervor of the old days.

YR was ANTENNA's answer to BB, and while it never had the overwhelming success of the latter, it has been considered by the channel as its most successful foreign program, as Lola Daifa (ANTENNA's PR spokesperson until recently), told me in 1997. Truly, YR has kept a steady fan base over the years. A daytime soap that was first broadcast in the States in 1973, YR is set in the fictional Genoa City and deals with the rich, business oriented professionals of the community and their romances, antagonisms, etc.

Soap opera has enjoyed an established space in Greek television programming. In 1996 ANTENNA, STAR and ET1 broadcast eight soaps, making up 30 hours of weekly airtime[17]. In the same year it was also reported that 7 out of 10 Greek women spent at least forty five minutes daily watching soap, while at least 3 out of 10 men over 45 watched Greek soaps[18]. Finally, younger and middle class women preferred American soaps over Greek ones whereas older ages went for the domestic soaps (Iereidis, 1996).

Nevertheless, the audience response has changed considerably over the years covered by my fieldwork. American soap operas do not attract large audiences anymore, especially after the telenovela craze that unexpectedly took over Greece in the late nineties, when SKAI broadcast Esmeralda in the ratings-lazy summer months of 1998. Memories of burned meals and unhooked

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[16] By getting BB ANTENNA won the greatest bidding war in the history of Greek television (O' Donnell, 1998).

[17] In the winter of 1999 the weekly number of soap airtime was almost 41, while presently it should be even higher.

[18] Audience ratings for the soaps referred mostly by the participants are included in Appendix B.

telephones that described the *BB* enthusiasm were relived and soon an array of Latin heroines were parading across every private channel. An important element for their popularity is that they are the only dubbed (non children's) shows on Greek television. This certainly facilitates the following for children, older viewers and the women who do housework simultaneously. Although still high in the ratings, *telenovelas* have left behind their initial success and there is less demand for them by the public (Petroutsou & Andritsaki, 2001).

The ups and downs of foreign soap opera reception do not compare with the solid and steady following that the Greek soap operas have enjoyed, a decade now after their launch on private television. To understand the meaning and the continuous appeal of indigenous soaps, despite their competitors[19], one has to locate them in a broader historical context of Greek popular culture. The 'moments' that are significant, in my opinion, and must be addressed are the romantic pulp novels of the fifties, the old 'golden' age of Greek cinema, and certainly the past television work of Nikos Foskolos, the 'father' of Greek soap[20]. My argument is that the Greek soaps that he writes and directs, namely *Lampsi* and *Kalimera Zoi (KZ)*, are among the few items on Greek television that can anchor the Greek viewers to their past, and hence it is essential that we look at those historical links.

The serialized novels of Dickens and De Suy have been identified as the forerunners of the soap opera form,

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[19] *Telenovelas*, in particular, were immediately seen by the media as a threat for the Greek everyday serials, that followed closely the war of the ratings.

[20] I must acknowledge here that my argument involves *Lampsi* and *Kalimera Zoi*, the first and longest-running Greek soaps. There are more Greek soaps being broadcast on Greek television currently, which I have not looked at in this study, as they had not been launched when I carried out my fieldwork. Moreover, they have not yet been so well established or so popular as the older ones.

from radio to television broadcast. The same pattern can be found in Greece with the romantic pulp fiction that became immensely popular in the forties and fifties[21]. The work of Ioanna Boukouvala-Anagnostou, 225 novels in all, was serially published in pulp women's magazines (*Romantzo, Pantheon*) and newspapers of the time. Her stories, ranging from romances to mysteries and crime, were so popular that she was writing simultaneously for several papers and magazines under different names. She has claimed that she extracted her ideas from what happened around her, and according to Philippou (2000), her work can lead to important conclusions concerning the morals and the way of life in post-war Athens, as her novels cover an array of social formations: bourgeois, petits bourgeois, and luben elements. Around the same time, as Philippou points out, the first radio-broadcast serials go on the air, which immediately enjoy big success, especially with women. Romantic stories, like the notorious *Pikri, Mikri mou Agapi* (My Bitter Little Love) continue for years and make a landmark in Greek popular culture.

To give an adequate account of the Greek cinema of the fifties and sixties would require a thesis on its own, but I strongly believe that it has to be addressed in relation to soaps. In the grave days that followed the civil war and the cold reality of poverty and deprivation, the cinema of the time was an oasis of lightness, joy and laughter, or romance and tears for Greek people. It has been accused for its failure to chronicle the zeitgeist with the social eye displayed by Italian Neorealism, for example. Nevertheless, its charming style, charismatic actors, and well written scripts were much loved by audiences, and still are. All Greeks have been immersed

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[21] A comparison between these particular works with the aforementioned authors' is not by any means relevant.

in the 'golden age' of Greek cinema, since some movies have been shown as many as 29 times in periods of seven years (Petroutsou & Andritsaki, 2001). Older generations view these films with nostalgia for the 'old days', while the younger have fetishized those images as a period of innocence and childish carelessness that has been lost in modern day Greece. There is no doubt that the Greek cinema of the time constitutes a strong national vocabulary and imagery, and an agent of national consciousness for Greeks.

Significantly, Nikos Foskolos is linked with both of these traditions in Greek popular culture. He started his successful career as a writer for radio serials, then moved to film writing and directing (over 100 films) and he was one of the first to get involved with TV serials in Greece. Obviously his discourse has worked on all of these levels, and always with popular success. Foskolos does not have a penchant for comedy: all of his movies were melodramas with a strong social or national edge. His film *Ypolohagos Natassa* (1970), is the biggest box office hit of the Greek film industry and deals with a couple involved in the Greek resistance during WWII and their sacrifices for their country.

Although he was early filed by the police as a communist and his movies treated issues with a socialist angle, in the period of the Junta he was accused of being a friend of the dictatorship. His first serial in Greek television was the notorious *O Agnostos Polemos* ('The Unknown War' - 1971), which dealt with secret military activities preceding the war with the Italians in 1940. The serial ran from 1971 to 1974, its ratings went up to 83% and has definitely had a legendary status (Valoukos, 1998). The story focused on the doings of Colonel Vartanis and of course portrayed the Greek army in a

heroic way. During the military coup, this portrayal had been interpreted as propaganda by some. Others, and Foskolos himself claim that the show's setting was just an excuse to deliver harsh criticism against the Italian dictatorship of Mussolini and fascism in general, and that the Colonels were fooled by the show's military emphasis (O' Donnell, 1998). All of his other serials were always historical, for example *En Touto Nika* ('In this Symbol you Win Against All'[22]) and *Porfyra Kai Aima* ('Royal Purple and Blood') which both dealt with the Byzantine era before the Ottoman invasion and the corruption in the core of the Byzantine Empire.

There is an evident continuation between Foskolos' earlier and current work. Although structurally similar to American soaps, *Lampsi* and *KZ* are distinctively Greek, as O' Donnell remarks and have both been the most popular everyday soaps - in several occasions topping general ratings. *Lampsi* was first broadcast in 1991 and it has almost reached 2500 episodes. It is broadcast every weekday of the year before the evening news. The main characters of *Lampsi* are the Drakos family, led by Yiagos, an incredibly rich and ruthless businessman, his brother Sevos, who is a politician, and Yiagos' children. Another set of characters are the Drakos household personnel, the poor yet honest maids Persa and Effy. The rest of the main characters are supplied from the police headquarters and hence there is a strong emphasis on crime/violence storylines.

KZ is less glamorous and more low-key than *Lampsi*, dealing with more middle-class characters. The story revolves around brigadier Stathis Theoharis, the quintessential loud and proud Greek, a headstrong, temperamental and old-fashioned, but ultimately kind

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[22] The inscription that in Orthodox tradition accompanies the crucifix symbol.

cop, ready to die for his values: the family, the police force and his honor. His brother Nakos is also a cop and their sister Elektra works in a clinic where also part of the action takes place. The rest of the characters are the colleagues, family members and relations of the Theoharis.

Both soaps have tackled social issues, like abortion, drugs, rape, HIV, mental illness, prostitution, etc., but significantly they have regularly portrayed stories that have also preoccupied current affairs in Greece, like police corruption, political scandals, earthquakes, blazes, and other incidents that have shook the public. Romance is relatively downplayed, and Foskolos has often said that love is only a vehicle for his social and political critique (Loubrinis, 1999).

Foskolos is keen on comparing his shows with foreign soap operas. He ascribes his success to the intensity and strong emotions that are displayed in his works, in contrast to American soaps. In a personal communication I had with him in 1998, he admitted that he studied *BB* in order to identify the elements he should avoid, namely, 'nerveless situations, de-dramatized chit-chat, focusing scenes on trivial arguments, lack of self-sufficiency and closure in episodes'. While closure and self-sufficiency have not been his trademarks, since storylines have been lingering as long as whole seasons, it is a fact that *Lampsi* and *KZ* are anything but nerveless. Both shows are highly melodramatic: full of tension and emotional intensity, loud and delirious monologues, violence, and a close study of social problems.

Both earlier and later work by Foskolos show a preoccupation with political and social issues that few other film and television writers/directors in Greece can be said to display. Moreover, we see an emphasis on

national rhetoric. *Agnostos Polemos* and the Byzantine serials focused on periods of extreme significance for Greek national identity and ethnic consciousness. Greeks are immersed in the mythology of 1940 and the glorious Byzantine era. They were 'our finest hours', preceding national disasters and foreign occupation. The military in Foskolos' serials always represent the finest, most patriotic specimen that Greece offered in the defense against the Enemy.

Today's enemies for Foskolos are social ills: drugs, AIDS, crime, corruption, and their fighters are righteous cops. His characters 'perorate', as O'Donnell (1998:97) fittingly puts it, about honor, dignity, bravery, honesty, and love of one's family and country. In his analysis of the Greek soaps O'Donnell makes a point of how *Lampsi* and *KZ* are constructed with Greek prototypes and influences, rather than American, and he correctly points out the links between *Ypolohagos Natassa* (1970) and the two soap operas: the preoccupation with men in uniforms, lingering close-ups, melodramatic style, use of superimposition and slow motion, cinematic movement of the camera, extreme violence, intense music, as well as dialogues that are heavy on pompous words and grand delivery[23]. These are only some of the evident similarities and continuities.

Undeniably, then, the mode of address that is present in *KZ* and *Lampsi* is not something new or incongruous for the Greek audience: like his predecessors in popular fiction and film, Foskolos is attempting to produce moral tales that capture his preferred notion of Greekness. Besides his own tradition in the film industry of the fifties, another element that relates his soaps to the Greek cinema of the era is his use of old film actors,

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[23] For a flavor of Foskolos' works see the pictures in Appendix B .

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some of which had more or less disappeared from the business. There are numerous examples of actors that appear in the current soaps that evoke memories of the sixties films and his serials of the seventies.

Therefore, besides the tension in his soaps that portrays fittingly the unstable and whirlpool-like lived experience of Greek society, as O' Donnell observes, the other element that is recognized and evoked for the audience – and especially the older viewers – is a link to the past and a direct address to their national identity, based on the crystallized Greekness that is portrayed and glorified by characters like Stathis Theoharis.

At this point I would like to go back to the work of Tsourvakas (1996) and his analysis on the forms that Greek dramas (including *Lampsi*) use in order to convey dominant ideologies in each period of television's history. He identifies two sets of values which he relates to the earlier and later development of Greek television, and respectively a pre-capitalist, ethnocentric tendency versus a capitalist, Westernized one[24]. Some of the ideological values he ascribes to the traditional element are: honor and pride, yearning, meddling, clientelism, discontent, localism, and community, finding them dominant in the television serials of the first two periods, and absent from the period of privatization. In the latter phase he identifies values linked to a capitalist way of life that have become prevalent in Greek society and, as he claims, in Greek serials of today. Such values are: individuality, elitism, competitiveness, dynamism, and temperance.

Whereas I agree that some of the 'capitalist' values could be linked to the character of Yiagos in *Lampsi*, it

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[24] I find further problems with this analysis, other than those discussed here, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis to address them.

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would be a mistake to conclude that Foskolos' soaps use these values as an ideological avenue to reach their audience. The function of Yiagos, in my view, is to demonize these characteristics. Poignantly, Foskolos has stated that he wishes to end his career 'by making Yiagos Drakos realize in some terrible moment that the sole capital of humans can be found two meters below the ground' (Loubrinis, 1999:31). On the other hand, Stathis Theoharis, as well as other characters in both soaps, encapsulate all the traditional values that Tsourvakas has associated with the pre-capitalist model that characterized Greek reality before the developments of the privatization era. Stathis is the proud, conservative man who would sacrifice everything for the honor of his family name, who constantly interferes in the affairs of his family members and colleagues, works in a communal sphere of action for the good of the community, whining and yearning for better days. Perhaps the dominant ideological discourse in nineties Greek television conveys the set of Westernized, bourgeois values that Tsourvakas identifies but, if that is the case, then the appeal that *Lampsi* and *KZ* hold for the Greek viewer can be understood as a yearning for the traditional, petit-bourgeois, pre-capitalist, pre-privatization, typically Greek values that describe the lifestyle they used to know and have lost in our days of rapid economic and social development.

Hence, we can see that the Greek soap operas of the nineties interpellate their viewers on several levels: they are the continuity of a much loved tradition in popular culture, they invoke memories of an idealized past, as well as very clear definitions of Greekness. These elements are not offered by foreign soaps or other television forms in Greece today.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to locate Greek television, and Greek soap opera in particular, in a historical and social context for the reader. In order to understand the peculiar circumstances under which Greek television was set up and institutionalized, one has to go back to the times of the Ottoman occupation that stigmatized the *modus operandi* of Greek society. Clientelism, patronage, lack of industrialization and civil society prevented the rational development of a parliamentary democracy and capitalist production. In contrast, Greece is the example of a country where political and economic institutions were imported without the proper infrastructure and maturity, and as a result, while on the surface there was economic development, it was taking place at the expense of other sectors of the economy. At a social and cultural level this resulted in a social formation that has never been clearly defined and acting under class interests. Thus, there was a basic contradiction between who Greeks were and who they thought they were: an identity crisis with which they have struggled ever since they were free of the Ottoman rule.

Unsurprisingly, social and historical conditions did not favor the rational and healthy development of television in Greece. Under the stifling shadow of government control, intervention and propaganda, its administration and programming was always a matter of political interest. When deregulation took place, the anarchic state that followed was unprecedented and the audience embraced the commercialized pluralism that was offered in abundance. Nevertheless, it is still too early to make conclusive observations about the future of Greek television, as the trends are still changing.

A stable feature in television reception has been the popularity of Greek soaps. Whereas foreign soaps caused a momentum when they were first broadcast and have since declined in ratings, Greeks soaps have been steadily followed by the public. It has been argued that *Lampsi* and *Kalimera Zoi* represent continuities in popular Greek culture that are traced back to the pulp novels of the post-war period and the radio serials, as well as the Greek cinema of the fifties and sixties. The writer and director of the soaps, Nikos Foskolos can also be seen as signifying part of this past, as he has a long career in radio dramas, film, and television serials. His work has always emphasized quintessentially Greek values, has spoken in very ethnocentric, historical discourses, and addresses clearly issues that relate to Greek society. All of these features make his soaps unique in what they offer to the Greek viewer today: an island of familiar and ideological stability in the sea of changes that are taking place unremittingly.

But, besides my own understanding of what these soaps, in relation to the foreign ones, mean for their audience, the main theme of this project is how the viewers construct meaning and how they *use* this meaning in their everyday lives. In their own discourse and practices I aim to look at, in order to explore to what an extent it is empowering and/or resistant. In the chapter that follows I will give an account of the methodological aspects of my attempt.

3. Issues of methodology and method

> And I forgot the element of chance introduced by circumstances,
> calm or haste, sun or cold, dawn or dusk, the taste of
> strawberries or abandonment, the half-understood message, the
> front page of newspapers, the voice on the telephone, the most
> anodyne conversation, the most anonymous man or woman,
> everything that speaks, makes noise, passes by, touches us
> lightly, meets us head on (Sojcher, 1976:145).

Although the use of the term 'methodology' is more
frequently used than that of 'method' in current media
literature, it is important to bear in mind their difference,
namely the study of and discourse on method, as opposed to
the actual research processes that are being used (Melia, 1997).
Methodology is a sensitive issue in media research. Apart from
the epistemological debates brought about by postmodernism
and its critique of traditional theories of knowledge and
subjectivity, the field of communication research is strongly
inter-disciplinary (Press, 1996) and, hence, prone to
methodological variety and uneasiness. Several authors have
pleaded for less qualms over research methodology and more
research in itself (Morley, 1992; Press, 1996). While such
preoccupation reveals maturity and responsibility, self-
reflexivity over methodology should not reach what Morley
calls, referring to Geertz, a 'methodological and
epistemological navel gazing' (1997:191) that would impede
research.

This chapter is an account of my methodological
framework and will briefly address some problems that are
inherent in qualitative methods, which are relevant to my
methodological choices. Then I will describe how I approached
my research questions and explain how previous work has
informed the design of my own research, on which I will
elaborate, exposing the methods and techniques I used for the
collection and analysis of my data, and reflecting upon them
and their implications for the findings of this study. I will end

this chapter with short descriptions of each interview, in order to acquaint the reader with my participants.

3.1 Issues of methodology

Soap opera research has established itself in media scholarship and embodying the 'ethnographic turn', this work has used qualitative methods in investigating soap audiences. In my work I followed the same, established methodological route: qualitative, semi-structured interviews, which took place in viewers' homes[1] and lasted from one to three hours. The observational and interview data I gathered comprise the focus of my analysis. Even if my project belongs in an already established methodological tradition (Brunsdon, 1997; 2000; Geraghty, 1997), the interpretive character of such work, as well as the current debates about the status and the value of this type of audience research, calls for a justification of my methodology. I will start by considering the strongly hermeneutic character of qualitative methodologies - especially ethnography - and the resulting political and epistemological implications.

3.1.1 The ethnography of reading

The development of cultural studies and the notion of culture as the historical and temporal whole of everyday life, saw the rise of qualitative methodologies in studying the audience (Hobson, 1982; Morley, 1992; Radway, 1987). Communication theorists realized that to grasp the subtle complexities of television reception, one needed to study the whole viewing context. 'The general macro-processes can only operate through myriad micro-performances of power, none of which can be guaranteed in advance', as Morley (1992:19) writes.

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[1] Apart from a few cases which I shall indicate.

Therefore, in order to study the 'myriad' filaments of power that are woven in the everyday life of media consumers, one has to approach them and obtain their own accounts of their relationship to the media technologies. When dealing with complex theoretical concepts no survey questionnaire can ever be tailor-made to fit the needs of the research and produce knowledge close to the viewers' opinions and narratives of media consumption (Schrøder, 2000). One would only obtain boxed-in responses, pre-constructed by the researcher that would constrict the respondent's own voice[2]. Ang (1996a) has pointed out that such methods, smacking of positivist claims, objectify the audience and treat it as a quantifiable entity that can generate scientific truths, which can ultimately be used by the industry at the consumers' expense[3].

In search of a methodology that would do justice to the 'ever-evolving kaleidoscope of daily life and the way in which the media are integrated and implicated within it' (Radway, 1988:366), audience researchers turned to ethnographic approaches. Looking at the gestalt of media consumption and its intricate role in people's everyday life, media ethnographies can capture the articulation of micro- and macro- sociological processes taking place in such contexts (Ang, 1991; Morley, 1996; Radway, 1996; Drotner, 1994; Silverstone, 1996), since the local sites of ethnographic study are embedded in larger systems of power relations. Finally, ethnography embodies epistemological and political considerations about audiences which reflect the principles of the cultural studies paradigm (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Ang, 1991; Radway, 1988). Evidently, the first cultural studies projects which appropriated

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[2] 'I would far rather read a good survey than a bad ethnography (and vice versa)' says Morley (1992:13-14), and I agree that questionnaires and surveys are useful methods in their own light. In some cases, one can effectively combine both qualitative and quantitative elements in audience research, as Schrøder (2000) maintains.

[3] This comment, however, applies to any audience study, indicating the political stakes of research practice.

ethnographic methods were part of the early work on subcultures by the CCCS, conducted by Hebdidge, Cohen, Willis, and others (Lull, 1990). This early tradition, which required from the researcher to come into direct contact with the 'object' of study through participant observation and in-depth interviewing, gave rise to the first ethnographic audience studies of the early '80's by Hobson (1982) and Morley (1987).

Geraghty (1997) rightly marks that the term ethnography is contested because of the divergence between its practice by anthropologists, who developed and used it to study foreign cultures by immersing themselves into them for long periods of time (Altheide & Johnson, 1994), and media researchers, whose methodology differs in important ways. While most audience studies proclaim an ethnographic approach or intention, few instances could be paralleled to the anthropological standards of ethnographic practices (Geraghty, 1997; Gray, 1992; Jankowski & Wester, 1991; Press, 1996; Drotner, 1994). Some of the main diversions are the length of the actual fieldwork, the number of different methods used, the familiarity and proximity of the research subjects in audience studies, and also the breadth of the analysis. Nevertheless, media ethnographies should not be evaluated by measures used in other social sciences, Alasuutari claims, since media researchers possess the 'local knowledge' of their object of study and do not need to immerse themselves in the culture under study (1999:8). As media consumers themselves, their fieldwork has begun long before the decision to embark on a research project.

However, the methodological problems raised by ethnographic research practices go further and have preoccupied the field of media studies, as well as most humanistic and social research circles (Alasuutari, 1995; Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). These problems have been indeed taken on by numerous

authors (Ang, 1996a; 1996b; Drotner, 1994; Geraghty, 1997; Morley, 1992; 1996; 1997; Press, 1996; Radway, 1996) and although I cannot cover them in detail, I will address the ones relevant to my research, starting from the central problem of interpretation.

3.1.2 Interpretation of qualitative data

Commenting on her research about women's domestic use of VCR technology, Gray indicates that her empirical findings depend on 'double interpretation':

> The first one is the interpretation which the women bring to their own experience, and the one which they share with me, whilst the second is the interpretation I make of what they say (1992:33).

Gray adds that both interpretations relied on the subject positions and the discourses that she and her informants have had access to. These positions may vary widely, depending on social and historical contingencies, so one must always bear in mind that the knowledge produced from such research practices is deeply situated and must be contextualized. In this regard, Ang (1996b) reminds us that the researcher must not only highlight the context of media consumption, but also the context of the 'production of ethnographic knowledge', as well as the fact that ethnography should ultimately be thought of as another way of 'storytelling' (254-255). This logic does not underestimate the quality or validity of ethnographic work but it strips it of claims of realist knowledge and 'scientific' objectivity.

Most audience researchers have been reflexive about the epistemological status of their qualitative data (Hermes, 1995; Hobson, 1982; Jenkins, 1992; Press, 1991; Radway, 1987; 1988; Seiter, 1990; Seiter *et al.*, 1989). In most cases, like Gray, they acknowledge their active role in the research process, which involves a social and cultural exchange between

researcher and participants, and whose result is 'as much a product of this social dynamic as it is a product of accurate accounts and replies' (Fontana & Frey, 2000:647). This kind of reflexivity has been encouraged by Ang (1996b) and Radway (1996) as a way to refine methodological practice, but it cannot always compensate for problems of validity.

3.1.3 Validity of qualitative data

In comparison with quantitative methods of studying audiences, qualitative work is said to yield more valid results, because participants have a more active role in setting the research agenda and speaking their own voices – not being confined by standardized procedures and imposed discursive categories (Schrøder, 1999). On the other hand, because of its reliance on interpretation, qualitative research has not been deemed to be reliable. Authenticity, however, is more important than reliability for such work, the aim being to obtain input that reflects participants' experiences and understanding of their social reality (Alasuutari, 1995; Silverman, 1993).

This kind of validity and authenticity, though, cannot be guaranteed. In addition to the researcher, actively shaping the research process in several ways, the epistemological status of the interview data (the empirical material for most audience studies) should also be addressed. As several authors point out (Alasuutari, 1995; Ang, 1989; Geraghty, 1997), interview responses must not be treated like natural facts: it is unlikely that the interview will echo the research questions. One will not ask directly the participants whether, for example, they are active or resistant in their relationship to the media: this will be interpreted through their accounts, since 'interview responses cannot constitute in themselves an argument; they have to be interpreted and set against other material' (Geraghty, 1997:155). This point is a legitimate concern for

audience researchers, for whom the presentation of interview extracts – which have been selected, edited and positioned in quite a determined way – constitutes the basic means of demonstrating the validity and truthfulness of their arguments. There is a tendency for 'ethnographic data to be used unproblematically, as a form of illustration that somehow speaks for itself', notes Buckingham (1993:205). Discussing their ethnographic data, Fiske and Dawson rightly argue that:

> interpretation is a structural and theoretical process... Indeed the choice of these data as worthy of study is a theoretically and politically informed choice. So, too, is the process of transcribing the data into words (1996:313).

Both Schrøder (2000) and Seiter (1990) have referred to the problematic status of interview extracts which, having undergone several levels of mediation by the researcher, cannot constitute a perfect measure either of validity (in that they do not necessarily represent a real phenomenon), or reliability (in that another interpreter could make of them something entirely divergent). Their treatment is ultimately a theoretical and political choice, as Fiske and Dawson argue.

As Alasuutari (1995) points out, it is very hard to check interview data against other sources. Hence, the truthfulness of such data is dubious, and indeed 'the results [have] to be taken on trust' (Schrøder, 2000:45). However, data authenticity would be at stake in any research method. At least, by means of qualitative, in-depth interviewing, and given the establishment of good rapport between researcher and informant (Fontana & Frey, 2000), one probes into the discursive tools used by the interviewee to construct his/her account. In the words of Morley:

> At least through my verbal responses, you begin to get some access to the kind of language, the criteria of distinction and the types of categorizations through which I construct my (conscious) world... The interview method, then, is to be defended... not simply for the access it gives to the respondents' conscious opinions... but also for the access that it gives to the linguistic terms and categories... through which the respondents

construct their worlds and their own understanding of their activities (1992:181).

Morley, thus, considers interview data not only as a source of information concerning social phenomena, but as a means of revealing the interpretive process taking place at the discursive level of the interview. In this regard, the interview becomes a resource in itself through which the researcher tries to identify the linguistic repertoires upon which the respondent constructs her or his discourse (Seale, 1998).

Issues of self presentation are relevant here, since for many participants the research process appears as a chance, or pressure, to reflect a positive self image, moral reputation, or dominant social role, and thus to present deliberately the sort of account they consider desirable (Alasuutari, 1995; Buckingham, 1993; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Seale, 1998; Seiter, 1990). The contradictions, fractures, incoherencies, and inconsistencies that come up in qualitative data should, thus, be problematized by the researcher and highlighted in their analysis: 'By foregrounding conflict, the ethnographer might more effectively invite judgment, evaluation, even disagreement with his or her self-characterization and interpretations' (Radway, 1996:241). In this way, also, the researcher somewhat shifts the balance in the power relations, embedded in the hermeneutic character of qualitative research.

3.1.4 The politics of interpretation

'To advance an interpretation is to insert it into a network of power relations', writes Ang (1989:105). The research process, regardless of how unstructured or standardized it is, can never be a natural encounter - even when it takes place as such (Dingwall, 1995). The researcher has an agenda, a purpose, a procedure in mind, and the participant is expected to conform with it and adjust her/his communication to the demands of the situation. Apart from the

self-interest that is inscribed in ethnographic relations (Radway, 1996), one has to consider the asymmetry of power that can be quite salient, especially when one thinks about gender, age, class, race or ethnicity difference. Such asymmetries can undermine the rapport and the quality of communication between researcher and participants and there are several examples in the literature that have problematized this issue (Dinsmore, 1997; Gray, 1992; Hermes, 1995; Seiter *et al.*, 1989; Seiter, 1990)[4].

Research politics do not just undermine the 'objectivity' and validity of one's methods, but are also an issue of personal ethics and intellectual commitment. The partiality and incompleteness of discursively produced knowledge puts the researcher who generates it in a position of political and ethical responsibility. Without the security blanket of validity and reliability (the certainty that the findings reflect facts that correspond to social reality), the role of the researcher in the production of this knowledge is more salient and accountable. In this respect, reflexivity is not just about 'soul cleansing by researchers of problematic feelings and sticky situations in the field' (Fontana & Frey, 2000:661), but a necessary measure of the quality and honesty of interpretation and representation. As Becker has argued, 'the question is not whether we should take sides, since we inevitably will, but rather whose side we are on' (quoted in Jankowski & Wester, 1991:56).

3.1.5 Generalization vs. 'particularism'

This discussion cannot end with a simple conclusion: the problems I mentioned highlight important questions concerning the generalizability, representativeness, and relevance of qualitative, and especially ethnographic studies. In the light of

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[4] Asymmetries can also have a facilitating role, as Dinsmore (1997) noted in her research with videotape collectors, while shared cultural resources, e.g., feminine discourse, can be used to smooth out class differences, according to Seiter *et al.* (1989).

those problems, several cultural studies scholars have pleaded for 'radical contextualism' and methodological situationalism (Ang, 1996b:258), 'methodological openness' (Silverstone, 1996:293), and 'a reworked ethnography... [that] would... begin with the everyday, not with texts... it would start with historical individuals, but it would not assume that their unique individuality persisted throughout myriad activities unchanged' (Radway, 1996:245).

The problem with such meta-methodological statements is that they have little heuristic value. Such diffused and vague strategies of research undermine the basic principles of ethnographic study (Press, 1996). While contextualization and sociological situationalism are definitely needed for the production of workable and challenging research, to eliminate any kind of categorization or boundary in subjective experience would create further problems in the practice of qualitative audience studies. A complete 'open-mindedness' as to the factors that most likely explain our data could mean a collapse of critical social analysis, which depends on categorization (Morley, 1992). Others, like Schrøder, maintain that such 'theoretical and methodological orthodoxy of diffuseness... [is] writing the audience as well as the media out of reality, into the pure realm of situational discourses' (1999:47-48). Arguing against Ang and her insistence on particularism and lack of generalization, he warns that if audience research 'wishes to enter into a dialogue with people (policy makers, other media researchers as well as ordinary citizens) who do not understand, let alone share, the post-structuralist vision of endlessly nomadic subjectivities' (*ibid.*), then some sort of generalizations have to be made.

The small number of participants, the local contexts of research, and the interpretive character of the analysis do not prompt generalization of findings to larger scales and in this light, contextualism and caution are needed, but not always

displayed. As Geraghty notes, 'work with television audiences is used to draw conclusions well beyond the boundary of their study' (1997:155), citing several examples in previous literature. Attention to the object of study and consideration of the sample size should therefore be highlighted. There can be a balance between a systematic organization of the data and a qualitative depth in analysis, and usually patterns, clusters, and differences in the data can be discerned and related to a theoretical framework that will support one's approach and findings. The role of theory is crucial in this respect:

> The relationship among... specific data... is only made significant by its insertion into a macrotheoretical understanding of the social order and its class relations... Ethnographic data can never have the property of objective reality... There is real value in empirical data that put flesh on a theoretical skeleton and show how a macrotheory can be revealed in a particular analysis (Fiske & Dawson, 1996:313).

Alasuutari (1995) stresses that in qualitative work we are not trying to prove the existence of a phenomenon, but to explain and clarify its function. Thus, generalization should not be a problem for qualitative research: the term is not even relevant in this context. The aim is not to come up with totalizing laws and regularities that govern human behavior and social processes. On the other hand what should be emphasized is 'how the analysis relates to things beyond the material at hand... As far as generalization to a population is concerned, *extrapolation* better captures the typical procedure in qualitative research' (Alasuutari, 1995:156-157). On a broader note, *all* empirical knowledge is determined by representation and interpretation, positioned according to political interests, social and historical factors, conditions of chance or even individual biochemical reactions. These contingencies will underscore any generalization of any type of research. However, 'none of this, in principle, vitiates the need for empirical work and for argument founded on the assessment of empirical evidence' (Morley, 1992:179). As Ang (1996a)

argues, audience research cannot tell us comprehensive truths about the audience but at least it will explicate some of the social and cultural implications of living in such a media saturated world.

3.2 Issues of method

The purpose of my research has been to investigate the ways in which Greeks watch, understand, take pleasure in, and use local and foreign soap operas; the extent to which these responses and practices are resistant; and finally, the role of gender, social and historical background, and cultural identity, in the articulation of such practices. I will begin by tracing within this project my 'autobiographical' marks. Next, I will discuss and justify the analytical categories through which I approached my object of study, and in the following sections I will present the specific techniques I used in the collection and analysis of the data.

3.2.1 Self-positioning

Like other women who have researched soap opera, I have been a keen soap opera viewer since my late teens in Greece. It was my mother who initiated me in the comfort zone of *The Young and the Restless*, a typical American soap with the downplayed, daytime sort of glamour that middle-class viewers like my brother and I would quite enjoy after lunch.

The decision to study soap opera audiences was drawn out of my experience of being a fan and relating to other fans. The wide array of pleasures and social processes that were being recreated in my relationship to other people, and the way they would feed or contradict each other, had always struck me. The relevant literature on soap opera audiences inspired the wish to examine soap opera viewership at a scholarly level. Hence, I agree with Ang that ethnographic work is 'a hermeneutic ambition to provide representations that allows us to better

understand other people's as well as our own lives'
(1996b:255). In the same vein, Gray wrote 'I am a woman in
my study' (1992:135) implying that sharing the same gendered
experiences put her in a position to connect with her
respondents and enrich her research. In many audience studies,
especially in cases of particular genres and texts, the
researcher comes forward as a fan (Ang, 1985; Brown, 1994;
Jenkins, 1992; Seiter *et al.*, 1989). This can have several
implications for the role of the researcher.

Being a soap opera fan and approaching my participants as
such, was a valuable means of rapport and a shared symbolic
ground that served both in my understanding of their accounts
and as a buffer when our different social roles produced
divergent perspectives in a sample that was quite
heterogeneous in terms of age, social class, gender and
occupation. The danger of being too close to my object of
study and thus losing any critical perspective was always a
preoccupation. Drawing on my theoretical background, treating
the interview data as texts, and reflecting on my processes of
interpretation and analysis helped me to distance myself from
the practices I studied. I did share certain feelings and
experiences with my participants, but there were also several
sources of difference between us that certainly gave rise to
multidimensional power relations, to which I will return below.

My research is not an ethnography of soap opera fans in
the anthropological sense of the term. The bulk of my data
comes from semi-structured, in-depth interviews that I
conducted. As a rule, I gained access to fans' homes, and in
many cases I met their families, shared food, watched soaps
and soap related material, and had long conversations which
had nothing to do with soaps. The contextual data that I gained
in these instances was immensely valuable for the
understanding and contextualization of the viewers' discourse.
With some participants, being close to their age, I developed

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social relationships and spent with them much time even beyond fieldwork. In these cases the term ethnography is fitting because I took part in their soap opera practices from their perspective and gained feedback that exceeded the interview data. However, as this did not happen with all the participants, I would call my study 'ethnographically informed' rather than *bona fide* ethnography.

3.2.2 The analytic categories

To study the phenomenon of resistance in soap opera consumption, I chose to look at the role of gender, class, age, and ethnic origin of the program. I am aware that the analytic practice of such categorization is criticized by certain authors (Ang, 1996b; Ang & Hermes, 1991; Radway, 1988), but I believe that it is necessary to look at those 'traditional' categories if we are to refine polemical concepts like resistance and empowerment. Even if academic discourses are beyond such categories in favor of more 'nomadic' subjectivities, one cannot deny that social and ideological institutions still interpellate their subjects via such categories.

Gender difference emerged as an organizing principle in my thesis relatively late. I did not intend to study male fans of soap opera: my perspective was based on the concept of women's resistance to patriarchal ideology, in the way it had been argued by authors like Fiske (1987), Seiter *et al.* (1989), Lee and Cho (1990), and notably Brown (1994), who looked particularly at fans' discourse. The decision came about when the advertisement I had placed in two TV magazines got a surprisingly high response rate by male soap fans. This was unexpected but intriguing because it prompted me to explore an uncharted territory in audience research. Hermes (1995) had observed tendencies of ironic and camp readings by gay readers of gossip magazines, but they were not a main feature in her study. Finch (1986) had looked at the camp readings and

uses of *Dynasty* in British gay culture, but his approach was not audience-centered. Gender and genre were problematized by Morley (1987) and Gray (1992), who highlighted masculine and feminine ways of watching television – not in essentialist but in socially determined ways. The male viewer, though, had not received particular attention, especially as a subject of 'feminine' texts, and in Gray's study men were represented through their wives' accounts. Therefore, the inclusion of men viewers had the exploratory aim of understanding a largely unrecognized and ignored issue, as well as the analytic purpose to investigate whether resistant and/or ironic and playful readings are gender specific responses.

Compared to gender, class is a much harder category to establish. Press (1991) also outlines her difficulty in demarcating between middle and working class viewers. Especially in the case of women, she reports, it is not clear whether one should categorize them based on their husbands' or their parents' social class, profession, or income. Press went along with 'traditional sociological measures' (1991:184), looking at the husband's, father's and the woman's occupation, as well as education. In my case, class was even harder to define, since (as discussed in chapter 2) Greek society is not as class ridden as British society, where researchers have seemed comfortable with the class positions of their respondents (Gray, 1992; Hermes, 1995; Morley, 1992). Class is more or less a taboo in Greece and it would be awkward to refer to someone's class position in a social, everyday context. Secondly, in the questionnaire that participants filled out as a demographic information resource, I noticed that many tended to downgrade their income[5], so it could not be trusted on its own as a valid measure. Hence, I also took into account occupational status (blue collar jobs vs. professionals) and

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[5] I observed that with several informants with whom I was familiar through personal acquaintance and had thus an idea of their financial situation.

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educational qualifications. With viewers who were not working, I considered their husband's or their father's occupation. Some cases were harder to define and there I used my own impression concerning the participants' education, housing, neighborhood, lifestyle, language, and so on. I realize that this is quite an impressionist move, but the differences were subtle, as such cases would usually range between lower-middle class and working-class.

Age is a category that cultural studies have thoroughly ignored (Couldry, 2000). Groups of older people have been overshadowed by the emphasis on youth subcultures, fans, or young women, who have attracted a great deal of scholarly attention. Hobson (1982) was among the first to address the figure of the older viewer, who together with the housewife, was marginalized as a keen soap opera fan, while Tulloch (1990) and Press (1991) have also looked at aged viewers and their consumption of television drama. I was very interested to find out how age interplayed with other categories, so I made sure to balance my sample between younger and older viewers which I divided in three age groups (see Table 4.1 in the next chapter). Television in Greece does not date further back than thirty years, so it is a commodity with very different meanings for older and younger viewers. In my organization of the analysis, the theme of age runs across the remaining categories because its role was articulated at different levels, as it will be demonstrated in chapters 5, 6, and 7.

To examine the role of cultural identity in soap reception, I used different means from Liebes and Katz's (1990) *Dallas* project. Whereas they studied cross-cultural reception by looking at how different ethnic groups interpreted one foreign text, I wanted to compare the difference between foreign and domestic texts in the reception patterns, interpretations and practices displayed by their viewers. Kreutzner and Seiter (1991), in comparing German and American drama, stress that

soaps are culturally specific in their progressive possibilities, and O'Donnell (1998), having studied soap operas around Europe, has argued that soap texts are distinctive to the culture that produces them and suggests that their hegemonic role is embedded in the historical and social conditions of their production. Schrøder's (1988) study was also cross-cultural and he did not compare the *Dynasty* data against a domestic text, although many of his respondents identified several differences between watching domestic dramas and *Dynasty*. The empirical investigation of the positions that foreign and domestic texts offer to their audiences would reveal the significance of culturally specific repertoires (national identity) in the consumption of soap opera. In this light, the respondents were fans of daytime American soap operas [*The Bold and the Beautiful (BB), The Young and the Restless (YR), Days of our Lives (DOOL), Sunset Beach (SB)*], the prime-time American soap *Beverly Hills 90210 (BH 90210)*, the Mexican telenovela *Marimar*, and two Greek soap operas, *Lampsi* and *Kalimera Zoi (KZ)*[6].

   This approach could be criticized as reductionist (Ang & Hermes, 1996), since I 'dissect' the audience in specific categories and texts, in opposition to post-modern ideals, but even if methodological categories are *par excellence* reductionist (Morley, 1992), it does not follow that my interpretation should be reductionist or inflexible. I wholeheartedly agree with Stuart Hall's proposition in the preface to Morley's *Family Television* that 'we are all in our heads different audiences at once' (1987:10) and that different ways of viewing television have different 'saliences' (*ibid.*), at different times, for different people. Nevertheless, I do not

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[6] The thesis does not offer a textual account on these soaps, so I rely on the soap literacy of my readers when I refer to their storylines and textual elements. *BB, SB,* and *BH 90210* have been broadcast on British terrestrial television. For a good analysis on the Greek soaps see O'Donnell, 1997.

take this formulation to mean, as Hermes argues, that 'texts do not produce subjectivities' (1993:493). These 'differences' are to some extent constructed by several agents: societal, textual, and of course individual, as the viewer negotiates these forces in order to satisfy his/her needs, pleasures, and interests. By looking into the different social formations of audiences and how they are articulated in local contexts of cultural power we will understand their diversity, which cultural studies theorists have intensely argued for, but often failed to formulate in tangible terms. Gray has also taken issue with such criticisms about her categorization of gender in domestic use of VCR technology and argues that

> as long as our use of categories and indeed theoretical frameworks is sensitive to the particular research context, to our political agenda and our research practice, the social categories can and must allow us to say something about the wider social and cultural networks of power (1992:30-31).

3.2.3 The participants: fans, viewers, friends and strangers

Having shown how the research questions of my thesis reflect on its design, I will now discuss how I located the informants[7], what were the criteria for their participation, and a brief overview of the sample demographics.

The distinction between fan and viewer is hard to establish in the Greek context. Soap opera fanship in Greece is not organized; there are no fan clubs or special publications in the press. Even the word 'fan' does not have an appropriate translation in the Greek language that captures television fandom[8]. Whereas the English 'fan' is relatively dissociated

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[7] See Appendix A for a schematic representation of the 'snowballing' process.
[8] 'Fan' has several meanings in Greek: 'thavmastis', or admirer, connoting a personalized object of fandom, i.e., an actress or a music band, 'latris', which means adorer or lover, and has a 'high culture' connotation, and finally 'opados' which means follower and is mostly used in relation to sports and political parties (Oxford English-Greek Dictionary, 1987). Younger people use the English term frequently, so with some participants I used the English term.

from its 'fanatic' etymological root, in Greek it has to be juxtaposed to a predicate. One would have to say 'fanatic soap opera viewer', an awkward phrase that few soap fans in Greece would use. Hence, a primary problem I faced when selecting the participants was their enunciation. I decided to base my selection on more descriptive terms, so I constructed a questionnaire, which was sent out or given to prospective participants. The aim of the questionnaire (available in Appendix A) was to identify the viewing history, preferences, and general practices of participants, as well as to establish demographic characteristics that were important for the study.

Having acknowledged this difficulty, I want to warn the reader that my use of the word 'fan' does not convey institutionalized fandom. My participants have an affective bond with their shows and watching soaps is an investment for them; for some, definitely, more than others. Soap opera fanship means different things to different people: it is something I will problematize in this thesis. Nevertheless, what is common between all of my participants is the experience of pleasure through soap watching; a meaningful pleasure that they would not derive from another source (at the time of the study) and at this level their media use acquires meaning, in contrast to Hermes' (1993; 1995) view about the fallacy of meaningfulness in media consumption. Hence, the assumptions based on this study reflect 'invested' soap opera consumption, and not what Buckingham calls a 'routinised... cultural activity' (1993:205), which merely helps the time pass. This is important to keep in mind because audience studies are not always clear about their criteria of participant selection. It is inevitable that findings will depend on the investment of the audience towards the media product that is under question (Barker & Brooks, 1998; Schrøder, 2000)[9].

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[9] Hence the need for some degree of specification and categorization when we study media consumption. In saturating a wide range of texts

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I interviewed in total 35 participants (16 men and 19 women), all living in Athens, except from one young woman from the island of Lesvos who was staying with relatives at the time. They had all watched their favorite soap for at least two years, regularly, and although it was not necessary to be a fan of both Greek *and* foreign soaps, a familiarity with both was important, since I wanted to explore the different responses towards domestic and foreign soaps.

I used several techniques in order to locate informants. I started out with an advertisement that appeared in a TV supplement of a Sunday edition and the TV pages of a weekday edition of two widely read tabloids[10]. Both adverts were placed on the soap opera section and read as follows:

> Do you like watching soap operas like *Lampsi* or *The Bold and the Beautiful*? Do you enjoy talking about them? As a researcher from the University of London I would be very interested to hear from you.
> Please call... or you can write...

I received 15 responses, 8 of which were by men. Of the questionnaires that I mailed to them, only six came back filled out correctly. Of those six respondents only four were ultimately interviewed (two men and two women) because the other two were living outside Athens and I could not afford the time or the expenses to travel.

Another pool of participants was located through a family friend, Liza Karoutzou, who introduced me to several friends and neighbors of hers who were keen soap viewers and willing to participate. Other friends of mine also recruited for me, and I approached several people from my own social circle, knowing well their history as soap fans, while advertising my

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and activities in a general pool of media consumption we risk 'collapsing the distinctions between them', as Buckingham (1993:209) argues.
[10] *TV Ethnos,* January 11-17, 1998; *I Apogeumatini,* January 15, 1998; January 16, 1998; December 17, 1998.

thesis at every chance in case I could find, as Geraghty fittingly puts it, 'willing victims' (1997:144).

Being a fan made it easier to recruit participants because I approached them on an equal basis. I witnessed a great deal of self-defensiveness from many interviewees, but as soon as my own fanship was established, it really smoothed up the conversation. Jenkins (1992) in his study of television fan cultures acknowledged his dual role as a fan and academic researcher, approaching his object of study through both perspectives. He admitted that his identity as a fan 'color[ed]' : his writings about fandom (5), but the danger of over-identifying with his object of study would not necessarily be eliminated by an assumed stance of objectivity. I agree with his position, as well as his observation that the understanding and trust that his fandom generated in the research process were valuable assets.

Furthermore, Jenkins studied a particular kind of institutionalized fan subculture and his project was very much about science fiction fanship, and what it means to belong in such a subculture. My study is not strictly about fanship, but about the meaning and appropriation of soap opera in fans' everyday life and the possibility of resistance in their relationship to the programs and other fans. My aim was neither a redemption nor a crusade: the narrative I produced is rather a negotiation of the encounter between my position (as researcher and fan — but also as woman, feminist, Greek, and middle-class) and that of my participants. Fanship is a commonality between us, but there are other constituents that also colored our exchange, and it is this multidimensional account that I tried to capture.

Finally, the fact that some of my participants were already familiar to me, or even good friends[11], is something I want to address. In several audience studies the participants are related

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[11] These cases are indicated in section 3.4.

to the researcher. Jenkins (1992) for example, took advantage of his fan network and one of his key informants was his partner. Hermes (1995) dedicated a section of her book about women's magazines to the interview she conducted with her mother. More recently, Brunsdon (2000) based her study of soap opera criticism and its complex relation to the feminist position on interviews with well known scholars whom she chose because they were friends, producing thus an autobiographical account in support of her project.

My own work is not entirely autobiographical, so the problem is more relevant to the interpretation and analysis of the interviews with people with whom I already shared common experiences and indeed, soap opera references. The common ground between me and those participants - as opposed to those I met during the research process - made their account more recognizable, less unfamiliar and less prone to misunderstanding or miscommunication; it ensured a source of contextual information that facilitated certain interpretations and guaranteed a level of genuineness (they would not dare to lie!). This study would have been very different and one-sided had it been *based* on friends and acquaintances. On the contrary, I tried to include in my sample people from very different backgrounds. Friends and acquaintances offered a rich contextual and communicative basis, which surely enhanced some aspects of interviewing. I would stress, however, that my interpretation of the interviews was never based on individual differences or psychological traits, but on social formations and specific practices, communicated to me via the interview. Moreover, the fact that some interviews yield different degrees and qualities of rapport holds irrespective of whether the participant is familiar to the researcher. Interviews are social situations and it is inevitable that some participants will be less liked than others and that some views will be closer to ours. These conditions do not

necessarily apply only to interviews with friends or acquaintances (see also Seiter, 1990).

3.2.4 The interviews

I conducted 25 interviews, during three periods: April 1998, October-December 1998, July-September 1999. The first three were conducted as pilots, in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the topic guide, but as the method worked well I decided to include them in my data. Most interviews were individual, while some were conducted with groups of friends or family members. Three of the people who answered the advertisement asked me to interview them in cafés and, although I would rather visit their homes, I accepted their request because I wanted them to feel comfortable. The interviews lasted from one to three hours and were accompanied by at least 30 minutes of casual conversation about their lifestyles and interests, or anything else that came up. All the respondents who welcomed me in their homes offered me beverages or things to eat, and made me feel very comfortable. Before, during, and after the interview I would write in a notebook anything that struck me as important about the participant, the conversation, or the surroundings.

The interviews were semi-structured. I followed a topic guide (see Appendix A) with questions and themes that interested me, without following a pre-set order and maintaining a natural, conversational flow throughout the interview. After a few interviews, I knew by heart these topics and I rarely used the guide. I wanted the participants to feel free to bring up any issue that interested them and to pursue it for as long as they wanted. Only when I felt that we had completely strayed away from the topic, I returned to something relevant. The pace and tone would be relaxed, resembling an informal, friendly chat. I did not hold back my knowledge and opinions concerning soap stories and that was

quite helpful in establishing rapport. When the participant referred to an issue critical to the research questions my role would be restrained to probing casually for additional input as I did not want to reinforce particular themes.

Speaking for myself, the interviews were enjoyable and I think that all the participants would agree. In all cases I managed to establish trust and rapport, which ranged from satisfactory to a sense of real connection with some viewers. All shared with me interesting stories, some of which were funny and others moving, soap related or not. In the same way that Gray (1992) describes her experience of the stories that her interviewees shared with her, I was also taken by the degree to which people can open up and share intimate narratives about their lives with someone they had just met.

Apart from the shared interest in soaps, the good rapport was due to the power relations involved. I agree with Dinsmore (1997) that in my case, too, the power balance shifted towards the side of the participants. My status as a PhD student and not professional academic, my youthful appearance and casual attire gave me the aura of 'the girl next door' who should be helped, assisted, and protected. I was not an expert but someone who needed them and their insight on soaps. I got the sense that the experience of the interview validated and empowered them. When other family members were around I would be proudly introduced as the lady/girl/student 'who came to interview me about *YR*'. Many told me that they had not realized that soap operas could make such an interesting subject of conversation, while others urged me to contact them when the thesis was finished with the 'results'[12].

I did not have problems establishing rapport with men participants, as Hermes (1995) did, being concerned that it might come across as flirtation. Interviews with women tended

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[12] I discussed some interpretations with one participant, and got positive feedback. I have not been able to do this with others but may do so in using this research further.

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to last longer and be more intimate, but male participants also seemed quite casual and comfortable. Especially older men, I think, saw me as a grand-daughter to whom they could tell stories, and I encouraged that image of myself. Dinsmore (1997) and Seiter *et al.* (1989) also discuss a pragmatist approach in power relations, in that they used certain characteristics to empower the interviewees.

All the interviews were done in Greek, and an important methodological decision was to analyze them in Greek, too. One of the reasons was that to translate forty hours of dialogue in English would cost me too much time, but most importantly, it would also undermine the immediacy I enjoyed with the Greek text, being the object of study in my native language. In order to make the most of the discursive element of the interviews I decided to analyze them in my first language and thus, register every expression, connotation, and figure of speech as authentically as I could. Having coded the interviews, and progressed with working hypotheses and typologies, I translated in English the extracts I was going to use in my writings, doing my best to convey the sense that those statements would carry in Greek[13].

3.2.5 Analysis of the interview material

Despite the popularity of qualitative methods, few researchers provide information on analyzing the textual material they faced after the data collection process. It is also true that there is a lack of sophisticated and systematic analytic tools when it comes to qualitative analysis (Bryman & Burgess, 1994; Silverman, 1993; Schrøder, 2000). In addressing her method of analysis, Brunsdon offers a defense of her own 'intuition', which together with her training and

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[13] I translated four interviews before reaching this decision, but I concluded that I would gain more by analyzing them in their original language. Unedited extracts from these translations can be found in Appendix A.

knowledge, render her a 'skilled reader as well as a participant' (2000:94). I cannot deny the fact that I too, used my own intuition and cultural experience in trying to make sense of my data. The theoretical background presented in Chapter 1 was also a prominent screen on which I projected fragments of the data, which I then tried to link and integrate into a larger picture. My analysis did not yield unified and conclusive results, as the reader will find out, and there were several contradicting pieces of evidence that defied my interpretive frameworks. I make a point of disclosing such instances and relating them to the less 'unruly' elements.

To assist me with the difficult task of the coding and the analysis I used the N-VIVO software package. N-VIVO offers a flexible coding tool, with which one can code chunks of the text under nodes that s/he creates either beforehand, or during coding[14]. The nodes can be later organized into hierarchical trees or cases and both nodes and documents (interviews and memos) can be given attributes (like gender, age, etc.). As a result, it is easy and fast to retrieve a code from any text and link it with a certain categorical attribute. The memo option was also quite useful since one could link memos to as many codes and documents as necessary and this enables the researcher to make more abstract observations concerning her/his inferences (Hughes, 1994). Effectively, computer assisted analysis is tidier and less menial but one still has to call the shots, by coding the data and ultimately generating some patterns that can explain it (Alasuutari, 1995; Schrøder, 1999).

First of all, I should stress that I used the interviews both as resources and as 'topics' (Seale, 1998), that is, I paid attention both to what was being said and *how*, by looking at the context in which themes where brought up, the choice of

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[14] A list with all the nodes I made while analysing the interviews can be found in Appendix A.

vocabulary, repetitions of words, contradictions, etc. (Brunsdon, 2000; Bryman & Burgess 1994, Seale 1998). The topics that were particularly interesting to me during the interview were:

- Pleasure
- Talking about the soap
- Social practices related to the soap
- Political discourse
- National discourse
- Recognition of aesthetic and narrative conventions
- Recognition of ideological themes
- Context of viewing – viewing practices

I first organized my data under these thematic networks and through continuous scrutiny several sub-themes were grouped under those networks.

Regarding the problems of validity, discussed in section 3.1.3, I must reinstate that I did not treat the viewers' responses as absolute truths. I was well aware that they were accounts mediated by several layers of power relations. I was alert for corroborating elements, or contradictions and slips that would point to a different perspective, but I never assumed so without ample empirical evidence, illustrated by examples. Several times, participants admitted constructing a favorable identity, and this is something I address in the analysis. Clearly, in qualitative interviewing one has to take the data on trust, as Schrøder (2000) says. It is hard to validate the respondents' accounts, but at least the knowledge one gains stems out of the discursive framework chosen by the audience, and this is invaluable. Hence, in my analysis, I treated answers not only as sources of information, but as texts which are ideological in themselves, which convey meaning at different levels, and should be analyzed as such.

In presenting my findings I make extensive use of the respondents' voice, in order to demonstrate my arguments and

because I want them to come alive through these pages. I should note that some extracts are used in several places throughout the thesis, but each time I approach them through a different angle[15] and the emphasis is on another issue that is evident in the viewer's statement. Another note concerning interview extracts is their referencing, which complies with the NVIVO system of paragraphing. Hence, the number next to the participants' names refers to the paragraph of the software document that this statement can be traced. For economical reasons I have edited the extracts. Where I have cut more than one sentence I indicate so by dots in brackets ([...]), while less text is signified by dots. My own inserted comments appear in brackets, in italics, in order to provide some extra information.

An important component of the analysis was the construction of a typology, which in this case was data-generated, or bottom-up, if you want. Typologies are useful according to Bryman and Burgess 'in the identification of differences in the data and can help with the elucidation of relationships among concepts' (1994:7). The categories that emerged were built upon commonalities and distinctions among the participants' accounts and revealed the major patterns of the data. They reflect 'viewing positions' that are dominant in certain contexts and can be negotiated in others: they comprise the building blocks in my analysis and they will be analyzed in the next chapter.

3.3 Conclusion

In designing and carrying out my research I faced several methodological issues that relate to qualitative methods like ethnography, which have dominated audience research in the '80s and '90s. Most relevant to my work (that largely relies on interview material), are the problems of interpretation,

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[15] Brunsdon (2000) used interview extracts in such a way, also.

validity, generalization, and certainly, the politics of representing an audience. I have tried to support my methodological choices using the ideas of prominent researchers in the field, and by discussing the specificities of my own research, and throughout this section I tried to position it as regards those concerns.

In practice, several of these problems are intertwined, and sometimes for the best. For instance, although my status as a soap fan could undermine my objectivity, it also enhances my interpretive skills and my claims for validity, since respondents felt comfortable to share with me many details of their soap related practices, that could possibly be real. I cannot deny, however, that ultimately my findings reflect a 'double interpretation' of situational, discursively produced knowledge and that they could be different if another researcher collected and analyzed the data. Moreover, the scale of this research does not allow generalization: the sample might not even be representative of the total Greek soap opera audience, let alone other audiences in the globe. Nonetheless, it is the 'thickness' of description that we are after in qualitative research, and the extent to which the phenomena I will be describing can be extrapolated and linked to other social phenomena.

I hope that this account has given an idea of the journey I took while pursuing this research. Throughout the presentation of the analysis I will be providing evidence for my arguments and propositions, in the form of interview extracts, which I will contextualize as much as possible in the spatial restraints of this thesis, trying to make my reasoning as transparent as I can. To familiarize the reader with the respondents, their brief profiles conclude this chapter.

3.4 Participant Profiles[16]

Rea Antoniadou (18/04/98)

Rea is 25 years old, lives in a seaside suburb of Athens and originates from a middle-class family. She holds a BA in Philosophy and Psychology and an MA in Philosophy. At the time of the interview she was looking for work. She is interested in art, film and photography. I have known Rea since high school and was aware that she has been watching *YR* for many years.

Prodromos Serafeimidis (22/04/98)

Introduced to me through a common friend as a long time fan of *Lampsi* and *YR*. He is 21 and studies Political Science and Advertising in the University of Athens. He is the only child of a middle class family and lives in a suburb east of Athens. He is very lively and energetic, has many friends and enjoys traveling and going out.

Lakis Kapantais (30/04/98)

Lakis is a friend of Rea's – they belong in the same group of *YR* fans. *YR* was a family tradition for Lakis but he has grown to enjoy it more through his friends. He is 20, studies Management in London and comes from an upper-middle class family. He enjoys driving, sports, computers, playing bridge and watching 'bad television', as he said.

Glykeria and Spyros Lembesi (19/10/98)

Glykeria is in her late fifties, and her husband Spyros is ten years her senior. Glykeria has been employed by my family as a housekeeper for many years. She left her village in her early

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[16] Names have been changed following agreements of confidentiality. The details given here apply to the time the interviews were conducted. All interviews took place at the participants' homes, unless indicated otherwise. The respondents who are listed together were interviewed as a group.

teens to work in Athens and as a result she did not receive any formal education. Spyros used to work as a salesman in a department store and was an active trade-unionist. They are both ardent fans of Greek soaps and I interviewed them together in their flat in the center of Athens. They both enjoy cooking and gardening.

Anna Kountoura (19/10/98)

Anna is in her early forties, she is married and has two children. She works as a secretary in a shipping company and is a very active woman, coping with family and work, as well as pursuing many interests. She exercises, reads and writes poetry, and belongs in an amateur theater company. She originates from the island of Lesvos, but joined her parents who had immigrated in Australia and went to University there. She has watched *YR* for many years but currently her favorite soap is *KZ*.

Maria Paltatzi (20/10/98)

Maria is a fan of *YR* and used to watch *Lampsi* as well. She is married to a ship-owner and comes from a well-off background. She is in her early sixties, and her two children are both in their twenties. Her daughter is a friend of mine and that is how she learned about my research. Although she wanted to pursue a higher education she was not allowed to by her father. She can speak English, French, Italian and German. She spends a lot of time with friends, she likes going to the theatre and movies, and playing cards.

Elly Leoussi (20/10/98)

Elly is a friend of Maria's and also a fan of *YR*. She is in her late fifties, married to a pilot, with whom they have two daughters. She has studied music and used to be a piano teacher but quit her job early as they are very well-off. She is a

big television fan and also likes classical music, ballet, cinema, and traveling.

Aliki Danae Mastrokosta (30/10/98)

Aliki Danae's granddaughter is a friend of mine and I learned through her about her soap fanship – she watches all the popular soaps on TV (*BB, YR, KZ,* Lampsi). Having given up much of her social life to nurse her bed-ridden husband, she spends a lot of time watching television. She is well into her seventies, but still actively helps her extended family. She did not have the chance to go to University as the aftermath of the Greek-Turkish war in Asia Minor led her to flee to Greece as a refugee when she was a young woman. She would have liked to study law.

Katia & Aspasia Kyriakidi (02/11/98)

This mother and daughter pair are fans of *YR* and the two Greek soaps. Katia is in her early sixties, a devoted mother and grandmother, who likes knitting and embroidering in her free time. She has a high school education. Anastasia, her younger daughter, is 32 and in spite of a disabilitating arthritis she has earned a BA and a Master's degree in Comparative Literature. She also likes to paint, read, and collect stamps. They come from a lower-middle class background.

Vassos & Gina Politi (02/11/98)

This couple of pensioners are *YR* fans. They used to run a shop but have retired now, spending a lot of time with their children and grand-children. They enjoy gardening and taking walks. He has finished high-school and she only primary school.

Veronika Makridi (05/11/98)

Veronika is in her early forties and used to work as an accountant but quit her job when she had her first child. Now she is a stay-at-home mom while her husband owns a shop – they are a lower middle class family. Veronika watches the

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Greek soaps but she prefers *telenovelas*. I interviewed her in her home, dominated by screaming toddlers, youngsters and their friends who had to be fed, cleaned and attended to. As she told me, she missed her days as a working woman!

Clelia Kotsira (15/11/98)

Clelia lives on the island of Lesvos but at the time of the interview she stayed with relatives in Athens. She is 23, married and has a baby girl. She has studied computer programming but at the time she had chosen to stay at home and look after her daughter. She comes from a working class background. Her favorite soap is YR.

Anestis Karydis (15/11/98)

In his early teens, Anestis was the youngest person in my sample. His father was a police officer and now works as a security guard. His family lives in a small flat in a working-class suburb west of Athens. Anestis was a *Lampsi* fan, and he also likes science fiction programs. He is interested in comic books and he has set up his own fanzine. He likes music and football and his favorite class is Ancient Greek.

Nestor Panorios (22/11/98)

Nestor is an old friend of mine who is a fan of the American soap *Sunset Beach*. At the time of the interview he was doing his military service and working in advertising at the same time. He is 25 years old and he comes from an upper-middle class family. He enjoys playing squash, going to the cinema, traveling, and music. Because of his busy schedule the interview took place in a café.

Danos Arampatzis (05/12/98)

Danos is a big fan of *KZ*. A lower-middle class pensioner in his seventies, he used to be a civil servant and had studied law. His interests include film, theater, reading, and going to the *kafeneio*.

Kassandra Plessa (11/12/98)

Kassandra was one of the *YR* fans who replied the advert I placed. In their early thirties, she and her husband (a physiotherapist) had just had a baby. Before giving birth she used to work as a personal trainer and dance teacher, having studied modern dance.

Petros Vlavianos (17/12/98)

Petros was also contacted through the advert and asked me to interview him in a café. He is 33, owns and manages a ceramics store and has published his poetry. He has also worked as a record producer. He comes from a middle class background and has studied Theology in the Athens University. His favorite soap is *BB*.

Roula Nikoleli (18/12/98)

Having responded to my advert, Roula met me in a café where the interview took place. She is a *YR* fan and used to watch *Lampsi* too. She is in her early fifties, she is divorced and lives with her two children. She used to work in a bank but has retired and wants to take a computer programming course. She also attends workshops in Psychology offered by a local mental health organization. Other interests include reading and cinema.

Eliza Antoniadou – Kostas Kyriakou (04/01/99)

I interviewed those two fans of *BH 90210* in Eliza's flat. Eliza is Rea's sister, while Kostas is a friend of mine. Eliza is 30 years old and works as a financial investment consultant in a manufacturing company. She holds a BA in Marketing and an MBA from a British University. In her free time she does a lot of sailing and she designs and makes accessories. Kostas is 25 years old and at the time of the interview he was doing his military service. He comes from an upper-class background and

has lived in England since he was 12. He has a degree in Politics, and he loves film and music.

Aaron and Melina Levi (07/01/99)
Aaron is a family friend and with his daughter Melina they have been *BH 90210* fans for many years. Aaron, in his late forties, is a College professor of Economics. He writes for several newspapers and magazines, and is also a food writer, restaurant critic, and cartoonist. He loves art, film, music and literature. His daughter studies Philosophy and shares her father's interests. Aaron is divorced and lives with his daughter in a middle-class suburb east of Athens.

Telis Maninas – Stavros Limas – Yiotis Kardoulis (06/09/99)
Telis was introduced to me through common friends and arranged this interview with Stavros and Alkis, with whom he has watched *KZ* for several years. They all were in their early twenties and came from upper middle class families. Telis studies Engineering, Yiotis Marketing, and Stavros has a job in the City, having finished a degree in Economics and Sociology. They work/study and live in London but the interview took place in Athens, in a café. Telis takes film courses and works also as a DJ. Stavros used to work as a radio producer and all three are music aficionados.

Yiorgos Theodorou (08/09/99)
Yiorgos contacted me after seeing my advertisement. Yiorgos is a fan of *KZ* and comes from a lower-middle class background. He is single, in his forties, and works for a military hospital as a civil servant. He has a degree from a higher technical institution (Polytechnic).

Fenia Tzenetou (12/09/99)
Fenia used to be my Philosophy professor in College and we had often talked about our common interest in *YR*. She was educated in England and comes from an upper class

background. Before settling down and having two children, Fenia did a lot of traveling, exercising her skills in photography. She writes for several publications and has recently taken up tango lessons.

Kostoula, Elsa & Evita Sofianou (14/09/99)
This interview was arranged through Fenia, since Kostoula is her aunt. I interviewed her together with her daughter Elsa and granddaughter Evita, bringing together three generations of soap-watchers! Kostoula, in her seventies, watches *Days of our Lives,* BB, YR, KZ, and *Lampsi,* and she also likes reading and going to the cinema. Elsa (who watches *DOOL* and the Greek soaps) is in her mid-forties and except Evita, a university student, she also has a son. Recently she decided to pursue her interest in design and she is taking relevant courses at a college. She is struggling to combine family life with her studies, but she is very content with her decision. Evita, twenty years old, is studying Marketing and enjoys going out and traveling. Her favorite program is *BH 90210.*

Manos Depastas – Titos Karabinis (17/09/99)
Manos and Titos were later introduced to me through Telis, with whom they went to school together. They are also in their early twenties and big *KZ* fans. Manos and Titos have been close friends for many years. They share an interest in Greek music and cars, and both study law in the Greek University, following their family traditions in law practice. The interview took place in Titos' home.

4. Towards a typology of soap opera viewership

The analysis of my data is based on a typology of viewing positions that were demonstrated by the soap viewers I interviewed. Admittedly, the cultural specificities inherent in my project do not allow for this typology to be general and conclusive. Nevertheless, my findings relate to existing accounts of soap opera audiences and this surely means that some aspects can be extrapolated from this material.

I am not aiming towards a monolithic categorization and pigeon-holing of audience members. Nevertheless, the recurring issues, themes, patterns of activity and discourse that came up in the interviews led me to distinguish between three major viewing positions that characterize the participants' relationship to soap operas:

- The *aesthetic*[1] position
- The position of the *social observer*
- The *ironic distance* position

These categories are not rigid or mutually exclusive: in fact, one rather important finding of this research is that viewers shift between positions according to several factors that will be discussed in this chapter. Hence, the difference and variability which Stuart Hall talked about in his introduction to Morley's *Family Television* does not only involve 'different texts' that have 'different saliences'for their viewers (1987:10). Apparently, a viewer can display different patterns of reception even in relation to a single text. Notwithstanding this variability,

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[1] I am aware that in philosophical discourses the aesthetic experience is described as a state of disinterested enjoyment of the aesthetic object, which is not involved in the aforementioned viewing position. I use the term 'aesthetic' in a different context here, invoking the viewers' emphasis on the visual and formal elements of soaps.

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there is in most cases a dominant pattern of viewership and discourse that ascribes one as being an aesthetic viewer, for instance. At the same time, though, several viewers exemplify more than one position in their viewing experience, according to the viewing setting, their mood, or a particular textual aspect, to name a few factors. Therefore, the groupings that I present here are not points on a continuum with middle and extreme positions. A viewer can maintain, for example, a position of ironic distance and at the same time present some aesthetic features (which would otherwise be the two ends of a scale). In themselves, however, viewing positions are proportional structures, since there are people who occupy a position in extremes and others who do not.

Having drawn these analytical lines, I shall describe the soap viewing characteristics that these categories entail. As we go into the specifics of each position, the examples and excerpts from interviews will prove helpful in demonstrating the distinguishing factors that gave rise to this categorization[2]. Viewing position is an umbrella term I chose[3] in order to capture the types of attitudes, pleasures, and practices that characterize the patterns of reception that I encountered in my interviews. When viewers negotiated between positions, I looked for the main sources of their pleasure, their representative attitudes and feelings about the shows, and their soap-related social activities, in order to determine which viewing position is dominant. These cases will be highlighted and problematized because they present

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[2] To keep up with the interviewees whom I will be quoting throughout the thesis, I would suggest to the reader to refer to their profiles (section 3.3) for contextual information, or Table 4.1 that lists their basic attributes and their viewing positions.
[3] Ang (1985) has also used this term to distinguish between the responses she got from *Dallas* viewers.

resistance and concepts like class, gender, and

Name[4]	Age	Class	Education	Soap Preference	Viewing Position
Aliki Danae	>60	LMC	High school	*KZ, BB, YR, L*	Aesthetic-Social
Aspasia	<35	UWC	Post-graduate	*KZ, YR, L*	Aesthetic
Anna	36-59	LMC	Higher	*KZ*	Social Observer
Clelia	<35	UWC	Higher Technical	*YR*	Aesthetic
Evita	<35	UMC	Higher	*BH 90210*	Aesthetic
Eliza	<35	UMC	Post-graduate	*BH 90210*	Ironic-Aesthetic
Elsa	36-59	UMC	Higher Technical	*DOOL*	Aesthetic
Elly	>60	UMC	Higher Technical	*YR*	Aesthetic
Fenia	36-59	UMC	Post-graduate	*YR*	Aesthetic
Glykeria	>60	LWC	No formal	*KZ*	Aesthetic
Gina	>60	UWC	Primary School	*YR*	Aesthetic
Kostoula	>60	UMC	High School	*BB, KZ, L*	Aesthetic
Kassandra	<35	LMC	Higher Technical	*YR*	Social Observer
Katia	>60	UWC	High School	*KZ, BB, YR, L*	Aesthetic
Maria	>60	UMC	High School	*YR*	Aesthetic
Melina	<35	UMC	Post-graduate	*BH 90210*	Aesthetic
Roula	36-59	LMC	Higher Technical	*YR*	Aesthetic-Social
Rea	<35	UMC	Post-graduate	*YR*	Ironic-Aesthetic
Veronika	<36	LMC	Higher Technical	*Marimar*	Aesthetic
Aaron	36-59	UMC	Post-graduate	*BH 90210*	Ironic Distance
Anestis	<35	UWC	High School	*KZ, L, DOOL*	Aesthetic
Danos	>60	LMC	Higher	*KZ*	Social Observer
Kostas	<35	UC	Higher	*BH 90210*	Ironic Distance
Lakis	<35	UMC	Higher	*YR*	Ironic Distance
Manos	<35	LMC	Higher	*KZ*	Ironic Distance
Nestor	<35	UMC	Post-graduate	*SB*	Ironic-Aesthetic
Petros	36-59	UMC	Higher	*BB*	Aesthetic
Prodromos	<35	UMC	Higher	*Lampsi*	Aesthetic
Spyros	>60	LWC	Primary School	*KZ, Lampsi*	Social Observer
Stavros	<35	UMC	Higher	*KZ*	Ironic –Aesthetic
Titos	<35	LMC	Higher	*KZ*	Ironic Distance
Vassos	>60	UWC	High School	*YR*	Aesthetic
Yiorgos	36-59	LMC	Higher Technical	*KZ*	Aesthetic-Social
Yiotis	<35	UMC	Higher	*KZ*	Ironic Distance

Table 4.1 Participants: Demographic data and viewing position

implications as to which positions are negotiated, when,
and by whom. The social and cultural dynamics that are
articulated in patterns of reception, and how they are
related to the phenomenon of resistance is the major
theme of this project. The construction of this typology,
is a helpful way to analyze the relationship between

[4] All names have been changed according to my agreement with the interviewees.
Italics: Females. Bold: Males. UMC: upper middle class, LMC: lower middle class,
UWC: upper working class, LWC: lower middle class, UC: upper class.

resistance and concepts like class, gender, and cultural difference, because resistance, (as discussed in section 1.3) is itself a process of negotiation.

4.1 The aesthetic viewing position

> For me watching *YR* is the equivalent of lying on an armchair and staring at the sea (Fenia, 98).

> We watch it [*YR*] like the movies; that's the way we've come to enjoy it. (Vassos, 301)

This viewing position is characterized by an emphasis on the aesthetic experience of soap opera watching and it was the most common among the participants of this study. Aesthetic viewers consider their programs as works that are enjoyed and experienced sensually. Soap opera is located here in a discourse of aesthetic, visual and textual appreciation. The distinctive narrative structure, the characters and their stories, the sets and scenery that are portrayed, combined with the relaxation and security of a daily ritual like soap watching, are the chief sources of pleasure. The viewers pay close attention to the text and narrative events; they are also familiar with generic rules and conventions and highly aware of the constructedness of the text. Nevertheless, they choose to ignore these knowledges in order to gain greater pleasure from their soaps. We will now consider those features more closely, and look at accounts of aesthetic viewers.

4.1.1 The central role of the text

> It's the plot that holds my interest. The actors are lovely too, but the main thing is the story (Clelia, 137).

> The story is everything! If there's no story, it's zero for me (Anestis, 383).

The aesthetic viewing position entails an intrinsic enjoyment of the text: soap opera is viewed and appreciated as an end in itself. The structure and orchestration of narrative events are the main reasons for their following:

> J: Can you tell me what is it about soaps that pleases you most?
> A.D.: All those plots, in these serials, they are not just one, they are many fragments! It is as if you're watching many serials, not just one. (Aliki Danae, 147-149)

Aliki Danae is evoking here a formal element of soap opera, namely the synchronous unfolding of several storylines, which creates the impression of 'many serials in one' that she finds pleasing. This structural characteristic is important for aesthetic viewers because it contributes to the construction of a landscape which is familiar and challenging simultaneously. Fenia, who compared watching *YR* to looking at the sea, used the term 'wallpaper' to describe soap opera:

> A kind of pleasant wallpaper, that alternates, however, like the sea, which relaxes you because it changes all the time but it is always the same (Fenia, 104).

The aesthetic viewer sits back and watches the synchronic weaving of several threads into a narrative panel that is always familiar but changing daily. The unfolding of the narrative was always mentioned by such viewers:

> G: What I generally like about [*YR*] is that it always changes storylines and it draws you in with everything new that is happening [...] It launches new storylines and you understand that they are the progress of the old ones, and you are drawn, you are magnetized (Gina, 261-289).

Gina locates the role of the viewer in this landscape and indicates the pleasure in charting the trajectory of the story-telling. She is 'magnetized' because the

narrative engages her in its structure; she is asked to relate the past with the present, since every development in the text relates to the characters' past histories. It is the paradigmatic axis in the soap narrative that defines the codes of character relations and actions, as Allen (1985) has put it. For certain viewers these formal qualities of soap opera are the most pleasurable:

> J: What is the main reason that you enjoy watching [*Lampsi*]?
> P: ...It is the story that creates suspense... what's gonna happen with this storyline, the other one... The heroes are all well defined, you know their marks. Foskolos twists the stories and puts you on a trail, you want to see what happens next... everything is woven together. It's the story basically, if the story is not complex... (Prodromos, 358-360).

Here, we retrace the central role of the generic qualities of soap operas in the pleasure of aesthetic viewers. Prodromos, too, mentions the familiarity of the characters, the crucial 'twists' and the interweaving of the storylines, elements that invoke the audience's suspense and following.

All these accounts share a similar discourse about the relationship between text and viewer which plays a significant role in the aesthetic position. The text is experienced as an aesthetic object: a powerful, complex structure which 'draws', as Gina said, the viewer in the stories. However, it is the strategic knowledge (Brown, 1994) of the fans - who are familiar with the characters, their secrets, and their personal characteristics - that enables them to enjoy the stories thoroughly. The multiple, well-known characters and their relationships form the steady ground that is contrasted with the constant ups and downs, the ever-shifting balances, and the fragile *status quo*, in order to produce the sea-like vista that Fenia talked about: a view that while changing constantly, is reassuringly familiar and structured in a

way that puts the viewer on a vantage point and a trail at the same time.

4.1.2 The promise of escape

> J: You said that *BB* put you under a spell.
> P: Yes, and I think that the spell was the different world it promised. There was a world that was more beautiful, or more beautified; rich folk without the pettiness of the poor; a sort of cleverly done glamour that the audience can understand, which is discreet and spell-binding at the same time (Petros, 19-21).

This *BB* fan expresses clearly the escapist pleasure that his soap watching entailed. He also spells out the artificial world portrayed by the daytime soap ('beautified'): we will come back to this open recognition of the soap's constructedness, but here I want to address the element of escape in the aesthetic viewing position. In the account above, the 'magnetizing' text is given magic qualities once more, as it weaves a spell on the aesthetic viewer through its promise of beauty, glamour and romance. The notion of escapism has always carried a negative mark, as a form of aesthetic appreciation (Bourdieu, 1984) and has been linked by its critics to feminine popular culture, like romances and glamorous American serials. Many audience studies have come up with similar accounts of escapist pleasures (Ang, 1985; Gray, 1992; Morley, 1987; Press, 1991; Radway, 1987).

Aesthetic viewers often expressed the pleasure of being mentally transferred to a different location and pay close attention to the soaps' scenery. Anestis, the youngest viewer I interviewed, talks here about the sets of *Lampsi*:

> The props, the camera work, the cars, the blow-ups, the locations. Especially the locations, I'm really into those... it has to be something that penetrates your eyes, that makes you think that you're actually there (373).

Soap opera watching here goes beyond the aesthetic and visual level; the viewer does not only care to perceive but also to be a part of the action, as Anestis' metaphor conveys, and the location is important in this respect. The experience has to come alive through the close observation of the material aspects of the image, as well as its *mise-en-scene*.

Both male and female aesthetic viewers were keen observers of the fashion and styling that features in soaps – an audience pleasure that has also been widely cited (Ang, 1985; Brown, 1994; Gray, 1992; Miller, 1995; Press, 1991). Lavish clothes and accessories, beautiful people and lush surroundings are either admired or sneered at as kitsch and excessive, but in any case they make an important part of aesthetic pleasure and are closely inspected, as the following extracts show:

> Caroline was staying in that beautiful home which was supposed to be humble, but not really, it was gorgeous. She was poor but the house was still gorgeous, you see what I mean when I tell you it's like a fairy-tale? And then Thorn came to visit her, and I really liked Thorn at that point, he was wearing something trendy, I really liked his look (Petros, 207).

> J: Do you also watch *Marimar* for the style, the clothes, the sets...
> V: Yeah, I love those, I get ideas too! Marimar is overdressed, with gowns and such things you can't really wear everyday, but in the Greek ones which follow our own thing, I love looking and wonder where did they get those skirts (Veronika, 177).

> [Style] is a detail but a basic one [...] Jewelry is a key detail, for example. Virna would be less credible in a dramatic scene if she was garlanded with jewelry than if she wore something casual [...] What I also like is that everyone wears clothes suitable to their income, their social status, their jobs and their personality (Prodromos, 257-259).

> It's a serial where women supposedly wear posh labels, but I always ask myself 'why is she wearing that horrible thing'? [laughter] But then, money and taste are not the same thing. If something is not right, aesthetically, I will think or maybe talk about it (Maria, 137).

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These accounts show that sets, clothing and accessories play several roles. There is the sheer delight of the gaze: all aesthetic viewers agreed on the importance of 'aesthetically pleasing' (Maria, 52) actors, houses, and clothes. Some viewers also pick up ideas for shopping and decoration. In addition, décor, whether admired or looked down on as in the case of Maria, validates one's own sense of style. More importantly though, we see that aesthetic viewers study style as a signifying language: homes, clothing and accessories are indices of social hierarchy, realism or artificiality. The gorgeous home of the poor family in *BB* is a sign of artificiality for Petros, while the excessive fashions of the Mexican *telenovela Marimar*, are too exotic for Veronika, in contrast to the styling of Greek programs.

The ethnic background of the text plays a crucial role in its promise of escape. The majority of aesthetic viewers followed foreign shows and when they watched domestic soaps too, they claimed that the Greek ones were not effectively escapist because of their emphasis on real life problems and the proximity of their representations:

> We face so many problems everyday, that we expect to watch something that will make time pass, make you escape, be it silly or lame, good, or bad. Now, you'll ask me, how can you escape with Foskolos who shows the exact same problems? That's why I prefer the foreign ones, to watch and say 'ah, look at those beautiful clothes, those beautiful actors, the scenery, the homes... you escape for a while (Elsa, 123).

> A: [In *YR*] you see the romance. I loved it when Paul and Cricket were in Hawaii. The scenery was idyllic.
> K: That's the thing, you see the places. All the Greek ones are mostly shot indoors.
> A: And everything he did for Cricket, the surprise when he took her to that trip, the basket of fruits he gave her [*laughter*]... (Aspasia & Katia, 461-465)

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For Greek viewers the American soap operas present an opportunity to enjoy an element of exoticism, glamour and escape that is lacking in domestic everyday serials, the latter being either more modest or closer to daily problems. Relaxation was also a recurring theme in the aesthetic viewing position. The activity of watching, thus, entails another set of pleasures, which in the case of aesthetic soap viewers is also a distinctive aspect of reception.

4.1.3 The viewing experience

> J: From the whole experience of watching [*YR*] for so long, what do you enjoy the most?
> C: Sitting for an hour, doing nothing [...] I will put the baby to sleep and I will sit in front of the TV. An hour devoted to me. Alone or not, at that time I will sit down and watch and there won't be any talking, just watching. Well, except during the ads. Is it perhaps a routine? But a pleasurable one (Clelia, 257-259).

The aesthetic viewing position involves a particular viewing context where soap viewers immerse themselves in the stories of their programs. As an aesthetic experience, soap watching becomes a sort of self-indulgence. Besides the entertainment value of the programs' content, the act of watching them *per se*, holds special meanings for aesthetic viewers. Here we can recall Radway's (1987) romance readers, for whom the act of reading represented something besides the text. Aesthetic viewers devote all of their attention and mental energy to the soap and resent being interrupted or having to do something else during the show. An hour spent 'just watching' is an hour spent on themselves. Clelia also points out the element of routine: a pleasurable, comforting routine. Soap opera watching is an everyday ritual devoted to herself, a physical and mental break from housework and family roles that demand her energy, time, and constant care. It is not surprising that many

women in my study described soap watching as such a ritual, and I will come back to this issue in Chapter 5.

Although daily demands might sometimes prevent them from indulging in immersed soap watching, almost all of the aesthetic viewers would rather enjoy their soaps alone, in silence and deep concentration:

> to sit down, to be quiet ...to watch it in peace and calm and to enter into every word they say, because... even the smallest bit matters. If you watch it thoughtlessly you don't relish it. Whereas, if you sit quietly, noiselessly, and watch everything, you relish it, you get deep into it. It pleases me more, not talking or doing other things at the same time (Aliki Danae, 259).

> When I'm on my own and no one can spoil it (Maria, 8).

> An hour of my own. And let me tell you, I'd much rather if the little one was asleep so that I could watch it alone. You're like, 'don't do this, don't do that', and you can't watch (Veronika, 291).

All these examples support the significance of the aesthetic experience of soap watching as an activity which in itself must be savored and enjoyed. Even if the aesthetic viewer's purpose is to relax and pass the time, soap watching is a meaningful and motivated experience, unlike other routine-like uses of the media (Buckingham, 1993; Hermes, 1993). The words of Aliki Danae have a particularly strong aesthetic emphasis, describing the perfect conditions for soap watching. Other family members or side tasks would only spoil the pleasure. It is also worth pointing out that strictly aesthetic viewers (those who do not shift to other viewing positions) do not, as a rule, talk about their soaps. Fan discourse for them is occasional and random and was not described as particularly pleasurable or meaningful. On the other hand, there were aesthetic viewers who would like to share fan discourse but lacked the social network to do

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so. The aesthetic viewing position is very much a private mode of watching. This observation will be further elaborated in the chapters that follow, since the social use of soap operas is one of the preoccupations of this study, in respect to empowerment and resistance. At present it suffices to note that soap talk is not important for most, as these representative extracts demonstrate:

> J: Do you like talking with your friends about *YR*?
> M: Not really. If I miss an episode maybe, but still, you can always tell what's going on. In general I don't like to talk about it that much, it's the moment that it's on that I want to experience, and then it's over (Maria, 111-113).

> Pleasure... I don't feel any while talking about [*YR*], it's watching it that gives me pleasure (Clelia, 93).

For these viewers soap opera is not solely a chance to sit comfortably on the couch and put their duties on hold. It is the soap experience in itself and its aesthetic component that offers these feelings of comfort and relaxation, as the following examples show:

> V: It is a time...
> G: It is a time, everyday, that we wait to watch it [*YR*], with love. I want to, I like it this way.
> V: We wait for it and it waits for us [*laughs*] (Vassos & Gina, 81-85).

> F: What interests and relaxes me at the same time is this feeling of continuity... the fact that I wait for it [*YR*] to go on and on is relaxing.
> J: It's always there.
> F: It will always be there and this sensation relaxes me [...] the Colonnade[5] and all this unbelievable glamour [...] yields a sense of general well-being and pleasure, it's not a drama, while I do find it ridiculous at times because of this excess. But it's mostly the feeling of psychological comfort and pleasure (Fenia 122-126; 292).

The aesthetic viewing position articulates the pleasure in the narrative structure and content of the soap with its integration in the cycle of everyday life. Vassos

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[5] Fenia refers to the Colonnade restaurant, a lavish dining spot of mythical dimensions for Greek *YR* fans.

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and Gina talk about *YR* as a program that incorporates their life rhythms; it is a two-way process that they describe, because it appears to them that the distinctive structure of their soap accommodates their schedule in the same way that they organize their daily tasks in order to watch at the best time possible. Fenia also emphasizes the sense of continuity – the familiarity that we talked about earlier – and the comfort in the regularity that an everyday serial stands for. This structural element is a relaxing factor for her, together with the excesses and the visual style that characterize soap operas. Hence, this kind of engagement with television is accentuated by the generic elements of soap opera and is not only a matter of unwinding in front of the television set. The final aspect of the aesthetic viewing position that I will discuss is the suspension of disbelief that is displayed by most aesthetic viewers.

4.1.4 A leap of faith

> I know that a production involves a bunch of machinery and cables behind a set. I know this very well and I know that if the camera moved by mistake I would see cables and loose threads. I knew that all the time, but I preferred being under a spell and enter this fantasy world (Petros, 249).

Soap viewers' familiarity with soap opera conventions and the pleasure they gain by recognizing them has been widely acknowledged by soap opera scholarship (Geraghty, 1991; Buckingham, 1987; Katz & Liebes, 1990; Schrøder, 1988; Seiter *et al.*, 1989). Instead of being unable to distinguish between fiction and real life, soap opera fans are acutely aware of generic rules, visual techniques, production details, and background information about their favorite shows. Schrøder (1988) maintains, based on his *Dynasty* viewers data, that commuting from recognition of fictional

conventions to close involvement with the narrative is what yields most of the pleasure for soap viewers[6].

In Petros' statement above we can see clearly this type of commuting. Being aware that *BB*, his favorite soap, is a constructed representation, he nonetheless decides to ignore this knowledge while watching in order to enter the liminal space that is created through his encounter with the soap. This kind of pleasure requires a leap of faith: the suspension of certain knowledges in order to let oneself get carried away. The aesthetic viewing position entails the letting go of the viewer's awareness of constructedness and/or critical challenge. This has nothing to do with the viewers' critical abilities or ideological beliefs about soap representations, but involves the generation of pleasure through a certain mode of reception. Petros, thus, refers very consciously to himself as being spellbound, losing in a sense his critical faculties willingly and entering the 'wild zone', the fictional world of the soap.

Ang (1985) has also commented on how for many *Dallas* viewers the awareness of the text's artificiality and ideological status allowed them to indulge in these excessive representations and take great pleasure through fantasy and identification. As we saw in Fenia's account in section 4.1.3, the 'unbelievable glamour' of *YR* is what she likes about this program, in spite of finding it

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[6] Actually, I do not agree with Schrøder's whole treatment of this issue. He extends the viewers' immersion in the narrative to the research setting, so that when his respondents recount narrative events, or shout at the screen for example, he concludes that their awareness of aesthetic conventions and distance from the serial are evidently weak (1988:71). When shouting at the screen, though, the viewer does not necessarily expect to be heard by the soap characters, while referring to the motivations behind their actions in the narrative does not mean that the viewer believes these actions took place in reality. Such practices are common in our everyday relationship to the media and have to do with our pleasure in *engaging* with a fictional world.

'ridiculous at times because of this excess' (292). Aesthetic viewers can accommodate their beliefs about the lack of realism or the aesthetic hyperbole of soaps, in order to immerse themselves and savor the narrative and its visual aspects.

The majority of soap fans that displayed an aesthetic viewing position were experts in the programs' narrative conventions. They often commented on the lack of realism, the outlandish events, the fragmented structure, and the open-endedness of the narrative. Their familiarity · with the genre, though, led them to expect these features and take pleasure in them. In the excerpt below, Elsa, a *DOOL* fan, questions the narrative device of leaving a storyline lingering with no intent of resolution:

> E: So, what happened to this woman[7]? Last time they showed her she was on that fishing boat, peeling potatoes, fish, whatever *[we laugh]*. And then she just disappeared! They surely made it to a port someday! It just leaves these gaps, and OK, you know that you get the stories in fragments and that they will be revisited in fragments, but hey, at least do come back to it, what happened to that story?
> J: Yeah, show some signs of life!
> E: Exactly! Show her still skinning those fish, but show something! *[agitated - she laughs]* ...Nothing, she just faded... they think that we forget and move ahead so they leave these weird gaps (325-333).

Elsa is reacting here to these narrative conventions and her response is two-fold. On the one hand she is joking about it and we all laughed because it was a typical soap moment (the expected but nonetheless unrealistic rescue, the conveniently outlandish location, the fading out of the story) that we could all recognize. She is familiar with the fragmented style of narration so, it does not come as a surprise. Because of this strategic knowledge (Brown, 1994), she can joke and stretch the

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[7] This character survived a plane crash and was rescued by a fishing boat in the South Seas.

unrealistic aspect of the storyline ironically.
Nevertheless, there is also a questioning side to her
response, and while she knows that she cannot logically
question this device (because it is after all soap opera
and it is supposed to be this way), she is oscillating
between the two discursive levels that so many fans try to
accommodate.

This was also evident in the respondents' own
retelling of soap narratives, recounted in gossipy and
excited tones that expressed the pleasure they found in
them, and injected with meta-statements on the
narrative's fictional devices and constructedness.
Prodromos, for example, filling me in on how Virna's
unknown daughter appeared in *Lampsi*'s narrative, ended
his extremely detailed, lively and funny account thus:

> So, out of nowhere [Foskolos] somehow remembered that
> Virna had a child. And he really made history then because
> he wrote a script where... [*he recounts a rather
> complicated storyline*] And now he has left all this behind
> and he's put all the work on Tolis and Nassia's dilemma
> [*goes into current storyline about other characters*] (18-
> 32).

Throughout his meticulous narration (three pages
long in the transcript), I could tell how much he had
enjoyed watching this storyline. He was recounting it as
if we were gossiping about people we knew, injecting
funny comments, exclamatory remarks, and great detail
about the characters' feelings and doings. Nevertheless,
the fictionality of this narrative was acknowledged at
several points, some of which I tried to highlight in this
excerpt. First of all, Foskolos is positioned as the
authorial force behind the narrative, having performed a
tour de force ('he made history') in conjuring up an
impressively unbelievable, yet coherent, storyline. In his
last statement Prodromos refers to *Lampsi* as text: the
characters, who were the subjects of his discourse

become the objects of Foskolos' authorship; the personalized stories he told me become interchangeable texts with central themes and functional value; the fictional quality of the narrative is brought to the fore. Hence, aesthetic viewers can accommodate immersion in the fictional representations of soaps with a meta-discourse about them and their viewing position.

To summarize the elements that constitute this mode of watching, I would have to underline the importance of the soap opera as an aesthetic object. The text for aesthetic viewers has sensuous qualities that must be savored intrinsically. Social pleasures, like discussion between fans, are not particularly valued and indeed soap operas are best viewed in silence and privacy – resembling almost a cinematic experience. The text is the regular, everyday promise of an escape to a fictional world of excessive, aesthetic qualities which are acknowledged as such, but which are received without any questioning because of the pleasure and comfort that they offer in everyday life.

4.2 The social observer viewing position

> I watch it [*YR*] more as a social issue. It is so social, so... Everything that's happening in there, I've seen it too with my own very eyes, and I tell you, it's as real as it gets (Kassandra, 163).

Soap operas invite their audience to engage in some form of social commentary and in the discursive context of a loosely structured interview, such discourse is bound to occur. However, there was a number of respondents for whom soap opera was accounted primarily as an opportunity to observe and discuss issues of a social and political character. Such viewers emphasize the divide between public and private realms and seem to appreciate soaps as social texts. In contrast to the previous viewing

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position, this one does not focus on the aesthetic qualities of the programs. A preoccupation with soap as an agent of social and political critique, a strong belief in the realism of the programs and an identification with the ideological positions of the text are the most important features of this category.

4.2.1 Soap opera discourse as social commentary

> [Foskolos] was right to address it[8]. He was right to put in [the Crusader]. You'll tell me that he shouldn't take the law in his hands... but he was forced! ...The state doesn't care, they're not interested anymore. They're all words! As a simple citizen, what can I do? What can we, simple citizens do?... Should we arm ourselves and kill the arsonists? No, he gives you an example: beware, because there shall be more like him and Greece will become a place where everyone kills each other, if measures are not taken. But what measures can be taken, why, they're all corrupt! *[agitated]* (Spyros, 932)

In the discourse of social observers soap opera becomes a platform for social commentary. Spyros' interview was full of instances where he embarked on criticisms about the Greek political system, the government, and social institutions. In this excerpt, he is using the storyline to question his role as a citizen and the administrative and judicial practice of the state, to voice his dissatisfaction, vent his anger, and raise criticism.

Like Spyros, there were fans who engaged in this viewing position – looking at the soap not only as a means to entertain themselves, relax, and indulge in narrative pleasures, but mainly as a reflection of social

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[8] He is referring to 'the Crusader', a storyline in *KZ* that captured the public outcry following the blazes of the summer of 1998 in Greece. It involved a serial killer who, having lost his family in a blaze, killed arsonists and estate developers that together were responsible for the destruction of forests and their subsequent capitalisation as property (most of the arsons in Greece are indeed organised crimes). Graphically, the Crusader hung his victims from burnt forest trees and set them on fire.

reality and an extension of the public sphere, through which they participate in an agenda of heated issues and debates. Moreover, their own narratives do not focus on the storylines or the aesthetic aspects of soaps, but lead to a commentary about current affairs. In this context, the domestic and private sphere of the soap is not of major importance:

> J: So, the serial [KZ] is not so personal as much as it is social.
> D: Nothing touches on me at a personal level. But it's social, these things happen in the police. The good ones and the bad ones [...] It's not mushy... to put it in common words. It has depth, that's it. Because it is a fact that the police has sunk very low, when they catch police officers with drugs, with dope or whatever, selling... operating brothels, everything is debased. The state, we're all depending on it. There has to be some authority, some fear (Danos, 173; 270).

It is not only Foskolos' preoccupation with social issues, and incorporation of real incidents in the narrative that gives rise to such accounts. The mode of address in the Greek soaps, where everyday dialogue and casual interaction are heavily dramatized and sensationally directed, makes Danos think of them as serious and 'not mushy'. He, too, emphasizes the incompetence of state institutions, the corruption of the police, and the importance of law and order. We can see how he begins from the serial and its realism, to go into a critique of the police and a general political commentary. The discourse here is very similar to Spyros's and even the structure of their account bears similarities, in the way social themes are extrapolated from specific storylines and taken further.

The preoccupation with the depiction of social issues was recognized by social observers who claimed that they were more determined than average soap fans:

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> I don't watch [*YR*] to see things I haven't lived,
> like some ladies say 'I want to see those dresses I've never
> seen before', or like 'I want to see the love affairs'. This
> has nothing to do with me... I don't want watch for the
> luxury... [or] because it's fun ... I watch like a social
> observer, watching over things that have happened to me
> too... I watch it psychologically, because I really like
> psychology and sociology and I read stuff. And I think
> about how the director, how the writer has written it. I see
> it like, scientifically let's say, from his point of view
> (Kassandra, 163-183).

Kassandra acknowledges that she finds no escapist pleasure in *YR;* she does not watch for the romance or the glamour. For her *YR* is a 'social issue', a text that she watches as a social observer because she believes that her experience and her interests render her a rightful critic. She does not identify with the characters, but with the makers of the show, perhaps because she is more interested in the way these representations reflect reality and her own beliefs. Social realism, thus, is more important than emotional realism (Ang, 1985) in this viewing position, as I will argue further on.

For some social observers, soap opera discourse is an important part of their fanship, although the majority do not engage in such practices regularly. Nevertheless, the talk produced by these viewers also takes the form of social critique:

> J: Do you like talking about *KZ*?
> A: I do in the sense of taking an issue further. Prompted by
> Theoharis's fighting for his honor, right? That's how I
> enjoy talking about it, I will take an issue and say, 'do you
> see that? This word is forgotten nowadays' [...] and take
> this example from the serial and start a conversation with
> my friends.
> J: So, is it mostly with friends -
> A: With my husband too, I might say to him, look how
> ethical, or unethical, someone's behavior is, or about how
> in the serial they mention a lot providence and God, yeah?
> (Anna, 153-157)

> J: So, when you talk, is it about what's happening [*in KZ*]?
> Y: Initially we refer to the storyline, but then you relocate
> it in reality, in everyday life. You say, this happens, or it
> does not, or it has happened. You make a critique through

the serial about what happens in everyday life.
You do that mentally anyway when you watch, but in a
conversation you can also exchange opinions, reach a
conclusion, agree, disagree (Yiorgos, 55-57).

Fan discourse for social observers differs from the other viewing positions quite significantly. It does not take the form of gossip or irony, and it is not fuelled by hermeneutic enigmas: it resembles a debate, and although it is related to everyday life, as Yiorgos says, it is more argumentative and formal, than personal and chatty. We see again the tendency to 'take issues further'; to evaluate morals; to treat storylines as vehicles for debate outside the context of the soap; to exchange, finally, opinions and reach conclusions. It is generally a more formal and public type of communication that uses soap as a prompt and not a topic in itself.

Therefore, the position of the social observer and the treatment of soap narratives as social commentary was not only a product of the research setting, but it constitutes indeed the preferred mode of talking about soaps for these viewers. These viewers are positioned as social observers, generating from the soaps themes and narratives that associate to bigger issues. For them soap opera is not just entertainment; it is a serious matter, and this will be more evident in the following section, where I will address the issue of realism.

4.2.2 Soap opera and real life

A recurring theme in most interviews was that of realism. Soaps were seen as realist texts that feature stories from everyday life. Neither Greek, nor American daytime soaps are close to the social realism that has marked soap opera production in Britain (Geraghty, 1991) but, nevertheless, viewers found them realist in their representation of relationships, family interactions,

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domestic problems, and social issues. Social observers went far beyond this observation, considering their soaps literally reflections of reality. In some cases they claimed that soaps were even more authentic than real life experience:

> The actors [*in YR*] *are* amazing! They are so real. Everything is so real, it's like watching reality. And the storylines are taken from real life, totally real. It's like watching real people's lives and that's why I watch it, because it's so real [...] In a way, it's also educational, you learn about life. Yes, you don't need to experience the world out there, you can watch this serial [*YR*] and tell what's going on outside (Kassandra, 75; 163).

> [*KZ*] is a serial that touches everyday life, everyday issues happening in our lives and they are imprinted in a way... how should I put it, they are more real. They're not imaginary, implausible things (Anna, 157).

Kassandra and Anna here invoke two notions of realism: as correspondence to real life, and as plausibility. They both find that the issues portrayed are indeed the very stuff of everyday life, plausible stories that can take place. Besides that, they also appreciate the realistic *mode* of representing those stories. Anna's comment on the way issues are 'imprinted', or Kassandra's emphasis on 'watching reality' and 'real people's lives' allude to representational realism. We don't find in their accounts any reference to emotional realism; it is because of soaps' resemblance to real life and social situations that these women watch so enthusiastically. Perceived realism is the marker of value for the soaps and a strategic discourse for social observers:

> They haven't made a serial out of their imagination. They take specific events. There are cases, crimes that take place and after some time you will see them on the serial. You see and you remember [...] Drugs, illnesses, death, how people react to those, how does the system function on the top... They simulate reality and everyday life (Yiorgos 14-15).

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Here, the fictional character of the soap is almost negated, in contrast to aesthetic viewers who referred to the 'fairy tale'-like element. The 'imagination' involved in the writing and setting up of the soap is not an issue for Yiorgos and the other social observers. The soap documents real life and its dramatization is not judged to be mediating – a fact that struck me because especially in the Greek soaps, the delivery and the style of direction are intensely dramatic. It's also worth pointing out the function of memory, as Yiorgos indicates, in this capture of real life by the soap. 'You see and you remember' – a striking statement. Soap opera in a national context can invoke public and popular memory; the portrayal of social events becomes even more meaningful by invoking narratives of a recent or older past[9].

The recognition of a common past constitutes a dimension of *motivation* for social observers, another aspect of reception that according to Schrøder (2000) must be taken into account. In the tendency of social observers to overplay the real life value of their soaps, the concept of motivation points to a determination behind these soap readings. I would argue that social observers *want* their soaps to be so real. Consider the following excerpt in which Spyros and his wife Glykeria disagree about the fictional character of *Lampsi*:

> S: I don't know if this man, Foskolos, has really lived all those things he's writing about... or if they're just his imagination.
> G: Listen, he's been abroad. And he sees foreign serials and he ... puts in bits of them[10].
> S: I don't know. This evil he's presenting, I don't think it's just in his head.
> J: So you believe that...

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[9] Section 2.3 discusses Greek soaps' invocation of national memories.
[10] Glykeria's claim is true: Foskolos indeed traveled to the States and studied American daytime serials before writing *Lampsi*.

S: He's seen it somewhere. He's heard about it
[...] it's impossible. An innocent man [...] would not be
able to think of such evil...
G: But there are other people in production too, not just
Foskolos. He's not alone there with his head. He's an old
man.
J: His children write too, his son co-directs.
G: Right, right, his children write too.
S: But there are things, most of the things he shows are
realities (Spyros & Glykeria D., 346-384).

This exchange is helpful in demonstrating another instance of viewer motivation. Spyros appears to be so convinced about the authenticity of *Lampsi* and the truthfulness of Foskolos' version of Greek society that he will not accept his wife's arguments about the program's fictional status. He is so close *ideologically* to the text and its values of encoding that he refuses to consider that they have been encoded. Glykeria, who is obviously more soap literate and knowledgeable about production details, points to *Lampsi*'s textual identity and its source of production, but Spyros remains adamant about its relationship to real life and the lack of mediation. This certainty has two functions, and they both apply in the position of social observers: it legitimizes the worth of their fanship and their ideological position as valid outside any textual constraints. Spyros tries to validate his soap by claiming its grains of truth, and by doing so he is validating at the same time his own view of the world, as such. If he was not in agreement with Foskolos' representation he would have negotiated its truthfulness. Thus, the motivation behind the reception pattern of the social observer is to a great extent ideological, as I will argue in the next section.

4.2.3 Soap opera and ideology

What I like about [*KZ*] is that they're searching for the truth. The actors, the writer, everyone involved, they all desperately try to find the truth and let it shine, because lo and behold lest corruption prevails, the drug addicts, the

thieves, all those. The law must reign. That's why
the Romans used to say, *dura lex, sed lex* (Danos, 436).

The generic conventions of soap opera work to
undermine the inevitability of truth, as a narrative
resolution (Geraghty, 1991), but we saw that in the social
observer viewing position the constructedness of those
conventions is overlooked. In the account above, Danos
locates truth not only in the hermeneutic quest of the
narrative, but at a higher, almost ontological level. *KZ* is
a vehicle for truth to 'shine', to become exposed and
outdo the anti-social forces of corruption. The truth of
KZ is his own truth, too: aligned with his own social
beliefs (or rather, flexible enough to be appropriated into
his system of beliefs), it also endorses a mode of address
that effectively speaks for him. The central motivation
behind the readings produced by this viewing position, is
an ideological alignment with the text, and it is this
recognition of a shared agenda that activates pleasure for
social observers:

> J: What do you think about the way they handle subjects
> like rape or abortion [in *YR*]?
> K: I like it, I absolutely agree with the way they handle it.
> J: Would you say it's a conservative serial?
> K: Yes but good conservative, lively. I agree with them, I
> share these beliefs [...] They are conservative but in a good
> way, not puritans, but not like, anything goes. The way it
> should be. The way I would do it if I were in their position
> (Kassandra, 409-419).

The significance of this extract is clear: Kassandra
favors the ideological stance of the serial and its
portrayal of social issues. In addition, her judgment is
normative: the *YR* narrative is 'the way it should be'.
Although realism is not mentioned here, one can now
situate her aforementioned claims about the authenticity
of the soap in her ideological affiliation with it. As in the
case of Danos, the narrative speaks for her; she would

have produced a similar account, if she wrote the serial – once again she identifies with the production team.

Anna Danae was earlier identified as an aesthetic viewer in her relationship to foreign soaps, but when it comes to domestic ones she shifts to the position of the social observer. The salience of socially oriented storylines activates and validates her own beliefs:

> Foskolos writes about current problems and issues. He criticizes the rich, the capitalists, and he supports, he encourages the poor. And I like that. I'm on his side, he's right (211).

Aliki Danae devoted considerable time in our interview on the issue of class, as a grand theme of *Lampsi* and *KZ*, and it was evident that her pleasure was very much a matter of confirmation of her own political position. In Greek soaps, such viewers find a form of public sphere where their ideas adhere to events that are clearly shaped by current affairs and actual events. In effect, they watch their own belief systems taking a tangible, living form which they recognize and celebrate. Aliki Danae establishes here the actuality of the storylines ('current problems'), and then defends and adopts Foskolos' position. In social observers' accounts, soap ideology has also didactic properties; its consciousness-raising role is acknowledged and favorably received. In the following extract, Anna also takes the role of the program makers and articulates the soap's function as an invocation of forgotten values:

> When you create such a serial you must try to put forward certain teachings, values that we have forgotten, because especially we as Greeks need them. Without them our children will lose their generation and our people will perish. We must hold on to religion, our homeland, our soul. Even older people need to be taught those values (Anna, 375).

The intertwined concepts of memory,
history, and generation come alive in Anna's account,
and similar discourse was used by all social observers,
who endorsed the quest for higher ideals (justice, honor,
family, social equality, patriotism, and so on[11]) to be
extrapolated from the storylines and be taught to those
who have forgotten, those who must 'see and remember'
(Yiorgos, 14, 4.2.2). The commentary in which they
engage also has a rhetoric function and hence its forensic
and formal style. The social observer finds pleasure in
the celebration of his/her values and their ideological
representation in soaps, which create out of them
narratives that speak in such 'real' and authentic
language. It is a language that evokes memories and
values, activates meanings situated in the social and
historical background of social observers and motivates
them to make such readings of soap opera.

4.3 The ironic distance viewing position

> J: What makes you laugh [*in YR*]?
> L: The whole thing is so unreal. Everything about it makes
> me laugh. Victor taking his lady friends to the Colonnade,
> all these extremely complicated stories where everyone is
> involved with everyone, completely far fetched... to the
> point of hilariousness (Lakis, 222).

> There was a very intense sarcastic commentary [*about BH
> 90210*]. This sarcastic relationship gave us the alibi to
> watch, the fact that it's sarcastic allows us to watch
> (Aaron, 64).

Most of the fans I talked to distanced themselves at
several instances and made meta-statements concerning
soap operas, but they basically displayed a high
involvement with the text which fuelled their fanship.

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[11] It is no wonder that these ideals are very much associated with a
romantic notion of 'Greekness' (Tsourvakas, 1995; see also
chapter 2) and that they appear in such a nationally charged
statement as that of Anna's.

The final viewing position to consider, that of ironic distance, is distinctive in that fanship is constituted by the celebration and overplay of this very distance. Watching soap becomes a game of identifying and laughing at excessive meanings, relocating them into personal narratives.

Ironic distance fans will go to considerable lengths in order to prove their critical distance and their aesthetic disapproval of soap opera. Their discourse is distinctly elitist because they reject soap opera as a cultural product of low quality, aimed at audiences of lower intellectual and social caliber. This attitude though will not stop them from claiming fanship, or even addiction when it comes to soap watching. Indeed, they were the only ones in my sample whose fan activities went well beyond watching or reading about soaps in the press. Their engagement to soap has spawned artwork, video collections, letters (between fans), visits to soap actors' theatrical performances, and a rich, oral culture based on their own re-working of the texts. Central to these practices, and to this viewing position generally, is the existence of friendship networks – soap watching is primarily a social activity for these viewers.

Surely, the strong involvement with soap as fan practice contradicts the ironic distance and negative attitudes towards soap as a text. This contradiction is not a novel characteristic of popular culture. Hermes (1995), Ang (1985), and Finch (1986) have also commented on audiences' ironic and camp uses of 'low' popular culture. Ang in particular sees in the ironic discourse of *Dallas* fans a defense vis-à-vis the elitist ideologies about the low worth of mass culture. Aaron's statement above supports this argument; he clearly indicates that the ironic commentary was the excuse for him, a middle-

class academic, to watch and gossip about a teenage drama, which he proclaims as 'utter rubbish' (112).

What follows will introduce the practices that characterize the relationship of ironic viewers to soap opera texts.

4.3.1 Soap opera poachers

The most basic feature of the ironic distance position is the semiotic play that viewers engage in. In comparison to aesthetic viewers, for example, ironic distance fans also focus closely on the soap opera text, but their pleasure is generated by their own reworking of the textual meanings into different narratives. Characters, storylines, locations, and other textual references are received with a playful attitude. Ironic viewers will not feel suspense or sympathy for the characters or agonize over what will happen. They will, however, keep an eye for details and meanings that activate an ironic commentary. In the following excerpt, *YR* fan Rea indicates that the fan discourse she engages in with her friends does not center on the narrative as a syntagm, but on its components: the exaggerated functions of the narrative and the conventionalized representation of characters:

> We're not so much interested in what happened, as in how it happened. We talk about the extreme things that take place, we make fun or we're sarcastic about the characters, how they talk, their expressions, you know, like the trademark phrases they use, like Jack calling Victor 'the mustache man' (365).

Most ironic commentary is aimed at the characters, their look, and the visual style of the soap, as this group of fans demonstrate:

T: ... a haircut, a one-liner, the frowns, you know,
the details.
S: Theoharis' *[character in KZ]* uniform is just incredible.
Loaded with decorations, medals, it's incredible.
T: Their hair in general, like when he runs and his hair
bounces. When you take the piss at a serial you basically
make fun of the protagonists (Stavros & Telis, 1021-1031).

However, the use of language in the soap opera text
is also crucial for the ironic viewers' response. Staple
figures of speech were picked up by Rea and her friends,
as 'classic lines' that they laugh at and use in their own
talk. The common discursive and cultural references
among the members of those fan networks, as well as the
playfulness and creativity in their meaning construction
is articulated on the level of language, as in the usage of
staple lines, for example, and their transposition into
different contexts. The linguistic element of the soap
opera text is assessed against generic knowledge and
cultural resources. Nestor, an ironic distance fan of *SB*,
also draws from the program's dialogue for his fan
discourse. In this instance the formulaic style of the soap
dialogue is situated in the mainstream, Hollywood film
tradition:

J: Do you use lines from *SB*?
N: Definitely, lines are a must. There are some clichés,
which you'll find in any Hollywood product you look at,
like when one dies and his partner by his side says: 'don't
you die on me man'. These are classic lines (Nestor, 119-
121).

Besides stereotypical expressions, language that is
considered excessively melodramatic or ceremonial is
also an aspect that gives rise to ironic commentary:

J: So the Greek ones are funnier?
L: They are funnier, quite ridiculous. Every sentence cracks
you up... The acting is very poor, the situations are more
dramatic, the dialogue is funnier ... it's a disgrace... they
use a very high level vocabulary, gratuitously, just to
impress and give us a better cry *[laughter]* (Lakis, 248-
250).

> The language that Foskolos uses is amazing, I
> mean a line like 'come hither cop' cracks you up naturally
> *[laughter]* (Stavros, 546).

Stavros refers to the ceremonial and pompous dialogue of Greek soaps, as an example of a textual aspect that does not need further re-working: to them it is inherently funny because it clashes with cultural expectations of how working class cops, for instance, are supposed to speak in everyday situations. In all ironic distance accounts there is a common pattern of reading 'against the grain'. The 'tragic structure of feeling' of soaps that generates pleasure for other viewers, is met here with cynicism, opposition and critical distance which lead to a playful appropriation of the text. Ironic distance fans are also quite reflexive about their aberrant readings and a great amount of their pleasure results from the knowledge that these texts were produced to be read differently.

Hence, the unconventionality of their reading practices is an important source of empowerment and self-confirmation. Lakis, for example, indicates that the melodramatic elements that might touch a chord in other viewers are the ones that he finds the funniest, and the following account makes similar claims:

> I watch [KZ] as a source of laughter, not as a social drama
> [...] Whereas all the older fans see it as a serial with
> interesting storylines, suspense... (Yiotis, 379; 492)

As several authors have maintained (de Certeau, 1984; Hobson, 1982; Fiske, 1987; Radway, 1987; Storey, 1999), it is also evident here that the meaning of the text is largely dependent on its moments of consumption and what its readers make of it. These fans are aware that besides their oppositional reading of the texts, their cultural use of the programs is also 'against the grain'.

In many cases, the ironic viewing position leads fans to reject not only aesthetic but also ideological aspects of

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the soap text. First of all, by opposing the soaps'
mode of address they challenge any process of
interpellation:

> I don't identify at all [*with BH 90210*]. I mean, I am so
> distanced when I watch, that really it cannot touch me at all
> emotionally (Aaron, 435).

Like Aaron, many ironic distance fans feel that the
programs do not speak for them; they all make a point of
belonging in a 'special category' of fans who use the
soap for a specific, aberrant purpose. Moreover, it is
precisely the mode of address, and thus the ideological
operation of the text, that they resist most directly. Let
us look at the following examples:

> For me, [*KZ*] is meaningless. It has no point, it's just a
> laugh. Nothing more. I agree with Telis that there are
> certain ideals that Foskolos tries to get across, but they
> reach such a hilarious level that we just scorn them (Yiotis,
> 1327).

> K: We would take aspects from [*BH 90210*] and ascribe
> them to our friends, taking the piss, just for fun's sake,
> without letting in this moral teaching, the standardized
> ethics we've been talking about. We produced our own
> moral teaching, among a light-hearted, relaxed group of
> people, talking and laughing... I mean, I can't even imagine
> talking seriously about *BH 90210* even for five minutes...
> We were transferring aspects from the serial into our own
> lives, but we would twist them and render them in a way.
> J: So, you were writing an alternative *BH 90210*.
> K: Yeah, exactly (Kostas, 383-387).

In the first extract we can see that the ironic
distance that Yiotis proclaims is strong enough to block
any other meaning or subject position that the text may
offer. The text is prescribed with his own expectations
and ironic discourse, which eliminates further
signification. He can identify ideological operations at
work, but he laughs at them, precisely because they are
so conspicuous ('such a hilarious level'). Kostas
highlights the social use of *BH 90210* at the expense of

its paternalistic ideology. Again, the playful discourse in which the soap is located ('taking the piss', 'for fun's sake', 'light-hearted') is emphasized as a reactionary stance against textual positioning. In both accounts we can see that ideological meanings are stripped of their signification, as new, oppositional ones are being produced.

Evidently, de Certeau's (1984) formulation of poaching, as a tactic of consumers to make their own culture using the resources of the imposed culture, a sort of *bricolage*, becomes relevant in this context. The ironic viewing position is characterized by the 'stealth' of meanings and their re-shaping into something new that suits the interests and cultural repertoires of the viewers, and thus fits de Certeau's analogy. Nevertheless, in contrast to his claim that poached meanings are transient, I would agree with Jenkins' (1992) observation, that there is a tangible aspect in the culture produced by fans. Jenkins based his argument on organized fans of science fiction programs who produce art, songs, videos, and literary texts, and whose poaching thus has material results. I also came across many such instances with ironic distance fans. I would argue, however, that even the creation of an alternative discourse displays an aspect of permanence and ownership, too. We saw that the ironic distance position leads to a strong sense of control and ownership for the viewers. Another tangible aspect is the social role of this discourse, which I will now address.

4.3.2 Soap opera discourse as a social practice

Compared to the other viewing positions, ironic distance is in many ways the most social one. For ironic viewers fan discourse *is* the purpose of reception: the

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soap text is not as important as the spoken text it generates. Discourse is the main source of pleasure and meaning for those fans, who reject the programs aesthetically. For Aaron, *BH 90210* is a tradition of private jokes, raucous TV dinners, and common references that he has shared with his daughter for many years. This social, family practice is what makes the soap pleasurable:

> A: I don't watch the serial as escapism. It never goes through my mind that I get lost in the glamour and that I'd like some of it for myself. It's not the reason I watch, it's what I told you in the beginning-
> J: The social-
> A: It's the social element, the family element (Aaron, 603-607).

Usually, the practice of soap watching is initiated through group activities and retains this communal character. Even if ironic viewers watch on their own, watching is still fuelled by the existence of a friendship network, because they will pick up the details that form the basis of their shared commentary, having in mind the social process that will follow:

> Because I know that we're gonna talk about it [*YR*] I laugh with what they say because they're things we've talked about and I say 'wow, amazing line' and I laugh out loud [...] it's something that I enjoy watching and... I will talk about it with my friends afterwards, I'll hear one line or two and put them in a letter and laugh with T. that also watches (Rea, 155, 419).

Group watching usually takes place through the use of video technology. Ironic distance fans made extensive use of video recording and collected favorite episodes. By coincidence, two of the fan networks that I encountered were Greek students based in London (although I met and interviewed them in Athens), who had arranged for *BH 90210* and *KZ* respectively, to be videotaped and sent to them from home. In these cases

there is definitely a diasporic quality to soap related practices and the social significance of soap watching as a dispatch from home becomes even more highlighted. Nevertheless, the qualitative character of fan discourse produced by diasporic and home-based fan networks is largely similar – the difference lies mostly in that the former ones make more use of VCR facilities, and hence, engage more in group watching.

Another intrinsically social factor of this viewing position takes effect far beyond the viewing process. Although watching is a fun activity for ironic distance viewers (fed by the promise of group talk and commentary), soap opera experience is basically constituted by the social exchange of meanings that takes place post-watching. The textual details are extracted from their 'parent' text and appropriated into a discourse that carries the mark of the fan network. Linked with their own shared references, vocabularies and experiences, soap opera becomes a cultural currency that spawns further narratives and meanings, which belong to the fans. Thus, poaching becomes a distinctly social process; it takes life from the infusion of diverse and shared social experiences, backgrounds, cultural specificities and lived histories.

As the meanings circulate among friends, they grow and change in order to fit the fans' lives. Ironic distance fans will not share personal experiences through soap storylines (since they feel that they are not spoken to by the programs), but they do inject soap opera references in their interpersonal communication. Soap characters and narratives become social categories that will spice-up their talk and add some 'cult' references that are shared only by members of the group. Let us see how Manos and Titos talk about the social dimension of *KZ* fanship:

T: First of all, we shoot a lot of clips that are related to *KZ*, and in general there are many things from it, like lines, words, situations, that stay with us [...]Figures like the fruit seller *[laughter]* or some others who make an appearance. The best thing is that we don't stay there but we re-shape them, we talk on the phone, we discuss them, we put them in our own lives.

M: We simulate them in our lives, like some people who are really into cars and they enjoy dropping car jargon into their conversation, that's how we talk, we're gonna drop a line from *KZ* while we're having a laugh, make a related joke.

T: Especially when it's the two of us, because you know, when people who don't watch are around they don't get it and there's not much point to it.

T: It's not our only resource but it is one of our resources. I mean, when you get involved with something you adjust some things and use them (1121-1131).

In this excerpt we find most of the themes relevant to the ironic distance viewing position and its social use of soap opera. Manos and Titos exemplify the process of poaching meanings and re-shaping, transforming and incorporating them in their everyday lives. The process of meaning transformation is emphasized by them as 'the best thing'. The figures, words, and references related to the text do not stay intact but are re-worked in a different context and at a different level, to become a form of communication, a 'jargon', a shared cultural resource, a common language between friends that enhances their relationship. These two fans also produce their own soap-related texts by shooting comical home videos that draw on their interpretation of *KZ* storylines.

It can be said that in the ironic distance position soap opera takes on a dimension that is very close to real life. Although these fans do not consider these shows close to their lives or to anyone's life, generally, through their social practices, the injection of soap references in their personal lives, and their talk about the characters as if they were real persons, they go to great lengths to give the texts a sense of lived reality, albeit at the level of

irony. The social role soap opera plays in this position will be further analyzed in the chapters that follow.

Having introduced the patterns of reception that shape my interview data, I will address an important element of this categorization: the negotiation and shift between viewing positions. I shall discuss the way in which positions are negotiated, the contexts in which such shifts take place, and what can this fluidity of viewing positions tell us about soap opera viewership.

4.4 Negotiating viewing positions

The oscillation between viewing positions was encountered with several cases and constitutes evidence of the complexity and flexibility of television reception. Nevertheless, this fluidity is not articulated at random; they were some clear boundaries between positions that were not transgressed by any viewers, as well as certain recurring factors that influence shifts between positions. The steady patterns and specificities that characterize viewing processes reconfirm the significance of this typology: if all viewers took up any position, at any time, and under any circumstances it would not make sense to talk of viewing positions.

4.4.1 Viewing context and social dynamics

Several social observers and ironic distance viewers flirted with the aesthetic position; arguably, the most generic one. 'Flirt' is an appropriate term because, as indicated, there was always a dominant viewing position that captured the viewer's engagement to soap. For some, however, there was also a latent mode at work, evident in fleeting comments, in the fringes of their discourse, and in very specific circumstances. This phenomenon I call

negotiation between viewing positions. The reader might recall that I described viewing positions as proportional structures, in that some viewers can be 'hard-core' social observers, for example, while other social observers might also negotiate with an aesthetic tendency. Having clarified the meaning of this notion, let us see how such shifts were articulated in the interviews.

For Stavros, watching *KZ* is largely associated with the pleasures of the ironic discourse produced by his group of friends. His identity as a fan is so deeply defined by his position of ironic distance, that the disclosure about his aesthetic side surprised his friends and led to an interesting display of social dynamics during the interview. In this instance, the shift between viewing positions signifies a shift between social allegiances (Fiske, 1989b). It became clear that audience members tend to associate modes of watching to gender identity. The aesthetic viewing position was preferred by several men, but in the case of ironic distance viewers, the contact with aesthetic modes of reception was not a comfortable process. Because of its association with femininity - and to be more exact, an assumed, particular type of femininity, that of the 'housewife' – the aesthetic viewing position was always reluctantly revealed and discussed.

> S: To be honest, when I watch *[KZ]* on my own I don't laugh.
> T: Oh, I always do.
> J *[to S.]*: Really? That's interesting.
> S: I don't know, if I watch together with Telis or Yiotis I'll be laughing out loud, but if I watch on my own, I just sit down and look at it, I watch.
> T: I just laugh and make sure I'm recording it.
> J: *[to S.]* So do you think you're really into it?
> S: No, well, I still keep a distance but... when I'm with friends I have a laugh, alone, I just sit and get carried away, I even feel suspense [...] Sometimes I've caught myself laughing during the beating scenes, but it's because my sister will be in the room and I laugh because there is someone with whom I can share the ludicrousness of the

thing. I see the ludicrous but I don't laugh
(Stavros & Telis, 468-480).

The oscillation between the two viewing positions is apparent. Stavros quite guardedly admits that when the viewing context changes, when he watches alone, he will 'look at it... watch it' without engaging in playful practices. We see the traces of the aesthetic position: the emphasis on 'pure' looking and watching, being carried away, the emotional involvement with the narrative. This involvement is reluctantly admitted, and I am not sure whether Stavros would have talked about his aesthetic viewing in detail without my probing ('Really? That's interesting'). It is also worth pointing out that Telis immediately reinforces his own viewing position and distances himself from his friend's oscillation.

In Stavros' account we identify the crucial role of the viewing context; to a certain extent viewing position is dependent on social dynamics. Our response to television can be controlled and monitored through our reflexivity about its performative role. Viewership in the presence of others entails several micro-performances of the self; by laughing at the appropriate scene, dropping the right comment, or pointing out the right information, we perform a role and convey a message about ourselves, being aware that we are being watched. As Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) indicate, media fans and enthusiasts center their cultural reception around performances of the self. Being a fan entails acting in a certain way and making a statement about one's identity. This explains why ironic distance viewers invest so much in the social dimension of their fanship, and engage in strongly social activities concerning the soaps. Social relationships are maintained and enhanced by the micro-

performances of fanship that take place, and hence the theatricality and playfulness of ironic distance practices.

In the presence of members of our in-group we will perform the roles that are prescribed by the group norms and allegiances, the practices that strategically signify who we are. With his friends, or even when his sister is around, Stavros is a typical ironic distance viewer who will point out the kitsch elements of the scenery, laugh at the actors' delivery, and exchange *KZ* lines in order to 'have a laugh'. He will externalize the way he constructs meaning and his response towards the narrative, according to the context around him. Since the aesthetic pleasures he extracts are not congruent with his identity as a male, middle-class, young professional, he will laugh, almost mechanically, when someone else is around with whom he can 'share the ludicrousness of the thing'. Irony, sarcasm, playfulness: we must have an audience in order to respond thus, as audience members. On his own, Stavros' style of engaging to *KZ* changes because there is no one with whom he can share his wit and laughter, no one to prove to what kind of viewer he is. Although he will not admit to 'be really into it', he owns up to getting carried away and feeling suspense – responses that no ironic viewer will confidently admit. Indeed, he talks about this type of viewership as a 'secret side' and his friends admit their surprise:

> T: Stavros has a secret side!
> S: Yes I do have a secret side, that I will admit.
> Y: Of which I had no idea! (Stavros, Yiotis & Telis, 518-522)

As Stavros starts talking more openly about his characteristics as an aesthetic viewer, Telis and Yiotis become more sarcastic:

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S: I have to say that I've been following with
suspense these days, I was on the edge, wouldn't miss an
episode.
Y: Did you lie awake at nights thinking about it?
S: Well, I did not go to-
T: He was taking Tavor [*sleeping pills*] to cool down (607-
613).

Stavros' style of discourse is quite confessional ('I have to say...') as he admits to an identity that he is not comfortable with, snapping in reaction to his friends' ironic comments. Following the conversation we see indeed that Yiotis and Telis become more judgmental and Stavros more defensive, after the latter admits that *KZ* is meaningful and pleasurable beyond ironic discourse, revealing his negotiation between different kinds of pleasure:

S: I don't really mind anymore if I don't talk about it – I
will just watch on my own.
Y: OK, you're way over the edge.
S: I am a bit, I admit it [...]
J: What is different about you guys and other fans?
T: We can control what we get from the show – others take
everything in.
S: I am on the borderline.
T: You are a housewife.
S: I believe I belong to both [...] For example, I might call
Yiotis and talk about Nakos [*KZ character – laughter*]...
but I might as well not, not talk about it at all. I might have
watched and found loads of ridiculous stuff, but not be
interested in talking about it, to just keep it for me *[he
laughs]*. For my sake [...] I've started to feel for it [...]
Nakos is a good man, their love *[with Zeta, his wife]* is
eternal *[laughter]*... The other day it was showing flash
back scenes, the old times, really touching [...]
Y: Oh God!
S: Yiotis looks at me very dodgily! *[laughter]*
J: (*to Y.*) What do you think about what Stavros says?
Y: OK, if he means it, and I think that he does, I think he
should perhaps take a break from the serial *[laughter]*. It's
not very nice to be controlled by a TV serial.
T: I disagree, I think that Stavros knows what to take at the
right moment, I mean he can watch the serial and be a
housewife, and –
S: Listen, maybe I had really missed television [...]
T: You have two positions.
S: I am still oscillating between the audience Telis
represents and the average forty-five year old housewife.
I'm not sure *[laughter]* I think I might be both! (757-1275)

There are several processes that are documented in these extracts. Firstly, we can fully appreciate the shift in viewing practices that signify a negotiation between positions. The social dimension of soap watching is not the only lure for Stavros. He is also interested in the story itself and even enjoys a romantic storyline, whereas ironic distance viewers tend to prefer more violent and socially focused stories. He also displays another aesthetic feature by suspending judgment about the excesses of *KZ*, which he will identify as 'ridiculous' but having found pleasure in tuning himself into them he lacks the interest to call his friend in order to gossip and laugh about them. His mode of reception, thus, varies according to the viewing context. In his discourse the reflexive blending of the two positions is evident, since in the same statement he will make a joke about a *KZ* character and then talk about the same hero's romance and how touching it was. Stavros is highly aware of his double allegiance: he professes to be on the borderline. It is also worth noting that audience groupings are very clear cut for this group of viewers. One can either be a 'housewife' and be 'over the edge', 'feeling' the narrative and be controlled by it, or the young male viewer who has his fun with the soap without feminizing himself.

The strong gendering of reception modes explains the reaction by Yiotis and Telis. They are both uncomfortable finding out that Stavros is not 'one of the boys', that he has transgressed the unwritten rules of male viewership and has become a 'housewife'. Yiotis suggests that his friend should stop watching because he has lost his control over the serial. The conception of a powerful audience, in control of their viewing experience, is considered a privilege of ironic and

distanced reception that aims at debunking the soap. The pleasures associated with the text, that were displayed by aesthetic viewers, are judged here to be disempowering.

This might explain some of the revelations by other ironic distance viewers concerning the function of playfulness and irony as an excuse to watch soaps without guilt. Aaron was one of those fans. 'Apparently our social circle does not allow us to speak about soaps seriously... only humorously' (148), he said, referring to the social legitimacy of soap opera as a cultural resource. The strategic use of irony was mentioned by other ironic distance fans who in that context turned some of their sarcasm back to themselves:

> You know, sometimes I think that I really like [SB] and that all this is just an excuse, you know, about it being silly, and having a laugh with it. But I watch it; if it's so ridiculous why don't I switch it off? No, I think at the end of the day I enjoy it, it makes me feel nice. I'm proud [laughter]! (Nestor, 153)

> J: What is it about a soap that will make you stick with it?
> L: It has to be really ridiculous and friends have to watch it too.
> J: How come then you don't watch Clarita [a telenovela]? You said it's hilarious and pretty low.
> L: It is, but nobody watches it, I'm the only one from our crowd who has ever watched it. This says a lot about me, actually [laughter]! (Lakis, 254-260)

These statements reveal the negotiation in the viewers' identity, especially in that sarcasm is *still* their preferred channel of discourse as they reveal that soap is not always about having a laugh with your friends. Nestor admitted self-reflexively that he is actually more personally involved with SB, than his ironic comments let show and goes on to proclaim that he really enjoys it – soon, though, his discourse resumes a camp style. Lakis, similarly, while stating his ironic distance criteria for soap fanship (another evidence for the social dimension

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of this position), self-sarcastically comments that actually these criteria do not always guide him. The fact that he has been watching *Clarita* on his own, he considers as a sign of his hidden, but 'true' identity as a 'real' soap fan ('this says a lot about me'). Both of these disclosures, however, significantly slip out only via self-sarcasm; half-seriously, half-jokingly. This goes to show how far social dynamics affect our reception of television and also interview data.

It is possible that Lakis and Nestor would not have made these revealing comments had they taken part in a group interview (like Stavros), where power relations would be different. Several methodological issues are at stake regarding this finding, as it relies completely on the fans' accounts and whether I interpret them at face value. Nevertheless, I have more reasons to read them as authentic than not. They reveal their negotiation quite cautiously by means of self-sarcasm, a mode that makes them feel comfortable and less 'exposed'. If what they said was false they would have been more nonchalant about it. Stavros also showed this ambivalent attitude, and especially in his case, being surrounded and sneered at by his male friends, there was nothing to win by presenting a false identity.

Morley's (1987) research on the role of television in family life has underlined similar issues about the gendering of reception and the importance of social context. My data indicate that modes of reception can be negotiated according to viewing contexts. Television reception is an activity that blends with our surroundings and our role as viewers will change, depending on whether we are watched and by whom. The power of social dynamics – gender roles, social class, group norms and expectations – over audience behavior, and the

function of viewership as performance of the self were both salient in the accounts we explored. Another factor that proved significant in viewing position shifts was the text's origin (highlighting issues of national identity that will be discussed in Chapter 6).

4.4.2 Viewing positions and the television text

The origin and the thematic preoccupation of the text also led viewers to engage in different styles of reception. Greek soaps, for example, base their storylines on true stories and refer extensively to recognizable institutions, social groups, and historical details. We saw that this social specificity was a feature that clashed with many aesthetic viewers, who desired something less mundane. On the contrary, social observers appreciate this element of realism and relevance, and consequently were particularly drawn to domestic soaps. Therefore, viewers who negotiated between the aesthetic position and that of the social observer, were fans of both foreign and Greek soaps, like Anna:

> KZ reflects the beliefs that I talked about and insisted on previously, it shows these values, right? The ones we tend to forget as modern Greeks and this serial comes like a reaction to what we try to look like, that's why I want to watch it. YR on the other hand, I watch because of the way they handle emotions, it's more refined, better acted, and all that (299).

The two soaps are situated in different discourses and are received with different positions. When our conversation focused on KZ, Anna talked about the forgotten ideals, the social issues that she extracted and discussed with her husband, and the didactic role of the soap. Her discourse was clearly anchored to the social observer position. KZ hailed her as a Greek citizen and this interpellation led to a reception aiming at social critique, glimpses of which we can see in the above

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extract. However, in relation to *YR* Anna never commented on social issues, or engaged in similar type of critique. Instead, as we see here too, she talked about romantic heroines and she focused particularly on the portrayal of romantic relationships, as she also does above. Her dominant mode of reception *is* the social observer position: social commentary regarding *KZ* took up most of our interview time and *KZ* was the serial she considered her favorite. But still, a social observer can be an aesthetic viewer when faced with a text that invites such mode of reception. Foreign texts tended to elicit escapist pleasures for Greek viewers because of their glamorous and romantic aspects; their 'fairy-tale' like quality which led to a suspension of judgment and an emphasis on aesthetic pleasure:

> *YR* is outside my reality, so it's not important whether it's relevant or not. But living in Greece, and knowing the people, I can't watch [*Lampsi*] and accept that this serial corresponds to the way Greeks live... I mean, *Lampsi*, I just watch it for laughs [...] *YR* does not correspond to the life that the average American leads. But given that, when I watch it I don't really care because it doesn't concern me. I see some sort of fairy tale in *YR* (Rea, 470).

Rea is an ironic distance soap fan who will, nevertheless, display an aesthetic position at times because *YR* is not culturally and socially relevant to her. It does not activate her identity as a Greek citizen, in the way *Lampsi* does. Being ideologically and aesthetically distanced from *Lampsi* she will not accept its representations, as social observers do. She receives the show in an ironic and playful manner, in the same way she will do with her friends about *YR*. The actual, geographic distance, however, of the culture that is being depicted in *YR* can at times suspend her ironic distance. A Greek soap would not do that, unless it were closer to her ideological beliefs, as in the case of Aliki Danae,

who negotiates between aesthetic and social observer positions in her engagement to foreign and domestic soaps, respectively. When I asked her whether the Greek soaps were close to her life she answered:

> They're not that close to my life, but they're close to my ideas [...] The foreign ones are more neutral, they don't have any politics, they do not have a political purpose [...] There are family problems, emotional problems, love affairs. These things happen in the Greek ones too, but Foskolos goes further, he goes into class conflicts, this sort of thing (221, 235, 239).

The theme of cultural specificity re-emerges here. Aliki Danae was quoted in sections 4.1 and 4.2, so the reader is familiar with the articulation of her reception patterns. In this extract we see clearly where the viewing position shift is grounded; it is her cultural citizenship and her system of beliefs that are hailed by the Greek texts and raise this response. On the other hand, the foreign shows are considered politically neutral and free of ideology. This was an observation that many of my respondents made, especially those in the aesthetic viewing position who claimed to deliberately avoid ideological messages.

Issues of cultural identity arise in this context but more detail will be devoted to them further on. Here, I wanted to demonstrate how the text functions as an agent of viewing positions shift. Cultural specificity emerged as a significant factor, together with the contextual aspects that shape the viewing process. It is remarkable how formations of class, gender, and nationality enter the micro-process of television viewing and make their mark. I believe it became evident in the way male viewers, for example, negotiated hesitantly with a style of reception that is associated with class and gender characteristics, or in the way ideological discourse can be acknowledged

or deliberately overlooked because of a soap's ethnic origin and cultural mode of address.

John Fiske writes in *Understanding Popular Culture*:

> The popular can... be characterized by its fluidity. One person may, at different times, form different cultural allegiances with different, not to say contradictory, social groups as he or she moves through the social formation (1989b:30).

Evidently, a popular cultural form like soap opera can give rise to viewing positions that are fluid and negotiated according to social formations and allegiances. Nevertheless, the data that I introduced in this chapter point to certain boundaries in this relatively flexible process. The most obvious limit appeared between the positions of the social observer and ironic distance. Whereas several social observers and ironic distance fans would flirt with the aesthetic position, there was no evidence of an articulation between the former two. No social observer would ever engage in ironic commentary about his or her soap: they viewed their soaps respectfully, as texts of social and educational value that conveyed worthy and truthful ideas. Likewise, ironic distance viewers might succumb to the escapist pull of soap operas at particular times, but their opposition to soaps as cultural and ideological objects was always tenacious. This is an important finding that we should keep in mind throughout the analysis that follows, which raises important questions regarding the reception of ideology.

Concluding this chapter I would like to point out how viewing positions are spread demographically across this sample of soap opera fans[12], because issues of class,

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[12] The reader can refer to the participants' profiles in Appendix A, or Table 4.1 for a closer look.

age, education, and gender are obviously relevant in the adoption of viewing position(s). Figure 4.1 displays this spread schematically:
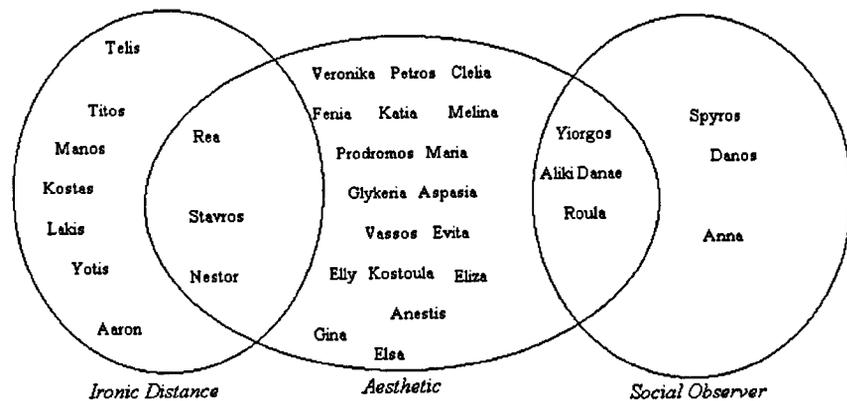
Figure 4.1: The distribution of viewing positions across the sample.

While only three men were 'pure' aesthetic viewers, there were many male fans who negotiated with an aesthetic mode of reception. Besides the predominance of females, the aesthetic position was occupied by people from all ages and social classes. The social observers were also a heterogeneous cluster of fans, with no upper-middle class representatives. On the other hand, the ironic viewing position was the most homogeneous to emerge. With the exception of Aaron, a college professor in his early fifties, all of the ironic distance viewers were young adults, students or professionals, aging from 19 to 25 years old. Significantly, they were all middle class, coming from well-off backgrounds, and apart from Rea[13], all were males.

The small sample of this study does not allow any generalizations related to demographic detail. Having said that, this remarkable specificity does call for some problematization about class, age and gender and this is

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[13] There were two more female YR fans in Rea's group of friends whom I did not have the chance to interview.

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exactly what I will pursue in the analysis which
will follow, starting from the role of gender in soap opera
reception.

5. Gender and soap opera in Greece

My research differs from the majority of soap opera studies in that men viewers participated on an equal basis. I have already taken up this issue in the introductory chapter of the thesis, but I feel that I have to make some self-reflective remarks here as well, since this chapter deals with the question of gender, which in this case takes on a new dimension, since we address it comparatively.

Why study men who watch soap opera? It is a question that has echoed in my mind and ears for as long as I have been involved in this research, and it is a legitimate one, which has often made me feel uncomfortable with my own position as a feminist. To explain this, I must first refer to the changes that have marked the soap opera landscape. Clearly, the shows in question. are not what they used to be when soap opera scholarship first appeared in the States and Britain. Prime-time soaps like *Dallas* and *Dynasty* caused a major 'refurbishment' in their daytime counterparts, as well as a re-orientation of the public towards the genre. Moreover, as Geraghty (1991) pointed out in *Women and Soap Opera*, the 80's saw the rise of a masculinization in soaps, with shows like *Brookside* that a male audience followed too, with more action-oriented storylines. The same is true of the Greek soap operas of the 90's, as well as some American daytime shows, like Aaron Spelling's teen vehicle *Sunset Beach*. Geraghty problematized this trend, as she saw that these novel narratives were colonizing the feminine spaces, that were originally offered to women in the generic soap content. This line of thought is relevant in the case of audience research, too. If soap opera audience research has given a voice to female soap

viewers that have been silenced and scorned since the birth of their programs, what is the effect of giving voice to their husbands, on the basis that they're watching too? What are the purpose and the politics of studying men as soap opera fans, and more than that, as resistant readers of soap operas? What would they be resisting against?

By asking these questions, I acknowledge the slippery surfaces of my project. Notwithstanding those difficulties, though, the understanding we could gain from this relational analysis can shed light to several areas uncovered by previous work that focused on women soap viewers. More recent publications by Ang (1996) for example, make the case for viewers' flexible identities. To some extent, I agree with this discourse, and it is one of the *raisons d'être* of my thesis. If it is objectifying for women viewers to focus only on their gender and overlook other parts of their identities, it is equally restricting to discard male soap fans, part of an audience that is clearly more diverse than previous studies suggest. Moreover, the politics of identity is also going to be an issue in this thesis, because even in our post-modern world, the 'flexible' identity one chooses as fan or viewer of a television program, how one manages it and negotiates it, reveals the social constructs that might affect such choices – constructs which are not always flexible.

Having expressed these considerations, in this chapter I will explore gender at several levels. Firstly, I will identify the differences between the male and female participants of my study in their reception of soap opera. While women have been exhaustively studied as soap opera viewers, men have not; my first concern, thus, in this section will be to look comparatively at how both relate to soap opera, what they do with it, and what it

means to them. The question shaping this part of my analysis is whether watching pleasures and practices are gendered, as it has been noted in the existing literature on domestic audiences (Brunsdon, 1997; Gray, 1992; Morley, 1986). I will look at fan practices, viewing processes, and how pleasure is derived for women and men soap viewers. Moreover, I will investigate whether soap means different things to men and women viewers and how they conceive of themselves as part of the soap audience. The next section will examine specific fan discourses about gender issues as they appear in soaps, in order to see how male and female viewers receive them and in which contexts gender is problematized. In conclusion, I will consider the question of resistance in the reception of gender representations and patriarchic ideology in soap opera.

5.1 'I don't go around saying I watch *Lampsi*': Greek men watching soap.

Despite the feminine aura and the low status of soap opera within popular culture, some men *do* watch. In 1991, when *BB* was still at the height of its Greek glory, its percentage market shares were 52.2 % for men and 55.2% for women, a quite insignificant difference. Fewer men were watching *YR* back then, the share for women being almost double. Greek soaps have always attracted male viewers, but still the difference between the sexes until recently was more than 10%[1]. These figures vary according to age since the percentage of male viewers increases with older ages.

What these numbers cannot tell us, though, is what the programs mean to those viewers and how they are

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[1] For a detailed view of soap ratings in Greece, in relation to gender, see Appendix B.

integrated into their lives and everyday practices. More specifically, how do these Greek men feel about being soap opera fans and what is their relationship to programs?

5.1.1 Viewing position and male fanship identity

In the previous chapter we encountered the phenomenon of negotiation and shifting between two viewing positions. The strong association between gender identity and viewing position appeared as a catalyst in some cases. For example, we saw that the perceived feminine characteristics of the aesthetic viewing position made Stavros, an ironic distance fan of *KZ*, feel very uneasy about his shifts to the aesthetic mode. Tellingly, his friends called him a 'housewife' upon disclosing his non-camp following of *KZ* and feared that he is 'controlled by the serial'[2]. Evidently, gender affects viewership and fanship identity in complex ways, which we are going to examine in this section by looking at how men of different viewing positions deal with soap reception.

Prodromos is in his early 20's and an ardent fan of *Lampsi*, since its first broadcast. His involvement is characteristic of the aesthetic position and yet, he is not particularly comfortable about making this fact public:

> J: So, do you feel you belong to the audience of *Lampsi*?
> P: Yes, yes! [*emphatically*]
> J: How do you feel about that?
> P: Look [*he laughs*], I don't really go around saying so, you know, that I watch *Lampsi* and this sort of thing. When I watch this serial... I get really into it, you know... I talk out loud 'oh no! It's him! Look out'! I feel very upset that I can't tell Virna [*Lampsi character*] 'Yiagos has done this and that' [....] you know, I identify [....] I want to get inside the TV and beat up some people, hug others... (181-187)

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[2] The relevant extract can be found in section 4.4.1.

Prodromos manages his identity as a *Lampsi* fan discreetly: it is a private issue not involving his social self. On the other hand, his experience of the serial is active and emotionally intense, almost physical, and it is this physicality that must be pleasing him the most. However, it is also a source of uneasiness because in a public context it may imply that he has no control over the text: that he is too receptive, too sentimental, or that he does not distinguish between fantasy and reality. Besides that, the sole fact that he watches *Lampsi* is not something to brag about, as he states.

Several younger men expressed their uneasiness about making their soap watching public. Consider Petros, also an aesthetic viewer:

> J: How did you feel about being part of the *BB* audience?
> P: I was bewitched by it but I don't think I would ever talk about it [....]
> J: Had you ever received negative comments about *BB*?
> P: Negative, like why don't you do something else with your time?
> J: Yes this sort of thing, like this is just for housewives, etc.
> P: I would probably get such remarks from my brother who didn't watch, if after the serial I'd sit and talk about it. But I watched in my room, in a space where I didn't disturb anybody, so there was no problem [....]
> J: So, the fact that *BB* was so popular was never a factor, you watched...
> P: I watched just for my sake. To be honest though, when at times there were talk shows on TV about *BB*, and all the fuss about it, gallops on the street asking people about it, I remember that I sat in front of the TV with great interest to see what people had to say about the serial I watched (66, 111).

In this passage we witness the secretive character of male soap watching, the belief that one is watching for his own sake and the determination to keep it separate from the public sphere of the individual. We can easily identify the commonalities between Prodromos, Petros, and Stavros: the private nature of their pleasure, the emphasis on being alone and unwatched. We can recall

that Stavros had described his shifts to the aesthetic position as having a 'secret side'. The wish to keep these pleasures silent and hidden from his friends was also evident; Stavros had said: 'to keep it for me... for my sake'. Watching alone is as pleasing as watching with friends, but the former is harder to accept. His suspense over the storylines and his loud swearing at the TV set (an effort to interact with a fictional setting), puzzled him. Like Prodromos, Stavros also responded in a lively way to the program and found that sometimes he preferred talking to the screen than his friends.

Petros says that he is 'bewitched' by *BB*, so he ascribes to it considerable power which as long as it remains in the realm of fantasy, is not harmful. His watching takes place privately, away from his brother's surveillance and the possibility of his sneers. Notice that he uses the verb 'disturb' in its active form: his family's presence would not disturb *him*, but on the contrary, he and his soap would be disturbing *them*!

These accounts show that male fanship of soap opera can be a taboo subject, especially when it involves a mode of watching that displays feminine traits (identification, vicarious emotion, caring, etc.). As the aesthetic position is characterized by these features, men who watch in this mode have to negotiate their identities as soap fans more than other male fans. It is also noteworthy that Stavros' friends identified that position as the 'housewife'. The audience (in this case those male viewers) have their own preconceptions about the way a 'housewife' relates to soap opera and the term becomes a category: an explanatory formation to describe their own experiences with the genre. For Prodromos the identity of the 'housewife' is the only option, but Stavros is oscillating between his 'boyish', public persona and his

secret side as a 'housewife'. Petros must have found the process of negotiation much harder than Stavros, since he went to great lengths to keep his affinity to the soap a private and secret matter. By preserving his 'secret side' he protects his pride from derogatory comments and keeps the soap inside the safe pocket of fantasy, since *BB* 'bewitched' him. The use of the magic metaphor is quite telling since it implies that the soap could not appeal to him through rational means, but only via a fantastic element. Despite this strategic narrative, Petros is still struggling with his identity as a fan. There is a part of him that needs to relate to an audience; that wants to know what other fans have to say; to assess the object of his affection in public. The only possible way for him to engage in such practices is mediated: he returns to television as the site of an imagined, virtual fanship community that is interviewed on the streets.

Another issue that came up with men participants was their peers' reaction when their soap watching is known about. Most of them deal with the odd, half-serious, half-joking, but still derogatory remark whenever they admit in public that they watch soaps, or even when they urge their friends to watch too. Nestor also negotiates between the ironic distance and the aesthetic positions and said that he took the negative comments with humor:

> J: Do you feel that you belong to the serial's audience?
> N: Yes, yes, certainly.
> J: And how do you feel about it?
> N: Well, I'm not going up to everyone and talk about it, you know, about *SB*, Paul's new girlfriend, and so on. With some friends we'll make fun of it, we'll have a laugh talking about it. I don't feel proud about it, but not exactly inferior either [...] If I felt something between the two, that would have to be a slight nuisance, you know, I feel more uncomfortable about the fact that I watch soap, than happy and cool about it.
> J: Have you received any negative responses?

N: Yeah! I'll come clean! People have beaten me up on
the street; [laughter] I've been beaten; I've been
humiliated! [laughter]
J: Come on, tell me!
N: Well, OK. People have told me things like, 'come on
man what are you watching, have you gone mental'?
J: And how do you respond?
N: Nothing, I just laugh too (47-53; 55-65).

Nestor's account does not differ from the ones we've discussed so far. Outside the group of friends who also watch, SB has no place in his public image and makes him feel rather uncomfortable. His jokes about people's responses (being harassed on the streets) shows that he sees them as a common and natural phenomenon but they may also imply a certain uneasiness and nervousness. The strategic use of irony, even in the context of the interview, was a typical rhetorical form for ironic/aesthetic viewers (also encountered in section 4.4.1). In a way he agrees with the negative comments and he will not bother defending himself; not even on the grounds that 'it's just for laughs', a defensive strategy also used by ironic viewers.

One can deduce from the above extracts that when soap watching is such a private issue, fanship practices are dictated by the need to preserve them as such. When pleasure is associated with the aesthetic mode of watching, the viewer will not engage in the creation of fan discourse and culture. Such practices are largely dependent on the existence of a fan network, which is not the case for the 'aesthetic' fans we encountered above, unless they're oscillating between positions, like Stavros and Nestor. Thus, even though they might feel the need to be more openly involved with their programs, the lack of other fans, or the negative feedback from their social circle, prevents them from doing so. Prodromos illustrates this point effectively:

J: I imagine that with friends who also watch you immediately share something.

P: Like with Rea, right? [*laughs*] Now, with Sotiris, Vassilis, Alexis, I'll never talk about it. I know they don't watch, that they're not interested, so I won't talk with them about serials. Not to mention that they make negative remarks. 'You sit there like a busybody and watch the serial' [....] I'm telling you, I talk more about it with my granny, when I ring her. 'What a shock, Virna's husband going after her daughter' and such things [*laughter*]. This is OK, but with my friends, not! (219-221)

The availability of a fan network among his male friends is inconceivable for Prodromos. Not only are they not interested in *Lampsi*, but they would look down at him if he talked about it. On the contrary, with women he feels safe to gossip about the soap's storylines and characters, a practice that has been traditionally linked to female discourse and stigmatized, as such. It is socially unfavorable for males to engage in gossip, especially in situations where social norms and gender roles are more salient, for instance, among Prodromos' male friends who condemn him as a 'busybody'.

Gossip as a pleasurable practice and a formula of soap opera discourse features highly with male ironic distance viewers. Ironic distance is often the pretext for gossip to take place and become socially legitimate, as we saw in section 4.4.1. When male fans become involved with soap aesthetically[3] and emotionally the arising guilt may lead them feeling uncomfortable, watching privately, or laughing about it with friends. Ironic distance fans are fortunate because in their fan networks not only are they free but they are encouraged to talk about soaps - but only in a playful manner. Take for example Lakis:

J: How do your friends and family react towards your soap watching?

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[3] I use the term in the context of the aesthetic viewing position.

L: With most of them we talk about it, so there are no
reactions [....]
J: So, you feel you're a different kind of viewer?
L: Yeah, yeah, certainly [....] I would never watch without
having a laugh about it. I don't have any suspense and it
doesn't affect my personal life, I'll never shed tears about
what goes on in *Lampsi*. Unfortunately, some people
watch it seriously, and I think that the topic you've
chosen is quite interesting. I'm critical about these soaps
while the others love them (52-54; 381-383).

What in Lakis' view differentiates him from 'the others' is that he maintains a critical distance. The fact that his relationship to the show relies on his irony and active transformation of the text, puts him, in his opinion, in a different cast of viewership. This viewer formulates his identity, as such, on the basis of not being *the other* viewer: the one who identifies with the narrative, feels suspense, reacts in emotional ways (the kind of viewer Prodromos described himself as). The stigmatized persona of the soap fan is here utilized by Lakis, and all ironic viewers, to build a viewership identity that is empowering and favorable: that of the disinterested, sarcastic, and distanced fan who can have fun at the expense of the soap[4]. Other ironic-distance viewers, like Stavros' friends, Telis and Yiotis also feel that they differ from ordinary fans:

J: Would you say that you're part of the show's audience?
S-T: Yeah, of course.
Y: I'd say so as well, but a bit cautiously. I am indeed a
fan of the show [but] I don't know to what extent there
are many fans of this sort. There must be some but not
that many you know.
J: How would you compare your own engagement with the
show versus what you'd call maybe a typical audience?
Y: You mean the difference? Well what we talked about
earlier, mainly that we watch it, rather I only do, as a
source of laughter. I think all the older fans watch it as a
serial that conveys some interesting storylines, with
suspense. For me, there is no suspense for example.

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[4] It is interesting to observe how these elitist hierarchies between
different kinds of audiences are inherent even among soap fans.
Such instances should make us think twice before thinking of fan
communities as harmonized, homogeneous groups.

T/ The difference from other fans is that basically they are controlled by the serial, whereas we control it.
Y/ Yeah, exactly (767-798).

These fans seem to believe that they belong to a higher level of fanship where they have control over the serial. The agency and control that are expressed here are important issues that I will tackle in chapter 8, but here our focus is fanship identity, which appears to be based on difference. The pun aimed at Stavros is also noteworthy: 'we watch it, rather I only do as a source of laughter'. Even if they have shared together several years of common jokes about *KZ*, from the moment Stavros discloses his secret 'housewife' identity, his old one as 'one of the boys' is in danger: the balance of power, even within this single group of fans, is transformed. We can only begin to imagine how strong the hierarchy of taste looms above male soap fans without the comfort of a friendship network in which they can share their soap experiences.

Male soap fans are struggling to contain an identity that jeopardizes their masculinity and their social image as respectable consumers of culture. In accordance to the viewing position that is dominant, they will pick strategies in order to resolve the conflict. For the aesthetic viewer soap is a private matter and the pleasures that he generates are met with some guilt. Consequently, he will rarely talk about his favorite program. In contrast, the ironic viewers are more open about their fanship: they will perform activities that publicize their identity as fans. This is done, in their view, at the expense of the soap and other ordinary soap fans who supposedly cannot reach their high standard. So, are ironic distance viewers completely at ease with their soap fanship? I think the answer is negative: at least in the case of the viewers that I encountered, the

emphasis on their distance, as well as some self-confessional comments showed that their irony can easily be a defensive strategy too.

5.1.2 Age and male fanship identity

Not all men find their identity as soap fans hard to handle. The older men that participated in my study seemed to be much more at ease with their fanship. Not only were they proud about the quality of the serial they were following, but also had no qualms declaring their own strong bond to it. The viewing position that mainly features among older fans (40's - 70's) is that of the social observer, with few exceptions of aesthetic and ironic viewers.

Danos is a widower in his early 70's who identifies himself with the rest of the *KZ* audience readily and believes he's a 'true fan':

> J: Now, do you think you belong in the serial's audience.
> D: Definitely, I'm a true fan [...] it is a priority for me [...]when the serial is on I sit and watch as long as it takes, rather than go out, because I like it, it appeals to me.
> J: Sometimes people ascribe negative labels on everyday serials.
> D: Look, many people have said that about *Lampsi* and are ironic about Foskolos. Friends of mine started to discredit *Lampsi* because it went on and on. I don't agree with that, because Foskolos might be stretching it, but it's still interesting [....] at least for me personally, others might say other things. But it does satisfy me and I sit everyday and watch it. In the weekends for example, when it's not on, it doesn't feel right (58-60; 272-278).

As a typical social observer, Danos is eager to express his admiration for the soap and relate this involvement not to extrinsic reasons, but to the program itself. The qualities he describes make the soap a priority for him and he is quite willing to talk about the concessions he makes for the sake of his soap, at the expense of his social life. Moreover, he defends his

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fanship against negative criticism about Foskolos. His response regarding soaps' reputation is telling: he ascribes such commentary to the show as such and not to his act of watching and, thus, there is no need for him to work on strategies of 'self-defense'.

Another male fan of *KZ* who is also unguarded concerning his fanship is Yiorgos, a military civil servant in his 40's. He is a social observer who crosses to the aesthetic position very often, particularly when it comes to identification:

> Y. A.: ... this effort to save a life. I mean, it affected me in a way that I showed incredible sensitivity and interest, I mean, I identified from afar [...] The script is full of such sensitive issues, and I want to believe that I'm a sensitive person too, and this is what moves me and draws me there [...]
> J: So you believe you belong to the audience of the serial.
> Y. A: Absolutely. I believe that I'm part of the serial. I'm a regular, unless if for some other reasons I can't watch. But I can always read what happens next in a magazine (33-35; 351).

In watching *KZ*, Yiorgos experiences as intense emotions as the younger men we discussed earlier. This fan is more at ease with his identity as soap fan and talks openly about the sensitivities that the soap invokes in him. As we will see below, his soap fanship is not private, but he seeks to exchange his ideas about the serial with other people and does so, actively. Moreover, like Danos, he associates the negative feedback from his peer group with their preconceptions and not his own behavior:

> Those who make such comments are either not interested in this serial, or may have a negativity towards serials [...] and they'll say 'come on, what are you watching this rubbish for, these things are unreal'. They say it's crap, that it's low quality. But perhaps they're just biased on this issue. [...] Perhaps they have not watched it (Yiorgos, 43-45).

The negative comments that soap fans get are more or less the same but the issue here remains that younger male fans take such negative feedback for granted and trace the problem in their own identity.

Nevertheless, older fans will not engage in regular soap talk either, including most social observers, who take such joy in the truthfulness and relevance of their shows[5]. Their explanation was the lack of contact with other fans, rather than identity management. In fact, all male social observers were eager to declare that talking about their soap was something they enjoyed but rarely did because, reportedly, they had very few friends who also watched. Nevertheless, I have my doubts as to the validity of this response, because in at least three cases participants were watching in couples, a setting that would otherwise favor soap related discussion. Gender dynamics seem to be crucial in these cases, and we will deal with this aspect later in this chapter.

From the above analysis we can infer that in addition to the viewing position, age and class also shape men's identity as soap fans. The main concern here was the conflict that males encounter in acknowledging and managing their fanship identity. The findings clearly show that identity politics are at work even in the most everyday and trivial activities like soap opera watching. Soap's low symbolic cultural status lead male fans to negotiate their identity as soap aficionados, in order to present a favorable image.

In the case of older men, the majority of whom were also working or lower-middle class, though, this pressure is not so strong. Having grown up in a more patriarchal society with more clear-cut sex roles and behaviors, they

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[5] Only two cases of social observers discussed soaps relatively often, Anna and Yiorgos.

do not consider their masculinities challenged by their soap watching. Younger men feel more compelled to fill their time with activities that are considered more righteous and less effeminate and so prove themselves. Class, and the different cultural capital demanded by each class culture is also involved in this pattern. These aspects appear to be interrelated, the one feeding into the other: age and class must indeed play a significant role in the formation of viewing positions and consequently, in the meanings soap operas carry for their audience. The section that follows discusses how women fans deal, in turn, with their identity as soap fans. I believe that this comparison will help clarify the role of gender in soap opera fanship identity and practices.

5.2 'I will drop everything and say 'excuse me but this time belongs to me': Greek women watching soap.

Although one would expect women, as the traditionally *preferred* soap opera viewers, to be more comfortable than men with their fanship identity, the pattern of guilty pleasure was also the norm among female participants. The basic themes that arose with men viewers are also relevant here: negative peer and family pressure against soaps, lack of fan communication and discourse, as well as tension about the social stigma attached to the programs.

Nevertheless, there are certain specificities that place female reception in a different context. This will be explored in this section, as well as the differences in viewing processes and fan practices that generate pleasure for women viewers. The accommodation of soap opera in women's everyday life as a break from housework and other tedious tasks is a factor that structures their relationship to soap in a significant way,

and is what differentiates female from male reception of soaps. The role of viewing positions is also different in this set of data, and that is why it is organized differently. Basically, whereas men were more spread across the three positions, the majority of women were aesthetic viewers, and those who were not often negotiated with that position. Does this imply that the aesthetic position is a 'feminine' way of watching soaps? Viewing positions are much more complex in order to be labeled thus. Gender roles, and other cultural factors, too, have to do with the fact that most women are aesthetic viewers, and as this analysis will show, we should steer away from such essentialist notions.

5.2.1 Housework, family and fanship identity

The majority of women in my study emphasized the soap's soothing factor: a chance to relax and unwind in front of the television with something appealing and not too demanding. The fact that most women are constantly busy and struggling with a multitude of tasks inside and outside their homes gives soap watching a sense of entitlement. Women consider it an hour well earned that belongs just to them:

> J: How do you feel about being part of the *YR* audience? Have you been ever been bothered by the bad name soaps have?
> M: People saying that it's rubbish? No, I don't mind at all [...] It's my own thing and I don't care what anybody says. For me it's a time that finds me home, having been on my feet all day, so I like putting my mind to rest (Maria, 58-60).

Maria seems determined not to compromise the pleasure that she derives from *YR* on the account of its reputation as rubbish. Her defense is built on the ground that as long as she has been doing her share of chores, it is up to her to decide what is good for her. It is a time

that she devotes to herself only and the soap is her personal territory. 'It's my own thing', she says, meaning both the program and her time, *per se*, which is precious but colonized by the traditional roles of family and home keeper. In fact, most women will structure their daily work in order to save some peaceful time to savor their soap, like Clelia, a young mother in her 20's and *YR* fan:

> J: And did the serial have its place in a typical day?
> C: Yeah! *[she laughs]* I would cook, have the food in the oven until 15.50 when it would start, so that for the half hour I would spend watching the episode, the food would be cooking. I mean I kept track of my time! During that time I knew that I would just sit down, I would be simply watching television (37-39).

For many women the luxury of sitting down and watching without interruption is not always affordable. Clelia, for example, said in the interview that while she was doing the housework she would have the TV on and get a glimpse of other shows too but for *YR* she would take a break. Making time to enjoy *YR* properly was a concession and a declaration of freedom at the same time. Others also express this notion which appears to be a source of empowerment:

> When I'm out and can't get home on time it I won't fall over me. But if I'm home I will drop everything and say 'excuse me, but this time belongs to me.' Even if my son asks for something, excuse me but I can't right now (Roula, 40).

For Roula to quit being a 100%, available-at-all-times mom, as for most Greek women of her generation, is something that gives her control: control over her time and her person, as she decides when to attend to somebody else's needs. Most mothers and homemakers made similar statements of independence when referring to the role of soap opera in their daily life. One has to place this discourse in the Greek context, where the role

of the all-giving, Mediterranean mother and wife is still the norm (Daraki, 1995). Undeniably, the home is for women a space of labor where they are expected to keep busy and perform their unending cycle of domestic duties. For example, Kassandra (a social observer) has also in mind that her soap watching must not interfere with her housework:

> I will have finished all my work, everything else, so that I won't let it hanging over the rest of the day (527).

Soap opera featured as the antipode of housework in all of the interviews I conducted with women. The role of soap as a break and an opportunity to make use of the domestic sphere in the context of entertainment and not housework is important in the structure of women's fanship identity. The pleasure experienced in this type of reception, where soap opera is a space of comfort and self-caring in the midst of a demanding home and family life, is directly related to gender roles. Studies such as Radway's (1987), Gray's (1992), and Hobson's (1982) emphasized the buffering role that popular media play for women who are confined in unfulfilling roles of patriarchal femininity. The women in those studies used television, video, or romances to create a time and space for themselves, away from the draining and infinite demands of housework.

In this study, too, the domestic role of women structures soap opera reception and fanship identity in many ways. Firstly, soap opera watching is a ritual integrated into everyday life and domestic duties are organized to accommodate soap reception. In tune with previous work, we find that this ritual symbolizes a token of independence and autonomy vis-à-vis the demands of housekeeping and childcare. In contrast to male reception of soap, the particular context in which women watch

gives to them a sense of entitlement and empowerment that downplays the social stigma attached to everyday serials. People might say 'it's rubbish' but the fact that they have worked hard in order to deserve some comfort and relaxation buffers to some extent women viewers against such pressure.

Hand in hand with any declaration of independence and entitlement comes though an experience of conflict and guilt. Firstly, there is the issue of how their fanship is received in the domestic setting. In the case of Anna, a working mother in her 40's, this conflict is obvious:

> J: How does your environment react *[she laughs]* to the fact that you belong to the *KZ* audience?
> A: When the serial is on it's usually rush hour. One kid has to go to her English lesson; the other one is doing his homework and wants my help, someone might pop round, and there I am, wanting to sit down, watch and not miss a single word. My son comes in suddenly to ask me a question... 'Just wait until it finishes and I will tell you. Give me ten minutes'. 'For God's sake, mom, you and your serial! For God's sake with *KZ*!' My daughter, the same. Now, the hubby... I'd say his response is lighter. Rather condescending. 'We're watching *KZ* now. When it's over we'll see to it'. Right, yes, condescendingly (59-61).

Anna gives us a taste of what is expected from her and how her family reacts to her prioritizing her own involvement with the soap over their wants. Apart from soap opera' low cultural status, women's domestic demands are another hindrance to take into account when we look at women's reception of soap opera, which is not a factor in the case of male fans. Even the mention of her 'environment' in relation to soap makes Anna laugh. It is difficult to engage in fan practices – like watching the soap undisturbed and in peace - when one is expected to cater for others at all times. Her son's reaction shows how much these expectations are taken for granted and how surprised he is at not getting his mother's attention; especially for the sake of soap. In the domestic scenery

soap is perceived as a space where women will forget their everyday roles and duties, but this pleasure is always enjoyed at a cost.

If Anna's husband is condescending towards her soap opera watching, others, like the spouse of Aliki Danae, can be even more negative:

> J: How do you imagine the rest of the audience?
> AD: *[lowering her voice]* Listen to what he says. 'This is rubbish made for idiots and old folk'. And he's mad at me for watching [...] he says I'm always running after those serials, that they strain me, that they harm me, because I arrange my work accordingly. Well, he wasn't always like that. People change with age. But still, I watch with pleasure (51-53).

To my question regarding her conception of the soap's audience, Aliki Danae chooses to confer her husband's perspective; his own discourse with which he has been trying to exercise power over her activities, her pleasure and ultimately her mind. He has succeeded in that she is voicing his opinion, not hers, and secretively: she does not want to confront him. On the other hand, her last statement defeats his discourse. Despite his offensive and restraining behavior she keeps on watching, and most importantly, *with pleasure* and this is something he has no control over. Nevertheless, even if Aliki Danae silently defies her husband's surveillance, his oppressive efforts have had their toll on the way she perceives her engagement to the show:

> J: So, such comments have no effect on you.
> AD: No, no effect. It's not something I'm ashamed of, we all have a right to have a hobby. I may have this weakness but I don't accuse those who don't share it. I can't beat it of course; it's like smoking, alcohol, this sort of thing. And I can't overpower it, it's like that (55-57).

Watching soaps might be shameful for Aliki Danae, but apparently she considers it a vice; an addictive behavior similar to cigarettes and alcohol that takes

control of one's will power; an undefeatable weakness. On the one hand, she claims that her husband's view of soaps has no effect on her, and yet her opinion of *her own* relationship to soaps and her identity as a fan are built around this pleasurable guilt. Whether her husband's influence has anything to do with this idea of pathological behavior, one cannot say with certainty. It is a rather common view of soaps as addictions and other women[6] referred to them in pathological terms:

> I won't miss [YR] for the world *[she laughs]*. Sometimes I say, OK guys, some people have many diseases, I only got one, *YR! [laughter]* (Roula, 40)

> There used to be a Latin American *[soap]*, I wouldn't even take my afternoon nap *[she laughs]*, I just had to watch it. It's over now, this obsession (Elly, 30).

> Because it's so addictive and I always try to watch when I'm home, I don't get to do other things, which is a shame. I mean I could be painting during *YR*. But coming to think of it, it's not that bad because I do want this time for myself. I wouldn't want to talk on the phone during that time, for example (Rea, 63).

These examples highlight the complex negotiation that takes place at the level of fanship identity. There is the question of cultural value, for example, that Rea addresses when she feels guilty for not using her afternoons for an activity that would be considered more creative and respected or more sociable. Elly also questions her priorities and the importance she placed over her *telenovela*, while Roula, addressing her social environment, positions her fanship in a humorous way, seeking their understanding and sympathy. All three women, though, are using a 'pathological' discourse: soap is an addiction, a disease, an obsession.

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[6] Actually, there were several men, too, who talked about their viewing in such terms, mostly ironic viewers like Manos, Titos and Aaron.

Looking at these accounts suggests that the meanings soap opera holds for women viewers are not completely straight-forward. On the one hand, soap represents a well-earned time for themselves. It is interesting how Rea, for example, has made the choice that painting or talking on the phone would not yield the same satisfaction she finds in *YR*, although they are both activities that might please or relax. The recurring regularity, the open-ended continuity, and the ritualistic character of soap watching renders to it a quality that women integrate in their hectic, domestic lives, as Modleski (1982) has speculated. The incorporation of soap opera in everyday life, and the subsequent organization of one's duties, is an aspect that structures female fanship identity. Feminine domestic roles make soap watching legitimate and well-earned, and reduce the feelings of guilt that other researchers have discussed regarding women viewers (Gray, 1992; Morley, 1987). Nevertheless, these very roles still trigger guilt among certain women, who feel that they practice their fanship at the expense of their family and household obligations, some even referring to it in pathological terms. In the section that follows we will follow the thread of guilty pleasure by examining the issue of soap opera talk and women fans.

5.2.2 *Women and soap opera discourse*

In my interviews I always got the impression that women made an effort to appear less involved with soaps than they really were. Apart from the guilt that stems from the constant demand of women's roles, the social bias against soap operas makes it hard for women to come to terms with their identity as soap fans. Gossiping and talking about soap opera did not appear very popular

among women, a finding that surprised me. As in the case of men, they either do not find the outlet for such conversation, or simply they just prefer watching them. Some ardent fans, like Kassandra or Clelia argue that the pleasure of soap operas lies in watching them: talking about it is only secondary.

> J: How important is the pleasure you get out of talking about [YR]?
> K: Not as important as watching it. That's what counts for me, that's what interests me. I will rarely talk about it, only if I've missed an episode, which is unlikely; I ask someone else to tell me what happened (Kassandra, 325-327).

> C: To be honest, talking about it isn't much pleasure. Pleasure is watching it (Clelia, 91-93).

There were numerous similar accounts, reflecting the predominance of the aesthetic position among women[7]. For most women the peak of the soap opera experience is watching the show, whereas talking about it would only fill up hermeneutic gaps in the case of a missed episode. Soaps do not represent a means to relate with people on a further, symbolic level, as is the case with ironic distance viewers (male and female). One's relationship to the program is something personal and private that cannot be reproduced socially. The aesthetic component of soap opera watching is emphasized and most women want to watch alone and undisturbed so that they can truly savor the programs. The interrupted and disordered mode of watching soaps is something that women have to put up with, not necessarily something they prefer.

While other accounts of soap opera audiences describe women viewers, in particular, to engage in talk

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[7] For more accounts of women who prefer watching in silence and do not enjoy talking about soaps, see section 4.1.3, where the viewing process in the aesthetic position is discussed.

or housework during the programs (Hobson, 1982; Brown, 1994; Morley, 1986[8]), the present findings indicate otherwise. As Brunsdon (1997) has claimed, the attentive, silent and absorbed mode of watching that has been linked to a masculine type of reception, is really a mode of power. If women had the luxury and power in the viewing setting to choose how they would like to watch soap operas, most would prefer the 'masculine' way. Its aesthetic role is even more salient in the cases where soap is basically a space of relaxation and seclusion from the hustle and bustle of the domestic hearth. To concentrate, 'not miss a single word' (Anna, 61), and immerse one's self in this everyday ritual is what is mostly appreciated.

Soap opera talk, which has been cited in so many works (Ang, 1985; Brown, 1994; Buckingham, 1987; Fiske, 1987; Geraghty, 1991; Hobson, 1982; 1989; Seiter *et al.*, 1989), as an important source of pleasure and meaning making, was not considered significant by the majority of women participants. Many women watch with other family members, including many husbands, so they will engage in making comments during the soap, but to talk about it outside the viewing setting, in a social context, was unlikely and many times my relevant questions were met with slight defense, as these examples illustrate:

> J: Do you like talking about the soaps?
> K: Well, we do, but it's not like we've nothing better to do. OK, while it's on we will throw a comment or two (Katia, 315-317).

> J: Do you ever talk about [*YR*] with your children?

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[8] I should note that none of these authors made such claims on essentialist grounds. The divide between masculine and feminine modes of watching (I refer most directly to Morley here) was located in social and historical conditions.

G: Yes, if it comes up. But not much, I'd rather spend time with my grandchildren.
J: When you watch [*with your husband*], do you comment on how do they look for example, like what he's wearing, this sort of thing, a bit like gossip.
G: Not really... We watch the serial, we respect it, we love it, and that's it. We're not gossips, in general, not just about the serial [...] We have other interests. Magazines, newspapers, we're not stuck. I'm busy with the house, keeping it clean, my cooking, my children. I want to be of service. We are simple and quiet people (Gina, 129-132; 139-145).

It is quite clear that both of these answers are strategic in the viewers' self-presentation techniques. The negative mark of gossip is such that women would not like to be associated with such practices. Especially Gina seems to be offended by my question and makes an effort in order to prove herself an industrious and busy home keeper, as if that would be negated by the act of gossip. Brown (1994) discusses gossip in connection with the carnivalesque and as a practice of transgression and celebration of feminine values. In fact, the core of her argument on women's resistance through soap relies on the centrality of gossip and talking in fan networks. The findings of my study do not reproduce Brown's emphasis on soap opera discourse, but there were a few examples of women aesthetic viewers (who as a category are the least keen on fan discourse) who engaged in some form of commentary during the shows, or discussed them with friends:

J: Is watching more enjoyable when you talk, exchange comments?
K: Well, yeah, [...] you don't watch it in mute. You will make some sort of comparisons.
A: Dad, though, is all sushhh and sushhh. So, off we go inside (Aspasia & Katia, 353-361).

J [*To Glykeria*]: So, you like that, you talk to Spyros while it's on [*KZ*].
G: Yes, of course I do!
J: And what do you say?

G: Err, I'll say 'the bastard, it's not him, it's the other one', this and that, [and he says] 'what are you saying that for? I watched it myself!'

S: But I did too! She interrupts me! Since I'm watching too, let me watch it for God's sake! Let me see what's happening! *[animated]*

G: That's the way it happens, like he says. 'Can't I see it with my own eyes, why do you have to tell me?' But there's no stopping me! [...]

S: She always does it, during the news, the serial, the football. I miss all the best bits, because she says something and I miss the line. And there are many words that are difficult, I can't make them out and I'm thinking hard, and at that crucial point, there she pops in and spoils it *[she laughs]* (Spyros & Glykeria, 414-436).

J: Generally, how much of the pleasure you get out of the serial is because you talk about it with your friend?

R: OK, you exchange some views, and surely when you talk about certain things, personal things too, you feel relieved in a way, and you also hope that some day, perhaps we'll get to be like them (Roula, 399-401).

The first two extracts were the only cases I came across that reproduced the traditional accounts on the masculine vs. feminine styles of television reception. As Morley (1987) and Gray (1992) have shown, these differences reveal the relationships of cultural and domestic power that are exercised in the home. These relationships are apparent here, too. Katia admits that together with her daughter Aspasia, they will comment on the action that takes place. One can see, however, by her casual reply that it is not a significant activity: she considers it only natural that they will exchange some form of opinion and not stay 'mute'. This practice, however, is reprimanded by the father, who requires silence during broadcast of *Lampsi* and *KZ*, which are the soaps he watches. This scenario typifies previous findings on gendered viewing, but the women here (who, significantly, outnumber the father) do not tolerate these restrictions and reported that they go elsewhere to watch, leaving the father/husband on his own.

In the second case, the power balance over viewing processes is more intense because of the different family structure and the antithesis of gendered watching is at play. Spyros cannot share Glykeria's need to accompany the action with some live commentary. He cannot see the social and symbolic currency of such discourse, and since it has no informational value, he objects to it with fervor, but to no avail, since Glykeria is reportedly unstoppable!. Her discourse is to him a nuisance that interrupts and interferes with his comprehension. It is noteworthy that by admitting his inability to register easily the vocabulary of the Greek soaps[9] he is also stepping down in the power hierarchy, because he is presenting what may be the real reason behind his complaints: his own weakness and need to hang onto the text. Beyond this fact though, the dynamics that are present in that setting are very much related to gender and the different meanings soap has for Glykeria and Spyros.

Finally, Roula was one of the few non-ironic fans who mentioned her best friend and their everyday conversations on the phone about *YR*, a practice that she enjoys. This was the only case that I can relate to Brown's (1994) study, since the soap talk here holds special meanings for this fan. It is a platform for sharing personal stories, problems, and disappointments; a means of relief comfort, and socializing. Moreover, there is the element of utopian possibilities here (Geraghty, 1991) which are taken further by talking. This is an issue that will also arise later in our discussion about the gender-related content of soap opera discourse and in chapter 6, dealing with cultural difference and identity. Hence, for

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[9] Spyros is not alone in his difficulty with Foskolos' lines. The level of the dialogue is indeed very high, consisting of complex syntax, long sentences and obscure words that would rarely feature on prime time television.

soap opera discourse to thrive and carry more personal meanings the presence of friendship networks is necessary, as Brown herself admits. Very few women talked about soap opera at a level that they considered personal, meaningful and significantly pleasurable. The lack or the negativity of social outlets towards soap opera discourse and the low status of soap opera fanship are the reasons for the women's relative silence. Thus, an important finding in relation to previous works on soap opera audiences, is that in the specific cultural and methodological context of this study, soap opera did not create an intimacy among the majority of its women viewers, as fanship is practiced at a private, personal level.

5.3 Gender and/or viewing position?

From these accounts, I would argue that both men and women's soap related practices are ruled by similar dynamics. The factors that seem to play a distinctive role in the way one engages to soap opera cannot point solely to gender, and we began to trace the importance of age, class and cultural identity. Activities, pleasures and discourses involved with soap opera tend to follow patterns that cross gender. The fear of being thought of as a lazy gossip and worthless couch potato haunts men just as much as women. Moreover, fan practices like talking about the shows, or the integration of soap in everyday life as a break from tediousness, also seem to fit viewing positions better than gender differences. For example, consider the following extracts by male aesthetic viewers Petros and Prodromos:

> So I would close my shop ... and go home, lie in my armchair ... and watch *BB*. I would have made sure to have had lunch already because although I could eat my lunch in front of the TV I avoided it ... I would prepare,

> though, my favorite drink ... pomegranate juice, so I
> would have my nice drink and enjoy what I was watching
> (Petros, 386).

> I will have returned from college and done some work.
> Once the sun sets I close all the books, sit on the sofa, I'll
> take a bag of crisps, or a cup of coffee, and you know, it's
> just the perfect timing [...] I will watch it and then I
> might go out, it's a quiet time and it just fits the context
> of my day... an afternoon watching *Lampsi*, it comes very
> natural (Prodromos, 225).

Both go into great detail in order to describe their soap ritual, around which they structured their daily schedule. One also notices the habitual order of the procedure they describe: the shop and the books close, paraphernalia like drinks, coffee and crisps are summoned, and the fans sit comfortably in front of the TV set. Both speak of the soap similarly to the women who tried to finish their housework in time so that they could relax and self-indulge in soap land. The discourse and the meanings that soap holds are expressed likewise by all aesthetic viewers, irrespective of gender.

Another example of the significance of viewing positions is the only female ironic distance viewer that I interviewed, Rea, who like male ironic distance fans (see section 5.1.1) structures her identity by distinguishing (and victimizing in some cases) between different kinds of soap audiences:

> J: How do you feel about the negative stamp that some
> attach to soaps, as TV rubbish?
> R: To a certain extent I agree [...] There is an audience
> whose life relies on it and they believe that Genoa City
> and those people are real, etc. I'm not part of this
> audience, and it is because of this audience that soaps
> have negative aspects because *[she laughs]* you see where
> watching the soap got them. Given that, ... the average
> citizen, or a bit above average anyway, would not believe
> these things are for real and would watch it with a more
> disinterested point of view (Rea, 21-23).

Again, the issue of control is brought up: the other audience is controlled by the serial, duped between fantasy and reality, addicted to a television program.

Viewers imagine the audience in quite a stratified way, and one will always try to represent the preferable category. Rea goes as far as to argue that 'the other', gullible audience is to blame for the bad name soaps have. Most fans believe that television has a great deal of power and they want to present themselves either as able to resist it (ironic-distance viewers say they control the texts), not be affected by it (the aesthetic viewers do not let it slip into their social lives), or finally be able to appreciate its positive effects as a social study (social observers). Rea's view of soaps and their audience resembles the opinion held by Lakis, Yiotis and other male ironic viewers, and in fact, she was the only woman in my sample that also displayed the ironic distance position, and thus one of the few women who engaged in soap opera discourse.

The practice of talking about soap opera is also more related to differences in viewing position rather than gender differences. In the previous chapter we discussed the pattern that each position follows as regards to soap opera discourse, and the same patterns were evident here, irrespective of gender.

These observations though do not rule out the role of gender. First of all, one could say that the prejudice and stigma that lead men and women soap fans to be secretive and feel guilty about their watching is very much related to gender, since soaps have acquired their low cultural currency because of their association to femininity and domesticity (Brunsdon, 1997). Moreover, it cannot be denied that a major difference between male and female fanship is the experience of home as a setting of continuous labor, which as we have seen places a certain amount of stress over women about scheduling, organizing and enjoying soap viewing. This however, can

work both ways as it makes some women feel that an hour of watching soap operas is a treat that they deserve more than anyone, a belief that boosts their fanship against the low respectability of soaps.

The fact that viewing positions – mostly the aesthetic and the ironic distance ones – are quite gendered, also points to the significance of gender differences. The most marked one regards the ironic viewing position, which only Rea was found to occupy[10]. Apart from sampling reasons, one must also take account of the strategic function of ironic distance as a means to enjoy soap opera without being labeled as someone who takes soaps seriously. Middle class males are especially prone to using such mechanisms, because their masculinity is also at stake. Judging from the passage where Rea builds her soap fan identity against the 'other' fan, we could say that this tension must also involve the cultural value of soaps, a tension that ironic distance viewers alleviate by this particular way of engaging to soaps. Most ironic viewers *appear* to be quite at ease with their fanship identity because they consider themselves to be special and different from ordinary fans in that they find pleasure by twisting the soaps' meanings. The majority of women do not experience this tension; they do not feel out of place as soap fans and so do not base their fanship on sarcasm and social networks; they do not need an excuse, in other words.

Age might also be a relevant factor in this issue. Let us not forget that older men were much more relaxed about their soap fanship. Rea was among the youngest women I interviewed, in her mid-twenties, not involved in housework or childcare, but a young, university

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[10] Many women made jokes and ironic remarks about soaps, but as it will be further discussed, their ironic discourse is very different and not a regular source of pleasure.

graduate looking for work. The factors that made other women feel entitled to soap opera watching do not apply in her case, so she shares with males the same tension that leads one to strategic irony and playful subversion.

Hence, men and women soap opera fans do not differ in many respects, but they do in some crucial ones. The examination of the factors that structure fanship identities revealed their complexity: the several tensions, tactics, and attitudes that are related to soap watching and gender differences. In the next section, we will examine such differences at a discursive level, by looking at how men and women *talk about* gender.

5.4 Fan discourse: talking about gender

Here the focus shifts on fans' interpretation of the soap opera text and the subsequent commentary that emerged in the context of the interviews that were conducted. One must bear in mind that this discourse is bound in the research setting, since many of the participants did not engage in soap talk on other occasions. Nevertheless, using the flexible structure of the interview, I had the opportunity to get as much input from the participants, as they desired, about any subject that was brought up, in a manner that resembled a friendly chat about one's favorite program, and hence the extracts that follow *are* soap talk.

In general, women were more prone to bring up issues of gender in their discussions of soap, to identify such issues in the storylines they went over, or to problematize them in the context of Greek society. However, not all women approached this in a similar manner, and neither did men; hence the need to explore these patterns in the present section. For some women, gender was not an issue at all; for most it was latently,

yet significantly, present in their discourse, while for very few it was openly voiced and contested. Demographics seem to play an important role in this aspect. Firstly, women who are occupied outside the home, as well as those of older age, were less likely to bring up women's roles and issues in relation to soaps. Secondly, younger men also displayed such an involvement, to a moderate extent, in contrast to older ones. In other words, there are several factors, which mediate this discourse even within same sex groups.

5.4.1 Contesting positions

The first type of discourse that we will examine refers to representations of gender in soaps. Storylines and characters were a source for such talk. There were several characters, for example, that were evaluated on the basis of their behavior towards men/women. In the following extract, Aspasia and her mother Katia discuss Victor Newman (one of the main *YR* characters), Stathis Theoharis, (the protagonist of *KZ*), and two female characters from *Lampsi*:

> A: Like Newman. On the one hand he's likeable. With women though, he always wants to manipulate and dominate them [...]
> K: He wants his women to be like little mice, not to say much, to keep their heads down. And the one he just married, it's because she depends on him *[refers to Victor's blind wife Hope]*.
> J: Yeah, he brought her into the city whereas in her farm she was independent.
> K: Exactly! And he keeps her by his side like a lost sheep [....]
> J: What about Stathis? Do you like him?
> A: I wouldn't say so. He's always imposing. Whenever it comes to his wife, and to women in general, he's despotic. He's authoritarian, he wants to keep his wife at home [...]

K: Effy[11] is OK, she's a cheerful girl. The other one
[Persa], she just cares too much about [Alexis] and she
acts like his slave, literally, cleaning his wounds, and
such things. It just doesn't agree with me (525-539).

Katia and Aspasia were among the few women who
openly referred to gender relations, and I will return to
their interview later. One of the most basic soap fan
pursuits is character assessment, in the form of gossip, or
an evaluation of morals. For these two women, gender
representations seem to play a central role: they condemn
male characters as possessive and domineering, based on
their relationships with women, and female characters for
their lack of independence. When talking about Victor, it
is clear that they have worked out a rationale for the
storyline that is consistent with their judgment of Victor
as a chauvinist.

Still, other fans accommodate the same characters
differently:

Deep down [Stathis] is all right. He just shouts too loud
(Aliki Danae, 129).

Stathis is not a bad actor... but he's too macho (Titos,
719).

[Stathis] is a proud, tough man. His pride and manhood
are his emblems, and this manhood has been captured by
the serial, especially with him, he comes off as the man,
and I mean *the* man, in all his greatness. Either when he
slams his hand on the table and everyone shuts up, or
when he says 'I am the man around here and I'm the one
on top' (Yiorgos, 131).

S: [Stathis] Theoharis is a savage, he is barbaric.
T: He's full of soul though! *[laughter]*
Y: He has some sensitivities!
S: But when he tried to show them over a delicate
matter...
J: He totally screwed up!

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[11] Effy and Persa work as maids in the rich Drakos household.
Persa gave birth to Alexis Drakos' child after a one-off encounter
and has been trying to convince him to recognize his paternity.

S/ He screwed up, yeah (Yiotis., Telis, Stavros, 319-426).[12]

The depiction of Theoharis as a loud and macho man is present in all of the above readings. It is obvious though that this image is negotiated in different ways in each account. Aliki Danae gives the mildest account and she does not even discuss Theoharis in a context of gender relations, in common with most *KZ* fans, who emphasized his faith in God, honesty and integrity. The men refer to the machismo displayed by Theoharis and significantly place it in the context of a gender-oriented storyline. In this perspective, Yiorgos paints a graphic picture in order to describe Theoharis' compromise in accepting a baby that is not his. He acknowledges the character's chauvinism but will not go as far as to condemn it. In fact, his rhetoric is ambiguous: I am not sure whether he has romanticized this representation or not. The younger fans (Titos, and the group of Stavros, Telis and Yiotis.) use harsher words for Theoharis but their positioning is playful: for them he is just a caricature of Greek machismo. Even if Stavros intends these remarks to be meaningful and wants to explore how Stathis dealt with his emotions in this particular storyline, his friends will not cross the ironic distance position.

This example shows how a single aspect of the text leads to an array of readings, which are all linked by common features that most fans recognize, and yet the

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[12] The two latter extracts refer to the same storyline: Marianna, Stathis' wife, was raped by an Albanian criminal, got pregnant and fell out with her husband because she refused to have an abortion. The couple almost divorced and she attempted suicide because of the dilemma. Only then did Stathis agree with her decision to keep it. The moral dilemmas, though, continued as the couple then learned that the baby descended from a long line of sociopaths. Marianna finally had a miscarriage, so the resolution of the storyline was conveniently *deus-ex-machina*.

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reading of gender differs drastically in each one of them, according to the viewer's experiences and social positioning. Katia and Aspasia's readings are openly anti-patriarchic and express their acknowledgment and rejection of such ideology.

Even though few women openly contested gender roles in soaps, many recognized the excesses of soap opera as far as femininity and representation of gender is concerned.

> In *YR* everybody is overdressed, but I like it! I mean, who dresses like that everyday? Who wears suits like that? (Fenia, 173)

> Catherine wears nice clothes, even if she's older, but her rings and her nails, they're too much! God, those nails, they're so long! And curved, she looks like an eagle. And I wonder how she keeps them long without ever breaking them (Aliki Danae,153).

> What often makes me wonder in these serials is, she's busy at work all day, OK so far. She comes back home, where is the kid? She goes on with her husband or her lover, or whatever, still the kid is nowhere to be seen. What is this kid up to, doesn't s/he[13] want to eat? Play? Who takes care of these kids? (Roula, 123)

> A: I'm impressed with Stathis' wife who does her housework wearing high heels, like 6 inches long *[laughter]*! How does she keep her balance up there? K: In *YR* they're also dressed up to the nines. And I say, don't they ever wear aprons, like I do? Do they always wear their hair like that at home? Don't they ever wear slippers? *[laughter]* And [Catherine] with these nails... but of course, she doesn't do any housework so she can keep her nails like that (Aspasia & Katia, 349-351).

All these fans laugh at the unrealistic representation of women in soaps who can juggle with work, family, romance and their excessively groomed appearance. Gender here is invoked in terms of women's roles and the conflicting expectations placed on them. 'When women talk and joke in recognition of their subordination, they

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[13] In Greek the word 'kid' is of neutral gender, that is why I've used the 's/he'.

break boundaries and assert their power. This inversion of power can be a threat to dominant institutions and transgress the barriers of polite society', writes Brown (1994:149). These viewers here might be talking about the soap characters, but the subtext is about themselves and the conflict that entails their own experience of femininity and the hegemonic media representations that attempt to categorize and recreate womanhood. These representations are compared against the daily experience of their own roles, and the result is laughter and sarcasm that assert their power, as Brown states.

How does this kind of laughter compare to the playful discourse of ironic distance viewers, most of whom were men? Firstly, we must keep in mind that for ironic distance viewers laughter and sarcasm is the *preferred* and *dominant* mode of discourse and engagement with soaps, whereas for these women who are aesthetic viewers it is a response vis-à-vis the absurdity of patriarchic society and the cultural forms it offers them. Aesthetic viewers, as we have discussed in the previous chapter, are aware both of the low production values and narrative conventions, as well as the excessive representations of soaps and they can distance themselves and comment or laugh about them. However, this would defeat their purpose of watching, which is the pleasure of the soap opera illusion:

> J: Do you ever laugh at *YR*?
> F: You mean if I laugh because it's too much? Because there's nothing else that could be funny about it [...] No I don't. I mean, I take *YR* quite seriously *[laughs]*... I take it at face value *[laughs]* (Fenia, 139-141).

> J: Does [*YR*] ever make you laugh? Ironically, I mean.
> M: Ironically? No, I don't think so. I don't find it so silly. I don't say 'oh do they take us for fools' [...] and I'm not going to laugh because I'm being taken for a fool... I have no illusions about what I'm watching. But I'm not ironic or sarcastic, it's just something that gives me pleasure (Maria, 177-181).

Hence, when women aesthetic viewers resort to irony and openly laugh about soaps they do so when triggered by a hegemonic leak of the text. It is not just about laughter or pleasure, but it entails a political reaction, albeit at a personal level, since most women in my research were not part of fan networks and did not discuss soaps socially.

The further conflict that is caused by the pleasure women experience when watching these images is also enunciated in the first two extracts. Fay admits that she likes the excessiveness and Aliki Danae probably enjoys the fact that an older woman (the character of Catherine) is lavishly styled; yet, they both know that it does not measure up to their own experience of reality. In the accounts of Roula and Katia, a subtle anger is laden in the sarcasm. Is this anger directed to the unrealistic portrayal of women, or towards the boundaries of their own lives, Roula being a divorced, ex-working mother of two and Katia a housewife who had to wear an apron for most of her life?

5.4.2 Exploring positions: male fans

Definitely, such discourse and laughter could never be articulated by male fans. Some men may also be aware of the over-stylization and constructedness of soaps, but lack the experiential background of subordination that enables these accounts (Brown, 1994). Moreover, the incongruence between representation and lived reality is much more salient in the reproduction of femininity on these shows. Nevertheless, men are not oblivious to gender issues as raised by soaps, with the exception of older participants who generally had greater sensitivity for class as an interpretative category. Men were not as articulate as women - who in their majority were not

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articulate either - about these issues but they approached them on several levels. Firstly, in several cases male participants identified with the feminine perspective of a storyline:

> J: So, which was your favorite storyline?
> P: Anything with Virna. Yiagos always cheated on her, and her one big misdemeanor was being in love with her stepson, which was nothing big really. She would be all alone in the house, I mean, if it wasn't for her job she would have broken down, because [Yiagos] would be after a different woman everyday; he even kept a bedroom next to his office. [...] So, I really like Virna's position now because she filed for a divorce, having caught her husband and her daughter together, she's shocked and finally decides to get a divorce[14] (Prodromos, 14).

Prodromos, like other male soap fans (mainly aesthetic or negotiating with that position, like Petros, Stavros, Nestor, Yiorgos), showed a preference for material, which they typed as 'romantic' and not targeted to men[15]. Apart from this fact, the way Prodromos handles the story of Virna, recounting her domestic unhappiness and taking pleasure in her breaking free from the predicament of the lonely and cheated wife, show that he is also sensitive to the portrayal of gender and that he welcomes challenging storylines. It is clear that he places much emphasis on Virna's independence and that altogether he has assumed her perspective in the storyline.

Other male fans appreciated the fact that certain storylines were presented through the viewpoints of both male and female characters. This was true of the aforementioned KZ storyline about Stathis, Marianna and

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[14] This was not an incestuous union: Gina was a recently discovered daughter from Virna's youth.

[15] Specifically, Prodromos said that 'Virna represents the romantic element in Lampsi, but we get more of Yiagos, with storylines about his stocks, his oil business, his health. These appeal more to the male audience', and he agreed that Foskolos made an effort to attract men viewers at the expense of the romantic storylines that feature on Lampsi.

the ill-fated baby. Stavros, Yiotis. and Telis, as well as
Yiorgos (who were all interviewed when this storyline
was on) were positive that this was a cumbersome issue:

> There are some things, which are sacred in Greek society,
> which you can't touch. The little Albanian for example;
> you can't play with these things and that's why Theoharis
> got to that point (Stavros, 1317).

> Anybody would expect, and I as a man, not that he would
> kick her out, but that she would at least get an abortion,
> since she was raped. That he would make her get one.
> However, Marianna was passionate about her baby, she
> said I don't care about how it came to be conceived; since
> I carry it in me, it is my baby, I wish it hadn't happened
> that way but it did. And even if her husband insisted that
> they terminate the pregnancy, he gave in at the end
> (Yiorgos, 127).

Foskolos is obviously dealing with quite a sensitive
issue, and we see here that both men can readily identify
with and justify Theoharis' insistence on not having the
baby. There are several issues at stake in this storyline:
paternity, since the baby is fathered by a stranger;
ethnicity, since the father is an Albanian, an origin that
elicits negative prejudice in Greek society; choice and
control over the female body is of course another issue –
and the plural tense Yiorgos has used in the last sentence
('they terminate') is quite revealing. The fact that
Foskolos has Marianna refusing to terminate her
pregnancy seems outrageous to both: the writer is playing
with 'sacred' ideologies in this instance. Yiorgos is
straightforward about his interpretative framework: 'As a
man I would expect...'. However, he goes on to voice
Marianna's position, as interpreted by him. Her wish to
be in control of her body, which has already been
violated once, is read as a 'passion' about the baby – a
rather romanticized view of motherhood[16] - but

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[16] One must be careful here not to conflate the position of the text
with that put forward by Yiorgos

nonetheless, Yiorgos here has comprehended to some extent the complexity of the storyline and the perspective of Marianna. Notice however his last sentence: 'her husband gave in at the end'. The phrasing is a significant indicator of the storyline's ideological resolution. Let us see what the younger fans made of the story:

> T: How is it possible for the woman to want to keep the little Albanian because it's also hers?
> Y: Right, now we've come to a major issue...
> S: No, I think that Foskolos handled that in the most amazing way.
> T: Why? Who would keep a little Albanian? (370-380)

Telis kicks off the discussion clearly identifying with the male position[17]. Not only is he not considering the possibility that a woman might want to keep the child and that it would be her legitimate right to do so, but the reason he states (and reinstates) for not wanting it, appears to be based on racial prejudice. The fact that this baby would be the result and the constant reminder of a traumatic experience for Marianna is not openly articulated by any of the viewers. However, while Telis brings up this storyline as an example of Foskolos' unrealistic and extreme choice of material, Stavros disagrees:

> S: He raised amazing questions and discussions around the issue of abortion. There were some amazing dialogues at play there [...] from talk shows with Mataragas[18] on TV saying to what extent is abortion ethically correct or medically correct, to Theoharis and the view of the lower-class, narrow minded Greek to preserve his dignity and

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[17] To distinguish just between two perspectives (masculine and feminine) in the discussion and reception of this storyline is rather limiting since there are so many issues at stake. One could not even assume that women would necessarily take the position offered by Marianna, since there are several complexities. Since Telis though here will not even begin to consider the 'because it's also hers' perspective, I have characterized his position thus. (Later it will be negotiated.)

[18] Mataragas is the name of the actor who plays Theoharis' brother in law, a medical doctor.

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honor [...] He gave many sides to the subject, I mean, the abortion issue never closed.

T: Listen... when you have two grown up people who don't have children and can both have their own, it's preferable to abort the little Albanian so that they can always love it with all their heart, so that it is their own child. Theoharis will never be able to do that, so it's not realistic (382-392).

What Stavros has appreciated in the portrayal of the storyline is the range of perspectives that Foskolos offered. In this account he identifies the one represented by Theoharis: 'the lower-class, narrow minded Greek [who wants] to preserve his dignity and honor', and the institutional, public discourse of science that places the dilemma in a context of social ethics and medical practice. Firstly, let us keep in mind that Theoharis and the discourse of dignity, manhood, and honor are typified by class and nationality. One can witness in this instance the centrality of these structures as interpretative categories through which the viewer reads the text and constructs meaning. The focus on Theoharis' class position prevents Stavros from identifying with him, but he will neither heed Marianna's viewpoint.

Telis, on the other hand, regards the issue from a different level; he assesses the realism of the storyline, and does not engage in Stavros's discourse. Telis still cannot see that partly this baby is Marianna's: as he says, it is preferable that they have *'their own'* children, thinking in terms of paternity solely, and excluding the baby's mother.

S: This is not what I'm saying. Her, the arguments she put forward to keep the little Albanian were very legitimate. Someone would very well accept those arguments, even Theoharis. I mean, there are two different sides, he didn't just give the side of Theoharis...

Y: I agree with that.

T: Still, it's so over the edge. [...] His wife had to cut her wrists in order for him to approach her and say, 'OK we're keeping the baby'.

S: You're right, all this had to happen first for him to go... (394-396; 428)

Stavros realizes the gap in their communication and finally evokes Marianna in the discussion. Without of course specifically articulating her standpoint, he assesses it as being 'very legitimate'. He does not inform us whether he is in agreement with her reasons, but he appreciates the fact that they have been voiced. Although we never get to learn what is the preferred reading for him personally, Stavros has indeed been able to comprehend this complex issue through a non-male perspective. He applauds the multiple sides through which the story was presented instead of a single one, male-centered view, which significantly is associated to class and nation in his account.

Telis, however, being the one who is scrutinizing the narrative for excessive representations, points out to Stavros the resolution of the conflict. Marianna, caught in a dilemma between the demise of her marriage and an abortion that she does not want, decides to put an end to her life and slashes her wrists. She does not succeed and of course, when her husband finds out, he is at last more than willing to keep the baby. Nobody has brought up the way Foskolos ended this storyline before Telis, who seems to be implying that regardless of the multifaceted problematic that was raised, Marianna still had to attempt suicide in order for Theoharis to reconsider. This resolution is highly ideological, since one can make of it that Theoharis was not convinced by the 'legitimate arguments' of his wife about her baby, but by her melodramatic gesture to end her life because she could not choose between her husband and her child.

I am not sure whether Telis is aware of the ideological bearings of this textual twist because his statement involves only the narrative aspect of it, which

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he criticizes as being redundant and overly melodramatic. Judging from Stavros' response, I believe that the fans conclude that the complex problematic was gratuitous, since it made no difference whatsoever to what Theoharis decided at the end of the day. On the other hand, Yiorgos, without referring to Marianna's suicidal attempt, takes on a different reading about Theoharis' change of mind:

> If you look at it coldly and superficially, you might say: 'No way. I'd rather kill her than let her have the baby, since it's not mine.' But there are more things at stake here and I believe it's love, that is the solid reason why Theoharis gave in. If he didn't feel that great love for her, he would have left her... But because of love... and I was really moved by this. And who? A man, a very tough man [...] There you go, the serial once more is there to satisfy every side. At the end of the day everything happened the way it should, the way Theoharis wanted it, in another way let's say (127; 131).

Yiorgos has embraced a reading position in which all-conquering love solves every problem and restores the hegemonic order. His last sentence implies that Theoharis might have given in, but without making any genuine compromise, since he agreed to the baby when all reasonable resistance failed. Marianna's ultimate measure put to the test his love, not his values as a 'tough man'. This is why Yiorgos uses the phrase 'gave in': it implies a reluctant agreement, the granting of a favor, not an informed decision. What is also noteworthy in this extract is that while the last sentences imply an awareness of the hegemonic role of the resolution ('to satisfy every side'), his earlier emphasis on the agency of love is aligned with the text's ideological message, and discards Marianna's perspective. If there were no love involved, he would have never given her a chance, seems to be his conclusion, and it is love that enabled Theoharis to put aside his male pride. In contrast, the group of

younger fans doesn't think in these terms. Their discourse is an example of what Liebes & Katz (1990) described as mutual help: we witness how their mutual exchange of observations and ideas jointly form a reading position, which goes against the grain of the text.

Apart from gender, the storyline of Marianna's baby raises many other issues, but I chose to focus here on the colliding perspectives of masculine and feminine experience and how they are identified and explored to a certain extent by these male fans. It is clear that their starting position was always the one closer to home: 'One does not play with these things' or 'As a man I expect...' In addition, even after considering the multitude of perspectives, no male viewer can be said to have assumed Marianna's viewpoint. Some assess it as a valid line of thought, while others, like Telis, do not even acknowledge its legitimacy. Hence, we cannot say that any significant boundaries were transgressed in this example. Nonetheless, we have seen a prominent tendency from male fans of soap opera to pick up and explore the feminine standpoint of particular storylines. This might well be related again to the notion of viewing position: it was Stavros whose reading was the most flexible, who is the one to negotiate between ironic and aesthetic positions. It would be interesting to get a woman's take on this particular storyline and I indeed consider its absence as a drawback in this analysis[19].

5.4.3 Exploring positions: female fans

An important aspect that emerged in our analysis of gender in those male fans' discourse was the relevance of class and ethnocultural identity, as it appeared in

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[19] When this storyline was running I had completed my interviews with female fans of *KZ*.

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Stavros' account. In fact, nationality was ubiquitous in women fans' references to gender issues. In chapter 4 we first saw how Greek soaps do not offer recognizable experiences of femininity or specific pleasures that some female viewers want from soap opera. Instead, they interpellate them as citizens and bearers of a common culture. The women who talk about gender do so in a context of 'national culture', a finding that raises certain questions as regards to the primacy of gender in soap opera reception and which will be fully addressed in chapter 6.

Being competent in both foreign and domestic soaps certainly facilitates the comparison between gender representations in them. Most female participants admitted that although they felt closer to Greek soaps because they portrayed familiar settings and social problems, they were not pleased by their lack of or unsatisfactory treatment of, romantic and domestic storylines. On the other hand, American soaps were said to capture a romantic element that generated a great amount of pleasure:

> J: So, all these romantic...
> K: Eh, that's the stuff we like.
> E: Well, look, in the foreign ones they have more romance, they make them more romantic, prettier. The Greek ones don't do romance. The others have this style, it might be fake, it might be the real thing, but they will go over there with the flowers, the rings, they'll take her out to restaurants. We don't have this kind of thing here, have you seen any private dining room around here? (Elsa & Kostoula, 131-139)

In many cases women who watched both American and Greek soaps readily compared the programs' handling of romance, like Elsa and her mother did, and preferred the stylized romance of American daytime programs. Elsa is well aware of the constructedness of the representation, since she questions its genuineness:

she says *'they make them more romantic'*, and lists the props that are employed in order to convey a romantic feel. Nevertheless, this 'stuff' is absent from the Greek shows, whereas it appears to have quite a specific function for these viewers:

> R: In *YR* emotions are the dominant theme. Even Victor... who is the tough and ruthless businessman, or Jack, or whoever, you see that they have them crying! This never happens in Greek serials. At least in *Lampsi* they never portrayed so much emotion in the characters' relationships [...]
> J: And do you like the way romance is presented in *YR*?
> R: It moves me, and I like it very much; it touches me, because I've always operated on this mode... Now, the dry way *Lampsi* does it, I don't like at all and that's why I left the serial quickly. There's no emotion there, it's all about scheming and money and when there is emotion it's sick and over the edge (Roula, 111; 309).

Besides the dominant romantic aspect in American soaps, Roula also refers to the representation of men as having a sensitive side and being in tune with their emotions, a typical hegemonic strategy observed in soap operas (Brown, 1994). She readily compares these elements to *Lampsi*, which although abundant in machinations and tragedy, lacks the kind of romance that makes *YR* so much loved by women. Roula compares the structure of feeling in *YR* to her own *modus operandi*. The ideological constructs of traditional, heterosexual romance have touched Roula and they are a major source of pleasure. There were numerous other examples of women for whom the emphasis on the private sphere was an aspect that touched their 'feminine desires'. Other women, like Maria, Clelia, Fenia, Veronika, Aspasia, Katia and Gina also noted how *Lampsi* and *KZ* portray graphic violence, which they found offensive and extreme, even though some still enjoyed the shows.

The national audience for *Lampsi* and *KZ* is, nevertheless, predominantly female and even the few

examples of *Lampsi* and *KZ* storylines that I've used,
show that there are indeed storylines about family and
romance. Therefore, the reason that so many participants
are dissatisfied with the way Greek soaps depict the
private sphere, and happier with its American version,
must be the mode of address - the mode in which
femininity and the world that surrounds it is constructed
and conveyed in the indigenous programs. If we look at
the following extracts, it will become clear that
femininity is bound to national identity and can be
contested through alternative representations.

A *YR* storyline that attracted a lot of commentary
concerning gender in the interviews I conducted, was the
Nikki – Cole – Victoria triangle[20]. The story touched on
several issues, but some of them were the boundaries
between mother and daughter roles, the involvement of
an older woman with a younger man, and the conflict
between romantic and motherly affection. The storyline
was negatively received by several fans:

> K: A mother will never want to spoil her child's
> happiness. The thought of stealing my daughter's husband
> cannot even cross my mind. Not for a millisecond. To
> make my child unhappy –
> A: The competition between mother and daughter –
> K: It was also about Nikki's selfishness and vanity, 'why
> not me?' she said. We too, here we don't go after young
> boys and girls.
> J: Well, of course when this whole thing started Nikki
> didn't know that Victoria was –
> A: Yes but then –
> K: She did not give up and they became the worst of
> enemies. And the mother was more spiteful than the
> daughter I think (712-723).

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[20] Nikki and Victoria Newman, mother and daughter, fell in love
with the same young man, Cole, who lodged in the family ranch.
Initially, the two women were unaware of their common love
interest, but when Cole officially chose Victoria Nikki was
enraged with her and kept pursuing Cole, until the couple left and
married secretly, severing any ties between mother and daughter.

In their commentary, Aspasia and her mother, Katia, mostly blame Nikki for letting her infatuation prevail over motherly love. Katia is adamant that Nikki's behavior is contrary to the maternal role of putting children's happiness first. Katia, as a mother, is voicing her own understanding of motherhood: she cannot even conceive breaking these rules of maternal conduct. Notice that when Aspasia identifies competition as the main theme of the storyline, Katia adds that Nikki's unmotherly traits were also to blame and she backs this with the reference to her local culture. Even if she is also a mother, parallel to Nikki's position, she would never go after someone younger, let alone someone her daughter loves: '*here* we don't go after young boys'. Motherhood, sexuality, and femininity are conceived in terms of national values and codes of behavior. According to Katia, for a mother to seek a younger lover, she has to be vain and self-centered because a relationship with such a man would only aim to pleasure; it would not contribute anything towards her home or her offspring. A younger man is not mature or prosperous enough to offer support to the family and home setting. His function as 'toy-boy', and hence, Nikki's pursuit of her own pleasure are unacceptable for Katia's set of family values in the local context of Greece. The discourse continues:

> J: Did you think this story was far-fetched?
> K: Yes, I did not like it.
> A: It was far fetched for our own standards.
> K: Because if I lived over there I could too...
> A: Because it's natural, if you see that the daughter has grown up and they don't act anymore like mother and daughter but like two rival women.
> K: Yes, but still, she is a mother.
> A: Yes, and at some point her motherly instinct was thrust aside.
> K: She just did not care! She wanted her daughter out of the way.
> A: She was blown by the fact that she didn't have a man.
> K: Desperate. She had to have one... But this passion of hers led her to the worst (725-743).

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Once more, national culture is emphasized. Katia readily admits that if she were American, such behavior would not be inconceivable, contradicting, thus, her earlier statement. Outside the Greek cultural context, she can imagine herself doing things that she condemns and finds unfitting for a proper mother, like breaking the rules and transgressing the boundaries that spell out what is appropriate behavior for mothers and daughters. However, as Aspasia tries to imagine Nikki and Victoria outside their kin roles, the themes of motherly instinct and selfless love become salient again, and both women voice the ideological representation of motherhood as incommensurable with sexual feelings: 'her passion led her to the worst'.

Several binary oppositions in this dialogue reveal the conflicting roles that women have to accommodate: mother/woman, family/self, maternal/romantic love. Patriarchic conceptualizations of femininity and motherhood will attempt to naturalize the role of women as mothers because this representation is less threatening and more convenient to the economic and social state of affairs. It appears that in the Greek society the mythical notion of motherhood operates strongly enough for these viewers to condemn Nikki. There are traces of negotiation, like the benefit of the doubt that Katia puts forward, concerning the different cultures involved, and Aspasia's attempt to view the characters outside the familial structure. However, the ideological representation of motherhood prevails.

When soaps challenge such ideological constructs with storylines like these, there arises the opportunity for women to reassess their roles and regard them from a different level, outside their own lived experience (Ang, 1985; Brown, 1994; Geraghty, 1991; Lee & Cho, 1990;

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Press, 1991). However, these roles are to a significant extent shaped by culturally specific values. Some Greek women watch in foreign soaps behaviors and lifestyles that can only be imagined in their social reality. Elly, another *YR* fan in her 50's, also refers to the same storyline in such a way:

> J: What did you enjoy the most from the whole experience of watching *YR*?
> E: Nikki, that one, with her lies, with the illness[21]. I did not like her of course, but this whole story with Victor and Nikki and all that, it was one of the most fascinating... and then when she got involved with her daughter's man. Well, I reckon I didn't like this sort of thing, a mother going after her... well nobody would like this sort of thing. But they do happen in real life. They don't happen of course here, mothers going after...
> J: So is it the real life element that draws you mostly...
> E: They help me as well. It does draw me, you don't want it to happen, it must not happen, but it draws you even more, because you want to see the outcome. Something that you can't do yourself. (189-193)

Elly's account shows effectively how soap becomes a space for women to mentally break rules. Throughout her speech, one can see the tension over what she *enjoys* and what she believes she must enjoy. I asked her what was the most enjoyable aspect of the whole *YR* experience; therefore, watching Nikki breaking the rules must have been a great pleasure to her. She cannot bring herself though to admit it, and hence her defenses keep popping up every two sentences: 'I did not like her of course', 'nobody would like this sort of thing', and so on. The pleasure of watching Nikki doing something that she cannot do is initially negotiated with cultural norms of femininity, and then articulated favorably in the light of this interview.

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[21] When Nikki was still married to Victor Newman, she pretended for a period of time to be terminally ill (having been initially misdiagnosed) so that he would not leave her for another woman he was seeing.

Like an echo of Katia's phrase above, Elly says: these things 'don't happen of course *here*'. Nation is anchoring gender, once more, shaping values, codes of conduct, and building the boundaries of women's identities. The cultural bearings are so strong that she's feeling guilty about the pleasure she took in this particular storyline that must have offended what is 'sacred in Greek society' (to quote Stavros). There is marked ambivalence in her account between guilt and pleasure, fascination and rejection, the *here* and *there*. Although, unknowingly, with my next question I am giving her another chance of self-defense (the real life element), she discards it and being very open, she admits that her main pleasure in soaps is watching what is forbidden in *her own* life, what her social and domesticated self would not allow to happen, what one cannot 'try at home' but would very much like to witness. Is then soap a way of tasting the forbidden fruit without getting oneself messed up and dirty? A safe exploration of boundaries?

Nikki's behavior goes against the rules. Although she is not a villainness (thus crossing the boundaries for good), Nikki trespasses into forbidden territories without losing her 'respectability' status in the *YR* community. Several fans, like Roula, expressed their fondness of Nikki and ascribed it to her genuine, less domesticated personality:

> I like Nikki because she... reacts like a normal person. She will get angry, out of line, while all the other women are perfect. They don't get angry, they never get out of line, they don't do anything (Roula, 143).

Nikki's defiance of rules, lines and boundaries is an opportunity to test out possibilities for behaviors that can only be imagined by some women. When these are openly addressed, they are linked to cultural difference: these

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things do not happen *here in Greece*, or they are not portrayed in Greek serials.

> E: Now, you'll tell me how can you escape with Foskolos who shows the exact same problems? That's why I prefer the foreign ones, to watch and say 'ah, look at those beautiful clothes, those beautiful actors, the scenery, the lovely homes'... you escape for a while.
> K: The lovely sex! [*laughter*] Ours are more camouflaged; the foreign one is more... open (Elsa & Kostoula, 123-125).

> We came in contact with the American way of life and we fancied to free ourselves, to have free sex, casual sex, when it's not like that. I mean, you can't have sex with just anybody, just because you went out. First you must fall in love, you must have a spiritual connection, and sex will come later. [...] We began following the American example and we forgot our true self, that we had values, that virginity used to be a girl's pride and dignity (Anna, 379).

Likewise, in the above extracts we witness how sexuality and its portrayal are formulated in terms of one's ethnocultural values. An 'us vs. them' rhetoric is used here in order to anchor and standardize discourse about gender. Feminine experience is localized in the accounts of these viewers. To be a woman, a mother, a daughter, a soap fan, and even a virgin in Greece differs from being these roles in America, or elsewhere. The geographical boundaries give rise to cultural boundaries, and hence imagined ones, as far as gender is concerned. Nation, a sense of place, a common culture: these notions become the platform on which femininity and gender roles are (re)constructed, understood, communicated, and categorized. National identity is summoned in this discourse in order to account for the representation of gender in ways that challenge the hegemonic order.

Gender roles and their imagined boundaries create conflicts for women, who experience their subjectivity divided over different functions and duties expected to be fulfilled. While Greek 'national values' may highlight

their traditional roles as mothers and wives, subordinated to patriarchic family structures and social institutions (Daraki, 1995), their feminine desires may entail forbidden pleasures, romance and undomesticated sexuality. Soaps may provide spaces for these conflicts to be resolved, as women can experience these imagined behaviors and roles and gain pleasure in this mediated form. 'They help me as well', admits Elly, who unable or unwilling to break the rules, she can gain the satisfaction of watching them being broken by fictional characters, in imagined communities that however represent an alternative space. It's not real but it supposedly imitates an alternative reality: this is the promise of soap opera that feeds a longing for change, voiced by several women who contemplated on their own reality:

> J: So, [YR] might be far from your own life but that pleases you.
> R: Well, yes, because there is an expectation, let's say, that since these things happen somewhere, they might happen here too someday! [laughs] (Roula, 370)

If soap then is a space of utopian possibility for some women, there are certain implications to be considered. Are these spaces empowering? Until we explore this issue in chapter 8, national identity must be emphasized as a factor that shapes the experience and understanding of gender roles. Male fans who discussed the heated issues raised by soaps did so with culturally constructed codes of gender behavior, thinking of what is sacred in Greek society and what not. In the above extracts, women viewers also engaged in discourse about gender placing it in clearly localized contexts, referring to cultural differences, and distinctions between 'Us and Them'. This shows that gender identity is also historical and geographical and that sometimes it may actually clash with one's national and cultural identity because of

conflicting ideological representations. We also witnessed how these representations are sometimes received with sarcasm and laughter or even overt rejection of patriarchal ideology. This discourse though can never be consistent. The viewers may reject an ideological construct only to celebrate its sibling a few minutes later. Hegemony, like a net, is full of holes but still effectively entangling.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I looked at gender through various perspectives. Firstly, by identifying the differences between the men and women participants of my study in their reception of soap opera. Secondly, I examined specific fan discourses that had to do with gender in order to see how male and female viewers receive such issues and in which contexts is gender problematized. My other concern was resistance in relation to patriarchy and other sets of ideologies that naturalize and validate asymmetrical power relations between the two sexes. The questions we should be asking, therefore, in this context should be: how does soap opera as a text, and watching soap opera as a practice, facilitate viewers' awareness of hegemonic structures and patriarchic ideology? Which aspects of soap opera viewership are empowering in a patriarchic context of gender relations?

As a symbolic practice, watching soap opera represents a statement of resistance against the patriarchic demands of women's domestic roles. Many women made such statements when they voiced how their fanship clashes with their everyday toll of housework and family duties. Many declared triumphantly that they drop their cooking, dish-washing, childcare, and other daily chores in order to relax and enjoy the programs that have

come to signify a space and time devoted only to themselves, in spite of the constant demand for their labor and attention. In fact, any guilt that results from the low cultural status of this practice and/or the short disruption of their housework schedule is met with their conviction that it is because of their primary role as care-givers and home-keepers that they deserve any kind of break they enjoy the most.

Nevertheless, we have to ask ourselves whether women viewers consider themselves this practice as a form of resistance to patriarchy. Even if we suppose that they do, we must still address the issue of guilt and tension that surrounds their fanship identity, which in a way defeats the purpose of the argument. Most of the times women were not comfortable with their identity as soap opera fans. For some this tension was a result of family or peer derision, while others were more self-critical or ambivalent about their own pleasure and engagement to soap, feeling that they should occupy their time with other activities. As Geraghty argues:

> The guilt which women feel about 'their' programmes may be as much to do with their own ambiguity towards the terrain which soaps map out as fear of male mockery (1991:197).

Soap opera fanship in Greece is not institutionalized: there are no fan clubs, official publications, or other external means to bring fans together. Moreover, hindrances like the social stigma that such a following entails and the guilt over watching make soap opera a rather private affair, as section 5.1 showed. Research like Brown's (1994) and Lee and Cho's (1990) about fan networks and women's resistance placed emphasis on the importance of these female spaces that acted as catalysts for resistive behaviors. In my study

however, very few women made such use of soap opera, notwithstanding their investment on the programs.

Nevertheless, in the interview setting there was indeed talk about gender: several women voiced their complaints about Greek television's sexist portrayal of gender roles and relationships in soaps, as well as their concern about gender equality in Greek society, as the following example shows:

> If someone was to be taught something from Greek television, a young kid let's say, the first thing he would learn would be that he's the man and that he's got the upper hand. In every story women will always be in the background in order to follow his demands (Aspasia, 245).

There were also accounts that brought up the conflicting images of hegemony, laughing at the excessiveness of the soap texts and their unrealistic representations of femininity. Again, we must ask ourselves, do these accounts show an awareness of subordination and do they facilitate the rejection of dominant ideology? In the case where viewers overtly addressed ideological representations and condemned them, I believe that we have the traces of resistant readings. What must accompany such statements is awareness, and when we focus on patriarchal ideology we must look for overt verbalizations that address it. Nevertheless, these discourses are not standardized or representative: they do not stand for the whole ideological framework that informs the viewer's judgment. Thus, they must also be evaluated at a personal level. Even if they are political statements they are still just fragments of resistance, giving voice to concerns and problems that women face in their everyday experience of patriarchy.

The fact that such resistive discourse lacks consistency and a social outlet might be due to several

reasons involving social factors like class, education or age. One reliable observation was that occupation was a key factor in gender-challenging discourse. Women in the sample who had jobs or other roles outside the home, were less likely to be overtly concerned about gender, and if they were it was expressed through laughter and irony.

An empowering function of soaps against patriarchal ideology is the testing out of utopian possibilities. Placed in a context of cultural difference between lived reality in national and cultural boundaries, and an imagined/perceived reality being offered in soap operas, this function can yield a great amount of pleasure (not free of guilt, though) and resolve on a mental level the conflict between desire and reality, as well as other binary oppositions that are inherent in patriarchy. Nevertheless, there are at least two problems with this function of soaps, regardless of whether it empowers women to a certain extent. Firstly, it does not follow that by projecting one's fantasy of breaking patriarchic rules, one will be empowered at an experiential level. Fantasy, as Ang (1985) has argued, is an elusive territory, which can accommodate ideological constructs without second thoughts. Thus, women may enjoy watching Nikki from *YR* breaking rules, but if they do not acknowledge this pleasure overtly and confidently, the process remains in the elusive domain of fantasy. Secondly, and this is quite important in the cases that soap opera is consumed in foreign cultural settings, the imagined alternative becomes a romanticized other that will not be easily questioned, acting thus as a hegemonic structure. There were several women who idealized the representation of women and gender relationship in foreign soaps and

justified them in terms of their 'otherness', a privilege of a foreign, more evolved culture.

If I were to make a conclusive remark concerning my data on gender, it would have to be its significant linkage to national identity, which acts so strongly upon reading practices that it will most of the times anchor the viewer to hegemonic readings. We saw that also in the case of male viewers, who although ready to explore feminine positions, they will not transgress their own nationally hailed masculine perspectives (in the contexts of interpreting storylines and soap talk). In other words, gender is articulated through ethnicity: when they talk about gender in soaps, viewers first think of themselves as Greeks and then as men or women. In the chapter that follows we shall have the chance to examine the issue of nationality and how it shapes soap opera readings in more detail.

6. National identity and soap opera reception

M: [*KZ*] has captured Greekness, one must admit so.
T: They say so themselves: *[reciting the trailer voice-over]* 'tune in tomorrow to *KZ*' –
M: 'To see your favorite Greek heroes in major adventures' *[together with T., laughing]*
T: 'A Greek program written by Greeks'
M: 'For Greeks', yeah, yeah.
T: And it sounds so pompous, it's really a majestic moment! (Manos & Titos, 777-787)

Presumably, the creators of *KZ* consider the nationality of the show a selling point for its Greek audience, vis-à-vis foreign soap operas[1]. National identity is essential in understanding the soap opera text and its mode of address, as well as its reception. All of the participants, like Manos and Titos above, discussed the cultural origin of soaps, and the way this origin was represented, as an important factor in their following. One of the aims of the thesis is to examine the role of cultural expertise: how audiences react to indigenous and foreign texts and whether resistive readings are facilitated, and if so, to what degree, by the familiarity that is so prominent in the culture, language, people, and events that are represented in domestic shows. To what an extent can a resistant viewing position be accounted for by national identity?

The present chapter will investigate these questions. Firstly, we will look at indigenous soaps and the different forms that cultural expertise can take when confronted with home-grown ideology. Then we will see how Greek viewers treat foreign soap texts and which processes configure their engagement and interpretations. Any kind of audience reading hinges on the text that produced it, so the following section will consider the

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[1] Significantly, this trailer first appeared during the *telenovela* fever in the summer of 1999.

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role of the texts themselves and their mode of address, as perceived by the participants, and finally we will assess the importance of national identity in 'viewing against the grain'.

6.1 Watching indigenous soaps

The account on Greek television and its domestic everyday drama in chapter 2 must have indicated to the reader that Greek soaps differ from their American and British counterparts, if not structurally, at least in aspects of style and content. It was also indicated that Foskolos' soaps exaggerate their national representations, invoking historical memories and a specific definition of Greekness. One of my primary findings was that viewers' engagement to Greek soaps is qualitatively different from foreign programs. In this section we will look closely at the factors that determine the mode of receiving indigenous soaps, with an emphasis on resistant readings.

The main difference between watching Greek and American soaps is cultural expertise, which in itself leaves room for divergence. Thus, class, education, gender, age, even geographic origin, mediate the access to different kinds of cultural knowledges, which are reflected in the use of television, and the discourse used to describe such practices. Having said that, what is common among all members of the audience who watch soaps of both origins is the fact that they are all competent in the language, practices and cultural knowledge that are entailed in being Greek and we will examine the extent to which this facilitates resistive readings.

6.1.1 Language

> T: How can I say it, the Greek serial is closer to you
> because you laugh much more easily, it's already
> digested.
> Y: It's also your own language (Telis & Yiotis, 1121-
> 1123).

This laconic, yet concise statement by Yiotis points to the centrality of language when it comes to watching soap opera, a television genre which celebrates orality, dialogue and verbal narrative progress. There is no doubt that the popularity of Greek soaps owes much to the fact that they are better understood without any mediation, as another young fan of *Lampsi* points out:

> I enjoy the Greek ones more because of several things.
> One of them is the language, which in the foreign serials
> is translated somehow by some translators [...] in the
> serial they talk about one thing, the subtitle about another
> and the meaning that should come across is lost
> (Prodromos, 432).

Language, undoubtedly, is the foremost agent of cultural expertise in the case of the Greek soaps, and an agent of mediation when it comes to foreign ones. Receiving a text in its original form and understanding it as such is a plus which was identified by numerous participants. The above statement by Prodromos reveals that familiarity with the spoken language, and thus the actual *meaning*, endows the reader with extra control and immediacy over the text. Here we are reminded of the problem of translation: intercultural communication is always contingent on the exchange of culturally specific meanings. Prodromos considers this exchange dubious: *some* translators, who *somehow* convey a meaning whose legitimacy remains uncertain. Although English is definitely the most popular and well-known second

language for Greeks it is still not their native
tongue. Thus, the ability to assess a particular line and be
aware of all the possible social and extra-textual contexts
of its use, as well as the cultural connotations it alludes
to, makes one much more powerful in the position of the
reader. The following passage illustrates this point:

> Look, with the Greek ones I have more fun [...] Every
> sentence cracks you up [...] The dialogue is funnier, the
> vocabulary – because I understand them better too – it's a
> disgrace. They use a very high level vocabulary,
> gratuitously, just to impress and give us a better cry
> [*laughter*] (Lakis, 248-250).

Immediacy and familiarity with the language has
enabled Lakis to see through the melodramatic oral tones
of *Lampsi*, because he can compare it to an everyday
context where such dialogue would sound inappropriate.
Therefore, he rejects the 'high-level vocabulary' as a
'disgraceful' strategy to capture the audience's emotions.
This resistive statement (laughing at the melodramatic
and pompous dialogue *and* commenting on narrative
'strategies') as Lakis himself admits is partly due to
linguistic knowledge.

For ironic viewers of Greek soaps, language plays a
significant role in their treatment of the text. As
described in section 4.3.1, the ironic viewing position is
characterized by picking up and re-working specific
linguistic elements from the soap opera text. Obviously,
in their native language, ironic viewers have an added
advantage of cultural expertise that guarantees the
knowledge of all potential connotations and social
meanings of the 'lines':

> In the foreign serials you don't get the Greek lines
> (Yiotis, 1145).

The soap narrative has to be well understood in order to
be poached, assigned new, ironic meanings, and used on

another communicative level by fans. The emphasis that all ironic distance viewers place on soap 'lines' (including fans of foreign shows[2]) shows that the process of colonizing a television text is basically a linguistic one. In the following example, two fans of *KZ* talk about a passing character who made them laugh because of his rough accent and speech (which they had much fun imitating for me), cultural elements that they might not discern if *KZ* was not a Greek program:

> T: So, this guy was selling fruit next to the car that was blown up.
> M: And even in the interrogation he was like *[changes tone and accent]* 'the babes, the cherries' *[laughter]*.
> T: I swear, that's how he talked! [...]
> M: And he says to Tonia 'hey sugar' –
> T: 'You know what I want from you' *[also changes accent, emphasizing the consonants]* (Manos & Titos, 669-679).

All ironic distance viewers rejected the realism of Greek soaps, and thus viewed them as cult objects, on the grounds of the use of language, which they described as exaggerated and pompous, as we shall see in the next examples[3]:

> S: The language that Foskolos uses is just amazing. I mean this 'come hither cop', you laugh even by listening to such a thing *[laughter]* [...]
> T: Or about drugs, 'you're sowing the seed of death in our schools'. They don't use any, how shall I say it... youthful lines [...] They use very outdated ones.
> S: You learn Foskolos' language in foundation courses for the university *[laughter]* (Stavros & Telis, 546; 552-558).

Very interestingly, what we have here is a parallelism between the language used in *KZ* and the vocabulary which students have to learn in order to pass the

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[2] Similarly, all ironic distance fans of foreign soaps speak English fluently. Their good understanding of the language and its social uses facilitates their viewing position.
[3] The exact lines which are used by the participants have gone through my own translation, but in Greek they would sound like Shakespearean dialogue on *The Bill*, for example.

'panhellenic exams'[4] – a state establishment
which is considered indeed outdated by most Greeks.
Another young viewer who compares Foskolos' dialogue
to essays is Rea:

> They speak as if they're writing essays for high school.
> They use this vocabulary, these unbelievable, absurd
> words, which we don't use when we talk [...] It's the way
> they use it, they make it sound ridiculous. When Virna
> speaks it's like: [*assumes formal tone*] Essay title: Drugs
> in today's society. And she's orating: 'Drugs are the
> social plague of our society.' In *Lampsi* they speak in
> aphorisms (456).

The soap text and its creator, are here opposed and
resisted to at a verbal level; they are perceived to
represent an 'outdated' ideology which resonates of
formal institutions, governmental discourse, and the
policing of ideas through intensive, uncreative schooling
methods. 'Panhellenic exams' and 'foundation courses'
are the semantic categories which describe, in the young,
ironic distance fans' understanding, the language used in
Greek soaps – a language which they resist, parody and
laugh at.

Thus, language is not just a matter of easier
identification and faster understanding of dialogue, but a
matter of resistance. Ideology resides in speech, in
figures of speech, in clichés, and other culturally specific
idioms, and linguistic capital offers the basic knowledge
needed to assess hegemonic messages in more
symmetrical terms.

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[4] The 'Panhellenic' student exams are a 'coming of age' experience
for most young Greeks and their first encounter with the State's
surveillance and governing mechanisms. The 'foundation courses'
[frontistirio] that Stavros refers to, are intensive preparatory
courses that Greek students take in order to enter University. One
of these courses is written composition, for which students prepare
by learning academic essays by heart. The rule is that the more
stale, uniform and pompous your writing is the better your chance
to get in.

6.1.2 Cultural expertise

If language is the cornerstone of cultural identity, the symbolic knowledge that is reflected on everyday life, its mores and traditions, and the ability to recognize and relate to it, is what I mean by cultural expertise. Certainly, it's not just a matter of ethnicity: one can immerse one's self in a foreign culture and incorporate its elements in one's identity. Previously we saw how mastery of a text's language can equip the reader with the distance needed for parody and criticism. Mastery of the cultural forms in a text can only enhance this process, as this section will make clear. The connotations ascribed to language and social behavior are culturally specific − beyond the boundaries of language, as the following excerpt from Lakis' interview shows:

> J: You said that you understand the Greek ones better.
> L: It's not that I don't understand the other ones, it's just that a foreigner who knew Greek would not understand *Lampsi* [...] Even if he could speak Greek, he would not understand [...] Every line that Yiagos throws has a whole philosophy to it. He's just amazing (293-299).

Lakis is indicating that in order to fully grasp the gestalt of *Lampsi* one needs more than fluency in the Greek language. In order to see the 'philosophy' behind *Lampsi*, and be distanced enough to laugh with it, one has to be familiar with its cultural context as well.

'The Greek serial is closer to you... it is already digested' said Telis. It is an interesting way to describe the material that is already experienced, and hence, more easily picked up and transformed into an aberrant reading, in the ironic distance position. My concern here is the extent to which this engagement with the show is due to its Greekness. These young men are adamant about it:

J: So, could you do what you do to *KZ* with a
foreign serial?
T: No, no. The guy with the mullet in the American serial
won't say a thing to me, whereas the Greek guy... I'd
never laugh if Thorn had a mullet. I'd laugh because
Theoharis has a mullet, or his cousin, or Jedi. Because
I've seen people like that in Omonoia[5] or whatever, in the
80's, who make me laugh. A foreign person with funny
details won't make me laugh, unless he's a comedian.
Y: The fact that it's a Greek serial plays a major role.
T: It's the Greek element. With which you would laugh
anyhow and you just see it in a serial as well. Or the role
of the police. The look of the police in Greece, their
reputation. If you watch an American cop series you won't
laugh, while a Greek cop saying all this bullshit will
crack you up. Because you see him around everyday.
J: What is it about the foreign serial that won't make you
laugh?
T: What happens there is not close to me and I can't see it
everyday around so that I can ridicule them. The only
thing I can ridicule about foreign serials is their lack of
substance. As Stavros says, they don't have any
problematization (1127-1139).

There is no doubt that humor is culturally specific.
These readings though do not just boil down to a sense of
humor: they are aberrant readings which reveal a close
study of the text and an interference with its rules. The
'signs' which are interpreted in this way are neutral in
themselves, or set in a different, non-Greek context. An
American actor with a mullet would not be laughed at and
renamed 'Jedi', but the particular hairstyle signifies what
it does because it is accommodated in a particular
cultural syntagm, thus giving rise to such responses. In a
foreign comedy things would be different: one is meant
to laugh, as Telis says. The everyday drama of soap opera
can make you laugh, instead of cry, if it triggers certain
cultural references, associated with previous experience
and knowledge that one can only share with someone

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[5] Thorn: character from *BB*; Jedi: a *KZ* character whose mullet
hairdo, according to those fans, resembles Darth Vader's helmet;
Omonoia Square: the most central point of Athens, always
congested and chaotic. During the past few decades it has obtained
an infamous status and has attracted a lot of underworld element
and ethnic minorities, mainly because of the central rail and bus
stations. In the daytime the place thrives with small-scale retail
businesses and public administration services.

coming from the same cultural background. For them it's 'the Greek element' that does it. It is probable that the same plot and dialogue with Hollywood settings and subtitles would not yield such responses.

Another thing to consider is the knowledge of institutions, when, for example, Telis mentions Greek police and its role in the serial. As a Greek citizen he has an everyday experience with institutional power, its agents and the form it takes in everyday interaction. This cultural know-how has played a role in his resistance to accept the depiction of police officers in *KZ* and take them seriously. Perhaps what is also lacking is an established mythology of 'the cop' in Greek media (notice how he refers to American cop series, a genre that has mythologized the image of the cop), at least for Telis' generation. Another such example from the same interview is the following one, where the three friends describe a scene from *KZ* where the rich businessman Archos arranged a surprise memorial service for the late ex-husband of his wife, which even I was, to say the least, surprised to hear about:

> S: What about the surprise memorial service in the Metropolis[6] that he does for her and she's stunned?
> J: What memorial service? *[laughing out loud]*
> S: And she says to Archos 'I can't believe you did all this for me', and he says 'yeah, I've invited the whole company, 300 people will show up'...
> Y: A surprise memorial service.
> J: I can't believe it!
> T: How would an English person ever have a laugh at that?
> S: Yeah, how? You know Greece and you know Metropolis, and generally, mourning in Greece is an institution, it's not something superficial, it's not something you play with. So, when Foskolos says 'oh, you did for me a surprise memorial service in Metropolis' you just freak out, you can't laugh about it anymore, you just say the man has lost it.

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[6] The Metropolis, in central Athens, is a grand church where all public and formal religious ceremonies take place, something like St Paul's in London.

> T: Yes, that's why you laugh, because he's
> extreme (1165-1179).

We witness here a different side of this process, where the participants, being aware of religious institutions and practices and their normative character are bewildered at the way these are depicted in *KZ* and react to it. It is not exactly clear whether they also consider these institutions sacred and are offended by this representation: maybe Telis' reaction is more 'camp' than that of Stavros, who appears to be saying that it is beyond having a laugh. Nonetheless, it is their cultural identity as Greeks and the way that the text hails their Greekness that enables them to problematize this particular point, judge it as unrealistically extreme and hence cult.

There are more young participants who cannot take the Greek soaps seriously, like Nestor:

> J: Why do the Greek ones make you laugh more?
> N: They're more ridiculous. It's a nasty criterion, but yeah, you hear the most preposterous things, the plot is absurd. The maid who is pregnant by his lordship Drakos and he offers her 200 millions to keep her mouth shut. I mean, it's absurd, these things can't happen. No way, I can't accept it. The sums of money, the uranium storylines, it's so absurd, where do they get these ideas? (231-233)

Several participants said that they found the foreign serials more realistic and less far-fetched than the Greek ones. However, the absurdly rich businessmen and their equally improbable endeavors, affairs, and family trees, are common to most soap operas, especially those of American origin. Where do the Greek ones stumble, at least with a certain portion of their audience? Rea explains:

> I haven't lived in America, so I don't know how people talk over there. I was born and raised in Greece so I know how people talk here. OK, the people in *Lampsi* are very

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rich, but I know rich people too and no one talks
like that. The dialogue is so far-out... I can't swallow
such a thing... If you live in Greece ... you can't relate to
Lampsi... because it doesn't correspond to Greek reality
[...] There are people though who watch and say 'this
stuff is drawn from real life'. But how on earth could this
be real life? No, I really think that Foskolos is taking
advantage of the viewers in the worst possible way (456).

It is clear that Rea bases her argument on the
premise that she is familiar with the Greek way of life in
order to judge the soap's realism. Her knowledge of the
language and the standards of the Greek way of life
enable her to reject *Lampsi*'s call for realism. While
maintaining her cultural expertise she locates the soap in
an upper-class setting - not very far from her background.
Later, however, she expands the serial's failure of
relevance to the whole of Greek reality ('if you live in
Greece...'), putting class characteristics aside and using
cultural identity as her main criterion. She does not even
allow the benefit of the doubt, as she would for a foreign
series ('I haven't lived in America...'). So, cultural
expertise features prominently in the viewers' rhetoric as
a way to check the quality and realism of a serial. This
finding is congruent with Schrøder's research on the
reception of *Dynasty* in Denmark. Danish viewers
claimed that they would not accept events that took place
in *Dynasty* if they appeared on a Danish serial; in the
case of an American serial, however 'we like to sit down
and watch it', some viewers said (1988:77; see also
Chapter 1). American serials are strongly identified as
mindless, larger-than-life entertainment, while from
domestic material viewers expect more realism and edge,
one of the reasons being its cultural specificity.

In a similar vein, Lakis also rejects the 'reality' of
Lampsi:

J: So, do you prefer the Greek ones, which are more social
and political, involving the state mechanism...

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L: Yes, but again, they've got nothing to do with reality. They are far fetched. OK, Foskolos tries to get a message through, but hey, we all know what's going on [...] [He does so] more than the foreigners. They also make reference to social problems, but he really wants to convey his message, to give his opinion about what's going wrong with Greece.
J: And do you think he achieves this goal?
L: He achieves to get his opinion through, but whether it corresponds to reality, this is another issue.
J: Let me rephrase this, have you ever thought about the problems raised in an episode?
L: It's way too simplistic. It's nothing you'd ever dwell on and think through... I mean, we know these things already (256-266).

This passage is an account of resistant reading, based on national consciousness. It contains several meta-statements concerning the process of ideology, ascribing it of course to the figure of Foskolos. Nevertheless, Lakis here claims that he is too sophisticated in order to take the 'messages' seriously. He finds them simplistic and reflective of Foskolos' *opinions*, and thus unworthy of his attention. However, it is interesting that in his answers he refers to those messages, and the problems that they target, as something already known and '*digested*'. Moreover, he considers it as elementary knowledge, not anything one has to be informed about: the kind of knowledge that builds one's national identity; the everyday problems and current affairs that make up everyday life and public discourse. Lakis is arguing that this kind of cultural capital shields him from those messages which he considers opinions, not reality.

My argument in this section takes three strands. Firstly, that it is much easier to be playful, creative and sarcastic about a text that portrays one's own society and its subtleties, which one encounters daily and which have acquired a special, richer signification, ready to be used for one's own pleasure. Secondly, in terms of assessing the text's constructedness, excess, and fictionality, direct cultural knowledge will enhance the critical ability of the

reader. Thirdly, it can sustain the critical distance which will help the reader to see through ideological messages.

6.1.3 Complications

The association between a reader's cultural identity and a text's cultural origin is, nevertheless, more complex if we take into account some viewer characteristics. Clearly, what I have described is a salient pattern, related to the age of the respondents who were ready to break the rules of indigenous soap narratives. They are in their twenties, well educated and middle class. This does not make them more or less Greek than other participants, but it does set a different agenda for them. Apart from the aesthetic and textual strategies, these young fans also resist a mode of address concerning a particular construction of Greekness created by these soaps. The soap text activates different parts of the readers' national identity for different groups of its audience. This explains why other Greeks make very different readings out of the same soaps, concerning representations of Greekness.

There are viewers for whom *Lampsi* and *KZ* are utterly realistic, cutting edge dramas that speak primarily to their identities as Greek citizens. This audience finds in these soaps a strong touch of currency and materiality, since they portray stories that have preoccupied Greek public opinion and are relevant and familiar for most people. Government and police corruption, earthquakes, blazes, as well as more particular news story items, have been some of the objects of Foskolos' attention. Instead of the universal family and interpersonal relationships of the private sphere that dominate American soaps, in *KZ* and *Lampsi* the public sphere features more prominently,

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with real, historical events and references, social critique, and political tirades. Apart from the experiential level, what comes out of the interviews as a further level of involvement is a national one. Yiorgos says of *KZ*:

> These events come from everyday life, the life of today. I mean, it's not about something that happened in South Africa and has nothing to do with us. The storylines have to do with Greece, not Uganda. It speaks specifically ... [about] the pulse of Greek society [...] It is about social events [...] and you see that they are real events... not the writer's imagination. It brings to memory things that have happened, to me, to a friend, things you saw on the news (96).

For this fan, *KZ* is very close to Greek reality and uses strong national references: it's about Greece, not some foreign, far away place. Collective memory is another important notion that Yiorgos brought up at several points of the interview (see also section 4.2.2). Soap opera here acts as a historical reference, charting indigenous social events that have meant a great deal for the audience. This function could only be fulfilled by a domestic program. The cultural specificity of the text finds fertile ground with fans who appreciate this particular aspect of national focus and describe it as a genuine representation of Greek society:

> J: So, which ones have made you think most seriously?
> A: The Greek ones, because they express Greek reality. These are the issues that are truly hot and interesting.
> K: We see events that cost many people their lives and homes. This is something that hurts inside (Aspasia & Katia, 799-803).

> K: That's why we watch the Greek soaps, we say 'we've also been through that'.
> E: Yes, the Greek ones are closer to us (Elsa & Kostoula, 61-63).

> I understand the Greek ones better [...] They're closer to us and I learn more things because they speak about our country, about the forests that were burnt. Foskolos goes on and on about that, after the blazes. Have you seen the murderer who kills them *[the arsonists]* and then hangs

them on the burnt trees? ... How can I not like
this? I like them better (Glykeria, 978, 882).

> What's special about the Greek soaps is that the things
> they speak about have to do with the current government,
> with current affairs, floods, blazes, whatever, while in the
> American serial nothing will ever remind you of
> something that took place in your country so that you can
> relate. When you hear for example in *Lampsi* that Tolis'
> flat flooded you think of what happened in Voula *[area
> outside Athens]* the last time it rained hard (Prodromos,
> 445).

The difference from the accounts that appeared
earlier, is striking; it is as if those participants are
talking about different shows. And nevertheless, there is
great internal coherence and similarity between the
different patterns of responses, which reveals therefore
that social factors have to be acknowledged for the
divergence. All of these viewers rely on the Greek soaps
as memorials of their experience: that is their *motivation*,
in terms of Schrøder's (2000) model of reception. The
conveyed meanings flash on specific experiences and
cause at times clearly emotional responses, a type of
catharsis, one could say. What is worth noting, however,
is that in none of these accounts is the dramatization of
real events acknowledged as such. The above viewers
recognize a reality in these serials and receive it with
great sensitivity. The storylines make them learn, think
and remember; they also recreate on screen their history
and collective memory. The other group of viewers also
considers Greek soaps as specimens of a purely Greek
culture, however they disagree with this representation
and do not think of it as genuine.

What makes matters more complex when thinking
about resistance is the existence of an ideologically
ambiguous fictional text (Morley, 1992; Schrøder, 2000).
It is generally quite difficult to ascertain a single
ideology in soap operas, in tune with the discourses of a

hegemonic group (Ang, 1985; Stempel Mumford, 1994). Instead, we may find ourselves talking about different kinds of 'preferred' readings that correspond to different ideologies. What some fans discarded as truism others embraced as an affirmation of their own experience and ascribe to Foskolos' work a radical, political edge. Aliki Danae believes that Greek soaps empower the marginalized and weak[7]:

> Foskolos lives here, he's aware of the situation and he tries to empower. Foreign soaps do not have any political goals, they just show their storylines. As if the writer of *YR* is going to influence the US government... But Greece is a small country; we're all suffering together. [Foskolos] is trying to do his bit (223).

Aliki Danae sees Foskolos' 'goals' as a result of his Greekness, and it is her own experience of suffering, her own Greekness, that makes her recognize his effort as such. The feeling of empowerment through soap is thus a result of *KZ*'s cultural specificity, her own national identity and historic experience, factors that do not come into play when watching foreign soaps.

There are viewers who talk of *KZ* as a show which goes against the grain, criticizes state corruption and consumerist ideology and brings people close to ideas that do not belong in popular discourses:

> Sometimes I think, I don't care, I will watch this even if they call me old-fashioned [...] He's not ashamed to come across as a traditional man, who follows the power of God, the love for our country, many times he mentions Greece in the serial... honesty. It shows these values that we modern Greeks tend to forget, and this serial comes like a response to what we try to be like. That's why I like to watch it... We need these values, especially we Greeks, because our children will be a lost generation. We'll perish. These values, religion, country, our soul... they must come out in the open and be taught [...] Do you know how many times I caught myself being ashamed to say in public 'It's God's will', and 'if God allows...'? I

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[7] Her position in relation to class issues will be further developed in chapter 7.

said it inside me but I was ashamed to say it aloud [...] We Greeks, we were not like that. But we learned the American way of life, through TV, and we became modern, we became like the Americans. And I say Americans because it's what we mostly watch.... And in the name of money and fortune, social and cultural progress we forget. We forget our dignity and become slaves (Anna, 161; 185; 299; 375-377; 388)

The above passage reveals how difficult it is to establish what a resistive reading of *KZ* would be. Anna's words reflect Brigadier Theoharis' rhetoric, so she seems to be accepting the textual messages offered. Can this position, then, be evaluated as a hegemonic reading of the soap, a result of the text's interpellation to her national identity? Schrøder's (2000) model distinguishes between *position* (i.e., the respondent's experience of accepting or rejecting the message that in her/his opinion is offered by the text) and *evaluation* (i.e., the analyst's assessment of that position in relation to the social formation – again a subjective position). In this case Anna's position is one of acceptance; however, watching *KZ* is for her a resistive act in itself since the serial voices concerns and ideas that have been driven out of public discourses for the sake of modernity – or Americanization, in her opinion. Here the reader has identified for herself what she is resisting against: the powers of cultural imperialism which have swept out the 'old ways' of a romanticized past.

Watching *KZ* is an empowering act for Anna because she considers the serial a resistive, progressive text in the midst of discourses that undermine traditional Greekness. Hers is a nationally oriented discourse, by all means, and an example of how *KZ* and *Lampsi* hail their viewers as national subjects and appeal less to other attributes of their identities. The Greek soaps appear in this discourse as tokens of genuine Greekness, raising high the flagships of national values and ideals, in

antithesis to products of American culture that instill foreign ideologies. The notion of memory is present again, as foreign soaps make Greeks forget who they are. Soap as an agent of national and historical consciousness appears in other accounts too:

> K: That storyline brought us back in the old days, those who lived through the disaster of '22.
> E: And Tzortzis is a nice actor, I like him.
> K: The Greek population from Turkey, who still hold that, in their hearts it's still their home. Ali was Greek *[she refers to Lampsi storyline]* but he didn't know that, he was raised there *[in Turkey ...]*
> J: So, that caught your interest.
> K: My mother, she was born there (Elsa & Kostoula, 205-215).

Kostoula, who was born by a refugee soon after 1922, received the storyline that dealt with the Greek heritage in Asia Minor and the relations between Greece and Turkey (another heated issue in public discourse), quite differently from her daughter Elsa, who just expresses her admiration for the protagonist. The issue that is addressed through the storyline takes a different dimension and intensity for the older woman. When she watched this storyline in *Lampsi* and assessed its relevance, its quality, and its representational techniques, she thought of it as a celebration of her past and her heritage, in contrast to her daughter who belongs in a different generation.

In the following extract Spyros relates the class issues addressed in *Lampsi* to the birth of a new middle class during WWII:

> Most of the things it shows in the serial are realities... They've happened. In the occupation there were people who co-operated with the Germans. Everybody was hungry, you, me, everybody. But they ended up loaded with money. How did they get this money? [...] While others were fighting for freedom they would buy your house for ten drachmas and you'd sell it because your children were hungry. My grandfather sold his donkey for

a sack of wheat. My grandmother made bread out
of it so that we could survive (Spyros, 390).

Spyros relates the merciless money-making schemes of
Lampsi's Yiagos Drakos to the hated 'collaborators'
during the German occupation. Such a historical
reference was not present in the text; however this viewer
drew from his own history in order to interpret social
injustice and linked it to this national moment. Spyros
(see also section 4.2.2) is trying to validate the class
ideology present in *Lampsi*; his historical and national
consciousness is the rhetoric and the discursive
framework that serves him best. For him, people like
Yiagos were once the enemies of the nation and its
freedom. National identity and his historical past are
called upon to legitimate the 'reality' of the soap ('Most
of the things... in the serial are realities... They've
happened').

Yiorgos also makes historic links to the tough years
known by older generations, and also brings up an
interesting link between Greek soaps and the Greek
cinema of the 50's-60's, that in his opinion accounts for
their popularity:

> The old Greek movies are a characteristic example, their
> plots were also about the everyday [...] the poverty, the
> deprivation... These plots are still very intense because
> the older generations have been through those things. You
> haven't, but your father or your grandfather have. [The
> movies] interest them because they bring to mind what
> they, or their friends, went through. These movies are
> diachronic and so is *KZ*. It's not just for today. It captures
> the pulse of Greek society (96-97).

The relationship between *Lampsi* and *KZ* and the
Greek popular cinema of the post-war period was also
mentioned in chapter 2 and here it is addressed by
Yiorgos Both are cultural products that embody a set of
values and experiences that are especially meaningful for
some generations of Greeks. Melodrama, as a narrative

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form and mode of address, and the figure of Foskolos, are also links between those films and his soaps. The above passages illustrate how national identity is activated in the reception of Greek soaps and explains why the audience constructs such diverse meanings from them. Older fans see in these programs a clear continuation of their historical experience, told in a narrative form that they can relate to their cultural past. Younger viewers of *KZ*, especially those who come from an affluent background, have different expectations from a television serial and its mode of address: they cannot identify with the melodramatic and intense story-telling of Foskolos and refuse to take it seriously. Moreover, they refuse to accept the soap's aesthetics, its intensive reference to national 'ideals', the exaggerated violence and desperation that characterize Foskolic heroes, and the whole notion of 'Greekness' as represented in his serials:

> J: You talked about a Greek element represented in *KZ*. Where do you perceive it?
> S: Everywhere. It's the haircuts, the faces, the talk.
> T: The stuck ideas [...]
> J: So, what are the ideals in *KZ*?
> S: I'd say family, but then again, not.
> T: It's honor basically.
> S: Honor, dignity. Dignity is above everything.
> J: And do you ridicule this too?
> T: Yes because the guy reaches an extreme point. I mean it just reaches a comical dimension. There is an honor which is lingering in the air, a Greek honor, a forehead[8] that Theoharis is struggling to keep clean.
> J: And do you think that this problematization exists in Greek society?
> T: Of course it does, it's the most classic one. People are led by their honor throughout their lives.
> S: You swear about someone's mother and he would go as far as kill you. There are some sacred, untouchable things in Greek society.
> J: And what makes you ridicule it?
> T: It's good to have honor and dignity in your life but this specific serial takes it so far, just for the sake of honor, that you lose the substance. You're not human anymore, you're just your honor. (1159-1163, 1307-1317)

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[8] Alluding to the Greek saying 'my forehead is clean', i.e., my dignity is intact.

Arguably, the aspect that makes these fans resistant to Foskolos' discourse is the intense, melodramatic form, which strips the 'substance' out of the message and renders it void, enabling them to colonize it with their own input of irony and play. The grand themes that they identify are truly resonant of the Greek popular feeling, captured by the Greek cinema of the 60's and the modern Greek television soaps. Notice how Greekness enters the discussion effortlessly: it is a 'Greek honor' that Foskolos is talking about, in their opinion, and they recognize the sacredness of these social values as a *par excellence* Greek phenomenon ('the most classic one'). Nevertheless, national identity is not a unified construct and we see here clearly that feelings and ideas about nationality differ among groups and generations of Greeks, who in effect react differently to what they read as Greekness in domestic soaps.

These young viewers treat *KZ* and *Lampsi* mainly as parodies, in order to have a laugh and gossip about the excessive aesthetic and verbal ventures of the heroes. They are conscious of the ideological strategy of the text and consider it void of meaning. On the contrary, the fans who are older (and the majority of which are of lower social class) see *KZ* as a resistive text in itself, and not only accept, but even celebrate its ideology on the grounds of its didactic quality and national values. National identity and cultural origin are central in this differential response. The resistance of the younger fans is based on their reading of 'stuck ideas' and 'outdated', void of meaning ideologies of the past. In making this interpretation they are activating their own national identity: their cultural knowledge and values come directly into play because they are receiving a product

that represents their own culture. Fans of older generations are empowered by Greek soaps because they consider them a revival of Greeks' true identity in the midst of outlandish, materialist ideologies.

It is nonsensical to draw a hierarchy among readers since we saw that resistance takes place at different levels: textual, experiential, and social. The distinction between the viewer's response about the textual message, and what we, as researchers, interpret as a hegemonic reading, is an analytical move that prevents us from valorizing 'accepting' *vs.* 'rejecting' readings, as Schrøder (2000:250) suggests. Faced with complex texts like *Lampsi* and *KZ*, it would be extremely hard and simplistic to label them at once 'progressive' or 'conservative', because clearly they offer a range of ideological meanings that passionately co-exist in their narratives and images.

The essence of the above analysis is the differential function of national identity, which can either facilitate opposition, or act in alignment with the ideological affiliations of the domestic text, abundant with recognizable, cultural signposts. Age proves to be an important factor, as *Lampsi* and *KZ* address with their language and forms older generations of Greeks, and carry historical signals that some younger audiences cannot recognize, a conclusion that O' Donnell (1998) has also come to. Class also features as a major explanatory frame, and chapter 7 will be devoted to its proper examination. Now we will turn to the role of national identity in the reception of foreign soaps.

6.2 Watching foreign soaps

> I want to see what happens out there, in the world [...] Is it perhaps what is missing from our own life? (Veronika, 101; 193)

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> In both Greek and foreign soaps everybody will get off
> with everybody and everybody shags each other, but I
> don't know, there's something about the foreign ones
> that's more appealing (Nestor, 239).

> We might be thinking that [*BH 90210*] is [full of]
> freshness because we don't have this kind of thing here.
> We might be saying it is fresh, while the Americans who
> watch it over there might not. For us fresh means... to
> drink ouzo on the seaside, to put on *zeibekika [Greek folk
> music]* [...] It's down to how you define freshness and
> here, because it's a matter of different cultures, it's
> Greekness and American-ness [Rea (with Kostas & Eliza),
> 599-606).

In the previous section we saw how national identity, and particularly competence in culturally specific knowledge, filters the reception of indigenous soaps. We shall now look at fans of American soaps, and how their Greekness is involved in their relationship with these shows. In the extract above Rea captures the encounter of self and other and shows how cultural identity comes to the fore when the reader perceives a representation of a foreign culture. While domestic soaps address the audience's lived experience and shared social characteristics, foreign programs represent cultural difference and a desire that is often entailed in this difference.

The role of national identity in the reception of foreign texts is evident in two ways. Firstly, it takes the form of a desirable encounter with an exotic other, driven by a conscious suspension of disbelief and a tendency to accept the text without any questioning[9]. Secondly, it can fuel resistive readings and practices[10], especially when ideological messages become prominent, on the basis of a

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[9] This point was introduced in section 4.1.4, in relation to the aesthetic viewing position.

[10] Similar to the resistance evidenced in the previous section on Greek soaps and sometimes by the same readers.

'we vs. them' rhetoric, a symbolic clash between different cultures and ethnicities.

6.2.1 Exotic others and the 'benefit of the doubt'

Foreign soaps, and in this case mostly American daytime ones, appeal to their Greek audience as an opportunity to immerse one's self in a comfortably luxurious setting with glossy characters and softly spoken lines that will offer a familiar, afternoon escapade. The reader might recall that foreign soaps are preferred by aesthetically positioned viewers, whose watching experience is based on escapist pleasure. The main issue here is the representation of the extraordinary. Viewers like Veronika and Nestor, quoted above, talk about watching something 'appealing' that 'is missing from our own life', so there is a tendency to observe and survey a different culture, where people dress, act and live a way of life that is appealingly unfamiliar.

We cannot talk, though, of passive escapism here, because as it was indicated in the description of the aesthetic position in chapter 4, the choice to let one's self go and 'be lost in the colors' is a very conscious one. Moreover, most foreign soap fans are quick to note that this is a process that is much easier with foreign soaps. The high melodramatic tones and constant references to current affairs make Greek soaps inappropriate for this kind of escapist pleasure.

The main finding related to national identity is, in accordance with the reception of Greek soaps, that escapist pleasure works much better when national identity is not activated and that this is a deliberate choice of the viewers. In addition, a central process in the reading of foreign soaps appears to be a negotiation of the viewers' cultural identity between 'ordinary - us'

and 'extraordinary - them'. Petros, quoted also in section 4.1.2, describes what was 'spellbinding' about *BB*:

> P: The spell was the different world it promised. There was a world that was more beautiful, or rather, more beautified; rich folk without the pettiness of the poor; a sort of cleverly done glamour that the audience can understand, which is discreet and spell-binding at the same time. With heroes completely out of the ordinary. And heroines of course. Caroline... I was totally in love with Caroline...
> J: They killed her off, though!
> P: Yes, I never appreciated that. I really think I should have written a letter to complain! *[laughter]* (19-25)

Petros acknowledges the aspect of *difference* as crucial in his involvement with *BB*. It is the promise of a world that bears little similarity to Greek everyday life (or any everyday life for that matter). We also witness how he negotiates the program's ideology, which he addresses as he describes this world as 'cleverly done' and 'beautified'. So, he recognizes a fictional world tailored to suit his need to be spellbound and thus its negotiation seems quite deliberate. One should also take note of the self-sarcastic statement that he finally makes about writing a letter to the producers, which parodies his own strong involvement with *BB* and the industrial, very material base of the fantastical world that mesmerized him. The exotic, the out-of-ordinary aspect of the soap is the agent of a self conscious, active non-resistance from the part of this fan.

In the interview with Kostoula, her daughter Elsa, and her grand-daughter Evita, the same issue came up:

> Ev.: I like better the foreign ones because they are more unusual [...] The Greek one seems a bit more ordinary, while the foreign one shows you the whole college atmosphere, the different environment, the homes, the music [...]
> El: Look, in the foreign ones they're more... they make them more romantic, more beautiful [...] they have this style, it might be fake or real, but they'll go with the

> flowers, the ring, they'll take her out to a fancy
> restaurant to have dinner. We Greeks, we don't have these
> things, you'll never see a private dining room in a
> restaurant...
> Ev.: It's not that these things don't happen here, but you
> take them and adjust them to your own society (87; 139).

Here, too, we observe the same line of thought; the serial is received through the difference between 'them and us', fabricated with all the details and subtleties of the cultural references found in the soap opera text, which are 'taken and adjusted' to fit the cultural experience of the viewer, as Evita points out. Interestingly, her mother touches upon the constructedness of the text ('they make them more...'), questioning the genuineness of soaps ('fake or real'). The benefit of the doubt that the viewers are ready to allow for is characteristic of the reception of a fictional cultural setting, which escapes their lived experience *and* their cultural identity. The result is a negotiated reading, since the viewers are aware of this process, but will not openly reject or point to the text's ideological messages, because of the benefit of the doubt. Rea explains this by saying that:

> *YR* is outside my reality, so it's not important whether it's
> relevant or not [...] And again, I don't believe that *YR*
> corresponds to the life that the average American lives.
> But, given that, when I watch it I don't really care
> because it's doesn't concern me. I see some sort of fairy
> tale in *YR*. While with *Lampsi* I care because supposedly
> it's relevant to Greek society (Rea, 470).

Rea argues that the representation of 'self', i.e. her own society, makes her more critical and resistant because of its supposed relevance to her life. *YR*, in contrast, makes no such claim, therefore its excesses and false representations will go unnoticed, or even enjoyed, since they depict the 'other'. *YR* references are located outside her reality and her accountability as a reader. The *difference*, that readers draw on, is directly related to

their national identity and the encounter with the representation of a foreign one.

Another example of negotiated national identity *vis-à-vis* American soaps and imagined conceptions of otherness can be seen in viewers who talk about soaps as an opportunity to come into contact, learn, and imagine about the other. Here, a romanticized conception of ethnicity comes into play, and this time it takes the popular imagery of the American Dream, the land of opportunity, and so on:

> R: What I like about [YR] is that no matter how high their social status is, or how well educated they are, they have never underestimated someone who is in an inferior position [...] We get to know how people live, what goes on in the other side of the Atlantic, as they say [...] It is very far from Greek reality. Sometimes I wish things were like that in Greece too. Mainly when they show legal cases, how people respect each other, their refined manners, their kindness...
> J: Which of those things would you wish to see here?
> R: Generally the American way of life. And I'm not judging just from the serial, I've read about this, people there have more chances to rise, economically and socially. This doesn't happen in Greece... Everything there functions on a civilized level. Even quarrels and aggression has something civilized about it, not like we know it in Greece [...] The fact that it is about another culture, another country with a different mentality, a foreign one, it doesn't mean it's not desirable (Rena, 159-163).

This discourse around national identity is based on an 'us vs. them' binary opposition. In contrast to Rea's account we see here a confident belief in and embrace of the interpersonal, social, and work relations in the manner they are portrayed in American soaps. The way it is all phrased and continually set against Greek reality shows how Rena's cultural identity, and the way she feels about it, encounters the desired 'other', across the Atlantic. This encounter does not question anything concerning the naturalizing processes that have produced the text. In fact, the reader is looking for further

evidence ('I've read about this') to confirm the reality of the show, a practice that often takes place (see quote by Spyros in section 4.2.2).

Nevertheless, this instance presents more subtleties, if we consider that soap opera opens for this fan a space to talk about her problems with Greek society. It is no wonder that it is mostly women who seem to feel this way about foreign soaps, since the slow emancipation of women in Greece has made them more sensitive about gender relationships in soaps:

> K: At least in the foreign ones men are more tender.
> A: And women are shown in every social role. They don't have a secondary position, on their men's trail [...] Theoharis wants to impose himself. Where his wife is concerned, and generally when it comes to women he's despotic. He's authoritarian and he wants women at home.
> K: [...] Greeks want their women to be mothers, to be wives, to work, they want everything, but at the woman's expense...
> A: And Greek women have not opened their wings yet.
> K: Maybe they want to open them, but they can't (Aspasia & Katia, 202-204; 231).

In these excerpts we see very clearly the longing for change, a possibility that foreign soaps open up. These women voice their concerns about unfair working conditions, or the oppression experienced in women's domestic role, through the utopian possibilities offered by foreign soaps, as we also discussed in chapter 5. Geraghty (1991) has indicated that by exploring emotional issues in the private sphere, where feminine culture is considered and portrayed as valuable, soap operas create utopias. Utopian possibilities allow women to experience alternatives and test out their roles and competencies. In the cases we reviewed, these possibilities are indeed accepted without questioning the text's ideology or historical and social conditions, and yet, the result is a reconsideration of the viewers' own social roles, in the sense that Brown (1994) has theorized

resistance among soap opera women fans. Such interpretations are not at all straight-forward, but must be considered on several levels.

Here national identity and cultural knowledge are informed by gender identity and feminine experience. The Greek serials offer to women a channel of public discourse, a social commentary which includes them as citizens, but does not contain them as women. In Geraghty's terms, the possibilities that Greek soaps offer are rather dystopic for their female audience. In their storylines women can recognize the experiences of subordination, but no possible or pleasurable way out is offered. Greekness also entails chauvinism and submission, and here gender identity seems to clash with the women's wish to recognize their own culture in a Greek drama. Gender, thus, comes into play, together with class and age, as a strong aspect of the viewer's subjectivity which may clash with ideas of ethnicity that are dominant in popular culture, and thus give rise to discourses that challenge hegemonic influences. American soaps offer an alternative experience of femininity (especially in the area of heterosexual relationships and women's roles) that re-defines the one that has been acquired in one's own culture by depicting its 'other'.

To summarize, we looked at readings that can be characterized as negotiated since the viewer finds her/himself in a position between the awareness that the 'other' is a fabricated representation, and the pleasure of escaping the boundaries of her/his own cultural identity by discovering a different one. It is a process of give some/take some, and a quite conscious one, at least in several cases. Moreover, we saw that even readings that embrace textual ideologies may lead to resistive practices

in that they open up spaces where the reader questions her own social conditions, but leaves the text unquestioned. National identity here acts as the basis upon which the reader will construct the notion of difference (self/other – we/them) that will filter her/his engagement with the foreign text.

6.2.2 Resistance rhetoric: 'we vs. them'

When readers overtly reject ideological messages on the basis of their national identity, the notion of difference functions as an agent of resistance. Specifically, such readings were salient in the case of the prime time soap *BH 90210*, which despite being very close to the generic format of soap opera, the Greek viewers in this study found it less refined in its narrative structure and more blatantly ideological than daytime soaps. Thus, we have to acknowledge the role and the boundaries of the text in reading processes, as I have done throughout this chapter.

It will become clear from the interview extracts and the analysis that will follow, that national identity played a prominent role in forming resistant readings of foreign soaps, in at least one case which I observed. This was another group interview I conducted with three young people in their mid- and late twenties who were all *BH 90210* fans[11]. Their readings are openly resistive and opposed to the ideological process which they find quite obvious in *BH 90210*. Kostas, aged 26, used to belong to a group of diasporic BH fans in London who received videotapes from home and engaged in fan practices. For these three participants, the formation of a resistant viewing position is to a great extent a matter of strong national identity and perceived superiority and

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[11] The group included Rea and her older sister Eliza.

sophistication which buffers them from the 'American moralism' that all of my respondents perceived in *BH 90210*. The group readily acknowledges that there is a blatant attempt to get through a social agenda and Kostas locates it in a wider media-industry perspective:

> K: Teenagers are a strong audience, consumer wise. They spend money so BH thrives from advertising. Spelling has succeeded in getting through a political discourse and in captivating teenage audiences in order to get the ratings the advertisers want.
> R: Yeah but the way they present the issues is so superficial. It's totally paternalistic.... It's the typically American practice of throwing in the moral teaching in order to pretend that there is a point to the episode [...]
> E: They have succeeded in that their so-called moral messages are marketed in the most gorgeous package you can imagine: babes, cars, clothes, sunshine... (199-205; 217)

As soon as they establish the existence of an ideological process they draw their tactic of resistance on the premise of the superiority endowed by their cultural heritage:

> J: What do you think therefore about these moral teachings?
> K: It's artificial. It's based on nothing. However hard they try, whoever Walsh *[BH hero Brandon's surname]* from Minnesota, or wherever, we are a civilization... dating back millions of years. We've done our evolution and we know at least how to raise a human being. We're not a young country built on the basis of capitalism, that has to produce a standardized model of moral values. In America there's no religion, no politics, there's nothing. People are clueless. If you ask them who their president is they'll say 'Snoop Doggy Dog'. If you asked the average American what is Greece, he wouldn't even show it on the map. They don't have the culture.
> R: I agree with Kostas, and I believe that we Greeks, or at least just us, because we represent a specific group of Greeks... we cannot identify! We laugh in its face! ... they equate every problem, from smoking to anorexia [...] They use a standard, deterministic line of moral conduct, typical of Hollywood, which is childish. I mean, it's unbelievable, it's for laughs. We, of course, are thinking beings and we don't buy their bullshit, but a younger kid might...

K: I don't think that a Greek kid would ever be influenced. Greeks watch it just for the clothes, the surroundings...
R: Well, I'm talking about Americans who are stupid anyway.
K: I sure hope your supervisor isn't American! *[laughter]*
(299-317)

These fans employ a clearly nationalist discourse, based on imagined constructions of Greekness and American-ness, in order to reject the effectiveness of the *BH 90210* social agenda. We find here historical references to ancient civilizations, strong cultural heritage, family values ('we know how to raise...'), and religion as agents of integrity and protective shields against uniform moral teachings. It is established that Greek audiences would only watch for the aesthetics of the serial – the 'messages' would never be taken seriously. Hollywood-made culture is criticized as lacking any substance and originality and is deemed good only for its glamorous content. Moreover, their criticism spills onto American society as well, with its capitalist values, standardization, lack of culture and political involvement, and so on. When faced with a 'marketed' foreign product, which they locate in such an ideological framework, their cultural identity, set against *BH 90210* and the American-ness it represents, enables them to 'laugh at it' and not take it seriously.

This response to *BH 90210* and its ideology is not new in this study: other fans[12] also spoke of it in such terms, mentioning moralism, political correctness, social agendas, and lack of substance and relevance. However, what was singular in this group was the extremely prominent nationalist rhetoric, responsible for the formation of their resistance. Greekness here is actively opposed to a representation of the American way of life,

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[12] The fans I refer to are Melina and Aaron, Manos and Titos, and Stavros.

which is also media-constructed, and yet taken for granted and employed in order to build-up a defense against the text's power, which might have an effect on 'stupid Americans', but not on young Greeks, descendents of a glorious civilization! National identity and difference construct their resistance.

The above passage bears striking similarities to Anna's account (section 6.1.3) about the forgotten values revived by KZ[13], as she also referred to a treasured national past, religion, traditional values and put this discourse against American ideologies of consumerism and capitalism. This implies that there is a congruity among the cultural values that feature in such discourses. They are the products of homogeneous socialization, schooling, ideological state apparatuses, and media exposure that procreate Greek culture. However, in section 6.1, I demonstrated that national identity did not function as a unified construct, in the reception of domestic soaps. Different groups of viewers hold a different conception of Greekness and differ in their response to its representations. Anna comes from a very different background to these young, affluent BH fans. What makes, in my opinion, the latter embrace such a traditional and ideological representation of Greekness (that they might otherwise reject as 'outdated'), is their encounter with the exotic 'other' in its stereotypical, media-assembled form. This encounter fuels the activation of such ethnocultural constructs, in order to resist and outsmart ideological messages of the text.

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[13] On the other hand, this is the reverse process from the one which informed Rena's account of the 'American Dream'.

Hence, ideological processes which have already formed these audiences as Greek citizens, and all the constructs that this identification entails, can surpass class or historical/experiential affiliations, when faced with 'otherness', and form a powerful, resistive discourse.

6.3 Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen a differential employment of structures of national identity as a function of soap opera reception. The present findings cannot point to a conclusive explanation, since especially the final, nationalist use of the 'us vs. them' rhetoric was observed only in one group of middle/upper class, younger fans. Moreover, ironic-distance fans of foreign soaps did not use any conceptions of cultural difference or national superiority for their resistive practices, so we must acknowledge the complex and diverse ways in which this phenomenon takes place.

National identity together with the cultural capital it entails, features as a strong construct which is extremely active in the reception of both indigenous and foreign soap, but in different ways. In the case of domestic soap operas, we saw that critical and playful readings are enhanced, since national identity is activated by cultural references that are extremely specific to the portrayed culture. Language is obviously the primary factor, since it forms and gives an expression to the categories stimulated by the text's materials. Lived experience though, in the form of everyday knowledge of social behavior and institutions is also powerful in creating aberrant readings. Nevertheless, national identity can also influence the embrace of textual ideology when it is located in nationally significant narratives, and hence its

differential function. The empowerment experienced by viewers in such cases shows that the phenomenon of resistance is multifaceted and does not only involve oppositional readings of the text. Class, gender and age appear to be shaping the way in which national identity is expressed in reading processes, as different generations of Greeks think very differently about Greekness and its representation in soaps.

With regard to foreign soaps, national identity is actively present in the formation of a 'we *vs.* them' discourse of difference, forming two patterns. It can either lead to a negotiated relationship with the text, where the reader negotiates her/his lack of lived experience of the portrayed culture and the resulting 'benefit of the doubt', with the desire and the pleasure of experiencing unconditionally the discovery of the exotic 'other'. Furthermore, we observed an instance where the represented exotic other was not desirable, but ideologically resisted. There, the 'we *vs.* them' rhetoric was strongly accentuated in a nationalist discourse of superiority as a function of the resistive reading of ideological messages.

Thus, the basic characteristic of national identity, as demonstrated in this analysis, is its continually active and powerful role in soap opera reception, which, however, can function very differently according to the reader's and the text's social, cultural, and historic origin. Regardless of whether it will facilitate resistive discourse, national identity dominates viewers' subjectivities and strongly interacts with their gender and class, as we shall see next.

7. Social class and soap opera reception

> These stories can happen. No matter if they're rich or
> poor, Americans or Greeks, in some specific situations all
> people will react in specific ways (Maria, 145).

Does soap transcend social and cultural borders?
Maria, a *YR* fan, seems to think that it does. Part of the
myth that surrounds the soap opera genre is that its
overwhelming appeal conquers demographic variances.
People from different social backgrounds and
geographical locations will tune in day after day, for
years and years, in order to follow the stories of
characters that appear to have nothing in common to
them. Ang (1985) has identified the tragic structure of
feeling as the aspect that makes soap operas so accessible
with a wide array of people who identify with these
programs on an emotional level. Nevertheless, even if the
universality of human emotions and the archetypal nature
of the narrative form can indeed explain the popularity of
soaps, one cannot doubt the significance that the viewers'
social background will have in the program's reception.
In this chapter I will attempt to identify the ways in
which class shapes soap opera readings.

Few studies of soap opera viewers have
problematized class, namely Seiter and her colleagues
(1989) and Press (1991). Both studies, and especially
Press's work which specifically focused on the question
of class, emphasized the importance of social and
cultural specificity in one's relationship to television,
and in consequence soaps. One of Press's most
interesting findings was that television images were so
imbued with middle-class experiences and
representations of reality that working-class women
accepted them as realistic, whereas middle class women,

checking them against their own experience, would not. Television, and specifically soap opera, is as much a product of capitalism, as of patriarchy. However, different sets of ideologies reside at different levels of soap opera texts, and although many are watched as glimpses into the life of the rich and glamorous, not all soaps celebrate middle-class consciousness. British soap operas are known for their focus on working class communities (Geraghty, 1991), while the Greek programs that my respondents watched combine the depiction of wealth with strong messages that condemn it. How do viewers of different class backgrounds interpret such messages? Do they recognize in them their own social reality? Is this aspect of soaps a ground on which they might base their criticism, their rejection or acceptance of these representations?

In addition, this chapter will examine the class patterns that can be observed in the viewers' accounts and identify how aspects of cultural capital are being activated in soap opera consumption, and particularly, in the case of resistant decodings and practices. In the first section, I will look at how soap opera fans deal with the issue of class: how it is associated with constructions of fanship and how class is articulated in soap opera discourse. The second section will examine class patterns in resistive discourse in relation to viewing positions, especially ironic distance viewers and social observers, and problematize the issue of hegemonic readings. Finally, I will argue that the resistive discourse by middle class, ironic distance fans is partly based on their conception of working-class culture as a representation of otherness in soap opera texts. This analysis will hopefully shed light on several complexities that characterize audience resistance.

7.1 Class distinctions in soap opera discourse

> We Greeks, or at least just us, because we represent a specific group of Greeks, [*BH 90210*] cannot guide us on how to raise children... (Rea, 303)

> I think *Lampsi* has lost it, it only addresses one kind of audience, the Sharons and Traceys who watch the rich people there, like Yiagos, like why should we even care about those people? (Stavros, 84)

These short extracts make clear that viewers approach their shows with an already established idea of their social background, like Rea who refers to her own social specificity in a reflexive way. This identity plays a major role in the interpretation and further use of a program's meanings. Soaps, moreover, have a class identity which affects the viewer's positioning vis-à-vis its meanings. These two conceptions work together in producing a viewing position that is noticeably shaped by social class.

When viewers make a class judgment referring to a specific program, they also make one about themselves, directly or not. In this case Stavros, in explaining why he chose *KZ* over *Lampsi*, points to the audience that *Lampsi* addresses, in his opinion: a female audience of lower social class who finds escapist enjoyment in the luxurious lifestyles portrayed. Stavros distinguishes himself from this 'inferior' audience and denies any interest in watching something outside one's social reality. There are more issues that surface in this statement, which will be raised later in the chapter. Right now, I will focus on the readiness with which soap operas and their audiences are defined by class related characteristics.

7.1.1 Class-ifying texts and audiences

Apart from femininity, class is a significant anchor of meanings and representations for soap opera and its audience and sometimes this may lead to tension in fans that do not recognize themselves as fitting the constructed image of the 'ideal' soap viewer:

> F: I was over 32 when I discovered [*YR*] and I was perplexed. How could I like this stuff when... And several friends would make fun of me, like, 'gosh, you watch soaps', as in not the most chic thing to do...
> J: For a philosophy professor! [*laughter*]
> F: [*fake pompousness*] A philosophy professor, watching soaps on TV, what a thing! So, I would not talk about it very much, not that I would be embarrassed, but it wasn't something that...
> J: made you feel proud?
> F: No, it wasn't a matter of pride. The thing was that most people to whom I was related did not watch soaps. But eventually it became a topic of conversation with other people, for example my father's family, my aunt [...] and I would use it when I met up with them (Fenia, 73-79).

In this discourse class entails education, culture, lifestyle, language, style and other socially re-produced variables to which value judgments are ascribed and strictly dictated by society's dominant groups. Fenia is an upper class philosophy professor and in her social context watching soaps is considered absurd. It is an aberration from her socio-cultural identity that not only caused her friends' surprised and unfavorable comments, but made her wonder as well. Obviously, watching soaps is judged inappropriate for a member of a cultural elite.

The perceived incongruity between soap opera and upper-class discourse is noteworthy, as well as the subsequent lack of a social network built around soap opera reception in this class context. Moreover, these class boundaries play a key role in the soap's assimilation in the social identity of the viewers. People

want to consider themselves exceptions to the rule that dictates what soap fans are like because they want to avoid the cultural index that soaps reflect in Greek society. It is not surprising that comments about the class boundaries of soap opera audiences come from middle-class viewers. In section 5.3, I also referred to numerous ironic distance fans who would differentiate between themselves and the 'other' audience, perceived to be lower class and controlled by the serials. Two such respondents are Manos and Titos:

> T: Basically, I don't want to sound, you know, but [KZ] is addressed to people of low class and economic level.
> M: And educational level.
> T: This goes without saying. I don't mean this the bad way, but it's quite rare for law students like us to be watching KZ. Of all the law students in Greece there must be like ten more watching KZ, tops.
> M: I'm not saying that you must not have some level in order to watch. It's your choice basically. I mean, the people who watch don't have the choice to watch something of high quality and appreciate it, you know, enjoy it (897-903).

This extract raises several issues but our focus is on the class-ification of soap audiences. These fans differentiate themselves from other viewers on account of their class and education, as well as their wider choice over the culture they can consume. In order to comprehend the dynamics of the ironic distance position we must emphasize here the role of class in their engagement with the show. I will revisit this point in section 7.3, but here I want to establish that middle class viewers think of soaps as cultural products aimed for viewers of low social, educational and economic status. Moreover, they are quite defensive about their elitism: 'not a matter of pride', 'I don't mean this the bad way', and so on.

Cultural difference feeds class distinctions between programs. Middle-class viewers consider Greek soaps to

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be closer to the lower classes, in contrast to foreign daytime shows:

> M: I've been watching [YR] for years... It relaxes me...
> This affluent lifestyle elicits some sort of relaxation,
> because they don't show any problems. When poverty is
> one of the folk's everyday problems things become a little
> unpleasant [...]
> J: You used to watch both *Lampsi* and *YR*. Do you think
> they fulfill different needs in the audience?
> M: I think that *YR* would strike the average viewer as a
> foreign mentality. It wouldn't fulfill him. I used to like
> *Lampsi* in the beginning; it didn't use to show so much
> crime, the way Foskolos does it now.
> J: Too many serial killers, eh?
> M: Yes, the Greek ones don't fulfill me anymore, and I
> don't think that the average Greek, who is better off
> financially, is of such a criminal nature (Maria, 12; 237).

What is at stake here is not the issue of violence, which is an aspect of *Lampsi* that Maria finds unrealistic, but the way she relates the failure to be convinced to class and financial status. The average, well-off Greek cannot be contained by the shows' emphasis on crime, she says, whereas the lush surroundings of *YR* would appear too unfamiliar for the average less affluent viewer. Maria has associated Greek soaps with a working/lower-middle class audience and assumes that this same audience would not be fulfilled by *YR*. The distinction she draws between Greek and American soaps is based on class: American shows depict wealthy lifestyles that can be recognized and enjoyed by viewers of a higher economical status. Class and identification with class-oriented behaviors are therefore identified as important aspects of viewership by Maria. At the same time, her class identity as a 'better off financially' citizen will not let her be fulfilled by *Lampsi* and its mode of address (characterized by excessive melodrama and violence). This is a clear example, therefore, of simultaneous distinctions among soaps and audiences, as well as the

self-positioning of the viewer in accordance to those distinctions.

Such tendencies were mainly observed with upper and upper-middle class viewers. Nestor is another young upper-middle class fan. In his account, it is also clear how the appeal of Greek vs. foreign soaps is thought of as being class-related:

> J: Do you think they cover different needs in the audience?
> N: Look, it's a matter of identification. I mean someone might identify with the cop in *Lampsi*... it's not that I'm better than him, but I identify with Ben in *SB*; we're definitely different!
> J: Which programs are closer to your life?
> N: The foreign ones, but again I have to stress that I'm not an average Greek.
> J: Yes but you can't deny that Foskolos talks about things which are very indigenous.
> N: On the other hand though, I can identify with the foreign ones much better than most Greeks, because I have lived outside Greece. Someone who has spent his whole life in a village seeing just goats, would find it much harder to identify... (215-225)

The class references are abundant in this extract and readily attached to the audience of Greek soaps. We witness again an effort to distinguish between one's self and members of other groups. Whereas Manos and Titos differentiate themselves from other *KZ* fans on the grounds that they watch ironically because they choose to do so, Nestor considers himself different because he is able to fully appreciate the foreign soap - unlike other Greeks - because it is closer to his cosmopolitan identity (arguably linked to his class position), and more familiar with his experiences and surroundings. On the other hand, in his opinion, viewers not sharing this background would find it harder to identify with *SB*'s construction of reality.

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7.1.2 Class, ideology and pleasure

Class operates in the understanding of soaps as texts, and in the construction of viewership identities. Viewers position themselves as belonging to a certain class, and this positioning determines the way they approach the soaps which are in turn defined by class characteristics, as we have already observed. So far, we have seen examples from upper-middle class viewers; those coming from different social backgrounds do not emphasize the class distinctions between soap operas, but in their accounts too, it is clear how their class identity plays a central role in their reception of soaps.

In contrast to American programs like *YR* where, as Maria observed, class differences are not problematized by the narrative, in Greek soaps the gap between rich and poor, the exploitation of the working class, and other political themes take up a large portion of the narrative focus. This issue was brought up by many participants, and those who emphasized it the most were mainly working or lower-middle class, like Aliki Danae and Spyros, both pensioners in their 70's.

> A. D.: Foskolos writes about current problems and issues. He criticizes the rich, the capitalists, and he supports, he encourages the poor. And I like that, I'm on his side. He's right. Foskolos... used to be very poor... these are all his ideas.
> J: Do you think that he's getting across a social message?
> A. D.: Of course, that's why he's doing all this. And he does get it across, at least to me.
> J: Has he provoked any thought from your part?
> A. D.: Surely, because that's the way I think as well. I'm not on the side of the rich, I'm on the side of the poor and I don't think that it's fair for the rich to do whatever they like because they've got the power of money, and let the rest suffer. I'm against that. I don't say I'm a communist... but I am a socialist. I'm in the middle (211-215).

Class-consciousness in this discourse positions the viewer and acts as a gatekeeper for the ideological messages of the text. Her attachment to these serials results from an ideological affiliation that she shares with the author, the text and the purpose she ascribes to them. Shared class background and class-related beliefs stimulate the acquiescence to soap opera ideology, especially with social observers like Aliki Danae. The acknowledgement of a common agenda forms part of the viewer's pleasure in watching because she feels that her beliefs are confirmed and celebrated.

Spyros, another social observer, admits that a main part of this pleasure comes from watching the corruption that is embedded in the depiction of wealth in Greek soaps. In this discourse, his viewing position is greatly determined by his working-class background and prior experiences as a worker and union member:

> J: Do you prefer the good guys [in *KZ*]?
> S: The good guys are always the good guys; we know that they're good. Now, we're neither rich nor evil, so ... personally I want the baddie there in order to watch what he does, how he goes about doing it.
> J: You enjoy it.
> S: Of course I do! I want to see it! ...It doesn't mean I'd do the same thing if I were him, no. I honestly want to see how he made all this money; how he's thinking. The money. What does the money do, the scheming, the evil. The evil thoughts... (256-268)

Spyros goes on to refer to a storyline in which *Lampsi's* Nassia rejected Yiagos' blackmail to give in to his sexual advances in order to lend her money for her husband's operation.

> S: Some people are weak and comply. They become snitches. That's how I call them in my own language. I told you I'm not a man of letters... They comply to their boss's wishes. Be a snitch if you want your job... and lose your integrity. That's how I see it.
> J: So, are these stories close to your life? [...] Even if they're about Yiagos who's a billionaire?

S: [...] In these stories someone hungry, like I've been, is exploited... there were times like that, when girls in need of money went to work and a guy like Yiagos stepped in and said 'you either give me what I want or off you go'. I've seen those things, co-workers of mine who lost their jobs this way. There were times when I was asked to swallow something unfair, and I wouldn't. I would burst! ... 'They drink our blood here', I would shout [...] These things are there, in the serial (288-308; 330).

This extract illustrates in many ways how class works in soap opera consumption. Spyros approaches the show with a highlighted class position: 'we're neither rich...'; 'I'm not a man of letters'; 'someone hungry like I've been'. These statements mark his position vis-à-vis the text and the way he interprets it. He comes into the viewing context with a set of beliefs, experiences, and discourses that inform his decoding of the soap's meanings and the pleasures that they generate. Spyros watches the show through a class-oriented discourse. He is a working-class pensioner watching the sagas of the rich and powerful and what pleases him the most is the fact that he does not resemble the image of the upper class. He enjoys watching the scheming and sinister means that Yiagos resorts to in order to have his way because it is a confirmation of his own beliefs about class relations. Moreover, the reason he accepts Foskolos' depiction of social reality is his adherence to the text's ideology –unlike Nestor or Maria. Nevertheless, all fans, irrespective of their social class, positioned themselves in terms of class differences that have actively shaped their viewing practices.

Several times class works as a boundary of experience: it establishes the social reality which the viewers have assimilated as the 'norm', the standard by which they compare the representations that they come across in soap operas. Apart from its role in dictating tastes and cultural practices, one's class background will

operate as a social repertoire of knowledge and learned experience about what is 'real', and what appears 'realistic' in a television program (Press, 1991). We have already seen that it is very hard for the viewers to go beyond the platform of class in their encounter with soap opera. In the examples that follow, both of these women in their 20's, coming from different social backgrounds, will resort to their experience of class in order to make judgments about soaps:

> OK, the people in *Lampsi* are very rich, but I know rich people too and no one talks like that. We've lived in an environment where most kids come from rich families. I don't know anybody who talks like that in his home, or to his parents. Using plural tense, you know. It just seems so unrealistic, I can't choke on it! (Rea, 455)

> J: Do you think *The Young and the Restless* is realistic?
> C: It must be. When it comes to Sharon... I believe she's closer to us, as far as economic status is concerned. Now, with the Abbots and the Newmans, I don't know, they have a certain lifestyle, the galas, the formal dinners... OK, all that seems way far from me, but the more... average folk, yeah, there are things that can happen. Like with Matt and Sharon, this whole thing. I think it can happen. Now, about the others I mentioned, I can't really have an opinion because it's too far from me (Clelia, 190-192).

In evaluating the realism of *Lampsi*'s dialogue, Rea makes use of her cultural knowledge of class-specific behavior and decides that *Lampsi* has not captured it. The opening excerpt of this section had also illustrated how the same viewer was quite aware of the role of her class background in her reception of soap. Here we see this cultural capital in practice: Rea makes use of class-specific discourse and experience in order to discard *Lampsi* as too artificial for her to take seriously. Likewise, Clelia, employs her own class-position as the norm and constructs meanings accordingly: it's either close, or far from her reality. When asked about realism, her answer is based on class: 'as far as economic status is

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concerned'. The fundamental role of class, thus, in viewers' discursive strategies is clear.

There are several points to be drawn regarding the role of class distinctions in these viewers' discourse. To begin with, soap texts have class identities as well, which are ascribed to them by members of the audience; many middle class viewers draw distinctions between Greek and American soap operas that are based on class and which are ultimately about the shows' audience. These distinctions also position soap viewers in a category that is above the 'other': someone provincial, older, less educated, and less cultured.

The role of class on a discursive level is to position the viewer with reference to the text's realism, which is the main strategy used by viewers to interpret a soap opera's ideological representations. Different class backgrounds produce different agendas, and consequently different readings (as we will examine in detail in the following section). Many viewers acknowledge their class-based standpoint with reflexivity, relating it to specific narratives and experiences which have formed their beliefs, and which in turn shape their reception of soaps.

7.1.3 The limits of class boundaries

There are two further observations to make concerning the determination of class-induced readings and discourses. In several of the viewers' accounts, the class boundaries that affect viewership seem to be particularly rigid. Many viewers put forward the idea that identification with soaps and soap characters is dependent on social proximity. This point was for example mentioned by Nestor, when he indicated that the ability to identify with the characters and their lifestyles

is a factor that determines his following. For him, such identification was taking place largely at a social level, in comparing himself to a viewer from a different social context. The following extracts from Nestor' interview demonstrate this point even better:

> N: I identify with Ben... An enigmatic figure, a loner *[he laughs]*. To begin with, Ben speaks with an English accent, not an American one. He has the right image, you know, he has money but he has class too, you won't see him running after every bimbo [...]
> J: What about style? Clothes...
> N: I want it to be up to date, to be 90's like.
> J: So you pay attention to it.
> N: Yeah, I want clothes to be close to what I'm wearing, closer to my age. That's why I prefer the lifeguards in *SB* with the red, hot swimming suits and not *Lampsi's* cleaning ladies with their mops. It's a matter of aesthetics (77-81, 159-165).

Nestor here elaborates on his point about identification. Class is more important than nationality: a reason he prefers watching foreign soaps is their middle-class 'aesthetics'. He can identify better with a foreign, affluent setting, than a Greek working-class one. His choice of the word 'aesthetics' is also quite telling: it makes his statement appear more cultural and less snobbish. Moreover, the characteristics that make him identify with Ben are also class-related. Ben has the right accent (British, not American), the right image, and the right women: these are all considered to convey social distinction and high class.

Prodromos, a young, middle class fan of *Lampsi*, also commented on this issue:

> Yiagos, it's doubtful whether he's for real... people don't identify with Yiagos' character... or Persa's *[One of Drakos' domestic help]*. They identify with the average people, you know, the DA, the lawyer, the secondary characters are more identifiable. I mean, a civil servant who watches *Lampsi* will identify with them from a material point of view, money-wise, you know. But deep inside you go into the character and identify in the sense that you feel for him, you feel whatever he's feeling, like

> I have a thing for Virna [...] I'm not a district attorney, and I'm not married to Yiagos, for God's sake! *[laughs]* But she's closer to my character and my temperament. I will go through a lot for the sake of someone I love (201-205).

Here Prodromos distinguishes between material and emotional identification. On one level, identification is structured by class relations, and yet, for Prodromos and other viewers, identifying with a character's emotional state is achieved at a 'deeper' level, regardless of social relations – or even gender, for that matter, since in this example a young male viewer identifies with the middle aged wife of a tycoon.

Thus, although class is a formation that structures reception to the point of identifying with characters closer to one's social status, vicariousness of emotions seems to be quite a strong factor, untouched by class and other social distinctions. Clelia and Aliki Danae, for instance, whose accounts were very class-centered, raise similar points:

> When you've been watching a serial for so many years, you get to feel for them as if they're your own folk, regardless of whether you have anything in common or not, regardless of how they present it (Clelia, 262).

> In the American [soap] the emotions are the same, people face similar things. Fatherly, motherly, whatever, their emotions... are not different. (Aliki Danae, 153)

Therefore, although class plays a fundamental role in soap reception, and especially in negotiating ideological discourse or the realism of the narrative, there are spaces that generate much pleasure for numerous viewers (mainly within the aesthetic position), and which appear not to be affected by social constructs. Fantasy and vicariousness of emotion seem to override class, gender and national identity in this respect – and hence the ideological force that is carried by the soap

opera text and its 'universal' appeal, witnessed also in the opening excerpt of this chapter.

Furthermore, we should be cautious not to stretch class identity to a point of over-homogenizing audiences of the same social background. This should be particularly emphasized in the context of Greek society which is less class-ridden than Britain, for example. The experience of class relations has changed over generations[1] and this was obvious in cases like Clelia, in her early twenties, whose rendering of this issue differs from older working class respondents. When asked to compare *YR* to the Greek soaps Clelia acknowledged the difference between their treatment of class relations:

> C: As far as *Lampsi* and *KZ* are concerned, there are the rich families, like in *YR*. There's the simple folk too, this is one more similarity. Also, the rich appear in their relationships to the poor, to take advantage of them, that they don't want them... although to be honest, this doesn't happen much in *YR*. Jack used to be with Mary-Jo, now he's with Lan, he doesn't seem to pay much attention to their finances.
> J: Like Hope and Victor too.
> C: Yeah, yeah. In the Greek ones there is still this mentality (212).

Other fans of *YR* were quick to comment on the rigidity of inter-class relationships in *Lampsi* and *KZ*, unlike American soaps:

> R: It's all about the money... Money must marry into money, it mustn't be supplied to those who are deprived. Relationships in *Lampsi* are like businesses [...] Money rules everything, which is not the case in *YR*. There, feelings rule [...] for example, Victor, he married this blind woman, she's just a peasant girl (Roula, 98-110).

In the first excerpt Clelia has identified in *Lampsi*'s discourse the same class-related themes that were mentioned by other fans too. She's aware of those themes and she acknowledges the class-oriented angle through

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[1] On the subject of class in Greek society see also chapter 2.

which relationships are handled. Roula, a lower-middle class working mother, has also indicated in her statement that romance in *Lampsi* is abstracted to the level of class struggle and control of capital. Both women seem to prefer the de-politicized treatment of romance in the foreign program, than the strong emphasis on its material basis which characterizes Foskolos' work[2]. Clelia in particular, with her phrase 'in the Greek ones there is *still* this mentality' seems to be thinking that the rich vs. poor gap that Foskolos highlights is an artifact of the past. It is a way of thinking that is *still* with us in the Greek dramas. She is implying that the subtle class differences of *YR* are more in tune with today's world.

Why was Foskolos' emphasis on class issues accepted by older working class fans in celebratory terms? Clelia and Roula belong to different generations: they are both educated and have had working careers. Their experience and perception of class does not resemble *Lampsi*'s presentation, and thus they are not hailed by this ideology in the same way that others were. Discussing how different generations of viewers conceive Greekness, we looked into the link between the Greek soaps and the commercial cinema of the 60's, expressed in a statement by Yiorgos (see section 6.1.3). There were ample references to class in that particular account, as class-ridden romance is a common theme in both cultural forms and Yiorgos was arguing that while these stories may not be so meaningful to younger audiences, they are indeed for older viewers.

Hence, age is another factor that must be considered in conjunction to class. The latter on its own cannot explain the positioning of the viewer and his/her address by soap opera. While foreign shows are devoid of

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[2] Women as a rule preferred the presentation of romance in American soaps; see also sections 5.4.3 and 6.2.1.

meanings that resonate such memories, the Greek soaps
are full of these historical echoes that find a fertile
audience in Greeks of older generations, as we also
witnessed in chapter 6. Viewers like Spyros and Aliki
Danae have strong memories of WWII and the German
occupation, the deep wounds of the rift caused by the
civil war and the persecution of the Left that immediately
followed, as well as the military junta of the 60's and
70's. These memories are as much about national identity
as about class, since these events had a radical effect on
the structure of Greek society. Obviously, younger
viewers, even of a similar social background, have a
different understanding of class than those whose
historical references include memories of a poverty-
stricken, socially divided Greece.

While class is extremely important in the way
viewers position themselves towards soap opera meanings
and negotiate their ideological function, if we consider
them as real, historical subjects we must be prepared to
be flexible enough in order to make room for such
specificities as personal histories and pleasures that seem
to override social distinctions.

7.2 Class and viewing position

This section will explore the role of class in the
production of resistant readings. Some of the themes that
will be examined have been already introduced; namely,
the differences between middle class and working class
viewers in their reading practices and their stance
towards ideological representations. In this section these
differences will be further problematized.

If we relate the issue of class to the notion of
viewing positions, identified as the main patterns of soap
viewing practices, we come upon some interesting

observations. Firstly, all ironic distance viewers are middle and upper-middle class. The group is very homogenous in terms of class and education, which suggests that at least within the methodological constraints of this study, there is a correlation between class and practices like the active transformation of the text, the creation of a soap-opera culture that feeds extra-textual communication, generating pleasure out of a social rendition of the text, and finally the reflexive critique and meta-discourse about the soap opera and the questioning of its ideologies.

Secondly, the social observer viewing position displays a strong belief in the soap's realism and representation of reality, its didactic value, an emphasis on soap opera discourse as social and political commentary, and the adherence to the ideological core of the soap as a transmitter of social ideals. All social observers were working and lower-middle class participants, a finding that also indicates a possible relationship between class and these viewer characteristics.

Thirdly, the aesthetic position was occupied by participants from all social backgrounds (with only a slight middle-class predominance), demonstrating the 'universal' currency of the formal characteristics of soap programs. This position is typified by an emphasis on the aesthetic enjoyment of soap operas, emotional involvement and identification with the characters, and a conscious suspension of disbelief in order to immerse one's self in the narrative. Nevertheless, since these features of soap reception were observed irrespective of class background, the aesthetic position seems not to be affected by class.

Class plays an important role in the practice of distancing one's self from the narrative and using the show's meanings and dominant themes to create a further text that is usually infused with fans' personal codes of communication. This kind of distancing from the aesthetic object is certainly a practice that is valued by middle class codes of cultural consumption, as Bourdieu (1984) suggested, and the findings of the study certainly support his argument.

On the contrary, this pattern of consumption was never displayed by social observers, whose adherence to the real-life quality of the soaps and their 'taking-for-granted-ness' of the show's meanings and codes is the main difference from the ironic distance viewers. I have argued in chapter 4 that this emphasis on the 'real life' currency of the soaps has much to do with an ideological alignment of these viewers with the soap opera. In other words, the program acts for them as an external confirmation of their own ideologies; they see it as a celebration of their own beliefs and worldviews. Class values are certainly bound to be important here, as the ideologies that are at work in this context (and especially in the case of the Greek soaps which mostly give rise to this viewing position) are, as we saw in the previous section, class related.

The viewing practices of social observers can be considered as an example of hegemony at work: these viewers recognize themselves and their imagined relations of dominance in a vehicle of popular culture. Nevertheless, I do not think that the answer is so simple. Some accounts by social observers that illustrate the complexity of this issue:

> Sometimes I believe that [KZ] interprets our society, and us too. In this storyline now... it says to you: it's your call. If you agree go ahead and kick your wife out for

reasons A or B. If you disagree, don't. [Foskolos],
though, gives you some guidance (Yiorgos, 139).

A.D.: [Foskolos] sees what happens out there and writes
about it in his work, in order to make an impression, to do
a little teaching, do a little good. And he's right, you
know. About the blazes, about the drugs, he's right (Aliki
Danae, 145).

J: So you use your own criteria in order to make your
judge the serial.
A: Of course I do. I know, first of all that it's just a lie
that is based on truths.
J: That's some way to put it!
A: But that's what it is. And that's why I watch it and I
also make my own critique like a thinking person. Some
things I accept, and others I go, no that's bull, that's
nothing. But some things I do accept. (Anna, 351)

The issue I want to point out in using those excerpts
is reflexivity. We observe an active awareness of the
ideological role of the text: Yiorgos talks about
Foskolos' 'guidance', Aliki Danae about the 'teaching'
and the 'impression' that the writer wishes to make,
while Anna refers to *KZ* as a 'lie that is based on truths'
and her own deliberation as a gate-keeper to the
meanings she negotiates. Throughout their interviews,
these viewers embrace the show's messages.
Nevertheless, they are reflexive about this process in a
manner far removed, in my opinion, from any model of
passive reception of ideology[3].

Apart from the reflexivity that is displayed at this
level, another complexity which was addressed in section
6.1.3 is the place of the ideological discourse in *KZ* and
Lampsi within a greater plane of dominant ideologies.
Anna considers the voice of Foskolos, which propagates

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[3] The fact that Foskolos is identified as the authorial source of all
the meanings that are inscribed in the text is certainly noteworthy.
In a way it is an ideological trap of personalization, because this
ideological discourse passes as his voice and is not placed into a
wider, more social perspective. Nevertheless, the tendency to think
of Foskolos as a metonymy for everything-soap is a tendency
shared by all Greeks and thus will not be problematized with
respect to this chapter.

traditional patriotic, religious, and family values, opposed to discourses that she resisted, namely, consumerism, Americanization, and loose morals. According to her, *KZ* is a discourse that defies dominant ideologies, and by endorsing its messages she felt empowered and justified. The same can be said about Aliki Danae and Spyros, viewers who believed that the treatment of class in the Greek soap operas opposes capitalist discourses.

The diffused nature of ideological discourse cannot allow us to be definite about hegemonic and oppositional readings, especially in television fiction (Schrøeder, 2000). Different viewers have different agendas, or 'positions' in Schrøeder's terms; for example, whereas Aliki Danae considers Foskolos to be left-wing, these young fans believed the contrary:

> S: He might not show it, but Foskolos is very conservative... Incredibly conservative. I mean, the guy is not just radical right-wing, but I'm sure that when Papadopoulos[4] died he wept by his grave.
> J: There are mixed opinions; some have called him a communist, others a man of the junta, anything you can imagine.
> S: Well, he's not a communist by any means.
> T: I think he's a God, simply (Telis & Stavros, 1287-1299).

Stavros and Telis, both upper-middle class, ironic distance fans of *KZ* hold a very different conception of Foskolos's work and ideological position. Their camp attitude is evident in Telis' last statement. They do not stop at interpreting Foskolos as a conservative figure, but they place him and his discourse at a level where the meanings of the show are twisted and re-worked for their own pleasure.

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[4] Papadopoulos led the military coup of 1967 and ruled Greece until 1972. He died in prison in 1998.

To what an extent is class responsible for these practices? It certainly plays a role, as it endows one with different codes for cultural consumption. Moreover, even in the constraints of the present study, the fact that both viewing positions were very homogenous class-wise, reveals a socially structured pattern. Nevertheless, when thinking about class and resistance, we must take into account that soap opera is a polysemous text that voices different ideologies, and that for many soap fans this is a process that they're well aware of. Also, oppositional readings might not necessarily be progressive ones, as Jenkins (1992) cautions. An important aspect of the relationship between class and resistance will be tackled in the next section, where we will look more closely at the resistive discourse of ironic distance viewers of Greek soaps and how it is informed by artifacts of working class culture, making it thus rather elitist.

7.3 Class and ironic distance

Much of the pleasure that ironic distance viewers aberrantly squeeze out of what appears to be serious melodrama, has to do with class characteristics and their association with a notion of Greekness. What makes this argument more plausible is that class/ethnicity jokes target mainly the Greek shows, whereas ironic distance practices that target foreign shows are fuelled by 'we vs. them' discourses of cultural difference.

We will look at extracts from two group interviews with young male fans of *KZ* that exemplify the role of class difference in the playful discourse entailed in the ironic distance position.

T: In the Greek serials you see many Greek elements which are already funny. Some people with a certain accent *[laughter]*, certain ideals, at which you laugh

because you see them around, ... in the *periptero*[5] , on the
street, or in the province, and it seems right to you that
this particular actor represents this particular thing and
you have a laugh...
Y: It's your own language too.
J: So, could you do what you do to *KZ* with a foreign
serial?
T: No, no. The guy with the mullet in the American serial
won't say a thing to me, whereas the Greek guy... For
example, I'd never laugh if Thorn had a mullet. I would
laugh because Theoharis has a mullet, or his cousin, or
Jedi. Because I've seen people like that in Omonoia or
whatever, in the '80's, who make me laugh.... The Greek
element is included in all this... it's the Greek element
that asks to be ridiculed. The line you will hear by a cab
driver in Omonoia, you get to hear it by Theoharis too. I
can't relate myself neither to BB or *YR*. Not even through
humor, it's not something close to me (Yiotis & Telis,
1121-1129).

Telis here makes a strong case for the cultural
specificity of humor, arguing that it is his familiarity
with Greek language and culture that enable him to
recognize certain elements in *KZ* and read them in an
aberrant way. Undeniably, one of the basic tenets of this
thesis is that cultural expertise empowers the reader, and
yet, there is more to this reading practice than the
recognition of ethnic characteristics. All the examples
that Telis gives as representative of Greek culture are
also, and very significantly, representative of Greek
working class culture.

I have to acknowledge here my agency as a cultural
critic, interpreting viewers' accounts based on personal
conceptions of class and culture in Greece. Nevertheless,
I think that some examples would make sense even to a
non-Greek reader. Telis refers to particular accents,
ideas, and places which are definitely not associated with
the social elite of Greece. It is unlikely that the 'mullet'
would be spotted in upper-class circles. Omonoia square
is also an inner city location with strong class
connotations, as is the job of the taxi driver. Juxtaposed

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[5] *Periptero*: newsagent kiosk.

on a sign syntagm, the mullet, Omonoia, cab drivers, a certain provincial accent - they all allude to working class culture.

However, what is essential here, and a clear example of the articulation of class and ethnicity, is that these signs become meaningful only in the Greek context. An English cab driver, or an American soap star with a mullet, would not create the same response, the reader himself professes. It is the Greekness of it, surely, but not solely. I am not sure whether the same viewers would make such interpretations about Greekness in Greek serials that appear closer to Telis' lifestyle. This is also clear when the three friends explained why they preferred *KZ* over *Lampsi*:

> J: Why has *KZ* drawn you more than *Lampsi*?
> Y: It's more about the heroes in *KZ*, they are more impressive. I mean, Stathis Theoharis, The Mullet, and such things. Haris, the Jedi. And generally, the heroes in *KZ* are much more kitsch than in *Lampsi* and more low budget.
> S: I think *Lampsi* has lost it, it only addresses one kind of audience, it's for the Sharons and Traceys who watch the rich people there, like Yiagos, like why should we even care about those people?
> T: Yeah, it is a *Dynasty* copycat.
> S: A *Dynasty* copycat which is very cheap and which has nothing to offer.
> Y: And you can't laugh at it so much.
> S: It's not a laugh at all.
> T: Well, the other one (*KZ*) is more realistic.
> Y: Basically, the other one is about coppers *[burst into laughter]* (80-96)

The class references are evident here too: the characters that have spawned this intertextual discourse - the basis of their fanship - are said to be 'low budget' and 'kitsch', in comparison to *Lampsi*'s higher-class set of players. Certainly, these adjectives refer to *KZ*'s focus on working class and lower-middle class characters. Moreover, Stavros' observation about *Lampsi*'s themes and audience is also quite telling about their camp

position: whereas the 'Sharons and Traceys' see in *Lampsi* a show about 'rich people', he and his friends watch in *KZ* stories about common people, or 'low-budget coppers'. Hence, it is clear how their resistive discourse is fuelled by objectifying working class characteristics. This is also a discourse about otherness: working class-ness acts as the 'other' since the upper class-ness of *Lampsi* cannot be laughed at so easily; it's closer to them.

Manos and Titos are also ironic distance fans of *KZ* and they display the same focus on working-class elements. In fact they more or less refer to similar textual aspects, while discussing the appearance of baddies in the program:

> T: Do you remember the guy who brought her[6] food and was saying 'go on, eat, it's good'? *[hardening his voice]*
> M: It was an Omonoia guy... They're naturals... in jeans, unshaven. Honestly, he gets actors who really look as if they're from Omonoia.
> T: They're probably just gambling[7] in Omonoia and he picks them up, 'come act for me' *[laughter]*, it's very likely! [...] They have this dodgy criminal look, you can see it from the stubble, the jean jacket...
> M: Their mug...
> T: And they all look alike, you know, all the baddies wear jeans from top to toe, jean jacket and pants, whitewashed, right? And a worn out shirt. They smoke too much, they're unshaven, crappy hair... (344-360)

The similarities with the discourse of the other ironic distance group are striking. Omonoia square is a standard reference, as the locale of the 'dodgy' element, as is the emphasis on the appearance and styling of those characters, which connotes lower class origins. Their comment on the natural appearance of the actors, jokingly assumed to be genuine Omonoia dwellers and petty criminals, is also significant since it implies that

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[6] Titos refers to a criminal who had kidnapped Marianna Theoharis.
[7] A usual illegal activity that takes place in Omonoia square is card gambling and betting.

their mocking targets the 'real thing', not just an actor's rendition. In an extract quoted in section 6.1.1, the same fans laugh at the accent of a fruit seller character. Accent and use of language are also class characteristics that are targeted in such discourses, as we can see in both groups.

The 'dodgy' and cheap look of *KZ* is for those fans, too, very important in their ironic-distance discourse:

> M: When you talk about Foskolos you must differentiate between *Lampsi* and *KZ*.
> T: In a way they're very similar –
> M: But *KZ* is really second-class. I mean, way more.
> T: That's the reason we like it more [...] With the American shows you can't have a laugh, it's not funny. Like, you can't laugh at BB; they've put a lot of money on it, too (Manos & Titos, 28-34, 1055-1057).

KZ's cheap production values and 'second-class' look provide the basis for their cult following of the show, in contrast to ironic fans of American shows who laugh at the excessive glamour and glitz. On the contrary, American soaps will not be laughed at, one of the reasons being their slick and expensive production. As in the previous group it is this paradox that fuels their viewing position: the reason they enjoy watching the soap is what other middle class viewers reject as too cheap, low class and melodramatic.

7.3.1 'Kafrila', Greekness, and elitism

An interesting term that both groups use, in order to capture what is special about *KZ*, is 'kafrila', or crudeness:

> T: So you want to see the *kafrila* –
> J: What do you mean by *kafrila*?
> M: The sloppiness -
> T: The off-handedness -
> M: The excess, the excessive crying, you know.
> T: It's also the cheapness, production wise. You know a good production from a crap one. I've seen foreign television, I can see the difference [...]

M: Many people from university... have heard about the *kafrila* in *KZ* and they've realized that it's indeed all about *kafrila*, that you see some serious beating, karate style, 80's cinema style beating, with scratches and bites *[laughter]*, well that's the kind of audience you get (Manos & Titos, 529, 919-935).

Y: And it's the Greek thing, you know, that makes it special.
J: This Greek thing you mention, is interesting.
Y: In general I believe that what characterizes *KZ* and all the Greek soaps I am aware of, which are all Foskolos' anyhow, is the existing Greek *kafrila*.
J: Greek *kafrila*?
Y: Yeah, a Greek thing, but *kafrila* wise. I mean, typical sort of dodgy looking blokes, especially in *KZ*, cops who deal with hassles, dirty cops, clean cops (Yiotis, 294-298).

'*Kafrila*' is a difficult word to translate in English without compromising its rich repertoire of connotations. As an adjective it can be rendered as crudeness, but it could also mean rudeness, vulgarity, or coarseness – as a noun it would refer to an animal. Manos and Titos describe several aspects of *KZ* by *kafrila*. It stands for the cheap production values, as well as the melodramatic excess and it is associated with Greek television, as Titos indicates. Moreover, *kafrila* is also associated here with the stylistic violence compared to 80's action movies. *Kafrila*, according to Manos explains the cult following of *KZ* by younger viewers who share these specific pop culture references.

For Yiotis the term stands for the essence of Greekness in Foskolos' soaps ('a Greek thing'). It captures the excessive macho behavior and attitudes of *KZ* characters, their physical characteristics and the storylines that come across. Although Manos and Titos are not so emphatic about the national character of the term, they have also associated its cheapness with Greece, implying that one would never come across elements of *kafrila* in a foreign show.

The fans' usage of the term is certainly related to their culturally specific experience of Greekness, but it clearly involves 'working class-ness' as well, in the form of otherness. They never relate these depictions to themselves – it's always about perceiving in the soap the dramatized images and behaviors that they have come across in their experience of working class culture in Greek society. To them, these are representations of otherness, viewed as 'kitsch', 'excessive' and 'low-budget', infused with intertextual references from popular culture and their own codes of what is humorous and subversive against Foskolos' mode of address, which cannot contain them.

In addition to the specific textual characteristics that are labeled as 'cheap', like the sets, the styling, or modes of speech, it is the show *per se* that stands for working class-ness. Both *KZ* and *Lampsi* are viewed by middle class respondents as programs that reflect working class values and which address working class audiences, as we have seen in section 7.1. In contrast to middle class viewers who do not enjoy these programs (one of the reasons being middle-class 'aesthetics', as Nestor put it), several young people watch them in an ironic distance mode. Thus, they defy bourgeois criteria of consumption by enjoying a lower-status cultural product, and simultaneously reinforce their own class-consciousness by objectifying as *kafrila* what is for them working-classness. In chapter 8, where we will deal with forms of audience resistance more specifically, we shall return to the complexities of the ironic distance position, but here I have highlighted the role of class in this mode of watching.

The other aspect that we should also address is the association of class with ethnicity in these fans'

discourse. These responses are also energized by Foskolos' aesthetic presentation and thematic preoccupation that perhaps encourage the viewers' emphasis on class characteristics. This is accentuated to a degree that is rejected and twisted by Yiotis, Telis, and Stavros, as they indicate elsewhere in the interview:

> T: That's why one laughs, because [*Foskolos*] is excessive.
> J: So, he takes the Greek element in its excess?
> T: Exactly, and within the Greek element many people are very excessive.
> J: And is this why you receive it in this humorous way?
> T: Because Greeks are excessive, not the average Greek, but a particular form of Greek. In general, the Greek is a picturesque figure (1179-1187).

In the extracts we have seen the signifiers of working-class converging with the 'Greek element'. It is Greek working class-ness that makes these representations worth distorting and playing with because only in the Greek context do they acquire the meanings that have been learned through cultural experience, and hence the importance of national identity. In the above excerpt we encounter once more the point about a 'particular form' of Greekness, which is not average (i.e., middle class) but nonetheless, 'picturesque'. Nevertheless, it is indeed the soap opera's excess that offers the impetus for this practice, and which in the case of Foskolos, his excessively melodramatic and pompous mode of address, has been accounted for by numerous viewers, like Lakis for example:

> J: So if you had the chance would you watch more of *Lampsi?*
> L: Definitely, the Greek ones are much funnier, they're ridiculous. The situations are more dramatic, the dialogue is funnier... it's so tacky. [...] It's such a great laugh. Oh, and the *mise-en-scene* is so bad, when you watch someone getting killed in slow motion, that's Foskolos' trademark. It's crazy, it's really something else. Oh God, the servant girl and the tycoon! (Lakis, 250-254)

Lakis' account serves as another ironic distance view of Greek soap opera, although he is not involved with Greek soaps to the same extent as the other young men. Nevertheless, his description of the programs resembles very much theirs. The melodramatic excess and the highly stylized set-up is acknowledged here too, and it is indeed a driving force for this type of responses.

Hence, it is a combination of elements that gives rise to the objectification of class as a function of oppositional reading of the text. Firstly, such a discourse appears to require some idea of 'otherness'. Similarly, ironic fans of *BH 90210* based their oppositional readings on their representation of American-ness vs. Greekness, as described in section 6.2.2. In domestic soap reception the representation of working class culture becomes the 'other', it is objectified as *kafrila* and transformed into a set of different meanings for these middle class audiences. Secondly, it is crucial that this discourse, which is in reality about class, is passed on as 'Greekness', perhaps in order to downplay the elitism that young middle class audiences are trying to denounce in the first place, by becoming fans of a soap that is considered cheap and lower class. Finally, the aesthetic codes of *Lampsi* and *KZ* accentuate these textual characteristics and thus facilitate the viewers to produce their playful and simultaneously elitist responses.

7.4 Conclusion

My analysis yielded some findings that, at least in the specific context of Greek society, identify some of the ways in which class shapes soap opera reception, and more specifically, whether and how it is related to resistance of dominant ideology. Firstly, soap operas and soap opera audiences are defined in terms of class. Soap

opera is imbued with several connotations of lower-class aesthetics, and its audience has always struggled with the social stigma of the mindless and culturally deprived. Fans distinguish themselves in social hierarchies, trying to appear more disinterested, critical, and sophisticated viewers than the rest.

Moreover, soaps have class identities too, Greek soaps being associated with working class aesthetics, themes, and audiences, whereas fans of foreign soaps tend to think that their shows would not be popular among the working class. A 1996 ratings research showed that American soaps were indeed preferred by affluent audiences (e.g. viewers who own two cars, PC, second TV set and a country house), irrespective of gender (Iereidis, 1996)[8]. My upper-middle class respondents, in the most part, failed to be convinced by the mode of address that is dominant in Greek soaps. Even faithful viewers of *Lampsi* and *KZ* criticize their soaps for their excessive codes of melodrama and pompous delivery. Moreover, other viewers were ready to dismiss the Greek soaps on the account of their not being realistic. In many of those cases, class was an evident factor in this critique, which shaped the position of the viewer.

Likewise, working class and lower-middle class viewers were also positioned by their social backgrounds and handled the text's ideology according to their positioning. Working class viewers were also more articulate about class – but this might reflect the fact that more working class people watched Greek soaps, which place much more emphasis on class relations. Indeed, class interacts with cultural difference. American soaps refer more or less to a class-less society, or to a society

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[8] The ratings in Appendix B, also show this. However, *within* the middle classes there is no significant difference between the ratings of foreign and domestic soaps.

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where class is not problematized, at least not as saliently as in Foskolos' soaps. His figure as the ubiquitous ambassador of Greek soap is also a strong element of indigenous soap reception, thought of as the sole voice of ideological discourse. In contrast, ideology in the American soaps seems to just be there; free floating, and autochthonous. Together with the lack of obvious class problematization, and the strong emphasis on the private sphere, this aspect of American soaps makes for a very different engagement from the part of the viewer.

Some findings that relate to Press's (1991) work on women, class and television, include the importance of age in the consumption of soap opera, as historical experience produces different class identities over generations. Moreover, as in Press's research, working class viewers showed less distancing from the soap than middle class viewers, and were more likely to find the soaps realistic, probably because middle class viewers have the cultural capital, in the sense that they have the experience and the references to 'check' the currency of realism against soap representations of middle class.

Nevertheless, even if class is an important determinant of the viewer's positioning, pleasure appears to be more accommodating: viewers will identify and take pleasure in identifying with characters that do not share their class background. This is explained by the viewers at the level of emotional realism.

The group of viewers who engage in the most evident oppositional practices are all middle class, a finding that points to middle class aesthetic values of disinterestedness and distance. However, one cannot conclude that working and lower middle class viewers were passive recipients of ideology. The viewing position of social observers was the one that exemplified a shared

affiliation to the textual ideology. These viewers belonged to working and lower-middle classes, and indeed accepted the ideological messages of *KZ* and *Lampsi*, but, in their own words, they do so while being aware of the ideological process (at an apparent level) and having made an active choice that was aligned to their personal beliefs.

Finally, the last part of the chapter focused on the way class is latent in discourse about nationality. Ironic distance viewers of *KZ*, by making a pastiche of the 'Greek element' and its representation in the soap, are actually talking about working class culture. In their encounter with the text's mode of address and its domestic cultural references which they have rejected as excessive, these viewers employ working class elements of *KZ* and place them in a syntagm of otherness which ostensibly stands for Greekness, in order perhaps to mask the elitism of their practice.

Hence, it is important to read class in soap opera reception as an important agent, that does not work alone, though. We saw in this chapter how it interacts with historical experiences of age and nationality, in order to give rise to a wide array of meanings.

8. Resistance

> Resistance is not an essence, but a relationship, and both sides of the relationship must be contained within its practice (Fiske, 1989b:168).

So far we have considered how gender, national identity and class shape soap opera reception, and their role in resistant readings. In this chapter I will concentrate on resistance: the ways in which audiences resist the dominant meanings of the text, the production site, or those that echo hegemonic social formations and institutions. I will look at specific processes, accounts, and practices displayed by my respondents and analyze them using the multidimensional model proposed by Schrøder (2000). This chapter will also be organized around three main concepts: evasive resistance, semiotic resistance and empowerment, which have been used by authors like Fiske and Grossberg in relation to audience resistance, and discussed in chapter 1.

First, we shall assess the evasion of ideological discourse by aesthetic fans, next how ironic distance viewers create a fan discourse that goes beyond semiotic resistance, and we will then move to social observers and the empowering role that soaps play in their lives. Evidently, the issue of resistance can be approached differently in each viewing position and the final section of this chapter will evaluate these approaches, as well as the meaning of audience resistance in everyday life.

8.1 Evading ideologies

Even if aesthetic fans describe soap watching as a 'passive' experience, in the sense that it is a relaxing pastime, their viewing position entails a deliberate 'letting one's self go', a great deal of reflexivity, as well

as the application of generic knowledge. In this section I will look at aesthetic' viewers readings and examine whether they can be considered, besides active, resistant.

Fiske's discussion of evasion as a resistive pleasure is relevant in relation to aesthetic viewing practices. Fiske defines as evasive the pleasure that escapes from social meanings and the socially reproduced forces that control them. Evasion is very much a bodily process; such pleasure is experienced at a physical level and Fiske compares it to the Barthean *jouissance*, which involves the loss of the social self and hence the evasion of ideology, because it yields from the *act* of reading and the physical characteristics of the text, not its ideology or meaning. Its 'resistance is one of refusal', writes Fiske, 'not of a semiotic insurgence' (1989b:50). Indeed, we have seen throughout this work that aesthetic viewers experience soap opera physically. Their pleasure owes to the program's intrinsic, formal aspects and their own affective responses. In order to maximize those they leave ideological discourse behind (the social meanings) and focus on the aesthetic enjoyment of their shows.

8.1.1 The role of pleasure

Melina and her father Aaron have been long-time fans of *BH 90210* but they differ markedly in the way they approach the show. While she joins him in the ironic commentary and playful interventions, she mostly maintains an aesthetic viewing position. In the following extract, Aaron wonders how she tolerates the show's conspicuous ideological paternalism, which is one of the main reasons for his ironic distance towards the show:

> M: I tend to view it from its aesthetic side.
> A: But don't you see its obvious messages?
> M: I do, but in some way...
> A: That every time there's a new issue to handle?

M: Yes there is, but...
A: The little kid that is lost, the kid[1]...
M: But I never sit and think that [*in a robot-like voice*] 'yes, now he gets through me the message that we shouldn't be cruel to animals'. I never think of it in this way. I think more about Brandon asking Kelly to marry him and see the images and the sounds and all, which are so familiar.
A: You just lose your self in the plot?
M: I get lost, lost in the colors, totally. So, I don't pay attention to the 'be kind to thy neighbors' sort of stuff, in a way all of this goes unnoticed (284-300).

Melina is aware that *BH 90210* is more than sounds, colors and romance. She is aware of the ideological operation taking place, of the 'messages', the social meanings that are offered. She chooses however not to pay attention to them, but rather 'lose herself' in the aesthetic pleasure that she feels. Part of her pleasure is the deliberate control of her aesthetic and perceptual focus; she prefers to take in the romantic element of the storyline, for example, and overlook the moral teachings that the young characters convey through their coming-of-age adventures. She is in control of the meanings that she chooses to construct and dwell on and hence she demonstrates the evasive pleasure that Fiske talks about.

Other fans also expressed their awareness of the soaps' agendas, like Maria and Fenia, both fans of *YR*:

J: Does the serial ever make you laugh? Do you ever laugh ironically?
M: I don't find it that silly or think that they take us for fools. I'm very conscious of what I'm watching, I know that all those serials are supposed to carry out a social crusade, and convey messages about alcoholism, about A or B... But I wouldn't ever laugh at them because they're taking me for a fool and present me with all this... no, I don't have any illusions about what I'm watching. I'm neither sarcastic about it. It's just something that gives me pleasure (175-181).

I watch the soap as a kind of photo-romance and when... too many social problems arise and this relatively superficial argumentation becomes the basis of the whole

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[1] He is referring to a child abuse storyline, in which Brandon and Kelly met a boy who ran away from his abusive home.

> serial, it's problematic [...] I find it annoying and
> uninteresting (285).

Both of these viewers are typically aesthetic in their approach: for Maria soap gives her primarily pleasure while watching, and Fenia talks about its similarities to a photo-romance, displaying the mode of their engagement to the show. Also, they both refer to the ideological content of the program as something that they are aware of, but which they avoid. The running theme in these accounts[2] is the active management of pleasure seeking. The aesthetic relationship to a soap does not presuppose passivity and acceptance of anything that is being offered. Like Melina, Fenia emphasizes her preference for romantic storylines too, which become a basic criterion for her commitment to a soap. The social agenda is not of any interest to her. Significantly, she is aware of its presence and of the reasons why she does not enjoy it, and she therefore chooses to discard it. Within their longing to experience the pleasure that soap promises, there is also a latent cynicism. Maria says that she does not have any illusions and will not bother laughing ironically about *YR*. Since she takes the kind of pleasure she is after, she might as well get some gratuitous social awareness commentary.

Another aspect of the aesthetic viewing position that highlights the fans' agency is the deliberate suspension of disbelief, summed up in Petros' statement:

> I know that if the camera moved by mistake I would see cables and loose threads... but I preferred being under a spell and enter this fantasy world (249).

There is the fictional world of the narrative and the real world of soap as a commodity, created by material means of production. The process of going back and forth

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[2] For more examples see section 4.1.

between those 'worlds' is deliberate and reflexive. Fans are aware of this distinction and refer to both in their discourse. Such readings reach the dimension that Schrøder calls 'discrimination' (2000:247): they indicate an awareness of the message's constructedness. Schrøder (1988) in an earlier work and Liebes & Katz (1990) have also described this process of commuting between these positions, but have not stressed that leaving the world of soap-as-commodity is a deliberate step, a leap of faith that viewers perform seeking greater pleasure. Petros speaks with frankness of his knowledge of the technical infra-structure of *BB*. He is well aware that the glossy surface hides the evidence of constructedness (the 'loose threads'). Nevertheless, he will not let this knowledge spoil his pleasure, because he *prefers* to enter the fantasy. To do that he has to let go of the conception of the soap-as-commodity, and evidently, for some viewers this includes the conception of soap as an ideological vehicle.

In order to 'get lost in the colors', aesthetic viewers have to suspend their ideological alertness. This trade-off goes beyond the scope of discrimination, in Schrøder's terms, because viewers are *aware* that their pleasure lies in the aesthetic conventions employed by the text. What they choose to leave behind when entering the soap world is their challenge of those conventions and their ideological meaning. Petros demonstrates this point, when asked about the handling of a rape storyline in *BB*:

> J: They had shown a rape storyline, hadn't they?
> P: I didn't care much about the makers' outlook on that. I just wanted to look at the story (348-350).

For aesthetic viewers, pleasure cannot accommodate ideological challenge. The presence of ideology, or the

idea that the makers of the serial will try to expose and transmit to the audience their beliefs about rape, is acknowledged by Petros, but does not interest him. He is after the story and the pleasure, which in that case involved the vicarious experience of the pain felt by Caroline, the character who was raped.

Pleasure is central in the active suspension of disbelief, and the way it is linked to resistance. These conscious responses show marked reflexivity about the modes in which aesthetic fans watch and derive pleasure, by deliberately making that leap of faith which allows them to experience the narrative much more intensely. They watch with self-interest and have associated soaps with very particular meanings and pleasures, which they know how to reach actively. By consciously overlooking the elements that echo the commodity status of the soap - the excessive conventions, the ideological subtext, their own realist criteria - they take an agency in the experience of pleasure, and thus their position is often more than just discrimination of constructedness. It is the awareness in their viewership that involves resistance, a resistance which as Fiske (1989b) stresses has to do with evasion, not confrontation and opposition against ideologies.

Another factor that we must take into account, and which gives these accounts a claim to resistance, is reflexivity; the awareness with which these viewers engage in a meta-discourse about their own viewership and their relationship with soap opera – which has a lot to do with their knowledge of generic and production details, and consequently its commodity aspect.

8.1.2 Awareness and reflexivity

As Geraghty (1991) writes, soap operas make regular use of standardized conventions which are recognized and enjoyed by fans with a mixed response of reassuring familiarity and confirmed anticipation. Furthermore, this generic knowledge leads to an awareness of the text's constructedness as well as the ability to stand back and reflect on the process of meaning construction. Arguably, this is a process that enhances the readers' control over the text and their viewership, and which often leads them to a position of challenge and critique.

An example in which Elsa questioned the narrative device of the 'dropped' character/storyline appeared in section 4.1.4, and is typical of soap fans' criticism. 'They think that we forget' (333) this fan had said, echoing the Oregon women of the Seiter *et al.* (1989) study who also voiced their anger towards soap producers. Textual expertise in this type of meta-discourse strips the text of its sacredness. Despite their immersion in the fictional part of soaps, aesthetic fans refer to the producers regularly. Everything in soaps happens for a reason: to stretch the number of episodes; to accommodate actors and producers; to fill up space. In the following example Aspasia and her mother Katia talk about a paternity storyline in *KZ* that lasted over numerous episodes:

> K: The same thing happened with Jack... it went on and on [...] In the end she finally told him, but God, we suffered along! You see, [Foskolos] has to write everyday, sometimes he can't come up with anything new, so he says 'let's stretch this for another day'.
> A: Well, he has to earn his pension scheme money in some way! *[laughter]*

Here, the slow pace of the narrative is criticized and contested, and significantly, the fans attribute this technique to material reasons. Half seriously-half jokingly, they refer to the commodity status of soap opera. They acknowledge their lack of control as viewers, their discontent with several aspects of soap opera, and this awareness is imminent in the viewing process. This is the anchor that allows the 'leap of faith' to take place; a negotiation between their awareness of lack of control over the text and their agency over pleasure. This pleasure is good enough excuse for them to make allowances; to 'forgive' the instances where they feel they are 'taken for fools', as Maria claimed earlier.

Could one claim, though, that these viewers exemplify how strongly soap opera can appeal and control its audience? Do they willingly subject themselves to the power of the text, notwithstanding their awareness of this power and the ways it is fabricated? I would not agree with this claim. These accounts are characterized by awareness and self-reflexivity. Fans are reflective about their pleasures, their relationship to television, soap opera as a text and as a commodity, and quite often about its ideological status, as Prodromos is, for example, in the excerpt that follows:

> A serial with a plot, story, characters, will transmit certain messages at times. I'm not one of those who go 'Oh, God bless Foskolos, who teaches us about drugs, Aids, and all that'. I mean, it's not a message about Aids, he's only depicting certain behaviors, and some of them might be true; not all of them [...] What you see on the news, what happens among your friends [...] will affect you more than... *Lampsi*, because you know it's not true (201; 488).

Like most of the fans we have encountered so far, Prodromos claims that the ideological overtones of *Lampsi* do not touch him because he is aware that this is a dramatized version of Greek reality, a highly

constructed and fabricated representation of 'certain behaviors'. In this extract, too, there is evidence that the viewer is conscious of the ideological potential of the text and its 'carriers' (the plot, the story, the characters – as Prodromos says), and its constructedness ('it's not true' – in contrast to what he considers as such, like the news or his own lived experience). Hence, several aesthetic viewers seem to be linking ideology with television fiction and its pleasures. Being competent in how fictional television works – its aesthetics, rhetoric, narrative devices and production details – they consider themselves competent to recognize the ideological attempts of the soap and discard them, while gaining the pleasure that is offered to them.

In this section we looked at the complex relationship between evasive pleasure, awareness of generic conventions, and a subsequent reflexivity concerning the ideological control of the text and its reception. To what extent is such a position resistant, or empowering? I will return to this issue in section 8.4, having examined other kinds of responses, too. What became clear through the evidence that I presented is that the aesthetic viewing position and the evasive pleasure it entails is resistant at the level of agency. These viewers 'have no illusions', to quote YR fan Maria, about what they are watching and the meanings it offers. They do not have much choice over what is offered, but they do when it comes to what reaches them and what gives them pleasure. We saw, moreover, that textual competency played a major role in these responses. Finally, these particular responses by aesthetic viewers are internal and personal, not touching at a social level, like the accounts to which we shall turn now.

8.2 Beyond semiotic resistance: Agency and fan discourse

> R: From the moment you're watching a soap opera you just accept that certain things happen. That's the way I watch, I accept the fact that I already know that how this scene is going to take place [...] That's just the way soaps are.
> J: And do you enjoy this? I mean, do you enjoy this predictability?
> R: I do enjoy it because I can make fun of it afterwards! *[laughter]* (Rea, 145)

This statement captures how ironic distance viewers depart from the position of evasion to a different level of resistance: one that transforms the meanings of the soap opera text to accommodate the viewers' own cultural repertoire. This level also entails the circulation and reproduction of those meanings within a social context. Rea was one of the most soap-literate participants in my study, and in this extract she also demonstrates the aforementioned 'leap of faith'. Here, though, instead of viewing pleasure, the purpose of this allowance is more proactive. Pleasure is derived from the expectation of the text's 'misuse'. This involves a certain sense of irony and surreptitiousness: Rea knows that she is not watching innocently; that the characters and the storylines she is engaging with today, will be stripped of their intrinsic meaning and acquire the identities and references that she and her friends will assign.

Semiotic resistance (Fiske, 1989a) is the concept that describes ironic distance practices. As observed in my study, it involves more than polysemic readings or the text's active transformation. The moment of reading is only the beginning, and for many of those viewers, it is the means by which they enrich their shared pleasure and solidarity with other fans. Therefore, soap opera here is received and used in a primarily social context.

We will look more specifically at the social mechanisms and the viewing processes that give rise to this form of resistance. We shall first explore how playful and ironic meanings are created, and subsequently consider their highly social role in fan networks.

8.2.1 Producing alternative meanings

The characteristics of the ironic distance position have been covered in earlier chapters, but here we will look more specifically at their elements of resistance. The common feature of these readings is an active transformation of the existing textual meanings into new ones which signify something private and special for the group of readers. Kostas, a *BH 90210* fan belonged in such a group of friends and described how *they* made the serial part of their social interaction by 'making up' their own scripts about the show's characters:

> K: We had really gone too far. Jimbo[3] would hit it off with Kelly's mother and they would do coke together *[laughter]* you know, him being the strict family man who cherished his values and had instilled them to his son who was...
> J: So you wanted to ridicule him.
> K: We wanted to ridicule him because Brandon always annoyed us and we also wanted to humiliate his father a bit. We would make up stuff and say that as Kelly's mother had a drug problem, they would hit it off and that Cindy would join them and watch them do stuff and orchestrate them *[laughter]*. This sort of thing. That Cindy and Steve's mom would also snog *[laughter]*, generally, we would have quite a laugh (173-179).

The contrast of the above script with the serial's tones is extremely significant. The Walshes, having moved to California from Minnesota, stand for the

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[3] A note on the characters: Jim and Cindy Walsh are Brandon's and Brenda's parents and the four of them embodied the organic and wholesome American family. Their Beverly Hills friends Kelly, Steve, Donna and David, had more dysfunctional family lives.

traditional, nuclear, wholesome family values which are diametrically opposite to the Beverly Hills lifestyle. Watching Brandon and Brenda coming of age and blooming in this environment without losing their basic innocence and family-instilled principles was the thematic anchor of the show. Hence, creating a text where Jim and Cindy, the moral cornerstones of the serial, have their go with cocaine and sexual orgies is indeed a subversive use of *BH 90210*. Kostas acknowledges their discourse as transgression: 'we had really gone too far'. It is a pleasurable transgression, by all means, as his last phrase indicates but not a meaningless one. Kostas states quite clearly that this alternative narrative aims at debunking the moralistic rhetoric of the serial. The role they gave to Brandon's father is the opposite of everything he stood for, and the basis for this twist was indeed the fact that he was the strict father who preserved the traditional values in the family ('him being the strict family man...'). So, their self-produced meaning is not merely a polysemic reading but their resistive response towards a political agenda; an attempt to deconstruct the shiny morals of the Walsh parents, as agents of this ideology.

In the above example we trace several resistive elements: the evident re-reading of the text and its transformation into a new narrative that challenges the ideological principles of its pre-existing version. It is a transgressive text which involves behaviors that are strictly renounced by its parent-text. In this case the viewers not only discard the ideological meanings that they receive, but they oppose them by creating their own subversive ones and at the same time generating pleasure which stems from their own discourse.

This transformation of the soap text is based on the fans' cultural inventory of meanings and their shared relationships. Another practice I observed consists of fans assigning soap characters' roles amongst themselves and thus creating an alternative text in which they take the leading role, where they relate the storylines to their own lives, with a certain touch of playfulness. Rea and Lakis belong to a group of *YR* fans and 'in order to have a laugh' they have given to each other *YR* character roles. Uprooting the soap narrative from its place, they use the storylines in order to create their own version:

> J: So, you like talking about the program.
> L: Yes, as I told you, we've taken it up to a very high level [...] We take the heroes further, outside the serial [...] We've given names to each one of us and it's like we're them and it's very funny. I'm Victor Newman of course *[laughter]*, the emperor of Genoa City *[laughter]* [...] So, with this other girl [*Rea*], while I'm abroad we hold a correspondence as Victor and Nikki[4]. And we make up all sorts of stories, like, Hope fell off the stairs *[laughter]*, that I love Hope more than her, we mock the serial with our own stories. How's the condition of the ranch, my horses, how's Miguel, how's Douglas, the old chap?(184-190; 363)

In this case, too, the viewer feels that he has been quite active with the text — 'taken it up to a very high level'. This statement indicates the investment that Lakis has put on his fan related practices, which are independent from the narrative ('we move the heroes further, outside the serial'). The characters, the storylines, the sign products of the soap are poached and transformed — here they literally become the fans' property. The sarcastic tone is evident throughout his account, and it is easy to discern how the storylines become the pretext for a playful and ironic discourse:

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[4] A note on the characters: Victor used to be married to Nikki. Later he got married to Hope, a blind woman. Nikki lives with their children in the Newman ranch in Genoa City. Miguel works in the ranch while Douglas is Victor's oldest friend — an English colonel, complete with British accent.

'we mock the serial with our own stories'. The characters in the fans' stories resemble their soap versions but they signify something different in this context, and are of course associated with ruthless satire, like blind Hope falling off the stairs. The use of specific lines *by* the soap in their own fan-based context is also a popular practice, and in this case we can imagine how Lakis and Rea's correspondence would take form, employing classic lines from the serial, like 'old chap' (or 'old boy' – the way Victor and Douglas address each other) and using the storylines in order to find pleasure 'outside the serial' – on their own terms of meaning.

Familiarity with soap opera conventions is important for ironic distance viewers. Formulaic scenes and typified representations in combination with soap-specific *mise-en-scéne* (like close-ups, for instance) invite playful responses. According to Telis, trademark soap scenes make for the best ironic distance material:

> Definitely, the best moments of the show are the monologues or when the camera freezes on his face with a sort of sour expression, as if he's eaten something bad *[laughter]* (554).

The excessive portrayal of emotion and the highly melodramatic tones have triggered this reading. Such techniques are supposed to yield feelings like suspense, sadness, and shock. Nevertheless, ironic distance viewers receive these textual moments in an oppositional manner: they make for the best laugh. Resisting the preferred meaning of the text, they dwell on what strikes them as material worthy to be colonized. Other examples that were mentioned from several fans were the use of slow motion, memory flashbacks, highly orchestrated scenes of physical violence (in Greek soaps) and of course, low production values, which are treasured as indices of 'cult', trashy, and low budget texts.

These accounts display a colonization of the soap's meanings and their unexpected, ironic, or even subversive transformation. Moreover, one observes a sense of ownership and manipulation of the text. These fans are not only receiving the soap; they are using it for a purpose other than watching. The soap becomes meaningful after having been 're-worked' to fit their own entertainment needs, which might involve the transgression of standard processes of reading and meaning construction. In other words, their pleasure is directly linked to breaking the semiotic, and at times ideological, rules of the text. Replacing family values with sex and drugs, turning romance into satire, renaming characters on the basis of their haircuts, and generally, distorting the text and using it in symbolically irreverent ways, is to break the rules of the text: what semiotic resistance is all about. We will now consider the social role of semiotic resistance; how soap discourse becomes a form of communication among the members of fan networks that enhances their social relationships.

8.2.2 Beyond textual boundaries

Soap opera reception has a strong social aspect and in the case of ironic distance viewers, it emerges as the most important factor in their viewership. Through their resourceful use of soaps, they create an additional channel of social interaction. In this context, resistance refers to the social solidarity and shared communication that emerges as an alternative consequence of soap watching – alternative, because it is not institutionalized and controlled by the site of production, or accidental, as in the case of two strangers sharing the latest soap gossip. Moreover, because of the transformation of meaning that has already taken place, the discourse that

these fans share is private and inaccessible by others, and this further enhances their agency and solidarity. The social level of ironic reception further supports the argument that pleasure for these groups is primarily induced by themselves, and not the soap, and in this light it is a resistive pleasure. Moreover, soap talk constitutes the main reason for their following, as Nestor says:

> J: In what sort of instances does it come up?
> N: When we're off our faces! *[laughter]* In times when we're being very silly and we just say and do daft things.
> J: What sort of things?
> N: All sorts. Mostly sarcastic stuff, we take the piss, really [...]
> J: At the end of the day, how much of the pleasure of watching the serial is due to your talking and laughing about it with your friends?
> N: About 70-80%. It's a big part, it's pretty basic (109-117; 127-129).

Soap opera discourse is integrated in the ironic distance viewers' everyday life and it emerges naturally in their interaction. For Nestor and his friends, having a laugh about *SB* is part of the time they spend together, being out for a drink and socializing. Being in a relaxed and merry atmosphere seems to be the right context for soap related discourse to emerge[5]. Evidently, the fun they have while doing this, is the basic constituent of their pleasure in being fans: the extrinsic, social aspect of soap opera.

Television watching as a family ritual has been discussed by several authors (Brunsdon, 2000; Hobson, 1982; Lull, 1990; Morley, 1987) as a means of bringing family members together and enhance their communication. For Aaron and his daughter Melina, *BH 90210* was an hour of shared togetherness; an old family

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[5] This relates to Brown's (1990; 1994) emphasis on the safe spaces, i.e. fan networks, in which women's discourse can take place without hegemonic restrictions. Here restrictions have to do with the low status of soap opera among an all-male group.

ritual, boosted by TV dinners and the jokes they exchanged about the serial's characters and storylines:

> A: I was caught in its web indirectly. Through a situation that had been established between Melina and me, the two of us watching together, it was a mode of communication [....] I have greatly associated *BH 90210* with Melina.
> J: Has it created a new part in your relationship?
> A: Yes, it is a common activity, it is a medium of communication.
> J: And at the end of the day what pleased you the most about it was...
> A: The fact that we would both be glued there together... The common factor between her and me, *BH 90210* was a common element, we would congregate... and go through all the ritual of the jokes, and, yeah, I think it was a major form of communication between Melina and me. About several things (344; 350-352).

In this case, the experience of watching *BH 90210* incorporates several pleasures, extrinsic to the actual show. It is about togetherness and enjoying each other's company; something which clearly has a special significance for them. The viewing context is mostly enriched by the viewers' input: the jokes, the gossip, and all the creative readings that were explored in the previous section. These constitute the 'form of communication' that Aaron mentions, and it is this text that he cherishes the most, because it was created out of his interaction with his daughter[6]. The tertiary text (in Fiske's terms) that they produce is not about the soap anymore. It is about the fans themselves and the social relationship between them, and hence, it is resistant and empowering.

Generating an in-group narrative is a basic element of fanship and enhances one's sense of belonging in that group:

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[6] Melina, in contrast, is not as articulate about her 'indirect' relationship to *BH 90210*. She is basically an 'aesthetic' viewer, and enjoys primarily the intrinsic qualities of the soap; she is more attached to the fictional than the social text (See also section 8.1.1). The degree to which pleasure is adhered to the social or the textual element of the show depends on the fan's viewing position.

> J: So, what are your feelings about these serials [YR, Lampsi, KZ]?
> L: They make me laugh basically, the storylines are funny and I like talking about them. Especially now that I talk about them with certain people and we have a laugh [...]
> J: And what role does this play in your watching?
> L: I can take part in a fun conversation [...] It's the most significant part... I mean, I don't like watching on my own (Lakis, 34; 68-70).

For Lakis too, watching soap means talking about it with friends and creating a new, shared level of communication. Soap here has a social role, but significantly, this role is led by the fans and what *they* do with it. Lakis also enjoys watching Greek soap operas but they have never played such a role simply because his friends do not watch:

> J: Why don't you talk as much about the Greek ones?
> L: Because my friends don't really watch them... Otherwise I think we would spend hours talking about them [...]
> J: What is it about a soap that will make you stick with it?
> L: It has to be really ridiculous and friends have to watch it too (305-311; 254-256).

The existence of a social network is a requirement for ironic distance reception, and Lakis' statement above shows that its role is much more significant than the text's, as far as pleasure is concerned.

The pleasure that these fans articulate is not restricted to just talking about the show. In the previous section, we saw how the production of an alternative text took place at several levels and in different contexts of everyday life. Soap opera characters, in particular, acquire a real-life status as besides talking about them, fans also make them part of their social practices, as Stavros and Yiotis disclose:

> S: Vasiliou [the actor playing Theoharis in KZ] is not Vasiliou anymore, everyone calls him Theoharis... When

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someone told us that Vasiliou's house was burned down,
we were saying 'they burned down Theoharis' house'. We
were like, 'who did that, why?' *[laughter]*
Y: Sometimes when we make noise at home we say that if
someone calls the cops, Theoharis will come round.
[laughter] It goes this far sometimes (575-577).

The extract shows how this form of communication
is materialized in the fans' discourse and how soap
references are relocated into social contexts and
activities. Being familiar with the soap and their own
alternative narrative, woven simultaneously, they relate
to soap opera as a resource of meanings that only they
recognize and control. This practice yields a sense of
ownership over the text and camaraderie among the fans.
It is another currency in their exchange of meaning, as
Rea illustrates:

In a way it's like when you go with friends on holiday and
come up with all those inside jokes... which you will
share in the future in order to communicate. So the way
it's being used is social. Marina, say, who didn't come
with us would not get this expression, only we would
because we were there together. It's like that with *YR*,
there are things that we only get and not those who are
outsiders (46).

The above passage explains the social solidarity in
which such discourse contributes. The boundaries
between out-group and in-group are articulated here, and
the creation of the tertiary text can mark such
boundaries, which do not so much alienate the group, as
add an extra level of understanding and communication
for the members. The teleological role of fanship is also
apparent here: 'in order to communicate', 'the way it's
being used'. These statements imply that soap opera is a
means to an end. The fun in being a soap fan can be
partly traced beyond the soap text, in the social
interaction among people who spend and enjoy their time
together. Yiotis and Telis describe this phenomenon when
he talks about the 'socialization' of *KZ*:

> Y: Before we started talking about it I knew it was funny,
> but... this socialization of the serial was not there... I
> began watching more fanatically because of the
> discussions, the phone calls during the serial.
> J: What are the elements of this socialization?
> Y: I mean the fact that we watch it all together, that we'd
> rather watch it all together. In order to chat, criticize,
> have a laugh all together.
> T: Because each one of us, according to his sense of
> humor discovers different funny bits that one wouldn't
> come up on his own. The hair, the one-liner, the odd
> facial expression, the juicy details [...]
> Y: We're all gathered, waiting for the gag to pop up, it
> will and we'll all crack up. When I'm alone it's not the
> same... it will be less of a laugh (1011; 1017-1021; 492).

The relationship between the 'ironic distance'
position with its resistant readings and the 'socialization'
of the soap text is clearly articulated in these statements.
One can observe a triangular relationship between the
primary text, the playful tertiary text and the social
interaction that results between the fans. All three are
inter-dependent, but most important are the latter two,
because they carry agency and deliberation. The process
of meaning transformation and the production of an
alternative text is a social one. Without this social,
dialectic input, the excessive details of the text will not
be recognized and re-worked into the viewers'
interpersonal lexicon. Some form of communication,
either synchronic to the reading context, or its
anticipation, is essential for this use of soap opera to take
place.

Finally, while 'ironic distance' fans speak of their
soaps in very negative terms, as they reject them
aesthetically and ideologically, they express only
positive meanings about *their own* interaction with the
soap, and the way they use it to a further level:

> Someone may be watching from a more disinterested point
> of view... and get the positive elements of soap [...] most
> of my friends watch it too... and I think it has a positive
> effect on us because watching it really makes us laugh,

and say, and do things, and use lines from the show, make jokes, but I'm telling you, it has more to do with the way we watch, and it's sarcastic (Rea, 27-29).

The positive effect that is meant here is the result of a further level of communication: empowerment, solidarity, and bonding. The emphasis is on the exchange and circulation of new meanings, produced by the fans, in opposition, or in ironic distance to the ones of the primary text. It is a dialogic process of giving and taking between fans, which adds something to their existing social relationships: a new set of discursive categories that enhance interaction. Rea acknowledges that this positive effect is a product of her viewing position: ironic distance is the fuel of the soap-related social interaction. The fact that fans themselves consider sarcasm as the causal aspect is important, since it gives this type of reception a subversive hue.

Semiotic resistance refers to resisting the text's signified references and creating one's own but the readings and practices explored in this section move actively into the social realm, into the everyday lives and relations of soap opera fans. Some cases that aimed at debunking ideological constructs of soap narratives were clearly instances of resistance. Nevertheless, agency of pleasure is a key notion here. Another form of resistance lies in the rejection of the pleasures that are readily given by the site of production and the creation of new, private ones, which ironically though, are produced using the materials that were offered via the soap. In this way ironic distance fans control their pleasure in a culture where pleasures are catered without much choice. Hence, this active pleasure is an art of 'making do' in the way that de Certeau theorized resistance. The demarcating line is that these fans enjoy more what *they* do to soap opera, and less what *it does* to them. Semiotic resistance

(the playful creation of alternative meanings) differentiates fan practices from television rituals that appear in every other living-room. Likewise, the social aspect inscribed in this type of watching turns semiotic resistance into a tangible reality which can be observed in viewers' lives.

8.3 Resistance beyond oppositional readings

Having examined how resistant readings of soaps are incorporated in everyday life, we shall look at viewers who do not oppose the text's ideologies, but use the soap opera text in order to resist other hegemonic voices. This issue questions the linkage of resistance to oppositional textual readings. The emphasis here is on the uses of the text, and the pleasures of watching a soap which celebrates the viewers' ideologies. Hence, the social context and position of the viewers is crucial in interpreting how they relate to the ideological messages of the soap.

When it comes to Greek soaps, Aliki Danae is a social observer and on several occasions (see sections 4.2.3 and 7.1.2) she admitted being a welcome receiver of Foskolos' messages. The writer and director of *Lampsi* and *KZ* is a famous figure, whose political affiliations have been intensely and publicly discussed, so Aliki Danae feels familiar with his beliefs and classifies his discourse as a political project. At this level, as she indicates, soap watching becomes 'tak[ing] sides' (211), and being on Foskolos' side means for her to be 'on the side of poor' (211), her own political position to begin with, against the hegemony. Ideological affiliation is of central importance: 'because that's the way I think as well' (215). The main factors that lead to such a reading here are the ideological alignment with the soap, and the

cultural expertise needed in order to appropriate the soap's ideological meanings in her political landscape.

Anna is another viewer who considers her soap watching a resistant practice in the light of hegemony. She sees *KZ* as a discourse that stands for the values and way of life that have been driven away by consumerism and foreign influences:

> Sometimes I think, I don't care, I will watch this even if they call me old-fashioned [...] [Foskolos] is not ashamed to come across as a traditional man... It shows these values that we modern Greeks tend to forget, and this serial comes like a response to what we try to be like (299; 388).

This statement is also straight forward in its acceptance of the ideological signposts of *KZ*. Nevertheless, by embracing these ideologies Anna is resisting other ones. She is referring to *KZ* as a proud flagship of the values she stands for, values that have been driven to the fringes of public discourse and popular media because they are not considered 'modern'. Watching *KZ* is her own resistance against these modern discourses and it is a practice that empowers her at the same time and feeds her sustenance to react to 'what we try to be like'. It makes her remember who she really is. Anna (fully quoted in 6.1.3) invokes a romanticized past and values which are not celebrated anymore in the Greek public sphere. This ideological discourse is marginal – not hegemonic, and thus *KZ* goes, for her, against the grain. Embracing it is an act of resistance – although, without considering the whole social and ideological framework that informs her position, one would not describe it as such. On the contrary though, I believe, and Anna is also clear about it, that this is an account of soap watching as a resistant *practice*.

Soap opera can also lead viewers to raise their problematic and concern regarding the public sphere and challenge dominant discourses, as in the case of Spyros. The statement below was generated while he was discussing a *KZ* storyline:

> A radical change has to take place, that's it. Radical changes don't happen on the top, they have to start from the roots. The little branches [...] It's the same thing in all public services, all the ministries. It starts from the roots and it goes up to the top [...] When they react they blame it on the minister, on the prime minister, they blame it on everyone else except themselves. But the little guys are also to blame. You'll tell me, Spyros, arent'you a little guy too? But of course I'm little, I'm not a big guy! (993)

Spyros uses *KZ* as a platform for political discourse. He speaks as 'a little guy', operating at the grass-roots, not anywhere near the bigger branches. He is acknowledging his position in the structure of power and he knows well that he belongs in a non-dominant group. Spyros used to be a militant union member and had always been politically active (see also chapter 7). As a pensioner now he has little chance to engage in political discourse and make his voice heard. The discourse that was articulated above does not hold the currency it would in a different context, but it is nevertheless articulated, and it is Spyros' reaction against what he finds problematic about Greek politics. The soap is used as a prompt for the development of personal political critique.

In this case one has to acknowledge that *KZ* and *Lampsi* embark on such critiques quite often and go against hegemonic discourses in the Greek public sphere. This could be a hegemonic ploy: the subordinate group must recognize themselves in the popular text in order to embrace it, in the sense that Fiske (1994; 1998) has theorized the popular. In these accounts though, which certainly adopt the ideological meanings without any

negotiation, the viewers are left questioning the social order. They may be reading 'with the grain' but they are using their soaps, in order to voice their opposition to hegemony. Resistance, thus, can also be articulated beyond the opposition to the text's ideology, as long as we take into account *how* the text is being used. Here it *is* used politically; viewers are not resisting textual meanings, but through espousing them they resist other dominant meanings and hegemonic discourses, a resistive act that empowers them.

8.4 Refining resistance

In the above sections we encountered three different approaches to soap opera texts as carriers of ideological meanings. Aesthetic viewers actively seek their pleasure and evade textual fragments that they consider ideological, while ironic distance viewers find enjoyment in opposing and twisting soap representations and in sharing with others their self-produced narratives. Finally, social observers do not question the soap's ideological role, but fully endorse it. In doing so, however, they display a deliberate resistance towards discourses that *they* consider dominant. This pattern clearly transcends models of reception that equate resistance and interpretive opposition, and in this sense it is structurally congruent with Schrøder's (2000) multidimensional model of reception. In this final section we will revisit these positions, attempting to illuminate the ambiguities of resistance in popular culture. I will draw on the notions of pleasure, resistance and empowerment that were introduced in chapter 1, and look more closely at elements of agency and reflexivity that are present in several of the accounts we have seen.

Evading ideology is a form of resisting dominant meanings and this process describes the aesthetic viewing position. Pleasure has a central, motivating role in this mode of reception: aesthetic fans are active seekers of pleasure and in order to maximize it, they experience soap texts physically and emotionally, evading their social and ideological dimension. Moreover, this evasion is deliberate because these viewers display discrimination, in Schrøder's terms. They are aware of and can discuss the constructedness of their serials and their ideological operations, but such meta-discourse spoils their fun.

Certainly, the main problem with this argument is that ideology works in more subtle ways than the obvious 'messages' that are so often inscribed in the soap opera text. The fact that the viewer evades certain discourses concerning child abuse, or date rape, or police corruption, does not necessarily guarantee insulation from all possible sources of hegemonic ideology. One could always argue that ideology is absorbed unconsciously by unsuspected viewers, regardless of what they think or say at a conscious level. This assumption, however, cannot be confirmed unless one follows up these fans using unobtrusive, ethnographic methods and examine the 'implementation' of media readings in their lives (Schrøeder, 2000). The feasibility and validity of this idea is a methodological and theoretical issue. One has to take into account though, that epistemological constraints allow qualitative research to go as far as the discursive categories that contain the viewers' reading of and relationship with the television text. Undoubtedly, the portrayal of social issues in soaps is an ideological 'hot-spot'. Hence, the viewers' understanding of it is legitimate and useful to a

certain extent, as an index of their reception of ideology. And after all, analysts' interpretations of hegemonic readings - the 'evaluation' of a position, according to Schrøder (2000) – are also subjective and might not necessarily comply with the way the audience receives these messages.

Empowerment, however, is not a state that I would necessarily ascribe to the aesthetic viewing position. Grossberg (1984) has indicated that pleasure is not always empowering and this is something that I observed with aesthetic viewers. For instance, some women were very reflexive about their pleasure in watching romantic storylines, but this pleasure was always imbued with the disappointment and cynicism that real life relationships are very different. Such readings[7] show an awareness of ideological representations of heterosexual romance and could very well raise a fan's consciousness concerning her own position, but they were never proclaimed by participants as instances of empowerment. Hence, pleasure and empowerment should not be conflated, a mistake often committed by Fiske, for instance:

> *This evasion is experienced as empowering*, but does not determine, or necessarily even influence the use to which that empowerment may be put. (1989b:54, my emphasis)

Watching soaps can often be disempowering, especially when the fans are well aware of fictitious or ideological elements and consciously discuss them. Feminist soap research like Brown's (1994) or Lee and Cho's (1990), has shown that such readings can lead to empowered subjective positions, but where I agree with Fiske is that, in itself, evasion of ideology (empowering or not) will not always have political or social effects. This was evident in the aesthetic viewers' accounts,

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[7] For relevant examples see sections 5.4.3 and 6.2.1.

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whose soap watching was more or less a private practice which they never took seriously enough to discuss with others, regardless of their investment in it.

On the other hand, ironic distance viewing is a position that *depends* on social relationships. For all ironic distance participants, soap watching involved social practices and shared communication of self-produced meanings which defied and opposed the dominant narrative. In this position we observe an intense 'semiotic insurgence', as Fiske (1989b:50) would put it. Ironic distance fans resist dominant meanings by actively opposing and laughing at them, and poach them in order to create their own alternative narratives. It is this surreptitious pleasure that fuels their fanship, which is by all means empowering, as we witnessed in their accounts about the solidarity and camaraderie stemming out of their fan culture (section 8.2.2). Moreover, the reflexivity in those practices is also underlined, as the following statement shows:

> T: If I sit down and accept whatever [*Foskolos*] gives me then he basically controls me. A film that I like, for example, has control over me, I have no expectations when I watch it and it carries me away. Foskolos can't do that, maybe it's his low quality or whatever, so I take from him whatever I want. He thinks he's doing a very serious job; obviously he never thought of it being laughed at. So I control him.
> J: Yes but you also get some sort of pleasure out of *KZ*, so are they different kinds?
> T: The pleasure I get from *KZ* is very specific, there's nothing out of the blue there that could make me happy or anxious about what's gonna happen. I'm expecting the one-liners to go off, the blokes, Theoharis, what I get is very specific.
> J: So are you the creator of this pleasure?
> T: Yes, definitely (Telis 871-883).

This example illustrates the notions of agency, control, and reflexivity concerning pleasure and soap opera consumption. Telis proclaims himself as the creator of his own pleasure, of which he is in control. There are

several elements that contribute to his agency and empowered position. Firstly, when he compares his watching to the aesthetic viewing position (emotional response, getting carried away, etc.), he finds that his control is due to a power balance. He does not approach the show innocently, but determined that he is going to laugh at specific moments and pick up elements to joke about with his friends. The 'serious' part of the soap does not interest him, and his agency over what he will take from the text is what gives him more power over Foskolos, as he says. Secondly, the subversive character of his watching is certainly empowering. He knows that he is reading against the grain and that the text was not supposed to be read thus. Finally, the knowledge that he is responsible for the pleasure he gets out of the soap is an important factor in his resistant position. This point applies to all ironic distance fans, whose pleasure and viewing depends on the social commentary that follows the show; *their own* text.

We must not, however, presume that this type of resistance is a fixed response of elitist viewers towards low-status television. Several ironic distance participants shifted to the aesthetic mode at times, a phenomenon that depended on such factors as social context and the text's cultural origin. Hence, we can only talk about moments of resistance, actualized depending on circumstances. Telis, a 'hard-core' ironic distance participant, admitted that while watching a good film, his viewing position would be less resistant, while others revealed a 'closet' aesthetic identity. Moreover, the resistance practiced by these middle class viewers should not be romanticized: we saw clearly that their viewing position is often a result of elitism (Foskolos' 'low quality') and class prejudices (see chapters 6 and 7) which has not always

progressive effects. One can surely claim empowerment on a level of identity and social relationships, but these fans do not politicize their soap-related practices and discourse on a more public/civil basis. Hence, there is no basis here to infer that this kind of empowerment has any political implications.

On the contrary, social observers were the most political soap fans in my study. They do not just enjoy social/political storylines, the ones which annoy aesthetic viewers, but also embrace their ideological address, the aspect that ironic fans 'attack'. Social observers watch their soaps politically and when discussing them they focus on the issues soaps raise, not on the gossip. As a result, soaps are to those fans a platform of public discourse: they feel more like citizens and less like television viewers. Hence the importance of national identity, as this viewing position is mostly the case with Greek programs. Not only do indigenous soaps (especially those of Foskolos) echo national problems which are relevant to their audiences, but they attempt to recreate a traditional experience of Greekness, which is rare in the changing media landscape of the country. Social observers are welcome receivers of this effort and find it empowering. Moreover, in watching *Lampsi* and *KZ* they feel that they are resisting the powers of capitalism and modernism that endanger, in their opinion, 'true' Greek identity.

This viewing position could well be interpreted as one of incorporation: social observers satisfy their patriotic and political needs through a soap that validates their beliefs, instead of real action. Moreover, those fans rarely address the constructedness of soaps: the level of discrimination is not always reached in this position. How can we then talk about resistance in this case?

Firstly, one must be pragmatic in thinking about the role of soap in instigating political action, or pacifying the viewers' political spirits. Clearly, all social observers share the ideological beliefs that are echoed through *Lampsi* and *KZ* and *want* them legitimated[8]. Their 'motivation' then, according to the multidimensional model, is very different from other fans'. Expectedly, they will find these soaps incredibly realistic, 'drawn from real life', and so on. It's not a matter of naiveté, but of mutual ideological support. Moreover, in a society where political action for the majority of the people is restrained to talking politics in *kafenea* (cafés), a soap that gives rise to such discourse is not necessarily hegemonic, especially when its politics is indeed far from mainstream ideologies.

On the other hand, it would be naïve for a cultural analyst to assume that soap operas could cause direct political change. Soap reception can certainly be a highly political matter. A well-off youngster who laughs at soaps' representations of working class-ness, but feels empowered by the fact that in being a soap fan he transgresses middle-class aesthetics, is in my opinion an example of a political use of soaps, with political effects, but at a personal level: I cannot assume that soaps would contribute to social change in attitudes about class, for instance. The fact, however, that soaps can give rise, among some of their motivated viewers, to social and political critique, the challenge of dominant meanings,

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[8] Significantly, the political rhetoric of Greek soaps can accommodate many different positions, for left-wingers like Spyros and Aliki-Danae, to more conservative social observers like Yiorgos and Danos, for example. In my opinion it is Foskolos' patriotism and emphasis on generalized ideas of justice and honesty that attract viewers from different political backgrounds, who nevertheless express complete ideological alignment with the creator.

and the empowerment of friendship networks is a proof of their *possibility* for resistance and change.

8.5 Conclusion

The diffused nature of ideological discourse makes the interpretation of these empirical accounts problematic. If ideology resides not only ˙ in the content but also in the forms of communication and reception, not only around us, but also in the way we conceive of what is around us to be, then the resistances that I have described here are rather plasmatic. To oppose a certain meaning because it smacks of patriarchy, for example, does not guarantee the resistance against other beliefs and behaviors that are being naturalized through soap. On a different note, little do station owners, advertisers, producers, and so on, care about whether or not meanings are resisted, twisted, or celebrated, as long as their recipients keep tuning in for more, raising the ratings and the advertising prices for the appropriate time slots. Then again, it would be unfair to assess the significance of these reading practices against such criteria, because simply they do not apply here.

It is wise to think about Fiske's distinction between television's cultural and financial economies. These economies operate on different currencies. While individual viewers hold little power in the financial economy of television, in the cultural one the process of meaning construction and its further reproduction, circulation and use, give them considerable power. Meaning is everything in the cultural economy, and the power to construct one's own meanings and pleasures is an agency of considerable power, albeit in the scale of the micro; the local; the everyday; but still, the scale of the social.

Aiming to explore the soap viewers' perspective I chose to approach their personal accounts as the discourse that would point to the answers I was looking for[9]. To maintain consistency between methodological and analytical standards we have to acknowledge that if I considered the viewers' discourse as a representative source of information about their reception and usage of soap operas, I will then have to interpret this discourse within its context; based on the resources that it offers. It would be dishonest to claim that I stand on the same position with my participants, as far as my field of study is concerned: I have been exposed to a body of theoretical knowledge that they have not. Nevertheless, this project is about *them* and *their* understanding of soap operas, ideology, and media power. Therefore, one must assess these readings taking into account what the above terms mean for the viewers in their everyday life, and not compare them against the media critic, academic, or theorist's understanding of those terms.

Many of those viewers proclaimed to be resistant viewers, in their own language; in the way that they experience soap opera reception. Although they acknowledge soaps as powerful programs, they believe in their agency over them. The different forms of agency displayed by different viewers were thoroughly explored and analyzed on the basis of theoretical models, but at the end of the day, it is their voice on which my observations are based and I tried to stay close to their discursive framework.

For this reason I would never consider soap watching equal to a public act of resistance with political

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[9] I must stress that these accounts *point to* the answers; I was not looking for absolute truths, nor did I expect that in themselves the data *are* the answers. They must however be assessed pragmatically: it is the information that these fans wished to express about themselves and thus, what I was interested in.

consequences. Besides my own evaluation of what such an act entails, the viewers' position never suggested such an interpretation. Significantly so, the only viewers who talked of their relationship to soap opera as having any political signification were the ones who actually accepted and were aligned with the soap's ideology in the first place. For those who rejected such discourse, and played against the dominant meanings of the text, re-appropriating them in order to fit their own ideological framework, there was talk of empowerment, in the sense of the satisfaction one feels when taking control over his/her pleasure, time, and thoughts. Authors like Brown (1994) and Fiske (1989b; 1992b; 1998) might consider such empowerment as a requirement for social and political change. I cannot doubt the logical possibility of this proposition, but methodological restraints do not allow me to endorse it. Thus, although many of the viewers I talked to are aware of the hegemonic processes at play and might also oppose them, the significance of soap opera and its possibility for resistance against dominant meanings lies in their everyday, personal and social lives.

Conclusion: articulation and
soap opera reception

The rethinking of several theoretical and
methodological issues resulted in what Alasuutari has
called the 'third generation' (1999:6) of audience
research. Specifically,

> the third generation resumes an interest in programmes
> and programming, but not as texts studied in isolation
> from their usage as a [sic] element of everyday life.
> Furthermore, it adds a neglected layer of reflexivity to the
> research on the 'reception' of media messages by
> addressing the audience's notions of themselves as the
> 'audience' (ibid., 7).

The present study reflects several aspects of this new
agenda, but it has also attempted to re-evaluate the
usefulness of notions like resistance, which have been
cast off in favor of less polemical terms.

In tune with recent debates concerning the use of
ethnographic methods in reception studies (Ang, 1996b;
Morley, 1996; Radway, 1996; Schrøder, 1999) and the
plea for increased reflexivity and contextualization in
qualitative research, I chose to approach my subject
using grounded and discourse-sensitive methods. The
respondents' talk was not seen as a window of their inner
world, but studied as a text in itself, in which our roles
and perspectives were negotiated; a text that belonged in
a broader sphere of social discourses and practices.
Hence, in my methodology I tried to capture the meaning
of soap opera in the participants' everyday lives without
disconnecting it from their wider social and cultural
landscape.

The contextual and discursive quality of the data do
not allow extensive generalization, however, as Schrøder
argues it enables one 'to discern the contours of patterns
in the audience data, broad categories of similarities and

differences of perception and practice' (1999:48). So, in my analysis I distinguished between three patterns of soap opera reception, which were not fixed, but nevertheless, sociologically and culturally grounded, as I demonstrated in chapters 5, 6, and 7, dealing respectively with the role of gender, social class, and national identity in the formation of viewing positions. The findings of this study may be localized and contextual, and certainly not statistically representative, but they point to important insights about soap opera reception, and this is due to the width and flexibility of the analytic categories, a proof that some sort of categorization is needed in audience studies.

Hence, these results point to the possibility of a methodology that combines an ethnographic sensitivity for specificity and contextualization, with a more analytic, sociological grounding. In fact, the conclusions of this work point to the articulation of gender, class, age and national identity in producing viewing positions which at certain moments can be resistant and empowering. According to Ang and Hermes articulation is the process whereby interrelated elements are altered because of their interaction. 'It connotes a dynamic process of fixing or fitting together, which is however never total nor final', the authors claim, having established that 'only through their articulation in concrete historical situations do media consumption practices acquire meanings' (1991:319).

The accounts of reception that we looked at are indeed instances of articulation. The viewing positions that we observed were always shaped by the interrelation of class and age and gender, or for example national identity and age, and so on to form an array of positionings that cannot be fixed or over-determined, as

they are inherently contextual. Some prominent examples would be the way gender identities were influenced by national discourses (see section 5.4), the role of class and age in men's identities as soap fans (section 5.1), the different notions of Greekness held by younger and older soap fans (6.1.3), or finally, how class related discourse passes as 'the Greek element' among young, middle-class viewers (7.3). National identity was shown to be differently employed by different social groups when watching foreign or domestic soaps, another finding that demonstrates how viewers' identities are articulated and socially constructed by a number of different factors.

The complexity of these viewing positions reflects some important findings about soap opera reception, showing that gender alone cannot explain adequately what these programs mean for their viewers. Moreover, we saw clearly that one cannot simply write the text out of the reception site. This study may not have been textual in its approach, but its results show that the programs' origin, cultural signification, and mode of address are immensely important in the way viewers derive meaning, pleasure and use it in their everyday lives.

Another issue that I consider noteworthy about this thesis is the de-coupling of resistance from several proliferating discourses. Schrøder's (2000) multidimensional model of audience reception proved very helpful in distinguishing between different levels in viewers' responses and relating them to a frame of ideological and social structures. It was thus shown that resistant readings are not always oppositional to the text, not always empowering or progressive and not always political in the public sense of the term. Schrøder's distinction between viewers' motivation, discrimination,

and position was especially relevant in the case of the soap fans in my study and the formation of their viewing positions.

On the other hand, the multidimensional model was a helpful tool in refining resistance and linking it to other notions, like agency and awareness from the part of the viewer. As it was established in Chapter 8, resistance takes place at several levels and it is evident in numerous practices and responses but its most important aspect is the viewer's agency and reflexivity about his or her relationship and use of soap opera. My project does not raise a flag of emancipation or validation for soap opera fans and I never believed that popular pleasures must be attached to extrinsic causes. What this work showed nevertheless, is that resistance is built into cultural reception (the latter being in itself a site where different perspectives are negotiated) and can take several forms according to the viewers' motivation and social positioning. Thus, questioning *who, how, when and why* is resisting *what*, is crucial in understanding several cultural processes and relations of power.

The finding that some forms of resistance do not always involve soap opera discourse [in contrast to Brown (1994)] made me reflect on my role as interviewer, analyst and interpreter in this research, as well as the discursive and contextual nature of this data. Despite their considerable investment in soaps, for the fans I met soap viewing is a private matter, in the sense that the talk it generates is not an important source of pleasure, except for ironic distance viewers who rated soap talk as their basic motivation behind watching. Soap discourse was a great source of empowerment for them and definitely a legitimate claim to resistance, as it 'socialized' semiotic opposition and gave birth to self-

produced pleasure. Nevertheless, aesthetic and social observer fans were resistant in other ways (by evading ideological discourses and actively controlling pleasure, or by opposing extra-textual ideologies through soap) that did not always involve soap discourse. Then again, we have to keep in mind that these findings are *per se* soap discourse, a point that leads us to the mediating role of the interview, as a way to look into resistance.

I have indicated along the way, and especially in cases of viewers who did not engage often in soap talk, that these accounts are bound in the research setting. Does this mean, therefore, that the phenomenon of resistance is only a methodological artifact that would not exist independently? Before reaching such a conclusion, one must think about the *politics* of watching and talking about soap. Certain people kept their soap watching private and their positions silent because they felt guilty about it, and others who enjoyed and resisted it so conspicuously in public, did so because they needed the reassurance of their social network.

The private nature of soap opera watching can, however, yield private acts of resistance, which take place at a personal level. The small luxury of the daily soap watching ritual has come to mean for some viewers more things than one might expect: it is certainly a symbolic practice, which carries an array of cultural and personal meanings. Moreover, it entails further symbolic practices, which in turn lead to other resistive acts and pleasures. Usually these practices have to do with domestic specificities and relationships.

Consider, for instance, Glykeria and her husband Spyros who have been watching *Lampsi* and *KZ* together for many years. In section 5.5.2 we saw how Glykeria takes pleasure in making comments, swearing, and

recapping the plot while the shows are on, while Spyros gets mad with her 'babbling' trying to follow the dialogue. At some point during the interview, when Spyros left the room for a while, I asked her:

> J: How much do you enjoy talking about it?
> G: Mmmm, I really enjoy it. But you know what I enjoy even better sometimes? No, not just sometimes, all the times. I love it when he gets up to go to the toilet and then comes back and asks me what happened. And I don't tell him! He should have sat there and watched (463-465).

This might seem as an insignificant caprice between a particular couple, but it is a good example of what I mean as an act of private resistance, which in fact takes place at a more generalized context than watching. Glykeria here is resisting her husband's surveillance over her speech. He has been suppressing it when she wants to speak, and demanding it when he so requires. Her tactic in order to resist her husband is to deny the offering of her discourse on his demand; the discourse that she has been denied to offer at her own will. Moreover, what is significant here is that the pleasure that this tactic gives to her is even greater than the discourse she has been denied to produce.

Such tactics of resistance, tactics of the powerless in de Certeau's (1986) terms, may be happening everyday, in every household, in every possible context where power relations are being negotiated. Another example from my fieldwork would be young Anestis who made sure that nobody else in the family would learn how to operate the VCR (setting the timer, recording the soaps, etc.), and proudly declared to me that this exclusive knowledge gave him considerable power over his parents.

By citing these practices I am not making a sweeping argument for resistance, but illustrating that like power and subordination, resistance also begins in

the home. These acts of resistance take place where viewers experience power relations most intensely. For some it may be an oppressive domestic situation, a social representation that validates their beliefs, and for others a lifestyle statement at school. In order to account for these instances though, one must hear about them *from* the members of the audience and look at the broader context of reception without overlooking the articulation of the social formations that contribute to those moments of resistance.

By enabling us to gain a glimpse of the viewers' discursive framework and understanding of their own relationship to soap opera, grounded, qualitative methods reveal the elements of negotiation that are so central in the idea of resistance, a concept that is still fruitful in our study of popular culture.

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Films and Television Programs

O Agnostos Polemos [The unknown war]. (1971-1974), N. Foskolos (dir.), YENED (Greece).

Beverly Hills 90210. (Oct. 4, 1990 – May 17, 2000), A. Spelling (prod.), FOX (US).

The Bold and the Beautiful. (Mar. 23, 1987 -), Bell-Phillip Television Productions, Inc. (prod.), CBS (US).

Days of Our Lives. (Nov. 6, 1965 -), Corday Productions Inc. (Prod.), NBC (US)

Kalimera Zoi [Goodmorning Life]. (Nov. 1993 -), N. Foskolos (dir & writer), ANTENNA TV (Greece)

I Lampsi [Glimmer]. (Sept. 1991 -), N. Foskolos (dir & writer), ANTENNA TV (Greece).

Marimar. (1994), V. Pimstein (prod.), Mexico.

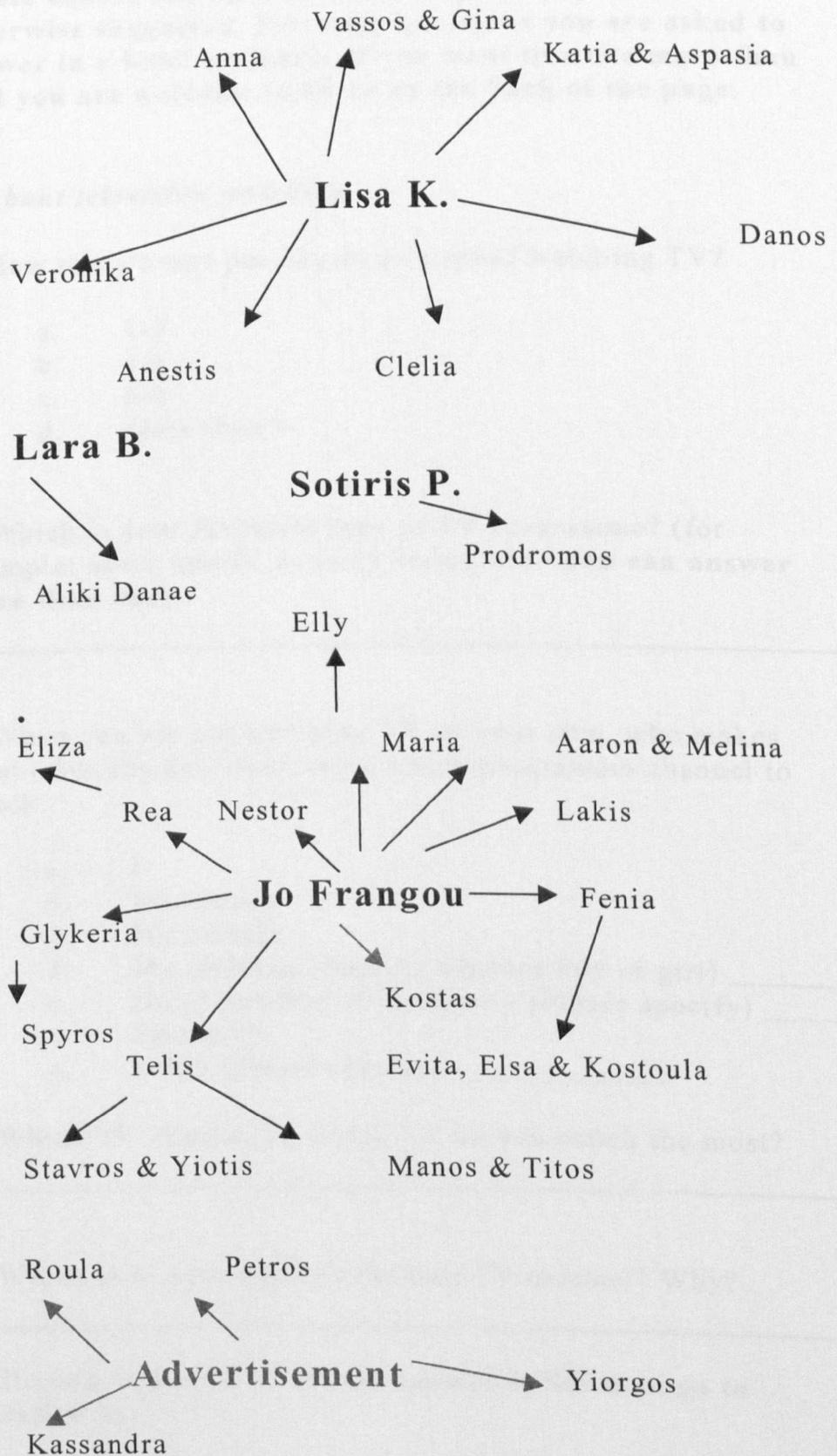*Sunset Beach*. (Jan. 6, 1997 – Dec. 31, 1999), A. Spelling (prod.), NBC (USA).

The Young and the Restless. (Mar. 26, 1973 -), Bell-Phillip Television Productions, Inc. (prod.), CBS (US).

Ypolohagos Natassa [Lieutenant Natassa]. (1970), N. Foskolos (dir & writer), Greece.

Appendix A

355

A1. Sources of participants
A2. Questionnaire
A3. Interview topic guide
A4. Sample interview extracts in English
A5. List of NVivo nodes

A.1 Sources[1] of participants

Anna

Vassos & Gina

Katia & Aspasia

Lisa K.

Veronika

Danos

Anestis

Clelia

Lara B.

Sotiris P.

Prodromos

Aliki Danae

Elly

Eliza

Maria

Aaron & Melina

Rea   Nestor

Lakis

Jo Frangou

Fenia

Glykeria

Spyros

Kostas

Telis

Evita, Elsa & Kostoula

Stavros & Yiotis

Manos & Titos

Roula   Petros

Advertisement

Yiorgos

Kassandra

---

[1] Lisa K., Lara B., and Sotiris P. are friends who introduced me to soap fans. The blue arrows point to the people I was acquainted to before the interview.

A2. Questionnaire

Please choose one answer for each question, unless it is otherwise suggested. For some questions you are asked to answer in a brief sentence. If you want to write more than that you are welcome to do so on the back of the page.

- *About television watching*

1. How many hours per day do you spend watching TV?

      a.   1-3
      b.   4-6
      c.   6-8
      d.   More than 9

2. Which is your favourite **type** of TV programme? (for example: news, sports, comedy series, etc.- **you can answer more than one**)

_____

3. When you are not watching TV on your own, who makes most often the decisions about which programme/channel to watch?

      a.   I
      b.   My spouse
      c.   My partner
      d.   My children (Specify whether boy or girl) _____
      e.   Other member of the family (Please specify) _____
      f.   Friend(s)
      g.   Other (Please specify) _____

4. Which TV channel on Greek TV do you watch the most?

_____

5. Which is in your opinion the best TV channel? Why?

_____

6. Do you own a VCR? **(If the answer is NO then go to question 8)**

      a.   Yes   b.   No

7. Do you own more than one TV sets? How many?

_____

8. List the titles of your three favourite TV programmes in order of preference:

    1)   2)   3)

- *About serials*

9. Which of the following serials (generally referred to as soaps) are you familiar with? If you are not familiar with any of them, then go to question 21.

    a.   *H Lampsi*
    b.   *Kalimera Zoi*
    c.   *The Young and the Restless*
    d.   *The Bold and the Beautiful*
    e.   *Days of Our Lives*
    f.   *Sunset Beach*

10. Do you watch any of the above serials regularly? Which one(s)?

---

11. How often do you watch it? If you watch regularly more than one, then specify how often by writing each title next to the appropriate answer.

    a.   Everyday
    b.   3-4 times per week
    c.   1-2 times per week
    d.   On and off but I keep track of the story

12. Do you ever tape any of these programmes on VCR? **(If the answer is NO, then go to question 13)**

    a.   Yes   b.   No

13. If you tape at least one of those programmes, can you specify how often is that?

---

14. If you are familiar with one of the above programmes, which of the following statements applies better to your viewing?

    a.   Missing a day's episode really matters to me.

    b.   It's OK if I miss two or three episodes in a row but no more than that.

    c.   I try to watch at least once a week - I wish I'd watch more.

    d.   I don't care if I miss episodes - I can always catch on what's happening.

    e.   I follow the storylines but I'm not really a fan of these programmes.

    f.   I don't care if I watch or not, it just happens to be there when I turn on the TV set.

    g.   I don't really care, I only watch because friends/family watch it too.

    h.   Other (please specify) _____

15. Do you enjoy talking about soap operas? **(If the answer is NO, then go to question 18)**

    a.   Yes   b.   No

16. Do you talk about soaps with your: **(You can choose more than one answer)**

    a.   Husband/wife

    b.   Partner

    c.   Women friends

    d.   Male friends

    e.   Colleagues

    f.   Other members of family (Please specify) _____

    g.   Other (Please specify) _____

17. Do you find yourself discussing more about Greek or foreign soaps?

    a. About Greek soaps   b. About foreign soaps

18. Do you usually watch soap operas:

    a.   Alone

    b.   With husband/wife

    c.   With partner

    d.   With friends

e. With other members of family (please specify)

_____

f. Other (Please specify) _____

19. Is this the way that you actually prefer watching?

a. Yes   b. No

20. Do soap operas make you laugh?

a. Yes   b. No

21. Comparing Greek soaps (e.g., *H Lampsi, Kalimera Zoi)* and foreign soaps (e.g., *The Bold and the Beautiful, The Young and the Restless,* etc.) tick in the appropriate box in order to show which ones you prefer in terms of:

	Greek soaps	Foreign soaps
Better quality of production		
Better acting		
More realistic plot		
More interesting plot		
Better dialogue		
More stylish		
More interesting characters		
More attractive actors		

22. In your own words how would you compare Greek and foreign soaps?

_____

_____

_____

• *About yourself*

23. What is your occupation?

_____

24. Which of the following categories best describes your overall income?

a. Less than 200,000 dr. per month
b. 200,000 < 500,000 dr. per month
c. 500,000 < 1,000,000 dr. per month
d. More than 1,000,000 dr. per month

25. Which of the following categories best describes your education:

    a.   Primary school diploma
    b.   Gymnasium diploma
    c.   Lyceum diploma
    d.   Have attended TEI (Technical education institute)
    e.   Have attended College/University
    f.   Post-graduate degree
    g.   Other (Please specify)

26. Your marital status:

    a.   Single
    b.   Cohabiting
    c.   Married
    d.   Separated
    e.   Divorced
    f.   Widowed
    g.   Other (Please specify)

27. In which age category do you belong:

    a.   15-22
    b.   23-35
    c.   36-45
    d.   46-60
    e.   More than 61

28. Some personal information:

Name: _____
Address:_____
_____
Phone #:_____

29. Would you be willing to take part in my project by allowing me to interview you about soap operas?

    a.   Yes   b.   No

30. Can you think of other people (friends, family, colleagues, etc.) who would be interested in participating and talking about soap operas?

    a.   Yes   b.   No

That's all! Thank you for completing this questionnaire. If you have any questions don't hesitate to contact me. If you would like to write some things about soap operas in your own words, you are more than welcome to do so, just turn the page!

A.3 Interview topic guide

I used the following guide for generating responses and keeping track of the interview. I rarely asked these questions in this specific wording and order. If the interviewee seemed eager to talk I gladly let her/him talk as much as s/he liked about a topic. On the other hand if s/he were reluctant to talk about something that interested me, I would change topic. Different issues came up at different points of the interview, and I didn't want to interfere with questions that would seem out of context.

- **Television** (as ice breaker)

What is the role of television in your life?
How many hours per day do you watch?
Favourite shows, etc.

- **Soaps**

How many / How often / Since when?

(Usually, after the above 'orienting' questions the interviewee names a particular title as being his or her favourite soap. The rest of the questions and answers refer mainly to this specific show)

What is the place of your soap in a typical day (e.g., organisation of tasks and housework according to time of show)

Do you consider yourself part of the soap's audience?

If yes, how do you feel about it? If no, what is it that distinguishes you from the audience?

How does your environment (friends & family) react to your soap watching? How do you feel about their opinion?

Do any of your friends watch that show?

What is the role they play in your viewing?

Who are your favourite characters?

With whom do you identify?

Do you talk about them as being people close to you?

Are the stories featured in soaps close to your life? Have you ever found yourself in similar situations? Do some move you more than others?

- **Talking about soaps**

Do you enjoy talking about soaps?

When, in what situations, in what way?

Do you gossip about it, e.g., about characters' hair, looks, behaviour, etc.?

With whom do you talk about?

When you talk about your soap, do you relate it to issues of your personal life?

How much of the pleasure of watching a soap comes out of talking about it?

- **Pleasure**

What is the main reason that makes your soap fun to watch?

Do you watch to see what is going to happen, or to see how it's going to happen?

Do you prefer trying to discover something you don't know about a character, or knowing something about a character and watching how the rest of the characters will discover it? (provide example, e.g., murder = pleasure in involvement, or 'detective's pleasure'?)

Which storyline on .... have you enjoyed the most?

Do you like romantic storylines? Romance in soaps.

Do you enjoy the stylistic part of your soap, e.g. clothes, hair, etc.

Villains.

Does your soap make you laugh? How, when, in what context, etc.

- **Soap knowledge**

What do you know about the show's production?

What criteria do you use in making aesthetic judgments?

Do you read about your soap? Where, how often, etc.

Do you figure out what's going to happen in storylines? How?

Plot development, character growth and change.

- **Greek Vs Foreign Soaps**

Preferences

How they differ?

What kind of pleasures do they offer or what needs do they cover?

About which do you talk more?

Which one is closer to your life?

Which is more fun?

A.4 Sample interview extracts in English

1. Stavros Limas, Yiotis Kardoulis & Telis Maninas

Why has *KZ* drawn you more than *Lampsi*?

Y/ I would say that it's more about the heroes in *KZ*, they are more impressive. I mean, Stathis Theoharis, The Mullet, and such things. The Jedi, Haris. And generally, the heroes in *KZ* are much more kitsch than in *Lampsi* and more low budget.

S/ And generally, I think *Lampsi* has lost it, it addresses one sort of audience, it's for Sharons and Traceys who watch the rich guys there, Yiagos, and why should we ever care...

T/ Yeah, it is a *Dynasty* copycat.

S/ A *Dynasty* copycat which is very cheap and which has nothing to give.

Y/ And it's not such a laugh.

S/ It's not a laugh at all.

T/ Well, the other one (*KZ*) is more realistic.

Y/ Basically the other one is about coppers! *[we all burst into laughter]*

Yes, but in *Lampsi* too there are many cops

S/ Basically *KZ* relies not so much in the script as in its characters, I mean, it has characters. Like Elektra, Nakos *[burst into laughter again]*

T/ Yeah sure, if it weren't for them...

S/ Foskolos has done a very good job with the characters in *KZ*. Whereas in *Lampsi* he doesn't sketch them as well as he used to. Yiagos for example, he's out of it, we don't know who Yiagos is anymore, we just don't know.

Virna has left

S/ Yeah, Virna left.

T/ It's clearly *KZ*. And the people in *KZ* are more extreme.

S/ And Vasileiou has identified to such an extent with his part, that he actually goes on TV shows still being *KZ*'s Theoharis.

And since when have you been watching *KZ*?

S/ It's been one year.

No, longer, longer! *[all together]*

T/ I believe it's two to three years.

Y/ Yeah, two to two and a half years.

And how often do you watch, considering you all study abroad.

S/ Well, during the summer we watch it everyday, every single day.

Y/ No, not I, not everyday, 'cause I didn't always catch it. But in winter too, I might say that thanks to Takis who brought tapes we remained informed. Also they would tell me on the phone what's going on and the scenes and I had some touch *[laughter]*. I can't say that I lost touch with it and that I came back in the summer having no clue. No I did have some contact and I had learned about Nakos, I really had.

T/ So, you came prepared.

Right, so who is the one who tapes it more often?

S-Y/ Takis, Takis, way more often.

Y/ Even his mom tapes it.

S/ He tapes stuff, not just *KZ*.

Why do you record all this on video?

T/ Right, because it is an infinite source of laughter. For me these people, acting wise, are terribly over the edge, in my opinion they're not actors. Basically it's a source of laughter which is good to tape because in a few years you will have such a laugh with this and it will be a relic. It's a surreal situation.

S/ OK, so some people are extreme in *KZ*, but not all.

T/ It is cult.

2. Danos Arampatzis

Now, regarding serials in particular.

From serials, I watch *KZ*. It's my favorite, I should say, which is drawn from life itself, it's got everything, about the downfall of the police, about this and that. I used to watch *Lampsi* too but now it's stooped very low and I don't watch it

that much. My late wife watched it with great pleasure. I didn't particularly.

So, you find it in decline.

Yes, Foskolos has taken it too far, he has to end it somewhere. All things in life have a beginning and an end. If they don't end and he stretches it, he stretches it, at some point it becomes boring. He changes the actors' faces[2] all the time, you turn on the TV and you see another one and another one. He pretends...

Does it bother you when actors are replaced?

Why, of course, it doesn't please me at all. Because when I know that you are so and so, and tomorrow Mrs. Karoutzou takes your name, what is this? It's helter skelter.

Yeah, sure. But in relation to *Lampsi*, *KZ*...

It's different, it has...

Tell me why you like it.

Lampsi is a soap opera, by American standards, like the American one, how was it called?

Dynasty?

Dynasty. In that serial it's... This one, *KZ* is drawn from Greek society. It depicts Greek society, and Greek society only.

So, you believe that it is very close to Greek reality.

Very much so, it's like real life. All the episodes depict everyday life in *KZ*.

And you think it's realistic?

I find it very nice. Very, very nice. Very contemporary and satisfactory, at least for me personally, others might say other things. But it does satisfy me and I sit everyday and watch it. In the weekends for example, when it's not on, it doesn't feel right.

You miss it.

I do, I say 'why isn't it on?'

---

[2] He's referring to the replacement of actors, which is very common in *Lampsi* and *Kalimera Zoi*.

You said that it annoys you when they change the actors in *Lampsi,* **have the characters attained a real dimension for you?**

Regarding the truth[3], whether they convey the truth?

No, I mean, like the brigadier, all the protagonists, if you think about them as they were real, if they have a real dimension, since in a way they come into your house everyday.

Yes, yes, they have a real dimension, in contrast to SKAI, which has the same serial, but as a comedy[4]. There is an actor, Seferlis, who makes all kinds of nonsense and rubbish, and all, who wants to strike Foskolos. They can't hit Foskolos so they hit his work. Foskolos is a veteran. If he was in America he would have excelled, he would be number one, there'd be no other one. Because it's true that he is a..., not that I know the man personally, but from what I see of him on TV, from his films that I remember, they all have substance.

He has a long past.

A great past in the film industry. Now he got into TV.

Earlier too, with *Agnostos Polemos.*

Yes, *AP.* Shall I tell you something about AP?

Please do.

It was night, I was in church, it was the vespers service, and at one point the priest says: 'come on guys, it's time for AP' and he finishes the service to go and listen to AP, with Antonopoulos *[actor from AP]* and all. You see, even clergymen...

were into it! *[laughing]*

It was the first and the most loved one.

Everyone brings it up.

It was the Junta then, '69, '70.

---

[3] In Greek 'true' and 'real' mean the same thing in some cases.
[4] He refers to a weekly social satire in SKAI channel that includes a sketch that parodies *KZ.*

Well, in that case, no, I wasn't born then, but I hear about it so often. Tell me, how long have you been watching _KZ_?

_KZ_ has had 1200 episodes and I've seen all 1200. Well, I might have missed 10-20 but I watch it unfailingly!

And who are your favourite characters?

Well, look, Evaggelidis, who is the chief of the police. He acts impeccably. While he's a comedian, here in a serious character he's doing very well. I also like the other one, the grumpy one, I forget his name...

Stathis?

Yes, Stathis, he's great in the role of the brigadier. He plays very, very well. From the women this nurse is really nice, the one who fell down and is paralyzed now...

3. Veronika Makridi

Would it matter if you got negative comments?

Well, the truth is that I know that it is sort of fairy-tale like. I was watching the other day an everyday serial, there was a pervert and he had abducted someone and wanted to rape her. And he had tied her up, in such a way, her hands were like that and he had taped her mouth like that, and come on, couldn't she take off the tape? _[laughing]_. I mean, they go too far and they make you react. In _Marimar too_, there are things, I mean, she is a pretty girl, but it can't happen, from one day to the next she becomes a lady... what can I say... is it maybe what we don't have?

Do you have friends who watch.

Not really.

So you don't talk about it.

Not really, we're not involved at all.

So, when you see it with Fotoula, don't you make any comments?

We do. When it stops for adverts I tend to go to the kitchen and do some work, but even if you miss a bit in between it's no big deal, you understand, they'll let you know in the process.

Who are your favourite characters?

Always the good ones. The protagonists who always get to be nice. Well, OK, they might not always be.

Like *Marimar*?

Yes, and that young guy Sergio. If you watch as a human being, even when the bad guy acting wise is very good, when you watch someone burning, and killing, and humiliating, it's down to your nature. You have to be mean in order to identify with the bad guy, you have to have mean feelings.

But do you identify with *Marimar* and Sergio, who are good?

I don't know if I as a character could go to such extremes, to act as complete strangers, because when he saw her face he kind of recognised her and said, 'it's not possible, it's not *Marimar*, it can't be, that shoe-less girl to have become a lady'. I mean, I could never keep it from him, to keep it till the end, because she will reveal who she is at the end. But she acts so cruel now, I could never be so cruel, to tell him...

So, when you watch, do you tend to think what would you do in a similar situation?

Yes I might do that.

Are the stories close to your life?

Not really. There are some things of course, *Marimar* is close in this one, couldn't it be that someone we loved let us down? Isn't that so? And then treat you in this way? But now, to be poor and become rich just like that... maybe one in a million chance. Or maybe not knowing who your father is. Many people haven't met their parents.

Is there something in the serial that annoys you?

Well, yeah, it's the hyperbole and the fact they're dragging it a bit. It's the same thing happening all the time, I'd like it to be faster.

Do you guess what's going to happen?

Almost always!

And do you like seeing how something will get to be done, how it will be orchestrated?

Yeah, yeah. And it just strikes me sometimes, the imagination of those writers, so many episodes! OK, they include all these far fetched things, but they do get your interest. Especially this

guy Foskolos, man, where does he come up with these things? He puts in stories, more stories. 'Cause, it's different, *Marimar* is just a single story, the other one has more stories and you've got to have imagination too!

A.5 List of NVivo Nodes

This NVivo-generated report lists all the nodes that I created while coding the interviews.

NODE LISTING

Nodes in Set: All Free Nodes
Created: 16/6/2000 - 2:04:18
Modified: 30/1/2002 - 2:28:29
Number of Nodes: 126

1	Accommodation of foreign elements
2	Aesthetic viewing position
3	Age
4	Agnostos Polemos
5	American dream
6	Audience distinction
7	Awareness of construction
8	Beating up
9	Being part of the soap community
10	Breaking rules
11	Changing characters
12	Common agenda
13	Control
14	Creating text
15	Critique
16	Cultural Capital
17	Cultural Expertise
18	Cultural specificity
19	Current affairs
20	Defending the Greek soap
21	Degrading
22	Desire
23	Desire for Other
24	Detective pleasures
25	Didactic role of soap
26	Drama
27	Emotional Identification
28	Emotional reactions
29	Escape
30	Evaluation of morals
31	Evil riches
32	Familiarity with characters
33	Fan discourse
34	Fan practices
35	Fanship identity
36	Forgotten values
37	Foskolos
38	Gendered watching
39	Good and bad characters
40	Good and Evil
41	Gossip
42	Greek movies
43	Greek Vs Foreign
44	Greekness
45	Guessing
46	Hyperbole

106	Social issues
107	Social network
108	Social observer viewing position
109	Social role of TV
110	Strategy of realism
111	Suspense
112	Taking part in unfolding
113	Talking about soap
114	Talking overrated
115	Television general
116	Testing out possibilities
117	Textual pleasures
118	The past
119	Uses of soap
120	VCR use
121	Vicariousness
122	Viewing position shift
123	Viewing positions
124	Viewing positions negotiation
125	Viewing processes
126	We Vs Them

NODE LISTING

Nodes in Set: All Tree Nodes
Created: 16/6/2000 - 2:04:18
Modified: 30/1/2002 - 2:30:45
Number of Nodes: 35

1	(1) /Fan involvement
2	(1 1) /Fan involvement/'Pathology' of soap watching
3	(1 2) /Fan involvement/TV makes you stupid
4	(1 3) /Fan involvement/Emotional attachment
5	(1 4) /Fan involvement/Saving face
6	(1 5) /Fan involvement/Soap as addiction
7	(2) /Viewing positions
8	(2 1) /Viewing positions/Social observer viewing position
9	(2 1 1) /Viewing positions/Social observer viewing position/Soap discourse as social commentary
10	(2 1 2) /Viewing positions/Social observer viewing position/Projection to real life
11	(2 1 3) /Viewing positions/Social observer viewing position/Observing the evil
12	(2 2) /Viewing positions/Ironic distance
12	(2 2 1) /Viewing positions/Ironic distance/Active transformation of the text
14	(2 3) /Viewing positions/Viewing position shift
15	(2 4) /Viewing positions/Aesthetic viewing position
16	(2 5) /Viewing positions/Viewing positions negotiation
17	(3) /Talking about soap
18	(3 1) /Talking about soap/Talking overrated
19	(4) /Gender
20	(4 1) /Gender/Gender
21	(4 2) /Gender/Gender in soaps
22	(4 3) /Gender/Gender resistance
23	(4 4) /Gender/Gender, nation, family

24	(4 5) /Gender/Gender - Patriarchy
25	(4 6) /Gender/Gendered watching
26	(4 7) /Gender/Soap and women's roles-duties
27	(4 8) /Gender/Soap as break
28	(5) /Social aspect of soap watching
29	(6) /Resistance
30	(6 1) /Resistance/Resistance - See through ideology
31	(6 2) /Resistance/Agency of pleasure
32	(7) /Class
33	(7 1) /Class/Soap in daily life
34	(8) /Nation
35	(8 1) /Nation/The past

Appendix B

B1. Soap opera ratings in 90's Greece

	TOTAL	M 15-24	F 15-24	M 25-44	F 25-44	M 45+	F 45+
1991	45.1	33.1	62.7	29	48.1	37.6	54.8
1992	54.6	46.1	61.3	39.1	53.7	51.2	61.8
1993	48.3	38.1	46	31.3	48.8	46.4	65.1
1994	46.5	26.3	42.2	30.3	48.7	46.5	61.8
1995	36.5	22.2	38	20.7	34.5	34.7	50.3
1996	38	16	23.2	20.3	34.3	40.5	58.1
1997	30.1	16.4	21.1	30.4	42.6	51.3	43.1
1998	33.1	16.3	20.2	29.4	29.6	30.4	46.6
1999	30.7	13.2	23	21.1	25.8	27.6	46.4
2000	25.7	13.8	17.5	17.6	20.7	26.2	35.8
2001	34	20.3	31.2	24.6	28.5	32.5	43.1

Table B1.1: Percentage market shares of *Lampsi* for male and female viewers (Source: AGB Hellas)

	TOTAL	M 15-24	F 15-24	M 25-44	F 25-44	M 45+	F 45+
1992	32.6	15.7	40.8	20.3	37.3	26.3	42.4
1993	30	21	37.1	13.7	36	23.5	41.9
1994	25.2	13.9	26.5	12.3	28.4	26.3	34.3
1995	24.9	13.4	25.2	12.1	28.8	24.3	32.7
1996	19.3	10.5	23	13.5	23.9	14.5	23.5
1997	22.8	12.2	20.8	12.5	31.5	25.2	25.2
1998	23	5.4	21.2	16	27.4	24.1	29.2
1999	20.3	8.9	18.4	11.6	21.4	18.6	28.9
2000	22.2	10.5	18.8	11.8	23.7	18.3	32.2
2001	17	8.7	12.5	10.6	17.7	14.3	26.3

Table B1.2: Percentage market shares of *The Young and the Restless* for male and female viewers (Source: AGB Hellas)

	TOTAL	M 15-24	F 15-24	M 25-44	F 25-44	M 45+	F 45+
1994	38.8	25.2	33.8	26.1	39.4	37.9	51.3
1995	39.8	21	32	19.2	30	46	59.4
1996	41.7	23.5	33.4	23.6	40.3	43.3	55.9
1997	44.9	29.2	27.9	30.4	42.6	51.3	57.1
1998	38	18.5	17.5	31.7	34.9	41	53.8
1999	37	22	29.9	24.9	29.8	36.5	53.5
2000	30.9	18.2	19.9	22.1	25.9	31.3	43.1
2001	31.6	19	21.7	20.6	22.3	23.6	34.9

Table B1.3: Percentage market shares of *Kalimera Zoi* for male and female viewers (Source: AGB Hellas)

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|	Total	Men	Women	M-25	W-25	M-35	W-35	M-44	W +44	+45
1991 ERT1	52.1	52.2	55.2	41.4	41.4	38.6	41.0	50.0	41.9	71.4
1992 ANT.	43.6	45.7	44.2	44.7	37.9	43.7	29.7	35.5	32.5	54.5
1993 ANT.	57.8	51.2	68.5	39.4	73.6	43.3	72.3	43.7	67.9	65.0
1994 STAR	29.9	20.3	39.7	8.9	33.0	8.2	27.1	6.8	21.1	45.4
1995 STAR	41.9	28.3	52.6	19.5	53.8	21.7	51.4	23.3	48.9	45.6
1996 STAR	38.0	32.2	43.7	26.4	36.8	27.5	37.0	23.5	33.6	47.9
1997 STAR	23.0	22.1	25.3	11.8	10.9	11.6	17.1	10.7	27.0	30.7
1998 STAR	24.6	20.9	28.9	3.6	22.0	5.6	24.7	18.9	27.4	31.2

Table B1.3: Percentage market shares of *The Bold and the Beautiful* for male and female viewers (Source: STAR CHANNEL)

	TOTAL	M 15-24	F 15-24	M 25-44	F 25-44	M 45+	F 45+
1997	14.7	8.5	19.2	10.6	17.2	12.3	17.4
1998	14.9	4.9	21.7	13.6	22.8	9.2	15.8
1999	13.8	8.7	20.3	7.3	19.4	10.7	15.3

Table B1.4: Percentage market shares of *Days of our Lives* for male and female viewers (Source: AGB Hellas)

## B2. Soap ratings according to social class over a representative monthly period, from 1998 to 2001

March 1998

March 1999
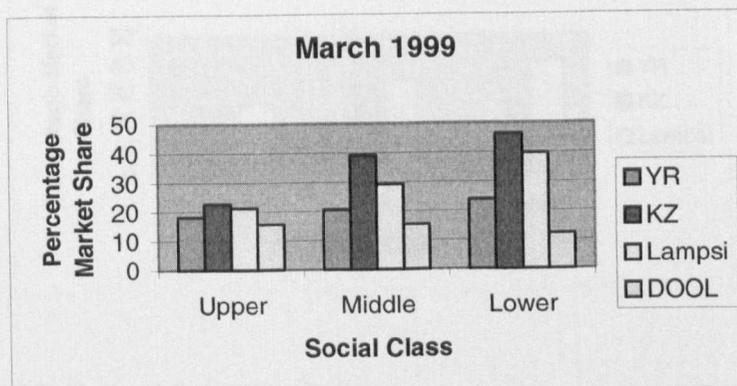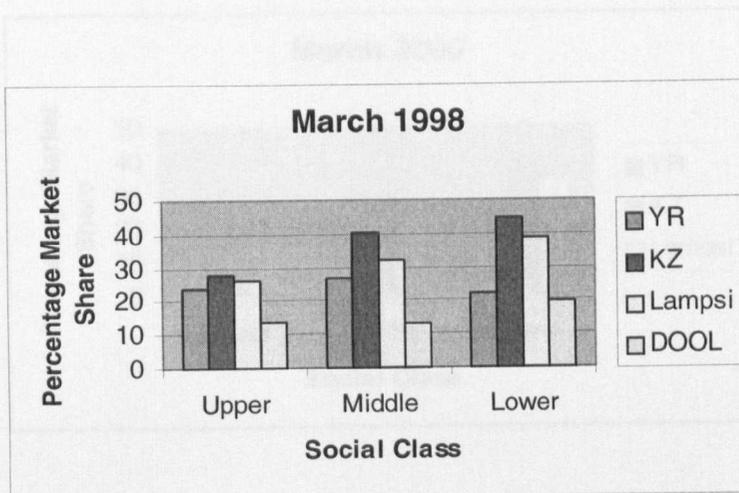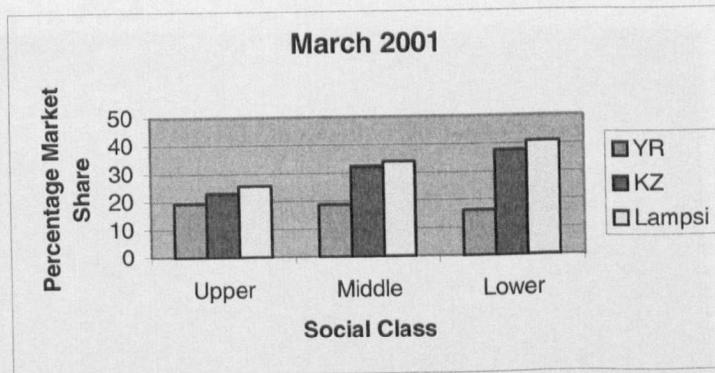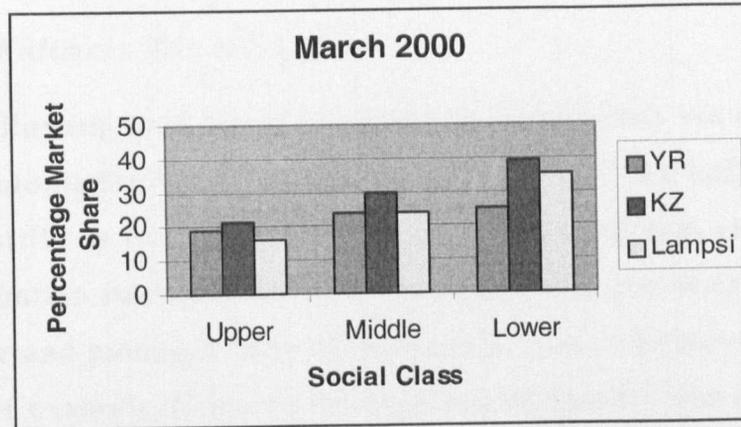
Source: AGB Hellas Media Services.

- *Kalimera Zoi* and *Lampsi*

The following pictures are circulating among fans via e-mail. Rea Antoniadou kindly forwarded them to me. The balloons on these stills do not correspond to the actual dialogue, rather they contain intensely obscene language that parodies the sombre and pompous tone of the serials. These endeavours are another example of ironic distance fan practices. (Note: the photographs were already numbered)

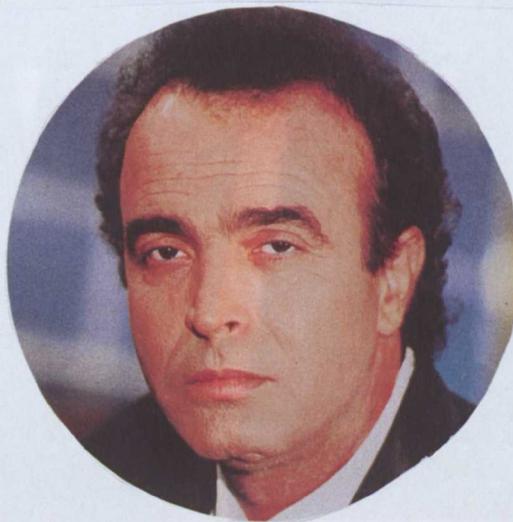Pictures 2-6: *Lampsi*. Violence towards women appears regularly in *Foskolos*' works.
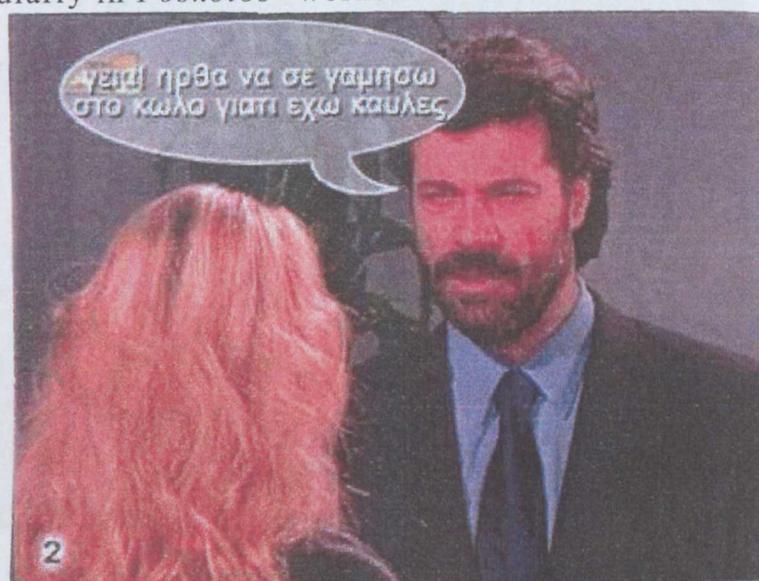
Pictures 1-5: Police headquarters in *Lampsi*
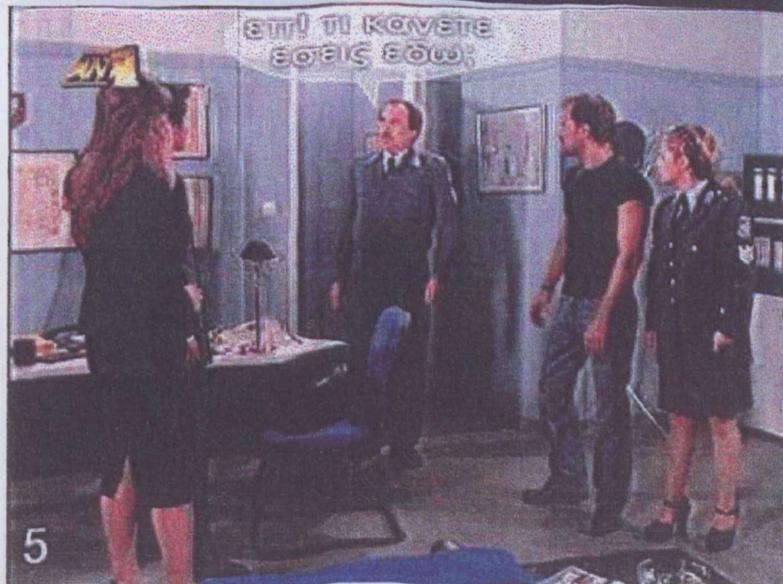
Pictures 1-4: *Kalimera Zoi*: Intense dialogue between Stathis Theoharis and a young woman who fell in love with him and almost cost him his marriage.

Above: Stathis Theoharis (Source: *Dolce Vita*, Jan. 25-31)

Above: The rich family Archos, in *Kalimera Zoi* (Source: http://www.in.gr/tvguide

- *The Young and the Restless*

Below: A shot of the entire cast (Source: http://www.geocities.com/TelevisionCity/Studio/)

Above: Nikki and Victor

- *Sunset Beach*

Below: Ben, always popular with the ladies