Everyday Consumption in Twenty-First-Century Brazilian Fiction

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Chapter Five

Working-Class Consumption

“Just think about their priorities: they may even go without food, but they have money to buy CDs and DVDs,” “They’re alienated, easy to manipulate,” “They don’t have culture,” “Now we have to put up with these people in airplanes too. And look at how they dress!” If you have spent enough time around certain middle-class Brazilians in recent decades, or even poked around social media, you probably heard—or read—comments such as these about the working class. They express the profound social hierarchy that exists in Brazilian society, which becomes painfully obvious when it comes to consumption. In the literary field, when writers from the periferia (economically impoverished areas in large urban centers) attempt to gain some ground, this social hierarchy materializes into something along the lines of “they don’t know how to write properly. They make a lot of grammar mistakes.” As critic Regina Dalcastagnè contends, Brazilian literature, in general, can be characterized as “a classe média olhando para a classe média” “the middle class looking at the middle class” (“Uma voz” 35). Much less often than ideal has the working class been represented in canonical works. As Dalcastagnè shows, when this class does make it to the pages of the canon, its members are often represented as exotic, violent, criminal, animalistic, of bad taste, clearly marked as separate, different, distanced from the middle-class narrators—and writers—that tell their story (49). Even scarcer is their (legitimized) presence in the literary field as producers of literature. Arguing for the need for a more inclusive definition of literature, Dalcastagnè notes:

Aqueles que estão objetivamente excluídos do universo do fazer literário, pelo domínio precário de determinadas formas de expressão, acreditam que seriam também incapazes de produzir
literatura. No entanto, eles são incapazes de produzir literatura exatamente porque não a produzem: isto é, a definição de ‘literatura’ exclui suas formas de expressão. (“Uma voz” 37)

Those who are concretely excluded from the literary realm in general, due to their precarious command of certain forms of expression, believe that they would be incapable of producing literature as well. However, they are incapable of doing so exactly because they do not do it; that is, the definition of the concept of “literature” excludes their forms of expression.

All the writers addressed in previous chapters belong to the middle class. Three of them—Bonassi, Sant’Anna, and Maia—portray working-class characters in the stories analyzed here. As we have seen, all three writers approach these characters with a middle-class gaze that frames them as either brutes or easily duped consumers whose irresponsible spending with “superfluous” goods contributes to Brazil’s economic crisis. In this chapter, I turn to working-class writer Faustini’s representation of working-class consumption in *Guia afetivo da periferia* (*Affective Guide of the Periferia*). I contend that Faustini’s portrayal of consumption is the most dynamic and complex of the ones in the corpus selected for this study. To put it in Miller’s words, rather than representing consumers as “too close to the still life or portrait,” Faustini “strive[s] to follow relationships through their expression in everyday worlds” (*Theory* 141). He represents consumption primarily as an act of love (155). In other words, by acquiring and consuming commodities, Faustini’s characters cultivate interpersonal relationships, highlighting that, as Douglas and Isherwood have argued, consumption is a social activity (xxiii) and, as such, it is affected by malleable social codes that do not necessarily reduce it to manipulation and irrationality. As an urban ethnography (Soares 15), Faustini’s work under study represents consumption as everyday practice: a dynamic, contradictory, and fluid activity. It implies that “shopping is not about possessions *per se*, nor is it to be about identity *per se*. It is about obtaining goods or imagining the possession and use of goods” (Miller, *Theory* 141). In this imagination, Faustini identifies the “crises,” that is, the little interruptions of everyday life (Gumbrecht 302) that aesthetic experiences with commodities can yield. From this perspective, out of all the texts analyzed here, *Guia afetivo* constructs the most hopeful critique of
everyday life in consumer capitalism in the sense that, where there is fluidity, there is also the potential for change and reinvention. For this reason, I call *Guia afetivo* a narrative of transformative hope with respect to its depiction of life in consumer culture.

Faustini’s text, indeed, carries the idea of hope and transformation in many ways, as critics of his work have pointed out. In her study of citizenship in contemporary Brazilian literature, Leila Lehnen argues that Faustini establishes concrete and metaphorical bridges between disparate terrains of the city that are commonly viewed as socially severed from each other. In doing so, he creates spaces of agency and presents himself as a citizen of the entire city rather than as an individual relegated to economically impoverished areas (*Citizenship* 160). In her reading of *Guia afetivo*, owning commodities implies strengthening the characters’ sense of citizenship, especially through home ownership, home improvement, and the improvement of public spaces (179). For Dalcastagnè, the city in *Guia afetivo* is a space of possibilities, inscribed in the protagonist’s free exploration of the *urbe* (“Deslocamentos urbanos” 35). Like Lehnen and Dalcastagnè, Vinicius Mariano de Carvalho proposes to read the protagonist’s wandering as an incarnation of the Afro-Brazilian *orixá* Exu’s transformative power and his impetus for movement (42). My reading of *Guia afetivo* proposes that this transformative force and this agency are also encoded in Faustini’s representation consumption as everyday practice.

*Guia afetivo* takes place in the city of Rio de Janeiro and tells us the memories of an unnamed protagonist, who is confounded with the author. Like Faustini, the main character also has a working-class origin. He grew up in Baixada Fluminense and Santa Cruz, areas inhabited predominantly by the lower-middle class, that is, by those who are able to hold a precarious middle-class status (Lehnen, *Citizenship* 178). Rio de Janeiro is often represented in various cultural productions as a fragmented city, divided between the rich and “legal” Zona Sul (South Zone) and the low-income and “illegal” Zona Norte (North Zone), a division that Faustini’s narrative contests (171). In reality, these borders are much more fluid, for many from the *periferia* work low-paying jobs in the Zona Sul and many dwellers of the middle- and upper-class zone cross into the *periferia* as drug consumers (K. Bezerra 6). Like other cultural productions originating in the *periferia* today (9),¹ Faustini’s narrative questions
stereotyped representations of low-income inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro as criminals, uneducated, and violent (Lehnen, *Citizenship* 167). This contestation includes the acknowledgment of the contradictions of a socioeconomic reality that makes the protagonist, for instance, feel a certain sense of superiority while watching, from his grandparents’ window when he was a child, slum dwellers suffer the consequences of flooding (Faustini 177).

Understanding the socioeconomic context in which *Guia afetivo* was published is important for grasping its representation of consumption. The book was released in a moment of Brazilian history when an estimated 20 million consumers ascended from class D (the second to last social class in the Brazilian social pyramid) to class C (the next higher one) in six years, thus creating a new market to which different sectors of the Brazilian economy began to cater (Oliven and Pinheiro-Machado 53) This shift, as mentioned in Chapter 1, was the result of the prioritization of social policies during President Lula’s administration, which were continued by his successor, President Rousseff. For the sociologist Emir Sader, these administrations were constructing a post-neoliberal hegemony, in the sense that they also avoided fiscal austerity, prioritized South-South integration over free trade with the United States, and enhanced the role of the state in economic growth via income distribution, as opposed to emphasizing the idea of small government and the invisible hand of the market (“A construção” 138). According to Sader,

Os governos Lula e Dilma representam uma ruptura com essas décadas [1980 e 1990], promovendo uma inflexão marcante na evolução da formação social brasileira. Por mais que o modelo neoliberal siga dominante em escala mundial e nosso próprio país ainda sofra os reflexos das transformações regressivas realizadas pelos governos neoliberais, os governos do Lula e da Dilma nos colocaram na contramão das tendências mundiais. (“A construção” 141)

The Lula and Dilma administrations represent a rupture with these decades [the 1980s and the 1990s], promoting a marked change in the evolution of the Brazilian social formation. Although the neoliberal model continues to dominate at a global scale and our own country still suffers the consequences of the regressive transformations implemented by neoliberal governments, the Lula and Dilma administrations have placed us in the opposite direction of these global trends.
Working-Class Consumption

These socioeconomic shifts gave more visibility to the sectors of Brazilian society that most directly benefited from the Workers’ Party social policies, as evidenced, for instance, by the success of Funk Ostentação (ostentation funk), which originated in the slums of São Paulo. This music exults conspicuous consumption within a narrative of personal success out of poverty, as funk artist Bio G-3’s words illustrate: “Com essa ascensão econômica e tal … eu acho que a periferia quis mostrar isso, quis mostrar que pode, entendeu? … nem que de repente seja um esforço pra ter … hoje em dia é mais fácil de ter condição de ter um carrinho maneiro, que antigamente era mais difícil” (“With this economic ascension and all … I think that the periferia wanted to shows this, wanted to show that it can [consume/be visible], you know? … even if [acquiring goods] is difficult … today it is easier to be able to afford a cool car, which used to be more difficult”; Bio G-3, Funk Ostentação: O filme 00:29:12–00:29:31).

In music videos produced outside the circuit of big production companies, artists such as MC Guimê sing about luxury goods, which appear in the videos:

Contando os plaquê de 100, dentro de um Citroën
Aí nós convida, porque sabe que elas vêm.
De transporte nós tá bem, de Hornet ou 1100 Kawasaki, tem Bandit, RR tem também (“Plaquê de 100”)  
Counting 100 [reais] bills, inside a Citroën car

We invite [the girls] ’cause we know they’ll come.
We’ve got good wheels, riding a Hornet or a 1100 Kawasaki, we have Bandit, we have RR too

Quando dá uma hora da manhã é que o bonde se prepara pra vibe
Abotoa sua pólo listrada dá um nó no cadarço do tênis da Nike  
Joga o cabelo pra cima ou põe um boné que combina com a roupa (“Tá patrão”)

When it’s one o’clock in the morning it’s when the bonde gets ready for the party
Button up your striped polo shirt, tie your Nike shoes
Flip your hair up or put on a cap that matches your clothes
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Ostentation Funk artists, mostly from São Paulo, commonly describe their music as providing a positive perspective on life in the favelas, contrasting it with Rio de Janeiro’s funk’s celebration of violence and drugs. They see it as the realization of the dream of a better life, where goods provide pleasure, happiness, and self-esteem amidst daily hardships (Funk Ostentação: O filme 2012). As Pinheiro-Machado and Scalco point out, ostentation funk “celebrates the right to happiness, luxury consumption, positive individual feelings, favela pride, and class boldness” (“The Right”). In this way, while many aspects of funk ostentação can be questioned, not the least of which the highly problematic ways in which women are often portrayed in songs and music videos by some of the male artists, the genre expresses a certain happiness that comes with the comfort of being able to afford (nice) things, and to gain some form of visibility in a highly excluding society.

Similarly, rap lyrics claim the right to own commodities while denouncing the violence and social injustice of those who live in the favelas. The rap group Racionais MC’s, for instance, recognizes that happiness in capitalism equals consuming, an association that is imprinted in one’s mind:

Não é questão de luxo
Não é questão de cor
É questão que fartura
Alegra o sofredor
Não é questão de preza, nêgo
A ideia é essa
Miséria traz tristeza e vice-versa
Inconscientemente vem na minha mente inteira
Na loja de tênis o olhar do parceiro feliz
De poder comprar o azul, o vermelho
O balcão, o espelho
O estoque, a modelo, não importa
Dinheiro é puta e abre as portas
Dos castelos de areia que quiser. (“Vida loka II”)

It is not a matter of luxury
It is not a matter of color
It’s a matter of abundance
It makes the one suffering happy
It is not a matter of looking good, dawg
This is the idea
Poverty only brings unhappiness and vice-versa
Unconsciously my mind thinks
About my buddy’s look of happiness in the shoe story
For being able to buy the blue, the red one
The counter, the mirror
The stock, the model, it doesn’t matter
Money is a whore and it opens the doors
Of any sandcastle you want.

In another song, titled “Otus 500” (“That’s another story”; literally “Other 500”), Racionais MC’s portrays the desires of a subject from the *periferia*, who takes matters of social justice into their own hands by entering a rich man’s house and claiming his belongings, the house, the refrigerator, a DVD. This subject dreams of owning the same things that the man owns: a pool, fancy silverware, several pairs of shoes, ties, two Mercedes-Benz vehicles, jewelry, Armani and Hugo Boss clothes, among other commodities.

With considerably less visibility in the media and with a focus on several issues besides consumption, the *literatura marginal* or *literatura periférica* has also been carving out its space, be it via canonical circuits of distribution, in the case of some writers, or via cultural events such as *saraus* in low-income neighborhoods in cities like São Paulo and Brasília. This literature has also gained important ground in the field of literary criticism, with numerous articles, books, reviews, academic presentations, and curricula dedicated to it, especially thanks to the work of the Grupo de Estudos de Literatura Brasileira Contemporânea (Studies in Contemporary Brazilian Literature Group), under the leadership of Dalcastagnè, professor and scholar of Brazilian literature at the Universidade de Brasília.

One of the main names of *literatura marginal*, Reginaldo Ferreira da Silva (Ferréz), has also portrayed how consumption can be a source of happiness. In the short story “O Barco Viking” (2006), two children from the *periferia* are initially barred from a ride at the chain restaurant Habib’s in São Paulo. The woman controlling the access to the ride explains: “Desculpe, meninos, mas é só para quem está consumindo” (“I’m sorry, boys, but it’s just for those who are consuming/eating at the restaurant”; Ferréz 54). The narrator, a working-class man who is dining at the restaurant in question, observes the scene and invites the children to eat with him and his family. It is only by being transformed into consumers via the invitation of the narrator, that the kids are
allowed access to the ride. The narrator recognizes that this access, although momentary and therefore limited, is important for the children, for it makes them happy. Moreover, the access functions as a transgressive act, symbolizing a potential change in social order in which the children would be able to stay in the ride “pra sempre” (“forever”; 55).

Access to goods as symbols of potential societal transformation also appears in Ferréz’s 2005 children’s book, *Amanhecer Esmeralda* (*Emerald Dawn*). In this story, the life of a little Afro-Brazilian girl named Manhã (Morning/Dawn) starts to change when she receives an emerald dress from her schoolteacher, Marcão. The gift symbolically transforms the life of the little girl, who becomes happier. Her happiness spreads through her house and her neighborhood, which begins to change into happier places. The dress, thus, acquires meaning well beyond that of mere commodity. Its biography (Kopytoff 68) includes the power to transform not just the life of the little girl, but an entire community, through a change in self-esteem.

Another prominent Afro-Brazilian writer, Conceição Evaristo, emphasizes everyday hardships when goods are absent or scarce in some of the stories in *Olhos d’água* (*Teary Eyes*; 2014), thus looking at consumption from the perspective of human rights. For example, she points out the happiness of the protagonist of “Maria” when she gets leftover fruit from her boss to take home to her kids; Kimbá’s hatred for the lack of comfort of a life of poverty in “Os amores de Kimbá” (“Kimbá’s loves”); and Dona Esterlinda’s love for soap operas in “A gente combinamos de não morrer” (“We agreed not to die”). Nevertheless, Evaristo also cautions against the hectic routine of capitalistic accumulation in “O cooper de Cida” (“Cida’s Run”). In this story, the sight of a homeless person and the waves of the ocean distract Cida, the protagonist, from her daily run, forcing her to slow down in a frantic world of promises such as “Aprenda inglês em seis meses. Garantimos a sua aprendizagem em cento e oitenta dias” (“Learn English in six months. We guarantee your learning in one hundred and eighty days”; 67, emphasis in the original). Her life is a constant race against the clock, beyond her daily physical exercise. Cida runs around the house fixing things, doing things, getting ready for work, “flying down the stairs” because the elevator is too slow. Even her reading of the headlines on the newsstands is fast-paced, thanks to “dynamic reading” classes that she took (65–66). As she slows down, she begins to ponder about the cyclic
repetition of nature, “century after century,” and little by little, she surrenders to this contemplation, feeling her bare feet in the sand; observing someone who enjoyed the ocean “em plena terça-feira, às seis e cinquenta e cinco da manhã” (“on a Tuesday, at six fifty-five in the morning”; 68). Emerging out of this state of wonder, Cida realizes that she needs to head back home and get back to her routine. Only not that day, for she decides not to go to work and instead, simply do nothing. Cida’s decision goes against the clock of capitalist life, thus imposing a break on its rhythm, introducing a subversive change, even if only a temporary one.

Besides Ferréz and Evaristo, Faustini has achieved considerable recognition among literary scholars with his book *Guia afetivo da periferia*, published as part of the project Tramas Urbanas (Urban Plots/Stories), sponsored by Petrobrás, a semi-public oil company in Brazil. As pointed out by Lehnen, this project is part of “the circuit of cultural commodities that both attempts to generate agency for disenfranchised social segments and capitalizes on such groups” (*Citizenship* 167). Lehnen’s comment points to the ambiguities surrounding cultural production in the twenty-first century, standing between activism and commercial interests. These ambiguities, as well as tensions among different positions taken by cultural producers of the *periferia*, express themselves in the audiences and spaces in which this cultural production circulates. Funk, for example, is both seen as “música de preto, pobre e favelado” (“music by/for poor, black people from the slums”) and enjoyed by the Brazilian elite in lavish wedding parties and middle-class festive gatherings (Trotta 91). Funk Ostentação, in particular, functions as protest against a desire to keep the poor invisible (93), while also portraying a world of consumption with which the middle and upper classes identify, therefore facilitating its acceptance in wealthy social circles (Dias, qtd. in Gombata). *Literatura de periferia* also operates between two worlds. In São Paulo, for instance, *saraus*, or poetry evenings, have opened spaces of production and consumption of this literature in bars of the *periferia*, where small community libraries also operate and out of which several publications and independent publishers have started. These initiatives provide people from these areas access to culture in ways that would otherwise not be available. Nevertheless, this literature has also reached so-called lettered circles via mainstream publishers, social media, and partnerships
with the private sector via government programs that support this cultural production (Tennina 117–44). Hence, there coexists in this literature a political activism toward giving the periferia a space to be both consumer and producer of culture and a desire to be consumed by mainstream readers that can be seen as controversial by some of the writers. Allan da Rosa, for example, has expressed concern about the sponsorship of corporations (Tennina 161). Indeed, private interests in the periferia have sought to achieve high profits and positive branding at the expense of securing true access to citizenship (K. Bezerra 89). While it is important to recognize the limitations of a project sponsored by a semi-private company that ended up involved in one of the biggest corruption scandals of Brazilian history, it would be inaccurate to reduce Guia afetivo to mere reproduction of its conditions of production. I concur with Lehnen’s argument that the novel can be seen as “a form of autoconstruction of cultural citizenship that emerges precisely at the sites where peripheral culture is devalued or negated … Culture is both a tool of insurgent citizenship and the expression of newly gained substantive political, social, and civil rights” (Citizenship 191). As we will see in the analysis that follows, while highlighting more positive ways in which goods mediate relationships, the novel also questions social inequalities expressed through consumption.

Consuming Together

As the title suggests, Guia afetivo da periferia presents an affective view of life in the periferia. Consumption appears as an integral part of this life and, consequently, it is seen from this affective perspective as well. This view of consumption implies that commodities can establish relationships of love (care, concern, obligation, responsibility, etc.) between individuals constituted as subjects of devotion in what Miller characterizes as a modern sacrificial ritual (Theory 151). According to Miller,

… shopping may also be a ritual practice. Its foundation is a sacrificial logic whose purpose is to constitute desiring subjects. Sacrifice was based on the rites for transforming consumption into devotion. Shopping begins with a similar rite, which negates mere expenditure in obeisance to the higher purposes of thrift. It ends as the labour of constituting both the immediacy and the dynamics of specific relations of love. (155)
From this perspective, consumption can be seen as the other end of shopping in these relations of love. By portraying consumption predominantly in such terms, Faustini suggests that commodities and the act of consuming them can mean many things beyond a “materialistic dead end” (Miller, *Theory* 128).

One of the most prominent commodities portrayed in *Guia afetivo* in this sense is food, which invokes fond memories of the protagonist’s relationships with friends and family members. The protagonist’s mother, Dona Creuza, is often depicted as a provider of comfort in the form of food. Her “prato fundo de feijão, arroz, pepino inteiro e bife de chã de dentro batido, bem passado” (“deep dish of beans, rice, whole cucumber, and a well-done steak”), which the protagonist enjoys while watching late night dubbed films on television, serves as a reward and a much needed pause in the grueling routine of riding a crowded bus after a long day of work (Faustini 31). Another family member with whom the protagonist connects via food consumption is his grandfather, who used to take him to eat fried dried meat at fairs in Maré (93). In another moment, the protagonist uses food to connect with his romantic interest by buying her a “pastel com caldo de cana” (“a pastry with sugar cane juice”) in an attempt to impress her (88).

In many instances of the protagonist’s life, food functions as a treat for him and his family. *Churrasquinho* (cheap kebabs sold by street vendors) at the bus station helps to alleviate his bad mood for having missed the bus. Candy and popsicles, in turn, make his daily journey on the train more pleasant. A bottle of Coca-Cola, a soda commonly viewed as one of the ultimate symbols of capitalist evil, is re-signified when purchased as a treat: a small luxury that his family reserves for special occasions, to be consumed with another small luxury, fried chicken with noodles. As a treat, the bottle of Coke appears as a small transgression in an everyday of constant pursuit of thrift out of necessity. It reaffirms the self by confirming the family members’ special status (Miller, *Theory* 47). As the protagonist notes, walking to the neighborhood store to purchase the soda on Sundays was a way to partake in the communal habit of many families in the neighborhood, who also rewarded themselves with the drink after having Kool-Aid for the entire week (Faustini 106). The act of purchasing the beverage also provided him with a self-confidence that he paraded in the streets as he walked home from the store holding the bottle. On
these Sundays of splurging and family reunions, the protagonist relies on his Coke as something that “organizes his senses” and provides him with a “sensorial and aesthetic discipline” that dissipates the anxiety that comes with this type of family gatherings (108). In this way, this product acquires positive uses that go beyond the commonly perceived nature of commodities as symbols of oppression.

It is important to point out, however, that the protagonist’s remarks about commodities such as these do not simply romanticize them. Evidence that the protagonist is not simply “buying into” the promises of Coca-Cola commercials is that, to the comforting memory of drinking Coca-Cola, he juxtaposes the image of the television set that he watches while drinking the beverage in question. He describes the set as having “Bombril na antena para sintonizar a imagem na distante Santa Cruz” (“Bombril on the antenna for syncing images in the distant Santa Cruz”; Faustini 108). This juxtaposition stresses the precarious technological conditions in which the product is consumed, in comparison to those of the upper-middle class during that time (consider the experience of the protagonist of Mãos de cavalo, for example). It displays the contradictory and complex nature of the socioeconomic context in which consumer culture emerges in Brazil, a country struggling with deep social inequalities, where television sets exist even in areas that lack the appropriate infrastructure for the technology to function.

Food portrayed as a treat is also part of the protagonist’s family’s grocery shopping. The protagonist remembers going to the supermarket as a child with his parents, a moment that he anxiously awaited every month. He saw these instances as opportunities to be rewarded for behaving well and for helping his parents push the cart around. His reward was eating spaghetti with ketchup at the supermarket’s food court and, sometimes, managing to convince his parents to buy him gum (Faustini 151). The act of eating after shopping represents compensation not only to the protagonist, but to the parents as well, who have to exercise much discipline during the remaining time of the shopping trip, as they look for the best deals in order to save money.

As sites of consumption, supermarkets fascinated the protagonist for the large variety of new products, which he was always eager to try. According to him, supermarkets also challenged him
to create new strategies to attempt to convince his parents to buy these items (Faustini 152). Therefore, for the protagonist, beyond an opportunity to acquire new commodities, going to the supermarket was a sensorial experience that stimulated creativity and provided him with opportunities to exercise relative power over his parents. Similarly, going to the neighborhood store to make last minute purchases as requested by his parents is for the protagonist more than simply purchasing goods. He notes that these moments made him feel proud, for he felt that he was contributing to the running of the household.

Besides food, many other commodities establish connections between characters in Guia afetivo. The protagonist remembers an ex-girlfriend for the trinkets that she used to buy in order to personalize an old vanity table her grandmother had given her (Faustini 88). In another instance, a cheap lamp is the focus of the narrative in a section titled “O Abajur da Pedro Américo” (“The Lampshade of Pedro Américo”). The object in question serves as an initial connection between the narrator and his roommate from the state of Ceará (94). Furthermore, even affective relationships between people and domestic animals are mediated by goods, such as the case of a girl’s connection with her dog, who sniffs her new shoes, in what the narrator characterizes as “um gesto carinhoso” (“a gesture of affection”; 101). Lastly, television shows also facilitate bonding amongst the protagonist’s friends, whose favorite pastime is to replicate narrations of soccer games that they watch on television. Rather than a numbing activity of mindless distraction, watching television until late at night is motivated by the opportunity to participate in social interactions about the content of shows broadcast the day before (171).

If goods are mediators of social relations in positive ways, many of the places of consumption that the narrator frequents appear in the story as spaces of socialization. He describes a street fair in Maré in a way that stresses the human component of trading and consumption:

A pressa e o improviso do mundo do trabalho carioca seminal que a Maré ajuda a sustentar é substituída por bicicletas guiadas com orgulho, motos que transportam sorrisos, evangélicos engratados seguindo a seta de sua missão, adolescentes em direção aos cursos de sonhos de sábado e sacolas de legumes e frutas em mãos firmes. Na descida da passarela, a feira da
Teixeira recebe o transeunte com sons, cores, cheiros e sabores. Os DVDs atualizam os gostos de rockeiros, funqueiros, lambadoreiros, pagodeiros e moleques fissurados em novos jogos. (Faustini 93)

The rush and the improvisation of the Carioca work realm that Maré helps to maintain is replaced by the bicycles ridden with pride, motorcycles that transport smiles, evangelicals wearing ties following their missions, teenagers on their way to their dream courses of Saturday night, and bags filled with fruits and vegetables and carried by firm hands. Down the bridge, the Teixeira fair greets the passer-by with sounds, colors, smells, and flavors. The DVDs update the taste of fans of rock, funk, lambada, pagode, and kids hooked up on new videogames.

As described above, the fair is a space where a community comes together. People from a variety of groups display consumer goods more out of pride for having worked hard for it, and less out of competition with others. The fair is depicted as a democratic space, where people who have a variety of tastes come together. The commodities they buy hint at their lifestyle and their personalities. The smiles, the pride, the firm hands, the tastes, the welcoming feel: the way the protagonist describes purchasing and displaying commodities emphasizes a perception of consumption as a communal practice, quite different from the self-centered and mind-numbing postmodern behavior of which theorists of consumption such as Jameson and Baudrillard speak (Featherstone 16–17). Without necessarily denying the existence of such behavior in consumer society, Faustini’s narrative shows that there are other possible ways of interacting with goods.

**Aesthetic Interruptions of the Mundane**

A sense that consumption has the ability to make goods personal (Miller, *Theory* 131) informs Faustini’s representation of his protagonist’s aesthetic experiences with a variety of commodities. These experiences can be understood as “crises” that interrupt everyday life in the sense described by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht: “… multiple modalities of aesthetic experience [that] permeate our everyday worlds today (without becoming a part of or identical with the everyday)” (301). Faustini’s protagonist’s aesthetic experiences with commodities—which are quite different from Gumbrecht’s
example of drinking bourbon and reading a book in a high-end chair—present us with other forms of crises in everyday life that take place through commodities. In general, these crises comprise both repetition and change in that they interrupt the everyday in the same way in more than one instance, as evidenced by the use of verbs in the imperfect in the examples below. Some of the crises are fleeting, but anticipated rather than sudden moments of interruption, given the hardships of the protagonist’s routine. Such is the case of ads for the protagonist’s favorite popsicle, *Dragão Chinês*:

Mas nada se comparava à sensação de tomar um picolé *Dragão Chinês* sabor milho verde, dentro do trem. O prazer começava pelo pregão anunciado: “O poderoso *Dragão Chinês*.” Depois era só cuidar para não deixar de lamber nenhuma gota derretida na mão, afinal o aproveitamento tinha que ser completo— até o palito eu chupava como quem chupa osso de galinha. (Faustini 92)

But nothing could compare to the feeling of having a *Dragão Chinês* corn-flavored popsicle on the train. The pleasure would start with the seller’s advertising: “The powerful *Dragão Chinês*.” After that it was just a matter of making sure to lick any drop that fell on your hand, after all, you wouldn’t want to waste any of it—I would even suck on the stick as if I were sucking on chicken bones.

Advertisement becomes intertwined with the sensorial experience of tasting the popsicle, thus making secondary its primary goal, which is to convince the consumer to buy the product. Every bit of the popsicle, according to the protagonist, was to be carefully consumed, which emphasizes the affective value of said product for him.

Similarly, the banal act of carrying out a commercial transaction at the neighborhood store provides a repeated aesthetic experience for the protagonist. When purchasing eggs, the protagonist enjoys watching the storeowner wrap the items in question in old newspaper:

De tanto comprar ovo, passei a observar o modo como o vendedor embrulhava separadamente de três em três ovos a dúzia. O barulho produzido pelo encontro das mãos com o jornal ao embrulhar os ovos em formas geométricas era hipnótico. As cores dos enlatados e ensacados que ocupavam as estantes altas próximas ao comprido balcão também ajudavam nesta sensação. (Faustini 151)
After buying eggs so many times, I began to notice the way the seller packed a dozen eggs three eggs at a time. The sound of the hands touching the newspaper while wrapping the eggs in geometric forms was hypnotic. The colors of the canned and packaged food on the tall shelves near the long counter also helped to create this sensation.

Although acknowledging the effectiveness of advertising on himself—he makes a similar comment about the Coca-Cola ad on television, stressing that the soda tasted exactly as the commercial promised—the narrator points out the different meanings that these products acquire beyond their commercial value. He does so by addressing the perspective of the consumer, that is, by looking at what consumers actually do with commodities (de Certeau 31). In these uses, he finds a sensorial experience that produces estrangement, interrupting the flow of the everyday, defamiliarizing the familiar, reframing quotidian moments. This perspective renders flexible the boundaries of the aesthetic to include the beauty of things like videogames, as described by the protagonist when he talks about his first time playing Atari:

um estranhamento muito grande. Estava acostumado com objetos eletrônicos grandes como TVs de válvula, vitrolas que pareciam móveis. Até os botões do Atari eram muito diferentes dos objetos eletrônicos que até então eu conhecia. Era bom de mexer! Na tela, as formas gráficas e as cores do aviãozinho do jogo River Raid formavam um universo mais crível do que os monstros que lutavam contra o Spectreman nos episódios da TVS [sic]. Era mais impactante que o monstrinho engraçado que sai comendo tudo no jogo Pacman. (Faustini 156)

a great estrangement. I was used to big electronics such as TVs with knobs, record players that looked like furniture. Even the buttons on the Atari were very different from the electronics that I was familiar with until then. It was nice to touch them! On the screen, the geometric forms and the colors of the little airplane on River Raid were part of a more believable universe than that of the monsters that fought against Spectreman on television. It had more of an impact than the funny little monster going around eating everything in Pacman.

Using words such as “estrangement,” “credible universe,” and “striking,” to evaluate the sensorial experience of playing video
games, the protagonist treats as an aesthetic experience what is generally considered negative addiction, highlighting sensations that tend to go unnoticed.

Another product that is a source of repeated pleasure for the protagonist is canned food. Calling attention to the mundane details of consuming canned sardines and canned corn, the narrator describes the pleasant sensations of seeing oil come out of a can of sardines as one opens it. He also takes pleasure in watching his mother open a can of Swift meat with the little key with which it came. Similar to his observations about the Coca-Cola that he used to enjoy drinking, his remarks about the mundane pleasures of consuming food end with a subtle criticism to the commercials that attempted to convince families like his that canned food was “like caviar” (Faustini 112). After narrating his childhood memories of consuming these canned goods, the narrator points out that his mother followed closely what the commercials of those products recommended and that, as a result, he sarcastically notes, now “she’s no longer skinny” (113). His remark suggests the potential long-term health problems that the consumption of such products may cause, thus acknowledging that, while not to be seen statically as a negative practice, consumption may have undesired concrete side effects.

Furthermore, the protagonist also notes how consumer culture aestheticizes reality through marketing, which distorts or even effaces certain aspects of this reality. To this end, he comments on the representation of the Santa Teresa neighborhood in travel guides. Santa Teresa, as a tourist site, is described in the narrative as a space “of controlled de-control of emotions,” that is, as a postmodern sites of “ordered disorder,” where the middle class can enjoy emotions in a controlled way, such as parks, malls, and resorts (Featherstone 80). As one of such sites, Santa Teresa appears in the narrative as a place where social inequalities are effaced so that foreign tourists can enjoy a cable car ride, while hoping to have “end of afternoon epiphanies” in a romanticized Rio that resembles a Venice from a distant past (Faustini 79–80). From the sanitized cable cars, according to the narrator, tourists do not notice the black people who cannot afford to pay for the ride their onlookers are enjoying. He remarks sarcastically: “Fico imaginando o anúncio de Santa Teresa em outros países: venha se perder em Santa Teresa!” (“I imagine an ad about Santa Teresa in other countries: come get lost in Santa Teresa!”; 80). His statement re-signifies the
verb *perder-se*: beyond the meaning of metaphorically getting lost in the tourist pleasure of a nostalgia for the past, the use of the verb by the protagonist suggests a metaphorical getting lost in the present by ignoring the surrounding social reality.

A couple of paragraphs later, the protagonist speaks from the perspective of a tourist guide to suggest, not to the foreigner, but to the “carioca que um dia puder desfrutar dessa vista,” (“Carioca that one day may enjoy the view”) that she visit the area on a Thursday, when she will be able to see young black men and an old black lady “com peitos do tamanho de um peito de uma mulher na cena de um filme de Fellini, com o pé que, de tanto andar, cresceu para os lados” (“with breasts the size of those of a woman out of a Fellini film, with a foot that has grown sideways from so much walking”; Faustini 80). Invoking the baroque aesthetic of the Italian filmmaker, the narrator juxtaposes tourist tropical sexuality (the woman’s breasts) with the rough reality of her everyday (her expanding tired feet).

**Low and High**

In keeping with the nuanced perspective on working-class consumption, *Guia afetivo* juxtaposes “high” and “low” culture, valuing the latter as much as the former and highlighting the commodity nature of both of them, as evidenced, for instance, by the protagonist’s selling his books and records in order to be able to attend concerts (Faustini 54). Movies, pop music, popular and canonical literature appear as means to advance socially, to expand one’s knowledge, to connect with others, to make money, or simply to interrupt the hardships of everyday life by providing moments of rest.

At times, these cultural products function as a sort of compass that helps the protagonist to situate himself socially, politically, and even sexually. In the case of film, he learns about sex from French cinema (he cites *La nuit américaine* [*Day for Night*], 1973), by founder of the Nouvelle Vague movement François Truffaut, as well as Leos Carax’s films) as cultural capital to try to impress girls with whom he wants to be romantically involved (Faustini 82). Other films, such as *Um homem sem importância* (*A Man of No Importance*, 1971), directed by Brazilian Alberto Salvá, and Italian director Elio Petri’s film *La classe operaria va in paradiso* (*Lulu the
Tool, 1971) contribute to develop his class consciousness (79). Petri’s film, in particular, functions as a kind of lens through which the protagonist sees his immediate space, in a similar way to how the main character of Mãos de cavalo interacts with his environment. With Petri’s film in mind, Faustini’s protagonist imagines his neighborhood as a “precarious futurist movie” taking place in the third world, where the aesthetic of the Italian filmmaker meets Eastern European post-punk culture (23). The development of his class consciousness leads him to engage in activities meant to symbolically take revenge on the system that forces him into low-paying jobs. One of such activities is to go to a McDonald’s, one of the most iconic symbols of capitalism and capitalist alienation in the form of its Fordist approach to preparing food and its Happy Meals, simply to think (116).

In the case of literature, the protagonist values both canonical and popular Brazilian writers, pointing out the role of their work in his formative years as well as the importance of these writers’ work for the experiences of others in his community. The popular teen narrative O homem que calculava (The Man who Calculated, 1938), written by Brazilian math teacher Júlio César de Mello e Souza under the pseudonym of Malba Tahan, for instance, was the first book to spark the protagonist’s love of reading (Faustini 54). Similarly, he considers the highly commercially successful novels of Brazilian writer Paulo Coelho the kind of reading that working-class people who have “intellectual aspirations” enjoy (33). Popular literature appears, therefore, as a product that connotes prestige among members of the working class. Alongside these literary references, the protagonist mentions having read A boa terra (The Good Earth), a novel by North American writer Pearl S. Buck about peasant life in China. The novel became a best seller, while also awarding its author the Pulitzer Prize in 1932 and contributing to her winning the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1938. The Brazilian translation, which was part of a popular collection sold at newsstands, was crucial, according to the protagonist, for shaping his political views. He also notes that the book—along with the board game War—led him to become interested in China and, later on, to learn about communist ideas, which he continued to explore beyond that initial reading. He adds that his interest in Asian culture also stems from having watched Japanese television series when he was growing up.
Chapter Five

While popular culture leads him to high culture, the opposite movement is also true, as evidenced by his remark that it was his interest in poetry that led him to like music lyrics, particularly rock (Faustini 139). Because of his love of both forms of artistic expression, he began to tattoo parts of song lyrics onto his body, which his mother considered “coisa de marginal, coisa de gente mal-educada” (“something that criminals and bad-behaved people do”; 139). Commenting on his mother reprimanding him for his tattoos, he notes: “Ela nunca entendeu que a tatuagem era a ponte que eu criava com meus cadernos de soneto. Era a Escola Estadual Euclides da Cunha em meu corpo. Eram os barquinhos de papel do soneto do Guilherme Almeida” (“She never understood that the tattoo was a bridge that I created with my notebook of sonnets. It was Euclides da Cunha Public School on my body. It was the little paper boats from Guilherme Almeida’s sonnet”; 139). Questioning his mother’s view of rock music and tattoos as degradation, the protagonist finds less than obvious links between “high” and “low” culture that appeal to him.

Like his path from poetry to music, cinema at times sparks his curiosity for canonical literature. He mentions, for example, how Nelson Pereira dos Santos’s film adaptation of Graciliano Ramos’s novel *Vidas secas* (*Barren Lives*, 1938) influenced his later reading of the book. Lastly, he references Allen Ginsberg’s poetry as the root of his curiosity for elements associated with science fiction, such as UFOs and aliens, as he contemplates the sky from the top of buildings and imagines that the latter float in the air (Faustini 148). These comments about high and low culture, on one hand, and visual and written texts, on the other hand, suggest the multiple possible paths of an individual’s trajectory as a reader, thus validating the consumption of a variety of cultural references.

Oftentimes, the narrator juxtaposes references to “high” and “low” culture in a non-hierarchical manner as a way to contest views of working-class consumption of pop culture as a sign of inferiority or degradation. This kind of juxtaposition appears for example when, in a kind of delirium, the protagonist imagines Brazilian poet Manuel Bandeira—whose association with Romantic poetry and his proximity to working-class bohemians the protagonist identifies with—appearing together with characters from the Japanese cartoon *Zodiac Knights*, to the sound of the 1980s American new wave band Berlin’s hit song “Take My Breathe [sic] Away” (Faustini 55). In the chapter that follows this juxtaposition, the narrator...
Once again references Romantic poets such as Brazilian Álvares de Azevedo, whose poetry he becomes familiar with not by reading the book, but actually by listening to a record by Brazilian actor Sérgio Cardoso. He goes on to point out that he battled pneumonia—a disease he was proud to contract because it brought him closer to Romantic poets who died from it—by reading the most challenging writer he had ever heard of: Marcel Proust, whose book he had acquired at a used bookstore. These references display the protagonist’s ability to navigate between high and low cultures easily. While seeking to legitimize his voice in literary discourse, he repeatedly uses his gained authority to then legitimize the consumption of popular culture, a common strategy among Brazilian working-class writers (Dalcastagnè, “Uma voz” 63).

Further legitimation comes from references to Brazilian writer Joaquim Manuel de Macedo’s character Simplício from A luneta mágica (The Magic Telescope, 1869), North American F. Scott Fitzgerald’s Amory Blane, and thinkers such as Leon Trotsky. The protagonist writes quotes from these writers’ work on his backpack, about which he comments:

Ter uma mochila toda rabiscada era como ter uma roupa de marca. Dentro do ônibus ou dentro do trem, colocava a mochila de modo que o passageiro ao lado conseguisse ler o que estava escrito. Eu queria ser um outdoor tanto do charmoso ceticismo burguês de Amory Blane quanto do charmoso espírito revolucionário trotskista. Se você não tem isso na sua juventude, você está morto. Apesar de tudo a minha volta propor a minha morte, eu queria estar vivo. Era como se a mochila fosse um livro de autoajuda, que eu lia para me encorajar. (Faustini 69)

Having a backpack with doodles all over was like having designer clothes. On the bus or on the train, I would carry the backpack in such a way that the passenger next to me could read what was written on it. I wanted to be a billboard for both Amory Blane’s charming skepticism and the charming revolutionary Trotskyan spirit. If you don’t have this when you are young, you’re dead. Despite everything around me wanting me to be dead, I wanted to be alive. It was as if the backpack were a self-help book, which I read to get encouragement.

Appropriating consumer culture’s branding strategies, but subverting their commercial purpose, the protagonist attempts to “wear” high culture as a fashionable commodity, claiming to become a
billboard for the writers and thinkers in question. While advocating for “high” culture in this way, he also values “low” culture by comparing the readings he mentions to self-help. Fitzgerald and Trotsky, along with the humble food prepared by his mother, give him the strength to keep trying to succeed in an environment where everything is designed to make him fail: “Ao comer o angu de milho doce, as incertezas davam lugar à coragem trotskista e à perspicácia fitzgeraldiana” (“Upon eating the corn porridge, all the uncertainties gave way to the Trotskyan courage and a Fitzgeraldian perspicacity”; Faustini 69).

If on one hand the narrator attempts to use marketing strategies to brand literature, on the other hand, he recognizes strategies used by characters in literary books in a candy seller’s tactics to convince people to buy his product. Comparing the candy seller’s style of announcing his product to that of a character from a story by renowned nineteenth-century Brazilian writer Machado de Assis, he points out that this man is aware of the power of fiction even without having read Machado:

Trata-se de fruir, de buscar ao longo do dia o direito a esse instante. Ele é possível até mesmo sob o sol a pino, quando você é um camelô e arruma fileiras amarelas e vermelhas de bombons Serenata de Amor sobre a lona de plástico azul na calçada, imitando a vitrine da loja de roupa de grife atrás.

Nesse momento, você deve negar-se a qualquer entendimento sociológico da vida deste rapaz que produza compaixão, pois logo em seguida ele vai oferecer três bombons por um real com uma voz anasalada, num pregão que lembra o negro que vendia cocada em Dom Casmurro. Ele sabe que a forma de executar o pregão é decisiva para que você compre ou não o bombom. Mesmo sem ter lido Machado, ele já se apropriou das estratégias de ficção. (Faustini 74)

It’s about fruition, about searching for the right to this moment along the day. This moment is possible even under the blazing sun, when you are a street vendor and organize the yellow and red lines of Serenata de Amor bonbons on a plastic cover laid on the sidewalk, imitating the window of the designer clothing store behind you.

At this moment, you have to let go of any sociological understanding of this young man’s life that may produce compassion, for right after that he will offer you three bonbons for one real
in his nasal-like voice, advertising like the black man that used to sell coconut candy bars in *Dom Casmurro*. He knows that the way he advertises is crucial to convince you to buy the bonbon. Even without ever having read Machado, he’s appropriated fictional strategies.

The protagonist’s observation emphasizes the wit and creativity of the working class, thus suggesting that one does not have to be a reader of canonical fiction in order to develop what would be considered sophisticated thinking. Noting street vendors’ manipulation tactics to get people to buy their product, he advocates for a non-romanticized view of the working class and for their right for their own aesthetic sense to be acknowledged.

**Tactical Consumption**

Faustini’s nuanced depiction of working-class consumption also highlights workers’ tactical behavior in order to cope with economic hardships and find creative ways of accessing products other than necessities. *Guia afetivo* depicts several moments in which characters, as consumers, take advantage of opportunities of the type described by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. De Certeau defines tactics as actions performed by those who do not hold the power. These actions, which take place in the territory of those who are in control, are isolated operations that outwit the system when opportunities to do so present themselves (37). Tactics are, therefore, circumstantial and do not deeply modify the system that they attempt to subvert. However, they allow the subject to contest the system, thus disturbing its stability.

Describing a fair in the Madureira neighborhood that he used to frequent, the protagonist emphasizes tactics utilized by working class consumers like him. He characterizes the fair as

```plaintext
um lugar de negócios, de transação, de pregão, de vendedor de balas, de lucro no centavo. Se o cartão de crédito internacional está para o Sheraton, a moeda de um centavo está para Madureira. Ainda hoje há uma babel de vozes nos calçados, mercadões, e shoppinhos, onde o capitalismo precário carioca experimenta as delícias de todas as possibilidades de Control C e Control V no século XXI. É ali, nas coloridas capas impressas em baixa resolução dos DVDs piratas, que pegamos da mão do camelô o sentido de negociação das ruas do bairro. (Faustini 92)
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A place of business transactions, of advertising, of the candy seller, of profit by the cent. The one centavo coin in Madureira is equivalent to an international credit card at the Sheraton. Until today there is a Babel of voices on the sidewalks, big markets, little shopping centers, where the precarious Carioca capitalism experiences the perks of all the possibilities of Control C and Control V in the twenty-first century. It’s there, on the colorful covers of the pirate DVDs, printed in low resolution, that we get from the street vendor the sense of bargaining from the streets of the neighborhood.

Pointing out the importance of small business transactions among low-income consumers and salespeople, in which cents count as much as credit cards do in fancy hotels, the narrator highlights piracy as a tactic that allows low-income workers to participate in consumption. In other words, the Madureira fair represents a space where low-income consumers learn the negotiation tactics that they need to make consumption more viable for themselves and to access commodities that provide pleasure. Faustini’s emphasis on working-class tactics to enjoy the pleasures of consumption acknowledges that, “[o] consumo é parte do processo civilizador capitalista, porém, ressalta-se o fato de que ‘onde há consumo, há prazer; e onde há prazer, há agência’” (“consumption is part of the capitalist civilizing process, however, it is important to note that ‘where there is consumption, there is pleasure; and where there is pleasure, there is agency’”; Scalco and Pinheiro-Machado “Os sentidos” 325).

Faustini’s protagonist further emphasizes working-class consumers’ right to pleasure when he talks about his dream of buying a set of drums. He describes returning to the music store religiously and repeatedly asking questions: “quanto custa, em quantas vezes parcela?” (“how much does it cost? In how many installments?”; Faustini 89). Speaking somewhat emotionally about this experience, he mentions the joy of witnessing others from his community finally being able to buy the instruments that they, like the protagonist, have wanted for so long. Consumption in these instances is thus represented very differently from the frantic, quick-discarding voraciousness promoted by advertising. It is rather the slow, carefully planned, patiently awaited accomplishment of a goal. Goods acquired this way, much like the savings on electricity that the protagonist’s father yielded every month from using a lamp bulb he had found in a junkyard (95), are likely to
bring long-term rather than fleeting pleasure, for they represent the result of patience and efforts to circumvent economic limitations. This is not to romanticize poverty, but rather to show a different side of consumption.

Characters also use certain commodities tactically as objects that allow for self-expression and self-affirmation in the face of homogenization and social exclusion. The protagonist admires female supermarket cashiers who have to wear uniforms to work every day, for affirming their individuality by wearing earrings that stand out (Faustini 78). He sees the earrings as these women's response to the daily uniformity imposed on them by their work environment. Wearing earrings provides them with the possibility of standing out in the face of the invisibility that their job forces onto them and of intervening in the repetitive boredom of their work routine. The protagonist expresses admiration for working women again when he comments on his mother’s “Tupperware and Avon parties” at his house when he was a child. Suggesting once again women’s defiance against the monotony and uniformity of the work environment, the protagonist notes that his mother and her friends, whose negotiations he enjoyed watching, “só usavam roupas com estampa de flores. Bem diferentes dos uniformes que eu era obrigado a vestir” (“Only wore flower-patterned clothes. [Which were] very different from the uniforms that I was forced to wear”; 162).

The protagonist affirms the power of commodities as objects of tactical action yet again when he recounts his strategies to enter spaces controlled by the upper and middle classes. By sewing tags of famous brands onto his clothes in order to look like he belongs to a higher social class, he gains access to buildings where circulation is highly controlled and monitored. As Lehnen notes, “the narrator, conscious of the power expenditure holds in the imaginary of social exclusion, manipulates the signs associated with consumption to his advantage” (Lehnen, Citizenship, 186). The protagonist’s desire to become visible via the display of certain commodities signals his understanding that acquiring goods, in many instances, is not the final goal of consumption, but a means to cultivate social relations and, in his particular case, also to undermine existing social boundaries.

Likewise, cultural capital allows the protagonist to claim membership in certain groups. Calling his favorite used bookstore
his “private socialist Disneyland” (Faustini 122), he evokes the ultimate North American symbol of consumption and simulacra to refer to a space where he acquires cultural products that allows him to engage in critical political thought. Noting that he sought Russian lessons at this bookstore as a way to “sell” himself as a more devoted militant, the protagonist suggests a parallel between the social value of building cultural capital and that of visiting Disneyland as ways of attaining or maintaining status within a group. From this perspective, the narrator’s interest in politics translates, at least in part, into the expression of a desire to impress others. The books that he acquires at the bookstore and the Russian classes are the commodities that allow him to cultivate these social relations.

Tactics of consumption in the face of limited or no income appear throughout the text as the narrator talks about his and others’ experiences as consumers: stockpiling; stretching better quality milk by mixing it with lower quality milk; using clothespins as toy war tanks and matches as soldiers; drinking a cold beverage to cool down when taking turns with relatives in front of the only fan in the household; buying books from used bookstores; getting records from street vendors, to name a few. Guia afetivo is, in a sense, a guide to understanding working-class consumption, which is also highlighted by several of the photos reproduced throughout the narrative. These photos display the protagonist’s family’s old fan (Faustini 24–25), the cover of a Stevie B. LP juxtaposed with an image of a Japanese cartoon character (52–53), movie tickets (97), bottles of Coca-Cola products on a table at a birthday party (110, 114), an Atari video game console (158–59), and candy the protagonist used to like as a child (172–73). Collectively, these photos place an emphasis on the details of his and his family’s everyday life as consumers. They tell through images the story of mundane consumption portrayed in the narrative. By emphasizing the everydayness of consumer behavior, Faustini makes the practice of consumption visible, doing what de Certeau calls for, which is going beyond the “elucidation of the repression apparatus” seeking to see the “the practices which are heterogeneous to it [the apparatus] and which it represses or thinks it represses” (de Certeau 41). Faustini’s narrative highlights, to use de Certeau’s term, some of our ruses as consumers.
Conclusion

While these ruses, as tactics, are limited in scope and do not produce deep changes in the system, they challenge the reader to think about the politics of consumption as a “direct mechanism of self-inclusion in a structure that is unequal and thereby class awareness is enabled” (Pinheiro-Machado and Scalco, “The Right”). When Faustini’s protagonist sees pride rather than alienation in being able to purchase commodities in a neoliberal society, when he sees food as relief from the hardships of daily life, when he sees clothes and accessories as a way to express his identity, when he sees popular books as a way to enter the lettered city, he sees politics in consumption. In these politics, there is potential for change in the daily repetition of getting up, enduring long hours of a low-paying job, and heading back home late at night to get some rest and start all over again the next day. The autobiographical tone of Guia afetivo suggests that its very publication confirms this possibility of change, assuming that its author shares many of his protagonist’s experiences.

Guia afetivo opens up the opportunity to see consumption under a different light. Faustini questions portrayals of working-class consumption such as Bonassi’s in Luxúria, suggesting that, as Scalco and Pinheiro-Machado contend, we are not diante de sujeitos cegos e amarrados à sociedade de consumo, movidos por impulsos materialistas, mas antes frente a pessoas que compram porque se relacionam e se relacionam porque compram—expressando a relação dialética que existe entre pessoas e mercadorias. (“Os sentidos” 325)

looking at blind subjects strapped down to consumer society, moved by materialistic impulses, but rather at people who buy because they relate to one another and who relate to one another because they buy—thus expressing the dialectic relation that exists between people and commodities.

Faustini’s narrative drives Scalco and Pinheiro-Machado’s point home by suggesting that we should understand the act of consuming as crisscrossed by a variety of factors that include both private interests and social solidarities (“Os sentidos” 353). Moreover, the narrative under study suggests that, as Miller notes,
Consumption, far from being the continuation of the projects of production and distribution, whether in capitalist or socialist systems, is actually the point of negation, where the particularity of goods is used to create fluid relationships in direct opposition to the vastness of markets and states. So the intricacies of our relationships expressed through consumption reassure us that we are not merely the creatures and categories of capitalism or the state—this is the very opposite of the effect of commodities upon us that we usually assume, when we take goods to be merely symbols of capitalism or the state. (Theory 147)

In this way, voices like Faustini’s are essential to open up the debate in Brazilian literature regarding consumer culture. This debate of course has brought invaluable and necessary contributions to understanding the violence of consumer capitalism and its threats to democracy. However, this debate’s failure to recognize the diversity of consumption has the unintended consequence of closing itself up, making it difficult to move toward envisioning other possibilities of collective existence mediated by the things that we consume. Portrayals of consumption such as the one provided by Faustini, while not offering direct solutions to the shortcomings of today’s capitalist reality, remind us that not everything about the goods that we consume stems from or results in destruction and that not all consumer behavior is about individualism and alienation. His reading of consumption offers hope—not blind and passive, but rather critical and active hope—for the potential to unite festival and everyday life (Lefebvre, Critique 356). Furthermore, it undoes stereotypical images of working-class consumers that narratives such as Bonassi’s, Sant’Anna’s, and even Maia’s reproduce. The complexity of Faustini’s portrayal of working-class consumption is essential in this sense because it breaks the cycle of prejudice that artistic discourses in Brazil (Dalcastagnè, “Entre silêncios” 228) contribute to perpetuate. For Winnie Bueno, Joanna Burigo, and Pinheiro-Machado, in the inclusion of those who have had little to no space in the political debate in Brazilian society, lies the vision for a truly democratic project for Brazil (“Introdução” 12). Similarly, Faustini’s portrayal of consumption suggests that, in the debate about consumer culture in Brazilian letters, there are other voices that also need to be heard.